

**DISCLAIMER:** This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoast Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.

## CHAPTER 10

### LUTAS

Harry saw many robes start to catch fire, and heard a few dozen screams. He didn't know whether he was on fire, but he reflexively grabbed his wand and performed the fire-suppression charm on himself. Looking around, he saw that half of the teachers' robes were on fire, including John's; he turned his attention to John because he knew that John couldn't do magic. John thanked him quickly, then yanked off his robes and used them to smother the fire spreading on Sprout's back.

Looking down the line of teachers, Harry saw them using their wands, but it seemed to be having no effect; they were still on fire, and if anything, the flames were increasing. The first years looked terrified; some were starting to catch fire, and a few were screaming. Snape was pointing his wand at them, but nothing seemed to be happening. Harry took a few steps over and quickly put out whatever fires he saw, ending with Snape, who had just started noticing that his robes were on fire as well. Harry then ran along the teachers' table, quickly using the charm on everyone who needed it.

Harry looked out into the Hall, at the students' tables. There was still screaming, and he saw some people on fire, running desperately, and a few rolling on the floor. He rushed to the students' tables, baffled by the fact that hardly anyone seemed to be using the fire-suppression charm. It's a third-year spell, he thought, most everyone should know it. But the flames, and the screams, only increased, fueling Harry's adrenaline. He moved to the nearest students' table, which was Gryffindor, and saw Ron and Ginny busily putting out fires there, so he ran to the other side of the room. He ran the length of the Slytherin table, putting out fires as he went while dodging and helping panicked students, until he ran into

Pansy doing the same thing. They moved to the Ravenclaw table as Harry saw the fires getting worse; several large sections of tables were now on fire, flames rising a few feet, and he could see a dozen people who looked like human torches. He knew that people would start dying, from burns or asphyxiation, in the next few seconds if something wasn't done, and he couldn't cover the tables fast enough.

Desperate, he decided to try the fire-suppression charm as an area-effect spell. He had never heard of it being used that way, but it had to work, it just had to. He pointed his wand at the Ravenclaw table, and fires in a ten-yard diameter suddenly went out. Thank God, he said to himself as he started to cough. He applied it as quickly as he could to the parts of the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw tables at which the fires enveloping people were the worst. As he did so, he noticed that all of the Gryffindor fires were out, and saw Hermione and Neville working on a part of the Hufflepuff table. Using the area-effect spell about twice a second, sometimes pointing to fairly distant areas, he extinguished the rest of the fires in about five seconds.

There were still some screams, screams of pain from those who had been badly burned, and the air was thick with smoke. Standing in the center of the Hall, he heard McGonagall shout, "Harry! Get up here!" He ran to the teachers' table as he heard her shout again. "Any student whose magic is working, come to the teachers' table immediately!" As he ran, Harry thought, what does she mean, whose magic is working? When does magic not work? He suddenly remembered Hagrid's problem from yesterday, and felt sick to the stomach. This was done to us, he realized. How, he had no idea, but he knew it had to have been done deliberately.

Hermione and Neville reached the teachers' table at the same time as he did, followed by Ginny a second later; Ron and Pansy ran up a few seconds after that. "You six," said McGonagall. "No coincidence, obviously. None of the teachers can do magic, and it appears that you are the only students who can."

Madam Pomfrey rushed into the Hall, stopping near McGonagall. "Minerva, what—"

“Fires, Poppy, and very few of us can use magic. Get out there and identify the worst off. Harry, please put Fawkes at her disposal, have him take her to St. Mungo’s so she can alert them to prepare to receive wounded.”

“Minerva, I can’t take people to St. Mungo’s using Fawkes, I would have to carry them, and their burns—”

“I know, just use him to alert them, then come back and start triage. Harry, can you still Apparate within Hogwarts?” Harry Apparated to a spot a few feet away. “Good, you must escort the wounded designated by Madam Pomfrey to St. Mungo’s.” Fawkes burst into view as McGonagall was talking, and in seconds, he and Madam Pomfrey were gone.

“Of course I will, Professor, but Hogwarts is under attack, it must be,” said Harry, shouting without realizing it. “I have to go alert the Aurors before I take anyone to St. Mungo’s, and unless—”

“Very well, go,” interrupted McGonagall. “Do it very quickly, and report to me upon your return.”

Harry Disapparated, and was suddenly in the Apparation detection room, ignoring the startled glances of Aurors. “Quick, who’s in charge?” Harry shouted.

Dawlish came running in from the standby room. “What’s going on?”

“Magic suddenly stopped working at Hogwarts, we don’t know why,” Harry reported briskly. “We don’t know how far it extends, maybe into Hogsmeade. Everyone was in the Hall, the candles fell, lots of burns. Fires are out now. My friends and I, the six of us can still do magic, but no one else. I assume there may be an attack on Hogwarts soon.”

Shouting at someone Harry couldn’t see, Dawlish said, “Full alert! Call in everyone!” To Harry, he said, “Probably with Muggle weapons, maybe Muggles using them. All right, get back to Hogwarts, we’re on it. You and your friends defend Hogwarts from the inside, pay special attention to the gate; that’s where they’ll attack, if they do.”

“McGonagall wants me Apparating the wounded to St. Mungo’s, I’m the only one who can,” Harry pointed out.

“Tell her I said, only life-and-death cases once an enemy is spotted,” instructed Dawlish. “Six of you isn’t much to defend a castle, we need all of you. We’ll do what we can from Hogsmeade. Go.”

In an instant, Harry was back at Hogwarts, near the teachers’ table. He took a few steps toward McGonagall and his five friends, who Snape had just joined. “Dawlish is mobilizing the Aurors, they’re going to go to Hogsmeade and do what they can from there. He wants me and the others defending the castle.”

Snape spoke. “There will likely be an attack, by some sort of Muggle mercenaries using heavy Muggle weapons.”

Harry nodded. “That’s what Dawlish thinks, too.” To his friends, he said, “Go out to the gate, but not past it. Look around to see if anyone’s coming, but don’t be obvious targets. Keep the Repulsion Charm on at all times. Ginny, call me on your hand the second you see anything coming, or anything unusual.” They nodded, and started running as fast as they could out of the Hall, to the Hogwarts gate.

Harry turned to McGonagall and Snape. “Dawlish said that I should join them as soon as they see an enemy, stop getting people to St. Mungo’s unless it’s really serious.”

“That makes sense,” agreed McGonagall, “but keep in mind that you are under my authority, not his. Very well, go to the tables, find Madam Pomfrey, and begin evacuating the wounded.”

Harry looked out into the Hall, found Madam Pomfrey, and Apparated to her side. “Good, there you are,” she said. “These four first, then a few over there. Look for me when you’re done with these.” She walked off. Harry looked down at the first victim, a Hufflepuff fourth year, one of those who’d lost two classmates at Hogsmeade. He crouched down and touched him lightly on the shoulder, and yanked his hand away when the boy screamed. Harry knew from things he’d seen

on Muggle television how painful burns could be, and said, "I'm sorry, but I have to touch you somewhere. It'll just be for a second." The boy nodded through his pain. Harry touched the other shoulder, no more firmly than he felt he needed to, and as the boy shouted in pain, they were suddenly in the emergency room of St. Mungo's.

Harry looked up to see three uniformed Healers waiting. "It's okay, we've got him," said an older woman with short brown hair, who looked to be in charge. "Just keep bringing them here, we'll send them where they need to go." He saw a Healer cast a spell on the boy, who relaxed visibly. The Healer then touched the boy gently, and they both disappeared. Harry nodded, stood, and was back in the Hall, near the other three students he was to take back. He quickly got them to St. Mungo's as well, taking about five seconds each to do so. He looked for Madam Pomfrey, found her among some Ravenclaws, and Apparated to her side.

"These three," she said, then walked off again. Harry crouched down and winced to see the very pained face of Luna Lovegood. He checked her right hand for burns; finding none, he took it. "It'll be all right, they'll take care of you," he said, suddenly heavy with emotion. In an instant, they were at St. Mungo's.

"I know," she said, in a raspy voice not much louder than a whisper. "Thank you, Professor." He squeezed her hand lightly, wondering if she was being deliberately humorous even through her pain. He let go of her, and she was whisked away as he returned to Hogwarts. The next two Ravenclaws were also sixth year girls.

He evacuated about forty people in the next four minutes, then he felt his hand tingle. Rather than look at it, he immediately Apparated to the Hogwarts gate, ending up just a few feet from his friends. "What?" he asked.

"People coming," reported Hermione. "Through Hogsmeade, on the main street. Looks like at least fifty... no, maybe more," she added as they started getting closer. "They've got weapons, looks like machine guns." Harry was surprised that the Aurors hadn't managed to stop them; apparently whatever was stopping magic had a greater range than he'd assumed.

“We should hide, wait for them to get into the gate,” suggested Ron. “Leap out, Repulsion Charms on.”

Hermione winced. “No, Ron. That’s too much like murder.”

Indignantly, Ron retorted, “And they’ll be shooting at us as a kind of greeting?”

“Hermione’s right, let’s not make this any bloodier than we have to,” decided Harry. “We’ll Stun, then rope them as they pass through the gate; with any luck, there’ll be a pile of bodies they can’t get past.” Glancing around, he saw Snape, standing about ten feet from Ron. “What are you doing here?” he demanded abruptly.

Snape raised an eyebrow at Harry’s tone, but reacted calmly. “The headmistress wished me to observe—”

“Never mind, I don’t care,” said Harry, getting angry. “Get back, way back. As far as you can and still see. You don’t have a Repulsion Charm.”

“I will retreat when the mercenaries have reached—”

“You will retreat NOW,” shouted Harry, “or in five seconds I’ll Apparate you off to St. Mungo’s!” As he glared at Snape, it fleetingly crossed his mind that his anger was motivated by genuine concern for Snape’s safety; he realized he would be upset if anything happened to Snape. I wonder when that happened, he thought. With an angry glare back at Harry, Snape turned and jogged away, looking behind him as he did.

Harry turned and walked toward the gate for a better look. “Okay, they’re not far now, maybe twenty seconds from the gate. Repulsion Charms on, now. Let’s get back to—”

There was a sudden explosion very close to them, only a few feet from where Snape had been standing. Harry felt himself knocked back a few steps as he saw Ron, closest to the point of impact, thrown back fifteen feet. “Ron!” screamed Pansy, as she rushed to his side.

“What the hell was that?” Harry asked the others urgently.

“I think there’s a tank out there!” shouted Hermione. “I thought I heard something like a motor while you were arguing with Snape. I can’t see it, though.”

The ground attackers were starting to come through the gate. As Harry made a decision, Fawkes appeared in front of him. “Pansy!” he shouted, getting her attention; she reluctantly left Ron’s side and turned to face the gate. “You four work on them, I’ll deal with the tank.” He grabbed Fawkes’s tail with his left hand, wand in the right; Fawkes flew upwards but didn’t disappear. He flew over the Hogwarts gate as his friends shot Stunning spells at the attackers. “Repulsion Charms on!” he reminded them from the air, making sure that his covered Fawkes as well. He heard machine gun shots a second after he finished speaking, and saw a half dozen attackers go down, clearly from bullets, not Stunning spells.

Shooting off a few Stunning Spells himself, he heard another explosion, which thankfully happened far enough away from his friends that they were unaffected. Deciding to use a spell Dumbledore had taught him last year, he pointed his wand into the moonlit night, and a wave of bright red came out of his wand. He saw it hit trees... then make clear the outline of a tank, fifty feet from the Hogwarts gate. He realized the tank had not been invisible, just very hard to see. He heard bullets close to him, and glanced down to see a few more attackers go down, victims of their own bullets.

Harry quickly wondered what to do about the tank; it was too big for any conventional, impact-based spell to do any good. With a sudden inspiration, an image flashed through his mind of a scene from his first year at Hogwarts: Hermione, with a superior expression, causing a feather to rise and float. Can I lift a tank? he wondered, then thought, what’s the point of being the strongest wizard in England if I can’t put it to good use? Fawkes flew closer to the tank so that Harry would not be a target of the mercenaries’ bullets. Harry pointed his wand at the tank, concentrated, and the tank began to rise: one foot, two feet, three feet... When it was ten feet in the air, Harry twisted his wand, and it turned over in the air, now upside down, turret pointed away from the gate. He slowly lowered it, then

decided to let it fall the last five feet, to stun the occupant in case he decided to try to shoot, even upside down. The tank came crashing to the ground, metal creaking, tank treads spinning in the air.

Harry turned his attention to the Hogwarts gate. The tank had distracted them enough that they hadn't started firing Stunning spells soon enough, and while a few bodies lay at the gate, many of the attackers had broken through. What looked like thirty or forty bodies were on the ground inside the gate, and more were going down every second, both from Stunning spells and their own bullets. Neville, Hermione, Ginny, and Pansy had formed a tight semicircle around Ron's prone form, clearly to shield him from bullets.

Harry Stunned, with three spells per second, the last fifteen attackers trying to get through the gate. Only twenty attackers were still standing, and they were going down fast; it amazed Harry that the attackers still used their machine guns despite seeing dozens of their comrades go down from doing so. He supposed that they thought they were being fired on with machine guns as well. Fawkes flew toward the fighting, and Harry joined his friends in Stunning the ones not being wounded by their own bullets. A few seconds later, no attackers were left standing, and the only sound was the moaning and pained cries of the wounded attackers.

"Professor Snape!" shouted Harry. "It's clear now!" He saw Snape run into the castle, then turned his attention to the others, especially Ron, who seemed to be showing faint signs of movement. Hermione pointed her wand at him, and he blinked, coming awake. He looked around, taking a second to digest the change in his surroundings.

"Ron! Are you all right?" asked an anxious Pansy, gently touching his face.

"Yeah, I am, or at least I will be," he said. "Got a terrible headache, feel like I've been beaten up a bit, but no real injuries, I'm pretty sure."

Neville shot off a Stunning spell at a Stunned attacker who had regained consciousness, then said, "We've got to wrap them up, more might try to get up."



“We can’t wrap the wounded ones, they were hit by bullets,” argued Hermione. “We have to get them to St. Mungo’s.”

“First, let’s get rid of their weapons,” suggested Harry. Seeing a machine gun on the ground, he waved his wand and sent it flying through the air, far from them or the gate. “Everybody do that, make sure they can’t wake up and start firing. Not you, Ron, just relax.”

“I was relaxing when I was unconscious,” protested Ron, but did as he was told. Weapons flew across the grass, and soon a large pile of automatic weapons had formed, well away from where the action had been.

As the last of the weapons flew through the air, McGonagall came running out of the castle, followed by Snape, then fifteen or twenty students, mostly older ones. The students gasped at the bodies littering the ground, though McGonagall didn’t react. Harry walked toward her. “It’s over for now, but we have to keep an eye on Hogsmeade, the gate in general. We don’t know that there couldn’t be more.”

McGonagall nodded, as Neville Stunned another who tried to get up. “Return to the castle and continue the evacuation. There are at least sixty more who require medical attention.”

“But we had to use Repulsion Charms, half of these people were hit by bullets,” said Harry, as Hermione nodded in agreement. “Some are probably dead, some might die if we don’t get them to a hospital right away.”

McGonagall fixed him with a hard stare. “I understand, Professor Potter. You will do as I asked. Report to me for further instructions when Madam Pomfrey tells you there is no one left to take.”

Harry was amazed; he knew the people in the castle, while injured and in pain, could wait, while some of the fallen attackers would likely die while he was finishing the evacuation. Granted, they were the enemy, but to let them die when they could be saved? He looked at her for another second, then reluctantly Disapparated.

Apparating and Disapparating as fast as he could, Harry finished the task in seven minutes. When Madam Pomfrey told him there was no one more, he told her about the wounded outside. "I know, but I'm afraid I'm pretty useless without a wand," she replied. She suggested that he take her to St. Mungo's, where she would talk to the people there about what was to be done with the wounded attackers, then stay to help with the burn victims.

He took her, then reported back to McGonagall. "All done," he said stonily, not bothering to hide his unhappiness with her decision. "Madam Pomfrey is at St. Mungo's."

"Very well," she replied, ignoring his manner. "Anyone here with a visible wound, take to St. Mungo's. After you take the first one, find an Auror at St. Mungo's; there should be two there now. Tell them what you will be doing so they can make arrangements for how these wounded are to be dealt with." Harry walked over to a man who was obviously in pain, knelt and touched his arm, and they were suddenly at St. Mungo's.

He stood. "Where can I find an Auror?" he asked the nearest St. Mungo's worker.

"Just a second," she said, and ran off. A few seconds later, Winston Clark ran up to him. "Harry!"

"Winston, there's a few dozen of them, they fired bullets and we had to use the Repulsion Charm. I'm going to start bringing them here, McGonagall said to tell you so you could decide what to do with them."

Clark nodded. "Okay, thanks. We'll get them to a Muggle military hospital; I'll talk to the other Aurors." He Disapparated, then Harry did as well, back to the Hogwarts gate.

He had moved about half of the wounded attackers to St. Mungo's when suddenly Fawkes appeared in front of him, Neville holding his tail feathers. "Harry, grab on!" shouted Neville urgently. "The Aurors are under attack from Voldemort and lots of Death Eaters!"

Putting aside his shock that Neville had managed to get to Auror headquarters and find out—had he traveled there using Fawkes?—Harry grabbed the tail with his left hand, putting his wand arm around Neville’s shoulder. They were suddenly in a large room in the Auror compound, spells flying through the air, almost a dozen duels going on, the Aurors clearly on the defensive. He had never seen the room before, but he guessed it was one that led to where the Death Eaters held by the Aurors were being kept, and this was a rescue attempt. He instantly put down an anti-Disapparation field; he hoped that Voldemort wasn’t wearing his device, but even if he was, he wanted to make sure the fifteen or so Death Eaters with Voldemort didn’t get away. Neville joined the fight as Fawkes sang.

Harry pointed his wand at Voldemort, and the beam came out. This time, Voldemort tried to physically move out of the way, but was too late. He was hit, and fell unconscious. Three Aurors shouted “Avada Kedavra!” and fired Killing Curses at Voldemort, but he disappeared less than a second before the Curses would have hit. Two of the three Aurors swore in frustration, which Harry could easily understand.

They were still outnumbered, but Harry was sure that they would prevail now that Voldemort was gone, and he was right. Harry started shooting off Stunning spells, stopping only to protect Kingsley at one point with the Killing Curse shield. He took down seven Death Eaters in a row with one Stunning spell each; five were unconscious, and two were knocked flat and dazed. As he did so, the Aurors were able to gang up on their weaker opponents. In less than a half a minute, the last Death Eater was on the ground, wrapped in ropes.

Kingsley approached him. “Thanks, Harry, Neville. That was... helpful,” he said, with humorous understatement.

For the first time since the magic went out at Hogwarts, Harry smiled. “Any time.” Turning to Neville, he asked, “How did you get here, anyway?”

Speaking to Kingsley and Dawlish as well as Harry, Neville answered, “While you were dealing with the wounded attackers, Hermione realized that the

rest of us would be able to Apparate as well. Since all of Hogwarts' magic is down, that includes the anti-Disapparation magic. For now, Apparating at Hogwarts is no different than Apparating anywhere, so all six of us can do it."

"Oh, that's right, I have to get back—"

Neville shook his head. "I told Hermione I was coming here to talk to Kingsley; she said she and the others would help you move the wounded. I'm sure they're done by now. Anyway, I was near the room here when the battle started; I tried to Disapparate to get you when I saw Voldemort—he didn't see me, I think, or else he might have known you'd be coming—but he'd put down a field, and I couldn't, so I ran away from the battle area, called Fawkes, and asked him to take me to you." Turning to Kingsley, he added, "I felt bad, I didn't want you to think I was running away or something. I just didn't want Voldemort to see Fawkes being called."

"You did the right thing, Neville," Kingsley assured him, a hand on Neville's shoulder. "And helped save our lives, I should add. Harry, I trust you'll thank Dumbledore for us tonight. Also, would you do me a favor, and ask McGonagall to come here with you? There are a few things I'd like to talk to the both of you about."

Harry nodded, and he and Neville both Disapparated. Back at Hogwarts, he and Neville found that the others had in fact finished moving the wounded attackers.

Harry relayed Kingsley's request to McGonagall; she hesitated. "I do not feel comfortable leaving. Though I can do nothing magical, I am in charge, and I should oversee the aftermath of this. Perhaps..." She touched her pendant, then let it go in frustration. "It is very annoying not to be able to call someone. Harry, would you ask Fawkes to bring Professor Snape?"

Harry did, and Snape was there in a few seconds. "Thank you, Professor Snape, and you, Fawkes," said McGonagall. "Professor Snape, Kingsley wishes my presence at the Aurors' facility along with that of Professor Potter, but I do not

wish to leave, so I am sending you instead. Miss Weasley, I want you with me at all times until further notice. Harry, I expect you to keep her informed of what is happening, and she will tell me. Miss Granger and Mr. Longbottom, come with me as well; I will be assigning you to accompany Professors Flitwick and Sprout, doing what magic they feel needs to be done around Hogwarts. Mr. Weasley and Miss Parkinson, I want you two to patrol around Hogsmeade, being very careful to keep your Repulsion Charms going at all times. You may offer magical assistance to the residents who request it as you choose, but your main responsibility is to make sure Hogsmeade is secure, and that there are not roving bands of armed Muggles threatening the residents. Does anyone have any questions?”

“Yes,” said Pansy. “How long should we patrol?”

“Report back to me every hour until I tell you otherwise,” responded McGonagall. Nodding, Ron and Pansy headed out the gate into Hogsmeade. McGonagall headed back to the castle, followed by Ginny, Hermione, and Neville.

Harry gestured to Snape. “Ready?”

Snape looked very unhappy. “It has been a very long time since I had to be escorted anywhere.”

Harry chuckled lightly. “I suppose I can understand why you’d be annoyed.” He stood behind Snape, put his hands on Snape’s shoulders, and they were in the room in which the battle had been fought.

“Professor McGonagall doesn’t want to leave, but I’ll be keeping her informed through Ginny, on my hand,” he informed Kingsley. “By the way, shouldn’t we be trying to figure out how this was done?”

Kingsley nodded, as Dawlish joined them. “Actually, Harry, those of us who haven’t been kept busy moving people to hospitals, rescuing Aurors, and fighting off armed Muggles have had a bit of time to think about that. But first, Professor Snape, I’d like to hear your thoughts.”

“Either *lutas*, or the Four Corners artifact,” Snape said simply.

“We thought of lutas,” agreed Kingsley. “But the Four Corners... does that really even exist?” To Harry’s confused look, Kingsley added, “It’s supposed to be a legendary magical artifact, that when set up exactly the right way, can cause disruption of magic over a great area. But it hasn’t been verifiably seen for over a thousand years.”

“I have no more information about it than you do,” responded Snape. “But it is my understanding that the Dark Lord has spent much time, both himself and his assistants, scouring the Earth for rare magical artifacts, in an effort to...” He glanced over at Harry, then finished, “... remove a particular thorn in his side.”

“I’m flattered,” said Harry wryly. “But what’s lutas?”

“Don’t you... oh, you stopped taking Herbology,” recalled Kingsley. “You study it in N.E.W.T. Herbology. It’s a rare herb, which has two magic-related properties. One is that it’s invisible, which is why Muggles don’t know about it. Two, it can’t be pulled out of the ground, or cut. Three... okay, three properties. Three, in sufficient concentration, it disallows the use of magic in a rather large area. That’s the one that makes the most sense to me, but it’s going to be hard to find out if it’s right.”

“I think,” said Harry, “it’s time to have a little chat with Malfoy, and after him, then Nott.”

“We don’t have Nott anymore, Harry,” said Kingsley, looking upset. “He wasn’t one of the ones we were holding. While you were fighting off the Muggles, other Death Eaters were attacking the areas where other prisoners were being held. Thirteen escaped, Nott among them. So, even though you helped us catch fifteen new ones tonight, it comes out as a wash.”

“Is it really that hard to hold onto these people?” wondered Harry, frustrated.

Dawlish nodded sympathetically. “We like it even less that you do, believe me. But look what happened just now. If you hadn’t come and saved our asses, we’d

be dead, and these ten gone. So it's hard to blame the ones guarding the others too much."

"Was anyone killed when the others escaped?" asked Harry.

"No, thank goodness," replied Kingsley. "Anyway, back to this topic, we've checked Malfoy already, a Legilimens has gone over him. We already know all we can from him. There's a Memory Charm, of course, there always is with Death Eaters we capture. We can't get past it."

"I could," said Harry simply. Snape, Dawlish, and Kingsley stared at him in varying degrees of surprise.

"Um, Harry... are you saying you're going to torture him?" asked Kingsley incredulously. "Somehow, I don't think you could."

"I don't have to torture him. I can do the Imperius Curse on him," said Harry with determination. "I can make him help me get rid of it."

"Professor, you have never done the Imperius Curse," pointed out Snape. "In addition, I do not think its use is consistent with what you refer to as the energy of love. It is a very Dark spell."

Harry smiled grimly. "Not the way I'm going to do it. Take me to him." The other three looked at each other for a few seconds in silence. Getting annoyed, Harry said, "Look, I'm serious. If it is this lutas thing, he probably knows about it, maybe even had something to do with it, and we have to know. Every minute Hogwarts is without magic, it's very vulnerable. There's over three hundred people there, including a lot of my friends. We've got to find out, and I can do it. I know how to break a Memory Charm with the other person's cooperation, and I can make him cooperate. Let me do it."

The others exchanged glances, and Kingsley gave a light shrug. "I suppose it can't hurt to try. All right, let's go." He walked off, the others following.

As they walked, Snape said, "It will be better if I observe from a spot out of Malfoy's line of sight."

Harry suddenly remembered why Snape was there, and that McGonagall wanted to be kept informed. He held up his hand, speaking as they walked.

“Kingsley is taking me to where they’re keeping Malfoy. Voldemort gave him a Memory Charm, and I’m going to use the Imperius Curse to make him help me break it.” He listened for the response, then chuckled, and said, “Just tell her.” He put down his hand and said to the others, “She said, ‘you’re going to do *what?*’”

“I don’t blame her,” said Kingsley.

Harry listened again, and said to the others, “McGonagall said, ‘Well, just so long as he doesn’t do anything rash.’”

“Okay, here we are, next one down,” advised Kingsley. Snape stopped walking. Malfoy was being kept in what looked roughly like a prison cell, except that the bars were thin, and made of what looked to Harry like silver. Harry walked up to the door; Malfoy, having heard the noise, turned to see what it was. His eyebrows went high upon seeing Harry.

Harry wasn’t sure exactly why he was so sure he could do what he intended, but he was, which he felt was more than half the battle. He felt he probably couldn’t do it if he hadn’t had the spell done to him before, and if he weren’t a Legilimens. Already pointing his wand at Malfoy, he concentrated on Malfoy’s mind, on infusing it with feelings of love. He sent out the energy... and Malfoy suddenly screamed, as if in horrible pain, and toppled to the ground. “Damn!” exclaimed Harry, as Kingsley and Dawlish gaped at him. He Stunned Malfoy, then walked back to where Snape stood, Kingsley and Dawlish following.

Kingsley looked at Harry with amazement and concern. “Harry, what in the hell did you do?”

“I focused on causing him to feel intense feelings of love,” Harry explained. As he said it, he realized that he should have predicted what happened. Malfoy had been Cleansed, and so was unable to feel love; when forced to, he experienced it as pain, as he had during the Cleansing.



“And he screamed in pain?” asked a disbelieving Kingsley. “Harry, no offense, but I don’t think you did it right.”

“I did it right,” Harry insisted, though he knew he wasn’t going to be able to explain what had happened without explaining the Cleansing.

Kingsley tried again. “Harry, if you try to cause someone to feel love—”

“He did it properly,” interrupted Snape. “The Dark Lord modifies the minds of Death Eaters in such a way that they cannot feel the emotion of love; they would feel very intense pain if forced to try.” Harry found himself surprised that Snape had given even that detail of the Cleansing. He must think this is important, thought Harry.

Kingsley and Dawlish exchanged amazed looks. Kingsley looked at Snape and asked, “Why did I not know about this?”

Snape returned Kingsley’s stare. “It has never been relevant until now.”

Kingsley was silent for a few seconds, then looked at Harry. “Harry, I want you to do to me what you did to him.”

