

Harry Potter and the Marriage Contracts Survivors

July 30, 1997

Longbottom Manor:

"Harry! Thanks for coming."

Harry picked himself up from where he fell after exiting the floo and took Neville's hand.

"I hate floo travel. Happy Birthday Neville. Your message said that you needed to speak to me, what can I do for my best mate?"

"I think it's more what we can do for each other Harry." Neville led him to the Sitting Room. This was possibly the most formal room Harry had ever seen. Something about Neville's manner screamed "BUSINESS" to Harry. Neville gestured Harry into a chair while sitting himself. On a side table by the chair Neville selected for himself were a pile of parchments.

"So, what's going on Nev?"

"We're officially adults now Harry."

"Well, tomorrow for me, but yeah."

"I got some surprises in the post this morning, and Gran explained what was going on to me. It occurred to me that if I didn't know, and I grew up with this crap, you wouldn't have a clue when yours arrives tomorrow."

"Ok, what are we talking about?" the Man-Who-Won asked.

"These," Neville gestured at the pile of parchment, "are proposals from various pureblood and old line families of marriage contracts with their daughters."

"You're kidding."

"I wish I was. It's a pureblood thing dating back to the 1200s. It's fallen to the wayside for most people, but you and I are heads of Ancient and Noble houses, for us it stills happens."

"You're kidding. You've got to be kidding."

"Harry, I got 27 offers. Me. I was just the sidekick, you're the fucking hero. You are going to be mobbed."

"I always knew that I should have told everyone that it was you who killed Tom. I'm not going to accept any of these stupid things."

"Neither am I. We just have to be careful not to accidentally accept one. And yes, some are them are written so as to trick you. Gran found two in this pile that were."

"How is Hannah taking all this?"

"She doesn't know. I suspect she's going to be pissed when I tell her." Neville smiled. "I'm hoping she tries to convince me to forget about them. She can be very persuasive."

The pair shared a laugh.

"Anyone we know?"

"Harry me lad, you wouldn't believe me. I am evidently quite the catch."

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"Thank you for asking me to spend the night Mrs. Longbottom."

"It's always nice to have one of Neville's friends over. Especially when they want to know about the old ways." the woman's eyes sparkled.

"Have you ever considered teaching Mrs. Longbottom? You certainly know your history, and the history professor we have is, well, not the liveliest teacher."

"I don't believe I have the temperament to teach Harry." She smiled, and then the look faded. "I was sorry when Neville told me of your falling out with Dumbledore and the Weasley clan. It had looked like your future happiness was ensured. Why they would treat someone like that I will never understand." Her expression brightened. "Still, it will be interesting to see how many offers you get given your notoriety."

"I'm hoping for none."

"Ha! Harry I got 27." Neville's eyes danced with laughter. "I'll give odds that you bust three figures."

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Neville's estimate as a bit conservative. The final count the following morning was 3,234 contracts offering marriage. After Neville's Grandmother went over the pile some concerned her (she said they didn't 'feel right') she called her brother for help.

Algernon Croaker had been an Unspeakable for most of a century, and had responded to a lot of calls for various mysterious objects. This was his first time inspecting Marriage Contracts. Of the more than three thousand, nine had portkeys incorporated into them, and seven had compulsion spells integrated into the parchment, those were forwarded to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and four were jokes (all from the Weasley Twins) those were deactivated and given to Harry for the purposes of revenge.

The remaining 3,214 were given to Harry with the instructions that to be on the safe side, he should touch nothing with his bare hands, to sign nothing without Augusta looking at it first, and to have a good time. Harry and Neville settled down to sort through the offers.

The pair put on light cotton gloves and between them, they quickly established four categories of letters.

- Interesting
- No.
- Oh Hell NO!
- My eyes! They burn!

When Harry opened his 9th letter he suddenly found the need for a fifth category.

- Uh, no, but my, that is an interesting photo of a surprisingly limber girl, and that photo might look nice in the dorm this year, and how does she get her legs behind her head like that anyway?

Neville was complaining that his contract offers hadn't contained any interesting photos as he added several pictures to the fifth pile. It took most of the day to make it through the pile of contracts and destroy all of the oh hell no, and My eyes! They Burn! categories. They found themselves with a large pile of almost 600 photos, 22 contracts in the No category and 19 contracts in the Interesting category.

The Interesting category was composed completely of their classmates. The No category was made up mostly of former class mates and acquaintances.

"I don't know if I should be laughing or crying over these girls." Harry said shaking his head. "Is there much overlap with your list?"

"I don't know. Let me look." Neville picked up the remaining pile. "Pansy Parkinson, check,"

"That one isn't going to happen," Harry laughed.

"I hear you," Neville agreed. "The Patils, check only I got one from each, you got an offer of both together."

"Wait, BOTH of them? At the same time? Is that even legal?"

"Well, yeah, it's not very common these days, but it's legal. Daphne Greengrass – I didn't get anything from her, but you did, AND a photo. Tracey Davis, check. Millicent Bulstrode, check."

"After Lucius was killed, Millie got away from Draco and turned out to be a relatively inoffensive person, but not a chance in hell."

"Yeah, knows her plants, but about as cuddly as Hagrid's brother." Neville shuddered a bit. "You got one from Sue Bones, I didn't. We both got one from Ginny."

"You've got to be kidding me. Why would Ginny be offered to either of us?"

"A lot of possibilities Harry, this could have been processed before Riddle fell, or possibly, the head of the Weasley family isn't aware of your falling out."

"Arthur was right there."

"I know Harry, but I believe the head of the Weasley family is Arthur's Great-uncle Amos, he may be unaware of the problems, or just doesn't care and is making the offer without any expectation of your accepting." Neville shrugged. "Amos Weasley is a contemporary of Dumbledore, who really knows how they think?" Neville picked up the next contract. "Lavender Brown. I didn't get one from her. Luna Lovegood, I got one from her, but her father demands a bride price of a breeding trio of Crumple Horned Snorkacks, so I was out of luck. Hmm. You didn't get the bride price demand... Somehow I feel cheap."

"Wait, a 'Breeding Trio'? How could that possibly work?" Harry's brow furrowed in confusion. "No, never mind I don't want to know. Life with Lovely Luna would never be boring."

"True enough. Romilda Vane? You pervert."

"Is it too late to put that one in the Hell No category?"

"Unfortunately tradition requires that since you know them, you have to personally return rejected offers to the girls in question."

"Are you telling me that I have to go up to the girls whose families made these offers and personally reject them?"

"Yep."

"So tradition requires I be an arrogant abusive ass?"

"Pretty much, yeah." Neville smiled. "Just channel your inner Draco. The girls should understand, I mean it's ..."

Before Neville could explain what it was, the hearth flared green "Neville Longbottom?" came a woman's voice from the floor.

"Yes?" He answered, crossing the room to the fireplace.

"Nev, this is Hannah, could I come through? It's important."

"Sure Hannah, come on over." He stepped closer to the fireplace as the flames flared again and Hannah Abbot came hurtling out, catching her.

"Neville, something horrible has happened. If I'd have known, I'd have stopped it, but my father sent Harry Potter a marriage contract, I need to talk to him, please don't get angry, I didn't know anything about it..." it was then she noticed Harry sitting at the table with an ornate piece of parchment in his hand.

"I didn't know your middle name was Clementine Hannah."

"Harry?" she was more than a little flustered.

"What's your take on this prospect Neville?"

"Hannah is an excellent kisser, and can be very affectionate." Neville said, knowing full well that he would be paying for that later.

Harry nodded. "That's important. Oh, Hannah? Could you turn around for me?"

"Harry, I swear I didn't know anything about this" She saw the playful look on Harry's face, sighed and slowly turned around.

"Well Nev, any kids would be well fed."

"Keep me out of this Harry; she's likely to kill me as it is."

As Hannah finished her turn, Harry rose from the table and approached the girl. "A most attractive offer Ms Abbott, but I must respectfully decline, as accepting would make Neville angry, and while Dark Lords and Death Eaters aren't all that bad, an angry Longbottom is scary!"

"Don't you forget it Mate."

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August 23, 1997

Diagon Alley:

Harry spent the weeks following his 17th birthday finding and politely declining the contracts from the 'No' category. He finally found Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell, and Alicia Spinnet (the last of the 'No' category) together taking lunch at the newly reopened Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor. They were served by the latest Florean Fortescue, the original's nephew and name sake who had taken over the business. Not one of them knew of the offer of the contracts, and were more than a little amused at the possibility. Angelina kissed him lightly on the lips and whispered that he 'wouldn't survive the ride', to which Harry had responded, that if he had to die, there couldn't be many better ways. That got him kissed again.

He presented the laughing girls their respective contracts with as much dignity as he could manage, and paid for their lunches, and then he escorted them to Weasley Wizarding Wheezes where they all worked. Harry wanted to speak with the Twins.

Unfortunately, Fred met him at the door. That didn't bode well.

"Harry, mate, wanna take a walk to the bank with me?"

"Ron or Ginny?" Harry sighed as he stepped back onto the street and began short walk to Gringotts.

"Ginny's inside now, Ron should be here anytime now. I'm sorry partner, but this is our busiest time and we really can't afford the screaming fit that would result if you went in."

"I understand. I don't want to start any trouble for you with your family."

Harry, George and I know aren't the bad guy in this, but... They're family, you know."

"I understand Fred, really I do." Harry sighed again. "I got a marriage contract from the Weasley family offering Ginny."

"You've got to be kidding me." For the first time since meeting him Harry had managed to shock Fred Weasley.

"And four from you and George. I didn't know you clowns cared that much, but I don't swing that way. I prefer my dates to be substantially more female and a whole lot less insane." Fred's expression went from shocked to embarrassed. Harry knew the man well enough to know the embarrassment stemmed from being found out before the prank was triggered, not from any moral issue.

"What are you going to do?" asked the slightly saner half of the twins.

"I find I must decline your offer." From his robes he produced a sheaf of parchments that he presented to the professional prankster. He had timed it just right, and Fred had taken the parchments in his hand just as he crossed Gringotts' outer wards.

"Prat. I mean what are you going to do about Ginny?"

"My intentions are honorable, oh scary older brother of the girl whose contract I hold. I will find a way to approach her when she is alone and decline the offer in accordance with tradition."

"I didn't mean it like that Harry. We know you wouldn't take advantage of her, just... Just don't hurt her ok?"

Harry shook his head sadly. "I don't think I could."

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August 31, 1997

Ottery St. Catchpole

The Burrow:

Hermione Granger lay staring at the ceiling of Ron Weasley's room. In the candle light the garish Chudley Orange had mellowed into a deep umber. Her body was still covered with a film of sweat from their love making. Ron's head was on her chest. She ran her fingers through his hair as he snored away.

How had she gotten to this point? She didn't understand her attraction to Ron. If she liked something, he hated it. He ridiculed her interests and habits, and she detested his. They had literally nothing in common, other than Harry. And something, she still didn't know what, had happened between Harry and the Weasleys, and they didn't even have that.

Her body responded to Ron like it did to no other person she had ever met. He had to but touch her and her nipple got hard and her juices flowed.

But he wasn't Harry. Harry was alone. After all Harry had gone through to save them all, he was alone. Harry needed her, but she needed Ron and... How had she gotten here?

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September 1, 1997

Kings Cross Station

Platform 9 ¾:

Harry had entered the train station spot on 10:15. One last year at Hogwarts and then he could get on with his life. It was as he approached the entrance to Platform 9 ¾ Harry noticed a group of 5 children with trunks standing near a larger group of adults who were looking a bit confused. Looking closer several of the adults had pieces of parchment written on in green ink, and the children were all clutching what appeared to be tickets.

Harry approached the group. "Good Morning. Going to Hogwarts?"

A look of relief washed across the faces of the children, a tall woman stepped forward from the adults.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"The parchment in your hands, the confused looking between platforms 9 and 10, kids with trunks. You all look the way I did when I came here for my ride first year."

The Adults relaxed at that. "You're... What did she call it? Muggle born?"

"No, my parents were both magical, but my Mother was Muggle born. After my parents died, I was sent to live with my Muggle relatives. I'm what is called Muggle raised. My Name is Harry Potter, could I be of assistance?"

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September 1, 1997

Hogwarts Express

Last Compartment of the Last Car:

When Harry and his new charges passed through the entrance to Platform 9 ¾ Harry was immediately greeted by the Creevy brothers. After Harry had introduced his charges to the 6th and 5th year, the Creevy's took a few pictures. You kids will be able to show everyone you know Harry Potter then helped Harry and the kids get all their luggage on the train.

Once inside the compartment, with all their trunks stowed in the overheads (but not before their school robes were removed and carefully hung out of the way) Harry sat and gestured the five Muggle born to do the same.

"Why are you staying with us, and not going off with your friends?" asked the girl with the red hair in a long ponytail.

"Well, Megan... It is Megan, right? Megan Puckle?" The young girl blushed and nodded. "I made some very good friends the very first time I rode this train, the pair of them became my best friends, but last year we had a bit of a falling out. My best male friend doesn't want to talk to me anymore, and my best female friend is dating him so she can't spend much time with me without risking her relationship with him. Most of the rest of my close friends are in relationships and use the train ride to be with each other."

"Are you THE Harry Potter? The one they wrote about in Dark Lords and Idiots: The Biography of Harry James Potter?" Asked Stephen Moore, a small boy with glasses, leaning toward the pudgy side.

"Well, I'm 'A' Harry Potter, I'm not sure that I'm the definitive Harry Potter. That book was completely unauthorized and what little I could stomach of it was utterly wrong. Rita Skeeter has a lot to answer for, and that book is only part of it. But to answer your question, yes I'm the one who fought and defeated the dark Lord Voldemort. Beyond that I don't really want to talk about it."

"But if you're a hero..." Tom Brissan began.

"I'm not a hero. Don't believe anyone who tells you I am." Harry interrupted the blond boy. "What I did was because Voldemort came after me, and he hurt my friends. I'm a survivor, not a hero."

"Could you tell us about the Houses?" asked Sophie Marconi, trying to change the subject.

Before Harry could answer, the train jolted as it started to move and the door slid open. "Good Morning Harry, room for one more?"

Luna Lovegood was framed in the doorway. "Of course Luna, there's always room for you." He rose to put Luna's trunk into the overheads. Luna noticed the looks on the young first year girls' faces when he lifted the trunk so effortlessly. She smiled, Harry added to his fan club every year without realizing he was doing it.

"Thank you Harry." She rose on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek. "How was your summer?"

"Quiet and uneventful. In short perfect. How was Sweden? Did the hunt go well?"

"Oh yes. Six weeks communing with nature and Daddy. Glorious. We found tracks and spore, but no actual Snorkacks"

"I'm sorry the hunt didn't pan out Luna."

"Oh, don't be Harry. The joy is in the hunting, not in the finding. If Daddy and I ever actually found one, we would probably release it and oblivate each other so that we could begin the hunt again." Her eyes lost focus for a moment. "In fact the possibility that we have already done this several times exists."

Harry shook his head and smiled. That was pure Luna. The firsties were probably going to be traumatized.

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September 1, 1997

Hogwarts School or Witchcraft and Wizardry

Great Hall:

We don't need no education.

We don't need no thought control.

No dark sarcasm in the classroom.

Teacher, leave those kids alone.

Hey, Teacher, leave those kids alone!

All in all it's just another brick in the wall.

All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

We don't need no education.

We don't need no thought control.

No dark sarcasm in the classroom.

Teachers, leave those kids alone.

Hey, Teacher, leave those kids alone!

All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

"Well, that was different." Harry looked across the table to Hannah. "I wonder who let the Hat listen to Pink Floyd?"

"Yes," Hannah said suspiciously, while leaning against Neville and hoping that none of the teachers noticed that she wasn't sitting at the right table. "I wonder who could have done that Harry..." She held the frown as long as she could before starting to laugh.

McGonagall and Dumbledore were both staring open mouthed at the Sorting Hat while the various Muggle born and Muggle raised in the Great Hall explained to their classmates why they were laughing so hard. Then Minerva shook the shock off and started the sorting.

The class was the largest since the first war, with 74 firsties to be sorted. Gryffindor got 19 new lions, including Harry's red haired friend from the train Megan Puckle. Harry made room for her next to him and she sat relieved to at least know someone in her new house.

During the meal, Harry surveyed the table for his other friends. Ron was down on the far end, next to the Head Girl, Hermione, who spotted him looking and smiled sadly. Dean and Seamus were deep into a conversation with Parvarti and Lavender. Megan hit him with a nonstop series of questions that he did his level best to answer.

Finally the meal was done; the golden plates and cutlery vanished from the table. Dumbledore made his final comments, the Forbidden Forest remained as the name implied, forbidden, Filch's list of prohibited items had started a second volume, and the students were excused from the hall for their dormitories, the firsties being led off by the fifth year prefects.

Harry looked around the Great Hall. No dark lords, no plots, no reason for Dumbledore to return to his manipulative ways toward Harry. Those were all pluses. No Ron. No Hermione. Those were minuses. Maybe this year was just going to even out. Harry decided that he could learn to like a life that evened out. He looked at his watch. 8pm... A smile snuck onto his face. With any luck, Tonks was where he asked her to be. This should be good.

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September 1, 1997

Diagon Alley

The Leaky Caldron:

Nymphadora Tonks sat in the back of the pub wearing the face and body of a male middle aged wizard she had arrested a few months before. The note had asked her to keep an eye on the Weasley twins tonight, and to make sure she remembered everything for a pensieve memory.

Tonks wasn't sure what Harry was up to, but she'd do pretty much anything for that kid, his life had been hell, like having a Dark Lord personally putting you up as number one on his 'to kill' list wasn't bad enough, he also had to deal with the crap that Dumbledore, the Weasleys and sadly, even Remus had done to him and his life. That was what had moved her to end it with Remus. She loved the man deeply, and he was the best physical lover she had ever found, but she found that she no longer respected him after the truth about what he had done to Harry came out.

As was their habit on a Monday night, the Twins were taking their dinners in the Leaky Cauldron.; spot on 7:45 they sat down to the House Special. They were far too predictable for her taste, if either of her trainers, Moody or Shackbolt had ever found her being predictable enough for someone to be able to know where she would eat or what she would have, they would have used the most painful hexes they knew on her.

She sat and watched them while nursing her drink. The clock on the wall started to chime. On the eighth chime, Fred Weasley (being a Metamorphmagus made her very aware of the physical difference in people, she really never understood why people couldn't tell so called 'identical twins' apart, it was so obvious) suddenly stood up, the skin on his face contorting, his hair lengthening and losing its red color. His male feature softened into what was possibly the more beautiful woman Tonks had ever seen, his hair was now long enough to reach down his... her back and was a silverish blonde.

Tonks was admiring the time delayed hex that allowed Harry to remotely change Fred Weasley into a beautiful woman, when the full force of the most powerful allure she had ever felt hit her full in the face. Every man in the pub was suddenly highly aroused and responding to Fred. It was only after her transfigured body started to respond to Fred's new form that Tonks realized what Harry had done. He hadn't changed Fred into a woman; Fred Weasley was now a Veela. A Veela in full rut.

Tonks smiled widely, while changing her body toward a neuter status. Whatever the twins had done, Harry had definitely won this round. It was then

a mesmerized George reached out and drew his transfigured brother into a kiss.

Harry was going to love this memory.

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September 01, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor 7th Year Boys Dorms:

Following the feast, Harry was in his dorm unpacking, and laying out his robes for the next day. Neville, Dean and Seamus entered to begin their own unpacking.

"Gentlemen, it's good to see you, we've got something to discuss.

"Harry, mate," Dean said, "We know you and Ron are having problems, but we can't be getting in the middle of that."

"This is nothing to do with Ron, Dean. I happened to have come into possession of some interesting Art work, and I thought I'd share the wealth." From his trunk he withdrew the photos that had come with the marriage contracts. "I present some Artwork. I call this set, 'Surprisingly Limber Girls'" He dropped the largest pack of photos. "This set I call, 'Surprisingly Limber Girls and their very affectionate Girlfriends'" A second smaller package joined the first. "And this one is 'Surprisingly Limber Girls and their amazing collection of Toys" a third package joined the others on the others. "I thought everyone might enjoy the artwork this year."

"Bloody hell Harry" said Seamus "Where did you get these things?" His eyes bugged out when he noted the face on one of the women in the photos. "That's Tamara Oakley; she works at Honeydukes in Diagon Alley and would never give me the time of day. Where did you get these?"

"They came with Marriage Contracts."

Dean opened and closed his mouth several times. "You are an unspeakably lucky bastard. You're sharing these with us?"

"Gentlemen, art of this quality is to be shared."

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September 02, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

Harry Potter sat with his back against an ancient oak tree enjoying the crisp air and the grandeur of the Scottish sunrise.

A lifetime of habit had robbed Harry of the ability to sleep any later than dawn. This day he had waken well before dawn, and knew instantly that trying to go back to sleep would be futile. He had risen then, gotten his shower before the crowd, and dressed quietly in the dark, appreciating the 'normal' sounds of the dorm. Neville would suddenly thrash about in his bed and then quiet down again for several minutes. Dean would mutter running commentaries of football games in his sleep, with occasional demands that the referee get his eyes checked and other less polite suggestions. Seamus hugged his pillow as if it were a woman, maintaining a constant whispered drone of endearments to it.

Ron's bed was empty. Completely untouched. Harry tried not to think about what that meant. Ron wasn't really part of his problems with the Weasleys, the break came because Ron needed to support his parents and sister. He wished Ron and Hermione well, and hoped the pair of them all the best. If only he didn't miss them quite so much.

From the dorm he made his way out of the castle and out onto the grounds. He found his quiet place and enjoyed the show. Something tickled in the back of his mind. Trust the old man to spoil a perfect sunrise.

"Good Morning Headmaster." Harry said without turning to look. "The sunrise always makes me feel small, you know?"

"Indeed Mr. Potter. I am unused to students being able to detect my coming and going. You startled me."

"Tommy caused me to learn a few things. What can I do for you Headmaster?"

"I was hoping you would finally reveal just how you defeated Tom."

"No," Harry said after a few seconds of reflection. "I don't think so."

"Why not? Why do you keep your accomplishment from the Historical Record?" The ancient wizard asked.

"You know, when my friends and I fell apart last spring, I tried to research how you killed your dark lord. Not a single word in the record."

"There are good reasons for that, I assure you Harry."

"And I have my reasons as well, Headmaster. I wouldn't want the next Dark Lord defending against it, nor do I want my own technique used against me."

"I'm afraid that I must insist Harry."

"Headmaster, you would never believe me."

"You will find that I can believe quite a few things Harry."

The boy sighed. This was ruining his morning; dealing with the old man had a way of doing that.

"Alright. I'm not the Harry you know. I'm from a future where Voldemort won."

"He won?" That answer seemed to have flustered the old man a bit. Good.

"Yes. In the original time line, I never found out what you and the Weasleys were doing. I spent 6th year allowing you to drive a wedge between Hermione and myself over a stupid Potions text. You made a big deal of showing me your home movies about the life of Tom Riddle as if knowing that the bastard killed his father or that he got Horace Slughorn to tell him about horocruces would be any help at all." Harry paused again, feeling the brush of an Legilimency probe. Giving no outward sign he pushed the appropriate memories to the surface and continued. "You took me on a horocruce hunt to a cave by the sea, where we recovered a locket after having to deal with a poisoned potion and inferi. While we were gone Draco had let Death Eaters into the castle via a vanishing cabinet in the Room of Requirements. We returned to Hogsmeade to find a Dark Mark over the castle. We borrowed a pair of brooms and flew to the Astronomy tower." Harry sighed sadly. "We heard fighting, and someone running up to the tower. You had me put on my Invisibility cloak, and hide in a corner. When Draco Malfoy burst in, you petrified me. The Poisoned Potion from the cave had you almost too weak to stand, and Draco had been tasked with killing you, but he wasn't a killer yet. You had him just about talked into surrendering when three Death Eaters burst in. They were waiting for Draco to kill you, egging him on, when Snape appeared."

"And Severus dealt with the Death Eaters?"

"No, he killed you. If the Killing curse hadn't been enough to do the job, his spell blew you completely off the tower. The sudden stop at the end of the fall was more than enough to kill you. Snape took Draco, and ran with the Death Eaters back to Tom. We buried you right over there." Harry gestured to where the cairn would have been erected.

The thought of his death seemed to have unnerved the ancient wizard. "Then what happened?"

"Ron, Hermione and I went on a horocruce hunt. The Ministry fell to Voldemort a few months later, a Pure Blood centric pogrom started. Half bloods were restricted to serving Pure bloods, Muggle born were 'relocated' to 'reeducation camps' which is to say executed after prolonged torture."

"We lost Hermione in 2000, when a hunter killer squad found our tent in the forbidden forest. Ron and I kept going. In 2007 we were captured as we destroyed the final horocruce, we had to break into Gringotts to get that one, stealing a Dragon to get away. The Goblins were pissed. Ron was executed on the spot, but I was taken to be presented to Voldemort himself."

"Harry, I'm so..."

"Old man, you wanted to know what happened, so shut up so I can tell it." Harry shook his head in frustration toward his Headmaster. "I was bound hand and foot and was being transported to Tom, when an assault team hit the convoy. I was captured by the resistance. I don't know what surprised me more, the existence of a resistance, or who the leaders were."

"Who were they?"

"Luna Lovegood and Daphne Greengrass. They had been keeping the Ministry under Tom off balance for years; they were what allowed us to get away with as much as we did. They had a plan to win, but to do that they needed me."

"To deliver the death blow to Tom?"

"No, to prevent his final rise to power. They had worked out a method of time travel using potions, runes and a specifically designed spell. The Runes setup a temporal containment field, the spell cast the field into the past. They projected that the field would go between ten and fifteen years backwards, so they needed someone who could make a difference in the period 1992 -1997. They chose me."

"What of the potion? And what powered the Rune cluster?"

"Caught that did you? Well you see, they couldn't send any mass back in time. They believed that the Runes properly powered would cast my soul and they hoped my magical core back to my own body, where they believed that my 'present' soul and 'future' soul would integrate to a single entity. They hoped that my 'present' magical core would do the same thing with my 'future' magical core. The potion was designed to eject my magical core from my body. I got inside the rune array, drank the potion, cast a killing curse on myself to power the runes and the girls cast the time displacement spell." Harry made a slight gesture and a glass appeared in his hand, and then the glass filled with water. Harry took a sip. "I woke up in my bed in the Gryffindor dorm last November 9th, with my two souls in the process of integrating. We had quite the conversation during that hour, and we agreed to do what needed to be done. I skipped breakfast and went to the room of requirements to experiment with my magic. I found that I knew and could perform all the magic I learned 'in the future' and that I was stupidly more powerful than I had been the first time."

In December I discovered your plot with the Weasleys, lost Ron and Hermione, found that I had other allies I had been unaware of, and started on my new path. My new allies and I gathered and destroyed the horocruces, then last May, Tom made the mistake of letting me get close, and I ended it."

There was silence between them for a few moments. Harry checked his watch, almost time to go to breakfast and get his class schedule.

"That is an amazing tale Harry. If anyone else had told it, I would have my doubts, but from you, I have to believe it."

Harry nodded sadly. "Thank you Headmaster. You know, I'm thinking of financing a study to determine just what happens to Wizards after they leave Hogwarts. If I was to tell that story in the common room tonight, I wouldn't get as far as Luna and Daphne teamed together to head the resistance before everyone in the room would be yelling 'Bullshit!', but our elders, including yourself buy a cock and bull story like that without blinking. It is truly amazing."

"That was a... story?"

"Of course it was a story. How I dealt with Riddle is no one's business but my own, and Neville's because he was with me. Now if you'll excuse me, need to get to breakfast, I'm hungry and I owe Neville Longbottom 10 Galleons. I never thought you'd buy such a ludicrous story."

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September 01, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Great Hall:

Harry slide into his seat at the Gryffindor table across from Neville, and slid the 10 coins across the table.

"The old man believed your little story did he?" Neville asked pocketing his winnings.

"Yeah. I would have though living a century and a half one would develop a bullshit filter, but you were right." Harry looked at the selection on the table and selected some scrambled eggs and fried tomatoes for his plate. "The photos were a hit."

"Large surprise there. I thumbed through them and didn't notice any of those from class mates past or present."

Harry shook his head. "I've culled those out and have returned them to the senders, or will when I decline their offers. Having those photos around would be disrespectful, and if the girls ever found out, they'd hurt me."

"No argument from me Harry. I was looking to pull them before Dean or Seamus found them. I should have known you'd do the right thing." Neville dug into his eggs while reaching for more bacon. "Starting with the declines today?"

"Yeah. It seems that most of the women in question were unaware their families made the offer, so I'm starting with the Slytherins today, and work my way up to the girls who will likely hurt me if they feel I'm insulting them."

"You don't think the Slytherin girls will try to hurt you?"

"Oh, sure, but they don't need to feel insulted to do so. Speak of the demons, here comes Malfoy and Parkinson." He smiled "Got your inbred Pure Blood Twit routine ready?"

"I resemble that remark." Neville said smirking.

The Slytherin pair drew near. Neville ruffled the newspaper he was reading. "I say Potter," he said in a loud voice that carried throughout the hall, "The Aurors keep finding more and more families that are claiming their marked loved ones were weak minded fools under the imperius for years."

"I know Longbottom old boy," Harry said in an equally loud voice, "It's bad enough the fools are dead, now their families are claiming they were all weak minded as well, well breeding will tell, if anyone would know that the death eaters were all week minded fools, who better to be able to say than their inbred off spring."

"Are you talking about my family Potter?"

"Good morning Draco. How are you this fine Death Eater free morning?"

"You'll pay for what you did to my father Potter."

"You've been making that threat since first year Draco. If I didn't know better, I'd be thinking you didn't like me or something. I certainly didn't do anything to your weak minded father Draco, I only killed the Dark Putz, your father killed himself when he took the mark and slaved his life and magic to a half blood, under the imperius as he was, being weak minded and all."

"Potter, I'm going..."

"Oh Pansy?" Neville interrupted the blond's rant. "It's good to see you this morning as well; Harry and I have some personal private business with you. Perhaps Draco would be so kind as to toddle off?"

"Nothing you have to say to me interests me in the slightest blood traitor."

"I'm sorry you feel that way Pansy." He reached into his robes and withdrew a rolled up parchment, which he handed to her. "In accordance with the old ways, Pansy, I decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage, as tempting as that offer might be."

Pansy unrolled the parchment and stared open mouthed at her families seal. This was real. "My family offered me... To you?"

"Me as well, Pansy old girl." Harry smiled at the stricken girl. "That personal note you attached bemoaning the extremely small size of Draco's willy while begging me to rescue you from a life time of sexual frustration was heart rending, really it was. I'm not sure what everyone in the common room was laughing about when I read it to them last night, but I find that I too must decline. As charitable as I am, I'm afraid that there isn't enough hot water and soap in the world to wash the unmistakable taint of Draco from your body and soul. Sorry."

Pansy stared unbelievably at the two contracts in her hands, and then ran away from the great hall in tears.

"Potter!" Draco hissed. "You are dead, when I bring the Malfoy fortune against you..."

"Malfoy fortune?" Neville interrupted again. "Didn't see this morning's Prophet Draco? It seems that the Goblin that the Death Eaters kidnapped and tortured to death trying to find a back way into the goblin tunnels was Grethok, the son of Ragnak, the head of the Goblin Nation. The Ministry managed to head off a Goblin Rebellion by signing off on the confiscation of the personal fortunes of every marked Death Eater. That leaves the Malfoy fortune at pretty much what you've got in your pockets right now..."

Draco paled. Then left the Great Hall without another word to verify this information.

"That was wrong. We should be ashamed of ourselves Neville."

"I know, but it was fun." Neville once again dug into his breakfast.

"You know the funniest thing about it? Ragnak didn't even like Grethok, though he was proud that his boy didn't break under torture. Ragnak was going to call it a wash because Grethok kept trying to raise a rebellion against Ragnak's rule, but then I suggested that he might as well make a galleon or two out of the deal. He cut me in for 2 percent for the suggestion."

Neville fell off his seat laughing.

"I just didn't want the fortunes of the Death Eaters financing the next Dark Lord." He shrugged. "Who knew that it would be both amusing AND profitable?"

Neville was picking himself up and more students filed into the Great Hall to break their fasts. Not long after the students were seated, the morning post arrived. Hedwig landed in front of Harry and extended her leg. Attached there was a small package and a sheet of parchment. Harry took the letter and the package, and gave his best girl most of a rasher of bacon. Then a small barn owl landed in front of him and offered its leg with a single sheet of parchment attached.

Taking the letter, Harry offered the owl some bacon, it took the offering, then winged off. Suspicious, he ran several detection charms on this newest letter. Nothing. Using his fork and knife he opened the letter without allowing it to touch his flesh. As he suspected it was from the Twins. The letter head had the Weasley Wizarding Weezes logo.

Dear Partner: It read

We hate you.

That Veela Prank was cruel beyond all belief.

(You have to tell me how you did it – Fred)

(I am still gargling to get the taste of Fred out of my mouth – George)

WE SURRENDER!

We should have known better than to challenge the son of a Marauder.

We only know it was you because we couldn't prove it was someone else

Love: Gred and Forge.

"What?" Asked Neville. "I know that look, and normally it means trouble."

Harry held up the small package. "I'll show you later. Believe me, it will be worth the wait."

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"Excuse me Millicent?"

"What do you want Potter?"

"Beyond some Slytherin to eventually call me 'Harry'? Not much. I just have to tell you something."

Millicent Bulstrode nodded. She then stood with a questioning look on her face.

"Miss Bulstrode, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take a wife. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you in mind."

She blinked. Twice. Then she began to laugh. "I can't believe that father would do that without asking me. You're alright Potter. The majority of the bastards in this school would never have said a thing to me, just skulked off like cowards. Thank you Potter... Harry."

"No problem... Millie."

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September 01, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor Heads Common Room:

For more than an hour the only sound in the room was the scratch of Hermione's quill. Ron had finally had enough. He heaved himself from the sofa he had been laying on and came up behind Hermione at her study desk. He leaned over, nuzzling her neck and cupped her breasts.

"Ron, I've got to finish this."

"It's the first day of class love. We've got rounds to make at 11 o'clock. That gives us two hours to relax." He nipped at her ear.

Hermione found herself leaning back into him, the quill falling from her fingers as she reached up to pull his lips back to her neck. All thoughts of her studies left her when his right hand left her breast and moved down to probe her through her panties.

They were 15 minutes late for their rounds.

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September 03, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Outside the Transfiguration Classroom:

It had taken Harry two days to track down his last two Slytherins. As usual, they were together. The pair were leaving transfiguration and heading to the Great Hall for lunch, Harry fell into step along side Tracey Davis.

"Ladies."

"What do you want Potter?" The shorter of the pair, Tracey Davis asked.

"A chance to speak with each of you in private."

The two girls exchanged a look, and then pulled Harry into an empty classroom.

"This is new." Daphne Greengrass said. "I've never been propositioned by a Gryffindor before."

"And you aren't now. I would prefer to do this in private."

"Anything you have to say to me, you can say in front of Daphne, Potter."

"Alright. Miss Davis, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take a wife. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you in mind." He handed the blonde the contract.

"My family offered me to you?"

"Yes they did. You don't really care all that much do you?"

"No, I guess I don't." She fixed Harry with a stare. "Ok, go ahead with Daphne."

"No. For Daphne I insist on privacy. If today isn't good, I'll try later."

The girls exchanged a look. Since first year they always had each other's backs.

"Go ahead Tracey, I'll be ok with Potter, he's harmless."

"I wouldn't go as far as harmless, but she is safe with me."

With a concerned look Tracey left the room.

"Well that was dramatic Potter, what do you want?"

"I thought I should return your photographs personally." Harry handed the five photos to Daphne.

A blush flooded Daphne's face, but she carried on with her traditional attitude. "Already made the rounds of the Gryffindor common room have

then?"

"No. The only person other than myself who has seen them is Neville Longbottom. He only saw them because he opened the envelope they were in."

"So, Longbottom's your social secretary now?"

"You aren't going to get a rise out of me Daphne, you can quit trying. Neville was helping me because I was at his home when I received over 3000 contracts, including yours. Neville won't tell anyone, he's a good person." He looked her in the eye. "Miss Greengrass, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take a wife. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you in mind."

"Is that all?"

"Not at all. You are the first person among our classmates that was aware of that a contract was offered. The fact that you sent photos intrigued me to no end. Why would your family do that to you?"

"How do you know that it wasn't my idea?"

"How do I know that it wasn't your idea to display yourself like a piece of meat? Well, given your general disdain for most of our classmates, much less me, that it was your idea seemed unlikely, especially when I looked at your eyes in the photos. The smile on your face didn't reach your eyes, they were dead and empty. Those were the eyes of someone going through the motions, someone who doesn't expect anything good to come from her life. I recognized those eyes; I saw them every time I looked in the mirror before I managed to kill Tom Riddle." He saw the questions in her eyes. "You knew him as Voldemort."

"My father is hungry for status; everyone believed our family to be supporters of the Dark Lord, even though we were neutral. I knew that he was offering a marriage contract in my name, but I didn't know who to. I guess he decided that the House of Potter was on the rise, and that an alliance with you would secure a place in the new order for our family."

"I thought it might be something like that. I was wondering Daphne, would you like to go out with me?"

The girl was gobsmacked. She really hadn't been expecting that. "What?"

"Now that I can have something that resembles a normal life I would like to try dating. This Gryffindor vs. Slytherin crap has isolated most of us into our houses. My house has three girls in my year. Lavender and Parvati do nothing for me; all they care about is fashion, makeup and divination. I like smart girls. In my house in our year, that leaves Hermione. She's with a friend and isn't available to me. That means I need to look outside Gryffindor. You are scary smart, much smarter than me, not that that is so hard. You are drop dead gorgeous, and my intelligence network tells me unlike our brainy classmates in Ravenclaw, you have never dated since you've been here. I tried once or twice and those ended in absolute disaster. I thought that put us on equal footing."

"So, you don't want to marry me, but you want to fuck me?" She asked trying to shock him with her ready use of profanity.

"I said date Daphne. If I wanted to fuck you I would have exercised my rights to clause nine of your contract. I would like to get to know you. If you'd like to know me, Saturday I'll be at the big oak by Hagrid's house at noon. I'll pack a picnic lunch; we can talk and get to know each other. Would you like me to escort you to lunch?"

"No, Tracey will be outside the door." She hesitated, and then appeared to make a decision. "I'll meet you on Saturday, but you won't touch me."

"It's a date then. Thank you."

Harry opened the door for her, and Tracey was indeed waiting for her. Harry left the girls to go to lunch.

"What did he want?"

"He got a contract from my father as well. He was the one Daddy sent the photos to."

"What did he do?"

"He gave me the photos back and declined the contract. Then he asked me out for a date."

"He wants to get in your pants." Tracey was clearly furious, her manner suggesting that Potter was going to pay for this.

"I thought so too. But he said that if that's what he wanted, he would have just exercised clause nine. I need to see what he was talking about." She unrolled the parchment, and scanned down to the ninth clause. The tall girl paled.

"What is it Daph?"

"Understanding that the traditional separation of Houses in Hogwarts may have left you with no personal knowledge of my daughter, I hereby authorize a period of no more than ninety days for sexual experimentation between yourself and Daphne. For that period, Daphne will be yours body and soul." The Raven haired beauty looked up at her friend with tears in his eyes. "Potter turned this down. Can you imagine if Malfoy or Nott, or Zambini had been made that offer? What kind of man is Potter anyway?"

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September 05, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The School Grounds:

The waiting was the worst part. Harry found himself wondering if it was the same for all men, waiting to see if a woman was actually going to show up. He had arrived half an hour early for the picnic date, with a basket lovingly packed by the kitchen elves, who had fallen all over themselves to help him. The little beings were so deliriously happy to serve, Harry found himself wondering why more picnics weren't happening each weekend. From somewhere the elves had produced a bottle of wine. Harry tucked that down at the bottom of the basket and covered it with several bottles of butterbeer. He didn't want Daphne to get the wrong idea.

"Hello Potter." Daphne's distinctive voice came from behind him. His early warning system had let him know she was there, but why not let her think she had succeeded in surprising him.

"Hello Daphne." He looked up; she was clad in denim jeans and a black jumper. Her clothing molded to her leaving no doubt as to her femininity. He found that his mouth had gone very dry. "I've never really done this before; let me know if I start acting like an idiot, ok?"

She actually smiled. "I think you can count on that Potter. So, are you ready to start your master plan to charm me?"

"The first step of my master plan is to get you to call me Harry."

She considered that for a moment. "Perhaps after you earn it, Potter. Where are we going?"

"There's a secluded spot by the lake. I like to study there on nice days, unless you know of a better spot?"

"The large stone near the lake? I've seen you there on occasion. No, I don't know a better spot for a picnic, lead on."

Harry led the way to the large stone that had become 'his place' since his falling out with the Weasley's the previous year that had cost him Ron and Hermione's company. "So, are you catching abuse down in the dungeons for knowingly associating with a filthy Gryffindor?"

"All of Slytherin knows that I am not to be trifled with Potter. Since you so skillfully neutered Malfoy, no one challenges me in my house. Do you expect to receive any abuse for associating with me?"

"Nah, I'm fairly untouchable, that and they think I'd do to them what I did to Riddle. What do you mean I neutered Malfoy? I didn't do anything to him."

Daphne fixed him with a stare. "Oh yes Potter. Voldemort and his fools kill the son of the Head of the Goblin Nation, you defeat Voldemort and his marked minions die, the Goblins make no mention of any retribution for the death of the Goblin that has attempted to lead four rebellions against Ragnak. You visit Gringotts the Friday before school starts and the goblins confiscate the fortunes of all marked Death Eaters. You obviously had nothing to do with it."

"That's all I'm saying." Harry smiled. "Your intelligence gathering is excellent. I didn't think anyone was paying attention to my coming and goings." They had reached Harry's 'spot'. He spread a blanket he conjured on the spot onto the ground, placed the basket down, and offered Daphne his hand.

"You expect me to sit on the ground to eat?"

"Traditionally, that's how a picnic works Daphne."

"Oh." She seemed surprised. "I've never actually been on a picnic before." She said in a small voice. "I've read about them though, they always sounded like fun." She smiled. "Now that I think about it the stories never mentioned chairs."

Daphne took his hand and settled to sit upon the blanket. Harry folded himself to sit with his back against the stone, with the basket between them. "A new experience for both of us then, I've never been on a picnic either. I wasn't allowed."

"Security?"

"No, as ass of an Uncle who hated magic, Wizards, and me. Not necessarily in that order. Until I was eleven and Hagrid took me to Diagon Alley for the first time, other than primary school, and the occasional shopping trip when they wanted something carried, my entire universe was an eighth acre lot in Little Whinging Surrey." Harry reaching into the basket he found a bottle of butterbeer and offered it to Daphne, which she accepted. He found another for himself.

"So. You got three thousand Marriage contracts?"

"Yeah. I don't know if that says something about Wizarding Society, or if it says something about me."

"It says you are the insanely rich head of two ancient and noble houses, Potter. It says that making an alliance with you would profit anyone who could manage it. It isn't really all that complicated." She sipped at her butterbeer. "Why am I here?"

Harry studied her face. "I don't understand."

"You got offers from three thousand women, me included. From what I could find out, you've declined almost all of them, again myself included. Why am I here? What is the purpose of this... date?"

Harry sighed. "Daphne, I'm seventeen years old. For my entire life I've been controlled, manipulated, guided and was expected, by those who claimed to love me, to die gloriously in defense of a culture that has abused and hated me since I was eleven. Well, I disappointed them by surviving and I've been free of all that for not quite four months. In those four months I've spent some money, I've traveled a bit, I bought a house and a company, and I've fired an employee. On my seventeenth birthday, I am offered my choice of three thousand women, the vast majority of whom I've never met. Yes, I've declined most of them. All but fourteen to be exact and those fourteen I will be approaching as soon as I can to personally decline them." Harry paused, taking a pull on his butterbeer. "Why did I ask you out after declining your hand in marriage? I am not ready to give up my new found freedom. This doesn't mean I want to be alone. I would like someone to spend time with."

"But why me?"

"I already told you. Because of your photos."

"Liked what you saw then?" her voice went ice cold.

"Of course I did. You are gorgeous. I wasn't commenting on your body, exquisite though it is. I told you before, it was your eyes. I knew those eyes; I've seen them in the mirror. I wanted to get to know the person behind them. That's why I asked you out." He shook his head in frustration. "That came out wrong. It wasn't the photos of you. I got hundreds of photos of women in various states of undress. Hell, the dorm is wall-papered with the stupid things. Only you can answer the question as to why you are here."

Harry wasn't surprised by the silence from the girl. He had definitely bollixed this up. She would no doubt be storming back to the castle any second; spreading the word that Harry Potter was a complete and utter idiot. He waited a ten count for her to bolt, and was surprised that she remained.

"If a copy of one of my photos is part of the 'wall-paper' in your dorm, no one will ever find your body."

"None of the pictures in the dorm are of any classmate past or present. I pulled those and have personally returned all but one, and she will get hers back when I decline her family's offer, just as you got yours." That seemed to satisfy her; she remained sitting on the blanket. "I think this is where we get to know each other." He said, breaking the new silence.

"Good idea. You first."

"You never give an inch do you Daphne?"

"Never."

Harry laughed, sipped his butterbeer and began to tell his story, his early life, the cruelty of the Dursleys and the odd things that happened around him. He told of his introduction to the Wizarding world at the hands of Hagrid and his tour of Diagon Alley, his first meeting with Draco, then seemingly fortunate meeting with the Weasleys outside platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ and his first real friendship with Ron. He told of meeting Hermione on the train, and the slow bonding of the trio that culminated that Halloween night first year with the troll.

During his story, they both began to eat from the basket, cold chicken, sandwiches of several types, hot sausages, and potato crisps. Daphne gasped at his description of facing the troll and later a Voldemort possessed Quirrel over the Philosophers Stone. She had heard stories, but never truly believed them. Harry's tales of second year facing the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets chilled her. He showed her the scars on his right forearm where the fang had pierced completely through.

His tales of third year with the dementors, the Hippogriff, and the murderer Sirius Black, culminating in Black being cleared, at least in Harry's eyes, and a rescue involving a time turner. Fourth year had the Triwizard Tournament, which she remembered well. She was surprised that he still denied entering, claiming that a death eater masquerading as Moody had plotted the entire episode. Her eyes teared when he told of the death of Cedric Diggory, of his escape from the Dark Lord and Harry's struggle to return Cedric's body to his parents.

Fifth year brought Umbridge, and the fight in the Ministry, his friends falling to their injuries one by one, until only he and a badly injured Neville Longbottom remained standing, the destruction of the prophecy, the loss of his godfather, the shame he still felt over using an unforgivable against Bellatrix Lestrange, the awe he felt seeing Dumbledore dueling Voldemort, and the horror of being possessed by Voldemort and asking Dumbledore to kill him.

Sixth year brought the discovery of the betrayal of Dumbledore and the Weasleys, the discovery that he had been carefully steered to this point, that they expected him to die and had taken steps to profit from his death. The loss of his friend Ron who though innocent of the deceit of his parents and sister, when forced to choose between Harry and his family went with family. The loss of Hermione who remained with the boy she had come to love. Harry's discovery of a new ally willing, even eager to stand with him against the darkness. Of the final battle, of pain, blood, loss, and surprisingly survival, even victory.

Harry told her of his first summer of freedom, his discovery of his family properties, of his subtle quiet revenge against the Dursleys, and his first tentative steps toward making a life of his choosing.

Daphne pulled the bottle of wine from the basket and inspected the label. "A pedestrian vintage Potter. You've got the taste of a House Elf." She said, removed the cork from the bottle with a flick of her wand. She placed the open bottle under her nose and inhaled. "Not too horribly bad I suppose." She put the bottle to her lips and took a long pull.

"Not using a glass?" Harry gently snarked.

"We're on a picnic Potter, which means we're roughing it." She then passed the bottle to Harry who hesitantly took a sip himself.

Daphne moved the basket from between them, and moved next to Harry. "I'm cold Potter. Put your arm around me. But don't get any ideas."

Harry's first inclination was to cast a warming charm, then came to the startled realization what Daphne could have done that easily, but chose not to. She was actually asking for him to put his arm around her. Desperately trying to not get his hand tangled in her hair and to avoid touching anything he shouldn't he lay his arm upon her shoulders. Daphne moved closer, almost molding herself to him. Maybe she really was cold.

Daphne retrieved the bottle and took another pull. Holding the trembling hand of the arm around her shoulders Daphne began to tell her own story, of growing up on the Greengrass estate. Of being lonely, so very lonely. She told of learning to ride a horse, of upsetting the house elves by insisting on caring for her horse herself. Being taught by tutors instead of going to school with other children. Both parents so very busy with 'important' things, leaving Daphne with her studies, the house elves and her horse. That pattern continued until her first trip to Diagon Alley, the first time she had seen more than a few people at a time. She told of her own trip to Platform 9 ¾ and the terror she had felt as she suddenly found herself in public without her parents in a crowd of strangers.

She told him of meeting Tracey Davis, and recognizing another frightened soul among the boisterous children, of begging the Hat to place her into Slytherin after seeing her friend go there, those first frightening nights in a strange dormitory, of joining Tracey in her bed to hold each other as each cried herself to sleep.

Daphne explained how she had built her Ice Queen public personae bit by bit until she was so intimidating that few would approach her. Of avoiding the hands of older boys until she was avoiding her own classmates. She told of watching the maelstrom what was Harry Potter from a distance as he inexplicably escaped death every single year, of the despair she felt as the Dark Lord built his power over the years, the terror that reasserted its self when those closest to 'The Chosen One' had seemingly abandoned him. (Harry choked when she used his nickname) And of the day last May when in the middle of a potions class Snape suddenly grasped his right forearm and began to scream, thrashing upon the floor until he died, then later that very evening, Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom, both broken and bloodied painfully hobbled into the Great Hall supporting each other and announced that Voldemort was dead. Then her anger and self loathing while posing for the photographs that Harry had returned to her.

When Daphne finished the pair were quiet for a moment. Then Daphne lifted the bottle and shook it, then raised it to her lips and swallowed the last of the wine. "We killed the entire bottle." She said as she put the empty back into the basket. "That gives me the excuse to do this." She rose to her knees, straddling him. She leaned over and sealed her mouth to his, her hands on the back of his head pulling him into the kiss.

Daphne had never kissed a boy before, but this seemed right somehow. She broke the kiss when she realized just how much she was enjoying it, smiled at the expression on his face and kissed him again. She then returned to her place beside him, pulling his right arm around her shoulder.

The couple spent the rest of the afternoon cuddled in quiet conversation, watching the antics of the Giant Squid playing with a floating log out in the middle of the lake.

Daphne rose to her feet. "It's almost five. We should get back." She smiled. "Tracey will be worried, and might come out her looking for us and hex you."

"Well we wouldn't want that." Harry stood and tapped the picnic basket with is wand. It returned to the kitchens. He was going to have to go down tonight and thank the elves. He then vanished the blanket he had created earlier and together the pair began the walk back to the castle.

As they got to the entrance to the castle Harry said, "Thank you Daphne, I had fun. I hope the story of my pathetic life didn't bore you too much."

"I wasn't bored Harry. You've shown me what kind of date you are on the grounds of the castle... Next weekend is a Hogsmeade weekend, I think I'll give you a chance to really show me a good time."

The Green eyed wizard smiled. "A second date?"

The girl sighed. "I suppose." Her eyes hardened. "Don't be getting any ideas Potter."

"I'll see what I can come up with in the way of plans. In case I don't see you between now and next Saturday, meet here at 9am?"

"I don't have to get up at dawn to milk the cows Potter, make it a civilized hour, and say 10am."

"10am it is. Any requests for the day?"

"Surprise me."

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September 06, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor Common Room:

Hermione entered the Common Room. It was odd how little time she spent in the Common Room this year. She would have to work at that. She really didn't want to lose touch with her friends.

In the chair nearest the fire she saw Harry quietly reading. Hermione sat down in the chair closest to him. "Hey stranger."

"Hermione!" his face broke into a smile, then quickly glanced around the room. "How are you? Won't this cause problems?"

Relax Harry. Ginny is at Quidditch practice. No threats of problems with Molly." Her smile dimmed. "How are you Harry? Ron and I miss you."

"And I miss you 'mione, both of you. It just doesn't seem right to go through the day without you two. I've barely seen Ron at all. What are you doing to the poor guy? I don't think he's managed to get to bed since school started." He waggled his eyebrows at her.

"I don't know how to explain it Harry. I've never felt like this about anyone, I love him so much." She blushed. "I hadn't realized we were being so blatant about it."

"If you don't share a dorm with Ron, you wouldn't know Hermione. You two just appear to be a normal couple. I doubt that anyone outside of the 7th year guys know for sure."

"Harry, we're in love." She whispered desperately.

"Hermione, after all we've been through, you don't have to justify yourself to me. I know you; Ron is the luckiest guy in this castle. You've done pretty well too."

"How about you Harry? I've heard you went for a picnic with Daphne Greengrass."

"Yeah, we had fun."

"Ron is convinced she's going to kill you."

"Ron needs to relax. The War is over."

"I wish we had been there at the end."

"I don't Hermione. Neville and I were luckier than we deserved, if anything had happened to either of you that would have killed me. I was deliriously happy that you two were out of the fight. Seriously Hermione, everything worked out for the best. Nev and I are closer than ever, I'm amazed, he and I are closer than Ron and I ever were."

The portrait swung open and one of Gryffindor's new beaters entered, covered in mud. Hermione's eyes widened. "Ginny will be up soon. We'll talk later Harry." She stood and made toward the door.

"Good bye Hermione." He said sadly. The three of them had faced Death Eaters, but their lives were being controlled by a vindictive 16 year old girl and her mother.

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September 08, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Greenhouse #6:

"Neville?"

Neville looked up from the Clingvine he was repotting. These Nocturnal Carnivorous plants were a pain to work with, but he was at a point where he could stop.

"Back here Millie."

Millicent Bulstrode made her way back to the carnivorous section of the greenhouse followed by a Daphne Greengrass. Greengrass's nervousness annoyed Millie. Like most of 'The Gardeners' (a small group of herbology students made up of students of all houses) she never really understood that the rest of the school was indoctrinated with the truism that you didn't go into Greenhouse #6 unless you were very tired of living and you were interested in particularly slow and painful ways of dying.

"Greengrass wants to talk to you Nev. Where are you at in this?"

"Got the primary root-ball repotted. I've got the nine secondary root-balls all staked and marked. I was sure that's all we'd get to tonight; we'll get to the tertiary root-balls tomorrow."

"Has anyone got a census on them yet?"

"Su said that she thought that there were nineteen, but she hadn't staked them yet."

"Sweet. Ok, I've got this; you go have your talk."

"Thanks Millie." Neville inspected his clothing. He frowned. "Daphne, if you want to talk to me, we probably ought to get out of the greenhouse." He edged around her, giving her as wide a berth as he could, then led them back to the exit. Outside he stood beneath a large shower head, and gestured with his wand, a torrent of a purplish liquid fell over Neville for more than a minute, he then stepped clear of the spray and waved his wand again cleaning and drying himself.

"Sorry about that, Clingvines have some nasty toxins, and I was covered in its sap. If I'd touched you, you'd wake up in a few days in the Hospital

wing."

"How bad could it really be? You were covered with it."

Neville smiled. "We 'Gardeners' build up something of an immunity over the years. What can I do for you Daphne?"

"Is my picture wallpapering the 7th year Gryffindor dorm?"

Neville shook his head. "No. There is quite a collection of photos on the wall, most but not all coming from Harry's collection of Marriage Contracts. None of the photos Harry allowed the others to see were of anyone we were or have been in class with, though he did get a few of those. I believe he has returned those to the ladies in question. You got yours didn't you?"

"Do you know why he's asked me out?"

"Ah a moral dilemma. Do I do what I think is right for Harry, or do I keep his secrets?" Daphne started in on the intimidation she used so effectively. "Daphne, quit it. We've known each other far too long, that isn't going to work on me."

Daphne blushed. Neville was one of the few playmates she had as a child. Her maternal grandmother and the Lady Longbottom were friends from their days at Hogwarts.

"Neville please."

"Daphne, Harry's a damaged guy. He was deeply in love with a girl who turned out to be the way you are supposed to be, but aren't. When the vindictive little bitch didn't get what she wanted, she went out of her way to take Harry's best friends away from him, running to her mother every time they even speak to him."

"Harry isn't looking for a life time commitment just yet. He wants to have some fun with someone who doesn't want anything from him. He doesn't want anything exclusive from you. I believe he's planning something very special for this weekend, and I'm not going to spoil it for you."

"Neville"

"Daphne. Trust Harry. He isn't looking to use you. He isn't looking to get anything from you. He wants to have fun and enjoy life, and he wants to do that with you."

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September 11, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Great Hall:

Daphne had just sat down for breakfast when a small brown owl lit in front of her and offered its leg. She untied the letter, and thanked the bird as it flew off. Who might be writing her? Her mother's weekly letter always came on Wednesday. This was the first time in her memory that she had ever received any post on a Friday. Most odd. She opened the letter.

Daphne:

Your surprise is ready, dress casually.

See you at 10...

-H

What was he up too?

...--ooo000ooo--...

September 12, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Entry Hall:

"Just don't be stupid Daphne."

"I can handle Harry Potter Tracey. It's just a little fun. Ignore Malfoy, no one has ever come back from a date with Potter and claimed rape. That isn't something Malfoy can say. "

"The Dark Lord thought he could handle Potter too Daphne. Just be careful."

"Voldemort never tried to handle Potter. He tried to kill him, a very different thing. This is nothing serious, just a little fun."

They arrived at the Entrance Hall exactly 9 minutes late in the theory that waiting on a woman is good for a man's soul. Together Tracey and Daphne exited the castle. Harry was waiting.

"Good morning ladies. Ready for an interesting day?"

"I prefer my days to not be all that interesting Potter." Tracey said. "Your level of interesting tends to end in the Hospital wing."

"You wound me Tracy." The Man Who Won said with that same smile. "I'll have you know I haven't been under Madam Pomfrey's care for four months now. Granted that 's a new record, but still."

"Quit teasing him Tracey. What do you have planned Harry?"

"You told me to surprise you; do you want me to ruin the surprise?" He offered Daphne his hand as she climbed up into the carriage for the trip to Hogsmeade; he did the same for Tracey, and then climbed in himself. "Will you be joining us today Tracey? There will be plenty of room."

Tracey glanced to her friend. Her answer was in Daphne's eyes. "No thank you Potter. I just need a few quills, and then I'll be heading back at the castle."

"If you're sure. Is there anything special you'd like to do Daphne?"

"After three years I doubt that there's all that much new to do in Hogsmeade Potter. I don't know how you think you're going to 'surprise' me."

"Ladies, please. It's Harry, just Harry. You asked to be surprised, so surprised you will be."

The thestral drawn carriage pulled into Hogsmeade; Harry hopped down and assisted the girls out of the carriage.

"You're sure you don't want to come with us today Tracey?"

"No thank you Potter. Daphne?" The tall raven haired woman went to the shorter blond. "Be careful Daph. He's up to something." She said in low tones.

"I know, he thinks he's going to sweep me off my feet. I won't be swept Tracey."

Daphne returned to Harry's side and together they watched Tracey make her way into the crowd of students in the town. Harry turned to face her, and startled her by putting his hands on her hips and pulling her close to him. Their faces were inches apart when he spoke.

"Do you trust me Daphne?" he asked with a smile.

Her Slytherin instincts made her want to laugh in his face, but when she opened her mouth to respond she was surprised by the word that came out. "Yes"

The green of his eyes burned into the violet of hers. "Hold your breath."

Tracey looked back to her friend in time to see them disappear in a shimmer of color. Where had that arrogant Gryffindor taken her friend?

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Harry Potter and the Marriage Contracts The Outting

September 12, 1997

Glasgow Scotland

Queens Street Station Apparation Point:

Every color in the universe swam before Daphne's eyes until they coalesced into the blazing green of the eyes of Harry Potter. His hands on her waist kept her upright. She found she could breathe again. Breaking his grasp she stumbled backwards a step.

"Bloody Hell Potter, what did you do? Where are we?"

"We're at the Apparation Point in Glasgow's Queens Street train station."

"Why did you bring me here? We aren't allowed to leave Hogsmeade! You're going to get me expelled! What the bloody hell were you thinking about?"

"In the order you asked. I brought you her to do some shopping in a place you don't know. We are both adults, and can leave the school any time we want and remain completely within the rules. You aren't going to be expelled, and I was thinking that you might enjoy seeing someplace new and completely outside your experience. You did ask me to surprise you. If you like I'll take you back."

"We can leave Hogsmeade?"

"Because we're over 17, yes. The staff doesn't advertise that fact, but it is within the rules."

"What are we doing here?"

"I put a lot of thought in to showing you a good time." He took her hand and led her off the apparition point to one of the benches that lined the spacious room. "You were saying that after three years there was nothing in Hogsmeade that was new. I figured that the same could be said for Diagon Alley. But then I asked myself, what were the chances you had ever gone Muggle?"

Daphne's breathing had calmed. She wasn't quite as angry any longer. "You're sure that this isn't going to get me expelled?"

He nodded. "Not even killed" Her eyes widened. "Sorry, bad joke from first year. We're perfectly safe, and not in any trouble. If Dumbledore trumps up any rules to try and punish you, just claim I took you against your will. There's no trace of your magical signature in the apparition, and I'm a well known malcontent."

"Oh Harry, you idiot." Daphne closed her eyes for a moment. "What is there to do in the Muggle World?"

"Not much. Shopping, restaurants, dancing."

"I like shopping." She said with a hint of a smile. "I've never been to a restaurant."

"The shops are waiting for us." He stood and offered her his hand. "When did I become 'Harry'?"

"You scared me almost to death, I wasn't in my right mind Potter." She pushed him. "Where are these shops you were talking about?"

Harry led her to the door of the apparition point. The door opened out into the train station. After the door closed, Daphne looked back to see what appeared to be a maintenance closet. She had never seen so many people, all bustling back and forth, not an obvious wizard or witch in sight. She held on to Harry's arm and pulled tight to him. "Are we safe here?"

"Of course we are." Harry said quietly. "Come on Daphne, Hermione told me you were in her Muggles Studies class; these aren't 12th century peasants willing to burn people different than themselves at the stake. They're just people. Some are bad, most are fairly decent folk. These days they just shun people different than themselves, and write scathing letters to the Editor of their favorite news paper about sending those 'freaks' back where they came from. I'll not let anything happen to you. Just keep holding on to my arm like that and you'll look like my girl friend."

"Are you sure no one will recognize you? I mean, you're famous."

"Not here. No one here knows me from Adam, just the way I like it." They had reached the station exits, and stepped out to the busy sidewalks and the even busier streets. Daphne gasped at the traffic. "Take it easy, those are just autos. Stay out of their way and you're perfectly safe."

"But there are so many people"

"Yes, Glasgow's a fairly big city." Walking with Daphne clinging to his arm was a very different experience. "So what kind of shopping do you like?"

"Tracey and I usually got for our school robes and other clothing. I could use some quills."

"Well, robes never really caught on in the wider world, and I don't think anyone's used a quill for about a century. Let's see what else there is." Harry guided her into a pedestrian shopping district. "I spent a few weeks in Glasgow this summer. I got to know parts of town fairly well." Harry was jerked to a stop when Daphne suddenly halted in her tracks staring at a display window.

"What is this?"

"It's just a shoe shop."

"You mean this entire shop is for shoes?"

"I think they sell other leather goods like purses and handbags, but yes, it's a shoe shop. There are probably half a dozen on this street alone." Harry was confused, why the interest in a shoe shop?

"We need to go in there," Daphne said, her eyes wide. "We need to go in there right now."

"Alright." Harry smiled. A shoe shop? Why did she need to go in a shoe shop? Ah well, how long could it take?

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Two hours and forty minutes later Daphne nudged Harry awake. "I don't have any Muggle money."

"Oh, no problem, I've got it." He dug into his pocket.

"I'll pay you back." She said leading him to the register where 9 shoe boxes and a happy sales clerk waited. Harry's eyes widened and the clerk's smile got even wider. She must be on commission Harry thought as he opened his wallet.

The pattern repeated itself in clothing shop a few meters down the road. As soon as Daphne had the sales clerks occupied Harry quietly shrunk the large shopping bags to a much more manageable sized and secured them in a jacket pocket. It turned out that shopping for clothing was far more interesting than shoe shopping. With each outfit change Daphne would emerge from the fitting rooms for his evaluation. Usually his evaluation involved attempting to refrain from drooling on his shoes, which seemed to please Daphne to no end. Still by the time she had decided on the four new outfits he had learned that one didn't buy a single item, everything to be worn with it had to 'go together'. Harry's stomach was growling.

Paying the bill he turned to the happily excited young witch. "Feel like getting some lunch?"

"Oh yes." She leaned into him as they exited the shop. "I don't know about Muggle food. Is it safe?"

"There are more than six billion Muggles Daphne, their food is safe. Have you ever had Pizza?"

"Pizza? I don't know what that is."

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Seated in the chain restaurant, Harry placed an order for a Sausage pizza with extra cheese, figuring that would be the least exotic combination available from Daphne's point of view. While he was doing this, she was going over the receipts for her purchases.

"How much is this in real money? I can't figure it out."

"Figure seventy five pounds to the Galleon. That's not exact, but it's close enough."

"Are you serious? All this is so cheap. How is that possible?"

"Something about mass production and competition. The Muggles are in a global market. I don't know exactly how it works, but it has produced fortunes and markets of plenty for those with money. In the Wizarding world, everything is made to order, in the Muggle world almost nothing is."

Daphne nodded. "The clerk asked me for my shoe size, I had no idea what she meant. She had this metal rule thing that she used to find my size. Seven and a Half by the way."

Harry nodded. "There are disadvantages to the Muggle way of course. Those shoes will never fit as well as the ones custom made for you by craftsmen in Diagon Alley." Harry shrugged. "You can get custom fitted for handmade clothing and shoes in the Muggle world as well, but it's expensive, even more so than the magical counterparts."

"I don't understand, everything fit fine."

"I'm sure it did. All I'm saying is that the overall quality of your magical made clothing will be superior to the mass produced items from the Muggle world."

"So, Muggle for fun, Magical for quality?"

Under the table he shrunk the clothing she had purchased, and that joined the shoes in his jacket's inside pocket. "Oh, while you were shoe

shopping, I ducked over to the stationary store next door. I got you this." He handed over a small box.

Daphne opened the box, it contained a short stick and three metal shapes. They appeared to be made of gold. She looked up questioningly."

"You said you needed quills. That is what the Muggles call a calligraphy pen. Those nibs should outlast a few hundred quills."

Daphne was amazed at the gift. Examining the pen she found herself wondering why the Magical world didn't use such devices, eliminating the maintenance and constant replacement of quills.

"Thank you Harry." She leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Harry started to say something when the pizza arrived. He thanked the server and put a slice on each of their plates. "Ok, first of all, pizza is hot. If you're not careful you will burn the roof of your mouth. I know I do just about every time I have some. Some people like to add cheese to their pizza" he indicated the shaker of ground cheese. "And some people like to add peppers to it" she showed her the shaker of a red flakey mixture. You can cut it with your knife and fork like a civilized human being, but pizza was meant to be eaten with your hands." He picked up his slice and took a bite. Daphne replicated his actions, and her eyes went wide at the flavors.

"This is good!" she exclaimed. "Why don't we get this at school?"

"I think Dumbledore's head would explode if someone introduced a new concept to the school." Harry laughed, not without a little bitterness.

"There are other flavors?"

"Sort of. There are several different ingredients that can be put on a pizza in different combinations. Some, in my opinion are awful, but most are great." Daphne had already moved on to a second slice. "So, I'm Harry again?"

She looked deeply into his eyes. "I think so. I'm having fun. More than I thought I would."

"Good." Something seemed to occur to him. "Today is all about introducing you to new things, right?"

"So it seems."

"Does the Wizarding world have works of fiction? Probably a dumb question, but I've never run into any."

"Yes. Novels and plays, like that."

"Have you ever heard of a Muggle invention called a 'Motion Picture'?"

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Harry led Daphne to some very comfortable seats in the most luxurious theater she had ever seen. The theater was almost empty for this matinee; Harry found what he considered to be the best seats in the house, front row center, first balcony.

"Any questions about this?"

"No, not really. This is like a play, but done with images, like a Wizards photograph, only it has sound and color."

Daphne had already decided that she wasn't going to tell Harry that she was prepared to be underwhelmed. He had shown her so many new and interesting things today, but there was no way that this Muggle 'Motion Picture' could possibly impress her, even if the theater did.

The theater darkened, and the huge white screen in front of her flickered with light. Orchestral music of such clarity it startled her suddenly boomed out into the theater, she craned her neck attempting to spot the musicians, and was surprised to find the orchestra pit empty.

Suddenly the words 'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...' appeared on the screen, followed by the words Star Wars in a stylized font over a field of what appeared to be stars, but not stars familiar to her from Astronomy class. Scrolling from the bottom of the screen towards a vanishing point at the horizontal center were the words "Episode IV A NEW HOPE" followed by more words. She leaned over to Harry, taking his hand into hers "Episode Four?"

"I'll explain later. For now just watch, this is so good."

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"That was AMAZING." Daphne was practically jumping up and down.

"I thought you'd like it."

Harry looked at his watch. 5:05. "We've got a decision to make."

"What do you mean Harry?"

"If we want to get back to the castle before they lock the gates we need to leave within the next half hour."

"Then what is the decision?"

"I'm not ready for this date to end. I would like to take you to dinner, then dancing. We could spend the night at my home, then tomorrow one last surprise. But it's your decision. We'll do whatever you want to do."

"Do you want to sleep with me Harry?"

"Yes, but I'm not asking for that. There are 12 bedrooms in my family's home, and three more in the guest house. You can have any of them you want."

"Who else would be there?"

"My two elves."

"You have elves? I wouldn't have thought that what with Granger and her silly SPEW."

"Dobby and Winky are free elves, I pay them, but that's neither here nor there. I'm having a good time with you Daphne. You have no idea how hard that it. Either the girl thinks of me as 'The Boy Who Lived' or is a Muggle I can't be myself around. I don't know how you actually think of me, but I know that you treat me like just another guy."

"You're fooling yourself. If you were just another guy, I never would have had anything to do with you. I do trust you Harry, but ..."

"Come on Daphne, take a chance. I'll make you breakfast."

"You cook?"

"Yeah, the elves hate it, but I do a killer omelet."

Daphne thought for a moment. There were so many reasons to return to the school. There were also so many reasons not to. She had to admit that she was having more fun than she could ever remember. Tracey would be waiting for her, and would give her holy hell if she spent the night with Harry... Potter... no, with Harry.

Her father would be furious. That alone was the best reason she could think of to stay with Harry. That could be her first down payment on his putting that damned 'clause 9' in the contract he sent Harry.

Word would spread throughout the school in minutes if she stayed with him...

"Alright Harry, but I'll need to send Tracey a note."

"We can stop by the manor and use my owl Hedwig." He smiled. "You could change into that little red number you bought, that'll wow them at the club."

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September 12, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

Tracey Davis sat unobtrusively on one of the benches that lined the walls of the Entry Hall pretending to read. 6pm. The last of the shops in Hogsmeade closed an hour ago, the last carriage had arrived half an hour after that. Where were they?

Tracey had been fiercely protective of Daphne since first year. Almost instantly Tracey had recognized that Daphne had been so very fragile back then. Tracey had four brothers and knew how to take care of herself so she had adopted her new friend as a surrogate sister.

A large white owl flew in the door, and landed on the shoulder of one of the suits of armor across the hallway from Tracey. Concerned about her friend Tracey never noticed. The owl regarded the girl for a moment, and then barked to get her attention.

Tracey rose from her seat on the bench and approached the majestic bird. "You're Potter's owl aren't you?" The owl bobbed its head. That startled the Slytherin witch. Did the bird actually understand questions like that? "Is Daphne in trouble?" she asked feeling stupid for actually talking to an owl and halfway expecting a response. Her feelings of shock rose to new levels when the bird shook its head. "Do you have a message for me?" The owl bobbed its head again and offered its left leg.

Trying not to think about the oddity of an owl that actually appeared to respond to direct questions Tracey took the parchment from the Snowy Owl's leg. "Thank you." The owl bobbed its head again, and took wing. That had easily been the most disconcerting thing Tracey had ever been part of. She shuddered, and then unfolded the parchment.

Tracey:

Having so much fun. Harry has discovered that there is no requirement that students over the age of majority remain in Hogsmeade during Hogsmeade Weekends. Harry has taken me shopping and to an amazing Muggle show. Did you know that Muggle have ENTIRE SHOPS dedicated to selling shoes? We had a marvelous lunch and will be going out to dinner and dancing as soon as I finish this. We will not be returning to the castle tonight, Harry's taking me to his home for the night. He tells me he has something planned for tomorrow as well.

Please don't worry about me Tracey, you know you get all melancholy when you worry. I am having a wonderful time. Harry has been a complete gentleman. Don't worry and quit waiting for me at the door.

- Daphne.

Mixed emotions warred inside Tracey. Rage at the casual way Daphne announced she was spending the night with Potter. What had that bloody arrogant Gryffindor done to Daphne? He had her calling him by his first name. There was also relief in the face that she was in fact safe. The use of the codeword they had established first year 'melancholy', showed that she wasn't under duress and actually was enjoying herself. This was so infuriating. If Potter hurt her in any way Tracey was going to personally disembowel him.

"They're not back yet?"

Tracey had been concentrating on the letter and her internal turmoil, otherwise Granger would never have managed to get this close without Tracey noticing.

"They're not coming. Potter has convinced her that she should spend the night with him."

"Oh, my." A part of Tracey was pleased that she had managed to shock the Head Girl. "It can't be that. Harry hardly knows her."

"Oh yes. He's taken her shopping, taken her to a show, taking her to some special dinner, then drinking and dancing at a club before taking her to his home for the night. Obviously he's thinking she's his long lost sister."

"I think I know Harry Potter better than you do." The brunette huffed.

"You knew the Harry Potter who was terrified he was going to die. You don't know the Harry Potter who survived and won. You have been too busy fucking Weasley to pay him any attention at all."

Hermione flinched as it struck. "You don't know what you're talking about. I know Harry better than anyone," she insisted defensively.

"Sure you do Granger," Tracey smiled. In Slytherin you learned to enjoy your smallest victories to the fullest. "Sure you do."

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September 12, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor Heads Suite Common Room:

"You wanted to see me Hermione?"

"Yes, thank you for coming Neville."

Neville Longbottom was more than a little surprised to find Tracey Davis waiting with Hermione. This had to be about Harry, why else would these particular two witches want to talk to him.

"We're concerned about Harry and Daphne Greengrass. They haven't come back from their date, and since you know them both, we were hoping that you might be able to shed some light on where they might be."

"You're both kidding right? What possible business is it of either of you what they might be doing?"

"Look Longbottom..."

"No, you look Davis" Neville interrupted, sitting down. "Both Harry and Daphne are adults; both are completely within their rights to spend the weekend away from this school. They have broken no rules; they have no requirements to report in to either of you. Hermione, you've said maybe a dozen words to Harry since the term began. You have no claim on him or his time. Davis, you have to realize that Daphne isn't the frightened eleven year old who needed you for everything anymore. She's grown up and is capable of making her own choices and if need be, mistakes. Daphne going out with Harry isn't a mistake. It's good for both of them."

"Longbottom..." Tracey's stony facade broke. "Neville, I know she trusts you, but she's my friend too. That means I get to worry about her."

Hermione found herself stung by the truths Neville had just told her about herself. "Can you at least tell us where they are?"

Neville checked his watch. Its 8:30, if everything is going to plan, they should be in a club that Harry and I own in London. No I won't tell you what the name of the club is; they deserve a chance to have fun. Harry plans call for them to stay at the club as long as Daphne wants, then go to his home for the night. He has another outing planned for tomorrow afternoon if Daphne would like, then to return to the castle for dinner."

"So, he's planning on getting her into bed is he?"

"Grow up Tracey. Harry planned out a date to broaden Daphne's horizons beyond School, Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade and you. He isn't executing a master plan to get her into bed. If that's what he wanted he could have had it, and you know that fully well. Will they sleep together? I don't know. I hope they do. They are both good people who haven't had all that much good happen to them in their lives. They are both my friends. If they want

you two to go to the castle on their date they tell you." Neville stood up. "If you will excuse me, I'm late for a stroll around the castle with my fiancé."

The two women stared silently as Neville left the room.

"What Happened to that shy little fat boy at the sorting?" Tracey asked rhetorically.

"I guess he grew up. I'm starting to wonder if I did." Hermione was more than a little angry at herself. "First you point out that I'd all but abandoned Harry, now Neville has told me the same thing." The brunette sighed. "I have to make the evening report to Professor McGonagall. Would you like to come along?"

Tracey thought for a moment, and then shrugged. "Why not?"

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September 12, 1997

London , England

The Toad and The Stag:

Stepping out of the alleyway they had apparated to Harry and Daphne made their way to the line waiting to get in the club.

"Maybe we should try another club Harry; it doesn't look like that queue has moved in a while."

"Don't worry Daphne. Getting in here won't be a problem." He led her to the head of the queue where a large muscular man was standing guarding a velvet rope. "Evening Geoffrey."

The man's glower brightened into a smile. "Evening Mr. Potter, coming in tonight?"

"Yes please."

The rope was removed and the pair passed through to the entry.

"Why'd you let those kids in?" Daphne heard from the queue.

"The young man bloody well owns the place mate." Geoffrey responded as the door closed behind them.

"Mr. Potter, good to see you." The well dressed hostess said when she caught sight of Harry. "Will Mr. Longbottom be joining you tonight?"

"Neville's busy Candice, but I'll let him know you asked after him. How's the crowd tonight?"

"Loud, having a good time, and spending money."

"Excellent. Got a table for two?"

"Of course Mr. Potter, your table is always available. This way please."

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"So, you own this place?" Daphne asked after they were seated and waiting for their drinks.

"Neville Longbottom and I bought it last May. A partnership to celebrate surviving Voldemort. It was already a popular club, but it was showing its age. We closed for a month, practically rebuilt the physical plant, updated everything to the current state of the art, hired good people to run it, contracted the financials to Gringotts and come by when we're in town." He looked around. "We intended it to be a local club, but it's become something of a tourist trap."

Daphne looked around. A huge bar covered one entire wall, there was a small gift shop that sold shirts and other items with the club's logo on them. She examined the logo on the coaster in front of her. A disgruntled looking cartoon toad and a laughing cartoon stag. That seemed somehow... appropriate.

The dance floor was huge (and crowded) and lit from below. The sound system pounded out what she had learned was called a techno-dance beat. The music was so unlike anything she had ever heard before, but she couldn't deny it made her want to dance. And the people, like everywhere else she had been in the Muggle world today, there were just so many people.

Their drinks arrived, a coffee for him, a white wine for her ("I'm apparating" He explained.)

"This music is just so... different." She shouted over the pounding beat.

"Yeah, the Muggle born and raised all say the same things about Wizarding Music. I figure a tune is a tune, as long as it's got a beat, you can dance to it. Do you want to dance?"