“Sure,” agreed Harry. He pointed his wand at Kingsley and focused on infusing him with love; he could sense Kingsley embrace the feeling. He sent a silent impression of what he wanted, and Kingsley dutifully hopped in place twice, then waved at the ceiling. Harry withdrew the spell.

Recovering, Kingsley gaped at him. “*That’s* what you did to him? Harry, that felt wonderful, blissful. People would *pay* you to do that to them. I’ve had the Imperius Curse done to me, and I’m good at resisting it. That may have the same effect as the Imperius Curse, but it is most certainly not the Imperius Curse. I went into it with the idea of resisting it, but as soon as I felt it, I felt like, why in the world would I resist this?” He shook his head in amazement. “And that caused Malfoy intense pain...”

“Remember,” pointed out Dawlish, “Professor Snape did say it was a Dark spell, and he said, ‘not the way I’m going to do it.’” He looked at Harry as if trying

hard to understand something. “How in the world do you just make up a spell like that?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know. I just want this really badly, I want to find out what he knows, and I knew it would work... on most people, that is.”

Snape looked at Harry significantly. “It still may work on him, Professor, but in a way you did not expect.”

Harry nodded. “I had the same thought. But we need to know more.”

“Indeed,” agreed Snape, who turned to Kingsley. “Mr. Shackbolt, please give me a five-digit number, and after I have memorized it, erase it from my memory.”

Kingsley’s eyes went wide as he realized why Snape was asking. “You can’t be serious...” Turning to Harry, he asked, “And you’re going to do this?”

Harry took a deep breath. “I’m not thrilled about it, and if it was just for the information I think Malfoy has, I wouldn’t do it, even with Professor Snape’s permission. But this could go far beyond Malfoy, and his information. It could be very, very, very important.”

Kingsley calmed down as he understood what Harry was saying. “You mean, it could be a weapon against Voldemort.”

“A very powerful weapon,” confirmed Snape. “Please do as I requested.”

Kingsley nodded. “Five four six seven two. Do you have it?”

“Five four six seven two,” repeated Snape. “Now, please give me a second number, but do not allow Professor Potter to hear it.” Harry took a few steps away as Kingsley whispered to Snape, then he walked back.

Kingsley waved his wand at Snape. “Do you know the numbers?”

Snape thought. “No, I do not, though I recall everything else, such as that I requested you to do this, and why. We may be back; we will find you if we need to see Malfoy again.” He looked at Harry expectantly.

“Your office?” asked Harry.

Snape shook his head. “We must inform the headmistress first. Please ask Miss Weasley where she is.” Harry did, and reported that she was in the Great Hall. “Ask her to meet us in the Transfigurations classroom, as it is nearby.” Again, Harry did, then put his hands on Snape’s shoulders.

They were in the Transfigurations classroom; McGonagall and Ginny walked in a few seconds later. McGonagall turned to Ginny and said, “Miss Weasley, you may go—”

“Miss Weasley should remain,” interrupted Snape, drawing him a reflexive sharp look from McGonagall, who Harry knew very well hated to be interrupted. “If she is to be a conduit of communication, it is better that she know what is happening.”

“Very well,” McGonagall agreed. Harry and Snape related the story, earning frequent surprised looks from both McGonagall and Ginny. After they finished, McGonagall said, “Harry, like Kingsley, I feel that I must know what this feels like. Please do it to me.”

Harry did, causing her to clap her hands five times; afterwards, she had much the same reaction as Kingsley. “Remarkable. Absolutely remarkable. You are having quite a night, Harry. Two new spells.”

“Two?”

“The area-effect fire-suppression spell,” she clarified. “Such a version of that spell did not exist.”

“Ah. Well, probably better that I didn’t know, I might not have tried. No, I take that back. I would have, I was pretty desperate. And, I’m pretty desperate to find out what’s causing this, and I just have a feeling it’s underneath that Memory Charm on Malfoy. I think I can get it.”

Ginny stepped forward, concerned. “Harry, I understand why you’re desperate, but you should think about this. Is it consistent with the energy of love to do something that’ll cause intense pain?”

Before Harry could respond, Snape did. “It is a supreme irony, Miss Weasley, that it is the energy of love itself that causes intense pain, in this instance. It must therefore be consistent with it.”

“I think he’s right,” said Harry, looking at Ginny with appreciation for her concern. “I know what you mean... but I don’t think it’s immoral. I’m not sure I can tell you why I think that, but I do, and it’s not just because I want what Malfoy has. Besides, remember what happened to Albus after he killed Grindelwald. If this wasn’t consistent with the energy of love, I wouldn’t be able to do it.”

“I know,” she sighed, then stepped forward quickly and kissed him on the cheek. Looking into his eyes intently, she said, “Just never forget who you are.”

“I won’t, I promise,” he replied earnestly. He turned to Snape. “Your office?”

Snape nodded, and they left.

They walked to Snape’s office in silence. Inside, Snape closed the door and asked Harry to soundproof it. “The soundproofing notwithstanding, you should Silence me before you proceed.”

Despite his determination, the idea made him a bit queasy; he slowly nodded.

Snape seemed to notice his expression. “It is important, Professor, that you not allow your concern for my condition to affect what you do.”

“How can I not?” asked Harry.

“Having a feeling, and letting it affect what you do, are two different things,” said Snape. “You will suffer for what you do; if you did not, it would be to your mind immoral, and Miss Weasley’s concern would be justified.” He paused, watching Harry mull this over. Then he said, “Do you recall, Professor, that on the night of the Dark Lord’s return, the headmaster asked me to undertake a task, a thing he was highly reluctant to ask of me?”

Harry nodded. “I remember. He was really concerned.”

“I would like you to view that memory; it may be of assistance.” Solemnly, wondering what he would find, Harry cast Legilimens.

Snape Apparated in the graveyard, fifteen feet from Voldemort. “My Lord,” he said. “I humbly apologize for my inability to appear promptly. I was at Hogwarts, and Dumbledore would have found my immediate disappearance suspicious—”

“You dare to show yourself in my presence?” thundered Voldemort. “The only thing I am wondering, Snape, is whether I should kill you slowly, or more slowly!”

The other Death Eaters were watching, though their heads were down. “I wish only to serve you, my Lord. I may be highly useful; I have Dumbledore’s confidence—”

“And why should you not have his confidence, having been his spy?!” asked Voldemort disbelievingly.

“I was not, and have never been his spy, my Lord. My memories are open to you; you will see that this is the truth.”

“The ones who told me very much believed that it was true,” said Voldemort coldly.

“They were mistaken, my Lord,” maintained Snape calmly.

Voldemort regarded Snape with great suspicion, his expression one of ‘do you really think I am so foolish as to be tricked in this way?’ He stared at Snape for a half a minute, then asked, “And what have you been doing these thirteen years, Snape, that you feel gives you the right to be in my presence now?”

“Looking forward to the day of your return, my Lord, I insinuated myself with Dumbledore, telling him that I had seen the error of my ways and wished to be a better person. Dumbledore is quite foolish in this respect, as you know, his great magical power notwithstanding. Such a flimsy story would seem highly suspect, but it is exactly the sort of thing that motivates his sympathy. He now trusts me, which has been my aim for these thirteen years, so that I may serve you better.”

Voldemort paused, thinking. “I detect no lie, but then of course, I know very well that you are an excellent Occlumens, almost my equal. I suspect that you would be capable of lying to me undetected.” Snape said nothing, as Voldemort paused again. “Tell me, Snape, why should I believe you? What would you do if you were me?”

“I would attempt to confirm what I was told, my Lord.”

Voldemort smiled cruelly. “But I have no way to confirm it, Snape, do I? I have only your word.”

Snape levelly replied, “You need not simply accept my word, my Lord. I may be an excellent Occlumens, but there is a test that I cannot pass unless my words are true, and that we both know I must pass in order to hope to earn your trust.”

Voldemort’s smile became even more cruel. “And you look forward to this, do you?”

“I confess that I do not look forward to the test itself, my Lord,” Snape admitted. “But I look forward to proving myself to you.”

Voldemort laughed. “You are honest about that, at least. And how long should the test be for?”

“For the maximum possible time, my Lord.”

Voldemort continued to smile, apparently enjoying himself. “And you are sure you do not look forward to the experience itself?”

“I am sure, my Lord.”

Voldemort chuckled mirthlessly. “You are brave, Snape, I will acknowledge that. Very well, I will do as you suggest. Malfoy, step forward.” Malfoy did so. “Five minutes each time, three times, with pauses of thirty seconds. Understood?”

“Understood, my Lord,” repeated Malfoy, taking off his watch.

“Very well, Snape. We will proceed. Malfoy, now!”

“Crucio!” shouted Malfoy, and Snape collapsed to the ground, screaming in agony, writhing uncontrollably.

Voldemort regarded the screaming Snape with amusement for ten seconds, then lazily took out his wand. “Legilimens,” he said. He entered Snape’s mind, and began searching.

The image faded, and the memory disappeared; Harry withdrew from Snape’s mind. “I will not subject you to the entire memory,” said Snape. “It is not necessary; you get the sense of it.”

Harry felt that he didn’t know what to say. “Was that your way of telling me that whatever happens here, it’s not as bad as other things?”

“In part,” confirmed Snape. “I could have shown you my memories of being Cleansed, but that would have been somewhat different, as I did not truly understand the nature of what was to be done. In this case, I did, but volunteered, so that I could oppose the Dark Lord.”

“So... the idea of the test was that even though you’re an excellent Occlumens, nobody could be tortured so intensely for fifteen minutes and still manage to hide a memory from a Legilimens,” speculated Harry.

“Correct.”

“So, the obvious question is... how did you manage it?”

“I have already told you of my ability to compartmentalize memories,” explained Snape. “Before the event itself, of course, I could not know for certain that it would work under such mental and physical duress. It was crucial that I not fail.” Snape gazed at Harry solemnly. “So... I practiced.”

Harry gasped, and felt tears press against him instantly. “Albus...”

“Yes and no,” Snape replied. “No wizard can perform two spells concurrently, and the headmaster had to be occupied by searching me with Legilimens. It fell to Professor McGonagall to perform the actual Curse.”

Taking off his glasses, Harry buried his head in his hands. Despite his efforts, a few tears escaped, and he wiped his eyes before putting his glasses back on. “That’s why she wasn’t concerned, like Ginny was, about my morality. She knows what it is to be in my position, and then some.”

“Exactly,” agreed Snape. “I know they both suffered greatly. So, as I said, it is important that you not allow what I experience to affect what you do, as they did not in that situation. You must do what is necessary to find the information we need.”

“I understand,” said Harry gravely. “Are you ready?”

“I am,” said Snape. He really is brave, thought Harry.

Harry pointed his wand at Snape and Silenced him, then focused hard on love, on infusing Snape with feelings of love. Snape screamed silently, writhing in pain. Trying very hard to focus, not to let what was happening to Snape interfere with what he was doing, he continued sending out love. Still in his chair, Snape continued to scream. Finally, Snape lost consciousness; Harry estimated that it had been about ten seconds.

Harry searched Snape’s mind, looking for a Memory Charm. It took him about a minute to find it; he wondered if he would get faster with more experience, as he had never gone looking for a Memory Charm before. He focused on unlocking it, as he had his own Memory Charm as Hermione had guided him to the spot. Very soon he could feel the Charm slipping away, and he saw Kingsley tell Snape the first number, then whisper the second. Harry sat back in his chair, mentally exhausted, glad to have accomplished what he wanted.

As Harry started to wonder how soon Snape would regain consciousness, he had a startling revelation, and felt stupid for not having realized it sooner: what he had just done to Snape was similar to what Dumbledore did to Voldemort. Oh, my God, thought Harry, I can do to Voldemort what Albus does.

Snape started stirring four minutes later. Harry fought back an urge to walk over to his chair and prop him up, or provide some other unnecessary assistance; he wondered if this was what Molly felt like when she tried to straighten his clothes or fix his hair.

“Professor... are you all right?”



“It appears so,” said Snape, as though Harry had asked an interesting question. “The pain notwithstanding, it was a... fascinating experience. The quality of the pain was far different than the Cruciatus Curse; it was not even exactly pain, so much as... unbearable stimulation. I cannot quite put it into words.”

“I guess it’s probably because what I do isn’t intended to be painful,” suggested Harry.

“No doubt,” agreed Snape, looking at a clock. “I see that I was unconscious for less than five minutes. Have you informed Miss Weasley and the headmistress?”

“No, I wanted to wait until you came back, talk to you first,” said Harry.

“Understandable. Apparently you retrieved the memory, since I can now recall both numbers.”

Harry nodded. “Yes, once you were unconscious, it didn’t take long at all. But I wondered about that, I thought I needed you to help me. It can’t just be that you can break a Memory Charm by making someone unconscious, or Voldemort could do it that way. How did it happen?”

Snape thought for a few seconds before answering. “Since this is a completely new spell, we cannot know. I would speculate, however, that the reason is that you created the spell with the intention of breaking Memory Charms; since that was your intent, the spell allows you to do so, even if it does not happen in the way you thought it would. It has the same effect as the Imperius Curse, but it appears to have... additional functionality.”

Harry raised his eyebrows; he wasn’t quite used to the idea that he could simply create spells. “Strange. During vacation, just to see what would happen, I tried to create some new spells, but I couldn’t do it. But with this, when I had the idea, I just knew that I could do it. I have no idea why. I really wish I knew how this worked, but I guess I should just be glad it does. Now, I can get into Malfoy’s mind.”

“And I assume you grasp the larger implications?” prompted Snape.

“Yes, I can do this to Voldemort. It’s funny, it doesn’t really change anything right now, since Albus could do it before. It’s partly that he doesn’t have to now, unless I’m unconscious or something... but I have a feeling that this is part of the puzzle, that there’s more to this than we can see right now.”

“Indeed. I would say this was quite worthwhile. We should meet with the headmistress, then with Mr. Shacklebolt. Where is she?”

Harry looked into his hand and spoke to Ginny, then repeated her answer to Snape. “The kitchens. Oh, that’s right, we never had the feast. I should be hungry, but I’m not.” They headed to the kitchens.

Ten minutes later, Harry, Snape, and Kingsley were walking to the area where the Death Eaters were being held. “After I do it,” asked Harry, “should I give him a Memory Charm?”

“We don’t plan on letting him escape, but it’s probably not a bad idea,” agreed Kingsley. “If he did, Voldemort would be pretty ticked off when he found a Memory Charm he couldn’t get through. He’d torture Malfoy long and hard trying, though.” He paused, then added, “No less than the bastard deserves.”

Harry couldn’t disagree, but couldn’t contemplate the idea that it was a good thing. “Okay, I’ll give him one when I’m done, it’ll cover everything that happened tonight. Probably to him right now, one day’s a lot like another.”

“We don’t provide them with a great deal of entertainment,” commented Kingsley wryly.

When they reached Malfoy’s holding area, Snape again hung back. Having prepared himself, Harry stepped forward, looking at Malfoy. Malfoy started to speak, but Harry Silenced him, then cast the new spell. Malfoy collapsed, screaming noiselessly. While not concerned about Malfoy as he had been about Snape, Harry nonetheless had to try hard to keep his focus on love, on what he was doing. He kept it going, not noticing Kingsley watching. As had been the case with Snape, Malfoy lost consciousness after about ten seconds.

Casting Legilimens, Harry started searching for the Memory Charm, and soon found it. Again focusing on love, it took less than a minute to dissolve the Charm. Viewing the memory, Harry made a fist of triumph. He exited Malfoy's mind soon thereafter, applying a new Memory Charm. He walked away, followed by Snape and Kingsley, and they were soon in the large room where the recent battle had been fought.

"It's the plant, the lutas," said Harry. "This is something Voldemort had him do at the beginning of last year, as soon as the term started. He was given these seeds, and told to walk around the perimeter of the school, just dropping them anywhere there was dirt. Apparently they're like weeds, they can grow pretty much anywhere."

"They are not, actually," Snape corrected him. "But they can be imbued to do so. I suspect the Dark Lord did not tell him the purpose of what he was doing."

"No, he didn't," agreed Harry. "All Malfoy knew was that it was very important. Well, looks like it's back to Hogwarts, to meet with McGonagall and Sprout." He looked into his hand and talked to Ginny, then put it down after a short conversation. "They don't know where Sprout is; they assume she's in the Hufflepuff area. McGonagall told me to come back and send for her with my dog." He looked at Kingsley. "Thanks for all your help, Kingsley."

"Wasn't much, I just took you to where we're holding him. Keep me informed, all right? I'll be in the standby room most of the time, so go there. If I'm not there, have someone call me." Harry nodded, then put his hands on Snape's shoulders.

Five minutes later, he, Snape, McGonagall, Sprout, and Ginny were sitting in McGonagall's quarters. Harry finished the story, and Sprout whistled in amazement. "I'd love to know how he got ahold of so many seeds. They're very rare, very hard to get. I try occasionally, thinking it would be an interesting N.E.W.T. in-class activity, but I can't get even a handful of them."

“It’s remarkable what you can accomplish, Pomona, with great magical power and a total absence of morality,” remarked McGonagall dryly. “So, what can we do?”

“There’s only one thing,” said Sprout simply. “Phoenixes.” To Harry’s surprised expression, she explained, “I’m sure you know from reading *Reborn From the Ashes* that phoenixes eat only herbs, a few specific ones. This is one of them, their favorite one. They love it. Lutas can’t be pulled or cut; the only way they can be gotten rid of is to be eaten by a phoenix. The phoenix can eat all the way down to the root, eat the complete plant if they want to. Usually they don’t, though; they want the plant to live, so they just eat down to a certain point, then let it grow again before eating from it.” Sprout suddenly had a regretful look. “Too bad humans don’t manage to do that with the things that are important to us.”

“Lucky that there’s a phoenix around here,” said Harry. “Well, I’ll ask Fawkes to do it, see what he thinks.”

Sprout chuckled. “It’s going to take much more than Fawkes, Harry. If the quantity is anything like you’re describing—and it would have to be, to shut down magic over this kind of area—it’s going to take a lot of phoenixes, as many as we can get. You need to let Fawkes know that this is important; he needs to tell other phoenixes, spread the word throughout the phoenix community, so to speak. The good news is that others probably won’t be reluctant to come. This’ll be like a feast for them.”

“It’s nice that someone gets to have a feast,” commented McGonagall.

“Professor, I know that a lot of phoenixes aren’t bonded to humans,” said Harry. “The ones that aren’t, are they people-shy?”

Sprout shrugged. “Now you’re getting out of my area of expertise, and into Hagrid’s. You’ll have to ask him.”

“You might simply ask Fawkes,” suggested McGonagall.

“Good point,” agreed Harry. Fawkes suddenly appeared, and perched on Harry’s shoulder. Sprout and McGonagall talked, but Harry didn’t hear it, as he was

focused on Fawkes, communicating with him. After a minute, Harry chuckled, and the others looked at him quizzically.

“You know that Fawkes communicates with images and impressions, not words,” explained Harry. “When I let him know what we needed, he sent me an image of the Hogwarts grounds, with phoenixes all over the place. Obviously he thinks it’ll be no problem getting them to come. He knows that we want them to eat them completely, and the impression I got from him was equivalent to the words, ‘what a shame, such a waste.’”

Sprout smiled. “Yes, he would think that. Well, I may have you ask him and the others to leave several plants intact, if there are any near the greenhouse, which there probably are; I’d bet Malfoy saw that as a good place to leave some.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” said Harry suddenly. “Yesterday I was talking to Hagrid in his hut, and he admitted... well, he might not want me telling you this, so don’t repeat it, but he uses magic occasionally—”

He broke off as McGonagall and Sprout started chuckling. “That’s not exactly the world’s best-kept secret, Harry,” said Sprout. “But do continue, sorry.”

“Right. Anyway, he couldn’t do magic yesterday, he asked me to get a fire going for him. He thought it was just something wrong with him, and it probably confirmed his impression that I was able to do it.”

“No doubt,” agreed McGonagall. “Ironic, that we almost had warning of this, but missed it, for the same reason that we were saved later. You do understand, Harry, that if not for the energy of love, we would all be dead. Many would have been killed in the fire, and those not killed would have been helpless against the mercenaries. I suppose we cannot know or guess why this particular type of magic is immune to the plant’s effect.”

“There are quite a few mysteries about it,” agreed Harry. “One of the reasons I’ve been hesitating to teach it.”

McGonagall smiled sympathetically. “I believe you will now have no choice but to at least try. Between its normal utility, its staggering usefulness in this

situation, and the Sorting Hat's song, your students will simply not allow you to avoid it.”

Harry shook his head. “Funny, the Sorting Hat telling me what to teach, pretty much telling the students to make me teach it. It must have known I was reluctant, and decided to give me a shove. I suppose you're right, I'm going to have to do something. Anyway, about Hagrid, why did it happen to him first?”

“The area around his hut is also a logical place for Malfoy to have dropped a larger-than-normal amount of seeds,” explained Sprout. “The plants have a collective effect, not an individual one; they don't inhibit magic until there are enough mature ones to reach a critical mass. There must have been enough near Hagrid's hut to do that.”

“Which reminds me,” put in McGonagall, “the timing of this was quite suspicious. It could have happened during the summer, or during the daytime, or when the Hall was empty, but it happened at just the right time to cause maximum damage. Could they have controlled the timing in such a way?”

Sprout thought for a moment. “The only thing I can think of would be that they might have set fire to a few of them. There may have been a local critical mass near the edge of the grounds, as there was near Hagrid's hut. If so, Hogwarts' normal defenses against aerial penetration would have been ineffective over that area, and a Death Eater could have flown in and set a few plants on fire. That would have caused a sudden increase in the intensity of the effect, and set off a critical mass involving all the plants at Hogwarts.”

Snape spoke. “How long will it take for the phoenixes to consume enough of the plants that the effect will be lifted?”

“I have no idea,” admitted Sprout. “Again, more of a question for Hagrid. Does Fawkes have any idea?”

Fawkes was still perched on Harry's shoulder. Harry waited a few seconds for any impressions, then responded, “Fawkes isn't really much for communicating numbers. Like, if he wants to get across the idea of ‘two days,’ he'll show me the

sun rising and setting twice. He couldn't be sure even if he could tell me exact times, but my impression is that he doesn't think it'll be a long time. Definitely less than a month, he thinks."

"How does he communicate the idea of a month?" asked Ginny, who then added, "Oh, by the phases of the moon, of course."

"Right," confirmed Harry.

"Well, I am glad that it will be no longer than that," said McGonagall. "Now that we know what is involved, we must consider the question of Hogwarts' security until then, not to mention that of Hogsmeade, which is also vulnerable. As competent as you and your friends have shown yourselves to be, Harry, the burden is too great for even the six of you. Not to mention that as the only ones who can do magic, your services will also be needed around the castle. It appears that I must leave Hogwarts after all; I must confer with Kingsley about this matter. Professor Snape, you will be in charge until my return. Most everyone knows what they should be doing; you will need only handle new problems as they arise. Continue sending Mr. Weasley and Miss Parkinson into Hogsmeade every hour until further notice. Miss Weasley, unless Professor Snape needs you for some specific purpose, please patrol the Hogwarts grounds, with particular attention to the lake and the gate, in case something gets by your brother and Miss Parkinson. If you see anything unusual, call Harry on your hand immediately."

Ginny nodded, as did Snape, who asked, "How is the food situation being handled?"

Sprout answered. "The house-elves are beside themselves, poor things. They rely so strongly on magic, they feel like we would if our arms and legs stopped working. The food was already prepared; it was just a bit cold, but we got it to the students. But we still don't know what we're going to do about tomorrow; the elves don't have a clue how to cook without magic. We're thinking of getting the food imported from other places, like the Ministry, for example; we just have to work out the transportation."

“Well, I will discuss that with the Aurors as well,” said McGonagall. “Harry, you will join us in the meeting, of course, as Hogwarts’ security rests with you and your friends for the moment. Pomona, if there is any information on Lutas that you do not have, or anyone it would be useful to talk to, feel free to leave Hogwarts; Mr. Longbottom can escort you. Harry, we should get going.” The others left McGonagall’s quarters as Harry put his hands on her shoulders.

Two hours later, Harry Apparated out to the Hogwarts grounds, and saw two figures standing by the lake. He Apparated to them, and was standing a few feet from Ginny and Justin. “Harry!” Ginny exclaimed, and threw herself at him, hugging then kissing him. “Does this mean you’re free?”

“For the moment, anyway,” he said, as she let him go and he exchanged greetings with Justin. They started walking, in no particular direction.

“I’m really glad,” she said, her eyes emphasizing her words. “Justin was nice enough to come out and keep me company. I ran into him and Ernie the last time I went in to use the bathrooms. Thank goodness they don’t need to use magic.”

Harry chuckled at the thought. “I assume Ernie was busy doing Head Boy stuff?”

Justin laughed. “More like, looking for Head Boy stuff to do. He envies the hell out of you six; he’d like nothing more than to still be able to do magic, to be useful...” He grinned broadly, then continued, “... to be turning tanks upside down...”

Harry smiled and shrugged. “Like I’ve said, you do what you have to do.”

“No, Harry,” corrected Justin. “You do what you have to do; the rest of us do what we can do. There’s a real difference. Anyway, he’s found a few things, but nothing that important. He spent some time talking to the first years, being all ‘I’m Head Boy,’ and like that. He was telling them about Hogwarts, but of course by that time the story of what you guys did was all over, so all they did was ask questions about you, when their first class with you was, why you could use magic when no



one else could, that sort of thing. I was near the wall watching, and it was all I could do not to laugh. He wrapped it up pretty quickly, and left.” He shook his head and added, “Usually, the Head Boy is the most important seventh year student, but not this year. You might want to be tolerant of him, Harry, if he seems weird around you for a while. I mean, he likes you, of course, but this is kind of hard for him. He’ll be okay once things around here get back to normal.”

“I hope so,” said Harry. To Ginny, he asked, “Have you seen Ron and Pansy lately?”

“Yeah, we saw them at their last check-in, talked to them for a few minutes. Apparently they’re becoming popular in Hogsmeade, people asking their help with all kinds of stuff, like starting fires, using their wands as flashlights to help them find their lanterns. One woman apparently tried to get them to rearrange her furniture.”

Harry laughed. “Better them than me. Of course, they probably don’t envy me, either, spending the last two hours in meetings.”

“I just realized, you haven’t eaten, have you? You’ve been too busy.”

“No, I ate during the first meeting. Kingsley had their house-elves bring McGonagall and I about two meals’ worth of food each. So, I’m set for the night.”

“Good,” said Ginny. “So, about security, what are they going to do?”

“First, it was just Kingsley, McGonagall and I at the Aurors’ facility,” explained Harry, “then we went to the Ministry, and met with Bright for almost an hour. Then Bright started making arrangements, and people were coming in and out of the room. They’re calling people into the Ministry, it’s pretty busy there right now.

“Anyway, what it looks like they’re going to do is call in the Muggle military,” he said. To their raised eyebrows, he added, “Yeah, that was my reaction too, but they don’t have a lot of choice. It’s either that or the six of us, and it would be hard for us to provide twenty-four-hour security. We could do it, but it would be tiring, like the Apparation crisis shifts. It’s not going to be a whole army or

something, though they haven't decided the exact number. They're making an emergency request right now; Bright and Kingsley are meeting with the Muggle Prime Minister... oh, what's his name again?"

"Kenneth Barclay. Don't read the Muggle papers much, do you?" asked Justin humorously.

"I can barely get myself to read the Prophet," responded Harry in the same vein. "They're going to ask him to send a small number, like fifty or a hundred, no more than that. It would be too disruptive, and they don't need much more anyway, since they'll still have us six. They'll still call us if there's another attack, and we could probably handle it by ourselves if we had to. The Muggles will be kind of an early-warning system, just so we can be safer until the phoenixes eat enough of the lutas that we get magic back. I assume she told you about that."

"Yeah, but I asked her how you found out, and she wouldn't tell me." Justin's tone made clear that he was teasing Ginny.

"Sorry, but I'm involved in some stuff that can't be public. I would tell you, I know you can be trusted, but..."

"Tell no one, even people you trust, I recall you saying last year," said Justin. "It's all right, I understand."

"How did the first years seem, Justin?" asked Ginny.