"Oh, yes!"

Together they went to the dance floor. "I don't know these dances." She said in his ear."

"Look at everyone else, there are no special steps, just move to the music, have fun, and try not to make me look too clumsy." Harry responded.

It was as Harry said, just do what the others are doing and fit in. Dancing with Harry was energetic sweaty fun, occasionally the music slowed and the couples clung to one another. These 'slow' dances she especially liked, molding herself to him, enjoying the scent of him. During one of these dances she kissed him, and he returned the kiss.. They quit moving during the kiss, and were startled to find that the music had stopped and the dance floor cleared without their noticing it. They were pulled out of their trances by the whoops from their 'audience', and they retreated back to their table.

"Merlin, it's after 1." Daphne exclaimed looking at her watch.

"Is it? I'd best get us home. This place closes at 2 a.m. Best to avoid the rush."

Harry led Daphne into the back of the club, into the office area. They entered the office marked "Manager". Harry pulled her into a hug, and they were gone.

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The pair appeared in the foyer of Potter Manor. Dobby appeared as soon as they did.

"Good morning Harry Potter sir."

"Good Morning Dobby. Did you get a bedroom ready for Miss Greengrass?"

"Oh yes Harry Potter sir. Miss's room is Blue Room next to Harry Potter Sir's suite. Winky will be serving Miss. If Miss is needing help, she should be calling Winky."

"Thank you Dobby." Harry offered Daphne his arm. "Shall we?"

Daphne took his arm as he led her up a flight of stairs. Harry stopped outside a door. "This is your room. If you need anything, just call Winky. If you need me, I'll be in the next room down the hall."

"Do you want to come in?"

"Oh Merlin, yes. But not this time Daphne. If we did, it would only confirm everything Tracey thinks about me, and I'm more than a little afraid that in the morning you would regret it if we did. This is only our second date after all, we hardly know each other. If we decide to make a go of a relationship, we should come in to it without any baggage. I think we should wait until we know what we want to do about us. Is this a onetime thing or the beginnings of something more permanent?"

Daphne blinked. She never expected for him to turn her down like that... "Thank you for today Harry." She said trying to recover her composure.

"Hey now, the date's not over yet, we've still got Sunday..."

She interrupted him with another kiss. After they broke the kiss, he stepped back and leaned against the wall. Daphne heard him mutter "God I hate being noble." Before he looked up and smiled. "Good Night."

"Good night Harry."

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September 13, 1997

Potter Manor:

Daphne woke slowly. This wasn't her room, nor was it the dorm... Where was she? The bed was large and luxurious. The room tastefully decorated; over the fireplace was a family crest... It took a few seconds for her to recognize it. Potter.

The previous day (and night) flooded back. There had been the shock and surprise of the unannounced apparation, the anger that Potter had risked her expulsion for his 'surprise'. She recalled his explanation of their new freedom that came with adulthood. Then the shopping, THE SHOES and the lovely clothing, Harry's gift, that amazing motion picture and the decision to stay with Harry (by then he had become Harry), the dinner, followed by a night of dancing to the oddly hypnotic music, of melting in Harry's arms. Returning to his family's manor, the kisses, and her offer...

Sweet Morgana, had she actually offered herself to him? To Harry? Daphne sat up in the bed, fully awake now. She had offered herself to him. He had turned her down gently, regretfully. Tracey was never going to believe this.

There was a soft pop and a tiny elf stood in front of the door.

"Miss is awake? May Winky serve Miss?"

"Thank you Winky" She recalled this was no ordinary Elf, but a free elf on a salary. Nothing in her experience told her how to deal with an elf as a near equal rather than as a slave. Still, it never hurt to be polite, a practice Daphne's mother insisted on with the Greengrass Elves, though Daphne hadn't always been the kindest of children. "Could you show me where the bath is?"

"Winky draw bath for Miss" the elf said insistently, popping away, returning in less than a minute. "The Bath is this way Miss"

Daphne followed Harry's elf into the room's private bath, divesting herself of the man's shirt she had worn as sleepwear. Harry's? She wondered as she stepped into the bath. The water temperature was perfect, this elf was a find. Perhaps Harry was onto something with this paying elves for their services, they were both certainly devoted to him.

"If Miss be needing anything, Miss be calling Winky." Said the elf with a curtsy before she popped away again, taking with her the shirt.

Daphne lay back in the tub, allowing the heat of the water to sooth the emotional storm inside of her. What was this feeling? She had gone on the date the day before knowing she was, at least on some level, attracted to the raven haired Gryffindor, attracted to the point that when helped along by alcohol and the excitement of the day she had offered him her virginity, is it possibly that his reluctantly declining her offer had made Harry even more desirable?

After she had finished with her bath, Daphne, wrapped in a large bath sheet returned to the bedroom, there she found Winky laying out clothing for her. She didn't recognize any of it. A pair of black slacks, a blouse the same shade of violet as her eyes, under things, even a new pair of shoes.

"Winky, where did all this come from?"

"Winky know Miss didn't bring change of clothes when you visit for the night, other than new clothes from Muggle shop. Miss cannot wear clothes two days, even with cleaning charm. Winky make new clothing for Miss." The elf looked slightly frightened. "Did Winky do wrong?"

"No Winky, you did nothing wrong. These are wonderful. Thank you." She knelt to hug the tiny being. "I didn't know elves could do things like this."

"Winky's first family made sure Winky learn. Winky took care of Mistress who was sick. Winky can do many things most elves don't."

"Harry is a lucky man to have you to take care of him. Is he up yet?"

The elf suddenly looked sullen. "Master Harry is in Winky's kitchen... He be cooking! Winky ashamed Master Harry cooks."

"Harry is a very different kind of Wizard. He isn't cooking to insult you Winky. I think he is cooking to impress me." She smiled in that tolerant female to female 'aren't males stupid' way that every woman knows. "Does he cook for every woman he brings here?"

"Master Harry never bring ladies home. Winky not serve lady since Miss Tonks visit in June. Before that not since Christmas at Dogwizard's home when Miss Hermione visit for half hour." Winky shook her head sadly. "Master Harry alone too much." She brightened. "Now he have Miss for friend. Master Harry ask what Miss would like in her Omelet."

Daphne smiled while trying to assimilate what the tiny free elf had just told her. "Please tell Harry that I asked that he surprise me."

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September 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Great Hall:

Hannah was busy showing everyone the ring Neville had given her the previous evening. Making it official was probably the smartest thing he had ever done. He was quietly amazed that Hannah's obvious joy could inspire such happiness in him. His Gran had been telling him to take this step for more than a month. Gran was smart, Neville resolved to listen to her more.

He and Hannah had been having a quiet evening in the Room of Requirement when Neville gathered his courage and suddenly dropped to one knee and offered her his Great Grand Mother's ring and his life. Hannah had blinked twice at the ring, it seemed that Great Grand Mother Longbottom had been a woman who had gotten what she wanted out of life, and for her engagement ring she had wanted a four caret diamond surrounding by sapphires set into platinum. After she had agreed, and Neville had slipped the ring onto her finger, Hannah had practically raped him right there on the floor. Neville smiled at the memory. It had taken almost twenty minutes to repair his clothing this morning. Just right now, it was good to be Neville Longbottom.

"Good morning Mr. Longbottom."

And just like that, it suddenly wasn't all that good to be Neville Longbottom any longer. Damn. The old man had appeared out of nowhere. How did he do that? "Good morning Headmaster."

"Miss Abbott seems very happy. Congratulations."

"Thank you Headmaster. We're both very happy."

"I noticed that Mr. Potter and Miss Greengrass did not return to the castle last night. Might you have any idea where they might be?"

"I would guess that they spent the night at Harry's home."

"Which would be?"

"Under the Fidelius Headmaster, as you well know."

"I am only concerned about Miss Greengrass' welfare Mr. Longbottom."

"Of course you are Headmaster. I can assure you that Harry has Daphne's welfare at the foremost of his mind. Harry would never do anything to harm anyone, not even for the 'greater good'."

"Mr. Longbottom, I assure you that whatever Mr. Potter has told you, I had his best interest at heart."

"Indeed Headmaster? It was in his best interest to arrive at the point that Riddle reappeared completely untrained? Was it in his best interest your machinations with his life? Was it in his best interest when you set the Weasley's on him, arranging so that he would need to meet the Weasleys in order to make it on to the platform that first year? Was it in his best interest to have Ginny Weasley playing with his emotions on your orders? I've got to tell you Headmaster, I surely hope that you never attempt to help me in my best interests."

"Mr. Longbottom, I..."

"You did almost everything you could to ensure Harry died. Your pet Weasels where quite literally banking on Harry winning but dying in the effort. That phony will they had had your magical signature all over it. That cost Harry the help of Ron and Hermione. He was going to face Riddle alone until I forced my way in to the fight. After a life time of being lied to by you, of being controlled by you, of being robbed by you, perhaps even of being orphaned by you, he was still willing to die for you."

"But he lived, though neither of you have ever told anyone how you won."

"Let me guess, since Harry wouldn't tell you, you're going to ask ME how we did it."

"Mr. Longbottom, please satisfy an old wizard's curiosity, Mr. Potter has been understandably reticent about telling anyone what happened that night, but I need to know. I assure you that I can be trusted to keep secrets; I have never told anyone of prophesy concerning him, you know."

"True, of course you also never told me or my parents about that same prophesy which could have just as easily been applied to me. You keep secrets even when you shouldn't. I find myself wondering if you had determined that I was the subject of that prophesy, would MY parents have been the ones killed and Harry's simply driven to insanity? With our best interest in mind of course."

"Hmm." Dumbledore didn't want to disagree if agreement would net him the information he was after, but why didn't this boy understand that what had happened, what Dumbledore had done was for the good of the community. That sometimes pawns had to be sacrificed to win? "Can you at least tell me what the unknown power was?"

Neville opened his mouth to speak, but paused and closed it again. "I suppose I can. It goes with the whole story, though, so be sure you keep it to yourself."

Dumbledore happily agreed.

"The power was, as you had guessed, love."

The headmaster hid his shock. "Ah," he said, stroking his long white beard.

"After Harry and I fought our way through Voldemort's inner circle, we came upon him in a kind of throne room. Voldemort was totally enraged, like the trapped animal he was. I actually felt pity for him, but I wasn't sure what to do. I was fairly messed up from my fight with Bellatrix. I couldn't believe it when Harry put away his wand. As Voldemort threw curse after curse at us, Harry walked towards him with his arms out stretched. All of Voldemort's magic dissipated around Harry, even killing curses. When Harry finally reached Voldemort, he actually pulled the snake faced bastard into a hug. I couldn't believe it. Then Voldemort broke down crying. As he sobbed for all he had given up, all he had lost for no reason, his dark magic that sustained him fled, and Harry was left with a dying Tom Riddle in his arms. Voldemort didn't last long, but he was finally at peace."

Dumbledore stared in shock. "Neville my boy, that's quite astonishing. I have long believed in the power of forgiveness, but I believe only Harry, once Voldemort's intended victim, could have done such a thing."

Now it was Neville's eyes that widened. "You mean you really bought that shit? Merlin's massive member, Headmaster, you've been listening to your own press for so long you've really rotted your brain if you believe Harry hugged a dark lord to death."

Neville walked away shaking his head and muttering about delusional old men as Dumbledore stared after him gobsmacked.

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September 13, 1997

Potter Manor

Kitchen:

"Good morning Harry." Daphne said as she entered the sunlit kitchen.

"Ah, just in time. He lifted the small pan from the flame and scooped a golden omelet onto a plate, which he placed on the table, then held out a chair for her.

"Showing off a little aren't you?"

"You bet. Cooking is something I'm good at that doesn't hurt anyone." He returned to the range to start his own breakfast.

Daphne shook her head as his claims and reaching for her knife and fork cut her first bite. Then another, and another. "Thith ith wannaful!" she said with a full mouth.

"The secret" Harry explained from stove top, "is to get the cheese melted just right. Too soon it's kinda greasy, too late it's crispy and dry." He looked over at the almost empty plate in front of her. "Whoa! Slow down Daphne, breathe. Would you like another one?"

"Yeth Pleasth" she answered

Harry laughed and cracked some more eggs. Concentrating on her plate, heard him stirring for a moment, and then he was at her elbow scooping the omelet he had been making for himself onto her plate. "Slow down enough to taste it this time." He laughed as he returned to the range. A few minutes later he sat next to her with his own plate and poured them each a mug of tea.

"I've never really been a breakfast person. The eggs at school are ok, but I love your omelets."

"Thank you," Harry smiled. I'm glad you like it. It's always nice to cook for someone who appreciates the end results if not the effort."

"I appreciate the effort and the results Harry. So what are we doing today?"

"Well, Neville Longbottom and his girlfriend will be here at noon, then if you'd like I thought we might go to a theme park."

"Neville never said anything about doubling with him. And what's a theme park?"

"The original plan was for them to be consoling me for my latest disastrous date. Nev tried to tell me that you and I would get along fine, but I've got too much of a track record of failing miserably with girls to believe him." He sipped his tea, pushed his plate away and smiled. "I've never been so glad to be wrong. A theme park is a Muggle thing. They have mechanical rides that will be easier to show you than to describe, games for prizes, food that no one should ever eat, but tastes good anyway. Things like that. I discovered them over the summer, and had lots of fun. I was going to introduce Neville and Hannah to them, and now you if you'd like to come."

"I would like to see this 'park' of yours. If you had fun, we all should."

"Master Harry is finished dirtying kitchen?" The high pitched tones of an annoyed elf interrupted.

"Yes Winky, I'm done." He smiled at Daphne again and winked. "I'll start cleaning up now."

"NO! Master Harry no cleans. Master Harry entertains Miss. Master Harry leaves kitchen NOW!"

"Yes Winky. Thank you Winky."

They made it to the sitting room before they started laughing.

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"I don't think I've ever seen a wizard ordered about by his elf before."

"Oh it was worse at the beginning. Winky came to me from a very traditional family. I couldn't believe some of the things she expected to do for me." He shuddered. "I'm just a poor Muggle raised boy; I was almost scarred for life."

Daphne sobered. "Harry, about last night. I said some things..."

Harry sat down. "Daphne, I understand. You had some wine, I dazzled you with things you've never seen. I didn't really..."

"Harry, you idiot, let a girl finish what she's saying before you start apologizing. What I was trying to say is that it wasn't the wine. I enjoyed the shopping, the show and the dancing was exciting beyond everything I've ever experienced, but that wasn't why I asked you to sleep with me. I offered because I am very attracted to you and really want to sleep with you." She slid onto his lap. "The way you turned me down, out of concern for me, showed me I was right to offer. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but I am going to get what I want Harry."

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "So, tell me about your history of disastrous dates."

"Well, forth year there was the way I abused Parvati Patil at the Yule ball. I spent my time staring at Hermione and lusting after Cho Chang and ignored Parvati almost completely. I'm surprised she's speaking to me even now. Fifth year I actually dated Cho, who was mourning Cedric Diggory, and I think using me as a connection to him. That was an utter disaster. If there's a dating guide book, that date is probably in the appendix under what not to do when dating. Sixth year the Ginny Weasley got her hooks into me until November when I found out what she was up to." She kissed him.

"Are you concerned about my hooks?"

"No, not in the slightest. If you were planning on stabbing me in the back, you would tell me about it in advance, and make me enjoy it." He smiled at her blush. "What about you? Any disastrous dates in your past?"

"No. The sum total of my dating experience is a day and a half with you."

"You poor girl. No wonder you're so easily pleased."

"I am expecting you to improve on my experiences. Today had best be impressive Harry. If I'm disappointed, I might have to go back to calling you Potter."

"See what I mean? You tell me about it, and make me enjoy it."

She pulled him into another kiss.

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"Ahem" Neville cleared his throat theatrically. Startled, Harry and Daphne broke apart, though she remained on his lap. "I was going to ask how your date went yesterday, but I guess that's fairly obvious isn't it?" Neville smiled.

Hannah smacked his arm. "Quit teasing them Neville. Good morning you two." Then she smiled herself. "You two have stirred up quite the storm at the castle. First the Slytherins were furious that the two of you didn't return, and demanded punishment. McGonagall reluctantly admitted that there was no requirement for those who have reached their majority to remain overnight at the school, then there was practically an exodus of the 7th years this morning, excepting the prefects, who Hermione cajoled into staying. I think couples formed on the spot for the express purpose of leaving the castle."

Harry started laughing. "Anything I can do to make Dumbledore's life more interesting is fine with me. I wonder how long it will be before he attempts to change the rules?"

"I would be surprised if he wasn't doing it now. I think I may have annoyed him this morning. Oh, by the way Harry, you owe me ten Galleons."

"I do? Which story did you tell him?"

"The thrilling tale of how you killed Voldemort by hugging him to death."

"He bought that? I thought that was the most ridiculous story we came up with."

"He took it hook, line, and sinker." Neville said, accepting the coins. "The look on his face when I told him it was fiction was priceless. The only reason I told that one is because I felt guilty when he believed the first one, since I came up with it. The man is gullible to the extreme."

"What are you two talking about?" Daphne asked.

"They're pranking the Headmaster." Hannah explained. "Dumbledore wants to know how they defeated Voldemort."

"If he wanted to know that badly, he should have been there helping," suggested Harry sarcastically.

"Well, yes. These two have made up some fictions to explain what happened. Harry told him a story of having lost the war, and ending up fighting a guerilla war until only he survived of the Gryffindors and is captured, then freed by a Wizarding resistance lead by you and Luna Lovegood, between the two of you, Harry's memories, soul, and magic were sent back in time to prevent Voldemort's rise."

"I told it better than that."

"I'm sure you did Harry." She returned her attention to Daphne and gestured to Neville. "This one told the Headmaster this morning that Harry defeated Voldemort with 'the Power of Love' and literally hugged the Dark Lord to death. Sometimes I think they both have death wishes."

"Well they are male."

"Hey!" Harry said.

"Come on." Daphne stood up from Harry's lap. "Let's go get ready for this 'theme park' Harry was telling me about."

Neville and Harry watched as the pair of witches left the room.

"Why do women leave the room in groups?" Neville asked.

"And why does it feel like our shortcomings will be discussed at length?" Harry asked shaking his head. "So, I saw that rock on her hand. You made it official did you?"

"Yeah. God that was scary. Next time, let's just go find another Dark Lord."

"I hear you mate. Women are dead scary."

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"So" Daphne had led Hannah to 'her' bedroom. "What does the rumor mill say about all this?"

"Oh, everything from you're the new Lady Potter to Harry is punishing the few surviving Death Eaters by raping their daughters, starting with you."

"Oh, lovely."

"Tracey and Hermione tried to interrogate Neville at where you were and what nefarious plans each of you had for the other, so you've got that to look forward to. Oh, and Ginny Weasley is utterly furious. She is telling everyone who will listen that you are trying to steal Harry from her."

"And what do you think?"

"I think Harry is a lucky man. And I think you could do a lot worse." Hannah looked into Daphne's violet eyes. "A word of warning, being associated with Harry won't be easy. The Death Eaters are gone, but there are plenty of opportunists out there looking to profit off Harry. I got a tiny bit of it from Neville's association with Harry, which I believe is the reason Neville offered me this a year sooner than I thought he would." Hannah showed her ring. "Then you factor in the girls who want to be where you are."

"Harry told me he hasn't been dating anyone."

"He isn't, but that doesn't stop those girls from wanting him. He's rich, powerful, the Head of two Ancient and Noble houses, and dead sexy. If not for Neville I might have taken a run at him."

"Harry isn't the type for a harem."

"No, he isn't, and only a very few have a chance with him. Your only real competition for Harry would be other women who think of him and treat him as Harry, not the boy who lived, not the chosen one, not the Man who conquered. Just plain Harry. That's a select group. Off the top of my head, the only ones who qualify would be you, Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, Lavender Brown, The Patil twins and Sue Bones."

"I haven't decided that I want him."

"Yeah, right pull the other one. Daphne we haven't been friends all through school, but I'm a Hufflepuff. I have my sources. You have shown zero interest in any guy at school, and then you're with Harry. You've decided. I saw you down stairs. You're not in love with him, but you are seriously in lust with him, and you know it."

Daphne didn't say anything. Her mouth set into a line.

"Alright" Hannah continued. "Going through them, Lavender and Parvarti aren't really in the running. They're nice enough, but far too giggly for Harry. He likes smart girls, and doesn't give a damn about anything those two find interesting. That leaves Luna, Padma and Sue. I doubt that Luna cares one way or the other, unless she decided that sleeping with Harry would allow her to find one of her animals. Padma might be interested, but when ever I've spoken with her she spoke of returning to her family's home in India to continue the Patil line. Sue is definitely interested. She's had a thing for Harry since third year."

"What about Granger?"

Hannah smiled at the Slytherins interest. "Hermione is a special case. She's with Weasley, at least for now. I don't see Weasley as the type to settle down with her. He has far too much insecurity to be able to deal with a wife more successful than he is, and she will be. She is Harry's friend."

"I know that, at least until she abandoned him"

"She didn't. She actually is or thinks she is in love with Weasley, and is with him for that reason. It's complex, but what matters is she is Harry's friend. Harry pushed her away so that she would be safe and happy. He intended to kill Voldemort by dying, and if Neville hadn't forced himself into the final fight, he probably would have. Whatever happens, you are going to have to face the fact that if Hermione calls Harry will go to her. I don't think Harry's in love with her; I think he cares about her. Any woman in his life is going to have to share him with Hermione Granger."

"Why are you doing this? Bones is your friend."

"She is." Hannah admitted. "And I'd love to see her with Harry, but I've seen him with you, first last weekend and now today. You've got him excited and happy, happier than I've ever seen him. I'm his friend. My future husband is bound to him. As long as you make him happy, you have my unquestioning support."

"He's not serious about me. He turned down a contract for me."

"Daphne, he turned down one for me as well. Harry would never accept any contract. He's just not wired that way."

"Thank you. I was wondering. Is it supposed to happen this fast?"

"I have no idea. I fell for Neville about a week after he asked me out. We'd best head back down stairs so that today's great adventure can begin."

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September 13, 1997

American Adventure Theme Park

Nightmare Niagara Log Flume ride:

"You'll want to hold on for this." Harry said.

Daphne gave him a sideways glance. This 'ride' thing looked to be interesting, but really? The carriage they were sitting in, made to look something like a hollowed out tree log, jerked into motion beginning what appeared to be a longish climb up to the top of an artificial hill made up of

a small gauge track, like a miniature rail road.

"Harry, please. Compared to a broom how fast can this be?" She looked over the side of the carriage. It did seem to be getting somewhat high above the ground...

"It's not so much the speed, though it can be pretty fast..." Harry said as they crested the top of the first incline and the log in which the pair sat began the seemingly freefall portion of the first drop.

Daphne's scream prevented Harry from completing his thought. Harry's eyes bugged out as his left hand was nearly crushed in Daphne's grip and the car reached the bottom of its first drop with a splash.

"... it's not being in control that's frightening." Harry concluded his comment, struggling not to laugh at the look on Daphne's now very wet face.

"You're trying to kill me," she gasped, wiping the spray from her face, barely aware that the car was climbing another incline, and then she grinned. "Can we do it again?"

"At least twice more," Harry gestured in front of them. "This ride has three drops. That was just the first... and the smallest."

As the car rolled over the second peak and began its second drop, Daphne screamed again.

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"I don't believe you two rode that thing!" Hannah exclaimed as Harry and Daphne exited the log flume. "You're soaked to the skin.

"Thrill seekers the pair of them," Neville opined. "So, what's next?"

Harry examined the map of the park he had gotten when they had arrived. "Well, what are you in the mood for?"

"Something less death defying I hope," Hannah answered.

"Ooh, they've got a carousel!" Daphne said poking the map with her finger. "I've always wanted to ride a carousel!"

"And then, something to eat," Neville said. The other three turned to stare at him. "What? I'm a growing boy."

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September 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

Hermione Granger found herself waiting in the entry hall. She knew that Harry would be back this evening. She needed to regain what she had lost with Harry. Tracey and Neville both had pointed out that she had all but abandoned Harry. If she didn't fix that... It was only then she realized that she hadn't seen Ron all weekend. He was probably dealing with Ginny and his mother.

She spotted Neville and Hannah first, holding hands and laughing. Following them was Harry, carrying a large purple stuffed rabbit. It was only then she noticed Daphne Greengrass practically molded to Harry. Harry shifted the rabbit to his left arm and pulled Daphne into a kiss, which was enthusiastically returned.

Hermione was shocked. She had never imagined Harry actually kissing anyone, other than Ginny, but that was obviously not going to be happening anymore. The couple began walking again and strolled past Hermione without either of them ever noticing she was there. It took her a few seconds to gather her courage and follow them. On the stairs she found a confrontation forming.

"Daphne Ophelia Greengrass! What the hell do you mean spending the night with this... Thing?"

"Hello Tracey. When were you made my mother? Using my middle name and everything."

"Daphne I warned you about him. I warned you what he was going to try."

"Yes you did, and you were wrong. Harry didn't try anything. I did." She turned to Harry and initiated a deep kiss. "Harry, you did very well today, I'll keep using your first name. Tracey and I need to talk a bit. See you after dinner?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. Of course." Daphne took her large purple rabbit from his grasp.

Hermione watched as Harry watched his weekend date descend into the dungeons with her very upset best friend. Her oldest friend had a goofy grin on his face. After Daphne was no longer in sight, he turned and started up the stairs toward the Gryffindor Tower. Hermione couldn't believe her eyes. Was Harry... skipping?

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September 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Slytherin 7th Year Girls Dorm:

Daphne led Tracey back to their Dorm. Once inside, she sealed the door and cast privacy charms on all the walls, the floor and the ceiling. Slytherins learned to be very thorough. She then laid her large purple rabbit lovingly on her bed, removed the shrunken shopping bags from her pockets and expanded them on the bed as well. Through all this Tracey stood glaring at her. Daphne sat primly on her bed.

"So, Tracey. You wanted to discuss my weekend?"

"Damn it Daphne. What did he do to you?"

"Harry treated me with respect. He didn't do anything I didn't want him to do. Well after he explained about it being alright to leave Hogsmeade anyway." Daphne smiled at her flustered friend. "In fact he didn't do something I wanted him to do."

"Daphne. Everyone knows that you spent last night with him. There are even idiots saying you married him."

"Anyone who thinks that is wrong Tracey. We had fun. For the first time in my life I got away from what I knew. I didn't play it safe. Harry took me shopping, he took me out to eat at some surprisingly wonderful Muggle restaurants, and we saw a Muggle show that was so amazing I can't really describe it. We went drinking and dancing." Daphne reached out to take her friend's hand, and maintained her eye contact. "Tracey, you already knew I found Harry attractive, and yes, he dazzled me with his unannounced whirlwind tour of the Muggle world. I was the one who decided to stay with him last night. I was the one who drank the wine he was buying me. I had four glasses of wine Tracey. We routinely have more than that when we go out together. Have you ever seen me drunk?"

No, but..."

"Harry took me to his family's home; he walked me upstairs to the bedroom his elves had prepared for me. I kissed him, and I invited him to stay with me."

"Daphne, I'm sure that's what he wanted you to think, but..."

"So you think I'm some empty headed moron like Parkinson who can be fooled into a man's bed?"

"Daphne, that's not what I said. But we talked about staying on your guard with him."

"Tracey. He. Turned. Me. Down."

"What?"

Daphne reached over and gathered her rabbit in her arms. "He turned me down. He thought we were going too fast. He was worried about you and what you would think, because he knows that you and I are friends."

"He cared about what I thought?"

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September 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Great Hall:

"Nice of you to return to us Mr. Potter."

Harry looked up from his dinner. "Good evening Professor McGonagall." He smiled at his head of house. "Should I assume that the Headmaster would like to speak with me?"

"That would be a safe assumption Mr. Potter. I will be there as well."

"Now, or can I finish my meal?"

"As soon as you are done Mr. Potter."

"Yes ma'am."

Harry watched as the Scots witch left the Gryffindor table.

"Harry's in trouble" Neville said in a sing song voice, a huge grin on his face.

"And it's such a surprise too." Harry laughed, returning to his meal. "I'm a baaad boy."

"One of the worst." Hannah agreed. "Why didn't you invite Daphne to eat with you?"

"Couple of reasons. I'm guessing that Tracey needs to hate me for a while, and that wouldn't be conducive to a pleasant meal, and Daphne sitting

here would cause certain Gryffs to right out. AND I expected Dumble's summons."

"Go easy on the old man Harry" Neville's grin hadn't faded at all. "He's had a rough day. Some students actually learned something new today..."

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"Enter."

Harry pushed the door open and stepped into the Headmaster's office. "Good evening Headmaster, good evening again Professor McGonagall. You asked that I stop by?"

"I would like to know what you think you were doing Mr. Potter."

Harry found himself wondering if Dumbles knew that his eyes lost their twinkle when he was angry. "You'll have to be more specific Headmaster. What did I think I was doing when I was doing what?"

"You know full well what the Headmaster is referring to Mr. Potter." McGonagall was livid. Harry wondered why. "What were you thinking when you spent the night with Miss Greengrass?"

"I'm afraid I'm not clear on just how what Miss Greengrass and I did this week end is any of your business Professor, or yours Headmaster."

"As Headmaster I am tasked with the safety of all of the students at Hogwarts Mr. Potter."

"Really? Where was this responsibility when you allowed a possessed Professor to let a troll into the castle? I wonder where this responsibility was when you brought a magical object that attracted a Dark Lord into the castle. Where was this responsibility when you allowed Lucius Malfoy to sneak a HorocruX into the castle with an innocent first year? Where was your responsibility when you allowed a polyjuiced Death Eater enter me in the Triwizard Tournament against my will? Where was your responsibility when Snape routinely abused and even injured student in what was laughingly called his potions lessons? Is this a new policy you've started just this year?"

"You will show the Headmaster the respect he deserves Mr. Potter."

"Believe me Professor, I'm showing him far more than he deserves." Harry returned his focus to the Headmaster. "Alright Headmaster, perhaps you could enlighten me as to what school rule or regulation I violated."

"That is neither here nor there Mr. Potter. It is the appearance of impropriety I am concerned with."

"Because of your actions, almost every 7th year left Hogsmeade and was roaming about the country." McGonagall added.

"Because of me? I never told anyone other than Daphne that since we were adults we had no travel limitations. From what I've heard, that information was promulgated by you Professor McGonagall. I'm not the one who made the age of majority seventeen. Nor am I the one who decided that one had to be eleven to start at Hogwarts ensuring that each and every 7th year will always be legally an adult. All I did was discover the realities of the actual rules as opposed to those the students are allowed to believe, and exercise my rights as an adult. Miss Greengrass did the same thing. As far as your hypothetical 'appearance of impropriety' Daphne and I are free adults with no obligations to anyone as far as impropriety goes."

"The school does have a morals clause Mr. Potter." Dumbledore spat.

"Really? How interesting."

"Indeed. Perhaps a check on the status of Miss Greengrass's virginity is in order." McGonagall looked at the Headmaster like he had lost his mind.

Harry's voice went very cold. "If you insult my friend like that Headmaster, then we will duel."

"Surely your success against Tom Riddle hasn't made you believe you would have a chance against me?"

"It doesn't matter Headmaster, even if you beat me, you lose. Every newspaper in Magical Britain will have the story because I will make sure they do. If you win, the board will sack you before I hit the ground. If I win, you will never regain your 'moral' superiority." Harry smiled but it didn't reach his eyes. "We both know your 'moral superiority' is a lie. We both know what you are. Have you ever shared your machinations with Professor McGonagall? I'm sure she would be so very proud of you."

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After the door closed behind Harry Potter, Minerva McGonagall turned on her oldest friend and mentor.

"What the devil are you playing at Albus? Threatening to verify Miss Greengrass's virginity? Have you lost your mind?"

"Sometimes I think I might have. What is the problem Minerva?"

"I would be surprised if more than a dozen of the young women in 6th and 7th years pass such verifications with their virginities intact. Do you even read the reports I submit to you detailing those found out of bounds, be it in a broom cupboard, an unused classroom, or the Astronomy Tower? It wasn't much different in my day. Hell Albus I wouldn't have passed such a test after my 5th year."

"An empty threat" Dumbledore waved off her concerns. "We need to reassert control on this situation."

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September 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

"Greengrass!"

Daphne turned to see who had called her name. "What do you want Weasley?"

"What the hell kind of game do you think you're playing with Harry?"

"What business is it of yours Weasley?" Tracey asked. "Didn't he kick you out of his life for being a slut?"

"Or was it thief? I lost track there." Daphne added.

"Let me be clear Greengrass. So clear even a Slytherin can understand. You will never get your hands on the Potter fortune. That is mine. Harry will come crawling back to me. Get in my way and I'll destroy you."

"You insignificant little..."

"Alright. Let's break this up." Hermione Granger stepped between the Slytherins and the irate Gryffindor. "I think the last thing anyone wants is a fight in the halls."

"Piss off Granger. This slut is coming between me and Harry."

Hermione had had enough of the vindictive 6th year. "20 points from Gryffindor Miss Weasley. Return to your dorm now. Or would you prefer to be having a week's worth of detention with Mr. Filch?"

Ginny huffed, and stalked off, her robes billowing behind her.

Hermione turned her attention to the pair of Slytherin witches. "I apologize for that."

"Thank you for dealing with it. If I had hexed her, who knows what might have happened between our houses."

"Daphne," Hermione hesitated. "I need to apologize to you as well, for what I was thinking when you stayed with Harry last night. As Tracey pointed out to me, I don't really know Harry all that well anymore, and as Neville pointed out, I have no claim on his time or his actions."

"You were hardly the only one to be jumping to conclusions Granger." Daphne said with a pointed look at Tracey. "There is nothing to apologize for. I think I surprised myself with Harry this weekend."

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September 24, 1997

London England

Tonks' Apartment.

Tonks took a moment to compose her features before opening the door. Living in a Muggle neighborhood necessitated her making sure she was wearing the 'right' face whenever she answered the door. "Can I help you? Harry! "

"Evening Tonks. Have you got a few minutes?"

"Of course Harry, come on in" She showed her favorite Head of family to her sitting room. "Now why would The Man Who Conquered come calling on little old me?" She chuckled at his wincing at his newest nick name. "Girl problems?"

"Am I that transparent?"

"What else would you be coming to your lovely vivacious cousin for?" She ruffled his hair. "I'm so proud. Skipping out of school and everything."

"No, that's no big deal. We can leave the school anytime we're not in class as long as we're at least seventeen."

"What? Is this a new rule?"

"No, as far as I can tell, it's always been that way. The staff just didn't tell anyone."

"I spent every bloody weekend at that damned school 7th year and I didn't have too?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Bloody hell. Alright, what's your problem?"

"How do you make a psycho bitch go away?"

Tonks paused for a three count. "Weasley problems?"

"Yeah. I've been trying to date a very nice girl, but Ginny keeps trying to pick a fight with her. How do I fight that, without, I don't know, smacking her?"

"I've heard about your dates. McGonagall put out an alert on you and the Greengrass girl when you kept her out over night." She smiled. "As far as your Weasley problem goes, I would recommend you knock her upside the head, stuff her in a sack, and apparating her to the outback in Australia"

Harry blinked, then regarded the young woman with a gimlet eye. "Are you sure you're an Auror?"

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September 27, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor 7th Year Boys Dorm:

Harry entered the dorm, and went directly to his wardrobe. Sorting though it he finally found the shirt he was looking for, and laid it out on the bed. A quick shower, then change. He was to meet Daphne after dinner. She said she had something important to discuss with him. He found himself wondering if the Room of Requirements would be in use that evening. That would be a superb place for a quiet date.

He turned from his bed and for the first time noticed Ron. His first friend was busy enjoying the art on the wall.

"Hey Ron. Watch it Mate, Hermione would be pissed if she found out you were looking at those pictures."

"This is amazing Harry. You're really not going to take any of these witches up on their offers?" Ron asked his eyes moving from one animated naked woman to another.

"Not really my style Ron. I can't imagine what they were thinking, or why they thought it would work. I mean I can appreciate the pictures on an artistic level, but I'd prefer to actually get to know the girl I'm going to marry before I propose. Why?" he asked with a smirk, "you interested in my rejects?"

"I might be," Ron laughed in reply, "gotta settle down someday, don't want to wait until all the good birds are gone."

Harry gaped at him. "What about Hermione? I thought you two--"

Ron shook his head as he lay back on his bed, a slightly dreamy expression appearing in his eyes. "She's a right bit of fun in the sack--really a great shag if you can believe it, I guess what they say about the quiet ones is true--but marry her?"

He missed the thunderous expression growing on Harry's face as he continued, "Mum'd pitch a right fit if I tried to marry a Muggle born, Harry, you of all people should know that! Besides, when I get married, I want it to be to a girl who knows her place; keeping a home and having babies, you know, like my Mum--"

"Ron." Harry interrupted. "She loves you. Loves you with all her soul. How can you talk that way about HERMIONE?"

Ron's face contorted in a frown. "Loves me? No, you've got it wrong Harry. It was just sex. Great sex, but just sex. We're friends... what's the Muggle term she told me? 'Friends with benefits'."

"Ron, you can't possibly be this dense. She loves you. I've heard her tell you that. I've heard you tell her."

"Harry, that's just words. I mean I just broke it off with her, my other girl didn't like sharing, you know? Hermione didn't say 'boo', just nodded and said she hoped I had a good time."

"Ron, what is the password to her suite?"

"Library Keeper. Why?"

Harry rushed from the room.

Ron rose from his bed and followed his friend to the door. "Harry?"

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Harry arrived at the door to the Gryffindor Heads suite at a full run. The Portrait that covered the door was of an armored knight astride a white charger.

"Library Keeper"

"My apologies good Sir, Head Girl Granger has changed the Password. She regrets that she is unavailable at this time. Head Boy MacMillan is receiving students and is currently in the Hufflepuff Heads Suite."

"Thank you Sir Knight. Could you please inform Miss Granger that Harry Potter wishes to speak with her?"

The knight and his horse left the frame to relay the message, and then he returned.

"Head Girl Granger wishes me to tell you that she is not receiving any visitors."

"Sir Knight, I believe the Head Girl to be upset. I need to see her. Now. Open your door Sir Knight, and then report this breach to whomever you portraits report too, and I will gladly take any punishment doled out. But for now open your door."

"Do you think I would forsake my duty on the word of a mere student? I say thee nay boy. Only the Headmaster may enter this suite without the express permission of the Head Girl."

"Sir Knight, the Headmaster is away for the weekend. I don't have time to wait. If you have another frame, I would suggest you go to it. I am entering the Heads Suite, either through the door, or through your portrait and then through the door. Either way, it makes no difference to me."

Harry placed his hands flat on the portrait, and channeled his magic through his hands, subvocalizing "OPEN"

A small crowd had gathered during his conversation with the painted knight, when Harry's Magic flared into a visible aura, the crowd backed away

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The alarms spread by the portraits brought Minerva McGonagall and Filius Flitwick hurrying to the Gryffindor Heads Suite. They arrived in time to see the entire door frame indent into the wall three inches from the force of Harry's magic.

"Mr. Potter, Stop this now!" McGonagall called over the sound of the castles' very stone being warped.

Not letting up on the pressure to open the door Harry replied through clinched teeth. "Can you open this door?"

"No, only the Headmaster can."

"Then stay out of my way." He ground out. "You can punish me later."

Harry redoubled his efforts on forcing his magic into the stone to cause the door to open, his aura flared brighter. And he fell though the portrait.

From the professor's perspective, he vanished, when the glare from Harry's aura faded, the castle walls around the portrait repaired themselves.

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Harry found himself lying on the floor of the darkened common room of the Gryffindor Heads Suite. How the hell had he done that? The door never opened, he seemed to have passed though the stone. How was that possible?

Shaking his head to clear it, he stood and looked around. The common room was a disaster area. Sweet Merlin, she had shredded her books! Damn you Ron. Harry waved his wand murmuring "Reparo" at various items around the world, hoping that Hermione's precious books could be recovered this way. He made his way to the first bedroom. The chamber was empty, the bed unmade. This must be the head boy's room. Moving on to the other bedroom he found Hermione on her bed, sobbing.

"Hermione?"

"Just get the fuck out Harry. I told that stupid painting no visitors." She snapped, her eyes wild.

"I'm not going anywhere Hermione."

She sat up suddenly furious. "Oh is it your turn with the fuck doll? Do I get to worship your mighty penis now?"

"Hermione, I came as soon as I heard what happened. Ron is an ass. I came because you are my friend. I'm staying because you are my friend."

Hermione looked conflicted for a moment, and then rushed to hug him. Harry returned the hug, and then he lifted her into his arms. Hermione continued to sob into his chest. He considered the bed for a moment, but decided that would be wrong. He carried her out to the common room and settled onto the sofa with Hermione on his lap, rocking her gently. After a few moments her tears subsided.

Harry kissed her on the forehead "Why does the sun go on shining?"

Hermione looked up perplexed; Harry continued "Why does the sea rush to shore?"

"What are you doing?" She asked.

Ignoring her question he continued, "Don't they know it's the end of the world? When you don't love me anymore."

"Merlin you are such a goof."

"Why does my heart go on beating? Why do these eyes of mine cry? Don't they know it's the end of the world? It ended when you said..."

Hermione kissed him. It was a hungry needful kiss. Her hands reaching for his face and pulling him into the kiss. "Love me Harry. Let me love you."

"I can't Hermione. I'm with someone now. But even if I wasn't, I couldn't not with you."

"Am I that repulsive?"

"Hermione, god no. You're my friend, my Hermione. I've never thought of you like that. You're my... my sister." He blushed. "I know I don't know what it's like to have a sister, but if I did have one I hope it would be like being with you. I'd do anything, go anywhere for you, but I can't do that. I love you, but not like that."

"God, I'm pathetic."

"Oh don't be silly. There would be a line around the castle if you were taking applications."

"I don't need any more brothers."

"Har de har har. You know what I mean. Take some time, heal, get over the ass, and date better. Believe me, that's the very best way to deal with not loving a Weasley anymore. I'm talking from experience here."

"What if I want to cry all night?"

"Then I'm here all night. As a matter of fact. Dobby!"

There was a quiet pop. "Yes Harry Potter Sir?"

"Dobby, could you bring us a quart of Ice Cream?" He looked into Hermione's eyes. "Cherry Vanilla please. Bring two spoons please."

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Daphne had been pacing back and forth in the Entry Hall for almost an hour. Where the hell was he? Harry had always been prompt for their dates. In spite of herself she was becoming more and more angry at him. She had even taken to asking passing Gryffindors if they knew where Harry might be. No one had a clue. It was as if the man had vanished.

Of course there was that insane story of Harry somehow burrowing his way through the castle walls to get into the Head Girl's suite. Where did those mad stories get started anyway?

"Miss?"

Daphne turned to see the male Potter elf... Dobby? "Yes Dobby?"

"Harry Potter Sir, asked Dobby to bring Miss this note."

"Thank you Dobby." The elf bowed and vanished with a pop.

Daphne opened her note.

Daphne:

I'm so sorry, I'm going to have to miss our date tonight. I cannot apologize enough, and I promise to explain everything tomorrow, if you still want to see me.

I hope you can forgive me.

- Harry

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Harry Potter and the Marriage Contracts Happy Together

September 28, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Room of Requirements:

Daphne stood outside the door of the secret room that absolutely everyone knew about; wondering if she should enter. Why had she opened herself up to this? Why did it hurt so much?

Hannah Abbot had approached Daphne this morning at breakfast.

"I take it you heard about last night?"

"Yes. He stood me up for her. You warned me that if she called, he would go to her. I just didn't really believe it. Since she and Weasley are split, I guess that Harry will go to her now?"

"No, you don't understand Daphne. Hermione isn't a lover for Harry. She's... She's his Tracey."

"His Tracey? I don't understand."

"You know Harry's history. Like you he's an only child, like you he has no idea what its like to have a sibling, despite that, like you he has found someone to be that sibling. Hermione is Harry's Tracey. Tracey is your Hermione. Have you ever wanted to have sex with Tracey?"

"No."

"And that is Harry's reaction to the idea of sleeping with Hermione." Hannah took a piece of bacon off the platter to her left. "Harry's terrified he's buggered up the best relationship he's ever had. Has he?"

"I... I don't know." The Slytherin appeared to almost be in tears. "I don't know if I can share. I was really amazed by how much his not showing up hurt me."

"If the situation was reversed and Tracey needed you, would you go to her?"

"Of course I would, but..." Daphne shook her head. "Can this even be real? It's all happening so fast."

Hannah shrugged. "As far as I'm concerned, some things are just meant to be Daphne. The way I see it you've got a choice. You can walk away now and always wonder what might have happened, or you can give him a chance to make it up to you. Don't expect him to apologize though, not for going to Hermione when she needed him."

"And what happens if I walk away?"

"I go get Sue Bones and tell her that Harry needs some sympathy." The first hints of a smile showed on Hannah's face.

Daphne returned the grin. "You had to make it a competition didn't you? Where's he hiding?"

"The Room of Requirements. Take it easy on him Daphne. If you want it over, then it's over, but if you want to give him a chance..."

Daphne reached for the brass handle on the door to the Room of Requirements, before she could touch it, someone called her name.

"Daphne!"

She turned to find Hermione Granger approaching. "Have you spoken with Harry yet?"

"No. I was just going to."

The bushy haired Gryffindor looked around, and then she waved her wand in patterns that Daphne recognized as privacy charms. Non verbal privacy charms. Daphne was impressed in spite of herself.

"I'm sorry Harry stood you up because of me. There's something about last night you should know."

Daphne nodded for the Head Girl to go on, fully expecting to hear that Granger intended to claim her relationship with Harry.

"I threw myself at Harry last night. More than once. I just wanted the hurting to stop, to know that someone wanted me. He wasn't even tempted. He told me he was with you. I know that you are still in the early stages of your relationship, and that trust has to be important. Please don't blame Harry for last night. It was my fault for being such an idiot."

"I don't think I'm blaming anyone Granger. Thank you for telling me. I think I need to speak with Harry."

"I just thought you should know."

Daphne watched as the Head Girl, still appearing to be somewhat beaten turned to walk away.

"Granger? I mean Hermione?"

Hermione turned to face her. "Yes?"

"If you decide to get some revenge on Weasley, come and talk to me... I've got all kinds of ideas along that line."

Hermione smiled. "I might do that."

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September 28, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Room of Requirements:

The door opened at her touch. The room was configured as a large open room. The only furniture in the room was a table and two chairs. Harry sat at one.

"Would it help if I started out saying I'm sorry for last night?"

"It might. It would depend on if you lied to me about if you would do it again." She approached the table and sat next to him. "This room is a little sparse."

"I figured it would give you less to hit me with." Harry smiled for a second before hanging his head. "I can't promise that I wouldn't do the same thing all over again if she needed me."

"Good. You're not lying to me. You hurt me last night Potter."

Harry sighed. "If I had had the time, I would have come to you to explain, but I found out what Ron had done, and I..."

"What hurt was you didn't tell me what was going on in your note. I had to find out you forced your way into Granger's suite from others."

"You're right. I screwed up."

Daphne reached out and lifted his head so that he was looking at her. "Don't you ever lie to me or 'omit' details ever again."

"Again? There is going to be the possibility of an 'again'?"

"I think I could be persuaded." Daphne stood up and pulled Harry to his feet. Her eyes closed in concentration, the table and chairs faded from existence. In place of the plain empty room was a duplicate of the Slytherin common room, the only difference Harry could see comparing it to his memories from second year was that the furniture had been replaced by a large chaise lounge.

"You have some very good friends Harry Potter. Hannah found me and pleaded your case, explaining to me that Granger is to you what Tracey is to me. Granger found me before I could find you, and made sure I knew that she came on to you and you told her that you were with me. Lock the door."

Harry drew his wand from his pocket and cast four different locking charms on the door. To be on the safe side he concentrated for a moment and a steel bar seated its self across the door frame preventing the door from opening.

"You're thorough. Good." Daphne pulled him over to the chaise, and then still standing she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him. "We've been going out for three weeks now, for the last two weeks the only person I've spent more time with is Tracey. We've had our first fight. I think it's time for us to make up."

"Thank you."

"I haven't completely forgiven you yet Potter. Perhaps after you earn it." She pulled him down onto the chaise.

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Their petting had been going on for more than half of an hour. Daphne sat up and pulled the jumper she wore over her head revealing a white tee shirt. She lay next to him again and began to play with the buttons of his shirt. "You've got hands Harry. It's alright to use them. Touch me."

"I'm Harry again?" He asked as his right hand traced down her spine through the tee.

Daphne shuddered at his touch. "I think I've forgiven you Harry." She said her eyes heavily lidded. "You've earned it. Now get back to work."

Harry didn't need to be told twice. Over the next half hour they shed their clothing. With unspoken agreement the both removed their underwear. She was fascinated with his erection, he with her wetness.

"What do you want me to do?" Harry asked

Daphne took hold of his erection. "I want to be very clear here Harry. As long as you are with me, this," she gave his penis a squeeze, "is mine. If you as much as show it to another woman before I am finished with you, I will remove it. And no bragging to your friends either." She leaned into him and kissed him tenderly. "Love me Harry. Love me."

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Like most first times it was awkward, embarrassing and for Daphne, painful. Harry was horrified that he might have hurt her, despite Daphne assuring him that the pain was completely normal and she had been expecting it.

Dean Thomas' collection of 'art magazines' hadn't prepared Harry for the actual sex act. The written descriptions of the utter bliss seemed to be lies in the face of Daphne's tears. He cursed himself for his ignorance and lack of skill.

After half an hour they tried again. Their second attempt was just as awkward and embarrassing, but somehow all the more exciting for all that.

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December 23, 1996

Ottery St. Catchpole

The Burrow

Molly's Kitchen:

Harry loved Christmas at the Burrow. This is what a family was supposed to be, people who cared about each other even when they fought and argued. Ron was visiting Hermione at her parent's home, the two of them would come to the Burrows sometime after 6pm on Christmas day. Ron was ecstatic. 'Think about it Harry' he had said on the train 'Two Christmas dinners.' All was right in Ron Weasley's world.

Harry just hoped that he didn't drive Hermione insane while trying to deal with live as a Muggle. Harry suspect that he could have sold tickets in Gryffindor tower for the chance to watch Ron Weasley try to pass for a Muggle.

Where was Ginny anyway? Under his invisibility cloak, Harry left Ron's room in stocking feet, the better to sneak up on his lady love. A good scare was usually good for a quick snog. She wasn't in her room. Probably down stairs. He quietly descended the stairs. There she was, sitting with her mum talking over a cup of tea. He sat on the step and sighed. He loved seeing her like this. Oh there was no way in hell that Gin would ever be a stay at home mother like Molly, but still just the sight of the two of them together made him smile.

"Ginny, you've got to calm down." Molly was saying, "what if Harry were to come down the stairs right now? How would you explain the tears?"

"It's just so hard Mum. He's such a sweet boy, how am I supposed to be knowing that he's going to die and that there is nothing I can do about it?" Ginny asked.

Molly just shook her head. "Ginny, you have to be realistic in this. I know you are well over your crush on Harry, and I know what sacrifices you're making for the family, but the poor boy is going to die and there isn't anything that can be done about it. If he dies without an heir, then the Potter fortune ends up combined with the Black fortune and goes to the last male of the Black Bloodline. Do you really want Draco Malfoy to have access to all that gold?"

"No," Ginny sighed. "It's just so unfair. Harry is so sweet in an abused puppy kind of way. I feel guilty whenever I think about what his future holds, and about how we're using him."

"We've known it might come to this ever since Albus told us of the Prophecy Ginny. Harry is destined to die while defeating You-Know-Who. We can't protect him, no one can. The only thing we can do is make his last days as happy as possible and protect his fortune from falling into the hands of the Malfoys."

Ginny looked toward the stairs staring directly into Harry's eyes without being able to actually see him. "If we're supposed to be making Harry's last days happy, maybe I should go upstairs and..."

"No Ginny, and you know why. The Potter family's magic is infamous for countering Contraception Charms and the Potion. The very last thing we need is for you to produce an heir so that the Potter and Black fortunes end up tied to a trust again."

"I suppose... It won't be too much longer will it?" The petite redhead asked.

"No, not really. Albus is predicting that You-Know-Who will make his move this summer and our little hero will march off to his doom. Severus

will have the potion ready on June the 1st, ensuring your wedding by the 15th, and then we get everything we've got coming to us. Your job is to keep him distracted and happy until it's time for him to do his duty."

Harry sat on the stairs unable to breathe, he couldn't believe his ears. Was this a dream? Was Voldemort manipulating his mind again? He drove the handle of his wand into his thigh. The pain made no difference in what he was seeing and hearing. Ginny and Molly were still there discussing the celebration of his upcoming death.

He had to get out of there. He returned upstairs and gathered his shoes and other things. Creeping down stairs he eased the door open and exited the Burrow. He made his way to the road and raised his wand. With a thunderous bang the Knights Bus arrived. He boarded, told the conductor "Diagon Alley" Hopefully, the Goblins could help.

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December 23, 1996

Longbottom Manor:

Harry stumbled from the floo into Neville's private apartments. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry looked into his friends eyes. "Neville, I've got nowhere else to turn right now. Can I hide out here for a fewdays?"

"Of course you can Harry. Should I get in contact with the Weasleys or Dumbledore?"

"No!" The raven haired wizard barked, his eyes panicked. He then closed his eyes and forcibly calmed himself. "I'm sorry Neville, but please, don't tell anyone, especially not the Weasleys or Dumbledore."

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October 11, 1997

London England

Diagon Alley

Floean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor:

Rita Skeeter was on the prowl for a story. Pickings had been slim since her favorite Subject Harry Potter had killed Voldemort and dropped out of sight. Sure, his unauthorized biography had been a nice payer, but in the news business, you're only as good as your last story, and the last one of Rita's that had generated much attention was over three months before.

It was then that she spotted them. Potter's Muggle born know-it-all and Longbottom, Potter's new sidekick. There was another girl at the table she didn't recognize. She dimly remembered that Longbottom had become engaged to a girl from the Abbott clan, so that might be her. Those three might just be her next ticket to the front page. She ducked into a quiet side alley and transformed to her beetle form. Taking wing she made her way to the top of the decorative trellis alongside the table where her new 'Sources' were sitting. She settled in to listen.

"No, not all of it." The bushy haired Know-it-all said playing with the necklace that hung around her neck.

Longbottom nodded sadly, "Every knut. It's part of the whole 'confiscate the assets of the Death Eaters' ruling that the ministry and Gringotts came up with. The Goblins determined that since both the LeStranges and the Malfoys were as client families sworn to the House of Black, the Goblin's confiscated the whole thing. Since Harry is the head of both the Black and Potter families, the fortunes were deemed merged. The Goblins took it all."

"But surely not all of it!"

Longbottom shrugged. "The money, the properties, everything. Harry actually laughed. He said it wasn't like he wanted all that money anyways. He grew up with nothing; he says he won't really miss it."

"I hope Harry knows he can always live with me if he needs to, at least until he manages to get back on his feet."

"Thanks, Hermione; I told him the same thing. Harry's proud though, I'm guessing he'll take a job in the Alley. He said something about seeing if the twins would rent him the apartment over their shop since they had moved in with Alicia and Angela."

Rita had heard enough. Once again taking wing, she made her way back to her office for some serious writing. Sometimes revenge was so sweet.

She never noticed the smiles that passed between the three sources of her latest story.

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The Daily Prophet:

Harry Pauper, The Boy Who Owed.

By Rita Skeeter

Sources close to the Man Who Conquered report that his fortune has been confiscated by the Goblins of Gringotts as part of their "Death Eater Retribution" program. While Potter himself isn't accused of having been a Death Eater, both the Malfoy and LeStrange families have been declared clients of the Black Family, and as such the Black Fortune was declared forfeit. In as much as Harry Potter is the Head of both the Black and Potter families, his fortune was declared to be combined, and both were confiscated to the last knut.

Friends of Harry Potter have cast doubts upon his sanity, saying that when told the news, he actually laughed.

Harry Potter dependant on the charity of his friends. See Page 4.

Sins of the Fathers See Page 6.

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October 13, 1997

Ottery St. Catchpole

The Burrow

Molly's Kitchen:

Arthur was safely through the floo off to his Monday morning at the Ministry, Molly settled down for her morning tea. The morning owl carrying the Daily Prophet winged its way through the open window and landed on the table in front of her. She put the price of the paper into the owl's coin pouch and accepted the paper from the bird.

After the owl left via the window it had entered, Molly opened the paper while sipping her tea, only to spit it out upon reading the headline. She stood and ran to the fireplace, threw in a handful of floo powder into the flames. She stepped into the green flames and said "Ministry of Magic."

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October 14, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Great Hall:

Harry entered the Great Hall for lunch, and all conversation stopped.

What now? That hadn't happened since he and Neville had returned from the final fight with Tom. Thinking about it there had been an abnormal amount of staring and whispering all morning. Had something happened at breakfast? Perhaps he missed something when he had surreptitiously taken Daphne to a surprise breakfast in Edinburgh...

Ignoring everyone he sat at the Gryffindor table and reached for one of the platters, when the double doors from the Entry Hall slammed open and Dumbledore escorted Arthur and Molly Weasley into the Great Hall. Oh Merlin on a Pogo Stick. What now? He bent over his plate focusing all of his attention on not paying any attention at all to the Weasleys. Maybe it has nothing to do with him. Maybe it has nothing to do with why everyone was staring at him and talking about him. That made him smile just a little bit. Of course the Weasley's weren't here to see him. He wasn't the center of the universe after all.

"Stand up Potter." Molly Weasley's harsh voice interrupted his musings.

Crap. Like hell he wasn't the center of the Universe. Not rising from his seat, he turned to face the woman. "Could I help you Mrs. Weasley?"

"Did you think you could get away with it?"

The woman was certainly worked up about something. How had he ever considered this woman to be motherly? "Get away with what?"

"You know very well what. You will return Ginny's marriage contract now."

Harry noticed that Ginny was standing beside her mother with an extremely embarrassed look on her face. "I've been intending too Mrs. Weasley. I simply haven't found her alone in order to decline properly."

"You aren't declining the contract boy. Arthur is withdrawing the offer of the contract. You no longer meet the standards of the Weasley or Prewett lines."

Harry felt vaguely insulted by that. "I've always been a Half Blood Mrs. Weasley, what is it I did that brought about this change?" The woman's face colored and Ginny's paled.

"Arthur!" The red headed matron sputtered.

"Mr. Potter, I find that the situation in place when the marriage contract for Ginevra was offered to you has changed, and I withdraw my offer of her hand to you." Arthur Weasley looked miserable. Poor bastard.

Harry shrugged. "If that's what you want sir." He reached into his robe for the contract he kept in his inside pocket. He had taken to carrying it so that if he had managed to find Ginny alone he could decline. This was far more public than he had intended, but the result was the same. "Your contract sir." He handed the roll of parchment to Arthur Weasley.

Molly snatched the parchment away from her husband, unrolled it and sighed with relief. "Thank Merlin he hasn't signed it." The woman turned her back on Harry and flounced away. Arthur caught Harry's eye and mouthed the word 'sorry', before turning to follow his wife.

Harry watched as the Weasleys left the Great Hall. What the hell was that all about? He looked up to find everyone in the Great Hall staring at him. "I'm here all week folks, tip your elves."

There was a spattering of laughter from the Muggle Born and Muggle Raised in the Hall, but for the most part the joke fell flat.

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After lunch Harry walked Daphne to her Ancient Rune's class. At the door, she pulled him into a hug and delivered a light kiss. "Harry, you should have told me. I don't care about your money."

"That's good," Harry said, wondering if this day could possibly get any weirder. "I don't care about yours either."

Daphne kissed him again, then turned and entered the classroom. Harry shook his head in confusion. What was going on today? What had possessed Daphne to say that? Had life always been like this and he was just too wrapped up in Voldemort to notice?

Harry made his way to the Entry Hall. It was a cold, but clear day. Perhaps spending his free period in a walk around the lake would give the weirdness of the day a chance to dissipate.

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October 15 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Great Hall:

Harry entered the Great Hall hoping against all hope that the insanity of the previous day was over. The staring and the whispered had continued into the evening. Daphne had a detention (something about a confrontation with Ginny Weasley) so Harry hung out with Neville and Hannah until Nev pointedly suggested that he go the hell away.

Still, today was a new day. Breakfast was probably his favorite meal at Hogwarts. The eggs were good (not as good as his omelets, but there you go), if only he could convince the elves that other fruit besides pumpkins produced juice.

"Good morning Harry."

"Daphne!" He rose and kissed her cheek lightly. "Would you like to join me?"

"Neville suggested that I should eat with you this morning. He said I would especially enjoy it."

Neville and Hannah slid onto the bench on the opposite side of the table. "Good morning you two."

Harry regarded Neville with a suspicious eye. "And what have you got cooked up Nev?"

"Who me?" Neville said innocently. "I never cause trouble, I'm the comedy relief."

"Yeah right."

"Oi" Ron Weasley's voice came from behind Harry. "I thought this was supposed to be a Gryffindor table."

"Piss off Ron." Harry and Neville chorused. The pair then blinked and laughed at their synchronicity.

Ginny was evidently in agreement with Ron. "Let's sit at the other end Ron, something smells down here."

"A shower would probably help you with that Gin-Gin." Harry offered, more than a little miffed at the girl for her attitude toward Daphne.

"Shut it Pauper!" the red head hissed as she stalked off.

"That's the second time she's called me 'Pauper' in the last couple of days. Is that a new insult or something?"

Neville was about to explain when the morning owl post started streaming in through the open windows. Hermione slid into the seat next to Neville.

"Did I miss anything?"

"No." Hannah said. "The show should be starting just about now."

"What show?" Harry asked. "What are you three up to?"

None of them answered. Harry noticed that their attention was focused at the far end of the table where a post owl had landed in front of Ginny.

"Why do any of you care that Ginny got her Teen Witch Weekly?"

Neville gave him a mysterious grin. "Wait for it..."

Around the Great Hall were a series of exclamations of surprise, none louder than the one from Ginny Weasley, who tore her eyes from her magazine to shoot Harry a look of pure loathing.

"What the hell did you three do?" Harry asked Neville and his celebrating sidekicks.

From his left Lavender Brown asked "You're not poor Harry? You really didn't lose your fortune?"

"Lose my fortune? How would I do that?"

"The Daily Prophet said that the goblins had confiscated all your money as part of their Death Eater penalty because the Malfoys and Lestranges were client families."

Harry fixed Neville with an amused look. "Pranking the nation are we? I was wondering why everyone was acting so weird. What was your part of this Hermione? Abusing your favorite reporter?"

"Why would I ever do anything like that to someone who called me a gold digger when I was 15?"

"Harry Potter, 17, retains his place as Magical Britain's number one most eligible bachelor for the 74th straight week" Lavender read from her own copy of Teen Witch Weekly. "As this issue was going to press the Daily Prophet broke the story of the loss of Harry's fortune. Never wanting to be behind the curve on just who the next most eligible hunk might be, your intrepid reporter immediately sought out an interview with a representative of Gringotts Bank. I got both good news and bad news in my research Ladies. The following is a transcript of my conversation with Ripclaw, head of Public Relations with Gringotts:

TWW: Thank you for your time.

Ripclaw: My time is in fact valuable. How can Gringotts help you?

TWW: I'm sure in your position as the head of the bank's Public Relations department you are aware of the report in the Prophet of the confiscation of the fortune of Harry Potter, the Man Who Conquered?

Ripclaw: It is the policy of Gringotts to never discuss the private business dealings of our clients. Especially the dealings of our Most Special clients.

TWW: So, to be clear, though you cannot and will not discuss the business dealings of Mr. Potter, he remains a client?

Ripclaw: A Most Special Client. If you will excuse me, I have actual business to attend to.

There you have it ladies, the good news. In Gringotts parlance, a Most Special Client is someone with more gold than Midas. It seems that once again the Daily Prophet has gotten it completely utterly wrong about Mr. Potter. They must be so proud.

But wait ladies, before you resume throwing yourselves at young Mr. Potter, I promised you some bad news. My sources inside Hogwarts tell me that Harry has been seen with a lucky young witch on his arm. Daphne Greengrass (17) of Slytherin house seems to be his newest Lady love. A Gryffindor and a Slytherin? What interesting pillow talk they must have"

Lavender looked up from her reading to see Harry's pained face. "Lavender, please, do me a favor. Never read anything like that out loud again. Please?"

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October 15, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Great Hall:

Following breakfast and the revelation of the status of Harry's wealth, Harry escorted Daphne from the Great Hall to her first class. She pulled him past her classroom into an unused darkened hallway, pushed him against the wall and kissed him.

"I just realized," Harry said when they broke the kiss. "I just realized what you meant when you said you didn't care about my money. Thank you. Sorry I was so clueless."

"You usually are. Its part of your charm." She kissed him again. "Do you still have any of those contracts?"

"Yes. I have three left, from people I know fairly well. I've been trying to find good times to do it properly."

"Do it now. Do it by the end of the week. I don't share Harry; I don't want anyone thinking she might have a claim on you. It would be annoying to have to hurt some girl because you were too shy to tell them to go away."

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October 15, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Owlery:

Harry folded the Marauders' map, returned it to his pocket, and steeled himself. This wasn't going to be easy. Almost nothing was easy with this girl.

He entered the chamber and his senses were almost overwhelmed by all things avian. Dozens of heads swiveled to face him, regarding him with unblinking eyes. One of those heads belonged to a blonde girl.

"Hello Harry."

"Hello Luna."

"Ohh, poo. You've come to disappoint me haven't you?"

"I've come to decline your family's offer of marriage," He had been right; nothing was ever easy with Luna. He smiled. "I'm not sure how disappointing that might be."

"Oh and we would have made such wonderful babies too." She looked very sad for a moment, and then brightened. "Alright Harry, go ahead."

"Miss Lovegood, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take a wife. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you in mind."

Luna took the offered parchment from his hand, then rose to her tiptoes and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Thank you Harry that was very well done. As always, you are the perfect gentleman." The slightest hint of a smile played across her lips. "So tell me Harry Potter," She was very close to him, her silver-grey eyes burning into his. She began to play with the buttons of her blouse. "Is a consolation session of oral sex out of the question?"

"What?"

"Hmm, I should really discuss this with Daphne, shouldn't I? Perhaps she'd be interested in my application to be your concubine... A Wizard in your position should have one you know." She rubbed her delicate right hand over his crotch. "Hmm. Maybe two."

"Luna?"

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"She didn't." Daphne couldn't stop laughing.

"She did." Harry didn't think it was funny at all. Here he thought he was being a good boyfriend telling Daphne what had happened, and she was laughing at him. Daphne just didn't get it, after all it wasn't her that had run... made a manly strategic retreat in the face of the Ravenclaw's advances.

"Calm down Potter." Tracey Davis shook her head at the boy's thickness. "Luna was just having you on. She likes to get a rise out of people. You should see what she does to my father." She saw the look on his face. "What? She's my cousin."

"Seriously?"

Potter was beginning to grow on Tracey, but sometimes his lack of understanding of the Wizarding world... "Seriously. Of course, the three of us are cousins too, however distant. But Luna's Mum was my Mum's sister. Aunt Selene was a lovely woman. She messed with daddy's head too."

"Wait. We're cousins?" Harry gestured a triangle between them.

"About nine generations back Bertram Davis married a Potter, Charity I believe." Tracey explained.

"No, Chastity. Charity was her twin sister who married into the Longbottom clan." Daphne corrected. "Chastity is both the Davis and Greengrass link to the Potters. She had seven children. The firstborn was a witch named Bertha, she married into the Greengrass line. On Mum's side the link is closer. Four generations back Elaine Potter married Angus Moody."

"Moody? As in Mad Eye?"

"I'll thank you not to use that horrible nickname when referring to my grandfather." Daphne attempted to look stern. "Cousin." She couldn't maintain the stern look; a grin broke out across her face.

"Daphne, how closely related are we?"

"Don't be silly Harry. Elaine was a sister of your Great Grandfather. Elaine was my Great Grandmother. In any way that matters you are probably as closely related to Hermione Granger as you are to me. Outside of idiots like the Malfoys who actually DO marry first and second cousins, inbreeding isn't really a pureblood problem." She got a pensive look. "We're going to have to teach you your family history. Being raised by

Muggles has left you woefully unprepared."

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October 16, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Greenhouse 2:

Greenhouse #2 was Pomona Sprout's pride and joy. While her student group 'The Gardeners' all seemed to gravitate to the more dangerous plants in Greenhouses 4 through 6, where the plants were poisonous, predatory, and carnivorous or a combination of the three, Greenhouse #2 contained flowering plants that, while they might be useful in certain potions, were not magical in the slightest.

Not being magical didn't mean they were not beautiful however. Pomona was world renown (in both the magical and Muggle worlds) for her roses, having developed three breeds that bore her name. It had taken quite a bit of begging on Harry's part for Pomona to allow him to use her bit of heaven for his meeting.

Threats of using him for fertilizer if any of Pomona's babies were disturbed in anyway still ringing in his ears, Harry sat on a bench among the flowers waiting. Sprout had also threatened him if he hurt her 'girl' as well. Harry had no intention of doing so, but...

"Harry?"

He stood up. "Over here Susan."

The red headed Hufflepuff strode over marveling at the flowers all around her. Harry gestured to the bench in front of him, as she lowered herself to the seat, he did as well.

"I've been waiting for this since you started dating Daphne Greengrass." She said sadly, and then smiled. "At least it's a beautiful place for bad news."

Harry extended the envelope in his hand. "I thought I ought to return these."

Susan blushed prettily. "I took those for you Harry, you should keep them."

"Thank you Susan, you are beautiful in them, but in all honesty I can't keep them and date Daphne. It would be disrespectful to her, and unfair to you."

"Hannah said you would say that." The Hufflepuff said, pocketing the envelope containing the photos.

"Hannah's smart. I try to listen to her and Neville about the important things. No one has seen those pictures; no one knows you sent me any."

"I promise I won't make a Weasley style scene." She dimpled, "Unless you'd like one?"

"Good lord No! That was more attention than I ever wanted." Harry stood in front of the girl and bowed deeply. "Miss Bones, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hand in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take a wife. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you in mind."

He handed the girl the rolled parchment.

She cocked her head at him. "Are you sure that's a proper contract refusal?"

"It's the one Neville and his Gran taught me... If anyone knows the traditions of the Wizarding World it's Augusta Longbottom."

"Hmm. As I recall, a proper, respectful contract refusal involves a kiss."

Hmm indeed. Someone else suggested something else, somewhat more intimate... I think I like your suggestion better."

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October 17, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Gryffindor Head's Suite Common Room:

The door opened to his knock, Hermione stood by the door. "They're both here Harry. Good luck."

After Harry entered, Hermione ducked out of the suite, leaving him alone with the Patil Twins.

"Ladies." He said, wondering if they knew about the contract.

"Hello Harry" Padma said looking up from one of Hermione's books.

"What did you want? Lavender is waiting."

"Well, first of all, it occurred to me that I never apologized for the Yule ball."

"Merlin Harry." Pavarti said with a dismissive wave of her hand, "that was almost three years ago. I'm long over it." She grinned, "Besides, after I dumped you, I had lots of fun."

"And while I for one wouldn't mind an apology" Padma interjected, "I would prefer it be from the guy who was an ass to me."

"So? Is that it?" Pavarti stood and started toward the door.

"No, please sit?"

Pavarti looked at him oddly, and then settled back into her seat.

Harry faced Parvati. "Miss Patil" then he turned his attention to Padma. "Miss Patil, In accordance with the old ways, I must respectfully decline your family's offer of your hands in marriage. At this time I am not looking to take wives. At some point in the future that may change and I will certainly keep you both in mind."

"Very funny Harry." Parvati scoffed. What did you really want?" Harry handed her the parchment. Padma crowded close to see. From his perspective Harry could clearly see Padma's eyes go all hard with anger.

"Giriraj! I'm going to kill him."

Parvati put her hand on her sister's shoulder. "Calm down Pad." She looked up to see Harry looking a bit perplexed. "Giriraj is our brother. Evidently our social climbing brother. When father died Giriraj assumed Daddy's place as head of the family and apparently thought it might be a good idea to sell us to you for..." she looked back to the contract.

"Five hundred Galleons." This was the first time Harry had ever seen Padma angry. "He wants to sell us for five hundred Galleons."

"Well, yeah. Each." Now Pavarti was getting angry. "Doesn't he know what you're worth? Five hundred Galleons. He's dead."

"Would this be a good time to point out that this wasn't my idea, and that the thought of the two of you together scares me to death because I doubt I could make one woman happy?"

Padma blinked for a few seconds as she deciphered his rapid-fire response, and then smiled slightly. "Relax Harry. We're not mad at you." Padma assured him.

"We've got to write Mother." Parvati said. "Thank you Harry. Lets go Pad."

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October 18, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The School Grounds

Harry's Spot:

It was an abnormally warm day for mid October. It hadn't rained for more than a week, and the temperature was a relatively balmy 18 degrees Celsius. Harry took the chance and had scheduled a final picnic. So far so good.

Daphne dug into the basket and found one of the bottles of wine. She looked at the label and made a derisive sound. "This is the exact same vintage Harry. Neville, look at this. He fed me this swill the first time we went out."

Neville took the bottle from Daphne. "Good Lord Harry. I thought you liked us."

"What? It's in a bottle with a cork and everything."

"I am marrying a wine snob." Hannah said shaking her head. "And you're dating one Harry."

Harry shrugged, took the bottle from Neville and removed the cork with a wave of his wand. "I've been told I have the taste of a House Elf. More for us I guess." He took a pull on the bottle and passed it to Hannah who took a drink herself.

"Wait a minute!" Neville laughed. "I didn't say I didn't want any." He reached for the bottle.

Daphne joined in with the laughter, Harry's expression dulled for a moment. The Slytherin's left eyebrow lifted for a second. Then Harry was back.

"Ok Daphne, I know you want to know, go ahead and ask."

Daphne accepted the bottle from Hannah and took a short pull. "Alright, it has been bothering me. You and Neville have been laughing about the stories you tell the Headmaster about how you killed the Dark Lord."

"And you want to know what happened?"

"Well, yes." She leaned into him and nibbled on his earlobe.

"There's a good reason not to tell anyone!" Harry said uncomfortably

"Come on Harry, for me?" her nuzzling became a bit more... convincing.

"You're doomed mate, just tell her." Neville said. "Besides it will get Hannah off my back."

"Oh, alright." Harry rose from the ground and looked around making sure no one was near. "You wanted to know how we killed Voldemort? The short answer is, we didn't."

"What? But you told everyone that you had." Hannah stammered.

"No luv, we told everyone that Voldemort was gone, and he is." Neville corrected.

Daphne took hold of Harry's shirt. "Explain Potter. Now."

"Alright. Neville and I made it through the Death Eaters and we found Voldemort in his lair. Somehow we caught him unaware. Neville busted in first, then rolled to the left of the door. That got the bastards attention and he was casting at Nev, who was dodging like a champion."

"I was fairly well motivated." Neville observed

"Anyway, Voldemort was concentrating on Neville and I got off a cutter that punched right through his shields and caught the bastard in the neck and I made him into Nearly Headless Tommy. He dropped like a puppet with his strings cut, and I fell to my knees where I stood. I thought it was over, I couldn't believe it."

"But you said..." Hannah said.

"I know, believe me I know. There I was kneeling in front of his dead body, almost in shock, and he sits up, his neck all healed and puts an ice spear straight through my chest. Then nothing."

"Nothing Hell. You were dead mate. I got to you while Voldemort was trying to stand up. You had a shaft of ice six inches around all the way through your chest. No pulse, no breathing. You. Were. DEAD." Neville shook his head. "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it. Your body ejected the ice spear, then healed it's self, then you sat up and cast a flame charm on Voldemort."

"Yeah, I burned the bastard to a crisp, he was dead. Again. But his magic healed him and he killed me."

"It went back and forth like that for almost two hours. Harry would kill Voldemort, Voldemort would kill Harry. Back and forth. They kept getting weaker and weaker, finally it was Harry's turn and he didn't even try."

"I just thought it was time to talk." He shook his head. "It just hurt so much, I needed a breather. Voldemort was just as hurt. We actually started talking, it turned out that we had a lot in common, Our illustrious headmaster screwed him over too, but he didn't have the resources of an ancient and noble house to fall back on. Voldemort came up with the theory that the prophecy wouldn't let us kill each other because we weren't equal, and the only way either of us could figure to tell when we were 'equal' would be when one of us managed to kill the other."

"Voldemort was telling us that he was just sick of the whole thing. He was only still trying to take over Wizarding Britain due to inertia. All he really wanted was immortality and comfort for eternity." Neville grinned. "I pointed out that as long as he and Harry weren't 'equal' they were both immortal for all intents and purposes."

"That perked Voldemort up." Harry added. "That was when I got to thinking about the Black family properties. There was an Island in the Azores that belonged to the family. It's been under the Fidelius for centuries, there is a mansion and a staff of twenty elves that maintain the island. I offered Voldemort the Island and 10 million Galleons to go away and leave everyone alone."

"He ripped the money out of Harry's hands so fast I thought Harry was going to have friction burns." Neville said, laying back and putting his head in Hannah's lap, where she began playing with his hair.

"But the ministry found Voldemort's body." Hannah said.

"A conjured homunculus. Tommy Riddle is sitting on a beach in the Azores spending 10 million Galleons." Neville explained.

"It was a win-win situation as far as I could see." Harry said. "He's gone, and I'm alive. Beyond that who cares?"

"Yes, but then that last condition he added in was a bit sick, but it's worth doing to keep Tommy happy and out of every bodies hair." Harry added.

"Oh, what condition was that?" Daphne asked.

"I don't know if you should tell them Harry, it's a bit disturbing." Neville put in.

"Oh, now you have to tell us. This sounds too good." Hannah put in her 2 Knuts.

"Just remember, you asked for it. Well, as I pointed out Dumbledore screwed Tom over as bad as he did me, well, uhm. Tom wants to return the favor. For now, we've been stealing hairs from the headmaster and shipping male prostitutes out to Tom once a month or so, but he's getting a bit

impatient and really wants to slip Albus a portkey to his private little dungeon. Of course, from the things I've been hearing whispered about, I'm not sure Albus would mind that much." Harry blurted out, looking a bit sheepish.

"EWW" the girls chorused.

Harry had been watching an area near a tree. "Ok, he's gone."

"You already showed him he can't sneak up on you, why was he trying?"

"I have no idea Daphne, but if our esteemed Headmaster wants to hear a story, why shouldn't we tell him one."

"Yeah, but the bet is off," Neville said with a laugh. "There's no challenge to it, this is just stealing your money."

"I bet there are some kick-ass anti-port key wards going up right now." Harry said laughing.

"Either that or he's primping."

The four teens collapsed into laughter. As soon as he could breathe again, Harry spoke once more. "Daphne, you probably ought to get word to your grandfather not to go on wild goose chases to the Azores... unless he could use a vacation on the beach... I actually do have an island down there, Moody might have fun... Lots of girls dressed so that he wouldn't need that freaky eye of his to ogle them proper."

...--oooOOOooo--...

October 18, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Headmaster's Office:

"Are you sure about this Albus?"

"Of course I am Alastor. It seems that Harry Potter has been lying to us. Voldemort isn't dead, but had retreated to an island in the Azores to lick his wounds."