"Pretty nervous, which I could really understand," said Justin sympathetically. "I mean, their first day at Hogwarts, and there's a big fire in the Great Hall as they're getting Sorted, and most people lose the ability to do magic? Thank goodness you got to them fast, Harry, and none of them had to go to St. Mungo's."

"I happened to be near them, and figured they wouldn't know the fire-suppression spell," said Harry. "I didn't know at that point that the magic was out."

"Funny, when you say it like that, it sounds like something that the Muggle repairman comes to your home to take care of," said Justin. "Right, Mrs. Johnson, we've got your magic back on. That'll be twenty quid, please."

Harry laughed heartily at the thought. "I wish it were that simple."

"That would be nice," agreed Justin. "Anyway, back to the first years, at one point I passed the Hall and saw all of the Slytherin second years, talking to the first years. So I think they'll be pretty well briefed on the Harry Potter situation."

"Oh, good," said Harry sarcastically, as Justin and Ginny chuckled.

As they walked, they turned toward the Quidditch pitch. "Hey, look," said Harry, pointing.

Not far from the pitch, Harry saw over twenty phoenixes on the ground, and two in the air. "Oh, wow," said Ginny admiringly.

"Hannah is going to go nuts," said Justin. "How many do you think are going to be here?"

"I don't know," Harry admitted. "More than this, though. I got the impression from Fawkes that it could be as many as a hundred. I just got an image, though, not a number."

"He must still be spreading the word," said Ginny. "'Come to Hogwarts! All you can eat!'"

"That's about it," agreed Harry.

"Do you think it's okay if we get closer?" wondered Justin.

"I think so, as long as we're slow," answered Harry. They walked slowly, getting to within ten feet of the nearest one, then stopped.

"They really are beautiful," said Justin softly.

"They sure are," agreed Ginny. They stood and watched the phoenixes for several minutes, then turned and headed back. "I just realized, I'm supposed to be patrolling," said Ginny, abashed. "I was watching them so closely, the castle could have been invaded and I wouldn't have noticed."

"I think we'd have heard something," Harry put his arm around her reassuringly.

She leaned into him, then leaned over and kissed him. As an afterthought, she said to Justin, “You don’t mind blatant public displays of affection, do you Justin?”

“Not if they’re directed at me,” he joked. “No, I don’t mind. I wouldn’t be hanging out with you two otherwise, you’re pretty famous for it.”

“Are we?” asked Ginny, surprised. “I try to restrain myself when it’s not just the six of us.”

“You fail more than you think,” said Justin, grinning. “But it’s all right. I do it with Susan occasionally, so I couldn’t complain.”

Harry saw a concerned look cross Justin’s face, in spite of his humor. “I’m sure she’s all right, Justin.”

“I know,” said Justin. Harry recalled that Justin had been with Susan when he’d Apparated her out of Hogwarts. “But she was in a fair bit of pain, even though she was one of the last twenty you got out of there. By the way, Harry... Ginny was telling me, before you got here, about what happened after the Muggles attacked, how McGonagall made you finish evacuating the Hogwarts wounded, even the ones who weren’t that bad off, before the attackers. For what it’s worth... I see your point, and it’s very noble, but I see McGonagall’s too. These Muggles, obviously being paid for what they did—paid by the people who tried to burn three hundred people to death—started firing automatic weapons at what they thought were unarmed teenagers. If I had to be making the decisions, I’d really hesitate before asking people suffering from painful burns to wait and deal with it until after saving the lives of paid killers. Ginny said you were mad at McGonagall, but it’s not an unreasonable decision. Not that I know from experience, but it seems to me that if you’re a leader, you have to think about your people first.”

“I know,” said Harry heavily. “And I wouldn’t be thrilled to look at Susan and say, ‘You had to wait in pain so I could save these other people.’ It’s just that when that happened, there were about thirty or forty of those people on the

ground, bleeding from bullet wounds. I guess I think more about what's right in front of me."

Justin nodded. "I'm not saying I think you're wrong, Harry. I'm not sure there is a right or wrong answer. Just that maybe you shouldn't have been so mad at her. Of course, I thought Ron's idea wasn't a bad one either, about jumping out with the Repulsion Charm. What could be more just than for them to get hit with their own bullets? I didn't exactly cry for Goyle last year, and I wouldn't for them, either."

"I understand. It's just a choice, a judgment we make," said Harry, echoing Dumbledore.

"Funny how you and Hermione are on the one side of that question, and the rest of you—I think—are on the other."

"I think Neville's with Harry and Hermione on that," put in Ginny. "I think he'd make the same choice they would. But you know, Justin, even though Ron, Pansy, and I wouldn't agree with Harry about that... if there was some battle, and Harry decided to save the lives of some Death Eaters before helping us get helped with our moderate injuries, we wouldn't hold it against him." She gave Harry a serious look before continuing. "We would know that it would pain him to make us wait, but he has to do what he thinks is the right thing. He's certainly earned that."

"I wouldn't argue with that," agreed Justin. Humorously, he added, "And I try not to argue with people who can turn tanks upside down. By the way, isn't there someone inside that tank?"

Harry knew what Justin was driving at, but pretended he didn't. "I assume so."

"And he's still there, right?"

"I assume so." To Justin's nonverbal prompt, he continued, "I think we're seeing the limits of how noble I am. Right after it happened, I was way too busy to think about it, and now... I feel like, to hell with him, he can wait until morning. I'll let him out when the Muggle military people get here, they can take him. He's not

going to die, spending a night in an upside-down tank. He almost killed Ron, not to mention Snape.”

Justin laughed. “She told me about that, how you threatened him. I couldn’t believe it. Getting back at him for all those years of him being a bastard to you?”

Harry smiled, wishing he could tell Justin the truth. “Saving someone’s life doesn’t seem to be a good way to get back at them, does it? He was endangering us, not to mention himself, and I was mad at him. I did what I did to make sure he got out fast. I really would have done it, would have Apparated him to St. Mungo’s.”

“Ginny said that, too, that it was really clear that you were serious. Which only makes it funnier.”

“Always happy to amuse my friends. Usually I do it by being made fun of, but this is fine, too.” Justin and Ginny chuckled as they continued walking.

Upon returning to the castle a half an hour later, Harry and Ginny headed for McGonagall’s quarters. Harry had pulled out his Hogwarts map before realizing it wouldn’t work. “Guess we have to find her the old-fashioned way, by looking,” joked Ginny. Fortunately for them, it turned out that she was in fact in her quarters.

Harry knocked. There was a pause, then a frustrated noise. “Just a moment,” they heard McGonagall say from inside. A few seconds later, she opened the door. “Harry, Ginny, come in,” she said politely, but Harry could tell that she was under stress.

Still, Harry couldn’t resist teasing her a little. “You tried to open the door with your wand, didn’t you.”

She gave him a reproving look that told him he was right. “It is easy for you to make jokes, your magic still works. I assume that that is not what you came to say.”

“No,” he said, turning serious. “First, I wanted to apologize for how I reacted when you had me—”

“The evacuation, yes,” she interrupted him. “I had a feeling that was why you came. Have a seat, both of you.” They sat on her sofa, as she took a chair.

Her expression seemed weary but compassionate. “This is one of those times, Harry, when Albus would have said, ‘he is only seventeen,’ and he would be right to say it. Decisions must be made in these situations that may cost lives, and you had to carry out instructions that you did not agree with, perhaps even felt were immoral. It was a highly stressful situation. You may have displayed your displeasure, but at least you did not argue with me.”

“Maybe partly because the more time I took doing that, the longer I had to wait to get people out,” he admitted. “But I was just talking about this with Justin, and I do see the reason you did that. I guess I just have to get used to the fact that I’m not going to agree with everything you decide.”

“Yes, Harry, but there is one other aspect of this which you may want to be aware of. Albus had told me that on a few occasions, such as the question of whether to endorse the ARA, you felt as though if you made a choice that differed from his, you must have made the wrong one. It was not that you had no faith in your own judgment, but that you had such great faith in his, in him as a person in general. Believe me, there have been times when I felt like that.

“Now he is gone, and I am in his position. You are a year older, and more experienced; you have had to make many difficult judgments, and you are becoming more comfortable doing so. In addition, you will not have the same automatic faith in my judgments as you did in his. This is not a criticism,” she said quickly, forestalling the objection she saw coming, “simply a statement of fact. I would not wish you to have automatic faith in my judgments, but rather to feel free to make your own. I mention it simply because you must get used to dealing with me rather than him, and it may be an adjustment for you. I know perfectly well that in this situation, he would have made the same choice that you and Hermione would have had me make. But I must make my own judgments, not ones based on what he would have done. It did not tend to happen with Albus, but it may with me, that

you must follow an order that your instincts and values tell you is wrong. I am confident that you will adapt to it. You did well in this situation, considering the circumstances.”

Harry wasn't sure that he had. “Thank you, Professor, I appreciate your saying that. But you know I have a lot of respect for you, and whatever you decide. I guess it's that there wasn't much time to think in that situation.”

“Not to mention that you had been extremely busy, at the center of a high-stress situation, since the fire broke out,” she pointed out. “You have done extraordinarily well this evening, Harry; your fast reactions saved many lives.” To Harry's surprise, she laughed softly. “Including Professor Snape's.”

Harry and Ginny chuckled. “He told you,” said Harry.

“Yes, but I believe some students were watching from a distance, and saw and heard what happened; I have overheard the account being given in the halls. I would have preferred that he keep a better distance. He also should not have argued with you; you were the commander on the scene, as it were, and he was more or less a spectator, albeit an authorized one.

“I have a suggestion for you, Harry, but first I want to know if you have any questions, anything else you wished to discuss.”

“I just wondered what would happen tomorrow,” he asked. “No classes, I assume?”

“No, certainly not,” she confirmed, “not until the security situation is settled, and the first years Sorted, both of which I expect to happen tomorrow. Hogsmeade is, I believe, not totally magic-deprived; we will do it in the open air if we have to.

“Which brings me to what I wanted to mention. The first years cannot sleep in the dormitories, of course, as they do not yet know to which they belong. Well, two do, but I do not wish to separate them from the rest. They will sleep in the Great Hall tonight. It would be preferable for them not to sleep at the site of so recent a destructive fire, but there is simply no other place for them. I visited with



them a half hour ago, and they are somewhat anxious, which is understandable. They are also quite curious about you, which is also understandable. I thought it might be helpful to them if you were to stop by and talk to them for a while. Your presence would be reassuring to them; for many, this may be the first time in their lives that they have been totally unable to do any magic. It may be good for them to know that there is someone around who can.”

Harry was reluctant, but could see that it made sense. “You really should, Harry,” said Ginny softly, obviously recognizing the possible sensitivity of the topic for Harry. “Think about how you would have felt if this had happened at the beginning of your first year. It wouldn’t have bothered you that you couldn’t do magic, of course, but the fire would be terrifying enough, and hearing about dozens of armed attackers... you’d have been thinking that the Dursleys were a better bet than this. Think about how they must be feeling.”

He nodded. “You’re right, of course. I’d have been scared to death, wondering what kind of horror chamber I’d gotten myself into. Okay, I’ll go talk to them, stay with them for a while. Now I feel kind of bad, I’ve been so busy that I hadn’t thought about what it was like for them.”

“Thank you, Harry,” said McGonagall. “Ginny, I wonder if you would be willing to sleep here tonight. On the sofa, or Harry can conjure you a comfortable bed. I need to be able to contact him at a moment’s notice, and you are the only way to do that right now.”

Ginny smiled. “Little did I know that having the Joining of Hands done would make me a ‘conduit of communication,’ as Professor Snape put it. But no, I don’t mind at all. The sofa looks fine, but I’m just curious, Harry, how are you at beds?”

“I’ll try to come as close as I can to the ones Albus did for Hermione and I that night,” he said. Focusing on how that bed had looked and felt, including blankets and pillows, then moving aside McGonagall’s coffee table, he waved his

wand, and a bed appeared. Giving Harry an impressed look, she climbed into it. “Wow, very nice. You do good work.”

“I learned from the best,” he replied. To McGonagall, he asked, “Oh, what about the others? How long will Ron and Pansy be patrolling Hogsmeade?”

“I have asked them to continue until one o’clock. I have also asked Professor Snape to prepare a Wakefulness Potion for Neville and Hermione; they will patrol Hogsmeade until seven a.m., at which time either the Muggles will arrive, or you and Ginny will take over until they do.”

“Okay, I understand. I’ll give Ginny a call on her hand if anything happens.” Harry started to leave, then looked back at Ginny, lying on her side in the bed he’d conjured. “Good night,” he said.

Before Ginny could respond, McGonagall stood. “I am going into the bedroom; you may say goodnight privately.” Harry couldn’t tell by her tone whether she intended any humor or not. After she closed the bedroom door behind her, Harry bent over and gave her a long kiss. “I love you,” he said.

“I love you too, and I’m proud of you,” she replied. Harry felt very good as he left McGonagall’s quarters.

Harry walked into the Great Hall, and saw immediately that half of the tables, presumably the ones that had sustained the most fire damage, had been moved to one end of the room, pushed against the wall so that half of the room was open space. Most of the students were sitting at what would normally be the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables. Some were talking; some seemed adrift, not knowing what to do.

Harry walked up to the space between the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables. He saw some students’ eyes go wide on seeing him. “Hi. I’m Harry Potter.” Now everyone stopped talking, all eyes on him. “I’m a seventh-year student, but I’m also a teacher. I’ll be teaching you Defense Against the Dark Arts. It’s an important

subject.” He deliberately paused, looking around, and added, “Which I guess you can kind of tell.” Some students giggled nervously.

“Here, let me do something,” he said as he headed past the tables to the open part of the Hall. “It’s hard to talk at these tables, so I want to make a carpet, we can all just sit down.” He conjured a large, thick red carpet, ten yards long and ten yards wide. As the carpet appeared, the students oohed and ahed. Harry sat down on the carpet, saying, “Anyone who wants to talk a bit, please, come over here and sit down. It’s probably more comfortable than the tables.” Students hurried over, and soon all forty were sitting in front of him, most looking eager.

Be yourself, he told himself. Think about how they must feel. “One thing I want to say is that what happened today doesn’t usually happen.” He heard more nervous giggling. “I mean, you’re probably thinking, fires? Attacks? What kind of a place is this? But usually it’s quiet and peaceful, just with classes and people doing magic and studying and playing outside. It’s a nice place, I look forward to coming here every year. You just had bad luck, that this happened on your first day here. But we’re doing our best to get things back to normal.”

A black-haired girl raised her hand. “Professor?”

“Yes, what’s your name?”

“Sandra Branford, sir. Is it true that a plant caused all this?”

“Yes, Sandra. The Death Eaters—which, you may know, are Voldemort’s assistants—they planted this plant all over Hogwarts. The plants grew, and if there are a lot of them, they cause magic not to work. That’s what happened, and it just happened at a really bad time. But we’ll get it fixed.”

“How?” she asked. He was surprised and pleased to see that his mention of Voldemort’s name had caused only the mildest of reactions.

“Phoenixes will help us,” he said as Fawkes burst into view, prompting louder oohs and ahhs than his conjuring the carpet had. “This is Fawkes, he and some other phoenixes will help.”

“Is he yours?” asked a brown-haired boy sitting at the front.

“I’m sorry, but when you ask a question, please say your name, I’d like to get to know all of you. What’s your name?”

“Dennis Forest, sir.”

“Ah. I have a friend named Dennis, he’s on the Quidditch team with me. About Fawkes, I wouldn’t say he’s ‘mine’ because phoenixes don’t belong to people. They can disappear and appear anywhere, so you can’t capture them. They choose the people they want to spend time with.” Smiling, he added, “So, in a way, I’m kind of his.” Many students laughed. “Seriously, the people that phoenixes choose are called ‘companions,’ and once a phoenix chooses you, he or she stays with you for the rest of your life. I was really, really happy that a phoenix chose me. Fawkes, can you say hello to the first years?”

Fawkes sang, and half the students’ mouths dropped open in amazement; he stopped after a half a minute, and the students applauded. Harry smiled at their enthusiasm. A blond girl raised her hand and said, “Sir, can—sorry, sir, my name is Darlene Tifton. Sir, could he say hello again?”

Harry and most of the students laughed. “Well, Darlene, he can’t do it all the time, because—” He was interrupted by Fawkes singing again, prompting a little more laughter. Harry stayed quiet as this song lasted almost a minute. After Fawkes stopped, Harry heard awed exclamations, students whispering ‘wow!’ and ‘cool!’ I would have thought that was pretty cool when I first got to Hogwarts, thought Harry. Of course, it still is, I’m just used to it.

“Thank you, Fawkes,” said Harry after Fawkes stopped. “Anyway, the plant is one phoenixes really like, so Fawkes has talked to other phoenixes. Some of them are already here, and more will be coming. They’ll be around until we get our magic back, so that’ll be nice.”

Another student raised his hand. “I’m Timothy Zeller, sir. You said that he talked to other phoenixes? Can he talk to us?”

Harry smiled. “Sorry, bad choice of words on my part. When I said ‘talk,’ I meant ‘communicate.’ Phoenixes communicate without words, by sending images

and feelings. They can communicate with each other easily; they can communicate with people, but only the one they've chosen. Fawkes knows how I'm feeling, and I can know how he's feeling."

"How is he feeling, sir?" asked Timothy.

"Good question, just a minute," said Harry. He closed his eyes and cleared his mind, and soon had an answer. "He's kind of... excited right now, this is an interesting time for him. He's happy that he was able to tell the other phoenixes about a place where there's so much food, and he's also happy that there'll be a lot of phoenixes around here for a while. Usually if he's with me he can't be with other phoenixes, but right now, he can do both. So, he likes it. But he also feels a little stressed, because today was a stressful day for me, and that affects him. If I feel something, he feels it too, especially if he's close to me. That's why phoenixes are very careful about who they choose; they don't want to be around someone who feels bad a lot."

Darlene raised her hand. "Did he choose you because you use the energy of love?"

"Another good question. By the way, everyone knows what that is, right? It's a new kind of magical energy I found last year, and it lets me do stuff most wizards can't do. It's also what's letting me do magic now, even though the plants are around."

A blond boy raised his hand. "My name is Evan Snowdon, sir. Why don't the plants affect it?"

"I don't know, Evan. This energy I use, and my friends now use, it's very new. We don't know a lot about it. I learn things from experience. But to answer your question, Darlene... I'm not sure you can say there's any one reason he chose me. But I have a feeling that had something to do with it. If I asked him—not with words, just the way phoenixes communicate—the answer would just be that I seemed like a good person to choose; he wouldn't think in terms of specific reasons. But it

is true that phoenixes are attracted to love, and he joined me about the time I started trying to focus on love so much. So, probably.”

“I’m Lisa Wilson, sir. Why did you do that? Focus on love, I mean?”

“Because of Voldemort!” said Sandra, before Harry could answer.

Harry was surprised. “How do you know that, Sandra?”

Looking pleased that Harry had remembered her name, she said proudly, “My parents told me about you before I came here, and they know from reading about you in the newspaper, I think. They said to pay close attention to everything you said.”

Smiling, Harry replied, “Well, I’m glad to hear that, but really, you should pay close attention to what every teacher says.” A few students giggled, and Harry added, “I understand what they meant, though. But to answer Lisa’s question, yes, it was because of Voldemort, but a lot of you may not know how that works, so I should try to explain it. You can understand it a lot better if I do.”

He launched into the story of last year’s events and how they had pushed him to use love as a defense against Voldemort. Students continued asking questions, which he answered, and he was eventually asked about what had happened after the fires had been put out. He decided to show them rather than tell them, using the Pensieve, and include the short battle with the Aurors. He wanted them to be able to see that Voldemort could be defeated, or at least made unconscious, and so puncture the mystique of fear and invincibility that Voldemort desired. He Apparated to his office and back, explained how the Pensieve worked and how to use it, and showed them the memory in two groups of twenty, which he found could fit with some students sitting and some standing and leaning over. After viewing it, the obviously awed students asked more questions, which he was answering when Ron and Pansy walked into the Great Hall. Harry looked at his watch; the time was twelve forty-five. Wow, I didn’t realize how late it was, he thought.

Ron and Pansy walked up to them, Ron looking unusually jovial. He gestured to the Pensieve and gave an inquiring look. To the first years, Harry said, “Everyone, this is Ron Weasley and Pansy Parkinson, two good friends of mine.”

One of the first years said, “And they’re also boyfriend and girlfriend, aren’t they?”

A few students giggled, and Ron and Pansy smiled at each other. Ron said, “That’s just a rumor,” then, to Harry’s great surprise, leaned down and kissed Pansy on the cheek. Embarrassed, pleased, and startled, she glanced up at him as the students roared with laughter, Harry joining them.

“I’ve heard that rumor,” said Harry after he finished laughing. “What’s up? Are you finished patrolling?”

“Not quite, but almost,” explained Ron. “Just going to see McGonagall. Another thirty attackers, wanted to let her know.”

Harry leaped to his feet as the first years exchanged anxious looks. “Thirty? We’ve got to—”

“Relax, Harry, it’s over,” said Ron, still smiling. “D’you think I’d be in here making jokes and kissing Pansy if they were still running around? Give me a little credit. We took care of it.”

“He took care of it,” corrected Pansy. “I mostly just watched.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” said Ron modestly.

“Well, c’mon, tell us,” urged Harry. “Oh, wait, you’ve got to see McGonagall, you should do that first. Pansy, can you stay and tell us while he does that?”

“Since you have this here, I’ll just let you see it,” she suggested. She started moving the memory over as Ron headed to McGonagall’s quarters. Twenty of the eager first years crowded around as Harry stood and leaned over, and they all put their fingers in.

Ron and Pansy were walking down a side street in Hogsmeade, having just turned off the main street. “Looks clear, as usual,” said Ron. “Not much happening in Hogsmeade at twelve-thirty in the morning. Fortunately for us.”

“I hope it’ll be this quiet for Neville and Hermione,” said Pansy.

“Me, too,” agreed Ron. “I think it will be, they’ve probably done all they’re going to do. Check the roof again?”

“Sure,” she said, and suddenly they were on the roof of a three-story building, the tallest in Hogsmeade. “Looks like— oh, no! Look!”

She pointed to the Hogwarts gate, which was rapidly being approached by a group of what were unmistakably armed Muggles. “We just looked thirty seconds ago! How did that happen?” asked a disbelieving Ron.

“Never mind that, what are we going to do?” asked Pansy urgently. “They’re almost through the gate! They’re going to get through before we can do anything!”

“The hell they are,” said Ron, determined. “I’m going to Apparate us both, I want us to be in this exact position when we get there. Focus on keeping the Repulsion Charm going, I’ll stand behind you. Okay?”

Pansy nodded, and Ron stood behind her, took her shoulders, and suddenly they were five feet behind the last of the attackers. All were facing forward, but they heard the sounds caused by Ron and Pansy’s Apparation. As they turned, Ron reached around Pansy with his wand, and to Harry’s amazement, all of the attackers started to rise into the air. Wearing a look of intense concentration, Ron watched them go up, until they were what Harry estimated to be thirty feet in the air. A few of the flailing attackers fired their weapons, again machine guns, but they fired wildly, having no purchase on anything and unable to turn.

“All right, now cut that out, and listen!” shouted Ron as loudly as he could. “You’re three storeys up, and a fall’s going to be pretty painful. Now, drop your weapons, or I’ll drop you!”



Machine guns started to fall from the hands of the likely terrified attackers. After ten seconds, Ron shouted, “Not bad, but that wasn’t everyone. I still see at least five of you with your guns. Now—”

One of the attackers started firing, and all started falling. There were cries of alarm as they fell, but they stopped falling about three feet off the ground, and started rising again. What Harry could see of their faces showed quite a bit of fear.

“Okay, that was a warning,” shouted Ron. “Believe me, it’s the only one you’ll get. Now, the rest of you, drop them!”

Amid cries from the air of ‘do it!’ and ‘whoever it is, drop the damn thing!’, more machine guns fell. “Is that all of them?” Ron asked Pansy urgently, still concentrating.

“I think so... no, one still has his.”

“What’s wrong with these people?” wondered Ron, amazed. “I don’t want to drop all of them just to teach one a lesson, and he can’t hurt us anyway... still... can you whisk it away from this distance?”

“I think so,” she replied. “I’ll have to drop the Repulsion Charm to do it, of course, but it should be all right.”

“Okay. Get behind me, then do it.”

Pansy laughed. “I love you too, Ron. No way.” She raised her wand and flicked it, and the last machine gun went flying away.

“Good, thanks,” said Ron, still focusing hard. “Oh, better yet, can you throw him into the lake? I have an idea.”

“I guess I can,” said Pansy, her tone suggesting that she didn’t understand why Ron wanted her to do it, but not wanting to argue. “I think I need to be closer, though.” She ran forward, then the one who hadn’t dropped his weapon started to move sideways fast; he yelled in alarm as he went flying into the far side of the lake. Harry wondered why she’d made sure he was that far away.

“If the giant squid in the lake doesn’t eat him, he should be all right,” announced Ron to the others still hovering in midair. Harry chuckled, now

understanding why Ron had asked Pansy to throw him into the lake: the giant squid wasn't dangerous, but the mercenaries didn't know that. As Pansy walked back to him, he added, "Now, when I let you down, if anyone moves, that's what happens to them. Here we go."

He set the mercenaries down, saying, "When you hit the ground, lie down." All did, and Ron and Pansy started wrapping them in ropes. The memory ended, and Harry exited the Pensieve. Pansy put the memory back as Harry watched the first years who had seen it exchange very impressed looks.

"You can show the other ones if they want to see it," said Pansy to Harry on finishing, "but McGonagall may be out any second, and—"

"I understand, I'll show them my memory of it," said Harry. "That was really good, you did it without anyone getting hurt. What about the one in the lake?"

"Oh, we fished him out after we finished wrapping the others," said Pansy offhandedly. "I think the squid was playing with him."

Harry laughed. "Wouldn't surprise me."

McGonagall entered the Hall, followed by Ron. They walked up to Harry and Pansy, the first years watching avidly. "Miss Parkinson," said McGonagall, "if you will come with us, we will collect Miss Granger and Mr. Longbottom, and you can help get rid of these thirty; then you and Mr. Weasley will be finished for the night."

"I'd be happy to—" started Harry, but was cut off by McGonagall.

"The others can handle it," replied McGonagall. "I would say you have already done enough for the night." Gesturing to the first years, she asked, "And why are they not asleep?"

"No one's mentioned anything about being tired," answered Harry with a straight face. A few first years giggled.

"Why, Professor, your sense of humor is coming along quite nicely," said McGonagall sarcastically. "Well, it is nearly one o'clock, and everyone in this room

will be roused at no later than seven-thirty, so I suggest you encourage them along in their tiredness. Mr. Weasley, Miss Parkinson..." She walked away briskly, and Ron and Pansy both gave a little shrug to Harry and the first years before following her.

Harry turned to the first years. "Unfortunately, she is right about it being late. I'll put the memory back in so the rest of you can see it, and then we should start thinking about going to sleep." A few started protesting, saying they weren't tired, which made Harry smile. "I know how you feel," he said. "But things at Hogwarts run on a schedule, and sometimes you have to try to sleep even if you're not that tired. But you must be a little tired; I can't believe your parents let you stay up this late every night." He put the memory into the Pensieve, and as the first years watched it, he started conjuring sleeping bags and pillows. After they finished, he let them stay up for another ten minutes so they could talk about what they'd seen and ask him questions. Finally, he told them it was time for bed, and had them get into their sleeping bags.

"Will you be sleeping here too, Professor?" asked a girl, obviously hopefully. A quick glance around the room told Harry that it was a popular idea. Guess I can't blame them, he thought. Considering the latest attack, they're probably wondering, what if something gets by Hermione and Neville.

"Yes, I will," he replied. "It's been a while since I've slept in a sleeping bag." He conjured one for himself, and climbed inside. Fawkes, who had left in the middle of Harry's talk with them, returned, and again Harry wondered whether this had been his idea or Fawkes's. "I know this has been a hard day for everyone, and it might be a bit hard to sleep. So, Fawkes is going to be nice, and help us out."

To Harry's great surprise, five more phoenixes appeared in the next few seconds, forming a rough circle around Harry and the first years. Harry was amazed as Fawkes nonverbally confirmed what Harry had assumed. "Believe me, you're going to have no trouble sleeping," announced Harry. "What you're about to hear is extremely rare for anyone to hear. Good night, everyone."