"Albus." Moody didn't like the look in his old friend's eyes. "There are at least 19 islands in the Azores, more if the Blacks have one under the Fidelius. More importantly it's a Portuguese territory and they don't like us. Have you considered that Potter might just be having you one AGAIN?"

"Nonsense. He was bragging to his girlfriend Alastor, he didn't even know I was there, I saw her coax it out of him."

"His girlfriend, as in my granddaughter Daphne? That girl wouldn't coax the information out of him. She might beat it out of him, but..."

"Alastor, just go, will you? Find Voldemort so that he can be stopped before he does any more damage to the world."

...--oooOOOooo--...

October 18, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Quidditch Pitch:

"POTTER!"

Harry looked down and saw the mangled old Auror. He called to his fellows in the pickup game that he was playing in, and then made for the ground. He lit next to Moody.

"Yes sir?"

"Walk with me Potter." Moody set out at a pace that Harry had to work at to keep up. For a man with a wooden leg, he could really move when he wanted to. As soon as they were well away from the others watching the game over the pitch, Moody spoke again. "I've got two topics I want to talk to you about Potter, lie to me about either of them and I will hurt you. First, is Riddle living on one of your islands?"

"Nope."

"Why did you tell Dumbledore that he was?"

"Because he's a nosey old bastard who let my parents die to forge his weapon. People like you won't let me kill him, so I'm going to keep information from him until it drives him completely insane."

"That's what I told him, but he insists that I go down to the Azores and search every island to check."

"Ok. Wanna stay on my island? It would make for a nice vacation... The women dress so you won't have to use that freaky eye of yours to see them naked."

Moody ignored that comment. "Second topic. Are you sleeping with my Granddaughter?"

"None of your business. If she wants you to know she'll tell you."

Moody stopped in his tracks. The electric blue eye quit whizzing around and focused on him, joining Moody's natural eye in staring at Harry in an intimidating manner. The old Auror held that stare for a five count. "Good answer Potter. Daphne is a good girl, one of my favorite grandchildren. You hurt her, I will hurt you. And I don't mean emotionally."

"I've expected that since I found out you were family."

"What are your intentions?"

"Mad-Eye, we've only been dating for about seven weeks. We've been having fun. I don't believe either of us are looking for a life time commitment just yet."

"Fair enough. Just bare in mind her father is a right bastard."

...--oooOOOooo--...

October 31, 1997

London England

Tonks' Apartment.

The rain came down in torrents; despite his magic he was soaked to the bone.

Remus Lupin hated this night above all others. Sixteen years ago tonight his greatest failure manifested from his mistakes. If he were a braver man, he would have killed himself years ago, but he was so frightened to face James and Lilly. And now he would have to face Sirius too. Peter would be there too... Was what Peter did really all that worse that what he himself had done? No, there would be no forgiveness for what he had done. What he had done to James, to Lilly, to Sirius, and even to Harry.

Damn Dumbledore. Damn him to hell.

He had come here tonight in hopes of catching a glimpse of his Nym.

But she wasn't his Nym. Not any more. She had made that very clear that night. Nym didn't want to see him; Harry had threatened to kill him if they ever met again. The only two people that made his life worth living wanted nothing to do with him. Worst of all, he agreed with them.

"Is there a problem Sir?"

Remus had been so wrapped up in feeling sorry for himself the pair of Police Officers had managed to walk right up to him without Remus noticing.

"No Constable. I was just..."

"You seemed to be focusing all your attention on that window there across the street. Hoping to catch a glimpse of someone are we? Your girlfriend?"

"Once." Remus admitted.

"Not once in the history of mankind has the waiting pathetically in the rain for her to notice you ever worked, sir." The female officer said. "Women don't find that romantic, they find it rather creepy. Go home, dry off, and call her on the phone. Talk to her."

"If we see you here again, we'll have to look into the possibility that you're a stalker" her partner said. "I wouldn't think you'd much like that."

Remus nodded and turned to walk away from the area. After walking for 15 minutes, he verified that no one was watching, then apparated away.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 24, 1996

London England

Diagon Alley

Gringotts Bank:

Neville followed Harry into the bank. The scion to the Longbottom family was concerned about his friend's state of mind. When Harry stumbled into his sitting room, he had been on the jagged edge of panic. The story had poured out of the frightened young man. Neville's first thought was that Harry had somehow misunderstood what Ginny and her mother had been talking about, but the more he thought about what he had observed of the younger witch's behavior the last school year...

Neville managed to get Harry calmed down and begged off of the preparation for the Ministry Ball that he and his grandmother were scheduled

to attend that evening. He was still going to have to go, but at least he didn't have to spend the day in getting ready.

Harry approached one of the Goblins in the reception area, a few words were exchanged and the Wizards were escorted to an ornate (if oddly subterranean) office.

"Lord Potter." A Goblin sitting at the desk looked up to welcome Harry. "And who is your friend?"

"This is my friend, Neville Longbottom Bank Manager."

Neville felt his mouth go dry. Bank Manager? He was in the presence of Ragnak? Neville knew Harry had the Potter fortune behind him, but how rich was he?

"Ah, Lord Longbottom, welcome. It speaks well of you that you are with Lord Potter," the ancient goblin said, using the title that Neville could not claim until he reached his majority. "Your father stood by James Potter when he assumed his responsibilities as well." Ragnak of Gringotts turned back to Harry. "Am I to assume that you wish the future Lord Longbottom to be present for our discussions?"

"Yes Bank Manager. Neville has been raised in the Wizarding culture, while I have not. He is my advisor in things dealing with that culture."

"Very well Lord Potter. When you came to us last night, I quite frankly thought that you were imagining things. Then I reviewed your claims. I find that I must apologize to you, if anything you are an optimist. There have been multiple withdrawals from your vaults over the last 15 years, none of which can be accounted for with the manner in which you were raised and cared for. We found evidence that reports of abuse toward yourself has been covered up for the last 14 years at least. Perhaps most disturbing, during your examination by our healer last night, evidence of at least five separate major obliations were found."

"Five?" Neville reached out to put his hand on Harry's shoulder seeing his reaction to that news. "Can they be reversed?"

"If Lord Potter wants us to try, we will make the attempt. We have Goblin healers readily available, if you would prefer a human healer that might take a day or two, what with the human holiday."

"I don't want to wait; they'll be looking for me. No Goblin has ever lied to me or tried to control me. I'll trust your healer Bank Manager. But first, I would like you to secure my properties for me."

"You mean the Black house at Grimmauld place?"

"Yes. Since you can speak of it, the Fidelus hasn't been recreated on that property. I would like to contract Gringotts to establish a new Fidelus on the property."

"That can be done by end of business today Lord Potter."

"Thank you Ragnak. Might I ask that Bill Weasley of your cursebreaking department not being used on this account?"

The Bank Manager appeared to be startled. "Do you have problems with Cursebreaker Weasley's work?"

"Not at all Bank Manager. However, Bill's family is aligned with Albus Dumbledore, I wouldn't want to put him in a position that might cause him to have divided loyalties. I'm not saying that he would, I just don't want to put him in that position."

The Goblin nodded. "A reasonable precaution. Who did you want for your secret keeper?"

Neville watched his friend as he considered. If asked Neville would step up, but he hoped that Harry had someone else in mind. Harry's face brightened.

"Could you recommend a reliable young Goblin who might be looking for a small well paid position?"

...--oooOOOooo--...

November 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Grounds:

It was a beautiful night for November, hovering about minus three. It had been below zero for most of a week, the air crystal clear and crisp. The Lake had just today completely iced over and the first snow of the season had not yet fallen.

Harry and Daphne were out for an evening stroll, their breath fogging the air. Harry took Daphne's gloved hand in his own, feeling her squeeze back at him.

"I love it when it's like this." He said. "The first real cold of the year, before it gets all snowy and messy."

"The stars are beautiful, but it's COLD."

Harry pulled her closer. "Cold you say? Could you use a warm up?" Leaning into her, he captured her lips.

After an indeterminate amount of time, she broke the kiss out of breath, looking up into his face she saw a few snow flakes in his hair, looking around she saw that the fat flakes were everywhere around them, gently drifting down in the calm air.

"Impressive Potter." She said her eyes dancing with inner laughter. "You kiss me and make it start to snow."

He pulled her closer. "Fear my power!" he whispered as he kissed her again.

...--oooOOOooo--...

An hour later the pair entered the castle laughing. Carefully used charms cleaned the snow from their clothing and vanished the residue from the floor. That action earned them an unseen approving nod from Filch. The caretaker had no great love for students, but this one... Argus Filch had no illusions as to what would have been waiting for him had Voldemort succeeded in his plans. This boy had prevented that, and from the caretaker's detached point of view, had asked nothing in return, other than to be left alone. Filch could respect that.

The Greengrass girl took the boy by the hand and led him off. The caretaker nodded to himself, then made his way to the school exit. He and Hagrid had their normal Thursday night out at the Three Broomsticks...

--oooOOOooo--...

Daphne led Harry through the dungeons to the entrance to the Slytherin Dormitories.

"Would you like to come in?"

"Very much. The only question is will I be all that welcome?" Harry ran his hand through the unruly thatch he called hair. "It's no secret that I'm not the favorite person of a portion of your house."

"If I say you're welcome, you're welcome." Daphne leaned into a familiar stretch of bare, damp stone wall and whispered a password. The stone door concealed in the wall slid open. Daphne stepped through the door way, pulling Harry behind her.

The Slytherin common room was just as he remembered it from second year: a long, low underground room with rough stone walls with several round, greenish lamps hanging by chains from the ceiling. A fire was crackling under an elaborately carved mantelpiece ahead of them, and several Slytherins were silhouetted around it in high-backed chairs.

"What the hell are you thinking bringing HIM here Greengrass?" Pansy Parkinson shrieked from one of the high-backed chairs.

"Who are you to tell me who I can take anywhere Parkinson?" She turned to Harry. "I'll be right back" and she headed down the stairs to her dorm.

Harry watched her walk away, enjoying the way her hips moved. As soon as she was out of sight he turned to find an even dozen wands pointed at him. He raised both his hands level with his head, wagging his fingers. "I come in peace." He intoned with a crooked smile.

"Oh quit being idiots." Draco Malfoy slurred from a darkened corner of the room. "Fucking Potter and Fucking Neville Longbottom fought their way through more than twenty Death Eaters and still managed to kill the Dark Lord. What chance to you morons stand?"

The wands slowly lowered, though the death glares remained. "Thank you Draco."

"Fuck you Potter." The blond took another pull on the bottle. "You've ruined my life; I just didn't want you inflating your reputation by killing any more of what pass for my friends."

Harry removed his cloak and scarf, quietly shrinking them wandlessly before putting them in an inside pocket of his robes. "Your life is what you make it Draco. If you allow what I had to do to survive ruin your life, then that's your problem, not mine. I'm not going to apologize for living. I never set out to hurt you, in fact other than the times you were being an ass to me and my friends you weren't really ever an issue."

"Take a seat Harry" Millicent Bulstrode said from one of the nearer chairs

"Thank you Millie." Harry sat on one of the empty sofas. "Nice. Your furniture is a lot nicer than what we've got in Gryffindor Tower."

"How did you win?"

Harry looked to the girl who he vaguely recognized as a 5th year. "What do you mean?"

"You're a half blood. How did you defeat the greatest Pureblood wizard ever?" the girl asked.

Daphne returned to the common room, now dressed in black slacks and a black cashmere jumper. She sat next to Harry, pulling his arm around her shoulders.

"You mean Voldemort?" Harry asked. The girl nodded. "Voldemort wasn't a Pureblood; he was a half blood like me." Harry thought for a moment. "Actually for what little it matters, he was even less pure than me. Both my parents were magic users, his father was a Muggle."

"You lie!" the girl hissed.

"Why would I lie? It's in the public record, you can look it up. Tom Marvolo Riddle, born to Merope Gaunt following a love potion induced love affair with a Muggle named Tom Riddle. Named for his father and maternal grandfather, Riddle was sorted into Slytherin house and was Head Boy for

the '44-'45 school year. He's in the school records. If you keep a record of the House Rolls like we do in Gryffindor, you should be able to look him up."

Harry thought for a second, and then drew his wand, doing the air-writing anagram trick with Tom Marvolo Riddle transforming to 'I am Lord Voldemort'. "Even his name is a double joke. He anagrammed his given name to come up with 'Lord Flight from Death'. Riddle used the Blood Purists to his own ends. I mean think about it. When he died, those who wore his mark died as well. Why? Because he slaved the Death Eater's magic and life to his own. Beyond that, he BRANDED them like farm animals. Would someone who truly believed in the superiority of the Purebloods do either of those things?"

The fifth year evidently had enough to think about and returned to her studies with a look of confusion on her face.

Tracey had come to join Harry and Daphne on the sofa. Blaise Zabini sat on the arm of Millie's chair and a quiet conversation started between the five began, ranging from the current class load, every one's preparation for the N.E.W.T. exams, and the chances of Slytherin and Gryffindor houses in the Quidditch cup. In a lull in the conversation Harry pointed to a portrait next to the exit to the dungeons.

"Is that portrait new? I don't remember it from the last time I was here."

A sudden silence filled the common room. Evidently pretty much everyone had been listening.

"And precisely when were you ever in the Slytherin Common Room before Potter?" Ted Nott asked from across the room.

Harry could feel every eye in the room on him. That had been a mistake. "Second year during the Christmas Holidays." The looks he continued to get (including from Daphne) told him that they weren't satisfied with that answer.

"It was during that whole people saying I was the 'Heir of Slytherin' thing. We thought that Malfoy was doing it all to make me look bad."

"Calling you the 'Heir of Slytherin' is not how I would make you look bad, Potter. One doesn't make someone look bad by complimenting them," the blond said from his darkened corner.

"Look, we were all younger and fairly stupid back then. Being called the Heir of Slytherin might not be an insult inside Slytherin house, but to the other houses it was tantamount to my being labeled the next Dark Lord."

Malfoy considered that and nodded. "You still haven't explained when you were in our common room."

"Yeah, well Hermione brewed some polyjuice potion,"

"In second year? She brewed a potion that takes more than a month as a second year?" Tracey interrupted.

"Yeah."

"Morgana, she is infuriating. It's bad enough she's at the top of every class, then she has to do things like that to prove how much better she is..."

"She didn't do it to show anyone up Tracey, she did it to help me. If it was up to her, no one would ever know about it." Harry saw every eye still on him, and sighed. He wasn't going to get out of telling this story. "Anyway, the polyjuice was ready Ron and I got hairs from Crabbe and Goyle..."

"Who did Granger get hair from?" asked Millicent Bulstrode. "Don't deny it; she wouldn't have let you two idiots out of her sight."

"Uh, from you Millie, anyway we took the potion and made our way into the dungeons."

"You may have looked like Slytherins, but you still didn't know the password, how did you get in?" Ted Nott asked.

"Draco found us and we followed him in."

"Wait, I remember that. I thought Goyle and Crabbe were being particularly stupid that day, but Bulstrode wasn't with them." The blond said.

"Hermione had a bad reaction to the polyjuice." Harry was NOT going to tell the Slytherins that Hermione Granger had used cat hair in her polyjuice. She would kill him as soon as word reached her. "She spent a few days in the hospital wing following that. Anyhow we found out that Draco had no clue as to who the 'heir of Slytherin' was, so we got out. The polyjuice was wearing off anyway."

There was a few seconds of silence throughout the common room, and then laughter began.

"Not bad Potter." Draco Malfoy said. "That was devious and sneaky. I didn't think you had it in you."

Harry smiled as well. The first olive branch perhaps? "I've often thought that the Gryffindors and Slytherins have a lot more in common that either of us would like to admit..."

"There's no reason to be insulting Potter." Draco sniffed.

...--oooOOOooo--...

November 15, 1997

The Village of Hogsmeade

The Three Broomsticks:

Almost two months.

Hermione Granger sat nursing her butterbeer, ignoring the students all around her. It had been almost two months since her 'break up' with Ron. This was her first foray outside the castle since then. She wouldn't allow Ronald Bloody Weasley to make her into a hermit. She just hadn't expected it to be so hard, being without Ron. After six years of always having Ron and Harry around, Hermione found herself experiencing an old emotion. Loneliness. She had known that in spades during primary school, never really fitting in, and then she thought that the experience would repeat its self here at Hogwarts until Halloween night first year, when Harry and Ron came to her rescue.

She had stupidly allowed the Weasleys keep her from Harry after Christmas last year. She had gotten most of her relationship with Harry back, but he was so focused on Daphne now... She didn't begrudge him his happiness with Daphne, or his new closeness with Neville. Part of her wondered what might have happened if only...

"Hello Hermione." Hannah Abbott said as she slid into the booth. "It's so crowded in here today. Mind if we join you?"

"Of course Hannah."

"Oh thanks. You know Justin don't you?"

Hermione looked over to the young man with the wavy hair. "Of course I do. Good to see you again Justin."

Justin Finch-Fletchly looked somewhat uncomfortable. "Hello Hermione. I believe the grand manipulator here is trying to fix us up."

"Justin!" Hannah exclaimed. "What a horribly insensitive, though completely accurate, thing to say!" The Hufflepuff smiled at the squirming pair. "Oh look at the time; I'm supposed to meet Neville at Honeydukes. Toodles!" and the blond girl was gone, melting into the crowd.

Madam Rosmerta appeared at the booth "Can I get you anything?"

Justin looked to Hermione with a raised eyebrow. Hermione looked to her nearly empty butterbeer and nodded with a smile.

"Two Butterbeers please." The Muggle born Wizard said. As the pubs owner left to fill his order, he turned back to Hermione. "Hannah was unusually subtle today. What is it with people who once they hook up with someone feel the need to fix up all their single friends?"

"I wish I knew. When I thought Ron and I were together, it never occurred to me to..." the emotions Hermione was feeling showed on her face.

"If it helps, it gets better eventually."

"Excuse me?" Hermione said struggling to regain control.

"It takes a while but you get over it. My girlfriend back home dumped me in late August. She couldn't deal with another ten month separation she said."

Hermione could see the sad emptiness she felt in Justin's eyes. "I'll get over it you said? When did you get over it?"

"I'll let you know." He said with a hint of a smile.

Madam Rosmerta returned to the table with their drinks, taking Hermione's empty with her. Justin raised his bottle. "To we few, we Muggle born, with a foot in both worlds, understood by neither side, feared by the bigots who hate us, pitied by the bigots who don't hate us. One day, so very soon we'll take over, and they'll pay, oh yes, they'll pay."

Hermione couldn't help but laugh. She raised her own bottle. "Hear Hear!"

On the far side of the bar Hannah Abbott was watching Hermione's booth carefully, when the pair sitting so far away began to laugh, she got her own private smile. It was so enjoyable with people stopped resisting her sensible suggestions and just cooperated.

"Oh hell." Hannah found Neville looking at her oddly. "I know that smile. What am I going to have to do? Dispose of bodies or apologize to someone?"

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November 20, 1997

London England

Tonk's Apartment:

Nymphadora Tonks appeared with a loud crack in her bedroom after a particularly long and stressful shift. What looked like might have turned out to be an interesting evening out terminated suddenly when the 'gentleman' in question pulled a photo out of his pocket and asked "Can you look like this?"

It had taken three of their fellow Aurors to peel her off of him. The idiot in question might, or might not make his next shift depending on the skill of the healers. Tonks dropped her uniform cloak onto the chair next to her unmade bed, and had toed off her boots when a mysterious smell suddenly

assaulted her senses.

It smelled like... food? What would food be doing in her apartment?

Wand drawn and in bare feet, she padded out of her bedroom to find the sitting room to be... clean. Not a takeout food box or dirty magazine in sight. The horizontal surfaces were even dust free. She had heard of such things, and even vaguely recalled seeing them at her mother's home and at Hogwarts, but surely such conditions couldn't exist in her apartment. Still following her nose, she eased the door open to the kitchen to find Harry Potter standing over her table pouring red wine from a bottle to a glass.

"Hey Tonks. You know, you're quite the slob. Winky, one of my elves, loves you. She says that you know how to make enough work that an elf feels needed." He picked up the glass of wine and pressed it into her non-wand carrying hand.

"What are you doing here? What's that smell? And what did you do with my porn?"

"Daphne had things to do with her friends, Hermione has a date. Neville hinted heavily that I was a wheeled broom, which I took to mean not terribly useful, the Weasleys are still pissed at me, and all my homework is done, so I thought I'd come over and cook for my lovely older adopted cousin." He smirked. And Winky said that your porn was disgusting and is alphabetized by title in the bookcase next to your sofa.

"Lovely SLIGHTLY older adopted cousin. You said you cooked, as in food?"

"Yeah, I've got a baked three cheese and sausage spaghetti in the oven."

"Are you telling me that my oven works?"

"Yeah, it's perfect. You didn't know? How long have you lived here?"

"Three years, but that's not important. You're not joking, actual food that I don't have to go out for or have delivered?"

"Yeah, it'll be done in about ten minutes. Would you like a salad to start?"

...--oooOOOooo--...

Tonks pushed her plate away and belched in a lady like manner. "If Daphne lets you get away, I'm going to kidnap you and keep you as a sex slave/cook."

"It's good to know I have options." Harry said with a grin. With a flick of his wand, the table cleared and the dishes were in the sink cleaning themselves.

"It's not that I don't appreciate it Harry, the meal was lovely, but why are you really here?"

"I'm worried."

"About what?" the currently pink haired Auror asked.

"I'm happy."

Tonks blinked. "Which is it, you're worried or you're happy?"

"I'm worried because I'm happy." Seeing the confused look on her face he continued. "My whole life, whenever I've been happy, something has happened and whatever or whoever is making me happy has been taken away. A friend at school chased away by Dudley, a toy Dudley never played with until he saw me with it, Sirius, everything and everyone." He ran his fingers through his hair. "It wasn't supposed to be like this, you know. When I asked Daphne out it was only supposed to be a bit of fun. I wasn't supposed to be happy. I wasn't supposed to care this much. What happens if she..."

"Harry, don't do this." Tonk's hair went from her favorite bubblegum pink to a mousy brown. "You've had a crappy life, but all that's over. No one is controlling or manipulating you now. If you're happy, just be happy. If you're looking for relationship advice, you're talking to the wrong girl; I usually can't find a guy who wants me to look like me. But I see my Mum and Dad, or the Diggorys, and I know it can work. You just need to find the right someone. For you it might well be Daphne. I hope it is, but if it's not, that doesn't mean you give up, it means you keep looking."

"At least until I'm old, bitter and alone, like you Tonksy..." and Harry ran for his life with an angry red haired Auror chasing him.

...--oooOOOooo--...

Harry Potter and the Marriage Contracts Changes

December 1, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Quidditch Pitch:

"Justin!"

The Muggle born Seventh year Hufflepuff looked up from the book he was reading. "Hello Harry."

"How's it going?" The raven haired Gryffindor sat down next to him.

Finch-Fletchly had been expecting this. Hermione's relationship with Potter was well known. "I'm good." He said placing a bookmark in his book, closing it and putting it into his book bag.

"So," Harry said. "Dating Hermione?"

"Yes. You know I am." He grinned at the guy who taught him to defend himself magically. "Is this the threatening the evil new potential boy friend talk?"

Harry ran his hand through his hair. "Am I that predictable?"

"I've got a kid sister mate. I did what you're doing over the summer, and we aren't nearly as close as you and Hermione." His smile got broader. "Harry, I'm not pushing Hermione to do anything she doesn't want to do. Not that it's really any of your business, but we haven't done much more than go for walks, talk and kiss. I don't know where we're going, but I'm looking forward to finding out."

"Right." Harry said uncomfortably. "So, you're sufficiently threatened then?"

"It will hold me until her father does the job proper," the Hufflepuff grinned.

"Good..." the raven haired Gryffindor hesitated. "Justin, all joking aside. Ron hurt Hermione badly. She means everything to me, you know? She means enough that the prospect of spending a few dozen decades in Azkaban wouldn't stop me from doing some horrible things to the next guy that hurts her. I know you're a good guy, I've asked around, but still..."

"I understand Harry, I do. Don't worry; I won't hurt her if I can help it."

Harry nodded. "So, do you and Hermione have plans for this weekend?"

"Not really, we're going out for a bit, she's got Ernie holding down the fort. Dumbledore insists that at least one of them be available at all times. Not sure what we'll be doing."

"Well, see, I've got a couple of spare tickets to the U2 concert at Wembley for Saturday."

"You've got extras? That show sold out in about 20 minutes, where did you get tickets?"

"I uh... I sort of own a chunk of their production company. The Goblins like to keep the portfolios they manage very diversified, or so they tell me. I asked, and a few minutes later I had 10 tickets. Want a couple for you and Hermione?"

"Bloody hell yes!"

"It will be Daphne and me, Tracey Davis, Neville and Hannah, and you two. I'm planning on spending the night at my home, and offer that as an alternative to coming back to the school to anyone who wants it."

"I'll ask Hermione."

--oooOOOooo--

December 24, 1996

London England

Diagon Alley

Gringotts Bank:

Neville spent the day sitting next to Harry as the Goblin Healer used a mixture of Goblin runes, Potions and an odd lying of hands to remove the layered obliviations. It was evidently a painful process. Neville was repeatedly horrified at what Harry was going through.

Even after the Goblins were done, Harry lay shivering on the cot that had been provided to him. Watching his friend's face as Harry integrated the freshly unblocked memories Neville found himself becoming more and more concerned. Slowly Harry's expression shifted from pained, to confused, to surprised, to very angry. Neville found himself feeling sorry for whoever that anger might be directed at.

Harry sat up grimacing as he did so, "Nev, you'd best get home. Your Gran will be going spare"

"I don't care about some stupid Ministry function Harry."

"But your Gran does Nev. I'm not going to be ready to talk about this for a day or two. Go, have fun. There will be girls there, just remember, you're Longbottom of Longbottom."

"No one cares about that Harry."

"Sure they do. Get going. I'll make sure the Secret Keeper shares the location of... that place, with you."

"Harry..."

"Go on Nev," Harry said. "Go have a good time. I'll see you Boxing Day, Ok?"

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 6, 1997

Potter Manor:

The seven students arrived in the foyer of Harry's home, their ears still ringing from the amplifiers.

"That was a great concert!" Justin said loudly. "Thanks for setting all this up Harry."

"So that's a famous band in the Muggle world?" Daphne asked. "After I got used to the differences, I quite liked it."

"Oh, yeah. U2 is huge" Harry said, leading everyone into the sitting room. "They've been around for a few years, and keep getting more popular... you saw the crowds."

"Well, they certainly were loud." Neville said sitting on one of the sofas.

Dobby popped into the room "Welcome home Harry Potter Sir."

"Thank you Dobby. Could you bring in some drinks and light snacks please?"

"Of course Harry Potter Sir. Dobby and Winky have snacks ready for Harry Potter Sir and his friends." The elf popped away.

"Harry..."

"Dobby and Winky are not slaves Hermione." Hannah said.

"They're the highest paid House Elves in the World." Daphne added.

Dobby and Winky appeared in the sitting room with drinks and a tray of snack foods. "Winky ashamed to be paid. Harry Potter Sir should bond elves. Make honest elves of Dobby and Winky." Winky muttered.

"Ah, such excellent service. Thank you Dobby. Thank you Winky." Harry said smiling broadly. "Service of this quality should be rewarded... Time for raises I think."

"No!" Winky was aghast. "Winky work slower Harry Potter Sir, Winky take breaks. Please do not give Winky more money."

"Just a joke Winky, you and Dobby are the best elves in the world." Harry took his employee's hand. "Never forget how much I need your help."

Winky nodded, and then popped away.

"Bloody hell Harry." Justin snagged a bottle of butterbeer. "I've never seen anyone get along with house elves as well as you do. Even after seven years, they frighten me a bit."

"We get along with our elves." Tracey sniffed.

"I'm sure you do." The Muggle born Hufflepuff said. "I've been in several old line Pureblood homes and seen how the elves bonded to those families

are treated, but Harry's different. Take the Bones family for example. It was at the Bones home the summer after first year I met my first elf. The Bones' are polite to their bonded elves, asking for things and saying thank you when they get them, but really, the elves are like animated furniture. If they aren't be addressed, they're pretty much ignored. It was like that at every one of the families with elves I've seen. Harry treats the elves that work for him like... well people I guess."

"They are people." Harry said. "Just a different kind of people."

"Is this one of those 'Muggles are more civilized' things?" Tracey asked.

"Good lord no." Justin shook his head. "My parents treat our domestics the same way... So did I for that matter, before I noticed that a lot of the Purebloods thought of me that way."

"Domestics?" Tracey was confused. "I don't know that term."

"Domestic Servants. People who clean and work around the house." Justin explained.

"You use actual humans for servants?" Tracey asked incredulously.

"Exposure to Harry and Hermione caused me to reconsider how I treated the Longbottom elves as well." Neville admitted.

"Neville was the first one to join S.P.E.W. after Harry and Ron." Hermione said proudly. "He never wore his badge though."

"Hermione, I joined because you were dead scary."

"Same reason Ron and I joined mate." Harry said.

The group fell into laughter at the look on Hermione's face.

...--oooOOOooo--...

An hour later Daphne emerged from the bath in the room that she and Tracey shared. She found Tracey looking at her in an amused way.

"What?"

"I'm going to spend the night alone here aren't I?"

Daphne smiled. "Am I that transparent?" Her smile took on an evil tone. "If you'd like, you could come with me."

"I suspect that if we both showed up in Potter's bed, the shock would kill him completely dead." Tracey laughed. "That would almost be worth it."

"It's not like I'll have many chances over the holidays..."

Her friend laughed. "Yeah I suspect your father might have a few words to say about that since Harry turned down his contract, even turning down his 'special' clause that would allow him to bed you... then sleeping with you anyway. Go on, get out of here... And if you're too noisy, I'll come in there with a bucket of water!"

--oooOOOooo--...

Justin emerged from the bath in his room to find Hermione sitting on his bed. She was clad in the blue t-shirt and slacks outfit she had worn to the concert. Her shoes were off; in their place were a pair of white bunny slippers. His mouth went very dry.

"Hello Justin."

"Hermione, what are you doing here?"

"Enjoying the view." She said with a smirk at his boxers and t-shirt. "Seriously, I wanted to talk about us."

"Ok." He wasn't going to flinch just because he was in his skiwies and she was fully clothed on his bed. He crossed the room and sat on the bed, leaning against the headboard. "We've been going out for a little more than three weeks now; I don't know if there is an 'us' yet, we're still Hermione and Justin."

"And I appreciate your take it slow approach, Justin. Really I do. I just wanted to know where you wanted to go if and when there is an 'us'."

"I don't know if I'd thought that far ahead Hermione. After we leave Hogwarts, I intend to attend Uni so that I can be in a position to assume my family responsibilities when the time comes. Having magic is wonderful, and I'll never give it up, but my life is out in the Muggle world."

Hermione nodded. "I will be going to University as well. I want to work in the Medical field, perhaps ultimately combining Muggle medicine with Healer skills..." she hesitated. "I love magic as well, but I've got a much clearer picture of the Wizarding world now than I did when I was eleven. I also believe my life will be in the Muggle world, with the Magical world being a place to visit, and perhaps learn from."

Justin laughed. "You know when Hannah suggested that you and I were alike, I thought she was crazy. I mean plain boring Hufflepuff me, and the dangerous Gryffindor thrill seeker Hermione Granger. The only things we had in common was being Muggle Born and spending part of second year petrified." Hermione moved to end up sitting next to him against the headboard. Justin sighed. "I like you Hermione, a lot. The last three weeks have been about the best I've had at Hogwarts, mostly because I've spent what time I could with you. Where are we going? I don't know. But I look

forward to finding out."

"I think I'd like that as well Justin." Hermione laid her head on his shoulder. "Would you like to come to my house for dinner Boxing Day?"

"Only if you'll come to mine the next day."

She dimpled. "Deal."

"Good." Justin paused. "I don't know if I should tell you this, but I will. Harry tried to give me the 'big brother' speech about you."

"The 'big brother' speech? What's that?"

"Ah, it was intended to be a generalized 'hurt her and they'll never find your body' threat. But Harry was, well, Harry. He couldn't be seriously frightening unless he was totally pissed at me. As long as I don't hurt you, I have nothing to worry about. It's funny, this summer I made the same speech, to my younger sister's new boyfriend, one would think that a threat from Harry 'I killed the Dark Lord, ask me how' Potter, would have been just a little more intimidating..."

Hermione moved to straddle him, took his face in her hands and kissed him. "Don't worry about Harry," she said breathlessly after breaking the kiss. "Worry about what I might do." And she kissed him again.

Justin just marveled at what she was doing to him, as he kissed her back for all he was worth.

"I'd best go." She said gasping at the sensation of his hands on her body. "Before I can't."

Justin watched her walk from his bed to the door, staring opened mouthed at her retreating body. As the door closed behind her, he thought about Ron Weasley. The Gryffindor was certainly in the running for the title 'biggest idiot in the world' when he cheated on that woman. Justin was simultaneously amazed at Weasley's stupidity, and thankful that Weasley had wasted his chance, ensuring that Justin would get his own.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 24, 1996

London England

#12 Grimmauld Place:

Standing on the street Harry looked up at the houses he stood in front of. The tall man standing next to him handed Harry a slip of paper. Harry unfolded the paper and read the message it held.

Harry Potter lives at #12 Grimmauld Place.

Following reading the note he looked up and watched the two buildings jump apart as #12 appeared as if from nowhere.

"Thank you Lojack." Harry said. "Could you come in for a moment?"

"Certainly Vault Holder Potter."

The pair entered the house, and the portrait of Sirius' mother immediately took notice

"Half Blood Filth! Howdare you defile my home bringing this cavern dwelling troglodyte?"

"I guess your glamour doesn't fool her Lojack."

"I believe you are correct Vault Holder." The tall man removed a bracelet from his left wrist, and the tall man was revealed to be a short young Goblin. "Do you have a list of people you wish to be informed of your secret?"

"Yes, thank you. One second please." Harry stepped to the center of the room. "Dobby!"

There was a sudden pop and Dobby was standing next to Harry. "Yes Harry Potter Sir?" The elf looked around, confused "Where is we Harry Potter Sir?"

"Dobby, this is Lojack. Lojack, Dobby is one of the people who need to knowthe secret."

"Very good Vault Holder Potter." The Goblin gave a slip to the confused elf, who glanced at it, then became somewhat less confused.

"Thank you Lojack. In the short term I only need two people told the secret of this house. Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger."

"They will be notified before close of business today Vault Holder. If you need me I can always be contacted via the bank. Once again I thank you for this opportunity."

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 20, 1997

The Village of Hogsmeade

Hogsmeade Station:

"Are you sure you don't want me to come with you?"

"I'm sure. I need to speak with my parents about you."

"About us." Harry said his green eyes burning into her violet eyes.

"About us. My father is going to be a bit put out that you declined his contract and we are together anyway."

"He can yell at me later." He leaned forward and kissed her. "Can I call you?"

She considered. "You had best wait until Monday. That will give my father a chance to calm down." This time she kissed him. "I think I love you Harry Potter." She stepped back and apparated away.

Harry stared at the point from which she had disappeared. He experienced a momentary sensation of emptiness with her leaving, then he finished processing what she had said, and his spirits soared.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 20, 1997

The Hogwarts Express

The Last Compartment in the Last Car:

Harry was the first in the car. Hermione had asked that he be aboard the train so that the Seventh years would have more representation than just the Prefects. At first Harry did it only grudgingly seeing the seven hours spent on the train as being something of a waste, but given the way Daphne had said goodbye, he was walking on air, and even the seven hours for the trip were now meaningless.

Neville and Hannah joined him after a few moments. Hannah fixed him with a look.

"Ok, what happened?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"You are entirely too happy Mr. Potter. What did Daphne do?"

"She just gave me a happy thought when she left."

Hannah raised an eyebrow. "A happy thought? How happy?"

"Oh, a thirty foot patronus happy..."

The door opened and Luna stepped in removing her cloak and scarf. "Hello everyone. No Weasleys?"

"Not this time Luna." Hannah said.

"Good, I am quite vexed with them over their behavior this year." She sat primly. "I expect no one is going to allow Ginny to forget her actions toward you when she believed that silly Prophet article. The almost every girl in sixth year is quite upset at her."

The door opened again, revealing Megan Puckle, the red haired Gryffindor first year that Harry had assisted back on September first. "Hello everyone. Could I sit with you?"

"Certainly." Luna said. "You allowed me to sit with you back in September, return the favor is only fair."

The young girl sat between Luna and Harry.

"Why here with the old folks Megan?" Harry asked. "Why aren't you with your friends?"

"Oh, for the extra credit." The firstie replied.

"Extra credit?" Neville asked. "Why would you get extra credit for sitting with us?"

"The Head Master promised extra credit if I could get Harry to tell me how he beat the bad wizard."

The compartment was silent for a moment.

"Well, why not." Harry said. "Let me tell you what happened. Not a lot of people know this, but the homunculus that Voldemort was using for a body since I destroyed his original body was actually snake based. It had human parts but it was mostly snake."

Megan looked up from the notes she was taking and nodded. "The third years were talking about that in the common room."

"Well," Harry continued. "Neville and I did a lot of research about how you would go about killing a snake, we tried to get samples of fast acting snake diseases, we tried to get hold of snake parasites, but none of that seemed to be what we were looking for."

Neville nodded. "That was when we realized that the reason that we had so little in the way of Snake related resources is that Britain is too cold for most snakes. So we said, why not use cold to kill him."

"But we couldn't just, you know, open the door, that wasn't fast enough, and besides it was May, and it wasn't all that cold anymore." Harry said. "That was when I remembered a film I saw in primary school about Muggle industrial processes."

"Neville found out where Voldemort was hiding." Luna put in helpfully.

"And Harry attached some timed portkeys to several Muggle devices called 'Cryo tanks'"

"Neville and I were hiding in the rafters of Voldemort's hideout when the portkeys activated, and dropped fifteen thousand liters of liquid nitrogen into the middle of Voldemort's meeting. Voldemort and his minions were something less than thrilled, but they froze solid in a few seconds. We waited for the nitrogen to boil off, and with bubblehead charms to protect us against the remaining fumes. Neville is the one who actually finished Voldemort off. He walked up and kicked him, making him shatter into several pieces."

Megan was writing furiously. "And that's how you did it?"

"Yep." Neville agreed.

"Thank you." she said. Folding her completed notes in half and tapping them with her wand. The pages disappeared with a soft pop. "I can't believe that I'm the one you finally told the real story!"

"Oh, that wasn't the real story Megan." Luna said.

"That was this week's story for the Headmaster." Neville explained.

"We'll most likely never tell him the truth." Harry said.

"But my extra credit?"

"You fulfilled his assignment, a story on how the Dark Lord was defeated. He can't be mad at you for not finding out the true story since he himself has failed to get it... How many times Nev?"

"Twenty three."

"Yeah, twenty three times." Harry nodded. "If you don't get your extra credit, come to me, I'll get it for you."

"Thank you Harry." Megan gathered her things, and exited the compartment, and headed forward to find her friends.

They waited until the girl was out of sight before the laughter started.

"I wonder how long it will be before Dumbledore figures out he's been had again?"

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 25, 1996

London England

#12 Grimmauld Place:

"Harry?" The door opened to her touch and Hermione Granger stepped into the foyer of the ancestral Black home. The first thing she noticed was the portrait of Sirius' mother was gone. She wondered how that had been done; she had watched Sirius and Remus spend hours trying to remove it with no success. Then she noticed that the wall itself was new.

If you can't remove the portrait, remove the wall it is adhered too. Brilliant.

There was a sudden pop. Winky was suddenly standing in front of her.

"Good Evening Miss Harry Potter Sir's Hermie. Is you here to see Harry Potter Sir?"