He heard many voices saying, “Good night, Professor,” then the six phoenixes started singing. The first years made a few awed and amazed noises, then became quiet, listening to the phoenixes. Harry lay back, started his Occlumency exercises while at the same time enjoying the song, and was asleep in ten minutes.

## CHAPTER 11

# MUGGLES AT HOGWARTS

Harry awoke to see Ginny's amused face looking down at him. "Sorry, but they need the room for breakfast," she said. Whispering now, she added, "It was really nice of you to sleep here. I've talked to a few of them, and I can tell it made them feel better."

He nodded, not wanting to whisper or answer out loud. Sitting up, he saw most of the first years sitting near their sleeping bags, talking; a few were watching him talk to Ginny. "Well, I probably slept enough anyway. I assume nothing happened during the night. Are Neville and Hermione tired?"

"They say they're not," said Ginny, as Harry stood and started Vanishing sleeping bags and pillows; he found that she had already taken care of most of them before he woke up. "Snape definitely knows his potions. I think Ron and Pansy aren't up yet, they're in guest quarters. McGonagall wanted them to be able to sleep in a little, considering how late they were up."

"That was nice of her. Well, I'd better shower, change, and get some breakfast. Kind of nice that I can do all that in my quarters now if I want to." He headed off and returned to the Hall in half an hour, feeling refreshed, and grateful that Hogwarts' plumbing did not rely on magic.

Entering the Hall again, he found that the tables had been restored to their normal positions. He had forgotten to Vanish the carpet, so he assumed Ginny must have done it. He found her, along with Neville and Hermione, at their normal spot at the table. He also found a tray in his spot. "It's not going to be piping hot, but it's better than nothing," said Ginny.

“I’ll take it,” said Harry, picking up a fork. “Hi, you two. I guess, I hope, you had a nice, boring night in Hogsmeade?”

“I don’t know about ‘nice,’ but definitely boring,” said Hermione in between bites of her breakfast. “I’m not complaining; we always have things to talk about. Especially last night, since so much happened. But we don’t know so much about what happened with you, so if you could fill us in…”

Harry spent the next ten minutes doing that, while trying to eat soon enough that his food didn’t get any colder. “Well, your night definitely wasn’t boring,” she commented. “As for us, even before our patrols, we weren’t doing anything exciting. After we finished Apparating the wounded mercenaries out, we had to do the wrapped ones as well, then as you know we were assigned to Flitwick and Sprout to go around doing stuff. Like, I went into the Ravenclaw common room to start their fire. It was really great, they have a little library right in their common room! A few long bookcases, filled with some of the most useful books. It even has three copies of ‘Hogwarts, A History.’ Anthony was teasing me, saying, ‘Now, don’t you wish the Hat had put you in Ravenclaw?’ Of course, I don’t, but I know what he meant.”

“Well, your trunk is practically a library,” said Harry; Hermione gave him a ‘very funny’ look. “Sorry, Ron’s not here, so somebody had to say it.”

Hermione chuckled. “Yes, I was just thinking, that’s something Ron would say.”

“He’ll be pleased I stepped in for him,” joked Harry. “But why did you have to go in? Couldn’t they have just used matches?”

“I don’t think there are any matches at Hogwarts,” she pointed out. “A lot of things that you and I would take for granted because we grew up with Muggles just aren’t common in the magical world, because they aren’t necessary. It’s like, you don’t think about getting water from a well, because we have faucets. But if the faucets stopped working, you might have to think about a well. Anyway, just a lot of stuff like that. I had to conjure big blocks of ice so the stuff in the kitchens

wouldn't go bad. There's lots of food, the elves just can't cook it now. Especially lots of meat, which even if it's kept refrigerated is going to go bad by the time we get magic back. I was thinking, we should have a big cookout on the grounds. Do you think you can conjure up fifty barbecue grills, Harry?"

"If I can do one, I can do fifty," he said, though he knew she was joking. "I'd have to look at one closely, I think. I've never tried to conjure anything made of metal before, but I guess it shouldn't be any different. Oh, speaking of metal, I need to go get that guy out of the tank."

"It's okay, we got him out last night," said Neville. "McGonagall had us do it after we'd finished Apparating out the thirty that Ron and Pansy got."

"Have any trouble?" asked Harry.

Ginny smiled at Harry. "He wants to know if he's the only one that can lift a tank."

"I would, if it were me," said Neville. "It was pretty impressive."

"The answer, Harry, is no, but that was with all of us," explained Hermione. "It was pretty funny, actually. McGonagall said we should get him out of there, so we walked over. Pansy yelled, 'Are you still in there?' We heard this voice yelling, 'Let me out of this damn thing!' Pansy said, 'I don't know, you almost killed my boyfriend. You should say "please."' The rest of us laughed, and McGonagall gave Pansy one of her best disapproving looks. The man yelled, 'Please let me out of this damn thing!' Pansy really wanted to say something else, but she didn't because of McGonagall.

"So, Ron said, 'I'll have a go. If I can lift thirty people...' He tried, and nothing happened. Then he said, '...it doesn't mean I can lift a tank, apparently. Why don't you give it a try, Neville?' Neville tried, and he made it wobble a bit, but that was it. Ron said, 'Wow, I knew Harry was strong, but this is really amazing.' We were all agreeing, and finally McGonagall said, 'Yes, let us all stipulate to the fact Harry's strength is most impressive. Now, I would like to get some sleep tonight, so if you would lift it together and get on with it...'" Harry and Ginny started

laughing; Hermione wasn't imitating McGonagall's tone, but Harry could easily imagine it. "So we did, and McGonagall told him that he'd better come out hands first and with nothing in them, or she'd have us drop it again. He did, and Neville wrapped him up while the rest of us put the tank down. We left it upside down so nobody would get the idea to jump into it and try to use it. Also, as a little monument to Harry's strength." She and the others smiled at Harry's predictable embarrassed expression.

"Well, I spent most of the night being McGonagall's shadow, and I think that's how I'm going to spend most of the next few days," said Ginny. "I'm not complaining, it was pretty interesting. But it's a real comment on how important she considers Harry that even though I'm one of only six people here who can do magic, I'm more important to her as a way to communicate with Harry than for any other reason."

"I think she also wants you with her so you can do magic she needs done," suggested Harry.

"You're cute when you're overly modest," she chided him, grinning. "No, it's because of you. It's what I would do if I were her. If there's another attack, she either wants to let you know immediately, or for you to let her know if you find out first. You're important to this situation, so she always wants to know where you are."

Harry was about to respond when Augustina and Hedrick walked up. "Hi, Professor," said Augustina.

"Hi there, what's up?" asked Harry.

"We've just been talking to the first years," said Augustina. "It was nice the way you talked to them last night. Not only did it help them, but now they're pretty popular, because they know lots of stuff the rest of us didn't, that you showed them in that thing. They saw you knock out Voldemort—that sounded great—and they saw Ron lift those people, so everybody wants to hear about it. It's a good way for them to get to know people."



“And Harry did it just for that reason, he knew that would happen,” teased Hermione. At Harry’s annoyed look, she said, “Well, it’s what Ron would say.”

Now he chuckled. “Yes, it is. No, I didn’t know that would happen, but I’m glad it did. It must be especially strange for them because they didn’t get to be Sorted, so they probably feel sort of... lost, maybe. Like they don’t know where they belong.”

“I’d probably feel that way, if I were them,” agreed Hedrick. “Anyway, we mainly came to tell you, if you didn’t know, that the Muggles just arrived. They seem to be setting things up, kind of between the lake and the gate.”

Harry nodded, impressed. “That’s the best place, since those are the two places we could be attacked. Thanks, Hedrick, I should go take a look. I hope they don’t scare the phoenixes. That reminds me, there should be a lot of them by now, right?”

“It looked like, over a hundred,” confirmed Augustina. “It’s really amazing.”

“Well, that’s something I have to go see,” said Harry. “How about the rest of you?”

“I’ll try to go look later,” said Ginny, “but McGonagall wanted me back as soon as I finished breakfast and showered, and I still have to do that. See you later.” She got up and left the Hall. Neville and Hermione were interested, so the three of them went out to the Quidditch pitch.

It was a bright, clear morning; warm, but not too warm. About thirty students were spread out around the area near the pitch, talking and watching the phoenixes. Harry walked up to Hannah, who looked positively enraptured. “Pretty nice, aren’t they?” he asked, with deliberate understatement.

She smiled brilliantly. “Oh, Harry, they’re so beautiful... and do you know how rare it is for humans to get to see this many at once? This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance, it’s incredible. Every minute I’m not in classes or eating, I’m going to be out here. I just want to watch them, see how they eat, if they interact with

each other... just everything about them. I'm curious, do you know what's going on with them? I mean, do you get any impressions, as a phoenix companion?"

He shook his head. "Any impressions I get are just from Fawkes. But I could ask him about the others, and he'd tell me if he could. I'll try asking how they feel about us watching them." He knew that Fawkes was among the many phoenixes they could see, but he didn't know which one. He relayed Fawkes's response to his silent question. "He says they don't mind. Some of them are bonded to humans, so they're used to them. Even the ones that aren't find comfort in numbers. They'd only get nervous if they were approached by someone with bad intentions, which they'd know right away. I got the impression that they're a little leery of the Muggle troops, but fortunately, they aren't near where any of the plants are."

"Are they afraid of the Muggles?" asked Neville. "Do they think they might hurt them?"

"Not exactly. It's more that they don't get a good impression from them. I'd guess you need a particular frame of mind to be in the military, and it's not one that phoenixes find attractive."

"I don't doubt it, it's not one I find attractive, either," said a familiar voice from behind them. Harry turned to see Hugo looking at the phoenixes. "They are lovely, aren't they?"

"Hi, Hugo. I'm always surprised when I see you in these situations, and then I realize I shouldn't be surprised. Of course, this is big news. Now that I think about it, I'm a little surprised you weren't here last night."

"Kingsley didn't want anybody here last night who wasn't already here, the security situation was too unsettled," explained Hugo. "Of course, I wanted to come. But I've just spent some time talking to some first years, so I'm up to speed now."

Harry laughed, because it was more or less true. "Don't need me at all then, do you?" he joked.

“No, I actually do want an interview, sometime today if it’s okay, whenever’s best for you. I know you’re busy, or at least, you may be soon, if not right this second.”

“I understand,” said Harry. “I should talk to Professor McGonagall, see if she has anything in mind for me right away. I just wanted to take a few minutes right now to enjoy the view.” He turned his head away from Hugo and back to the phoenixes.

“I know what you mean,” agreed Hugo, taking out a camera. “I don’t always bring this along, but in this story, the pictures are almost as important as the text. The phoenixes, the Muggles setting up shop over there, whatever damage to the Great Hall hasn’t been repaired yet, the overturned tank... say, any chance I can get a picture of you in front of the tank?”

Neville and Hermione laughed as Harry turned his head in mild annoyance. Hermione said, “Harry, I thought you liked to be teased, because it meant the person liked you.”

Harry couldn’t help but smile a little. “Seems like more and more people ‘like’ me all the time, in that case.”

“What can I say, Harry, there’s just something about you that makes people want to ‘like’ you,” joked Hugo. Turning solemn, he added, “Also, I already got some pictures of the students you Apparated out last night; I was able to go to St. Mungo’s. There are plenty of people, Harry, who are sure they wouldn’t be alive right now if it weren’t for you. And the others, of course,” he said, glancing at Neville and Hermione.

“No, it’s okay, it is mainly him,” said Neville. “He’s the one that comes up with new spells whenever he needs them. Even the four of us, us two with Ron and Ginny, barely managed to take care of the Gryffindor table and start on Hufflepuff before he had everything done.”

“Most of the wounded are Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws,” said Hugo. “I assume that’s because they were the inner tables, and harder to get to.”

“I guess it’s just natural to take care of where you are first, then do whatever’s easiest to reach,” agreed Harry. “I wish I could have gotten to them sooner.”

“Nobody blames you, Harry, believe me,” Hugo assured him. “You already did way more than you should have been able to.”

Harry reluctantly nodded, still looking at the phoenixes. “I suppose so. I hope I can get a chance to visit them today.”

“A lot will be coming back,” Hugo pointed out. “The people at St. Mungo’s told me that they think two-thirds will be back today, and even the more serious cases, later this week.”

“What?” asked Harry incredulously. “Some of those people had major burns, and that takes weeks to heal, and leaves all kinds of scarring. How can they be back so fast?”

“It takes weeks with Muggles, Harry,” explained Hermione. “Not with wizards. There are magical ways to treat burns, even serious ones, which are much better than anything Muggles can do. They’ll heal fast, and there won’t be any scars.”

More things about the wizarding world I didn’t know, he thought. “I’m really glad to hear that.”

He was about to make another comment when he heard McGonagall’s voice. “Harry, there you are. Would you come with me, please? There is someone I would like you to meet. Mr. Brantell, you may come along, provided you keep a certain distance.”

It must be whoever’s in charge of the Muggles, thought Harry. He glanced at Neville and Hermione apologetically. “It’s okay, we know that meeting people isn’t exactly your favorite thing to do,” said Hermione. “We’ll see you later.” Harry took a last look at the phoenixes, then reluctantly followed McGonagall.

She led him over to a small group of people about ten yards away from the Muggle vehicle and troops. Harry saw one person in black robes, one in deep

crimson robes, and to his surprise, a man in a Muggle business suit. He had assumed all the military people would be wearing uniforms.

As they got closer, Harry saw that the two wizards were Bright and Kingsley, but he still didn't recognize the Muggle, though he did look familiar somehow. The three turned to greet them. "Harry," said McGonagall, "this is Kenneth Barclay, the Prime Minister. Mr. Prime Minister, Professor Harry Potter."

Harry tried not to let his surprise show on his face. He found that his reaction had nothing to do with being impressed that he was meeting the Prime Minister, but surprise that the Prime Minister would bother to visit Hogwarts. Barclay extended his hand, which Harry shook. "I'm pleased to meet you, Professor," said Barclay politely, pausing slightly before the last word. "Sorry, I can't help but react with surprise at seeing a professor who is quite so young. Or are you perhaps older than you appear?"

"No, I'm seventeen," replied Harry, interested in the notion that people could use magic to make themselves look younger. "But sometimes I feel a lot older."

Barclay nodded. "Yes, I have been briefed on your situation, if not your exact age. It sounds as though you have been through quite a lot."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Harry. "I'm curious, sir, why are you here? I'm surprised that you'd be involved with something like our getting troops."

Barclay seemed both surprised and amused that Harry had asked the question; Harry suddenly got the impression that no one else had. "Yes, it is quite true that this situation does not necessitate my personal involvement, except insofar as actually approving the deployment. But I was briefed on the situation with magic when I became Prime Minister, and I confess to having had some curiosity about it since then. So, when this request was made yesterday, I thought I should come out here to see what the troops would be seeing. It seems to have been worthwhile already, if only to see those magnificent birds."

“Yes, they’re really nice,” Harry agreed, as he wondered what he was supposed to say to a Prime Minister. “Of course, because of the situation, you’re not going to see much magic around here right now.”

“Well, I did catch a glimpse of that tank outside the gates,” said Barclay, with what Harry thought might be amusement, but wasn’t sure. “An upside-down tank is not something one sees every day. I am told, by the way, that you did that because it was firing on you. Why did you not do something more destructive? Surely no one would have blamed you.”

“I don’t make it a priority to learn destructive spells,” said Harry, thinking it was an understatement, but not wanting to explain the energy of love to a Muggle. “I’d rather do defensive things, so—”

He cut himself off as he got a strong impression from Fawkes. He turned around and saw thirty phoenixes take flight suddenly, then a few more, as one of the Muggles approached the Quidditch pitch. Some flew to an area near Hagrid’s hut, some flew to a different location, and a few disappeared. To Bright, Kingsley, and McGonagall, he said, “Something just happened that really disturbed the phoenixes. Fawkes?”

Fawkes burst into view and settled onto Harry’s shoulder, as Barclay gave a start, then looked impressed. “I’m going to ask Fawkes what’s going on,” he said to McGonagall, “can you give me a minute? I think it’s important.”

McGonagall nodded, and Harry tried to shut out her explanation to Barclay about how phoenixes bonded and communicated with humans as he focused on the impressions he was getting from Fawkes. After a minute, he spoke. “Fawkes says that it was that man’s approaching them that made them nervous. They don’t want to be within a certain range of him. Probably the other... military people as well,” he added, trying not to use the word ‘Muggle.’

“But your students are much closer to the birds than Captain Ingersoll got,” pointed out Barclay, clearly surprised. “Is there something they know about handling phoenixes that our men need to know?”

“Not ‘handling’ them, exactly,” said Harry. “Is he the commander of the troops?” Barclay nodded. “Could he join us? I need to explain something to him.”

“Of course,” said Barclay, “but I have no way to communicate with him at the moment, except shouting, and he is a bit too far away for that.”

“Let me see if I can do it,” said Harry. He took out his wand, and a medium-sized, shaggy silver dog suddenly appeared. It barked, then ran off to find Ingersoll. As Barclay watched, eyes wide, Harry explained the purpose of the spell. Out of the corner of his eye, he could have sworn he saw Kingsley and McGonagall exchange a smile. The dog reached Ingersoll, jumping a little and pawing at him. Ingersoll tried to push the dog away, then Harry saw Hermione approach him and talk to him for a few seconds, pointing in their direction. She walked with him to Harry and the others.

With a glance, Harry thanked Hermione. “My apologies, Captain,” said Barclay to Ingersoll, “it appears that is how they summon people around here; Professor Potter had my authorization to attempt to get your attention.”

“Harry Potter,” said Harry, extending his hand.

“Captain Martin Ingersoll,” the man said, shaking Harry’s hand. “What is this about, Mr. Prime Minister?”

“The young professor has something important he needs us to understand, I believe, about those birds, the phoenixes,” explained Barclay. “Professor?”

Harry first made sure they understood how important the phoenixes were to the current situation, then gave some background on phoenixes. Finally, he said, “The phoenixes flew away because they could see that you don’t like them; they don’t know that you wouldn’t harm them, even by accident, in some situation. It’s very important that they not be disturbed; they’re the key to us getting our magic back and ending this situation.”

Ingersoll looked puzzled and annoyed. “What do you mean, I don’t like them? I have no particular opinion about them. What gave them that impression? All I did was walk out there, they flew away before I even got close.”

“Sorry, I chose the wrong word,” said Harry. “I didn’t mean ‘don’t like’ as ‘dislike,’ but as ‘absence of liking.’ See, phoenixes usually only are around wizards, and everyone knows about them; almost everyone likes them. Fawkes tells me that you view them the same as if they were, say, pigeons; if one got killed, too bad, but no big deal. Phoenixes are very sensitive, they can know things like that. They don’t want to be anywhere near someone who has that attitude.”

Ingersoll gave him an obviously skeptical stare. “If that’s true, then why is this one still around?” he asked, gesturing to Fawkes, still on Harry’s shoulder.

“I’m bonded to him, and he trusts me. He knows I wouldn’t let you do anything to harm him.”

Ingersoll chuckled for a second, then stopped himself. “Not that I plan to, but I don’t think you could stop me if I wanted to.”

Unable to help himself, Harry laughed, and he saw Kingsley stifle a chuckle. Ingersoll looked at him indignantly. “Harry...” warned McGonagall.

“Sorry,” he said to her, then stared at Ingersoll.

“Captain,” said Barclay, “I suppose you must have noticed that tank out there. I am told that this young man is the one who did that. I suspect he could protect this phoenix if he wanted to. In any case, I am requesting that you keep whatever distance from the phoenixes Professor Potter asks, unless necessary in actual combat. Will you do as I request?”

Ingersoll came to attention, even though Harry understood that Barclay was not technically his commanding officer. “Yes, sir!”

Harry sighed deeply. To Barclay, he said, “I’m sorry, sir, but he’s lying. He has no intention of making any special effort to stay away from them. And he doesn’t mind lying to you about that, since you’re not in a position to give him a direct order. He wanted to humor you, and be left alone to do his job.”

Ingersoll gaped at Harry, and Barclay was clearly surprised as well. “You can know that?” asked Barclay. Kingsley gave a brief explanation of Legilimency, after which Barclay turned to Ingersoll, now annoyed. “Captain, I am not your direct



superior, and was making a request, not giving an order. But I can send orders down through the chain of command which you will find most unpleasant once you get them. Now, I ask you again, will you and your men keep such distance from the phoenixes as Professor Potter requests?”

“Yes, sir!” repeated Ingersoll.

Barclay looked at Harry questioningly. “He’s telling the truth this time, sir,” reported Harry.

“Glad to hear it,” said Barclay sardonically. “Listen to me carefully, Captain. You are in command of this mission, but the reason we are here is that we want to cooperate with the magical community, and your presence is a part of that cooperation. You are here to see that the area remains secure, and to extend goodwill to these people, and to their phoenixes if they ask us to. If you don’t feel able to do both, I will withdraw your squad and send another one, with no prejudice to your career. Would you like to be relieved of this assignment?”

“No, sir!” said Ingersoll, staring straight ahead.

“Very well, then. Please feel free to get on with your duties.” Ingersoll saluted, then moved off to join the other troops. Turning to face the wizards, Barclay said, “I’m sorry about that. Our military officers aren’t used to having to consider such things as whether birds will be disturbed by their activities.”

“Very understandable,” said Bright. “We do not take offense.”

“I’m sorry I had to do that, sir,” said Harry to Barclay. “Normally I wouldn’t, it’s just that it’s extremely important that the phoenixes be left alone. I don’t blame him for being annoyed, he didn’t even do anything. This must all be pretty strange for them.”

“No doubt,” agreed Barclay. “Well, Professor McGonagall, you mentioned something about a tour of the castle, which sounded very interesting indeed. Will you be coming along, Professor Potter?”

“Actually,” said Harry, looking at McGonagall, “I’d really like to visit the people at St. Mungo’s, I was hoping—”

“You can do more than that, Professor; you can take some of them back,” she said. “Madam Pomfrey will let you know which are ready to come back. Miss Granger and Mr. Longbottom may assist you if they feel up to it.”

“Professor Snape told us that we’d probably be awake through this evening,” said Hermione, “so yes, I’d like to, and I’m sure Neville will too.”

“I’m going to stay behind for a moment, discuss a few security issues with Harry,” said Kingsley to McGonagall. She seemed to regard him suspiciously, then nodded, and headed off to the castle with Bright and Barclay in tow.

“What security issues?” Harry asked as they walked away.

Kingsley waited a few seconds, then said quietly, “There aren’t any, really. That was my way of not being dragged along for the tour. You’re not the only one who’d rather not spend time with politicians if he can help it.”

“I’ve been training with you for a long time, but I see there are still things I can learn from you,” said Harry humorously.

“I certainly hope so,” responded Kingsley. “Well, I’m getting back to work, there really are things to do.”

“How are you getting back?” wondered Harry.

“We’ve defined the edge of the area in which magic has been neutralized, and it’s at about the outer parts of Hogsmeade, a half mile away. It’s a four-minute jog, or a ten-minute walk. But if you wanted to give me a lift, I wouldn’t say no.”

“No problem.” To Hermione, he said, “I’ll see you in a few minutes at St. Mungo’s, right?” She nodded, and he put his hands on Kingsley’s shoulders and Disapparated.

After lunch, the Great Hall was cleared of all students except for a few, and the two long teachers’ tables were moved together parallel to each other, creating one wider table. Sitting at the head of the table at one end were McGonagall and Kingsley. Along one side of the table sat Ingersoll, John, Sprout, Hagrid, Ron, and

Neville; along the other side were Snape, Harry, Dentus, Flitwick, Hermione, Pansy, and Ginny. At the other end were Ernie Macmillan and Padma Patil.

“Very well, we are all here, so we will get underway,” said McGonagall. “This meeting is to coordinate our information and activities, to make sure everyone who needs to know what is going on knows. All the teaching staff are present except for Professors Sinistra, Vector, Svengard, and Trelawney, whose specialties are not directly relevant to the situation. Professors Snape, Flitwick, and Dentus’s specialties are not directly relevant either; Professors Snape and Flitwick are here in their capacities as Heads of House, and Professor Dentus, as a former Ministry undersecretary, to provide political perspective if needed. All students except for Professor Potter are here as observers, though they may ask relevant questions if they wish.

“First, I would like us to address the most pressing question, that of Hogwarts’ defense. That is the responsibility of Captain Ingersoll, who leads the non-magical defense of Hogwarts, and Professor Potter, in charge of the magical defense. Captain Ingersoll, firstly, I thank you on behalf of Hogwarts, and the magical community in general for being here. Would you please brief everyone on your responsibilities and activities?”

Ingersoll looked a little nervous, which Harry supposed was understandable, considering that this had to be by far the strangest assignment he had ever had. While McGonagall had talked, he looked around the table more than others, especially looking at Hagrid uneasily more than once. As he noticed this, Harry had to stifle a smile.

“I am the leader of what we call a Special Forces squad,” began Ingersoll. “There are fifty of us, currently divided into five groups of ten. One is on the Hogwarts grounds; the other four are at various locations in Hogsmeade. Our function is primarily defensive; we are not to engage in combat unless we are directly threatened. If we make visual contact with enemy forces before they see us, the group leader is to call Professor Potter, who will... appear there immediately, I

am told. I will then be contacted, as will the other students who can use magic. It is hoped that Professor Potter will be able to use magic to resolve the situation without casualties, as Mr. Weasley and Miss Parkinson did last night.

“In addition, later today, an anti-aircraft battery manned by a team of four is scheduled to arrive. Mr. Shackbolt has explained the possible aerial threat to the castle, so this measure has been taken. This area is far from commercial flight lanes, so any aircraft flying towards Hogwarts and descending will be considered an enemy, and fired upon.”

“Thank you, Captain. Professor Potter, do you have anything to add relating to Hogwarts’ defense?”

“Just that if there’s an air attack at a time when there’s not a land attack, I could take Fawkes into the airplane to make sure that it’s an enemy. I’d hate for them to shoot down something that wasn’t. But is an air attack all that likely? I mean, you need a military plane to drop bombs, I thought.”

“It would not be beyond the Dark Lord’s capabilities to subvert the crews of, say, a Royal Air Force airplane for long enough to accomplish the task,” pointed out Snape. “We must also consider the possibility of a plane on a suicide run. The pilot could be put under the Imperius Curse to do such a thing. The Curse would lose effect once the plane reached a point within a half-mile of Hogwarts, but the pilot could be instructed to aim the plane and take his own life before reaching that point. I assume, however, that the anti-aircraft weapons would be effective against that.” Ingersoll nodded.

Kingsley spoke. “Harry, you can’t get onto the plane anyway, can you? You know you can’t Apparate from a stationary point onto a moving object.”

“Fawkes can do it,” responded Harry. “Let me make sure, anyway.” Fawkes appeared and perched on Harry’s shoulder. It took only a few seconds for Harry to get the answer. “Yes, he can do it, he’s sure of it. So, if I try to do that, I’ll have to tell the anti-aircraft people not to fire until I’ve finished.”

“There are optimum firing ranges, Professor, which can’t be ignored,” said Ingersoll sternly. “Before you do such a thing, you must inform the anti-aircraft battery operators, who will tell you how much time you have to do so, if any.” Harry nodded his acknowledgment, and gestured to McGonagall that he was finished.

“Now, continuing... Professor Smith is functioning as the liaison with the member of the Special Forces who is supplying us with various items of Muggle technology, which of course will function while Hogwarts’ magic does not. Professor Smith, would you fill us in on that, please?”

John glanced around the table before speaking. “First of all, we have been provided with several cell phones, which for those of you who don’t know, are currently the most common way for Muggles to speak to each other when not in person. Phones will be given to the six who can do magic, Professor McGonagall, Mr. Shacklebolt, and Mr. Macmillan, whose responsibility it will be to organize the movement of students if necessary. The number of each phone has been set up in all others on speed-dial; I’ll meet with those getting phones later to explain how that works.

“As we speak, I’m told, monitoring cameras are being set up at the Hogwarts gate, near the lake, and at a few locations in Hogsmeade. This is to get advance notice of an attack in the highly unlikely event of something getting by the Special Forces groups, and as a redundant safety measure. The images will be continuously displayed on the screens of two laptop computers with which we have been provided. Student volunteers will monitor these images twenty-four hours a day, in shifts of no more than two hours. Ernie and Padma, it’s your job to recruit the volunteers and schedule their shifts.” Harry was pleased to see that Ernie did not seem to be acting self-importantly, instead appearing grave and thoughtful. Now he gets to do Head Boy stuff, thought Harry. Harry hadn’t been told, but understood that Padma was there because Hermione was too busy with magic-related responsibilities to function as Head Girl, as was Pansy, so Padma was

temporarily Head Girl. Harry wondered if Hannah had been asked and declined, preferring to watch the phoenixes.

“The cell phones are for people to keep in contact, but not in urgent situations, as there can be a delay of five seconds or more in establishing contact when using them. The six who can do magic will also be given pagers, which will only go off if an enemy is sighted by a Special Forces group leader. So, for example, if Harry’s pager goes off, he’ll look at the pager, know from which group leader it came, and Apparate there immediately. Those given cell phones and pagers will wear them around their necks at all times, on straps.” McGonagall looked very unhappy at the idea of wearing Muggle technology around her neck, but said nothing.

“Thank you, Professor Smith,” said McGonagall. “Professors Sprout and Hagrid, if you would give us an update on the status of the lutas, and how soon we may hope to have magic back?”

Sprout and Hagrid exchanged uncertain looks. “It’s jus’ impossible ter know, or even guess,” said Hagrid, shaking his head. “We don’ know exactly how fas’ they’re eatin’, or how many they have ter eat before the magic comes back. Sorry, but there’s jus’ too much we don’ know. The best guess yer goin’ ter get is whatever Fawkes tells Harry.”

Sprout nodded in agreement. “We can’t even say for certain how many plants there are, though we have a good idea now, based on the places I’ve seen the phoenixes feeding. The lutas’ effect on magic is so rare that we have no idea how many it will take to be removed before magic is restored. By the way, I should say that I would like the phoenixes not to eat every last plant; it would be good to keep a few around.”

McGonagall looked unsympathetic. “I understand why, from the point of view of a Herbology professor, but I will not consider even having Professor Potter discuss such a thing with Fawkes until magic is restored. We will discuss it more

then. Now, are there any opinions as to whether there will be another attack, and if so, what type will it be?”

No one spoke for a few seconds. Then Harry said, “On the one hand, Voldemort isn’t the type to give up. I mean, he keeps trying to kill me, even though he keeps failing. I’d almost be surprised if he didn’t try something else, while our magic is still down. But on the other hand, it had to come as a huge shock to him that the six of us can still do magic. He had to have thought that the hard part would be getting the magic down, then it would be easy. He can’t have prepared much beyond what he did, so anything he does now is going to be something he didn’t have to plan too far in advance. And besides an air attack, it’s hard to see what that could be, since it obviously can’t be anything magical.”

Snape nodded. “I agree with Professor Potter’s analysis. The Dark Lord will know by now that Professor Potter and the others can use magic, so he almost certainly will not try to gather more mercenaries. An air attack is the likeliest attempt at this point. I do not think it likely that he will use bombs, however. From his point of view, the plan with the greatest chance of success is as many small planes as he can manage, loaded with explosives, making simultaneous suicide runs.”

“Why do you think he won’t use bombs?” asked Ingersoll, surprised.

“Too easy to get rid of,” responded Harry, just having realized it. “I can have Fawkes take me in the air and have us free fall along with the bomb, and Vanish it. They’d have to have more than twenty falling at once for us not to be able to do that.”

“I’d like to see that,” muttered Ingersoll.

“The Dark Lord will know that Professor Potter can do such a thing, so he will probably not try. I do not know whether he is aware that phoenixes can transport onto moving objects; if he is not, that could be an advantage,” concluded Snape.

“Does anyone have anything else to add, or ask?” asked McGonagall. After a short silence, she said, “Very well. I expect, of course, that everyone understands that everything that was just said is to be held in the strictest confidence, not to be repeated to a single person outside this room, even after the crisis is concluded.

“I will now be taking the first years to be Sorted; we will use a park on the outskirts of Hogsmeade, just outside the range of the lutas’ effect. All Heads of House will attend, as will all fifth-year prefects. Mr. Weasley and Miss Parkinson will attend as well, for security reasons. That will be all for now.”

Two hours later, the six took their usual seats in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, arranged in a circle in the center of the room. “So, what’s this one about, Harry?” asked Neville, the last to arrive, as he sat down.

Harry was wearing a small, abashed smile. “I told McGonagall that I needed to discuss battle tactics with you, but there isn’t that much to discuss. I think we all know what to do. The fact is, I just wanted us all to be able to talk for a few minutes, spend some time together. I mean, at this time yesterday, we were all on the Hogwarts Express, the rest of you wondering how long I could hold out without going to the bathroom.” A few of his friends chuckled at the recent memory.

“Seems like a long time ago,” agreed Ron. “So much has happened. How are you doing, Harry? This is kind of hardest for you, you’re the one in big demand.”

“I don’t know, okay, I guess. In some ways, I feel like I’m running on automatic pilot. There’s so much to do, to think about.” Hermione then had to explain the Muggle reference to the others. “By the way, there’s something I need to tell you about. Ginny knows, but I haven’t had a chance to tell the rest of you yet.” He went on to tell them about his new version of the Imperius Curse, and what he had done to Malfoy. He omitted mention of Snape’s involvement.



“I was wondering how you found out,” said Hermione. “That sounds pretty amazing. Could you do it to me?” Harry did; he had Hermione knock on the desk five times. Afterwards, her amazement was plain. “Oh, my God... Kingsley was right, people would pay for you to do that... Harry, you have to be careful with this.”

“I will, obviously,” he said, wondering why she felt it was necessary to caution him. “I don’t plan to run around making people do things all the time.”

“No, of course not, that’s not what I meant,” she clarified. “I mean, you shouldn’t do it to people who ask you to, for their own enjoyment. People could get addicted to this, it could feel like a drug. If they had enough of it, then they didn’t have it, they might get depressed. I don’t know, it’s just a guess. All I’m saying is, be careful, and only use it when it’s necessary, not for entertainment.”

“I hadn’t even thought of that,” he admitted. “I guess I wouldn’t, since I can’t have it done to me.” At the others’ insistence, he did do it once to each of them, and they reluctantly agreed with Hermione that it could be too tempting to have it done often.

“Anyway, it could obviously be useful in some situations,” pointed out Harry. “For example, if someone was flying an airplane at Hogwarts under the Imperius Curse, I could get aboard and do this to him, make him fly past Hogwarts and land at the nearest possible place. Or, if we were attacked by a group with an obvious leader, I could do it to him, make him order his men to retreat. That kind of thing.

“But the best thing about this, and it’s strange, because this was completely by accident... but this is something I can use against Voldemort. I can now do to him what Albus does to him.”

Ron looked puzzled. “How do you know? I mean, just because it had this effect on Malfoy, how can you be sure it will on Voldemort?”

“It will. It’ll have the same effect on all Death Eaters.” Harry hoped that Ron would ask no more questions, but his hope was in vain.

“But how can you know?” repeated Ron.

“I’m sorry, I can’t tell you.”

“Ah, another Ginny and Hermione thing...” Ron paused, obviously thinking, then put two and two together, as Harry feared he would. “You tried this on Snape? He let you??” He gaped, and Neville and Pansy also looked amazed.

“Look, I’m really sorry, but I just can’t talk about it. I wish I could.”

Ron shook his head. “Boy, if we ever get to hear about all this, it’s going to be really interesting. Okay, I know, you can’t talk about it. Well, anyway, I’m glad you can do that, if only so Albus doesn’t have to anymore. Are you going to let this be known publicly... oh, I guess so, since the first years saw it. You’ve been so busy, I heard about it before you got a chance to tell us about it.”

“That was Albus, not me; that happened before I knew I could do this. But yes, I’m going to make it public that I have something that can knock Voldemort out, not say exactly what it is,” explained Harry. “The public explanation will be that it’s for security reasons, which is kind of true, but the fact is that it’s related to the new Imperius-type spell, and I don’t want that to be public. It wouldn’t be considered illegal, since it’s not really the Imperius Curse, but I don’t want people looking at me nervously. I’m going to take my time to decide whether to make that public or not.”

“I can really understand that,” said Neville. “But why say anything at all?”

“I want people to know that I can do it, because I want them to know that there’s hope, that they can be optimistic,” said Harry. “I think it would be good for morale.”

“I think so too,” said Pansy. “It’s good for my morale.”

“It’s a good idea,” said Hermione seriously. “I was talking to a few of the Gryffindor first years after they got back from the Sorting. I’d say their morale is pretty good. After seeing what you showed them in the Pensieve, I think they think it’s just a matter of time before you defeat Voldemort. That’s the attitude we want them to have.”

“Oh, yeah, I missed the Sorting,” said Ginny, who had been left behind as a means of communication: since McGonagall had Harry with her, she wanted Ginny at Hogwarts. “How did it go?”

“Pretty unusual, to say the least,” said Ron. “When we got to the point where the magic worked again, the Hat suddenly said, ‘—fflepuff!’, since it had gotten cut off in the middle of the word the first time. McGonagall had to tell it what had happened, and then they got on with it.”

“As one of the few representatives from Slytherin there,” added Pansy, “it was hard not to notice that most of the ones that got Sorted into Gryffindor were, let’s say, unusually excited. And, a few that were put into other Houses looked kind of disappointed.”

“I don’t know, Slytherin seemed a little popular,” Ron teased her.

“I felt kind of bad about that,” said Harry. “I mean, I don’t think Gryffindor is better than any other House, they should be happy wherever they go.”

“They will be, they’ll realize that wherever they went is pretty good,” said Hermione. “But it’s understandable; this was a very unusual year. Still, in future years—yes, I know, if you stay—Gryffindor will continue to be pretty popular, just not quite the same as this year, when they all got a chance to spend time with you before they knew which House they were going into. It just won’t be like this.”

Embarrassed, Harry looked down and thought for a few seconds, then looked up to see his friends’ amused faces. Surprised at their silence, he asked, “Is there some reason why you’re all not massively teasing me? It just seems like so obvious a chance.”

“That’s just it, Harry, it’s too obvious,” said a grinning Ron. “The situation itself teases you. We don’t really need to add anything.”

“It would just be too much,” added Pansy.

Even when they don’t tease me, they manage to tease me, thought Harry. “I see. Well, if the situation is done teasing me...” He managed to change the topic,

and they talked for another twenty minutes before stopping so they could get on with their other duties.

Harry's next duty was to have an interview with Hugo, who already knew most of what had happened, but wanted Harry's versions for the article. "As long as there are no pictures of me," Harry joked. After they had covered the events of the past twenty-four hours, Hugo put down his notebook. "Can you tell me, Harry, not for publication, how you know it'll work on Voldemort just because it worked on Malfoy?"

"Sorry, Hugo, I can't. I just had to tell Ron the same thing a half hour ago."

"I understand, just thought I'd try. Kingsley wouldn't tell me either. I admit I have a few guesses, but I won't make you listen to them."

Harry nodded. "Thanks, Hugo, I appreciate that."

"No problem. Before we finish, I wanted to know if you'd like to do a little... tying up loose ends, so to speak, journalistically." Taking in Harry's blank expression, Hugo smiled. "Sorry, I should be more clear. A few things have happened since you were last interviewed for an article, and I should see if you want to give a reaction to them; of course, you don't have to.

"For example, that Skeeter article about your childhood. You weren't interviewed for that, which was a breach of journalistic ethics, and the Prophet is responsible for that. Skeeter should have offered you a chance to comment, and if you had said no, said in the article that you didn't comment for it. People would have understood the article differently if they'd known you didn't cooperate with it. So, I'll ask you a question, and you can answer it and say basically anything you want. It's your chance to respond if you want, set the record straight."

Harry looked at Hugo suspiciously, only half-kidding. "Did Molly put you up to this?"

Hugo blinked in surprise. "What does Molly have to do with this?"

Feeling a little silly, Harry explained. Chuckling, Hugo said, "It's sweet of her to want to do that, really. I can see why she feels that way. But as for me, I

wouldn't encourage her, because I know probably better than most people how hard it was for you with your aunt and uncle. Even the first time I interviewed you, when they came up, your whole mood changed, even though you were trying to be polite and not react. Then the topic went away, and you were back to normal. I've seen that reaction in enough people to know what it represents, and I knew it was pretty bad. So, no, I have no agenda in asking, except journalistic ethics."

Harry nodded, sighed, then made a decision. "All right, go ahead."

Hugo picked up his notebook. "Harry, as you know, there was an article in the Prophet last month about your childhood. My understanding is that you were not interviewed for the article, even though you were quoted in it. You should have been given a chance to be interviewed for the article, and the Prophet apologizes for that. Would you like to say anything to correct the record on that matter?"

"Yes, Hugo. I was unhappy with the article, because it gave an impression that I think wasn't accurate. If somebody read that article and thinks they understand what my childhood was like, well, they really don't. I would really have preferred that the article hadn't been written at all. I understand I'm a public person, and can be written about, but it was done in a way that I think wasn't fair."

"Are the quotes from you in the article accurate?"

"Yes, the quotes are accurate, but they were taken out of context from conversations, private conversations, which the reporter overheard because she was an unregistered Animagus. Again, they give an impression which isn't accurate."

"Much was made in the article of the idea that your aunt and uncle dislike wizards. What was your impression of that?"

"My aunt and uncle are Muggles, and just want to live a normal life, the same as most Muggles do. My mother, my aunt's sister, was killed by Voldemort; that's their main association with the wizarding world. It doesn't seem too surprising to me that they should want to keep their distance from it."

“As you know, that reporter was killed soon thereafter, by an assailant using Polyjuice Potion to take your form. Do you think that was an attempt to discredit you?”

“I imagine partly, and partly as a ruse to get her to open her door, which she probably wouldn’t have done if it had been a Death Eater standing there. But, yes, I assume that Death Eaters thought it was a good idea to do that. I was unhappy that they took my form, but of course what was much worse was her death, and that of everyone the Death Eaters kill. They have to be stopped, and we’re all trying very hard to do that.”

Hugo put down his notebook. “Thanks, Harry.”

Harry chuckled wryly. “I think that last sentence was the only thing in all that that wasn’t false or misleading. About my aunt and uncle, what I said was literally true, as I’m sure you know, but gave an impression more misleading than Skeeter’s article. Maybe there’s a future for me as an unethical journalist.”

Hugo laughed. “Better stick to fighting evil, Harry. It was nice of you, though. Your intentions were good.”

“That was for Molly, not Petunia,” said Harry, a little more vehemently than he meant to.

Hugo raised an eyebrow, but nodded. “I can understand that.”

“Anyway,” Harry went on, “I especially didn’t like lying in the sense of giving the impression that Death Eaters killed Skeeter, since as you know, I know now that’s not the case. But I knew you’d understand why I had to say that.” As he spoke, he saw Hugo’s eyes go very wide. “What?” asked Harry, puzzled. “You had to have known that I was lying.”

Hugo smiled a little. “Harry, remember, magic is out at Hogwarts. My abilities may be natural, but they’re based in magic. They aren’t working right now.”

Harry’s mouth opened in surprise, then he kicked himself mentally for not having thought of it; he was annoyed at himself for having given away a secret he

didn't have to, especially one having to do with Snape. He looked at Hugo unhappily. "Could've told me."

Hugo's first reaction was surprise, then his expression changed rapidly several times; Harry had a hard time understanding why. Finally Hugo stared at Harry, clearly annoyed. Now, Harry was surprised. "What?"

Hugo shook his head. "I'm upset at you, which is a kind of a compliment to you, in a way you may not understand." He paused for a few seconds, then continued, as Harry wondered what he had done. "This goes back to the last time I talked to you, in your room at the Burrow. I was telling you about people's reactions to my ability. One of the things I like about you is that normally, my ability doesn't bother you. You may comment or make jokes about it, but you don't care, which is fairly rare. So, I guess I have higher expectations of you.

"I make my ability public; I specifically mention it to people I'm going to interview as a matter of course. This means that practically everyone who knows me knows I have this ability. I could have hidden it, not told people, like most Legilimens do, but I just thought telling people was the right thing to do. I still think that; as a journalist, not telling people I can see through them isn't that different from Skeeter listening in on people as a beetle. I don't regret doing it. But as I said last time, it's hard for me personally, both romantically and in a day-to-day way. I don't mean to complain, and usually I don't. But what you said just really hit me the wrong way. My thought was, it's bad enough that I have to go around telling people I have this ability, and now he's saying I should have to tell them when I don't have it? It just seems like that would be a burden on top of a burden. I wasn't trying to deceive you, I just didn't happen to mention it. But even if I deliberately neglected to mention it, I can't imagine that there would be anything wrong with that."

Upset with himself, Harry shook his head. "Obviously, there wouldn't be. I just... felt stupid, I suppose, telling you something I didn't need to. Then it was more stupid to blame you. Anyway, I'm sorry." He chuckled ruefully. "This is exactly what Hermione means when she says I don't think very well sometimes. It

just never occurred to me how it might look to you, even though you told me what you did at the Burrow.”

Hugo shrugged. “Don’t worry about it. Almost no seventeen-year-old would’ve picked up on it, and many adults wouldn’t. And even without my abilities, I get the sense that the question of who killed Skeeter isn’t an easy one for you, so you must not have been happy to have to lie about it in your answer. You don’t have to answer this if you don’t want to, but... does Hermione know who killed Skeeter?”

Harry got the feeling that Hugo was concerned about Hermione. “Yes, but it didn’t matter so much by that time. What she went through had more to do with herself, as I’m sure you know.”

“Yes, I do. I asked because... you recall that I was there for a few minutes that night, when Skeeter was killed. Most of you were just stunned, surprised, and feeling bad that some little part of you was happy about it, but Hermione... she was in such emotional pain, I felt awful for her. It wasn’t in her face, but she was just in turmoil. She seemed okay today, though. Did she get through it all right?”

Harry nodded, pleased that Hugo was so concerned. “Yes, she did, but it wasn’t easy. Both she and Neville had really difficult summers, emotionally, but they helped each other, and got through it okay. I think they’re both better people for it... but it’s a hard way to become a better person.”

“You would know about that, wouldn’t you,” Hugo reminded him. “Well, I should go, there are a few first years I haven’t talked to. I’m still not sure I know what they think of you yet.”

Harry smiled, knowing that this was Hugo’s way of letting him know that everything was okay. “According to Ron, the situation itself teases me, so you don’t have to.”

“I suppose it does,” agreed Hugo. “See you later.”

\* \* \* \* \*



That evening, and the entire next day, passed uneventfully. Harry went back to sleeping in his dormitory, and there were no attacks. There were no classes on Tuesday; McGonagall wanted to resume them, but some students had crisis-related duties, such as watching the video monitors or helping transport the food that came in from the outside three times a day. The loss of magic would also be a problem. Some classes, such as History of Magic and Muggle Studies, required no use of magic, while others, such as Charms and Transfigurations, were almost not worth holding without it. McGonagall decided Tuesday evening to hold classes on Wednesday, but they would not be formal classes, but rather opportunities for students to ask general questions about the topic, and for teachers to say anything they wanted which wasn't a part of the normal curriculum. Even for classes like History of Magic, she felt, having normal classes wouldn't be fair to those students who were occupied elsewhere.

The phoenixes continued eating, and Ingersoll and his men kept the distance from them that Harry asked them to. To Sprout's surprise and pleasure, shortly after Monday's meeting, the phoenixes stopped eating the lutas near the greenhouse. When asked about it by McGonagall, Harry swore he hadn't talked about it to Fawkes, but reminded her that Fawkes got impressions and images from him as well. Fawkes had no doubt understood what Sprout wanted, and Harry knew he was pleased that some plants would remain. Sprout assured McGonagall that what remained would be nowhere near close enough to interfere with Hogwarts' magic again.

Soon after Harry went to sleep Tuesday night, at least by his reckoning, he was in the phoenix place. "Hi, Albus," he said happily. "I haven't seen you for a few days."

"Yes, you have needed your sleep," said Dumbledore, as they sat down on the grass. "Yet again, it has been a trying few days."

“It sure has,” agreed Harry. “But at least one thing happened that wouldn’t have without all this, that new spell, I don’t know what to call it. Maybe it should be called the Imperius Charm, since it isn’t a curse.”

“Since you invented it, if you called it that, I’m sure others would as well,” said Dumbledore humorously.

“You must be happy that you don’t have to do that thing with Voldemort anymore,” said Harry.

“I am pleased that you are now able to do it as well, but I may still be called upon to do it myself,” pointed out Dumbledore. “There could be circumstances requiring it. What pleases me most is that you can do it without suffering as I do.”

“That’s why I hope you don’t have to do it again,” said Harry. “I was—”

“Up, up,” said a voice gruffly, and Harry felt himself being yanked from his bed, as the image of the phoenix place disappeared, replaced by one of rapid movement as he found himself standing near his bed, off-balance and confused. He looked around and saw one of the Muggle soldiers holding him by the wrist, and two others with pistols pointed at Dean, Seamus, Ron, and Neville, who were all in their pajamas, as was Harry. Dean and Seamus were frightened, Ron looked angry, and Neville appeared to be thinking.

“What are you doing?” asked Harry indignantly, as the soldier patted him down, obviously looking for his wand, which was under his pillow. “What’s going on?”

“C’mon, out,” said the soldier. “We’re taking you out to the pitch. No talking, let’s go.”

What in the world is going on? thought Harry. Why are they taking us there? Why are they doing anything at all? Could they be under the Imperius Curse? No, of course not, no magic is working. Then, what? He couldn’t imagine what would cause Ingersoll and his men to do this, they had orders from their Prime Minister.

As they were led out of their dormitory, Harry found himself thinking less about what had happened and more about how to get away. He didn’t have his

wand, but there was Fawkes. But if he suddenly appeared, the soldiers might start shooting, either he or Fawkes, and he couldn't risk that.

They were led out the portrait hole. One of the three soldiers went first, followed by the five Gryffindors, then the other two soldiers. Harry and Ron were the first two out, and they looked at each other as they waited for the others to come out. Harry mouthed the word 'Fawkes' and glanced upwards; Ron gave him a tiny nod. They walked down the corridor, again with one soldier at the front, two at the rear. Harry communicated to Fawkes that he should appear just after Ron turned the corner, the idea being that the soldiers at the rear wouldn't see, and the one in front wouldn't turn around until it was too late.

The soldier turned the corner, then Harry, then Ron. Right on cue, Fawkes appeared above Harry and Ron. They reached up for the tail, and Fawkes took flight. As the lead soldier turned, Fawkes disappeared.

They were back in their dormitory. Harry and Ron ran to their beds, scrambling for their wands. Ron grabbed his, breathing a sigh of relief. "I feel naked without this thing, hadn't realized it until now. What do you think is going on?"

"I have no idea, but I know how to find out. We're going back, behind the soldiers at the back. Repulsion Charms on."

Ron grunted. "If you'd said 'Repulsion Charms off,' I'd have said, 'up yours, mate.' Damn right, they're on."

Harry nodded. "Just making sure." He didn't like the idea, but he knew that soldiers shouldn't be shooting at people they knew didn't pose a threat to them. Of course, he thought, they shouldn't be rounding people up in the middle of the night either. "Ready?" They grabbed Fawkes's tail, and were again in the corridor they'd turned off from a minute ago. Harry felt his hand tingle, but didn't have time to answer it. It continued to tingle, then she spoke. "Harry! Are you okay?" He looked at his hand as they ran and whispered, "I got away, can't talk now." As they neared the corner, she spoke again. "Thank goodness, Harry. They have us all out at—"

He held up his hand again. “Ginny, please stop talking. I have to concentrate.” The last look on her face that he saw before he put his hand down appeared hurt, but he couldn’t think about that at the moment.

They turned the corner, and saw the group fifteen feet ahead, soon to turn onto another corridor leading to a main corridor where there might be more people, which Harry didn’t want; he wanted to be sure these three soldiers talked to no one else, though he knew they might have radioed ahead about his and Ron’s escape. Harry and Ron ran ahead, trying to be as quiet as possible, which made it fortunate that they were in their stocking feet. Harry got to within ten feet of the rear soldiers, and used his new Imperius Charm. The soldiers stopped walking, and stared at the ceiling. The lead soldier was about to turn the corner; Harry ran past the rear soldiers and pointed his wand at the lead one. The soldier stopped walking and turned around, facing an astonished Dean and Seamus. Neville smiled at Ron and Harry. “I knew you’d be back, just didn’t think it’d be quite that soon.”

Harry nodded at Neville, then turned his attention to the lead soldier. Using his spell again, he asked, “What’s going on? Why are we being rounded up?”

“I don’t know, sir,” responded the soldier. “Captain Ingersoll’s orders. We’re to round up all the castle’s inhabitants and take them out to the pitch. We don’t know any more than that.”

“How many more of you will be there?”

“All fifty-four, sir.”

“Including the anti-aircraft operators?”

“Yes, sir.”

Damn, thought Harry, this means there’ll probably be an air attack. “Did you communicate to anyone that Ron and I got away?”

“Yes, sir. Captain Ingersoll said he’d send reinforcements to help search for you.”

Harry turned to the two rear soldiers. “You two, point your guns at us. You, radio Captain Ingersoll and tell him you recaptured us,” he said to the lead soldier,

who proceeded to do so. Harry hoped that Ingersoll would call back the reinforcements; he didn't know how many people he could put under the Charm at once. "Okay, you three continue marching us out there. I'll talk to Ingersoll when we get there."

"Yes, sir," said the soldier, and they resumed their previous formation. As they started forward again, Dean said, "Harry, what the—"

"Don't say anything," Neville interrupted him. "Harry's got it under control, they're doing what he says. Just pretend they have us, he's taking care of it."

They continued walking, turning the corner and heading towards the castle entrance. It was still dark, with the first signs of light on the horizon, so Harry figured the time to be roughly five o'clock. He remembered the sky looking the same way at this time almost exactly a year ago, when he had been out flying with Ron and Dumbledore. He kept his wand in his right hand, holding it by one end, up his sleeve so as to be as inconspicuous as possible.

As they exited the castle, Harry noticed that there were no phoenixes, at least none that he could see. He thought of asking Fawkes, but then realized the reason himself: the emotional atmosphere was too negative for the phoenixes to be around, what with three hundred people being held captive near where the phoenixes had been eating.

They approached the Quidditch pitch, and could see that almost all the castle's inhabitants were there; glancing behind him, he saw other soldiers leading out the Slytherin seventh year girls and the Hufflepuff seventh year boys. The rest of the soldiers were at the outer edges of the group of students, many of whom looked frightened and anxious.

McGonagall and the teachers were in a group near Ingersoll, looking angry, except Snape, whose demeanor was calm. The lead soldier walked up to Ingersoll. "Was there any trouble recapturing them?" asked Ingersoll.

"No, sir, no problems," replied the soldier. Harry moved his wand as far down into his hand as he could without it being seen, and with a small movement,

pointed it at Ingersoll. He mentally instructed Ingersoll to defuse the situation to the extent possible, imbuing him with the certainty that he had been given false orders, and that his primary duty was to keep the Hogwarts inhabitants safe. Harry knew he couldn't have Ingersoll do anything obvious, such as order his men to drop their weapons; it had to be something that Ingersoll might plausibly do.

Ingersoll had each of the four other squad leaders report to him, then ordered them to take their squads and resume their former positions in Hogsmeade, including the anti-aircraft units. They did so, clearly assuming that Ingersoll and his nine men could handle three hundred unarmed civilians. Ingersoll then ordered his men to a spot near him. From ten feet away, Harry started applying his Imperius Charm to all of them, then took a surprised McGonagall by the arm and walked up to Ingersoll.

"Everyone's taken care of, Captain," said Harry, seeing Snape and motioning him to come forward. "Why were we rounded up?"

"I received new orders from the Defense Minister himself, sir," replied Ingersoll. "We were to round up the castle residents, and take them out here. I was to call for further orders after that was completed."

"This Defense Minister was under the Imperius Curse, no doubt," put in Snape. "Professor, Headmistress, there will be an air attack any time now."

"I know," replied Harry. To Ingersoll, he asked, "How soon will your anti-aircraft people be ready to use them?"

"Another five minutes at least, sir, to reach them and get them ready," said Ingersoll. "I'll contact them, tell them it's imperative to get set up as soon as possible."