"Yes I am Winky. Can you tell me where he might be?"

"Harry Potter Sir is in the Library."

"Thank you Winky." Hermione hesitated. "Winky, are you bonded to Harry?"

The elf's face clouded. "No. Winky is still free elf. Winky is much ashamed."

Hermione fought to keep the smile off her face. "Thank you again"

Leaving the elf to her business Hermione made her way to the library. She found Harry there, sitting in front of the fire in one of the high back chairs that she loved so much.

"Harry?"

"Hello Hermione."

"Harry, what's going on? The Weasleys are in an uproar, when I told Molly I was coming to speak with you she started screaming about my loyalty to the Weasley Family. Then Ginny accused me of trying to steal you from her."

"I won't be going to the Burrow anymore Hermione. Why isn't it important. I'm just won't. This isn't about Ron, and it's not about you. I'm no longer dating Ginny, and I'm not going to have anything to do with her."

Hermione blinked. "But Harry, why? You've always said that they were the family you always wanted."

"I'm not going to talk about it Hermione. The Weasleys and I are done. Dumbledore and I are done. The Order and I are done. Remus and I are done."

"Harry, you've got to tell me what's going on."

"No, Hermione, I don't." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "Are you and Ron happy?"

"Yes."

"Look after each other. Molly is going to force Ron to choose between her and me. If the two of you are happy, you're going to have to stay away from me as well."

"Harry, I'm not going too..."

"Yes, Hermione, you are. You and Ron are happy. You both deserve that. If you continue to try to hang around me, you'll probably lose Ron. Ron is my brother in all but blood, but if forced to choose between his mother and me, he'll choose her."

"Harry..."

"No Hermione. Go back to Ron. Be happy. I'll be alright."

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 22, 1997

Potter Manor:

"Greengrass Estate!"

The fire turned green, Harry knelt and stuck his head in the fire and clearly said "Daphne Greengrass."

A green tinged House Elf clad in an immaculate pillowcase appeared before him. "This be Greengrass Estate, can Tilict help you?"

"Thank you Tilict. I am Harry Potter, may I speak with Daphne?"

"Miss Daphne is unavailable Harry Potter. Could you call later?"

"Thank you Tilict, I will."

Harry pulled his head from the fire and the flames lost their green hue. That was odd. Daphne had told him to call. Maybe she was shopping.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 24, 1997

Potter Manor:

Harry stroked Hedwig, stared dully at the package lying on his desk. His Christmas gift to Daphne returned unopened, the attached note, succinct and to the point.

Potter.

I've reconsidered our relationship and have determined that you are not what I am looking for in a life partner. Your repeated attempts to contact me have become tiring; please refrain from continuing in the attempt. We had fun Potter, but we are through.

Daphne Greengrass.

Some minor part of his mind was wondering if his life was going to go to crap every Christmas for the rest of his life.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 29, 1996

London England

Diagon Alley:

"Harry?"

Harry Potter paused outside Gringotts, and turned to see Nymphadora Tonks rushing up to him. Behind her came another. Harry felt his soul chill.

"Hello Tonks, how are you?" Harry turned his gaze to Remus Lupin. "This is your only warning Werewolf. Stay away from me, or I will kill you."

Tonks paled. "Harry?"

Remus puffed himself up. "Harry, you need to listen to Dumbledore, he knows what's best."

Harry stepped forward until his face was inches from the older man. "Dumbledore's memory blocks are gone Werewolf. I know. I know everything you did. I know everything he did. I have taken steps to ensure that I can never be obliviated again." The boy smiled when he saw how pale the werewolf had become since they have begun speaking. "The next time I see you, you die. For what you did to my parents, what you did to Sirius, what you did to me you gutless bastard."

The angry young man turned on his heel and entered the bank.

Nymphadora Tonks turned to her lover. "Remus, what the hell did you do?"

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 29, 1996

London England

Tonks' Apartment:

Tonks hauled a sobbing Remus into her apartment, and pushed him into one of her chairs. She then went to the sideboard and removed a bottle of Ogdens and two glasses. She poured two fingers of the Firewhiskey into each glass, shoved one in front of her lover, and downed the other.

"Drink it." She said.

Remus reached for the glass with trembling fingers. Tonks watched as he took a sip then set the glass back down on the coffee table.

"Now. Tell me what you did."

"You don't want to know."

"That kid is a friend, and the head of my family. He didn't need to, but he returned my mother to her place in the family, something that ate at her my whole life. He says you did something to him, to my cousin Sirius, to James and Lilly Potter. Tell me what you did, tell me now, or by Merlin's Beard I will haul you into headquarters toss you into an interrogation room and let the professionals sweat the truth out of you. I love you Remus, more than I could ever say, but you are going to tell me the truth."

The man sagged in the chair. He picked up the glass, downed the contents, and started to speak.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 29, 1980

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Headmaster's Office:

"Remus, it's good to see you, please sit down."

"Headmaster, I've discovered something horrible. It's Peter, he's the leak to Voldemort. I spotted him last night and something just wasn't right, so I followed him. Headmaster, he went to a Death Eater's meeting. He has to be the leak in the order."

Dumbledore looked pensive. "Peter? You are sure?"

"As sure as I'm speaking to you now."

"This could be useful, useful in deed." The ancient wizard mused. He looked up. "Remus, you must tell no one, as long as I know who the leak is, I can ensure that the information he has access to is... creative."

Remus looked confused for a moment as he put the puzzle together. "So we use Peter to feed bad information to Voldemort?"

"Exactly."

"But shouldn't James and Sirius and Lilly know?"

Dumbledore thought for a moment. "I think not, they might react differently toward him, and in doing so, raise his suspicions. No, for now, let us keep this between the two of us."

...--oooOOOooo--...

November 05, 1981

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Headmaster's Office:

"But Headmaster, Sirius is innocent, you know that. He's Harry's godfather, Harry should go to him. The only reason Lilly and James are dead is that we didn't take care of Peter when we had the chance. We can't do this."

"Remus, it has to be this way. There's a prophecy about Harry."

The discussion went on for several hours, in the end Remus agreed that Dumbledore's way was for the best. Nothing that Remus or Dumbledore could do would return James and Lilly to life, and Sirius was at least responsible for the Muggle's killed when he confronted Peter. Remus had never really been a believer in the greater good, but the debt he owed the Headmaster for allowing him to attend school in spite of his affliction pushed him to agree.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 25, 1993

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Defense Against Dark Arts class room:

"Well, what have we here?" It was common knowledge that Albus Dumbledore always knew what was going on in the school, what was less well known is that the reason for this knowledge was that the many portraits in the castle reported to him directly. He had received a report of a drunken Remus Lupin telling tales best untold to a certain trio of Gryffindors.

It was amusing the individual reactions of the three children, from Ron Weasley, fear, from Hermione Granger, disbelief, and from Harry Potter, rage. So much rage. His magic would be fueled by that rage when it came time for him to face young Tom again. Still the knowledge of why the events of October 31, 1981 played out the way they had couldn't be trusted to mere children.

With a flick of his wand, he petrified the trio, and then set about obliterating their memories, tweaking their personalities just a little bit. Perhaps, he mused, perhaps Harry shouldn't be getting too much help from Miss Granger... Perhaps her attentions would be better focused on young Mr. Weasley. Perhaps Ronald's bit of jealousy at his friends skills should be amplified, just a bit...

A quick warning to the Werewolf, then the three children were levitated to their common room, where they found themselves waking an hour later, believing that they had dozed off following a lovely dinner.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 29, 1996

London England

Tonks' Apartment:

Tonks listened to Remus' explanation of what he had done, and his reasons for doing so without expression. When he finished she looked at him for a full minute without comment. Finally she spoke.

"Get out."

"But 'Dora, I..."

"Get the hell out, and never, ever come back. Tell your master I resign from the Order. If I so much as hear that any of you approach within 50 meters of Harry Potter, I will arrest the lot of you. Moody, Shackbolt and every other current or former Auror I know within the Order will be

hearing this story."

Remus sat looking at her in disbelief.

"I said get out. I won't ask again."

The broken man shuffled out the door and out of her life. As soon as the door was closed and locked behind him, Nymphadora Tonks began to cry.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 25, 1997

Granger Residence:

"You're awfully quiet tonight, even for you."

Harry looked up from the sink. Invited to Hermione's for Christmas dinner it had been too late to cancel, following the meal he had pleaded to be allowed to help with the dishes. His time with the Dursley's had taught Harry that sometimes he could submerge his pain in physical labor.

"Daphne broke up with me."

"What?" Hermione almost shouted, bringing her hand to her mouth. "When? How?"

"Yesterday afternoon, by Owl. She says we're through."

"So what are you going to do?"

"What can I do?" he sighed. "I accept it and move on I guess. If she says it's over, it's over."

"Harry."

"What? If you told Justin that it was over and he kept bothering you, I'd remove his teeth, what makes me special? If Daphne is happier without me, I can live with that."

Hermione pulled him into a hug.

"What did you do when you found out?"

"Oh, I threw quite a tantrum," Harry said with a wry smile. "Dobby was deliriously happy with all the things that needed repair."

...--oooOOOooo--...

"What a difference a year makes "Martin Granger said. "Only last year I was praying that my beautiful genius daughter would pull her head out of her ass and see that that 'Ron Weasley' was no good for her"

"And I was sitting alone in a room wondering just where everything went wrong."

Hermione's father had invited Harry out on to their backyard deck for 'a breath of fresh air.' It was substantially warmer down here in England than the winter weather he was used to from the School in Scotland, but it was still very cold fresh air.

"I like you Harry. I speak, you seem to be frightened. Any chance of you dating Hermione?"

"No sir. For a lot of reasons, but mostly she knows me too well."

"I had noticed that. So, tell me about this Justin."

"Justin's a good guy, Muggle born like Hermione, his father's in finance or something, I don't really remember. He was sorted into the house known for its cooperation and team work. Like I said a good guy."

"Is he good enough for Hermione?"

"No."

"No?"

Harry shrugged. "It's not Justin's fault, no one is good enough for Hermione. He'll try to be, that's what's important."

"Alright, I know why I think no one is good enough for my daughter; tell me why you think that."

"She's a bossy little know it all, who cares enough about me to save my life more times than I can count and kept me from killing myself stupidly more times than that. When I think perfect, I think Hermione." Harry shrugged. "I am lucky to know her."

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 26, 1997

Longbottom Manor:

"I swear to Merlin, Harry you have to be the most clueless individual on the planet."

Harry looked up from his feeling sorry for himself, somewhat hurt.

"I have to agree with Neville, Harry. When it comes to women at least, you are more clueless than most men." Hannah nodded from Neville's side. "Surely you don't really believe that the note came from Daphne."

"It is her handwriting." Harry protested.

"She may have written it, but it wasn't FROM her you prat." Hannah said dismissively. "Think about it. If Daphne was going to dump you, she wouldn't do it by owl post; she'd do it to your face." Just to watch a little piece of your soul die she added to herself.

"If it's wasn't Daphne's idea, then who could make her do this?"

"I don't know the man, but according to Gran, Cyrus Greengrass is one of the biggest asses to ever walk the face of the earth Harry." Neville explained. "Gran says he was furious that you declined his contract, and then had the temerity to date his daughter. Without the contract he doesn't get his Bride Price, but still has to cough up her dowry." Neville took on a look of frustration. "This is my fault. I should have explained all the intricacies of family line rules and politics, but honestly Harry, I never thought that you would get so involved so quickly."

"Quickly? Me?" Despite his pain, Harry found himself laughing. "This from Mr. "Harry, she's the one" after your second date?"

"Harry!" Neville protested.

"Second date? Really?" Hannah kissed her fiancé lightly. "We'll talk about how romantic that is later. Explain this family line politics thing."

Neville blushed. "Cyrus is the Head of the Greengrass family. Under strict interpretation of the rules of the old lines, family members are practically property of their Head of House. Only women have an out to this, and then only when they marry. At a traditional marriage between the Great Houses, for all practical purposes the woman is sold to her husband's Head of House to become his or her property."

"But Daphne's of age!"

"So was Andromeda Black when she wanted to marry Ted Tonks, if you recall. It doesn't matter." Neville sighed. "She could be fifty, in the eyes of the old laws; she belongs to her father, who is her Head of House, until she marries. Refusal to cooperate could cause her to be cast out."

"So?"

"So it's a huge deal for some people." Neville hesitated, trying to think of a way to explain. "Being cast out is thought of by some people as being worse than death. Think about how it affected Andromeda when the Blacks cast her out. You saw how she broke down when you reinstated her to the family, almost thirty years after the fact. Hell, you saw what Cyrus subjected Daphne to when you got her photos and he offered you her body on a trial basis. You must have noticed how vulnerable Daphne is behind her defenses. I intend no offense to Daphne, but Daphne Greengrass isn't as strong as Andromeda Black was. She will do what her father tells her to do. As far as she is concerned, he owns her body and soul."

"Daphne is no one's property" Harry stood suddenly, furious.

"Harry, mate. I agree." Neville stood as well, putting his hands on his friend's shoulders. "Say the word and I'll help you storm the Greengrass castle. We'll go to gaol, but I'll be with you all the way."

"Castle?" Harry asked.

"Actually it's more of a smallish manor house. The Greengrass family is a relatively new one."

"But 'storming' the manor would be a mistake Harry." Hannah added.

"You think I should wait until we go back to school?"

"So that you can talk to her before you decide to do something illegal, yes."

Harry sat back down and sighed. "It was so much easier when all I had to contend with was a homicidal maniac and his minions."

--oooOOOooo--

December 26, 1997

Granger Residence:

There was a quiet crack in the Granger back garden. Martin Granger looked through the back window to see his daughter and a young man.

"They're here Eve." He said to his wife.

Eve glanced out the window. "She's giving him his last minute pep talk. You be nice Marty. Don't scare him off with your sense of humor."

"Eve, this 'Justin' was raised in the real world, not like that Weasley boy. He'll recognize a joke when he hears one."

"Marty..."

"I swear to god Eve, if this one is as condescending as that Weasley boy, I'll kick him out of here, and FORCE her to date Harry Potter."

"I like Harry too Marty, but I don't think Hermione could be forced to do anything."

"Heh." The dentist chuckled in agreement. "That's my girl."

--oooOOOooo--

Standing on the pathway that led from the Granger's back door to their Garden shed, Hermione looked into Justin's eyes.

"Are you ready for this?"

"As ready as I'm going to be I suppose. Your dad hates me doesn't he?"

"He hasn't met you yet Justin." She dimpled. "He hated Ron though."

"You're not helping."

"They're going to love you Justin." Hermione reached up, pulled his jacket's zipper down half way, and straightened the knot of his tie. "We'll get through this, and then do it again tomorrow at your home. You wore my Christmas present." She rose on her tip toes to lightly kiss him.

"It's my new favorite jumper. Did you like your present?"

"Oh, yes. I'd never even heard of antique bookmarks, they're lovely." She kissed him again. "We'd best get inside. My dad's been watching since we arrived."

--oooOOOooo--

"Mum, Dad, this is Justin Finch-Fletchly. Justin, my parent's, Martin and Eve Granger."

"Welcome to our home Justin." Eve Granger said. "Dinner won't be ready for another thirty minutes, so you have a choice. Would you rather wait for the traditional interrogation by my husband, or get it out of the way before the salad?"

"My father always told me that the only way to go is forward. If you'd like sir, why don't we get it out of the way?"

"Right this way Justin." Martin led the young wizard from his kitchen to the sitting room. "Take a seat." Justin sat on the sofa, as Martin crossed the room to his wet bar. "Drink?" he asked raising a bottle of Johnny Walker Red.

"Water would be nice, thank you." Justin said.

"Good choice Justin. Ok, you carefully avoided my fiendish trap, tell me about yourself."

"I'm a seventh year, like Hermione." The Hufflepuff said accepting the tumbler of ice water and taking a sip. "I'm the first magical in the family and Cricket is my favorite sport, though I'm not much of a player. My family has been in finance for ever, my father runs his own brokerage."

"I know, I'm one of his clients. 'Finch-Fletchly' isn't the most common name around, but I never made the connection until I saw you in the kitchen. You look just like Miles." Martin Granger. "Saying that he 'run his own brokerage' is a bit of an understatement wouldn't you say? You make it sound like he works out of a spare bedroom at your home. Odd that Hermione doesn't seem to know this. She is under the impression that your father is some kind of bank manager."

Justin paled a bit. "Are you going to tell her?"

"That depends on why you haven't."

"Money changes things. Girls hear about the money and they don't care much about Justin anymore, they're interested in the Finch-Fletchley heir. What I love most about the Wizarding world is that no one has the faintest clue about who my father is."

Martin Granger smirked. "That is precisely why Harry Potter likes the mundane world. You're worrying about nothing you know. Harry is Hermione's best friend and has, according to her, more money than god, and she doesn't care about it."

"She got to know Harry before either of them knew about his family's money." Justin pointed out. "I want her to know me before she finds out."

"From what I understand, your home is a sight to behold. How are you going to explain a bank manager living like that?"

The young man's mouth opened and closed several times without making a sound. Finally he spoke. "I hadn't thought of that. I think I've got some explaining to do."

This was harder than Martin expected. Of the three young men his daughter had brought home in her life, he had actually liked two of them. "You

know what I do for a living, right?"

That question startled Justin a bit. "Hermione told me you were a dentist."

"I am. Just remember, I know all about pain." Martin flashed a small grin. "Feeling sufficiently threatened yet?"

"Yes sir."

"Relax Justin." The older man laughed. "I have to threaten you; it's in the rule book you get when your daughter is born. You should thank my wife; I wanted to put you in my chair to have our little talk. Eve wouldn't let me. She thinks I scared Ron Weasley off last year." The Dentist's manner changed. "Hermione won't tell us what happened with Ron. I know he hurt her, but she won't talk about him."

Justin knew that his best move at this point would be to keep his mouth shut, but he couldn't. "I'm sorry sir, I only know the rumors that flooded the school the day after, and those rumors are probably wrong. Even if I did know, it isn't my place to tell you. Let's just say that as far as I'm concerned, Ron Weasley is an idiot, and I'm glad he is. If he wasn't such a fool, I would probably never have had a chance to get to know Hermione."

--oooOOOooo--

Justin pushed back his plate.

"That was wonderful Mrs. Granger. Thank you."

"Thank you Justin. So, are you two men finished bonding? I hope Martin didn't threaten you too much."

"Daddy!"

"Hermione, your father didn't threaten me at all." Justin said with a wide smile. "He just showed me some photos."

Hermione's eyes went wide, and a blush ran up her cheeks. "What photos?"

"Oh, just some baby pictures... That cute one of you in the bath."

"DADDY!"

"Calm down Hermione" Martin said trying not to laugh. "Justin is just having you on. I didn't show him any photos."

"Then how does he know about the pictures in the bath?"

"I didn't until you confirmed them Hermione." Justin laughed. "Everyone has those pictures. I think all parents take them."

"I know we did." Eve said. "Want to see them Justin?"

"MUM!!!"

--oooOOOooo--

December 29, 1996

London England

Diagon Alley

Gringotts Bank:

"Good afternoon Harry."

Harry stopped with his hand on the handle that would open the door to Gringotts.

"Hello Headmaster."

"Harry, your little rebellion is over. It is time for you to return to the Burrow."

"I don't think so Headmaster. There is nothing for me there, other than Ron, not even friendship." The old man's eyes widened in surprise. "Haven't you figured it out yet Headmaster? I've got my memories back. All of them. I know what you did to us. I know you allowed my parents murder. I know you allowed Sirius to go to Azkaban knowing he was innocent. I know what you did to Ron, Hermione and me. I know that you expected me to die like a good little soldier taking Voldemort with me."

"Harry..."

"Save your empty lying words old man. The Goblins tell me that I can't do a thing about the money you stole since you somehow made yourself my guardian. That spigot is now closed. I have managed to become emancipated. It's amazing what you can get out of the Ministry for just a little gold. If I see any of your Order near me I will have them arrested."

"Harry you have to understand, it was all for the greater good."

"And still you tell lies old man. How was filling your pockets with my inheritance for the greater good? All you are to me is the Headmaster of my school. Nothing more. I have the political power of two ancient and noble houses behind me now, that and more money than the Ministry. Annoy me in anyway and I will destroy you."

"But Harry, Voldemort will..."

"Fuck Voldemort old man. And fuck you too. You two deserve each other. He can have you."

With that Harry entered Gringotts leaving a confused Albus Dumbledore behind him.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 27, 1997

Potter Manor:

Harry stroked Hedwig gently. His pretty girl's feathers still showed signs of the blood that had come from the wounds she received when attempting to deliver his latest note to Daphne. She had been attacked by something; Harry didn't know what and had returned with his note still tied to her leg.

He offered Hedwig a few bits of bacon, which she nipped at.

"I'm sorry girl. You rest ok?"

The Snowy owl bobbed her head in an affirmative manner.

Despite his discussion with Neville and Hannah, Harry had attempted to contact Daphne, and Hedwig was injured because of it. It had to be intentional.

"Dobby?"

The Elf appeared with a pop. "Yes Harry Potter Sir?"

"Dobby, could you take this note to Daphne Greengrass?"

The tiny being's ears drooped and tears formed in his large eyes. "No, Harry Potter Sir, Dobby cannot do this."

"Why not?"

"Master of Greengrass house tell Greengrass elves to keep all communications away from Harry Potter Sir's Daphne. Pilet of Greengrass elves tell Dobby to stop Harry Potter from trying. I tells Pilet that Harry Potter Sir is great wizard and will talk to Harry Potter Sir's Daphne when he chooses. Pilet say he sorry for hurting white Owl, and that all Greengrass elves will fight if Potter Elves try to speak with Harry Potter Sir's Daphne."

"I see. Thank you Dobby."

The elf disappeared with his normal pop. Harry stared into the fire. The Elder Greengrass had certainly gone out of his way to keep him from speaking to Daphne... Maybe Tracey... No, she hated him, she wouldn't help.

...--oooOOOooo--...

December 29, 1997

London, England

Tonk's Apartment:

"Harry, I don't know what to say."

"Just tell me what you think Tonks. Am I doing the right thing?"

"You're doing the legal thing Harry. Is it the 'right' thing? I don't know, only you can decide that."

"I thought..." He hesitated. "I thought that we were just having fun. But it's been nine days since I've seen Daphne, and I... I can't stop missing her. I can't sleep. I can't eat. I go over the last time we were together over and over and over looking for anything I might have done to push her away."

"Harry."

"I know. I'm being an idiot." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "How did I manage to get this pathetic?"

Tonk's hair went blood red and she had a huge grin on her face. "It is fairly sad."

"Thanks." He grumped.

"Sirius would be calling you a girl."

"Sirius would be helping me kidnap her."

"Probably, yeah. While calling you a girl."

...--oooOOOooo--...

January 5, 1998

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

Harry had not ridden the train back to Hogwarts following the Christmas holidays; rather he had Apparated to Hogsmeade at noon, and was waiting for Daphne.

Neville checked on him in the hall from time to time, but mostly left him alone. The first of the students arrived via floo and apparition to Hogsmeade by four p.m. No Daphne. The minutes crawled by. The Train pulled into Hogsmeade station early at 5:30 pm. The carriages delivered them to the entry hall. No Daphne.

"She isn't coming Mr. Potter."

Harry turned to face his Transfiguration Professor. "Not coming? What do you mean Professor?"

"I received notice today that Miss Greengrass was withdrawing from Hogwarts." The Scot said.

"No."

"Mr. Potter... Harry. I know you and Miss Greengrass have gotten close this year..."

"Harry?" Neville had come back to remind Harry about dinner, the presence of their Head of House surprised him.

McGonagall straightened her shoulders. "Mr. Longbottom, Mr. Potter has gotten some bad news, make sure he makes it to your dormitory."

"What's going on Harry?" Neville asked after McGonagall was gone.

"Daphne's withdrawn from school Neville. She's gone."

"Withdrawn? Why?"

"POTTER!" a woman's voice rang before Harry could tell Neville that he didn't know.

Tracey Davis rushed forward with Daphne's large purple stuffed rabbit under her left arm, a roll of parchment clutched in her left hand. Her wand was drawn and pointed between Harry's eyes.

"This is your fault Potter. Daphne's gone because of you, you selfish bastard!"

"I don't understand, where is she? What did I do?"

"When you turned down her contract, her father found someone else to sell her to. She's marrying a Romanian Count named Neacsu! Because of you, I'm losing my best friend!"

Neville reached out and pushed Tracey's wand arm down so that her wand was no longer pointed at Harry's face.

"When does she get married?" Neville asked.

"The Reading of the Bans before the Wizengamot is tomorrow, the ceremony Wednesday."

"Married?" Harry said slumping against the wall. "She's getting married?"

"Yes." The dam holding back Tracey's emotions broke; tears began streaming down her cheeks. "Daphne's father has destroyed every single thing you have given her. She asked me to get her rabbit and your contract and hide them until she's left her family's home so that she'll have them to remember..."

"She kept the contract?"

"Yes." Tracey nodded. "She said that refusing to make your relationship a business proposition was the most romantic thing you could have done. Damn you Potter, why didn't you just marry her and save her from this?" The girl's expression changed. "You're Harry Fucking Potter. You're the Chosen One. You're the Man-Who-Won." Her wand came back up again, not trembling this time. "You fix this. You fix this now. Or I'll kill you."

...--oooOOOooo--...

January 6, 1998

Greengrass Manor

Daphne's room:

5:43 a.m.

Daphne stared at the clock on the wall. She was to be married in twenty eight hours and seventeen minutes. She was to be married to a vile man sixty years her senior. She was to be married to a man with a son older than her father. She shuddered and hugged her legs closer to her body.

She had been informed of her upcoming nuptials the day she returned from Hogwarts for the Christmas Holidays. Daphne's first reaction was to run. Being offered to Harry had been one thing, to be sold (her father made much of the bride price she was bringing) to this... ancient man she had just been introduced to... it was just too much. Quickly discovering that anti-apparation wards had been erected since her arrival, she almost made it to the front door of her families' home before she slumped nervelessly to the floor following a stunning spell.

Daphne woke several hours later, her mother fussing over her. Eunice Greengrass nee Moody explained that Daphne would not be returning to Hogwarts, that she would be leaving for her new life in Romania after the first of the year. With empty, haunted eyes Eunice spoke of advantages of linking the Greengrass family to the Romanian Neacsu clan.

Daphne tried to tell her mother that she wanted not thing to do with the old man negotiating Daphne's future with her father, that she loved someone else. Eunice wouldn't listen saying that her father had everything arranged.

Daphne listened to her mother go on about her duty to the family, and realized that her future was set. She had always known that she would be offered to the man who made the best offer... It was just that when she had been with Harry she had allowed herself to forget.

Duty. This was her duty. Childhood was over. It was time for the reality of adulthood.

...--oooOOOooo--...

The pattern was set. During the day she would be given language lessons by the Count's Valet, and then be instructed on what was expected of her in relationship to the Count's estates by others of Benedikte's party. Evenings she would be instructed in proper behavior and conduct for the Romanian Magical Court. Any errors in any of these lessons were punished by the activation of a pain cursed bracelet that she could not remove.

On the third day the punishments became so severe that she tried to run away. Daphne had gotten almost half way to the ward line when the cursed bracelet triggered and she thought she was dying. The counts retainers retrieved her, and returned her to her suite, where, Daphne was beaten, all the while Benedikte's retainers were screaming at her about 'embarrassing the Count'.

Duty.

...--oooOOOooo--...

On Christmas Eve Cyrus Greengrass entered Daphne's suite.

"Daphne, I need you to write a letter to Potter."

Daphne didn't even look up. "Why do I need to write to Harry?"

"He keeps trying to contact you and sending you gifts. You need to break it off with him. Write him a note telling him you don't want to see him. Tell him to stop trying to contact you."

Daphne nodded, and sat at her desk. She took a fresh piece of parchment, inked her quill and wrote:

Potter.

I've reconsidered our relationship and have determined that you are not what I am looking for in a life partner. Your repeated attempts to contact me have become tiring; please refrain from continuing in the attempt. We had fun Potter, but we are through.

Daphne Greengrass.

Cyrus snatched up the note and read it, nodding approvingly. "Thank you Daphne, I'll get this owled immediately."

...--oooOOOooo--...

After dinner that day Daphne was allowed to have a visitor.

"Daphne? Morgana! What's happened to you?"

"Hello Tracey." Daphne said dully. "It's nothing. I've just been tired."

"Daphne, talk to me."

"I'm getting married Tracey, married on the 7th of January. You'll be back at school then, I'm sorry you'll miss it. I'll write as soon as I get to Benedikte's estate and let you know all about the Wedding."

"Getting married? You're getting married?" the strawberry blond asked.

"Yes, my father offered my contract to Benedikte a week ago, and after meeting me on the 20th, Benedikte accepted it." Daphne said in a lilting voice.

Tracey wasn't fooled for a moment. "Should I tell Potter?"

"NO!" Daphne bolted upright in her chair, showing her first real emotion since Tracey had arrived. "Leave Harry out of this."

"Ok Daph, I will."

"Tracey," Daphne's voice dropped to a whisper. "When you go back to Hogwarts would you get the bunny Harry won for me, and keep it safe until you can send it to me? Oh and underneath my pillow is the Marriage Contract Harry declined. Would you hold that one for me as well?"

"Of course, but why?"

"My father had destroyed everything Harry has given me; he says keeping any of it would be disrespectful to Benedikte. But I want those things to remember Harry by."

"Alright, that's no problem Daphne, I can do it. Do you mind my asking, why the contract? I understand the rabbit, but the contract?"

"The contract is a symbol of what might have been Tracey. If Harry had wanted he could have had me, but he didn't want me like that, so he waited until I gave myself to him. That is possibly the most romantic thing I have ever heard of." She looked deeply into Tracey's eyes. "I'm not returning to Hogwarts Tracey... After today, I will probably never see you again. I love you Tracey. I will write if I'm allowed." She hesitated, and then continued. "I know you don't really like Harry, but please if you can, tell him I love him, and that I said goodbye."

...--oooOOOooo--...

7:19 a.m.

"Young Miss?"

Daphne pulled her eyes away from the clock on the wall to look at the house elf standing at the foot of her bed.

"Yes Tilict?"

"Tilict is here to help Young Miss be ready for her Reading of the Bans this morning."

Daphne nodded. Twenty six hours forty one minutes until she got married. She stood from the bed. "Thank you Tilict."

...--oooOOOooo--...

Daphne sat in the Wizengamot chamber, and waited for the session to begin. Her father and Count Neacsu were off politicking. Tracey stared at the floor at her feet, just wanting it to all be over.

"Good morning Daphne."

She looked up into the smiling face of Neville Longbottom. "Hello Neville, how are you?" Daphne asked dully.

"Oh, I'm fine Daphne. We missed you at the welcoming feast last night. I understand that you might not be returning to Hogwarts?"

"No, I'm not." Why was Neville here? "Why are you here Neville? Skiving off school?"

"No Daphne, depending on how a few things work out this morning, I might have some business before the Wizengamot."

"What the hell do you think you're doing bothering my daughter Longbottom?"

Neville looked deeply into Cyrus Greengrass's eyes. His manner changed from smiling geniality to cold disdain. "I think perhaps the advancement of the Greengrass Family to the status of Noble House had given you ideas above your station Greengrass." He said in a voice that dripped ice. "I am Longbottom of Longbottom, who are you to speak to me in such a manner?"

Neville's voice carried throughout the Wizengamot chambers, the room went deathly quiet.

"My apologies Lord Longbottom, I misspoke."

"Indeed you did sir." Neville turned his attention back to Daphne his tone softened. "Tracey Davis said that you might not be returning, so, since I was here anyway I thought I'd return the book you loaned me." Reaching into his robes Neville withdrew a leather bound book, and presented it to Daphne.

"Thank you Lord Longbottom." Daphne said quietly. Privately she wondered what Neville was up to, he had never borrowed a book from her. She placed the book in her lap.

"No, thank you Miss Greengrass" Neville said, still playing to the crowd. He gave Daphne's father the slightest of nods as he left. "Greengrass."

The book in her lap began to lightly vibrate. Daphne looked around, and then sure that no one was paying attention to her opened the book.

Inside the cover was a small self inking quill, the facing page was blank except for a hand written sentence.

Hello Beautiful... Did you miss me?

Daphne realized what the book was. It was one of a pair of charmed journals. They were children's toys used to allow children to send 'secret messages' over short distances, usually less than 30 meters.

She took the quill in hand and wrote **Harry?**

Aw, you guessed. The words appeared in his sloppy scrawl. ***So much for finding your secret boyfriend's name.***

Harry, you can't do this. She wrote

Daphne, seriously now, answer me two questions and I'll leave you alone.

First question: If I can stop this from happening, do you want me to?

Up on the dais Dumbledore gaveled the room into silence.

"Before we begin this morning's session of the Wizengamot, it is my pleasure to announce that this morning we will be Reading the Bans to announce the impending marriage linking our own Greengrass family to the family of Count Benedikte Stefan Florinel Georghiu Neacsu of the Romanian Imperial Court."

Daphne looked down at the book. Harry had added another question mark to his first question.

She wrote: **YES YES YES**

Thank you. Now, the second question is important and will decide what I do next. Please, don't think about it, just answer.

Daphne, will you marry me?

The question stunned the Slytherin. She wrote: **Harry, Dumbledore's about to read the banns... I'm to marry...**

Tic Tic Tic Daphne. I don't need a lesson on current events, I need your answer. Will. You. Marry. Me ? The new text shimmered into existence on the page beneath her words.

Daphne wrote: **YES**

...--oooOOOooo--...

Up on the dais Dumbledore gaveled the room into silence once more. "The Reading of The Banns:" The ancient Wizard announced theatrically.

"I publish the banns of marriage between Daphne Ophelia Greengrass of the Noble House of Greengrass and Count Benedikte Stefan Florinel Georghiu Neacsu, the Head of the Romanian Imperial House of Neacsu. If any of you know any cause or just impediment why these two houses should not be joined together in magic, in tradition and in blood, ye are to declare it now. This is the first and only time of asking." Dumbledore paused dramatically to allow the customary time for the protest. The question was a bit of political theater that amused him to no end, as no Reading of the Banns had been objected to before the Wizengamot in more than five hundred years.

"I object." A single voice sounded in the abject silence of the chamber.

Every head in the chamber rotated to face Harry Potter.

"What is this Greengrass?" The Romanian nobleman thundered from his seat in the gallery. "Is some trick to increase Bride-Price? Who is this boy?" Now every eye was on the Count as he turned to Daphne. "This is boy you spread legs for?" the old man raised his hand as if to strike the girl, only to suddenly grasp his right arm and scream.

"Striking a woman is the surest sign of a barbarian old man." Potter said from his place across the gallery as he lowered his wand. "I would stop you from hitting any woman. Attempt to hit that woman again and I will kill you. If I find out you've struck her in the past, I'll still kill you."

"Greengrass! Who is this boy?"

From the dais, a startled Dumbledore attempted to reassert control of the chamber sputtering. "Mr. Potter, what are you doing here?"

"In this setting Chief Warlock, you should be calling me Lord Potter-Black, should you not?"

An expression of anger flickered across Dumbledore's face. "Very well then, Lord Potter-Black, what are you doing here?"

"I believe that should be obvious, Chief Warlock." Harry said, as if explaining himself to a particularly slow child. "I am protesting this proposed marriage."

"On what grounds are you protesting Lord Potter-Black?"

Line-Theft and Fraud."

Dumbledore's eyebrows threatened to climb above his hairline. "Those are serious charges, Lord Potter Black. Approach. Cyrus Greengrass, Count Neacsu, you both approach as well."

Harry made his way to the open section of the chamber before the assembled Wizengamot and stood tall, looking every inch the Man-Who-Conquered. Cyrus Greengrass and his proposed son in law stomped their way to stand beside Harry.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull Potter."

Harry put the tip of his wand under the elder Greengrass's chin. "Never piss off a Potter old man. No one takes from me what is mine. I followed your fucked up rules, I did what I was supposed to do, and you expect me to put up with this? I don't take kindly to being defrauded. When I'm done with you Greengrass, you won't have a pot to piss in."

"SILENCE!" Dumbledore's magically amplified voice boomed out, quelling all discussion and conversation in the cavernous room. The ancient Wizard looked about to satisfy himself that the chamber would remain quiet. "Now then Lord Potter-Black, what is the basis of your objection to this marriage between Miss Greengrass and Count Neacsu."

Harry stepped away from the elder Greengrass, lowering his wand. "Unless Daphne has a sister she hasn't told me about there is no 'Miss Greengrass'. Her name is Daphne Potter. We married on November 15th of last year. I signed his insulting contract, and his Bride-Price was paid the previous day." From his robes Harry produced several rolls of parchment. "Here are copies of all the appropriate documentation from Gringotts detailing the transfer of the Bride-Price to the Greengrass vault, as well as my signed and sealed copy of the Marriage Contract binding the Noble House of Greengrass to the Ancient and Noble Houses of Potter and Black."

"These Documents appear to be in order Mr. Greengrass." Dumbledore intoned from his dais.

Cyrus Greengrass paled. "You and Daphne are married?"

"There was however, no reading of the Banns for a marriage between yourself and the House of Greengrass Lord Potter-Black" Dumbledore noted.

"Neither Daphne nor I needed or wanted a dog and pony show to announce our relationship to the world. Everyone in this chamber is aware that this ceremony has no legal standing. It exists as a tradition simply to promote the political standing of minor houses looking to advance."

"Chief Warlock?" The Clerk of the Wizengamot spoke up hesitantly. "The Book of Records indeed shows the marriage between Harry James Potter and Daphne Ophelia Greengrass at 3:38 pm on the 15th of November last year."

"What is this? What trickery is this? Who are you boy?"

Harry turned his attention from Dumbledore to the blustering nobleman. "You would be well advised to shut the hell up old man. If you had actually struck my wife you would be dead now. The ease with which you made the gesture of hitting her suggests to me that you may have already done so, if she tells me you have, you die today." Harry stepped back from the man, his expression clouded. He glanced over at Daphne sitting in the gallery. She wouldn't meet his eyes. A sudden look of realization crossed Harry's face.

Harry took hold of the front of Cyrus Greengrass's robes and pushed him against the dais. "Did you give this man access to Daphne in his contract? Did you offer him Clause Nine? Did you allow him to put his hands on my wife?" Harry's magic flared into a visible aura, the granite floor beneath his feet indented.

"Mr. Potter!" Dumbledore said from his dais.

Cyrus Greengrass sputtered, "No. That was simply to entice... She never told me..."

"Didn't you wonder why your vault suddenly had an extra sixteen thousand Galleons on November 14th? I was not obligated to tell you that I had accepted your contract. Did you give her a chance to tell you before you gave her to that man? If he's as much as touched her, I'm going to destroy you Greengrass, anything you love I'm going to take away from you."

"Calm yourself boy." The Romanian rumbled from behind Harry. "All this fuss over girl? Lays like dead fish anyway."

Harry released the elder Greengrass. "Get your wand old man." He turned to face the Romanian. "I've already killed a couple dozen dark bastards; another one won't make any difference."

"You dare challenge me boy?"

--oooOOOooo--

"Daphne!" Tracey hissed in her friend's ear.

"Tracey? What are you doing here?" Daphne glanced out into the chamber where Harry was still threatening the Romanian, then toward the Count's Valet. "I don't understand what's going on. What is Harry doing?"

"Getting you out of this."

"YOU!" the heavily accented voice of Neacsu's Valet diverted the attention of the chamber from the entertainment before the Wizengamot to a

smaller drama in the gallery. "Stand away from Count Neacsu's woman before..."

The man stiffened in his seat. The only voluntary muscles that still obeyed his mind were those that controlled his eyes.