As Ingersoll did so, Harry exchanged glances with McGonagall and Snape, both of whom seemed to have worked out what Harry had done with Ingersoll. Harry saw Ginny, Hermione, and Pansy edge their way to the front. "Well, we'd just better hope that nothing happens in the next five minutes," said Harry. Just then, he heard shouts from a few students, and saw a few pointing to the sky. In the

darkness, he could barely see the lights of an airplane. “Damn,” he said, then to the others, “I’ll be right back,” as Fawkes appeared. Fawkes took off, and the next thing Harry knew, they were in the air, inside the plane.

It was a small plane, with some boxes where there would normally be passengers; Harry immediately assumed that there were explosives in the boxes. He moved toward the cockpit, where the pilot was picking up a gun. He waved his wand, and the man put down the gun, turned, and looked at Harry. “Are these boxes yours?” asked Harry.

“No, they were put on the plane by the people who sent me out,” replied the pilot.

Harry immediately Vanished the boxes. “You should land at the nearest possible place,” said Harry.

“I will,” agreed the pilot. Harry nodded, grabbed Fawkes, and was back at the Quidditch pitch. Fawkes set him down.

“Professor,” said Snape, and pointed at a different section of the sky. Harry saw more lights, closer this time. Harry grabbed Fawkes’s tail again, and again they were inside a small plane.

This time, however, they were too late. The pilot lay slumped over in his chair; Harry could smell something he had never smelled before, but knew it had to be from a very recently fired gun. He quickly turned and Vanished four boxes, then was back on the ground.

“The pilot is dead,” reported Harry to Snape, McGonagall, and Ingersoll. He realized he need not report that the plane was descending sharply towards them, as that was obvious. To Ingersoll, he asked, “Can you fly a plane?”

“Some kinds, but there’s no time,” said Ingersoll urgently. “That thing’s less than thirty seconds away.”

Students were starting to run, but Harry knew there was no point to it, as there was no telling exactly where the plane would hit. “Grab onto me,” Harry

instructed Ingersoll, who did. Harry put an arm around Ingersoll, grabbed Fawkes's tail, and they were on the airplane.

Harry pointed his wand at the cockpit, and the dead pilot flew out of the seat; Harry placed him on the floor behind them as Ingersoll quickly sat in the pilot's seat. The ground was getting closer and closer as Ingersoll struggled with the controls. Looking out the front window, Harry saw that the plane was headed right for the people on the ground, many of whom were now trying to run away from the pitch. Harry put a hand on Ingersoll's shoulder, ready to Disapparate them out at the last second before the plane crashed. He couldn't use Fawkes to get them out because Ingersoll was sitting, in no easy position to be carried, but Harry also knew he couldn't Apparate from there directly to the ground.

When they were so close to the ground that Harry was sure they were going to fail, Ingersoll shouted, "Got it!" The plane slowed its descent and started to level out. Harry saw that it would miss the ground, but plow into the Quidditch stands, and knew they couldn't be around for that. Harry grabbed Ingersoll firmly by the collar, and at the last second before the plane hit the Quidditch stands, Disapparated.

They were in the air, free-falling. Harry had decided to Apparate two thousand feet off the ground; he wasn't sure how fast they would hit the ground, and wanted to leave plenty of leeway. Fawkes materialized beside him and started falling. Harry grabbed Fawkes's tail, and Fawkes slowly started to fly, gradually decelerating so Harry could get used to Ingersoll's weight. When Harry was carrying almost all of Ingersoll's weight, Fawkes disappeared, and appeared three feet off the ground, on the Quidditch pitch. Harry set Ingersoll down, then Fawkes glided down further, so Harry could release him and land.

McGonagall stepped up to them. "Professor Potter, Captain Ingersoll... well done."



Thirty minutes later, there was a meeting in the staff room, attended by McGonagall, Bright, Snape, Kingsley, Harry, and Ingersoll. Bright had been roused out of bed by Aurors, and on his arrival at Hogwarts, privately given details by McGonagall about what had happened. Harry had kept Ingersoll under the Imperius Charm since the plane crashed, having him communicate to his group leaders that the orders he had received were not valid, and to resume their previous activities.

McGonagall spoke first. “Professor Potter, if you would now lift your spell...”

Harry did so, and Ingersoll blinked, then looked around, finally settling on Harry. “You did that to me?” he asked in astonishment.

Harry nodded. “I didn’t have much choice. If I hadn’t, we’d all be dead... including you, by the way. I’d bet the explosives on those planes would have taken out more than the entire pitch. Voldemort really doesn’t care who he kills.”

Ingersoll stared at Harry, then looked at the others again. “Have you confirmed that the Defense Minister’s orders were coerced?”

Kingsley looked at Ingersoll gravely. “The Defense Minister is dead. I Apparated to his office to talk to him, I found the body. It appears clear that a Death Eater got to the Minister, put him under the Imperius Curse to issue the desired orders, and killed him when he had no more use.”

Ingersoll looked stunned. “I guess we can safely assume that the orders weren’t valid. But what do we do, then? Have them give me orders and tell me that no further orders I get are valid unless they are given in person? And how would I know that whoever did that wasn’t under the same spell that he put me under?”

Bright spoke. “You can believe this or not, Captain, and I would understand if you didn’t, but law-abiding members of the magical community use such spells only when their use is absolutely necessary. Nobody who gave you orders would be under duress from us. But it appears safe to say that we made a mistake in asking you to assist us, as we involved you in situations you could not be prepared for. We

are so used to the forces of Dark magic leaving the non-magical community alone that we failed to consider the steps they might take once we ourselves involved you. In any case, this does not concern you personally, but I will be speaking to the Prime Minister as soon as possible and, for your safety more than ours, requesting that you and your officers be removed. No insult to you is intended; you have performed your jobs admirably, and you personally saved many lives, with Professor Potter's assistance."

Ingersoll shook his head. "After I endangered them. Yes, I had orders I had reason to think were valid, but I did think they were strange, and I should have tried to get confirmation. It's just that in the military we don't think to question orders unless they're obviously immoral or illegal, and this was borderline. You are all magical, so it's not inconceivable that you could be a threat. Anyway, you could be right, we may be in over our heads here. After what just happened, what almost happened, it would be hard to argue with you. All I can tell you for now is that I'll just flat-out disobey any orders I get that seem hostile to you people."

"Thank you, Captain," said Bright. "We know that's not an easy thing for a member of the armed forces to say. Well, if you would excuse us, there are magic-related matters the five of us need to discuss. You may want to make whatever preparations are necessary for your departure. You do not yet have orders, of course, but I suspect you will be getting them at some point today. I do not want to endanger you, or anyone in your chain of command, who may be vulnerable to another such attack."

"I understand," said Ingersoll. "I'll tell my men to get ready. I'll be at my usual post if you need me in the meantime." Nodding to them, he stood and left.

After he was gone for a few seconds, Bright spoke again. "I assume everyone agrees that it's better if they leave?"

"They have to leave, even if it wasn't a safety issue," said Harry. "Fawkes has let me know that after what just happened, the phoenixes won't come back here until the Muggles are gone. Not that they think the Muggles are evil, exactly, but

that they can be made to do bad or dangerous things. Fawkes is sure that once they're gone, the phoenixes will come back."

"I can't blame them," remarked Kingsley.

"Indeed," agreed Bright. "Well, that would appear to settle that matter. I will put in an urgent call to the Prime Minister as soon as we are done here. Now, Harry, do you think that you and your friends will be able to handle the defense of the castle by yourselves?"

"Don't really have much choice, do we?" pointed out Harry. "But yeah, we can do it. The electronic equipment the Muggles gave us will be a big help."

"Yes, it will," said McGonagall. "It should reduce the burden on you six by quite a bit. I will have to think about it, but I may not have you do Hogsmeade patrols at all. Hogsmeade residents have indicated a willingness to do patrols of their own; they accepted having the Muggles here, but did not particularly like it. After what just happened, they would probably demand their removal as well. I can give them a few of our cell phones, and they can call if they see anything suspicious." With distaste, she added, "I would be happy to let them have mine."

"What will we do about air defense?" asked Harry.

McGonagall looked at Kingsley. "I think we can get patrols going," Kingsley suggested. "We would need to find out just how high in the air the magic-prevention effect goes, but once we know that, we can put people up there on brooms, even at altitudes like a few thousand feet. They would patrol around the area, keep an eye out for planes or anything suspicious. It could be six people at a time, one Auror and five Ministry volunteers. If they see anything, they'd contact me, then I'd contact Harry on the cell phone."

"That sounds excellent, Kingsley, thank you," said McGonagall. "If you can get started on those arrangements soon, perhaps they will be ready by the time the Muggles leave." As McGonagall was speaking, Harry felt his hand tingle, then Ginny's voice, saying, "I know you're busy, but if you could come to your office

when you're done, I'll be waiting for you there." He wanted to respond and say he would, but he knew he couldn't.

"I'll head back and get started on it right away," said Kingsley. "One thing before I leave... we, by which I mean the Aurors, are going to monitor all incoming communication to Captain Ingersoll." Harry raised his eyebrows; he didn't know they could do that. I guess there's still a lot of things that can be done by magic that I don't know about, he thought. "I believe him when he says he'll refuse orders that are hostile to you, but he could be ordered to do something that he doesn't realize is hostile. It's better to be safe." Kingsley stood and left. Harry wondered for a second how Kingsley was going to get back to the Aurors' facility, then he remembered that one of his friends could escort Kingsley.

"I should be going as well," said Bright. "It is late enough that I should be able to contact the Prime Minister; he may be awake already, having been told of the death of the Defense Minister. I will impress upon him that time is of the essence in removing his troops. Professor Potter, would you escort me to my office?"

"Of course, sir, but I wanted to ask something while you were still here. I wondered... how many people saw me use my new spell—and by the way, I've decided to call it the Imperius Charm—and recognized what it was? Or will they think I used the Imperius Curse? Should we do anything about that?"

"You may have to let it be known publicly," said McGonagall. "Enough people saw, and by now will have told others, that it would be difficult to keep secret. In addition, people will assume that you used the Imperius Curse. While the cause was sufficient for you to have done so, I would rather they knew you had not done that. So, you should feel free to reveal it to anyone who asks; the only thing you should not reveal, of course, and no one will think to ask, is its effect on Death Eaters."

“I guess that makes sense,” he agreed. “I mean, I’d rather not have people worried that I’ll do this to them, but hopefully they’ll understand that it’d only be used in dire situations.”

“I think people’s regard for you, Harry, is such that they would understand that without having to be told,” said Bright reassuringly.

“Thank you, Minister,” said Harry. “I’ll get you back to the Ministry now, then.” He did, and was back very quickly; it was now just he, McGonagall, and Snape. He turned to Snape and said, “Well, you were right about the suicide runs. What else do you think he’ll try, at this point?”

Snape thought. “Considering that he has no magical means at his disposal, it is difficult to imagine what he could do now that he has not yet done. If I had to speculate, I would guess that he will now decide that his best efforts have failed in this situation, and work on new ways to eliminate you.”

Harry was surprised. “You mean, you think this whole attack was just to get me?”

“Not originally, obviously, since when he had Malfoy spread the seeds he had no idea of the threat that you would come to be. But now, I strongly suspect that he saw this attack primarily as a way to get rid of you. He will be highly frustrated that he has failed yet again.”

Harry smiled. “Thank you, Professor, I appreciate your making the effort to lift my spirits like that.” Annoyed, Snape gave him a very disapproving look. “Actually, that reminds me of something I wanted to ask. The fact that he keeps failing, and now I can knock him out... is that going to start making him look bad to the Death Eaters? Like he’s lost power, or maybe they’ll think they shouldn’t have joined him?”

“Not that exactly, but yes, I believe it will cost him some standing with them, if only in the sense that they will no longer view him as the greatest power in the magical world,” agreed Snape. “No one will say so to his face, of course, nor will they speak of it among themselves. They will prefer not to even think it,

because they know he has access to their memories. But it will be there in the background, unmentionable yet unavoidable. It will tend to depress their morale.”

Harry talked with them for another ten minutes, then Apparated to his office to find Ginny sitting in his chair. She leaped up, hugged him fiercely, kissed him, then hugged him again, holding on. “Oh, Harry...” She didn’t say more, but he knew what she meant.

“It’s over,” he said, one arm around her shoulders, a hand holding the back of her head.

She shook her head. “It’ll never be over. Not until he’s gone.”

He couldn’t deny that. “Well, for now, at least, anyway. Snape thinks he’s done all he can. I hope he’s right.” She finally released him, and they sat.

“I was really scared, when they took us out there,” she said, fear from the memory clear in her eyes. “I thought they were going to kill us. A lot of us did. I was so glad when you said you’d gotten away, I knew we were going to be all right.”

He recalled something that he hadn’t thought about since it happened. “I’m sorry I had to cut you off, when you were talking to me—”

“No, that was my fault,” she said apologetically. “When you said you couldn’t talk, I should have understood it meant you couldn’t listen either, you had to focus on what you were doing. I just couldn’t help it, I was so anxious, and so happy that you’d escaped. I know I need to keep that in mind for the future. But just standing out there, without our wands... I wanted to tell people that you’d escaped, so they’d feel better, but I knew I couldn’t take a chance on the soldiers finding out, making it harder for you. It’s funny, I got a little feeling of what it’s like to be you. Since I’m one of ‘the six,’ which I think people are starting to call us, a few first and second years came up to me, even more scared than I was, asking if there wasn’t something I could do. All I could do was shake my head and say I didn’t have my wand, just like them. They just wanted to know that there was some hope. I guess people look to you for that a lot.” She smiled, and added, “Including me, I suppose.”

“I’ll always do my best, for you,” he assured her, taking her hand. “Thank goodness for Fawkes, I couldn’t have done any of that without him. Funny how I get credit for a lot of stuff he does.”

“You get credit because he chose you, and that’s really rare,” she pointed out.

He nodded, and was silent for a moment. Then he said, “It’s interesting... I never worried about the soldiers killing us, because I’m Muggle-born. I know that even if they’d been ordered to kill us, they wouldn’t have done it. Voldemort would have made their Defense Minister order Ingersoll to kill us if he could have, but I’m sure that the Minister would have told Voldemort, or whoever did it, that Ingersoll wouldn’t follow that order. Not being familiar with how the Muggle military works, wizards wouldn’t know that. I can see why you were scared.”

“It was like a nightmare, being dragged out of bed like that,” she said, shuddering. “I feel like I want to go to sleep with my wand in my hand from now on.”

“At least until the magic comes back, and nobody can get into Gryffindor Tower without the password,” he agreed. “It must be really hard for everyone but the six of us, who can’t do magic. They must feel pretty helpless.”

She nodded. “And they need us to protect them, while this goes on. It’s hard to get used to that, that people would look at me like that, even if only for a few days. I feel like, ‘I’m nothing special, what do you expect me to do?’”

He gave her a slightly teasing smile. “And if people started going on about how great you were, you might get embarrassed, don’t you think?”

“Maybe a little,” she admitted. “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to stop teasing you about it.”

“Well, obviously, I would never expect that,” he joked. He started to say something else, but was interrupted by a knock on the door. “It’s me,” he heard Hermione say. He opened the door with his wand.

“I’m sorry, I can see why you two would want to be alone,” said Hermione sympathetically. “All I wanted to do after this happened was be alone with Neville, have him hold me.”

“It’s all right, we’ve done our holding,” Harry assured her as he conjured a third chair. “Sit down, I want to tell you something Snape-related while I have you two alone.” He proceeded to tell them about the events of Sunday evening that he hadn’t told the whole group, including the memory of Snape’s he was shown. They gasped when Harry told them about Snape’s ‘practicing,’ and tears came to Hermione’s eyes. “Oh, it’s so terrible... for all of them...”

Harry nodded. To Ginny, he said, “That’s why McGonagall wasn’t worried about what you were. She knew I would suffer, because she had, and that as long as I suffered, it wasn’t immoral. I was doing it for a greater cause, and so was she, when she did it.”

Ginny shook her head. “I could never have imagined something like that... but there’s something I’m wondering about, from that memory. You said Snape suggested that test, but it seemed like Voldemort knew about it already. Why didn’t Voldemort just demand that Snape take the test, instead of waiting for Snape to suggest it?”

“Part of Voldemort’s standard cruelty, I suppose. This comes across when you see it, but not when I tell you about it... Voldemort knew how horrible it would be for Snape, of course, and Voldemort got off on making Snape be the one to suggest it. You could see it in his face, in his smile. He was enjoying the anticipation, the fear he knew Snape would have at the idea. He would have preferred that Snape begged him not to do it; I got the impression that he was a little disappointed at how brave Snape was being. He likes to see people in fear, squirming.”

They were all silent, overwhelmed by the idea that someone could enjoy such a thing. Then Hermione asked, “Speaking of fear and squirming, that reminds me of something I’ve wondered about since I found out about the Cleansing. You



said that Death Eaters always have the Cleansing done. But Pettigrew obviously hadn't had it done, had he? He didn't act like it, at least, when we saw him."

"I don't know for a fact, but I'm pretty sure he hadn't," said Harry. "Not at that point, anyway. At the time he betrayed my parents, Pettigrew couldn't have had it done, because he was Voldemort's spy, and the Cleansing would have caused such a change in his behavior that it would have been noticed. So, at the time Voldemort came back, it still hadn't been done. As for now, I have no idea, but I'd guess Voldemort had done it to him. There'd be no reason not to, for Voldemort, and he always would have to worry about Pettigrew betraying him, feeling guilty for having helped kill my parents. Pettigrew doesn't exactly have the personality of a killer; the main thing we saw of him was fear. He could still have fear after the Cleansing."

"Snape doesn't seem to have much, if any, fear," suggested Ginny. "I mean, look at what he did."

"It was extremely brave," agreed Harry. "But he has fear, he just doesn't show it. I could feel it in the memory, and in one of the other memories he showed me before. But what he really fears... and he's never told me this exactly, I'm not sure how I know, but I know... he truly fears the idea of carrying on like he does without a purpose. Like, if he got exposed, and couldn't be a spy anymore. What would he do? Carry this huge burden, for no good reason? Now, he has a motivation to do what he does, a very important and valuable purpose. For that, he can endure what he endures, which is really hard even with my help. But could he do it if the purpose was just to stay alive, or be a viable member of the Hogwarts staff, or society in general? That would be really hard."

"But what's he going to do after Voldemort is defeated?" asked Ginny. Harry noted that she said it as though it were a certainty, an accidental or deliberate statement of her faith in him.

"I don't think he knows, and I don't think he cares. I think if I asked him that question, he'd say, 'I will think about that after the Dark Lord is defeated.'"

“You know what the really sad thing is,” said Hermione. “When Voldemort is defeated, we’ll be happy, celebrating, helping Harry avoid being made Minister of Magic.” She smiled, as did Ginny. “Sorry, couldn’t resist slipping that in. But anyway, he won’t even be able to be happy, or relieved. He’s done so much, suffered so much, to see that happen, but all he’ll get is a sense of satisfaction, maybe Schadenfreude at Voldemort’s expense.”

Harry nodded somberly. “I think that’ll be enough for him. I do wish there was some way to undo what was done to him. I just don’t think there is.”

After a pause, Hermione spoke, looking at Harry. “Anyway, the reason I came here was to suggest that you go be with people. Maybe go to the Great Hall. A lot of people are hanging around there, waiting for breakfast, not wanting to go outside where the soldiers are. You could talk to them, explain what happened.”

“McGonagall said she was going to do that, she’s probably doing it right now,” said Harry. “But yes, I suppose people will want to ask me questions. Okay, let’s go.” He got another hug and kiss from Ginny before they left.

They arrived at the Great Hall in time to hear the end of McGonagall’s speech, which was heard by most students. After McGonagall finished, Harry was surrounded and asked questions. He found that there was a lot of resentment against the Muggle troops, even though the students understood that Ingersoll had thought he was following legitimate orders. “There’s something about getting pulled out of bed at five a.m. and having a gun pointed at you that makes it hard to be understanding of it,” said a Hufflepuff fifth year prefect.

“Of course, Beth, I know what you mean,” agreed Harry. “But you have to keep in mind that he did save all our lives. Fawkes and I got him up there, but he was able to get enough control of the plane at the last second that it didn’t kill a couple hundred people on the ground.”

“But, Harry, that was—oops, sorry, Professor,” she interrupted herself as most of the hundred or so people in hearing range chuckled.

“We’re not in class, ‘Harry’ is fine,” he assured her.

“Well, anyway, that was only because you’d put him under that new spell of yours,” she protested. “He probably wouldn’t have done it if you hadn’t.” This prompted several people to talk at once, offering opinions to anyone nearby.

“I think he would’ve, but I agree we can’t know for sure,” said Harry. “I am sure that if he hadn’t been given false orders from his superiors, he definitely would have. Muggle military people are trained to do things like that.”

Harry heard some doubtful-sounding noises. “How is it that it just so happens he can fly a plane, anyway?” asked Terry Boot. “I thought he wasn’t in the Muggle air forces.”

“They’re Special Forces,” explained Colin Creevey. “They’re like the elite Muggle military forces, they get sent on all kinds of unusual and dangerous missions. They get trained in everything.”

“That’s true,” agreed Justin, “but why were they sent anyway? Why not ordinary Army troops? All they had to do was fight mercenaries, who couldn’t have been very well trained.”

“Well, the Prime Minister seemed pretty keen to cooperate,” related Harry. “He was strict with Ingersoll about ordering him and his men to keep away from the phoenixes. I guess he wanted to send the best they had. And it was a good thing they did, because most Army officers wouldn’t have known how to fly a plane, I’d guess.”

“Oh, something I was wondering about, Harry,” said Ron. “Sorry, I mean, Professor,” he added, getting a big laugh.

“You call me ‘Professor’ in class, and you’ll get detention,” retorted Harry, to further laughter, including Ron’s.

“Anyway,” said Ron, “when you had those soldiers under that spell, they kept calling you ‘sir.’ Why?”

Harry chuckled, embarrassed. “That was something I did on the spur of the moment. I don’t know if it was necessary or not, but I decided to have them view

me as a superior officer. Since they're military, I thought it might make more sense to them to be following my orders if they thought that."

"But you didn't specifically make them call you 'sir,'" clarified Ron.

"No, of course not, I was a little too busy to think of things like that. It wasn't as though I was controlling them like puppets. I just gave them the impression that it was important to follow my orders, and to ensure the safety of everyone at Hogwarts."

Just then, a phoenix burst into view and flew around the Great Hall. Everyone watched it, including Harry and those nearby. "Is that Fawkes?" asked Ron.

"No," replied Harry, confused. "I'd be getting an impression from him if it was." The phoenix flew for another half a minute, then to Harry's surprise, fluttered down and settled on his shoulder.

The others nearby reacted with great surprise. "Wow, Harry, you've been chosen by another phoenix!" said Ron, who Harry thought wasn't sure if he was joking or not.

"You can't be chosen by more than one phoenix," said Hannah, who looked like she was resisting the impulse to walk over to Harry and pet the phoenix.

"Harry, you should ask Fawkes what's going on."

Harry did, and reported the answer to the others in less than a minute. "He says she's curious about humans, and just landed on me because she recognizes that I'm a phoenix companion, so I would know how to deal with them, be comfortable with them. Apparently, she's one of the ones who's never bonded with a human before, so staying near me is kind of her way of feeling comfortable."

"That's interesting," remarked Hermione. "I guess it makes sense. After all, a lot of us went out there to watch them when they were eating. They should be able to come in here and watch us if they want to. Boy, she's really pretty, even prettier than Fawkes." She glanced at Harry, suddenly concerned. "No offense to Fawkes, I hope he knows."

Harry laughed. “He wouldn’t care... I’m getting something from him... he thinks what you said is funny, too. He agrees with you, he thinks female phoenixes are more attractive than male ones. Of course, he would think that.”

They talked about phoenixes a little more, then got back to the topic of the morning’s events. Even though the students had been told what happened by McGonagall, those around Harry wanted to hear his version of events, so he dutifully told the story as he had seen it. Those nearby who were Muggle-born agreed with Harry’s assessment that they had been in no direct danger from the troops, which the others found hard to believe. They discussed that for a while, then the subject changed to Harry’s new spell. Most everyone agreed that the Imperius Charm was a good name. Harry described how he did it, and Hermione described how it felt, and why she felt that he shouldn’t do it unless absolutely necessary. Even so, some people asked him to do it to them, but didn’t argue when he demurred.

The female phoenix stayed for less than a half hour, then took flight and disappeared, to the regret of the students. After spending the better part of an hour talking to the other students, Harry went outside to talk to Ingersoll. He found him talking to one of his officers, and waited until he was finished to approach him. “Captain,” he greeted him.

“Professor,” responded Ingersoll politely. “Soon after I left that meeting, I talked to the Prime Minister briefly. He confirmed that the Defense Minister should have given no such orders, and is now dead. Last I heard, he’s now talking to your Minister of Magic, so I expect we’ll be getting our orders any time now.”

Harry remembered Ingersoll’s earlier comment that he had endangered the Hogwarts residents. “You know, what happened wasn’t your fault. We should’ve guessed that might happen, it’s not the kind of thing that you could know.”

“It’s good of you to say that, considering what almost happened,” said Ingersoll. “I must say, I have a somewhat greater appreciation of your abilities, after that. And whatever you did to us, it felt awfully good. I heard some of my men

joking about it, saying, ‘Any chance we can get that kid out here and do it again?’” Harry chuckled as Ingersoll continued, “They were kidding, but I’m sure they wouldn’t have minded. I know how they felt.”

Harry found himself wishing he could experience the spell himself. “I also wanted to thank you for what you did in the plane. Without that, quite a few people would have died. There was nothing magical that I could do at that point.”

“I’m just amazed that I could feel that good, and yet focus when I had to,” said Ingersoll. He looked at Harry quizzically, as if having had a sudden thought. “Look, let me ask you... they told us that when we were finished with this assignment, our memories of it would be erased. I doubted it at first, but now I can definitely believe it. That’s probably going to happen soon, maybe in the next two hours. So, why are you out here talking to me, telling me stuff I’m not going to remember? Why bother?”

Harry hadn’t thought of it that way. “I’ll remember. I don’t know, it just wouldn’t have occurred to me to act like you don’t matter just because you’re not going to remember this. I’m not sure I can give a better answer than that.”

Ingersoll nodded. “I guess I can understand that. In that case, let me ask you another question, the answer to which I won’t remember. Why don’t you people just take over? Lord knows, you could, it wouldn’t be that hard.”

Harry grinned ruefully. “It’s too bad you didn’t ask someone who paid more attention in History of Magic. I have a vague recollection that it has happened before, mostly with wizards being advisers, the power behind kings and queens. All I know for sure is that wizards dread the idea of being known by Muggles, which is why your memories are getting taken away. I think the idea is that once the information got out, it would be very hard to undo, and wizards would get a lot of unwanted attention. People would be jealous of what we can do, and afraid of us. There may be more to it than that, but that’s all I know, really.”

“Sounds reasonable,” said Ingersoll thoughtfully. “Although I am surprised that even one person hasn’t tried it before, and gotten your world exposed that way.”

“Me too, come to think of it,” agreed Harry. “I’m sure someone has, and they probably just fixed it with Memory Charms. But I’d bet that was before they had television; it would be a lot harder to fix now.”

After a pause, Ingersoll said with mild embarrassment, “Okay, another question... for a guy who’s about to have his memories wiped, I’m awfully inquisitive, but as long as you’re willing to answer... how many times have you been in combat, or whatever is your equivalent of combat?”

Harry thought. “Depends on what you count, but at least a half-dozen times.”

Ingersoll nodded. “I thought as much. You have this look, very unusual for someone so young. You get a different outlook when you’ve looked death in the face, and I can tell that you have, more than once. You’re what, seventeen? How did that happen?”

Chuckling, Harry said, “If I tried to tell you the whole story, I wouldn’t be finished by the time they gave you the Memory Charm. I’ll just try to cover the highlights.” He took the next half hour telling Ingersoll about Voldemort and his history with him, though he had to stop a few times as Ingersoll fielded questions from his men.

After Harry finished, Ingersoll shook his head. “Amazing. Only seventeen, but you’ve really been through the wars. And it sounds like you’re not done yet.”

“Unfortunately, no,” agreed Harry.

“Why doesn’t Voldemort do more than he does, though, especially to Muggles? Here I am, using your word... anyway, why would he care about keeping your world secret?”

“I think I know this one. He’s afraid that Muggles would help us fight him. Not directly, but they could report sightings, that sort of thing, just make his life harder. He likes to do things behind the scenes, pull strings.”

“But, you’re saying they—” Ingersoll cut himself off as his cell phone rang. “Ingersoll,” he said. As he listened, his eyes went wide.

As Harry wondered what was wrong, his own cell phone rang. “Yes?”

“Harry, Kingsley. Ingersoll just got a call—”

“I know, I’m with him. What is it?”

“It’s from a Death Eater, they’re telling him to shoot you or one of the others, or they’ll find him and kill him once the Memory Charm’s been done to him. You have to find him—“

“I’m right here with him,” said Harry, keeping his voice down so he couldn’t be heard over Ingersoll’s phone.

“Good. Put him under the Imperius Charm, make sure he stays on the line. We’re tracing the call now.” With magic, not technology, Harry assumed.

Ingersoll was saying little to the caller, looking serious but not panicked. Harry decided not to put Ingersoll under the Charm until there was a compelling reason; instead, he waved his wand, and the words ‘keep him talking’ appeared in the air. Ingersoll raised his eyebrows at the method of communication, but nodded his agreement.

“Okay, we have it,” said Kingsley. “Sending a team out.”

Harry watched Ingersoll finish asking the caller a question, then listen. About five seconds later, Ingersoll closed the phone. “He stopped talking rather abruptly, so I assume they got him. You were monitoring my calls?”

“The Aurors were; I didn’t know they could do that,” said Harry.

Ingersoll nodded. “A reasonable precaution, given the situation. I assume you know that there was no way—“

“I know,” Harry interrupted Ingersoll. “Kingsley told me to do that spell I did on you before, but I could tell it wasn’t necessary. I think he knew that you



wouldn't, but he just wanted me to be careful. Being Muggle-raised, I knew there wasn't any chance you would do what they asked you to do."

"I'm surprised the one who called didn't know," commented Ingersoll. "What did he think, I was just going to walk up and shoot you or the others?"

"They have a different attitude about killing, as you may have worked out from what I told you," Harry explained. "They assume you would kill to save yourself, because they would."

"So, can they do what they threatened?" asked Ingersoll; Harry felt that Ingersoll wasn't overly worried, but was taking the threat seriously.

"Not if we give you protection, no," said Harry. "The Aurors will give you magic-detection jewelry, like my cousin Dudley has. If anyone magical gets anywhere near you, Aurors will be there before anything can happen. The people that threatened you know that, but they knew you wouldn't."

"They must be desperate, to try something like that," said Ingersoll.

"They must have thought, why not, one last try before you left," said Harry. "They would have thought it wouldn't hurt to try; I'm sure they had no idea we could track them."

Ingersoll's phone rang again; he answered it, spoke briefly, and put the phone away. "We just got our orders; we're to get out as quickly as possible." Ingersoll extended a hand. "I hope things go well for you, Professor."

"Thank you," said Harry, as he shook Ingersoll's hand.

Ingersoll took a look around. "This would be such a good story to tell my grandchildren someday," he said, a little wistfully.

"Tell you what, I'll tell my grandchildren," said Harry. "And I'll speak well of you."

Ingersoll smiled his thanks, turned, and headed off to talk to his men. As Harry walked back to the castle, he couldn't help wondering whether he would live long enough to have children, or grandchildren.

## CHAPTER 12

### FLORA

Three hours later, Snape put down his wand, just having finished his first session with Harry since the magic had been interrupted. They were in the boys' bedroom at the Burrow; they couldn't have the session at Hogwarts, since Snape needed to be able to do the Legilimens spell.

"A last, desperate gasp on the part of the Dark Lord," was Snape's summary of the scene he had just seen in Harry's memory. "He clearly did not know the Aurors could track the source of a telephone call by magic, or he thought they would not bother to do so. He had to have known this had a fairly poor chance of success. It was fortunate happenstance that you were with Captain Ingersoll when he got the call, but even if you had not been, and had the Aurors not been monitoring his communications, he would have had to be able to take one of the six of you by surprise, an unlikely event at such a crowded school. The Dark Lord was clearly hoping to get lucky, and instead got unlucky, losing an operative."

"You said before you thought he would give up for now," Harry noted.

Snape nodded. "I did not think he would do something with such a small chance of success. I think it is safe to say that he will now concede defeat, as the Muggles should be gone by the time we return to Hogwarts."

"I wish they'd take that tank with them," grumbled Harry. "I don't know what we're going to do with it. Guess we could always put it by the Whomping Willow, it'd be interesting to see who'd win that fight."

"I am sure the Aurors would be most interested in wagering on such a contest," said Snape dryly. They probably would, thought Harry.

“Why do you think he demanded that any of the six of us be killed, and not just me?”

“A recognition on his part of the plan’s low chance of success,” replied Snape. “Ingersoll might not have been able to find you easily, and his looking for you might have attracted attention. He chose the other five as targets not because of your emotional connection with them, of course, but because they can use your spells.” Harry nodded; that was what he had thought.

“I have a question for you, Professor,” said Harry, not sure of what had made him think of it right then. “I’ve pretty much decided that I’m going to incorporate flying combat into my N.E.W.T. classes, since I think there’ll be another attempt at the castle at some point, this one using magic. Some people might want to get on brooms and defend the castle, and if they do, I want them to know what they’re doing. I’d like to know if I can have your permission to use the Slytherin Quidditch brooms when I do.”

Snape considered it for a moment. “You may, provided that they are furnished to Slytherin students before those of any other House.”

Harry chuckled. “You would say that. I suppose Ron is right, that you’ll never agree to what Sprout and Flitwick are asking, about the Quidditch brooms being equal.”

Snape smirked. “Of course. They do not expect that I will; they simply want to be on record with something to point at as an excuse the next time Slytherin wins the Quidditch Cup. I think, Professor, that you do not understand the bargain I made when I accepted the brooms.”

“Sure, I do. It was that Malfoy got to be Seeker, right?”

“That was never explicitly stated, but of course understood, as such things usually are,” explained Snape. “But I am referring to the greater bargain involved. Though I know little about Quidditch, I understood that there was not a good chance that Malfoy would be a better-than-average Seeker, as he did not make the team with his talent. This turned out to be the case; he never managed to defeat

you, and Slytherin has not won the Cup since then. But Malfoy is gone now, and Slytherin still has the brooms. I accepted the prospect of six years of poor Quidditch teams with the idea that teams would be chosen based on talent after Malfoy graduated, and Slytherin would have an advantage for much more than six years. I accepted short-term disadvantage for long-term advantage. I mention this to you mainly because it is a useful strategic concept, which could benefit you to keep in mind should a pertinent situation present itself.”

“Now all I have to do is recognize the situation when it happens,” he said wryly. “But I see your point, and I’ll keep it in mind. Anyway, I’ll have Fawkes take you back to Hogwarts. I’m going to go downstairs and talk to Molly before I go back.”

The phoenixes had come back a few minutes after Ingersoll and his group left Hogwarts, and continued eating the lutas. Students returned in force to the area near the Quidditch pitch, both to watch the phoenixes and to gawk at the crashed plane. McGonagall had told the school in her speech on Wednesday morning that a team from the Ministry would be in to dismantle and Vanish it, as well as the parts of the Quidditch stands which had been destroyed, as soon as magic came back to Hogwarts.

The rest of Wednesday, and all of Thursday, passed without incident. Teachers met unofficially with their classes on Thursday, and Harry was bombarded with questions from both of his fourth-year classes about the energy of love, and requests to teach it. He gave them the warnings he had made sure Pansy gave the Slytherin second years, but they were not dissuaded. Harry decided to start by working on having them clear their minds, and he talked about his experiences in the previous year, though he knew they were familiar with them.

In the afternoon, he would normally have his Care of Magical Creatures class, and the seventh year Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs met Hagrid at the usual place. The topic was phoenixes, even though they’d had lessons on them the

previous year. About twenty phoenixes, including Fawkes, were eating lutas around Hagrid's hut. In the evening Harry relaxed with his friends, both outside near the phoenixes, and inside, in the Great Hall.

On Friday morning, he walked to the Great Hall as usual with Ron, Hermione, Neville, and Ginny, and they took their seats. The food arrived five minutes later; as he ate, Harry noticed that it seemed to get hotter and hotter each day. He supposed the new food-delivery system was becoming more efficient.

"So, what classes do you have this morning?" Harry asked the others between bites of his toast.

"We're free, actually," said Hermione, "but remember, it's unofficial meetings, not actual classes. But our normal Friday schedule is unusual, I guess because of you; we have more afternoon classes in general than is usual because of the needs of your schedule. The only morning classes we have are the ones that you don't take, like Herbology. Today we have your class, of course, at one o'clock, and History of Magic at three o'clock. That was done so you could take it, I assume."

"One of Snape's last-minute adjustments to the schedule," confirmed Harry. "Well, it's nice for you that you have the morning free."

"While you have to listen to classes full of fifth years badger you to teach them how to use the energy of love," teased Ron. "You do have it rough."

"Friday's not going to be an easy day, in general," Harry pointed out. "Eight hours, six as a teacher, two as a student. Of course, Monday and Tuesday are like that, too, since I have the same morning schedule as last year, but now teaching sixth years in the afternoon on those days as well. I figured it out, all together I have... twenty-six hours a week as a teacher, and ten as a student. It's going to be a fun year."

"Just think, next year—I know, if you stay, you haven't decided—it'll seem easy, just teaching a regular schedule," said Hermione. "But you have to stay anyway, now that I'm going to be a teacher. You have to keep me company."

“Well, just humor me, I’d like to think I have a choice about it.” Harry found that he didn’t really want to think about what he would do next year; he just wanted to focus on this one first. He continued eating as Neville asked Hermione a question, only to be interrupted by McGonagall’s magnified voice.

“Excuse me, your attention for a moment,” she said into the magical microphone. “I am very pleased to be able to report that magic has been restored to Hogwarts.” The students burst into loud cheers and applause; Harry saw many sparks and other harmless spells come from students’ wands as they confirmed the news. “The normal prohibition against the use of magic during mealtimes in the Great Hall is temporarily rescinded, and will be for another thirty seconds, after which I urge you to put away your wands.” This got a few laughs as students continued doing simple spells.

“I wish to thank those who have been monitoring the Hogwarts gate and Hogsmeade on the video cameras, and inform you that your services are no longer needed, especially now that electronic equipment will no longer function. Classes will resume their normal schedules as of now. That is all.”

Harry and his friends looked at each other. “I guess it doesn’t really change much for us, does it,” pointed out Ron.

“It does, in one way,” said Harry. “I don’t have to keep wondering if Voldemort’s going to launch another attack before the magic comes back up. I can relax, at least a little. An eight-hour day doesn’t seem that bad all of a sudden.”

“And, we don’t have to wear these anymore,” added Ginny, taking off the strap around her neck with the cell phone connected to it. “What do we do with them?”

“Give them to John, I’d guess,” said Hermione. “He was the liaison, he’ll probably get them back to the Muggles.

“Poor Hannah,” joked Ron, alluding to the fact that the phoenixes would soon be gone.

“Actually, they’ll be around a little while longer,” said Harry. “A day or two, at least. I need to get together with Sprout and Fawkes, have Fawkes tell me where there are plants remaining besides near the greenhouse and ask Sprout which ones should be kept. But they still need to eat more; just because we have magic back doesn’t mean that there aren’t too many of the plants around. We need to get the number down so low there’s no question of this happening again.”

“Oh, and the house-elves must be delirious,” said Hermione. “We’ll probably get some extra-nice feast tonight, they’ll be so happy to be cooking again.”

As she finished her sentence, hundreds of owls flew into the Hall, and mail started falling everywhere. “Oh, I forgot, there wasn’t any mail while the magic was out, the owls didn’t know where to go to deliver it. Probably I didn’t notice because I never get any mail anyway,” said Neville with a smile.

“I’ll have to send you some,” joked Hermione, as she picked up her copy of the day’s Prophet. “I wonder if they’ll charge me for the days I missed the Prophet. They might say it wasn’t their fault that the magic was out. And I just remembered, we missed the articles about this. I wanted to see what they said.”

“I’ll ask the teachers, maybe some of them have them,” said Harry. “Or, you could write to the Prophet, ask them for extra copies. You’re getting famous now, they might be willing to do it.”

She gave him a ‘very funny’ look as the others smiled. “They should do it anyway.” Harry gathered up the thirty letters for him and stacked them as well as he could, planning to go back to Gryffindor Tower and get his teaching books, even though he felt he wouldn’t be using them much that day.

After lunch, he headed for the staff room, knowing that this year he would have less time to spend there than last year, since his afternoon classes now started at one o’clock rather than two o’clock. He walked in and sat in his usual spot on one of the sofas, next to John. “So, Harry,” asked John, “did your students bother you about teaching them the energy of love?”

“Yeah, a little,” said Harry. At John’s raised eyebrows, and those of a few other teachers, he admitted, “Okay, a lot. I must say, people seem incredibly motivated to do this. I tell them how hard it could be, and they’re like, yeah, okay, fine, just teach us. I think I could tell them it’d take four hours of homework a night, and they’d still do it.”

“That should hardly surprise you, Harry,” pointed out McGonagall. “Not only is it highly useful in general, but they have just spent four days watching you and the other five being the only ones at the school able to do magic. This situation will likely not occur again, but that had a strong impression on most everyone. Even we found ourselves interested as we wondered how long it would take to get the magic back.”

“You’re interested in learning this, Professor?” asked Harry, surprised.

Sprout smiled. “Note Harry trying and failing to keep the surprise out of his tone,” she said to general laughter.

Harry didn’t laugh, but he smiled a little. “I’m not sure whether you were making fun of me, or her,” he said to Sprout.

“Both, of course,” she responded, with a teasing glance at McGonagall.

“Yes, she is making the rather obvious point that I am not the most emotionally demonstrative person in the world,” retorted McGonagall.

“I guess it’s like me with being embarrassed, it’s so easy a joke to make,” agreed Harry. “But you know, Professor, I didn’t use to be like this, either. I never would have thought I could do this, until I did it.”

“He means, ‘even you could do it,’ Minerva,” said Sprout helpfully.

“Yes, thank you, Pomona, I did gather that,” said McGonagall. “So, Harry, before you unwittingly give her any more material for humor at my expense, let me say that I do not think I am temperamentally suited to learn it, and leave it at that.”

“But isn’t that all the more reason that you should try?” persisted Harry. “It would be a good example for students who didn’t think they could. I mean, if you could learn it...” Harry trailed off as he realized he didn’t want to say the words



‘anyone could.’ His meaning didn’t escape the other teachers, of course, who burst out in loud laughter. Embarrassed, he looked up at McGonagall, who was giving him a look that said, ‘please, don’t say anything more.’ “Sorry,” he said.

Now, she smiled a little. “You could not make fun of me any better if you tried, Harry.”

“Which is what makes it so funny, of course,” said Sprout, still recovering from her laughter. “Oh, my...”

“Seriously, Professor,” said John, “I’m not trying to pile on, I swear, but you don’t think you could do it if you tried?”

McGonagall sighed. “If it were critically important, as it was with Harry last year, I might be able to. It is not impossible. But Harry has said that doing so more or less changed who he was, and we have all seen that. I simply feel... that I am comfortable with who I am. Perhaps I would be a better person, as Harry has become. I suppose I lack the motivation necessary to overcome my reluctance.”

“I guess I can understand that,” said Harry. “It’s hard for me to imagine having done this if not for the fact that I had no choice. If, say, Neville had come up with this, I’d have said, that’s great, but it’s not something I could do, or would want to. I’d have been much too embarrassed.”

“Ah, so you’re saying that Minerva doesn’t do it because she’s embarrassed,” said Sprout, deadpan.

“Maybe I should just keep my mouth shut for a while,” said Harry, to laughter.

“Alas, it is far too late for that,” said a resigned McGonagall.

“Well, then,” continued Harry, “Anyway, I do wonder if the students are so willing to try it now because of what just happened, but might lose their motivation as time goes by. I’m concerned about a lot of them failing to get it.”

“There’s not much you can do about that, Harry, just try it and see how it goes,” advised John.

“I guess,” Harry reluctantly agreed. Glancing up, he added, “Say, John, you’d be a pretty good candidate.” To his surprise, all of the teachers looked at him with confusion; he suddenly realized that they were wondering whether or not he was joking. “Um, except, of course, for your total inability to do any magic whatsoever...”

Everyone laughed again. “Yes, John, except for that, you’d be great,” agreed Flitwick.

Harry now joined in the laughter until it ended. “Boy, I’ve got to start thinking before I open my mouth. If I keep this up, the seventh years’ll have me for lunch.”

“Yes, that will be odd, teaching your peers, not to mention your close friends,” agreed Sprout. “You’ll be handing out detentions right and left.”

Harry chuckled. “They’d just laugh if I tried, which of course I won’t. No, I expect to be made fun of a certain amount, which I don’t mind. I’d do it if I were them.”

“Very sporting of you, Harry,” remarked Dentus. “So, is there always this much humor in here, or is it just that Harry’s having an off day?”

“Or an ‘on’ day, depending on how you want to look at it,” said Sprout. “We do have fun, though usually not quite so much.”

The level of ‘fun’ decreased as the conversation continued, which was fine with Harry. Soon it was time to leave for his class, and he got up to go. John and Flitwick humorously wished him good luck, and he walked to the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom.

He walked in at two minutes to one, and all twenty-five seats were occupied. He had been a teacher long enough not to be nervous, but this was definitely a new experience, looking out into the class and seeing Ron, Hermione, Neville, and Pansy, not to mention so many others he knew. His friends were smiling, no doubt wondering what he was going to say. He wished he knew.

“Okay... this is a little strange for me, as I’m sure it is for you. I’ve been your classmate for so long, it’s probably... strange, as I said, for you to look up and see me here. I guess we’ll all just get used to it as time goes by. Now, let’s see, should I call the roll, or...” This got a mild laugh, and Hannah raised her hand and said, “Here!” Harry chuckled. “Yes, you are always first, aren’t you... actually, I was just going to look at the roll sheet to make sure of who was signed up for the class, let’s see... did you guys know the roll sheets are color-coded by which House you’re in? Pretty convenient...” He saw a few looks of surprise, and Hermione, to his surprise sitting two rows back from the front, gave a slight nod. “Yes, Hermione, I’m not surprised you’d know...”

She rolled her eyes and gave him an annoyed look; he smiled. “Sorry. Wow, only two Slytherins, Pansy and Blaise. The other girls didn’t take this class last year?” Pansy shook her head. “Well, that’s why we were able to have everyone in this class. Let’s see, seven Gryffindors, eight Hufflepuffs, eight Ravenclaws, and two Slytherins, so twenty-five in all. Sorry the desks are a little tight, but it should be okay. I was thinking, on nice days, we could have class outside sometimes.”

“Today’s a nice day,” pointed out Hannah.

Harry chuckled. “Sorry, Hannah, not today, with over a hundred phoenixes out there. Nobody would pay attention to the class, including me. As I was saying, Professor Snape, who as you may or may not know made the schedule, was kind enough to put everyone into the one class so my already busy schedule wouldn’t be any worse. Now... yes, Sally-Anne?”

Sally-Anne Perks put down her hand. “I’m sorry, but did you just use the words ‘Professor Snape’ and ‘kind’ in the same sentence?”

This got a good laugh, and Harry had to try not to join them. “Well, it helps me a lot. I’m only teaching and studying for thirty-six hours a week instead of thirty-eight if he hadn’t done that, and he did it without my asking him to. So, yes, I’m going to stick with what I said. And, seriously, as a Hogwarts teacher, I can’t

condone making jokes at the expense of other teachers while I'm teaching. So I'll have to ask you not to do that from now on. Yes, Justin?"

"But we can make jokes at your expense, right?"

Everyone laughed, including Harry. "Yes, of course, Justin. I did say 'other' teachers. Considering how unusual the situation is, I'd be surprised if you didn't have a little fun with me. Oh, that reminds me... a few days ago, some of you were there, Ron made fun of me by calling me 'Professor.' Now, all the students in the other classes do, but I'd really rather you all called me 'Harry.' Yes, Mandy?"

"Harry, I know you have a lot of friends here, but I hope you're not going to be making fun of each other too much. I think this is an important subject, and I want to learn as much as I can in the time we have."

Harry pushed back his annoyance; he felt Mandy's comment was premature, and a little rude, but he tried hard to keep an even temper when he was teaching. Mandy was a Ravenclaw, someone he knew to be a serious student. He had never gotten to know her well, but he respected her. "Mandy, I completely agree. I was just making a comment on the unusual situation we have here; probably never before at Hogwarts has a teacher taught students the same age. But anybody who knows me knows that I'm deadly serious about this subject. What you learn here can save your life; it's saved mine more than once. What I want for you, for everyone to get out of this class is the ability to be attacked by a Death Eater and stay alive. And just so you know, I'm not going to be teaching directly for the N.E.W.T.s, I'm going to be teaching what I think will help you stay alive. Now, most years, it would sound silly for me to say that. But not this year; I think the last five days would show that that's true. So, that's my focus."

Mandy nodded. "I didn't mean to criticize you, Harry. I know you're serious about this, and the younger Ravenclaws who've taken your classes raved about you as a teacher, said they'd never learned so much. I guess I just felt like it would be easy for you to get distracted here, with all your friends here."

Harry nodded. “Well, I’m going to give you an overview of what I want to do in this class. As I said, the main theme is, surviving a Death Eater attack. To do that, one important thing to be able to do is duel. We’re going to spend a lot of time with dueling, which is both a defensive and offensive skill. Yes, Morag?”

A sandy-haired Hufflepuff put down his hand. “You showed the first years this fight you had with the Aurors against Voldemort on Sunday night, and they said you were knocking down Death Eaters with one hit each, better than the Aurors were doing. Is that something you can teach us?”

Harry fought the impulse to be embarrassed at the mention of his strength. “Not that exactly, no, I’m afraid. You already know Stunning spells, and how well they work is just a question of how strong you are. Apparently, I’m just... unusually strong.”

Mandy raised her hand again. “Are you that strong because you use the energy of love?”

A Hufflepuff named Jonathan answered before Harry could. “Obviously not, because the others can use it, but they’re not nearly as strong as he is.”

“Hey!” said Ron quietly but sharply; Harry wasn’t sure how much of it was meant as humor. “I lifted thirty people, you know.”

“Couldn’t lift a tank, though,” said Justin humorously.

“Like to see you try,” Ron retorted, in the same vein.

“All right, all right,” said Harry. “To answer Mandy’s question, that’s part of the reason. Using it, I’m stronger than I would be without using it—”

Neville interrupted. “Excuse me, Harry, but there’s something I think I should say, if you don’t mind.” Harry gestured for him to go ahead. Sitting next to Hermione, on the far left side of the middle row, Neville turned in his seat to face the others. “Harry is much stronger using it than not using it. You need to understand, Harry is just incredibly strong, stronger than the strongest Auror, than Dumbledore, than Voldemort. He—”

“We don’t know that I’m stronger than Voldemort, Neville—”

“Yes, we do, Harry,” responded Neville firmly. “When you and the Aurors rescued Hermione and I, you put down an anti-Disapparation field on him, and he tried and failed to Disapparate. That means you’re stronger than him.” In a serious tone, Neville turned again to the rest of the class. “Harry tends to understate things like that, because he gets embarrassed by them. I’m not saying this to make fun of him, but so you’ll know, and take it into account when he talks about this kind of thing. In June, a senior Auror said, ‘If there’s a stronger wizard than Harry, I don’t know who it is.’ As for the rest of us, I think I’m the strongest besides Harry—I can hold my own with the Aurors who aren’t so strong—and I’m not that much stronger than the others. We’re all pretty strong, compared to average, and I’m sure that’s because we use the energy of love. The fact that we’re not that strong compared to Harry is just because he’s in a totally different category.”

There was silence for a few seconds, Harry not knowing what to say. As he was about to speak, Susan did. “Wow, he’s right, you really are embarrassed.” Most of the class laughed.

“Well, I’ll try to be as factual about that kind of thing as I can,” said Harry, “and I’m sure that Neville or the others will correct me if I get something wrong. Now, to finish answering the question, why am I so strong besides the energy of love... we don’t know this for a fact, but Professor Dumbledore thought it was true, so I’d bet it probably is... we know that when he gave me this scar, Voldemort unintentionally passed on other things to me, like being a Parselmouth. We think that one thing he passed on was his strength. Now, that should mean that when I’m as strong as I’m going to get—and I don’t think I’m there yet—I should be as strong as him. But, I’m already stronger. So, I think that my ‘base’ strength is the same as his, but anyone who uses the energy of love will have their strength enhanced. That’s why I’m stronger than him. We think, anyway.

“Now, of course, the question of how strong I am isn’t all that relevant to this class, so—” Harry stopped himself as he saw Mandy’s hand go up.

“Well, yes and no,” she said. “I see what you mean, but if we know you did something, it helps us to know how much your strength had to do with it, and how much was because of things you know, things we could also do.”

“Don’t worry, I will address that kind of thing when I teach, and if I try to teach something that requires a certain amount of strength, I’ll be sure to mention it. I’m not going to be teaching area-effect spells, for example, because they require a lot of strength. Now, what was I saying before... oh, yes, what I’ll be teaching. As I said, lots of dueling, being able to duel is very important, you don’t have a hope against a Death Eater unless you can do that.” Harry glanced at Blaise Zabini at the back, looking intimidated, as though sure he had no chance of ever being able to duel, or even belong in the class.

“Another thing I want to spend some time on, for this class and the sixth years, is combat flying. Why? I expect this school to be attacked sometime this year. Okay, it already has been, but without magic. I expect some sort of attack with magic. I’m imagining a situation in which hostile forces are bearing down on the castle, either having taken down or avoided Hogwarts’ defenses. In an open area, being on brooms in combat can be a big advantage. It’s also a risk—you get hit, you can fall, so the higher up you are, the riskier it is. If that happens, if we get attacked like that, I don’t expect everyone in this class to grab a broom and go out there and fight. That’s a decision everyone has to make for themselves. But I want those who choose to do so to be able to do it confidently and effectively; you can easily get killed by not knowing what you’re doing. So, we’re spending some time on that, and that’ll definitely be outside. Let me ask you... please raise your hand if you’ve had minimal experience on a broom, or are uncomfortable flying.” Almost half the class raised their hands, including Pansy, Ernie, Blaise, Neville, and Hermione. “Okay, the only homework I’m giving today is for those of you who raised your hands, get in an hour or two of flying time. It doesn’t matter where or how high, you can fly two feet off the ground if you want to. Just practice flying. Madam Hooch can help you if you need it.”

He paused and looked around the room. The class was rapt, obviously listening carefully and taking him seriously. “We’re also going to be practicing group combat situations, like ten of us against ten Death Eaters, what to do in that kind of situation. Also, when dueling and in combat, specific spells which tend to be effective against Death Eaters, and defenses against spells they commonly use. Any questions so far?”

Hannah raised her hand. “Is it just by accident that you haven’t mentioned anything yet about teaching the energy of love?”

“No, I was waiting for one of you to bring it up. I’ll explain why in a minute, but first, let me ask you... raise your hand if you’re interested in me teaching that.” Every hand in the class went up. “Okay, so everyone’s interested. Now, as my friends know, I hesitated to teach this at all this year, because it’s so new. Before you teach something, you should know exactly how it works, know everything about it. To say I don’t know those things is putting it mildly. There’s a whole lot I don’t know about this, including the best way to teach it. I’ve... I was going to say I taught the other five, but it doesn’t feel right to say that. Maybe it’s better to say, I helped them learn how to use it. It’s not really something you can teach, like, you do this, this, this, that, that, study, and then you’ll know how to do it. This doesn’t work that way. It’s partly a choice, making a commitment to be a certain way. I think I can help you get there, like I helped them, but it has to be something you really want to do. If there’s some part of you that says, this is dumb, but I’ll do it anyway because I want to use the spells, it’s not going to work; that much I do know.