"Now, there's no reason to be so rude." Neville Longbottom said in a conversational voice from behind the petrified man's left ear. "Imagine how embarrassing it would be back home if you had to tell everyone that you missed seeing Lord Potter-Black, the slayer of Voldemort, the Man-Who-Conquered, kill your Count because you were too busy trying to stop a couple of young women from whispering?"

--oooOOOooo--

Hearing Neville's casual statement, the Romanian Count's eyes went wide. "You are Man-Who-Conquered? You kill Dark Lord?"

"He certainly is." Neville said, still in his conversational tone of voice, crystal clear in the silence of the chamber. "And I'm Neville Longbottom, the Man-Who-Held-Harry's-Cloak-While-He-Killed-the-Dark-Lord." The head of House Longbottom smiled widely. "Do you have a hyphenated name Count?"

"Enough of this!" Dumbledore bellowed from his dais. "There will be no dueling in the chambers of the Wizengamot!"

"My apologies Chief Warlock." Harry said, turning to face Dumbledore. "I was simply defending my line, in the traditions of pureblood culture."

"Mr. Potter, you cannot..."

"In this chamber I am Lord Potter-Black Chief Warlock." Harry snapped. "Good men died so that I might hold those titles and uphold the pureblood traditions you all hold so dear."

"Fine. Lord Potter-Black, you cannot simply attack someone in the chambers of the Wizengamot."

"Son of a Bitch!" once again the attention of the chamber went to Neville Longbottom. "Lord Potter-Black. We have a problem." The look on Neville's face was one of fury. "Someone has placed a proscribed torture device on the Lady Potter." Neville indicated a rune covered bracelet on Daphne's left wrist.

"What is it?"

"It's what's called a Bridal Submission bracelet, Lord Potter-Black." Kingsley Shacklebolt said stepping forward to examine the cursed jewelry. "We find them occasionally in caches of dark artifacts. It causes pain. If triggered it can incapacitate and even kill."

"Can you remove it?" Harry asked.

"I think so. It would be easier all around for whoever placed it on her to remove it." The tall Auror looked pointedly at the Romanian aristocrat.

"I will not remove my gift from the stricat until the bride price I pay is returned." The old man sniffed.

"You aren't going to live to spend that money old man." Harry leveled his wand in front of the Aristocrat's face. "Remove it. Now."

"To hell with it Harry, I just need a bit of his blood. I'll arrest him for use of a proscribed dark artifact and force the issue." Shacklebolt took on an annoyed look as he stood up from Daphne and her pain.

"Blood?" Harry perked up. "Is that all you need?" He lowered his wand, and drove the heel of his left hand into the nose of the Romanian, smashing it to one side. Harry's right hand took hold of the older man's hair, pulling the man's head forward so that blood from his broken nose pooled in the palm of Harry's left hand.

Harry crossed the chamber to where Shacklebolt stood. "Is this enough? He's got plenty."

"Damn it Harry," Shacklebolt said softly, "If you make me laugh I'll likely lose my job." With a wand gesture and murmured incantation the big Auror levitated the blood from Harry's hand to the bracelet encircling Daphne's wrist. The bracelet enlarged at the urging of Shacklebolt's incantations and wand movements. The bracelet floated over Daphne's hand when Harry felt rather than heard Neacsu cast a cutting curse.

Harry's reflexes took over. Whirling he cast a Protego Praecise charm and watched as the shield blocking the Count's weak cutting curse propagated as a wave of force that smashed Neacsu's body into the wall of the Wizengamot's chamber. The man slid down the wall to the floor, trailing blood and other fluids.

"I said no dueling!"

Harry shook off the shock of what his shield had done. "All I did was cast a shield in response to his attack Chief Warlock. Evidently a shield needed to fight a dark lord is a bit too energetic to use on a normal Wizard."

"That was a shield?" Madam Bones asked in a shocked voice from her seat.

The Clerk of the Wizengamot knelt next to the fallen Romanian. "The Count is dead."

Silence ruled the chamber for a moment, and then Dumbledore spoke from his place on the dais. "Lord Potter-Black. Surrender your wand to Auror Shacklebolt."

"Might I ask why?"

"So that we might confirm that you indeed only cast a shield charm."

--oooOOOooo--

From his seat in the gallery Alastor Moody watched as Potter's wand was tested, and the Praecise shield was confirmed. The old man shook his head. Back in his prime, when Moody was still whole he had found and worked for more than three years to be able to cast Praecise... Moody had never managed more than a pulse of energy.

After the confirmation was noted by the Amelia and Dumbledore, Potter had gathered Daphne and his friends and left the chambers, leaving a very subdued Wizengamot behind. Somehow Potter had lied and cheated his way to saving Daphne from that Romanian Bastard. Eunice had come to him this morning pleading that Moody somehow save Daphne from the hell that Cyrus had sold her into, so Moody was here. He had intended to approach the girl and portkey her away, then Potter appeared on the scene and Moody decided to sit back and see what the boy had planned.

Moody had been amazed when the boy's plan turned out to be little more than standing before the assembled Wizengamot and lie his ass off. The one thing that the old Auror couldn't figure out was how the boy had managed to spoof the Book of Records. Still it was a bad plan. It shouldn't have worked, but work it did. Killing the bastard that hurt Moody's little Daphne was just icing on the cake. The boy certainly had a pair. Hopefully Daphne wouldn't end up tearing them off.

Moody heaved himself up from the chair. It was time to tie off a few loose ends. Better do it before Daphne did. That girl took after him in so many ways, it warmed his old heart.

--oooOOOooo--

January 6, 1998

Potter Manor:

The quartet appeared in the foyer of Potter Manor with an echoing crack.

"Sweet Merlin's Mother! We got away with it." Neville said leaning against the wall. "I can't believe we got away with it. Merlin Harry how did you manage to keep a straight face while you stood there in front of Dumbledore and everyone."

"Calm down Neville, you're babbling." Daphne said softly.

There was a sudden pop and Dobby and Winky appeared in the foyer. Dobby stepped forward and bowed. "Mistress Potter, The Potter Elves welcome you home."

Daphne's breath caught in her throat. Whatever Harry had done had the elves convinced that they really were married. "Thank you Dobby. Thank you Winky." She thought about how her mother had treated new elves when the family acquired them. "We will meet soon to discuss the running of the house."

"We is bonded Mistress?" Winky asked hopefully.

"What is one of the things we will discuss Winky. Could you prepare a light lunch for the four of us please? And get Mr. Longbottom something to drink please?"

Winky nodded. "Dobby Elf, go start lunch!" Dobby popped away, Winky looked to Neville. "Mr. Longbottom sir?"

Neville had yet to calm down. "Butterbeer please."

Winky nodded and popped away.

"Why don't you two go wait in the sitting room while Harry and I discuss a few things?"

"Just remember," Tracey said smirking, "I made him come save you. He was going to sit in the Gryffy common room and cry."

"Thank you Tracey. Go on." She watched as Tracey entered the sitting room, then took Harry's hand and led him up the stairs to his bedroom.

"So, we're married? How did I miss that?"

Harry looked a bit embarrassed. "I sort of bribed the Goblins to backdate the marriage contract, and the payment your bride price."

"They can do that? And how much did that cost?"

"Yeah, and not as much as you'd think. The Goblins really hate the Wizengamot."

"How much?" She asked again in a tone of voice that suggested that it would be in Harry's best interest to answer.

"A half million." Harry said.

"Galleons?" Daphne asked incredulously.

"Yeah."

"And if I'd not said yes when you asked?"

"Well, plan 'B' was for Neville to slap a portkey to here on you, then we get out of the country as soon as we could. Activating the Portkey would tell the Goblins that the marriage was off and they would reverse whatever it was they did originally... for a small fee." Harry took on a thoughtful look. "You know, it's probably a good thing you said yes, that bracelet thing might have killed you if we portkeyed you while it was still on you."

"You spent half a million Galleons to save me?"

"I had it, so why not?"

He said it so casually. "So, I'm your property now."

Harry looked horrified. "No! You're your own person. Daphne, I'm barely capable to looking after myself. This 'marriage' I've forced on you was the only way I could think of to get you out of having to marrying that old bastard and still remain in Britain. There may have been better ways, but this is all I could think of."

Daphne drew him into a hug. "You saved me." She whispered. "We'll need to figure out what we're going to do, but never doubt for a moment that you saved me."

--oooOOOooo--

Winky called Neville and Tracey into the dining room for the lunch she and Dobby had prepared saying that 'the Master and Mistress' would join them shortly. Neville looked up from his soup bowl to catch the strawberry blond regarding him.

"What?"

"Where do we go from here? I'm pretty sure that you can I can just return to school, take our detentions and meld back into the school. What about Daphne and Harry?" The Slytherin shook her head in a worried fashion.

The Gryffindor shrugged. "If they want to return to Hogwarts to finish, I'm pretty sure that they can. Dumbledore wants to know just how Voldemort was defeated far too badly to send Harry away. If they don't want to, then it wouldn't take either of them much effort to prep for their N.E.W.T.s on their own or with tutors. In reality it doesn't matter. Neither of them will ever need their N.E.W.T.s, even with the deals Harry made today only put a minor dent in his fortune. He and Daphne can do whatever they want with their lives."

"I'm glad we didn't just grab her, but I wish we hadn't used the contract."

"Maybe it's just as well... Something seems to be keeping them from their lunches." Neville waggled his eyebrows at the girl.

"Oh please you pervert. They're just talking. Daphne's been through a lot in the last two weeks. They both need to decide how they're going to deal with the situation they've found themselves in."

"Have you ever wondered?" Neville said changing the subject. "Wondered what it might have been like if Hogwarts was set up differently? I mean what if we weren't divided into meaningless teams by an ancient hat deciding who your friends should be based on cultural mores a thousand years old? What if, instead of separating us, all forty of us had been grouped together in a single cohort able to easily make friends with anyone else in the class?"

"I've never been a fan of 'what if's Longbottom." Tracey shook her head. "You might as well ask 'what if Draco and Pansy's parents were decent human beings' or 'what if Goyle and Crabbe were intellectual leaders instead of moronic followers' or 'what if Harry Potter joined the Dark Lord'. None of those things happened. Wondering about them is a waste of time."

"Don't you have any dreams Davis?"

"Of course I've got dreams Longbottom. It's just that I recognize that they are dreams and I'm not surprised when they don't come true."

--oooOOOooo--

January 6, 1998

London England

Kockturn Alley:

Cyrus Greengrass had returned to his home to find his wife was missing. Not only was Eunice gone, but so were all seven of the Greengrass elves, and even the furnishings of his manor. It was the cap stone of a very bad day.

Immediately following the debacle at the Wizengamot, he had gone to Gringotts to investigate Potter's claim of having deposited Daphne's bride price, he discovered that the deposit had indeed been made. However his vaults were empty. He was informed by a smirking Goblin that Lord Potter-Black had purchased every outstanding debt that the House of Greengrass owed, and had called them all due.

So much for thinking that the Potter boy had been making empty threats before the Wizengamot.

He had been told that he was being allowed to return to his former home to collect his personal effects, and that anything left in the house at close of business that day would be destroyed. Cyrus found his personal papers and collections of photographs neatly boxed and waiting for him.

It had taken the head of the Greengrass family almost an hour to confirm the old Wizarding homily of 'A man in need has no friends'. Once news of his financial situation had spread, none of his long time friends and acquaintances had time for him. Left with only the clothing on his back and the coins in his pouch, Cyrus quietly rented a cheap room in a small inn off Knockturn Alley.

Sleep came slowly alone in an unfamiliar bed. Waking suddenly when the room's sole candle was lit was jolting. Though not as jolting as the sudden realization that Alastor Moody was sitting in the chair at the foot of the bed, staring at him with both his natural and magical eyes.

"Alastor? What is it?"

"I just thought you should know Cyrus, the boy was lying."

"What? What boy? Lying about what?" Cyrus had never been one to wake up gracefully, today was no exception.

"Potter of course. What other boy has fleeced you recently?" The gruff retired Auror grumbled. "He lied. He falsified the date on that marriage contract. He spoofed the Book of Records. The Goblins like him, they helped... for their usual fees. The things he did today that were real were love your daughter enough to risk it all for her, and his magic. His Magic... Now THAT was sure as hell real."

"He was lying? Then I can recover from this. Together Alastor, we can do to him what he tried to do to me. We can ruin him."

"That might work. But why would I want to? The Boy could put me in the ground without serious effort on his part. As far as you go, well as I see it, you deserve everything He's done."

"What?"

"Over the years I've seen how you treated my little girl, how you broke her spirit. But I told myself I raised Eunice to take care of herself, she chose you and she chose to stay with you despite how you treated her. Then you tried to do the same to Daphne. You sold my grand-daughter to that fat bastard to use and torture. For that alone I was going to kill you. You running to this shit-hole just made it easier."

Moody waved his wand lazily and Greengrass felt his body stiffen. "You know it's amazing what you can buy for a few sickles... This wee lass for example." The old man levitated a spider the size of a dinner plate from his satchel to hover over the paralyzed man. "Horribly poisonous, the only reason the Ministry allows their importation is that their fresh venom is so very useful in so many potions. If I were to guess, I believe that when the Aurors find you, they'll believe that either the little lady here escaped from a previous tenet of this room, or climbed in the open window from the apothecary down stairs."

Moody lowered the spider carefully onto his son-in-law's chest, and then canceled the paralysis. Wide eyed with terror, Greengrass immediately flinched. The spider, startled by the sudden movement, sunk its fangs into the man's chest.

Moody waited until his son-in-law's struggles stopped, then quietly left the room, taking with him all evidence that he had ever been there.

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Harry Potter and the Marriage Contracts Recovery

January 7, 1998

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

When Neville opened the door he was only slightly surprised to find the Headmaster waiting for them. He had expected the old man to at least wait until after breakfast before starting his latest 'does Harry understand what he has done?' inquisition, but there you go.

"Mr. Longbottom, Miss Davis. Good of you to join us." Oh that wasn't good; the old man appeared to actually be angry. "Where is Mr. Potter?"

"Both the Potters are at their home, trying to heal what was done to them Headmaster." Tracey said before Neville could answer. "They will be making the decision as to if they return to Hogwarts in a day or so."

"Where are they Mr. Longbottom?"

"Safe Headmaster. They are both safe."

"Mr. Longbottom. You will tell me where they are. You will tell me now or you can start packing your trunk."

Tracey Davis was amazed at Longbottom's reaction. The man squared his shoulders and faced the Headmaster with an intensity Tracey had never seen before. "Ignoring the fact that I cannot tell you where they are since I am not Harry's Secret Keeper Headmaster, I would suggest that you step back and consider what you are doing. Making empty threats like that serves no useful purpose..."

"Empty threats?" The old man interrupted. "I assure you Mr. Longbottom..."

"Yes Headmaster, a pathetically empty threat." Neville's voice took on a hard edge of anger. "When you consider that the alliance between the Longbottoms and the Potters was an ancient one before you were born, I was required by both tradition and honor to accompany my friend and blood ally to his protest before the Wizengamot. Had his conflict gone as far as a formal duel, I would have been required to travel to him to stand as his second even if I hadn't gone with him originally." Neville took a step closer to the ancient wizard. "But what makes your threat empty has nothing to do with that. I am Longbottom of Longbottom. I have assumed that position and everything it entails. That means I control six seats on the Wizengamot and three on the Hogwarts Board. Harry controls four seats on the Wizengamot and two on the Board. Harry has been quietly replacing your puppets in his family's positions. Try to expel anyone without cause and you would be gone and your victim would be reinstated before they could make it to their Dorm."

Dumbledore seemed to notice the audience that had been forming in the Entry Hall. "We should move this discussion to my office."

"I don't think so Headmaster. When you felt the need to upbraid me, it was totally in public. I know everything you've done to Harry. Everything. You made sure Harry grew up outside our society, ignorant of his position, ignorant of his family and its history. Harry's far too noble to use what you did to destroy you." Neville moved until he was nose to nose with the Headmaster. "I on the other hand grew up surrounded by some of the most able politicians in the world, and all of them made very sure that I was ready to take my place when the time came. I know my place in the world; I know my responsibilities and the history of my family. Harry made sure I learned to stand up for myself, and showed me how to reach my full potential magically. Threaten Harry or anyone close to him again Headmaster and I will use what I know to destroy you. Unlike Harry I'm not a noble man Headmaster, when I'm done with you no one will remember Grindelwald, your name will be synonymous with corruption and betrayal."

Dumbledore worked his jaw wordlessly. Spinning in place, he stalked away with a swirl of his robes that would have made the late, largely unlamented, Severus Snape proud as the assembled students made way to allow him to pass.

--oooOOOooo--

January 13, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Room of requirements:

Neville entered the room quietly frowning at what he discovered. Harry was in the center of a dueling arena surrounded by the debris of destroyed dueling simulacrum. Harry was drenched in sweat, panting as if he had sprinted a mile, and on his knees.

"Harry?" Neville ventured. "Are you ok?"

"No." Harry said without looking up. "I'm slow. I'm weak. I tire far too quickly."

"You also talk in your sleep, and you have the most amazing gas whenever shepherd's pie is served." Neville noted hoping the insult would pull Harry out of his funk.

Harry shot him a dirty look. "What?" Neville asked. "I thought we were listing your more colorful personality traits."

"I've got to get better Nev. I've got to get myself to a level where I can face Voldemort."

"You will mate. You'll do fine, because at very least those of us who went with you to the Ministry will be with you."

"No. No, I'm not going through that again Neville. Ron and Hermione have found each other, finally. I'm not going to risk them. I can't deal with Ginny at all and I won't risk Luna again, what those bastards almost did to her..."

"Fine then. I'm going with you. I stood with you in the Ministry; it will be up to you to make sure I don't break my nose this time. I'm much better now that I've got my own wand."

"No Neville." Harry struggled to his feet. "You're all your Gran has. I owe the pair of you far too much to put you at risk."

Neville reached out and poked Harry in the chest. "Fuck you Potter. I'm older than you remember? Who the hell are you telling me what I can or can't do?"

"Neville?" Harry asked in shock.

"I'm going to let you off this time Harry, because you don't know your family history. If I let a Potter, any Potter go into a fight without going along, my Gran would skin me alive. There has been an alliance between the houses of Potter and Longbottom for most of five hundred years. If a Potter is in a fight there is a Longbottom at his back. If a Longbottom is attacked, a Potter takes revenge. That's how it's always been, that's how it always will be. You're the last Potter, I'm the last Longbottom, and we're stuck with each other." He grinned. "You're going to have to get me up to speed so that I can be pathetic along side you."

The pair regarded each other for a moment, and then Harry extended his hand. With a huge grin Neville took his friend's hand.

"I never knew any of that stuff about our families. Why didn't you say anything before?"

Neville shrugged. "I thought you knew. Hell, everyone knows about the Potters and the Longbottoms. I mean you're Harry Potter, it's hard to think of you as Muggle Raised. As pitiful as I was, I figured you were cutting your losses and forming an alliance with the Weasley clan. It wasn't until that night in the Ministry I realized you didn't have a clue about family alliances."

The room had reformed around them; the dueling arena was gone, replaced by a sitting room.

"I guess the room thinks we need to talk." Harry said gesturing toward the chairs. "Tell me what I need to know about our families."

--oooOOOooo--

January 7, 1998

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Entry Hall:

Hermione Granger watched silently from the edge of the crowd that had formed to witness the confrontation between the Headmaster and Neville Longbottom. As Head Girl she really should be breaking up the crowd, but...

The confrontation between Neville and the Headmaster was thought provoking. She had never really thought about how much had been withheld from Harry over the last seven years, much less over his life. When the Headmaster plowed through the assembled crowd, she finally spoke up.

"All right everyone; let's clear out the Entry hall." It was a sign of the level of respect she was held in that the crowd broke up with only a minimum of grumbling. She approached Neville who was oblivious to the appraising look he was receiving from Tracey Davis "Good morning Neville. Heading back to the dorm? Would you like some company?"

Neville nodded, and then seemed to remember Tracey was standing there. "Would you like me to escort you to your dorm Tracey?"

"Thank you Neville," the strawberry blond Slytherin said. "I'm fine. I'll be seeing you both in the Great Hall for breakfast." The girl hefted her bag and left for the dungeons, and she suspected an interrogation on par with what Longbottom was about to get.

"How's Harry?" Hermione began without preamble as they approached the first stairway heading toward Gryffindor tower.

"Harry's... Good." Neville said simply, knowing that an answer like that was likely to set Hermione off, but offering it anyway.

"Neville..." Hermione consciously bit back on her automatic response. Yelling at Neville didn't work anymore. The scion of the Longbottom family wasn't cowed by anyone, not for about a year now. "You said 'Both of the Potters' when you were speaking to the Headmaster. Daphne didn't return

to school, Harry, Tracey Davis, and Neville disappeared two days ago without a word to anyone. Who is this second Potter? Where is Harry?"

The pair had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. Pausing before offering the password to the portrait, Neville looked deeply into Hermione's eyes. "Not here. Not now." Neville looked pointedly at the portraits. "We'll find some time to discuss it, later."

--oooOOOooo--

January 7, 1998

Potter Manor:

Daphne watched as Tracey and Neville disappeared in the swirl of color and the sharp crack that marked apparation leaving her alone with Harry for the first time since the Wizengamot. She had spent the night sitting with Tracey and talking. Now she needed to speak with Harry.

The organized portion of her mind was still trying to deal with Harry's actions of the previous day. The proposal, the one-sided fight, the death of Benedikte, Harry's admission of lying and fraud to save her. So many things to think about and deal with.

The young woman turned to face her 'husband' as he sat at the kitchen table his attention focused on his mug of tea. He had risked so much for her. Why? Their relationship was less than five months old, why had he done what he had done? She was grateful beyond words for his saving her from life with Benedikte Neacsu, but how did she feel about him? Before the holidays she had found herself telling Harry she loved him. While contemplating her upcoming wedding, she had come to suspect that whenever Benedikte came to her bed, she would be thinking of Harry, and only of Harry, but...

If not for the events of the day before, she would have been arriving at the Romanian Embassy about now for the marriage ceremony. She would be wearing that horrible monstrosity of a dress that the Romanian court required. She would be preparing to pledge herself to a very old man...

Daphne hadn't been happy about it, but it was what she had expected. She had been raised knowing that as a daughter of the House of Greengrass she existed to bind that house to another of greater status. It was the offer to Harry that had changed things. He had made it clear that he wasn't interested in purchasing her in the manner her father had offered, rather to her surprise he had wanted to get to know her. With Harry she didn't feel like a commodity to be bartered for status, but like a woman...

"I think we need to talk Daphne." She looked down from where she was standing into his blazing green eyes. "We need to decide what we're going to do."

Daphne sat facing him across the table. "I agree." She said simply. "How far are we taking this?"

"I don't know. I don't know who to talk to or even who we can trust. I never intended for the old man to die, what happens to you if we call this off?"

"I'm not sure what you mean by calling it off Harry. We're married." She smiled. "Besides, you asked. You're stuck with me."

"You don't mind that I killed the old man?"

Shaking her head Daphne answered. "Only in that it bothers you Harry."

"What if we take everything slowly?" Harry reached across the table taking her hand. "I've never really been one for plans. I just sort of rush in and bull my way through. This whole thing is just something Tracey, Neville and I threw together, you know? I'm still amazed that it worked."

Daphne squeezed his hand. "I thought I was never going to see you again." She whispered. "I thought that after you got that letter..."

"I didn't handle that letter very maturely I'm afraid. I threw a bit of a tantrum. Cleaning up afterward made Dobby very happy."

"Idiot." She said. Then Daphne smiled. "It just occurred to me; at the Reading of the Banns you said you protested the wedding on the basis of Fraud and Line Theft."

"You've got to admit," Harry said returning her grin. "I committed both."

Harry waited a few moments. "Do you think you're ready to go back to Hogwarts?"

"I... I don't know."

--oooOOOooo--

The Daily Prophet

January 7, 1998

Printing All the News That's Fit to Print

Violent Death Leaves Wizengamot in Uproar

Potter Announces He Has Been Married Since November

Charges Father-In-Law with Fraud and Line Theft Before the Wizengamot

By Michael Thigpen

During what was supposed to be the announcement of the linkage of two magical houses through marriage quickly became a confrontation between the Man-Who-Won and his Father-in-Law, the Wizengamot, and the Royal Family of Romania.

The Wizengamot was seated early in order to hear a Reading of the Banns proposing the union between the noted British Noble House of Greengrass to the Romanian Royal House of Neacsu. The session was begun with Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore announcing that he was reading the Banns, and in accordance with those Banns, asked if anyone objected.

Always mindful of tradition, the Chambers of the Wizengamot immediately became silent. No one expected a protest, because there hadn't been a protest in more than five hundred years.

So, of course, Harry Potter did the unexpected, standing and protesting the proposed marriage. Chief Warlock Dumbledore asked Potter why he was there. The young Lord Potter-Black corrected the Chief Warlock, reminding the elder Wizard of the protocols of addressing individuals before the Wizengamot. The 7th year Gryffindor then went on to define the reasons of his protest of the Greengrass/Neacsu union was based upon Fraud and Line theft.

Chief Warlock Dumbledore then called Lord Potter-Black, Romanian Count Neacsu and Cyrus Greengrass before the Wizengamot, where The Man-Who-Won informed the assembled Wizengamot that he had executed an earlier Contract of Marriage between himself and the Noble House of Greengrass the previous November, and that he had paid the Greengrass family's Bride Price without question or negotiation. These facts were quickly confirmed via the Book of Records and Gringotts Statements.

It was then that noted Potter ally and the famous slayer of Bellatrix LeStrange, Neville Longbottom discovered that Daphne Potter nee Greengrass was wearing an illegal Bridal Submission Bracelet. Lord Potter Black was aiding Aurors in the removal of the proscribed torture device from his wife's arm when the Romanian Count Neacsu foolishly attacked the Man-Who-Won from behind.

Lord Potter-Black responded by casting the most powerful shield charm this reporter has ever seen, which resulted in the death of the Romanian. After Aurors verified that all the Man-Who-Won had cast was in fact a powerful shield, the Potters left the Chambers of the Wizengamot together.

Want to know more?

What does the union of the Potter/Black lines with the Greengrass/Moody lines mean? **See Page 7.**

Cyrus Greengrass found dead in Knockturn Alley Inn. Murder? Suicide? Accident? **See Page 3 .**

Time Line of the Life of Harry Potter. **See Page 3 .**

Biography of Daphne Potter: **See Page 7 .**

Proscribed Torture Devices, what they are, what they do, and how to identify them: **See Page 7 .**

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The Quibbler

January 7, 1998

Printing All the News That Fits

Harry Potter Marries

Quibbler Publisher's Daughter Heartbroken

Claims Daphne Potter is a 'Lucky Witch' and Hopes She Shares

Thousands of Witches in Despair

By Luna Lovegood

Once again the truism that the all the good men are either married or gay was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. News reached this reporter that Harry Potter, known to the British Wizarding world as the Boy-Who-Lived, or The-Man-Who-Won, and to the Witches of Ravenclaw tower as Mr. Hot Hot Hottie is married, and widely believed to be straight.

Appearing before the Wizengamot to defend his bride against being sold by her opportunistic father into bigamistic slavery to some old foreigner, Potter 17, defended his lady love with the skills and bravery known and feared by Dark Lords worldwide. Once his Bride was safe, Potter escorted her out of the chambers, ignoring the questions of reporters, including several stringers for this very weekly.

This reporter would like to congratulate her school mate Daphne, with whom I have no classes seeing as she is a year ahead of me, and to remind Daphne that it would be monumentally selfish to keep Harry all to herself.

Related Articles:

Foreigners, their insatiable lust for British Witches, and why they are so bad at it: **See Page III**

Harry Potter, his victories and the part Nargles played in them: **See Page 9**

Daphne Potter, what does she really look like under that Glamour? Our seers say she's even Hotter: **See Page Dodecahedron**

THIS WEEKS SPECIAL GIVEAWAY:

X-Ray Specs . Not the silly Muggle Toy that doesn't work, a special offer from Quibbler Technologies **ONLY** for Quibbler subscribers, see through the clothing of anyone! Find out just how lucky a Witch Daphne Potter really is.

Warning: Using Quibbler Technology X-Ray Specs around certain ginger individuals may lead to nausea, loss of sexual desire, and a general need to scrub out your braincase with bleach. There are some things we just aren't meant to know. You have been warned.

--oooOOOooo--

January 7, 1998

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Great Hall:

At the Gryffindor table, Hermione Granger looked up from her copy of the Quibbler. She had received a subscription from Luna as a Christmas gift for the second year in a row. This gift was greatly appreciated because Hermione refused to read the Daily Prophet as a matter of principle. She shook her head. Hermione loved the quirky Ravenclaw like a sister, but this was a bit much... Harry married.

That was when it hit her. Harry was married. Neville had mentioned 'the Potters' as in plural in his confrontation with Dumbledore. Harry was married. Harry was married to Daphne Greengrass.

She looked down the table to Neville Longbottom, who was looking at her as if expecting the questions boiling in her mind. She glanced pointedly at the News Paper in her hands, and he nodded.

"Later." Neville said. "After classes. A walk around the lake perhaps?"

What was going on? Why was Neville acting like it was some big secret?

"Ok."

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The January sun had set long before classes let out. Neville and Hannah met Hermione in the Entry Hall. Bundled against the cold the trio set out on their 'evening walk'. Once they were well away from the castle, Neville seemed to relax then looked around. He then waved his wand about in a complex pattern while the two women looked at him like he had lost his mind.

"Harry and I can see Dumbledore when he's ghosting around the way he does, when we were training we got fairly good at finding monitoring charms. Like the one that was on your Head Girl Badge Hermione.

The bushy haired Gryffindor reflexively put her hand on the badge.

"Don't worry, I removed it. There probably isn't a nefarious reason for monitoring the Heads, it was probably there to be able to locate you if you're needed, but why take chances." Neville took Hannah's hand and started on the path around the lake.

"Neville," Hannah said quietly. "If you don't start talking Hermione's going to hurt you, and I'll probably help her. You've been doing this secretive stuff all day."

"When Daphne went home for the holidays she arrived to find her father had issued another marriage contract to a member of a Romanian Royal House. Greengrass needed to have the contract recognized by the Wizengamot to accentuate his status among the houses, so the actual wedding wasn't going to be until today."

"But the Prophet said..."

"I know Hannah. Daphne just disappeared; she wasn't answering Harry's floo calls, or his letters. In fact Hedwig came back hurt after being chased off by the Greengrass elves. Then Harry got a letter from Daphne saying it was over between them."

"Harry told me about that at Christmas." Hermione said. "He said that she had broken it off."

"I told him to wait it out, to talk to Daphne when she got back to school." Neville said. "I was an idiot. It frankly never occurred to me what Cyrus Greengrass was willing to do to his own daughter. When Tracey came back to school she told Harry what was happening. Harry and Tracey and I spent Monday making arrangements to stop the marriage from happening. Yesterday we got lucky, it worked."

"The Prophet said that the Romanian died." Hannah noted.

He had a Bridal Submission Bracelet on Daphne. Harry reacted pretty violently to that. The man then cast a cutting curse at Harry and Daphne, Harry, well he responded with a Praecise shield out of reflex. That shield accidentally killed the man."

There was several seconds of silence. "Harry killed someone with a shield?" Hermione asked. "How is that possible?"

A Praecise is a high energy shield intended for extremely powerful curses. When a low powered curse hit it, well, the energy just reacted badly." Neville explained.

Hermione took on the look that her friends knew to mean she was going to be researching something in short order. "All right, but I don't understand, if Daphne's father had one of those vile contracts with the Romanian, how did Harry..."

Neville bent down and picked up a stone that he heaved out onto the frozen lake. "Harry and Daphne married in November." He said simply.

"No they didn't, Harry said..."

"Hermione." Her fellow Gryffindor said quietly. "Harry and Daphne married in November."

Hannah's jaw dropped, but Hermione plowed on. "But Neville, he couldn't have..."

Hannah put her hands on the Gryffindor Witch's shoulders, looking her straight in the eyes. "Hermione, listen carefully. Harry and Daphne married in November. We know this because we are his friends."

Realization finally came to the smartest witch of her generation. "Oh, my." She covered her mouth with a mitten covered hand. "That means..."

"That means," Neville said as he led the pair of witches on the path back to the castle, "That Harry and Daphne married in November."

--oooOOOooo--

January 7, 1998

Potter Manor:

Harry entered the master suite toweling his hair dry to find Daphne waiting for him in his bed.

He stopped in the doorway to the bath, surprised, wondering what he should say. He had expected her to stay in the room that had become 'hers'

"Quit gaping at me and come to bed." Daphne huffed. "It's chilly and I need your body heat."

Harry hesitated for a moment, and then slid under the quilt. Daphne cuddled in close.

"What's wrong Harry?"

"I didn't think you'd want me to touch you after... Well after what you've been through." Harry stammered.

Daphne lay beside him for a moment in silence. The room lit only by the banked fire in the hearth. "I need you to hold me Harry. I want... I need some control of my life. The last few weeks have been... difficult." Daphne pulled Harry's right arm around her, interlacing his fingers with her own and resting her head on his bicep. "I need to have you here. I need to be with someone I want to be with."

"Whatever you want Daphne." Harry pulled her closer. "Damn you've got cold feet. How can your feet be that cold?"

"Don't make me laugh damn it."

"Sorry." Daphne could feel his heartbeat. "But your feet are cold you know."

That was the final straw. Daphne began to giggle helplessly. The giggles became full blown laughter when she saw in the dim light of the banked fire that he was wagging his eyebrows at her. While she laughed, Harry pulled her closer, all the while desperately attempting to force his body to stop responding to hers.

Daphne noticed of course. After her giggles died down, she cuddled even closer. "Do you want me Harry?" she asked innocently.

"Always." He whispered. "But I can wait until you're ready."

--oooOOOooo--

February 15, 1998

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

Hermione pulled herself up into the carriage. She was supposed to meet Justin at the Three Broomsticks at one o'clock. The tall Hufflepuff had offered to wait while she got her Head Girl responsibilities out of the way, but she told him not to be silly, there was no reason for him to wait around the castle just to wait on her.

Today, she and Justin were 'celebrating' their three month anniversary, a day early. Hermione was a bit amazed at how well they had meshed as a couple. While Justin wasn't the bookworm she was, he recognized the need to study, conversely he had introduced her to the joys of a quiet evening

of talking about nothing sitting before the hearth in the Head Girl's suite or the Hufflepuff common room. Justin had charmed her parents, and his parents and sister all seemed to be happily accepting of her.

All in all Hermione found herself to be surprisingly happy. They hadn't gone beyond kissing yet. She had learned her lesson in that regard. She dug into her ever present book bag for something to read on the short ride to town when the carriage door opened and someone climbed in.

Hermione looked up to find Ron Weasley sitting across from her smiling. Her first reaction was to simply get out of the carriage without saying a word to him, but before she could move, the carriage jolted into motion.

"Hello Hermione."

"Ron." She said quietly.

"How have you been?" the youngest male Weasley asked.

"I've been fine Ron, and you?"

"About the same I guess." The carriage was passing the gates of the school. "I've missed you Hermione. I've missed you a lot. I was thinking, you know, maybe we could try again."

"Excuse me?"

"We were good together, you know... I'd like to get back together with you."

Hermione found herself thinking about it. She smiled brightly. She leaned forward and placed her hand on Ron's knee. She suddenly realized she was wearing a scoop necked jumper he had liked when they were together, and she saw that his eyes bugged out when her movement had presented him with a view of her cleavage. When they were dating that look had thrilled her, now... "You know what I think Ron?"

Weasley forced himself to raise his eyes from her breasts. She had fantastic breasts. "What do you think Hermione?"

"I think you're out of your fucking mind if you think I'll ever let you touch me again." With that she sat back and crossed her arms.

--oooOOOooo--

Justin was waiting at the drop off point for the Hogwarts carriages. He had told Hermione he would meet her at the Three Broomsticks, but he found himself missing her. This caused him to wonder, not for the first time just how the hell he had gotten to this point.

The day that Hermione had spent at his parents' home had gone very well. His father was never a worry. Dad accepted everyone without question, only one of the reasons he was so good at what he did. Mum on the other hand had high standards. In his seventeen years, Justin had brought home six girls before Hermione. His mother had disapproved of every one. Julie, the girl who had broken up with him the previous summer, Mum had deemed as 'too flighty. She lacks the fire to make a relationship work'. Hannah and Susan from school were foolish, giggly girls who just weren't right for him. The other three were dismissed for similar reasons, so Justin felt he was justified in his concern over how his mother received Hermione.

The day went very well. As soon as Justin had brought Hermione through the front door and introduced her to his family, his mother had taken the girl on a tour of the house. Justin made to follow, but his father placed a staying hand on Justin's shoulder.

"Leave them be Justin." The elder Finch-Fletchley said softly as the women mounted the staircase. "This is the first girl you've brought home that wasn't a 'buddy' on the first appearance."

"It's not like that Dad." Justin protested.

The older man shrugged. "Your mother thinks it might be, I've learned not to go against her on these things." Miles Finch-Fletchley grinned at his son's discomfort. "From what I've been able to find out, she's a good girl from a good family."

"Dad, please don't tell me you checked them out."

"I didn't have to. Marty Granger is a client. I've known him for years. I'm going to have to get him into my office to talk about what you two get up to aren't I?"

Justin managed to laugh with his father despite wanting to hex him a time or two. The women returned smiling, which Justin found oddly... disturbing.

Dinner was a pleasant affair, with lively conversation and stories of Hogwarts. Hermione became somewhat circumspect when the conversation turned to the recent War and her part of it. Justin was surprised when she spoke of what she called her betrayal of Harry Potter.

Following the meal, Hermione accompanied Justin on a tour of the estate where he showed her his childhood haunts and former forts, while she made remarks about 'boys and their toys'. They found a quiet place in the old empty stables (remnants of previous owners of the property twice removed, the Finch-Fletchleys had never kept horses) to steal a few moments together. So it is understandable that both of them were a bit flushed when they returned to the main house so that Hermione could say her goodbyes.

Upon his return home (again, oddly flushed) Justin found his mother waiting for him in the kitchen.

I like her." She said simply.

"I'm glad."

Eunice Finch-Fletchley pulled her only son into a hug. "It's about time you found a smart girl. Some of those bubbleheads you insisted on bringing home had me worried about you." The woman smiled at Justin's discomfort. "I'm not going to ask how far you've gone with Hermione; it's none of my business. Just remember I was eighteen once. Just be careful until you're SURE. And don't make me a grandmother until you're twenty one, all right?"

"Mum!"

—oooOOOooo—

The arrival of the carriage broke Justin from his memories, but it wasn't the sound of the carriage its self that captured his attention, rather it was the sound of the row taking place inside of it. He instantly recognized Hermione's voice, and he had been in the vicinity of enough of the famous Weasley/Granger arguments to know Ron Weasley's voice when he heard it. The carriage came to a stop and the door burst open.

"I don't care what excuses you've got Ron Weasley. You just stay away from me."

Justin rushed to help her down from the carriage. This didn't go unnoticed.

"Him?" Ron Weasley bellowed. "You're throwing me over for a bloody Hufflepuff?"

Justin was trying his best to guide Hermione away from the confrontation, but she whirled about to confront Weasley again. "I would smack you in the mouth for that Weasley, but I don't want to get stupid on my hands. You left me you egotistical mouth breathing moron. And yes, I'm with Justin now. Now that I've been with a man, I just can't bring myself to lower my standards back down to whatever the hell you are." She then spun on her heel and stalked away. Justin rushed to catch up.

Once he did catch up, Justin matched her pace and said nothing, just waiting for her to calm herself. She finally did, and glanced at him sideways.

"Sorry."

"For what?"

"Letting him get to me." She frowned.

"Ex's are like that. Personally I'm hoping you can find time this summer for us to 'accidentally' bump in to my Ex, just so she can see how much better I did after she was out of the picture."

"Why, Mr. Finch-Fletchley, are you flirting with me?"

The tall Hufflepuff smiled. "You bet. How am I doing?"

The Head Girl took his hand interlacing her fingers with his. "Very well." She leaned into him. "Very well in deed."

—oooOOOooo—

April 2, 1997

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

The Room of requirements:

Albus Dumbledore stood under an obscure disillusionment charm watching as Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom continued with their pathetic attempts to train themselves. The ancient wizard smiled. The level of their abilities had improved since their adventures at the Ministry of Magic certainly, but they would lose spectacularly when pitted against any moderately trained wizard. And they both knew it.

Yes, this was an excellent development. It wouldn't be long before the guilt over Tom's atrocities drove Harry back into the fold. The boy would be begging Albus Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of all time to train him to be capable of fighting Tom. It was perfect, just perfect.

The Headmaster gathered his magic around himself and passed through the hidden exit from the Room of Requirements. There were plans to make and steps to take.

Neville pivoted on his left foot and cast a spell at Harry. As was the case of most of the spells Longbottom had cast this night, the cast was wide never coming close to the stationary target. The electric blue light splashed against the wall of the Room, and spread to cover every surface in the Room of Requirements before pulsing twice and fading from view.

"He's gone. He didn't bother to leave any monitoring charms this time." The sandy haired Gryffindor said.

"Good, he still hasn't sussed out that we can see him now." Harry posited, willing the room to start the exercise sequence that Dumbledore's arrival had interrupted. The stationary targets started moving. Each of the fifteen target simulacrams began firing heavy curses at the two young men. "First one to eight makes the run to the kitchen for the midnight snack!"

—oooOOOooo—

"Your sandwiches, oh great and powerful Cheater." Harry said through clenched teeth.

"Oooh, tuna." Neville said with a wide smile. "My favorite."

"I'm serious Neville; convincing the room that you needed all the drones to target me was cheating!" Harry took a bite of his own sandwich and grimaced. He hated tuna, especially at Hogwarts where the elves always used too much onion.

"You call it cheating; I call it using all the resources at my disposal." The larger man chuckled. "We're ready mate."

"I agree. Now all we need is a time and place." Harry chewed for a moment then continued. "I think I know where Riddle is. Little Hangleton."

"Only an idiot would hang out where he's known to have been." Neville nodded. "So, given that it's Riddle we're talking about you're probably right. So, we've got the place. I've got an idea about the time."

"I'll probably hate it, but what's your idea?"

"Riddle's been conducting all these nighttime raids, hitting several places at once, then moving and hitting several more. The Auror reports that Tonks has been getting us seem to be claiming that the same wizards are hitting several times throughout the night."

Harry ran his hand through his hair. "Yeah, they do. What's your idea?"

"The next time they pull one of their all nighters, we hit them early in the next morning."

—oooOOOooo—

April 20, 1998

Potter Manor:

Daphne woke in the darkness feeling warm and loved. For the most part the nightmares had ended, she had started dreaming again. Dreaming of life in the Slytherin dorms, of summers riding horses on her father's estate, and once again tonight, of Harry taking her to bed the way he had before.

She cuddled closer to Harry, and his arm tightened around her body, his breathing deep and steady. They had been in almost constant contact for three and a half months. Together they had decided not to return to Hogwarts.

Though it hurt, she knew it was the right decision. They studied together for their independent N.E.W.T.s and were scheduled to take the tests at the Ministry on the first of May. "Leaving that damned place doesn't bother me Love," Harry had said when she had finally told him that she didn't want to return. "I stayed for my seventh year mostly out of inertia. I'm glad I did." He squeezed her hand, "But it wasn't from any need or want, you know?"

During the week it was the two of them, the elves, and whatever tutors they decided they needed for their studies. Weekends had Neville and Hannah Abbott, Tracey, and occasionally Hermione Granger and Justin Finch-Fletchley coming over to keep them up on the latest gossip from the school.

Most of the time it was just the two of them. Harry delighted in cooking for her, and Winky's reaction to Harry cooking never failed to make her smile. They went for long walks on the grounds of the manor; Harry paid careful attention to her moods and needs. At times it was annoying that he hovered so much, but other times she craved his touch. Harry actually seemed to understand what she was going through, and knew to be there without putting pressure on her.

Harry had demons of his own. His nightmares sometimes owned his nights, though he seemed to calm at her touch, Daphne was more than a little pleased to think that they were healing each other, slowly, without any real intention to, just by being with each other.

This man had risked so much for her. Harry had spent more money than she had ever imagined falsifying the documents that allowed him to claim that they were married. He had fought a man to protect her, and killed to prevent her from being hurt.

It had been less than six months since Harry had approached her outside the Transfiguration classroom. In less than half a year her life had been turned completely upside down.

Still, it was too late for doubts. When Harry had asked her to marry him through those silly charmed journals in the Chambers of the Wizengamot she had to make an instant decision, life in a foreign land with a man she detested, or life with Harry. She had chosen Harry out of desperation, but she had chosen him.

Cuddled together as they were, she could feel his heartbeat as well as hear it. There was something comforting in that. Daphne felt his growing erection pressing against her thigh. Something in his dream perhaps? Dreaming of her? Between the sleeping man's reaction and her own dream Daphne reached a decision.

She sought out his face in the darkness, kissing her way up his neck. Harry stirred in his sleep to her ministrations. Daphne nipped at his cheek is what finally woke him.

"Daphne?"

"Who else?" she asked in a throaty voice.

"I don't know. Maybe some sociopath broke in and is molesting me in the dark."

Daphne shuddered as his hands ran down her body. "Don't worry, Ginny Weasley isn't here." She smirked to herself. "Neither are the Creevey boys."

"Thank Merlin for that."

Daphne was on top of him; she took his head in her hands and pulled him into a kiss, her tongue invading his mouth as she ground her body against his.

After the kiss broke, she lay atop him, both of them panting. "Daphne, tell me what you want."

"I'm collecting a debt Mr. Potter." She whispered before nibbling on his left earlobe.

"What debt is that Mrs. Potter?" he gasped.

"You owe me a wedding night Mr. Potter. I aim to collect."

"Oh." His hands found her breasts. "It was wrong of me to let a debt build for so long. I'll have to make sure I make payment in full tonight."

"You've accumulated several penalties being as late as you are."

"Good." His lips brushed hers. "I like paying penalties."

--oooOOOooo--

July 12, 1998

Longbottom Manor

Dining Room:

Everyone's attention was directed toward Harry as he stood.

"This is the part of the evening where I get to tell you stories I know about Neville and Hannah."

"Oh great, he's making a speech." Neville said hitting his head against the table.

Laughter rippled through the assembled crowd while Harry pointedly ignored the Groom.

"I thought I met Neville on the Hogwarts Express, but it turns out we played together as toddlers... I don't know why that was surprising to me when Gran Longbottom told me, but it was. Anyway, the second time I met Neville, he broke the ice by asking me if I'd seen a toad."

"That's the same line he used on me!" Hannah said loudly.

"Really? Nev, mate you need to work on your material."

"Why? It worked didn't it?"

Harry nodded. "Point." Hannah reached over to Harry and placed something in his hand. Harry glanced at the slip of parchment and continued.

"Following that momentous and somewhat disturbing meeting, Neville and I were both sorted into Gryffindor house, and let me tell you, you learn a lot about a guy when you sleep in the same room for almost seven years, but I won't go into that, no sense scaring poor Hannah off before the wedding night." Harry paused while laughter rippled through the room. "Neville is of course a Gryffindor's Gryffindor, brave, forthright, impetuous, and more than a little insane. Hannah is a Hufflepuff's Hufflepuff, loyal, caring, hardworking, and crazy enough to marry Nev and put up with me." Harry reached over and ruffled his friend's hair. "This is my best story about Nev: It's not about Hermione petrifying him first year, it's not about the dozens of cauldrons he destroyed in potions class, it's not even about all the times he came out of the Greenhouses covered in disgusting stuff. This is a story about the day he and I faced down Voldemort."

"Oh, kill me now." Neville said, again banging his head against the tabletop.

"Neville and I were hunkered down outside Voldemort's chambers. By then, it had boiled down to the Dark Wanker, and three of his guards versus Neville and me. I think by now most people know that Voldemort and I were linked via my scar, that sometimes I could feel his emotions through that link. Nev noticed me rubbing on the scar and asked if Voldemort was causing it. It was then that I realized what was different about this time. I told Neville that the Wanker was worried."

"Neville just looked at me, grinned a bit and said 'he's got a Longbottom after him this time, of course he's worried'. Which I suppose is how Hannah feels tonight."

Again laughter came from the assembled in the room. Neville reached over and put something in Harry's hand. "All right everyone. Neville just slipped me five Galleons to cut this short, sit down and shut up... which puts me in a moral dilemma because Hannah paid me ten Galleons to

distract everyone long enough so that she could make a break for it. Ah well the only thing to do is to keep going and keep all the money." Harry raised his glass. "Witches and Wizards, I present Hannah and Neville Longbottom!"

Throughout the room glasses were raised and drained in the toast.

--oooOOOooo--

May 13, 2000

St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries

Maternity Ward:

"EEEEEEAAAAGGGGHHH!!!"

The sounds Daphne was making were frankly scaring Harry to death. "Isn't there something you can give her?" He asked the Mediwitch.

"I'm sorry Lord Potter-Black, a potion would affect your daughter."

Harry was sitting behind Daphne on the bed, his left arm around her, his right clutched in hers. He had never felt more helpless or more useless in his life.

"You did this to me you bastard!" Daphne said to the amusement of the attending Mediwitches, "You'd better learn to sleep with your eyes open, I going to..."

"Oh, what you do to me." Harry whispered into her ear. "I do remember you telling me to stop, but as I recall, you prefaced stop with 'don't'"

Despite her pain, Daphne leaned back harder into him, as if to increase the contact between them. Once the contraction stopped, she ground out between clenched teeth, "Did you manage to contact everyone?"

"Yeah." Harry said, wiping the sweat from her face now that they were between contractions. "Your Mum is here, she came with Mad-Eye, who seems to think that he's going to take custody of Beth as soon as she's born. Tracey was on her way last I checked."

"Granddad only wants to make sure she's raised with constant vigilance..." Daphne winced when the next contraction started. "I swear to Merlin you are never touching me again."

"I love you too." Harry murmured into her ear as they waited for their daughter to be born.

--oooOOOooo--

February 22, 2001

London , England , UK

Café Nero:

"There you are."

Hermione looked up from her book and smiled. "Good morning Justin."

Taking the chair across from her Justin Finch-Fletchley signaled the waitress to bring him a cup of tea. Hermione might like these overpriced coffees, but on some level they offended him. It probably had something to do with his father passing on investing in the currently fashionable coffee boutiques, and missing out on one of the decade's massive successes. The fact that the tea was also horribly overpriced didn't bother Justin in the slightest.

"We might as well cut to the chase." Justin said, leaning on his elbows. "We're here to break up aren't we?"

Hermione looked a bit startled, and then grinned. "I was planning on easing you into it... am I that transparent?"

"No. We've been moving toward a break up since Christmas. If you hadn't called me, I was going to call you." He smiled his thanks to the waitress when she brought his tea, added a splash of milk to the cup and stirred the mixture. "With our schedules and class loads and going to different schools, it just isn't working very well is it?"

"When I'm free, you're busy, when I'm busy, you're free." Hermione agreed. "I've been feeling like a horrible person when I notice the men in my classes. Even though I haven't done anything, it feels like I'm cheating on you."

Justin smiled. "Don't. I've been looking and wondering myself. We've done fairly well I guess. We've been together for more than three years. If we were in a position to see each other every day..."

"So..." she sipped her coffee."Look at us, all grown up about it. Do you have a likely replacement in the wings?"

"No." Justin reached across the table and took her hand. "You know me Hermione, Old Smooth as Gravel they called me in the dorms. How about you?"

"A couple of men in a few of my classes have indicated an interest, but nothing firm." She drained her coffee and gathered her things into her bag. "Come on."

Justin blinked, and then stood. "Where are we going?"

"I took a room at the hotel next door." She rose on her tiptoes to kiss him. "I wanted to say goodbye to our relationship in as nice a way as possible."

Following the bushy haired force of nature from the café, Justin reflected once again that Ron Weasley was an idiot. And perhaps he was as well for allowing himself to grow away from this woman.

--oooOOOooo--

June 6, 2001

Ottery St. Catchpole

The Burrow:

She stood over the cauldron as it slowly boiled, stirring once, twice, three times clockwise, once, twice anticlockwise, and then the pattern repeated seventeen times. Slowly, so slowly the color changed from a milky white to a shimmering mother of pearl, the steam off the surface in the classic interlocking spirals. Perfect.

Amortentia, the most powerful of all known love potions. Carefully, so very carefully, she ladled a dozen doses into tiny crystal vials. A year's supply. Enough to ensure her future. To each vial she added the hair, and then sealed the vial. That finished Ginny Weasley opened her wedding trunk, what her mother called her 'Hope Chest', and stored eleven of the doses into a carefully hidden compartment within the trunk.

The potion was necessary she told herself. Without it she was doomed to a life like her mother's or one behind the counter at her brother's shop. Quidditch hadn't worked out. She quickly found out that being very good at the sport in school equated being rather pathetic at the professional level. Seven tryouts, seven rejections, only the Canons coach had come close to being honest with her.

"Little girl." He had said. "You've got some skills. But you're too small. You wouldn't last two minutes in a real game. You're pretty good on a broom; maybe you can find a job teaching flying to spoiled rich kids."

Ginny sighed and vanished the remnants of her potions project. Spot on nine A.M. there was a knock on her door. She opened it to find Fleur, Luna and George's girlfriend Angelina staring at her expectantly.

She gestured to let them in, and that was the last decision she was allowed to make for the next three hours. She was washed, and painted, her hair teased and volumized and twisted and who knows what done to. She was stripped naked then dressed a layer at a time until she was firmly wrapped in her mother's wedding dress.

Molly was in and out. Too busy orchestrating the wedding of the century to spend much time personally making Ginny miserable, entrusting that job to Fleur and Luna and Angelina. Her father Arthur came in toward the end, uncomfortable in the formal robes that Molly had picked out, looking proud, and happy and sad all at the same time, fighting back the tears at seeing his only daughter in the gown his own wife had worn all those years before. He didn't know about the love potion and never would.

The girls were done with her and dressed in their own gowns, each more hideous than the one before, and were down stairs waiting for the music to start.

Arthur Weasley looked into the eyes of his only daughter. "It's time Luv."

"I know Daddy. Could I have a minute?"

Arthur smiled knowingly, demonstrating that he didn't know anything. "Of course Luv. Take your time. They can't start without you."

"Thank you Daddy." She said as the door closed. Crossing to her bed, she lifted the pillow to get the tiny crystal vial and unstoppered it.

The scent washed over her. Holly Wood and Owl feathers. She wouldn't cry. She wouldn't. The scents of Harry. She had had the man she loved and didn't know it. She had had him and had driven him away as part of someone else's stupid futile plan.

No matter. The past was the past. She needed this potion to ensure her own future. Ginny Weasley crossed the room to the door, placing her left hand on the knob. In her right hand she held the potion. She paused, and then tipped the potion into her own mouth. Another second and she was awash in love and adoration for Michael. She opened the door to find her father waiting; she gave him a magnificent smile. "It's time to get Married Daddy." She said as she offered him her arm.

--oooOOOooo--

March 13, 2008

Rio de Janeiro

Doctors without Borders Clinic:

Hermione Granger sat impatiently in the taxi and waited for the driver to get through the city. She had been here three weeks and hadn't managed to be on time once. The traffic in this crazy city was worse than anything she had ever seen, including London, Paris, and Rome, and seemed to conspire against her arriving at the clinic on time.

Hermione considered taking a year off to serve others to be the best thing she had ever done. The gratitude of the people she treated warmed her heart in ways she had never imagined. Upon arriving in Brazil, she had gone directly to the local Ministry and registered her presence and intentions. The idea of a Witch practicing Muggle medicine didn't even raise an eyebrow among the Brazilian Officials. The young woman who interviewed her was impressed with Hermione's Mastery in Healing as well as her Muggle Medical degree, and quietly pointed out that the International Statute of Secrecy must be observed, then noted that no one would be monitoring her actions.

Hermione had been quietly using magic since she treated her first patient, if anything doing so here was even easier due to the awe that the people who came to the clinic held her and the rest of the medical staff in. Many of them viewed what the doctors did as magic anyway.

The Clinic building was surprisingly large, and thanks to the endless effort of local volunteers spotless. What little equipment there was tended to be ancient and frequently out of order, but Hermione was convinced that she did more good here in a single day here than she had ever managed in a week while at Bridgewater Hospital back in Manchester.

The taxi pulled to a stop in front of the clinic... Odd, Agnese the Clinic's receptionist was out front looking at the building. Had they been robbed again? Hermione hurriedly paid the driver and hurried to the young woman's side.

"What is wrong Agnese?" Hermione asked the young woman in halting Portuguese.

"Something has happened inside." The woman made the sign of the cross. "Something... odd."

David Morgan-Mar, an Australian Doctor here on a one year contract came out of the clinic shaking his head.

"David, what's going on?" Hermione asked.

"Someone was in the clinic overnight, and they... Well, they fixed everything." The dark haired man shook his head in disbelief. "All the old equipment is gone. It's all been replaced with better things than I worked with in Brisbane. The pharmacy cupboards are all fully stocked, there's a new generator, and there's AIR CONDITIONING. There is no bloody way in hell this could happen overnight. But... Hermione, you've got to take a look."

Hesitantly Hermione entered the clinic. As soon as she entered she realized that David was right. The chill of the air conditioner made her shiver for a moment. The walls appeared to be freshly painted, despite there being no scent of paint in the air. New furniture was where the dilapidated antiques had been the day before. She wandered down the hall looking into the examination rooms. Spotless. The exam tables even had the rolls of paper to keep the tables as clean as possible between patients. There was a brand new x-ray machine where the antique that hadn't worked since Hermione arrived. She pulled one of the drug cabinets opened and found it full. She hadn't seen this much in the way of supplies since Manchester. The last door at the end of the hall was her office.

She cautiously opened the door to find her office was as changed as the rest of the clinic. The old table that had served as her desk was gone. In its place was a heavy oaken desk, with an ergonomic office chair replacing the three legged stool that she had sat on the day before. The old black and white tile on the floor had been replaced with carpeting, and her reference books were now in bookcases instead of being piled on the floor.

There was a quite pop behind her. Hermione turned to find Dobby elf standing behind her.

"Dobby?"

"Good morning Miss Harry Potter Sir's Grangy." The tiny being said happily. "Harry Potter Sir ask Dobby to see if he could help Miss Harry Potter Sir's Grangy with her Muggle Healer Job after he read Miss Harry Potter Sir's Grangy's letter. Did Dobby do good?"

"Oh very good in deed Dobby. But you can't let anyone here see you."

"Dobby knows about Muggles. Muggles not see Dobby."

Of course not. Hermione mentally kicked herself for saying anything like that. "Thank you Dobby, and please thank Harry for me."

"Dobby do. If Miss Harry Potter's need anything for her Muggle Healer Job, she should leave a note on her desk, and Dobby do."

That surprised Hermione, and her surprise showed in her voice. "You'll be coming back?"

"Oh, yes Miss. Harry Potter Sir say that Dobby can help his Miss Harry Potter Sir's Grangy all he want. Winky be so jealous. Harry Potter Sir opened a vault for Miss's Muggle Healer Job. Dobby take care of everything."

"Thank you Dobby. Thank you so much."

The elf popped away. Hermione sat down at her new desk. Coming up with a story that made sense and convinced her coworkers was going to be a lot of work.

--oooOOOooo--

March 13, 2008

Copacabana Apartments:

It had been a hellish day. It was odd that despite the fact that having the new equipment had made the treating of each individual patient easier, the cumulative effect had meant that more patients came through the door.

Hermione slid her key into the door lock reflecting that she had seen more patients today than any three days since she had been here. Despite her fatigue she smiled wondering what the hyper little elf was going to do tonight. She would have to remember to write Harry to thank him for the help.

As the door clicked shut behind her Hermione's instincts perked up. Someone was in the apartment. Hermione searched her memories for the proper spell, she hadn't even thought about using her wand in anger for more than a decade. With a trembling hand she held her wand in the first of the seven approved dueler's grips, and carefully eased the door to her kitchen open.

To find Justin Finch-Fletchley sitting at her small table pouring a cup of tea.

"Justin?"

"Hi Hermione," the sandy haired man replied, his eyebrows raised at the sight of her wand aimed between his eyes.

Hermione lowered her wand. "You scared me to death. What are you doing here?"

"Well," the investment banker said, pouring a cup of tea for the lady of the house. "I wanted to see you."

"To see me?" she sputtered. "We haven't seen each other in seven years, why did you want to see me?"

"This is going to sound stupid."

"I'm used to stupid." The bushy haired woman said with a grin. "I dated Ron Weasley."

"Ok. I got my annual bonus in December, three million pounds."

"You got three million pounds as a *bonus*?" She shook her head. "I'm in the wrong business."

"I had a good year," Justin grinned. "Anyway, I had all that money and I realized I wasn't happy. And I haven't been happy for a long time. So I was sitting on my sofa wondering what was wrong with my life when a little manic elf popped into my apartment and told me where 'Miss Harry Potter Sir's Grangy' was and popped out again."

"Dobby?"

"I guess so, I never could tell them apart. So the elf tells me that you're in Rio helping sick people and I remembered the last time I was happy. So I thought that I'd come out and see if you were happy with your life."

"So you thought you'd hop on a plane and come down to Rio for a little slap and tickle?" Hermione asked wondering if she should be getting angry.

"Well, no. I wanted to see you... Though if you're a doctor of love these days..."

That was when Hermione hit him. Then she kissed him.

"So," Justin asked when they came up for air, "do you want to go out sometime?"

--oooOOOooo--

August 28, 2010

Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry

Greenhouse # 3:

"Well, as I'm sure you noticed very little has changed since you left." Pomona Sprout said as she led the new Potions Mistress from the greenhouse.

"Actually Professor Sprout, I had no idea that so many of our potions ingredients came from the greenhouses. I might have worked harder on my herbology assignments."

"Pomona dear, please. We are colleagues now after all." The older woman smiled, recalling her own first days as a new professor at Hogwarts.

"Thank you Pomona. Your tour has been most informative. I know I learned at least one thing, rather than the useless make work detentions that Professor Snape assigned; my detentions will be sent to the greenhouses to assist in the preparation of potions ingredients." Tracey Davis had plans.

"That's an idea that I have been pushing for years Tracey. Detentions should be at least as educational as they are punishment."

The pair paused for a moment. In the distance where Hagrid's cabin had once stood were a large man and a huge three headed dog fighting. Tracey gasped and drew her wand to help. Pomona put her hand on the younger woman's shoulder.

"It's not what it looks like. That's Charlie Weasley, he's the Flying instructor and he doubles as the Care of Magical Creatures Professor. He and Fluffy roughhouse quite often."

"Fluffy?"

Sprout shrugged. "He was named by Hagrid, bless him. Hagrid loved to give his pets the oddest names. You probably didn't know this, but your first year he had a dragon named 'Norbert'."

"Hmm." Tracey couldn't stop herself from looking at the man with the giant dog. "He seems to be very... strong. Is he married?"

"No, I don't believe he is."

"Hmm."

--oooOOOooo--

November 19, 2010

Ministry of Magic

Department of Magical Law Enforcement:

Nymphadora Tonks carried the box containing her possessions into the small office. Senior Supervisor. The entire night shift was hers. It took all of her abilities to keep a smile from breaking out on her face. No longer was her a drone at a desk identical to the other fifteen in the room. Now she had the office. With a door. And the drones at those sixteen desks worked for her. Finally.

She was still standing holding her possessions when the door behind her opened.

"Admire it later Tonks." She turned to face the speaker. Clayton Davies, the previous occupant of this office and her boss. He went to the desk and dropped several sheets of parchment into the tray on the left side of the desk. "These are the day shift's incident reports. You'll need to be able to speak about them at your start of shift inspection. Starting tomorrow you'll be getting them from the day shift Supervisor."

"Thank you Clayton."

"No Problem Tonks. I remember what it was like when I got this office." He turned to leave the office, and stopped at the door. "You'll do fine Tonks. You impressed Shack as an apprentice, and me as an Auror. Inside of ten years we'll all be working for you."

After the door closed behind Davies, Tonks quit fighting the smile. She dropped the box behind the desk, stopping only to remove a framed Wizarding photo of her parents from the box and setting it on the desk so that she could see it while she worked. The only bad part of this promotion is that it removed her from actually working cases from now on it was going to be all paperwork all the time.

She reached for the Incident Reports and began reading through them.

Ron Weasley arrested for public drunkenness, again. She shook her head. What had happened to that boy? Well at least he hadn't assaulted his latest girlfriend this time. Then she saw the notes at the bottom of the report. Ah, he had assaulted the Auror sent to pick him up. Resisting arrest and interfering with an Auror charges were added.

Dung Fletcher had been picked up with stolen property, again. This one made her sigh. How had this man ever gotten close enough to Dumbledore to have ever been part of the Order?

She worked her way through the reports of crimes committed and solved. Then she got to the next to last item. At 12:36 a report of a dead man had been received. The man was determined to be a Were, who hadn't survived his last transformation. Identified as...

Remus Lupin. Remus was dead. It had been fourteen years since she had kicked him out of her life, but part of her still loved the man. She could never forgive him for what he had done, but now he was dead.

Remus was dead. Remus was dead. Remus was...

Tonks was suddenly very happy to have her new office. It was important for an Auror to be seen as being hard case by his mates. It was especially important for a female Auror to be seen as being a hard case.

It was vitally important that none of her troops could see her crying.

--oooOOOooo--

February 1, 2026

Wudubucca-bern

The Ancestral Dumbledore family home:

"Thank you for coming." The old man wheezed. "I wasn't sure that you would."

Forty Six year old Harry Potter stood grimly next to the bedside of the ancient wizard, Neville Longbottom at his side.

"I wasn't sure that I would." Potter admitted. "In fact I know I wouldn't have if the request hadn't come officially as part of a session of the Wizengamot."

"Attempting to embarrass us into coming to see you is low even for you Dumbledore." Neville said in a conversational tone.

"Yet it worked." Albus Dumbledore paused to regain his breath. "For here you are." Another pause. "I am dying. The Healers say today is likely my last."

"We know." Neville Longbottom said. "They spoke to us before letting us in here."

"For once in your life, could you please get to the point?" Harry Potter snapped. "What do you want?"

"Do you hate me so?"

"Yes old man. We do. Your actions allowed my parents to be tortured to insanity and Harry's to be killed. You ruined both of our lives and it was only through luck we survived. Now. What do you want?"

"I did... what I did... for the greater good."

"Fuck you old man. Fuck you and your greater good." Harry spat, turning and starting for the door.

"Wait." Harry stopped. The ancient wizard continued. "There are many things I would do differently... If I could. I have many regrets... Don't you regret... anything Harry?"

"Yes." Harry admitted. "I regret I didn't kill you thirty years ago when I could have gotten away with it. What do you want old man?"

"As I've said, I am dying..." He paused. "Before I go to the next great adventure... I want, I need to know... How Tom died..." A look of pleading came to his eyes. "I beg of you... I spent my life... in pursuit of knowledge... I must know."

The old man collapsed back onto his bed, seeming to shrink before their eyes. It was obvious that speaking with them was costing him so much. Neville's eyes softened. Hope came to the eyes of the old man.

"Well..." the head of Longbottom house said. "I guess I could say... Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" Neville leaned in close to the dying man. "How do you like it?" The blond turned on his heel and left the room.

Dumbledore lay for a few seconds until he noticed that Harry Potter had remained. "Harry..." He gasped. "My boy! I'm begging you."

Harry seemed to consider for a moment, his fingers idly stroking a belt made from an albino snakeskin, then bent at the waist to lean in close to the ancient wizard's ear.

"No." He said quietly, before again standing back up, straightening his robes and leaving the room as well.

Harry and Neville were taking lunch in the Leaky Cauldron two hours later when they heard that Albus Dumbledore was dead. No one noticed the pair clink their glasses in a small celebration.

--oooOOOooo--

February 2, 2027

Potter Manor

Entry Hall:

Alerted by the wards, Daphne Potter reached the door just as Dobby popped into the Hall. "It's alright Dobby, I've got it."

"Yes Mistress Daphne." Said the aged elf before he popped away. Daphne knew that Dobby was reaching the end of his life. She was going to have to speak with Harry about arranging for less active duties for their first retainer.

She opened the door to find Nymphadora Tonks standing on her steps. Behind the Assistant Director of the DMLE stood her husband and Neville Longbottom, in magic inhibiting handcuffs, each flanked by a pair of uniformed Aurors.

"Hi Love." Harry said. "I know this looks bad, but..."

"Shut up Lord Potter-Black." Tonks barked before turning back to Daphne. "Lady Potter-Black, there's been a problem."

Daphne raised her left eyebrow. "Indeed? Would you and your people like to come into the sitting room with those two idiots?"

"I think that might be wise." Tonks said wearing her 'business' expression, which told Daphne the metamorphmagus was actually struggling not to laugh.

Daphne led Tonks, her husband, Neville and the four Aurors into the manors sitting room, where Hannah Longbottom and Tracey Weasley were waiting.

Upon seeing her husband in shackles, Hannah set her tea cup down. "Neville, what the hell have you done?"

"Hannah, I swear, it's not what it looks like." Neville began.

"Shut up Lord Longbottom." Tonks ordered. "Lady Potter-Black, Lady Longbottom, your husbands were found in the commission of a rather heinous crime. One that I rather doubt the courts would punish appropriately given who they are. As such, I've decided to turn them over to you for a more just punishment."

"You're no fun anymore Tonksie." Harry pouted from his place behind her.

"Shut up Harry." Daphne ordered. "What exactly was the 'heinous crime' these two over aged delinquents were caught doing?"

"Public urination." Tonks answered.

"Neville!" Hannah barked.

Neville flinched at the tone of his wife's voice.

Tonks wasn't finished. "Public urination on the grave of Albus Dumbledore."

The room went deathly silent for a moment.

"Aurors, release them and return to your duties." Tonks ordered her Aurors.

After the Aurors had left, Daphne approached her husband of almost thirty years. "I assume that the pair of you did a fair amount of drinking prior to your 'crime spree'."

"It was more of a 'crime spray'." Neville snorted. When he saw Hannah's face and shut up.

"We had a few." Harry admitted.

Daphne nodded. "Hannah would you like to spend the night?"

Hannah was face to face with her own husband. "That might be a good idea. If I was to use our portkey on this one he'd probably be sick all over me."

Daphne nodded. "Linco?"

Dobby and Winky's eldest popped into the room. "Yes Mistress Daphne?"

"Linco, the Longbottoms will be spending the night. Would you escort the gentlemen to their rooms?"

"Yes Mistress Daphne. Does Mistress need more tea?"

"Thank you Linco, no."

The four women waited until the door sealed behind the men and the elf before they started laughing.

"Just when I think they've finally grown up." Hannah giggled shaking her head.

"Those two will never grow up, at least not when they're together." Daphne said, wiping tears from her eyes.

"You should have seen the earnest young Apprentice that found and arrested them. She was beyond indignant that anyone would 'desecrate the grave of Albus Dumbledore'." Tonks chuckled. "She didn't realize who they were until she was at headquarters doing the paperwork. That's how I found out about what happened, the poor girl came running into my office begging me to protect her from retribution from two Wizengamot Lords and the slayers of You-Know-Who."

Hannah tsked. "We'll make sure those two idiots apologize to her tomorrow."

"We can't have these overgrown children frightening the next generation of Aurors." Daphne agreed.

"I would have thought that you two would have had them either trained or gelded by now." Tracey interjected.

"Gelding would remove one of the reasons I keep him around Tracey. You haven't managed to 'train or geld' yours yet have you?" Daphne asked with a smirk.

"Hey, mine's a Dragon handler. He's supposed to be feisty." Tracey's face took on her own self satisfied smirk. "Just the way I like him."

--oooOOOooo--

May 13, 1997

Little Hangleton , England

The Riddle House:

Neville scampered across the open space to take up position on the opposite side of the open doorway from Harry.

"Is that what you call giving cover?" He asked rubbing his shoulder where a dueler's healing charm was knitting up the wound from a glancing cutting spell.

"I don't know. Is that what you call running? If I'd known you were going to stroll over, I'd have built you a paved path." The raven haired wizard scoffed.

"You know, you could never hit a target to save your life, not since first year!" Neville shot back.

"Yeah? Well you're arrogant, just like my father!"

The two stared at each other for a few moments across the doorway. Then they started to laugh.

"I was fine until you started channeling Snape." Neville laughed. "He's in there isn't he? Voldemort?"

"Yeah." Harry rubbed his scar. "He's worried. I don't know why, but he's worried."

"Well, he's got a Longbottom after him this time, of course he's worried." Neville paused for a moment. "I've got a great idea about where we should go next."

"I don't want to hear it." Harry tried to peek around the doorway to see what was waiting for them in the next room. He pulled his head back out just avoiding being hit by a spell he didn't recognize.

"You'll change your mind when I tell you what the idea is." Neville said confidently.

"Look, just shut up OK?" Harry said.

"OK, OK. Sheesh."

"It's your great ideas that got us here." Harry pointed out.

"It's not all my fault. Forget about it."

"Hit them early in the morning after they do one of their all night assaults Harry' you said. 'They'll all be exhausted and won't be able to put up a fight' you said. I don't ever want to hear another one of your ideas. All right?"

"All right."

"OK then. You ready to go yet?" Harry asked.

"Australia " Neville paused and smiled. "I figured secretly you wanted to know, so I thought I'd tell you before we go in. Australia ." The sandy haired Wizard explained.

"That's your great idea? Australia ?" Harry asked.

"Oh, the greatest in a long line. I'm an idea man after all." Neville said.

Harry thought for a moment. " Australia 's no better than here."

Neville shook his head condescendingly. "That just goes to show what you know."

"OK then smart guy, name me one thing that's better in Australia ." Harry scoffed.

"In Australia , the girls think English accents are sexy."

"They do?"

"That's right, Mr. Negative, so we could be kept men. They've got Quidditch in Australia . You can play and I'll be your agent. And they got thousands of mountains you can build a house and hide out in when the fame gets to be too much. And Australia 's got a good climate. Nice beaches. You could learn to swim." Neville said hopefully.

"No swimming! I had enough of that fourth year. It isn't important. What's that about the Quidditch? What are the leagues like?" Harry asked.

"They've never seen a player like you mate, they're easy. Easy, ripe, and luscious."

Harry appeared to be torn. "The Quidditch or the women?"

Neville laughed. "The way you play, once you're in the game, you've got the women."

Harry didn't seem to be convinced. "It's a long way, Australia, isn't it?"

"Ah, everything's got to be perfect with you." Neville said disgustedly.

"Look Nev, I just don't want to get there and find out it stinks - that's all. What about Hannah?"

"She's a sport. She'd come along. At least think about it."

"All right, I'll think about it."

"OK then, when we get inside, when we get to Voldemort, just remember you need to... Hey, wait a minute!" Neville suddenly looked worried.

"What?"

"You haven't seen Lestrange out there, have you?" Neville asked.

"Lestrange? You mean Bellatrix? Nev, you killed her 20 minutes ago." Harry said, clearly worried about his friend.

"Oh yeah." Neville said, shaking his head as if to clear the fog from his thinking. "Good. Gran would kill us both if we missed her. For a moment there, I thought we were in trouble. Ready?"

The pair stood up on either side of the doorway. Harry counted off to three and they entered the room that contained Voldemort and the last of his Death Eaters firing spells from their wands.

A few minutes later the sounds of combat faded, only to be punctuated by a single, sibilant voice crying out, "DAMN YOU POTTER! This cannot be! I cannot lose! I am invinci..."

"Would you please just shut the hell up? Every bloody time we've faced each other you told me that I can't possibly be doing what I'm doing. It's very annoying."

"oh-h-h-h, SHIIIIIIIT!"

"You know Harry... That's not really what I expected a Dark Lord's last words to be."

--oooOOOooo--

August 25, 2011

Surrey England

Gatwick Zoo

Reptile House:

"Here he is, my first magical friend."

Harry Potter gestured through the plate glass at the large Boa who was pretending to be sleeping.

"Ohh, he's so big Daddy." Eleven year old Beth Potter said while holding her father's hand. "And you talked to him when you were younger than me?"

Eight year old Neville Potter ran broke free of his mother's grasp and ran up to the glass. Young Neville raised his hand to rap on the glass but Harry stopped him. "Don't do that son, he really hates it."

"He does?" the eight year old asked, his eyes round in wonder.

"You bet." Harry nodded. "Imagine if you were locked in a room and had people you couldn't talk to tapping on the window all day long. How would you like that?"

The boy nodded his understanding. "Are you going to talk to him Daddy?"

Harry smiled. "I'm going to try. Last time I saw him he was a bit put out with me."

Harry looked about to confirm that no one was paying any attention to him and his family, then covertly drew his wand and muttered an incantation to make the glass permeable to sound.

"Hello old friend."

The Boa lifted its head sluggishly. "Ah, it's you again Amigo. I should have known, a small crowd with no one tapping on the glass."

"My children have heard the story of my meeting you and asked that I bring them to meet you."

Neville was tugging at his belt. "Daddy, I thought you said that snakes talk their own language. He was talking English plain as anything."

"You understood him Nev?"

"I did too Dad." Beth said excitedly

"Your hatchlings speak the One True Tongue Amigo? Lucky them."

"Wonderful." The very pregnant Daphne interjected. "Now the three of you can have secret conversations while I have to wonder what you're up to."

Harry smiled at his wife's comments. So parseltongue bred true? He certainly never expected that. He would have to sit the kids down for a conversation about keeping this talent quiet. There were far too many people who associated Parselmouths with dark magic. Beth and Neville ran over to the next window which had a rattlesnake shaking its tail.

"How are they treating you old friend?"

"I can't complain." The snake said, its coils rippling. "The food has gotten a lot better since you dropped old Pasty off."

Harry turned his attention to the smaller snake in the enclosure. The creature's scales were snow white, its eyes, blood red.

"Hello Tom. Enjoying your home?"

"Damn... You... Potter..." the miniature boa gasped out. "... will.. esca..." the snake's diatribe faded as the creature lost consciousness.

Harry smirked to himself. What better punishment for a fallen dark lord? His magic destroyed, his body transfigured to a miniature snake with a metabolism one third that of most snakes. With no way to communicate, with no magic, trapped in a body that was incapable of doing much more than just surviving, Harry had jumped at the punishment when Neville had suggested it, and left the oh so very changed Riddle in the care of the first friend his magic had found.

"Keep an eye on Pasty for me old friend."

"Always do Amigo. It's too cold out there for me to head out to Brazil, what else have I got to do?"

Harry laughed, and guided his family out of the reptile house. Both the children wanted to see the lions and tigers and bears.

"What are those Daddy?" Neville asked pointing. "They look funny."

Harry spotted the pair of animals and suppressed a grin. Spotting the sign for the exhibit he answered. "Those are Aardvarks Nev."

"What are they doing Daddy? Are they wrestling?"

Harry glanced about. Daphne and Beth were at the next enclosure down the path. "Yes Nev, that's a special kind of wrestling called 'humping'."

As soon as the words had come out of his mouth, Harry knew he had made a mistake.

"Hey Mum!" Neville Potter shouted. "Look! Two Aardvarks humping!"

The look Harry received from his loving wife suggested that he wasn't going to enjoy the conversation that was coming.

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-Fin-