“Also, you may know this already, but there are some aspects of this that are going to be embarrassing, and not just for me because I’m easily embarrassed. Most people aren’t totally comfortable with the idea of love, talking about it, sometimes even thinking about it. I’m not saying that you will, or have to, start out not being embarrassed about it; I didn’t. But for this to work, you will end up that way. You have to completely embrace the idea of love, which is difficult for most people. I



would have thought it was impossible for me, before this happened. But you all already know what happened last year, why I dove into it so strongly; I just had no choice. You all saw me answer those questions from Hugo in the Great Hall after the first demonstration of my anti-Cruciatius Curse shield. I explained exactly what I did and why I did it. Let me tell you, I was embarrassed as hell. But it was important, so I did it. I just want you to know what you might be getting into.” He paused, looking around at their faces, which were solemn, serious. “Now, keeping all that in mind, please raise your hand if you want to work on this in class.” Again, everyone raised their hands.

He nodded. “All right, then. Just so you know. Fortunately, for this class, I’ll have help. Neville, Ron, Hermione, and Pansy may be able to help you. I developed the ability to do this in a short, intense period of time, and I was helped by having a phoenix on my shoulder the whole time, helping me to be calm and focus. They, and now you, have to learn it a different way: over a longer period of time, with no motivation except whatever’s in your mind. Since they learned it that way, they may be able to help you as much as I can. This’ll be unlike anything you’ve ever learned in a class before. Yes, Mandy?”

“I have a question, not for you, but for the other four here who can do this. I’d like to know, from each of you, what was your motivation to do this. You didn’t have Voldemort breathing down your neck like Harry did. What made you want to do this?”

“That’s a good question, Mandy,” said Harry. “And I don’t only mean good as in interesting, but as in relevant.” He gestured to his friends in their seats to go ahead and answer her question.

“Well, I’ll be first, I guess,” said Hermione, looking slightly nervous but trying to overcome it. “Probably everyone’s reason is a little different. I was thinking of a few things. Harry mentioned it to us—this happened just after he came up with the Killing Curse shield—because he wanted to know if it could be taught, and we were the most reasonable ones to try to teach it to. I realized that if it could be

taught, if it became widespread, it could have a huge impact on wizarding society. That thought gave me motivation to want to do it, to see if it could be done. Also, I knew the spells would be really useful, especially for us, who are always getting into danger because we try to keep Harry alive while Voldemort tries to kill him. And of course, I love Harry, we all do, the other five of us. There's nothing I wouldn't do for him if I could, and he wouldn't have asked if it weren't important to him. But probably the biggest reason of all is that we'd all seen how it changed Harry, in a very positive way. I was in love with Neville, and I knew how powerful a feeling it was, whether it was romantic love, like him, or friendship love, like Harry and the others. It just seemed obvious that it was a good thing to do."

Ron spoke next. "See, this is the problem with answering after Hermione, she's taken all the good answers," he said wryly, drawing a laugh. "In a way, I'm probably the best person to answer this question, because it was hardest for me. I'm not naturally expressive, like Hermione is; it's hard for me to tell someone I love them, or even think like that. I wasn't thinking about the society-wide impact, like she was, but all three of the other reasons work for me, I think. Also, they were all going to do it, and I didn't want to be left out. But I have to admit, if it had been just Harry and I, and he'd come to me and said 'do you want to do this,' I'd have hesitated, might not have done it. It was a huge challenge for me, and I'd be surprised if it wasn't for some of you as well. It's easier to do something like this if others are as well, especially people you feel close to. And even saying that much is something I couldn't have done back in March, so that may tell you something." Harry smiled, as did his other friends and some of the class.

"In my case, I was starting to fancy Ron then, so I thought it might get us closer together," joked Pansy, getting a big laugh and an embarrassed look from Ron. "I'm joking, of course, but who knows, that may have been in the back of my mind. Probably the biggest reason for me was the love and respect I had for Harry. If he wanted to do it, then I wanted to help him. The other reasons were good, but secondary."

“I should have said,” put in Hermione, “that any one of the four reasons I mentioned would have been enough for me to want to do it. Sorry, go ahead, Neville.”

“Like Ron, the last three reasons Hermione mentioned are true for me as well. Probably the biggest one was seeing the effect it had on Harry, how it changed him. He was just much more comfortable after that, and I felt as though even if that was going to be the only effect, it would still be worth doing.”

Harry was about to speak when Mandy asked another question. “Can you tell me... and let me ask you, Ron, since you said it was the hardest for you... how would you say it’s changed you? In what way do you feel different?”

Ron raised his eyebrows and thought for a few seconds. “I guess I just feel... happier, more comfortable, like Neville said Harry was. I realize I don’t have to be embarrassed about things I would have before, especially things to do with friendship and love. So, my experience is probably pretty different from Hermione’s, since she wasn’t embarrassed about that kind of stuff in the first place.”

“Well, a little,” she said. “I think everyone is, even if only a little. I just said and thought them anyway. But yes, I think I could say that it made me feel more... calm and peaceful, I guess. It’s hard to put into words.”

“One thing that may help,” suggested Harry, “is to think about Professor Dumbledore. Even if you weren’t lucky enough to know him well, as I got to last year, you know how he was: always calm, tranquil, friendly... I guess ‘serene’ would be a good word to describe him in general. He told me that what I discovered made him realize that he had been using the energy of love all along, he just had never thought of it like that. He was just naturally that kind of person, and it made his magic strong. I think that getting to the state where you can use the energy of love makes you more like he was. I’m not like he was, though I would love to be someday. But now, I’m more like he was than before I did this. I’d say, look at him

as an ideal, of where this could possibly lead. It takes you in that direction, and I think it's a very good direction to go."

Sally-Anne raised her hand. "How long do you think it'll take to learn?"

"Again, one of those things I don't know. It took them three months, Ron and Pansy a bit longer. But since we were meeting longer and more often than this class will, and since we were all good friends and weren't so embarrassed about saying things around each other, it might have gone faster for us. I just can't know. If I had done this with test groups first, people of different ages and situations, I'd know more. But since everyone wants to do this so badly, I can't take the time to do that. I'm going to just do the best I can, as I'm sure all of you will do. We'll find out together."

When no one asked any more questions, he said, "Okay, the way I want to structure this, at least at first, is to work on that for a certain amount of time every lesson, somewhere between twenty minutes and a half hour. Sometimes it'll be at the beginning of a lesson, sometimes at the end, until I decide which one I think is better. Today, it'll be at the end, and next time, at the beginning.

"All right. Today we're going to work on the Repulsion Charm, since recent circumstances showed how useful it can be, and we'll make a start on dueling. But first I want to talk about something Professor Dumbledore told us about last year, but I want to say it again, because I think it's really important. He told us about how important our thoughts were in how we did our magic, and I think my experience shows how true that is. When I—yes, Ernie?"

"Sorry, Harry, I should have asked this before, I just forgot I was going to. What you said about thoughts reminded me. First of all, did you know the Sorting Hat was going to sing what it did?"

Harry chuckled. "No, I sure didn't. I was very surprised."

"I saw his face, sitting up there," added Padma. "He was really surprised."

"Anyway," went on Ernie, "I have the words to what it sang, and—"

“How did you get the words?” asked Susan. “Were you writing them down?”

“No, of course not,” said Ernie. “I found out later that later Sunday night, some Slytherin and Gryffindor second years got together and shared their recollections, and got down the whole song on paper. No one remembered it all, but together they were able to do it. After the magic came back, they were giving out copies. Anyway, I have a question about it. Most of it’s fairly clear, just expressed in symbols, but the last verse... ‘So keep in mind that you may know/What you think you do not/And what you think that you don’t have/You have already got.’ What did the Hat mean by that?”

“To be honest, Ernie, I’m not totally sure. It would be funny to think the Hat knows something about this that I don’t, but it’s always possible. What makes sense just off the top of my head is that it’s saying that everyone can do this, even if you don’t think you can. Hermione, you’re better at this sort of thing than I am. What do you think?”

“Well, what you said is the obvious interpretation,” she said, apparently thinking out loud. “I have a feeling there’s more to it than that, but I just don’t know what it is.” Then, humorously, she added, “Then again, maybe I do know what it is, I just don’t think I do.”

Harry laughed, as did some of the class. “Yes, that’s always possible.”

“If we didn’t already know the Hat was singing about the energy of love, we’d have thought it was just talking about people’s potential in general,” suggested Mandy. “Maybe it was saying that there’s lots of potential in this, maybe even more than Harry knows.”

“That’s definitely possible, because there’s so much I don’t know,” agreed Harry.

“But the song seemed to be directed to the students, not Harry,” argued Ernie.

“I did say ‘maybe,’” pointed out Mandy.

“We could speculate all day about what it meant,” said Harry, “but unless one of us goes to McGonagall’s office and puts it on, we’re not going to find out. Even then, it probably wouldn’t tell us.

“Now, what was I saying... oh, yes, thoughts. Especially when thinking about the energy of love, which he didn’t know about when he told us this last year, it makes perfect sense. I think you all know that the way we know if someone is using the energy of love is that their score on that meter from last year is 100, which means that their nonverbal spells are as strong as their spoken ones. It suggests that thoughts are what is really important, and that if we’re focused enough, the words are unnecessary. Thoughts—”

Harry cut himself off as, to his great surprise, a phoenix materialized in the middle of the room, in the air. It flew around for a few seconds, then landed on the podium. Harry took a few steps toward it and said, “Yes, can I help you?”

“It’s the same one from the other day, in the Great Hall,” pointed out Hannah. “The female one.”

“Maybe you’re supposed to do something, Harry,” suggested Justin.

“Fawkes would tell me if I was,” said Harry. The phoenix took flight again, flying around the room, then landed on Hermione’s desk. Very surprised, she looked at Harry, who shrugged.

“Maybe you and Hermione are supposed to do something,” joked Justin.

“Maybe,” agreed Harry. “Let me ask Fawkes, he should be able to ask her, and find out.” Fawkes had appeared in the middle of his sentence, and perched on the podium. Harry cleared his mind to get impressions. His eyes went wide, then he smiled, suddenly very happy.

“What?” asked Hermione, confused.

He walked over to her side of the classroom, still smiling. “She’s chosen you.”

There was a collective gasp, and Hermione’s mouth hung open for a few seconds, as if she was unable to believe what he had told her. The whole class

stared at her. She turned to look at Neville, who looked both stunned and happy. Then tears started to come to her eyes, and she said, “Oh, my God,” repeating the phrase three times. She looked at the phoenix, then she smiled, tears still rolling down her face, and petted the phoenix gently. “I can’t believe it... I just can’t believe it...”

“I can believe it,” said Harry, looking at her happily; she looked up at him and smiled gratefully through her tears. He suddenly got a feeling of great joy and happiness, and then realized that Fawkes was sending him what the female phoenix was sending Fawkes, which she of course got from Hermione. “Hang on, I’m getting impressions from Fawkes... a lot of them, there’s a lot he wants to tell me. The first thing is that she, that phoenix, is very pleased at your reaction. She can feel your happiness, how thrilled you are, and she’s... wow, this is interesting. She’s never been bonded to a human before, you’re her first one.”

“You mentioned that, when she was with us the other morning,” pointed out Hannah, still amazed at what had just happened.

“Yes, I did, I just forgot,” agreed Harry. “So, she didn’t really know what it was like, being bonded, feeling what someone else was feeling. She felt it just as strongly as you did, Hermione, because she wasn’t used to it. Would everyone give me a minute, Fawkes is trying to tell me a lot of things. I know this isn’t relevant to the class, but I promise I’ll make up the time some other time, this doesn’t happen every day.”

“No, it’s okay,” said Padma and Mandy at the same time, and were seconded by others. Harry nodded and was quiet, focused on Fawkes’s impressions. He could hear people talking, but he didn’t hear what they were saying. Finally, after two minutes, he opened his eyes and addressed the class.

“Wow... there’s quite a story behind this. First, Fawkes and this phoenix—she doesn’t have a name, by the way, so Hermione, you’ll have to give her one. Phoenixes don’t name themselves, they have no use for them. Anyway, Fawkes and she are... I don’t know what term to use, maybe ‘long-term partners’ might be best.

As some of you know, like Hannah, Hermione, and anyone else who's read 'Reborn From the Ashes,' phoenixes only mate when there's a decline in the phoenix population and they need more. Fawkes and she have been... partners for a very long time, he can't give me a number, but I get the impression of hundreds of years. They've mated twice, and will again when it's needed by the phoenix population. I wouldn't say they're married, but as close as phoenixes ever get to that.

"He's been companionship humans for hundreds of years, and she never has. It's a very important choice for phoenixes, and they take it very seriously. Everyone knows how loyal they are to their companions. She had never wanted to do that, preferring to just be free to do what she wanted. Now, phoenixes exchange impressions and feelings all the time, especially with their partners, so their partners always know how they're feeling. She had begun to notice recently—and when I say 'recently,' for phoenixes, that means the last fifty years or so—that Fawkes had been happier, more content even than usual. He told her..." Harry took a deep breath, aware that tears were threatening, and continued, "...he told her that Albus was the best companion he ever had, and that he thought I might end up being a lot like Albus." Fighting to stay in control, he glanced up to see his friends smiling at him.

"Anyway, when this thing with the lutas happened, of course she was one of the ones who came here to eat them, and she was in more contact with him than usual. Fawkes is happy that by companionship Albus, then me, he's playing an important part in helping the wizarding world be a better place, fighting against wizards like Voldemort. By being here, she started to get a stronger impression of what the wizarding world was like, and why Fawkes likes to companion humans. She expressed interest, provided there was anyone who would be a good companion. Fawkes said he thought there was, and mentioned two people in particular: Hermione and Neville."

There was another gasp, and everyone now looked in Neville's direction, even more surprised than they had been with Hermione. "You must be kidding," said Neville, disbelievingly.



Harry smiled. “Neville, do I look like I’m kidding? I’m definitely not. Anyway, she checked you both out on Monday morning, when we were out looking at the phoenixes. She liked you both, and she spent some time with each of you over the next two days, while you were sleeping. Phoenixes do that sometimes so they can get a stronger feeling about what the person is like.”

“Did Fawkes do that with you?” asked Justin.

“No, he didn’t need to. I had spent enough time around Dumbledore by then, he knew what I was like. So, after a few days, she talked to Fawkes—let me stop for a minute and say that when I say ‘talk,’ I mean ‘communicate,’ and that when I say things they ‘said,’ I’m translating nonverbal impressions into human words and ideas. She came to Fawkes and said that she wanted to bond with both of them.” This prompted a few exclamations of surprise, especially from Hermione and Neville. “Fawkes said she couldn’t, that she had to choose one. She argued with him, saying that since Neville and Hermione are partners and are going to spend their lives together, she could be with both of them at the same time most of the time. He said that the bonding wouldn’t work properly if she tried to do it with both, that she could find herself torn in two directions. He also pointed out that there aren’t that many humans that phoenixes feel are appropriate for companioning, and it wouldn’t be fair of her to take two good ones for herself. They argued some more, and she finally agreed to choose one. It was hard for her; she liked them both, and couldn’t say she liked one more than the other. He advised her to choose the one whose personality seemed most attuned to hers, and she ended up choosing Hermione. She was also consoled by the idea that by being around Hermione, she’d be around Neville a lot too, even though they wouldn’t be bonded.”

“Did Fawkes say exactly what it was about Hermione’s personality that made her choose Hermione?” asked Hannah, clearly very interested.

“Yes, he gave me a sense of it, which I’ll put into words as best I can. You all know how hard Hermione studies, how much she wants to know everything.

You may remember that in third year, she used this device from the Ministry to get her an extra three hours every day, so she could take all twelve classes offered. This phoenix eventually decided that a human who did that was kind of similar to a phoenix who had never had a companion, but wanted two the first time she did it.” The class laughed, and even Hermione smiled. “There’s a similarity in personality there, and that’s what made her choose Hermione.”

Still amazed, Ron asked, “So, does this mean Neville will get chosen the next time a phoenix wants a companion?”

Harry glanced at Neville, who still looked amazed that he had been so strongly considered. “No, it doesn’t work like that. It does mean that if another phoenix is looking for a companion, and Fawkes knows about it, he’ll point him or her in Neville’s direction. But phoenixes choose based on the feeling they get, and different phoenixes have different feelings. Neville could get chosen tomorrow, or twenty years from now, or never. It’s all up to what any given phoenix decides. But he clearly is a likely candidate.”

“I wish she could have chosen both of us,” said Hermione.

Neville shook his head. “I’m glad she chose you, really. Like she said, I’ll get to be around her, through you. I’m really happy for you.” Tears in her eyes again, Hermione reached over and took Neville’s hand, holding it for a few seconds before letting go.

Harry smiled again at Hermione. “Congratulations, Hermione, this is so great. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she said, obviously very excited. “It’s so amazing, I still can’t believe it. And it’s even better that she and Fawkes are connected in that way. Does this mean that if you wanted to talk to me, that you could tell Fawkes, who would tell her, and I would know?”

“Something like that, but it would be unusual that that would be necessary. What’s more likely is that if, say, you were really sad about something, and she and Fawkes thought I might be able to make you feel better, Fawkes would let me know

how you felt, even if you didn't ask her to have him do that. Of course, Neville's usually going to be the one to make you feel better. It's just an example."

"Maybe I was the one who made her feel sad," suggested Neville humorously. Hermione gave him a 'don't say that' look, as Harry chuckled.

"Okay, well, I guess we should get back to what I was talking about, if I can remember what it was, so—"

"Sorry, Harry," interrupted Mandy. "One question before you do that... Fawkes chose you, and this phoenix was interested in Hermione and Neville; all of you use the energy of love. So did Dumbledore. Does that have anything to do with it?"

Looking at the class, Harry could see there was a lot of interest in the question. "I can't say exactly; phoenixes don't think in those terms. But it's really starting to look like it, and it makes perfect sense. As Hagrid told us last year, phoenixes are attracted to love more than anything else. Fawkes chose me at almost exactly the time I committed myself to the idea of focusing on love as strongly as possible to fight off Voldemort. And I know that Fawkes likes spending time around the six of us, he's let me know that this summer, he really enjoyed it. So, that's probably true."

Sally-Anne spoke. "So, if we learn how to use the energy of love, it means we might get chosen by a phoenix?"

Harry saw a certain look in Hannah's eyes. "Hannah, I have a feeling you can answer that, so go ahead."

She looked at Sally-Anne. "If you do it even partly for that reason, then no, you probably won't. The best way to not be chosen by a phoenix is to want to be chosen. They know why you want to be chosen, and it's usually not for what they would consider to be the right reasons. For example, I can be pretty sure that not only is Neville really happy for Hermione, but isn't even a little jealous that the phoenix chose her instead of him." Harry and most of the class looked at Neville, who nodded. "I know that because if Neville was the type to be jealous of

something like that, he wouldn't have even been considered. I mean, I..." Looking abashed, she nonetheless continued, "I was kind of jealous when Fawkes chose Harry. I wished it could have been me, since I like phoenixes so much. I knew that kind of attitude made it less likely that I'd ever be chosen, but I couldn't help it. It's kind of ironic, though, that wanting it makes it much less likely to happen. Who knows, maybe if I get to where I can use the energy of love, it'll mean I won't feel that way anymore."

"It is hard to say," agreed Harry. "And Hannah, I admire you for saying that, I know it wasn't easy. Saying things like that, that are hard to say, is the kind of thing that's going to help in getting to the place where you can use the energy of love. I know that all six of us have said things like that, that weren't easy to say."

"That's putting it mildly," muttered Ron, to scattered chuckling.

Mandy raised her hand again. "Sorry again, a question related to my last one... and my apologies in advance to Ron, Pansy, and Ginny, but—"

Ron turned in his seat and finished her question for her. "Why them, and not us, if we can all use the energy of love. Don't worry, it's all right. It is a good question. I suspect Harry's going to say it's just a matter of taste on Fawkes's part."

"Five points for Gryffindor, Ron," joked Harry. "Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say. Another phoenix might make a different choice. But it's also that Fawkes was looking to see who would be a good companion for this particular phoenix. Phoenixes have different personalities, and... yes, I'm getting something from Fawkes, he agrees with what I'm saying. He didn't mean to suggest by not specifically recommending the others that they weren't suitable."

"But it doesn't really matter anyway," said Pansy. "It would be pretty egotistical of us to say, just because we can use the energy of love, we should be considered as phoenix companions. I don't think anybody can have that expectation, no matter how many of their friends get chosen."

"Of course, that wasn't the point of Mandy's question anyway," said Harry, as Mandy nodded in agreement. "I guess the answer to her question would be that

probably using the energy of love makes you more attractive to a phoenix, but not an automatic candidate. It's a very particular choice, and I'm pretty sure it's very rare for a phoenix to have two people who she felt were equally appropriate."

"Or," suggested Neville, "it's partly because she's new to humans, and didn't have a strong idea about the kind of personality she wanted. I mean, it's probably the case that Fawkes chose you because you have qualities that are a lot like Dumbledore's." As Harry started to open his mouth, Neville quickly continued, "And before you start with your 'oh, I'm not nearly as good as Dumbledore' thing, keep in mind that Fawkes pretty much said you were as good as him, so I'm not buying it. You should just say, 'yes, Neville, you're probably right.'"

The class laughed heartily at Harry's expense as he looked back at Neville and tried not to smile. After the laughter had died down, said to Neville, "Yes, Neville, you're probably right." The class laughed again, as Harry and Neville smiled. "The people who know you," said Harry to the class, "are the ones who won't let you get away with anything. Okay, back to the subject of the class, though first I'll say that I'll forgive Hermione in advance if her attention wanders occasionally. She'd probably just like to go back to her dormitory and enjoy the feeling."

"I'll do that later," she assured him. "Go ahead, I'll be listening."

"Okay, we'll have to do the Repulsion Charm next time, this took up time I didn't expect, and I want to start dueling today. But back to thoughts and magic..." Harry felt a warm glow for the rest of the lesson, and he wondered if he was feeling Hermione's feelings, transmitted by two phoenixes.

An hour and twenty minutes later, he called the lesson to a halt. "Okay, it looks like we're out of time, but that was a very good start, both on the dueling and the energy of love. And now, I am officially not a teacher, but a student, and will be joining many of you for History of Magic very shortly." Everyone stood and started gathering their things, as Neville hugged Hermione enthusiastically. Harry

looked at his hand and asked Ginny to come to the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom as quickly as possible. Fawkes hopped onto Harry's shoulder.

"I thought you weren't taking History of Magic," said Anthony. "You didn't last year."

"Our new History of Magic professor, who's a friend of mine, made it a condition of taking the position that I took his class," explained Harry.

"Are you sure it isn't just because you'll be able to pay attention to the lectures without falling asleep?" joked Parvati.

"That, too," agreed Harry. "Although, as I said, I can't condone making jokes about... oh, wait, I just said I wasn't a teacher right now. Never mind. And as a non-teacher, there's something I wanted to do..." As Neville let go of Hermione, Harry walked up to her, kissed her on the cheek, and hugged her tightly, noticing that he had to be sure to hug her with his head on the side where there wasn't a phoenix on her shoulder. "I am so, so incredibly happy for you..."

"I know," she said, returning his hug. "Thank you." Ron, Pansy, then a very excited Ginny took their turn, and they headed off to History of Magic, minus Pansy and Ginny. Arriving three minutes early, they took their seats. Harry noticed that it was a Gryffindor/Hufflepuff class; there were fourteen students, evidently too many for Snape to have combined the classes as he had for Harry. Harry sat in the middle of the room, with Ron next to him, Hermione in front of him, and Neville next to Hermione.

Dentus walked in a minute early, and stood at the podium. "Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Archibald Dentus, your new History of..." He trailed off as he looked more closely at Hermione. "I thought that was just a trick of the light for a minute. Hermione, is that a temporary visitor, or permanent?"

She beamed. "Permanent."

"Extraordinary," he said, clearly impressed. "Congratulations. You must be... well, I can see that you are, very happy. Harry, would there happen to be a story behind this, that you could tell in the staff room after this lesson?"

“A very interesting one. I’ll be there.”

“Excellent, thank you. As I was saying, I’m your new History of Magic teacher. I worked for many years at the Ministry of Magic, rising to the position of Undersecretary while breaking as few laws as possible along the way.” The joke was greeted with a moderate laugh. “That was a joke, of course, but not quite as much of a joke as I would wish it to be. I will be following that up in my lectures, as I will view history from something of a political perspective, due to my somewhat limited background.

“Another perspective from which I will view history is one having to do with current events. History, it seems to me, is useless if boiled down to a recitation of names, dates, and places, devoid of any context.” Harry exchanged a quick grin with Ron, knowing that was precisely what Binns’ lectures had consisted of. “You may pass a N.E.W.T. that way, but you won’t really know much. You might be amazed at how many bright people I’ve talked to who got a History of Magic N.E.W.T. but had no sense of historical perspective whatsoever.” He paused a beat, then added, “And that was just among senior Ministry officials.” Harry and a few other students laughed, and Dentus wore a wry smile. “How I wish that had been a joke, but alas, it was not. So, my personal prejudice will result in my not teaching you in precisely the way that will result in your getting the highest possible score on your N.E.W.T.s, though you can get the proper information by reading, I should say, memorizing, the textbook. Yes, Ron?”

“You say you’re not going to teach to the N.E.W.T.s, and Harry just said the same thing in the last class. Do you think it’s possible that the way the N.E.W.T.s are given should be changed?”

Dentus chuckled along with the students. “Yes, that might not be a bad idea. Just curious, Harry, how would you like to see the Defense Against the Dark Arts N.E.W.T.s be changed?”

“I’d like it to be, a Death Eater leaps out at you, and if you stay conscious for five minutes after that, you pass.”

Dentus laughed. “Utterly practical, I would expect that of you. Yes, I would prefer that mine consist of a student sitting with me for fifteen minutes and telling me some important ideas which can be gained from an understanding of history, and how they relate to the events of the time. As I said, names and dates mean nothing.

“For example, let us look at current events. I believe everyone knows now that Harry has recently developed the extraordinary ability to incapacitate Voldemort at will, with a spell which he wisely does not make public, for Voldemort would seek a defense against it. Voldemort’s defeat is still hardly a foregone conclusion, but let us look ahead with optimism. We will suppose that Harry manages to defeat Voldemort, ending the Death Eater threat and the terror it brings, and causing Harry to be lauded, praised, and celebrated to such an extent that it will be, for those of us who know him and how easily embarrassed he is, highly entertaining to watch.”

The other students broke out laughing. “Sorry,” said Dentus, to Harry.

“No, you’re not,” responded Harry, with a hint of a smile.

“Well, a little,” said Dentus. “As they say, it’s funny because it’s true. In any case, he would be the hero of the time, even more so than he already is. Statues might go up, awards given, commemorative Galleons issued, streets renamed, that sort of thing. Nobody born during his lifetime would not know his name. And as I speak, he is making plans to, if he defeats Voldemort, immediately relocate to New Zealand and live anonymously.”

“It is very tempting,” agreed Harry.

“No doubt. But I will get to my point, which is to have you consider the following question: imagine the distant future in this scenario, one hundred and fifty years after Harry’s death. How will he be remembered in history books?”

Hermione’s hand went up, and Dentus smiled. “Yes, Hermione, I have been briefed on you. I would like to ask you not to raise your hand from now on; if I want a definitely correct response, I will know to call on you.” This got a chuckle



from the class, and Hermione put her hand down. “Anybody else... ah, yes, Susan, isn’t it? I know your aunt quite well, of course.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Susan. “She said that she hopes you’ll be as good a teacher as you were an undersecretary, and that you won’t have to quit this job in protest.” Dentus laughed, as did Harry and Hermione. “My answer to the question is that Harry would just be a name. Defeated Voldemort, the time’s most dangerous Dark wizard, what year it happened, Boy Who Lived, most famous wizard of his time, and that would be it. Students reading history books would learn his name and what he did, but wouldn’t learn anything useful by knowing that.”

“Yes, good,” agreed Dentus. “After he defeated Voldemort, the wizarding world was safe again, and they all lived happily ever after. One would have to read a detailed history of that era to understand the particular significance of it. And every era has its own significance, whether anything exceptional happened or not.

“Now, let’s look at Professor Dumbledore, another historically significant figure. For what would he be known in history books?”

Ernie raised his hand, and was called on. “Two things. One, his defeat of Grindelwald. Two, assuming Harry defeats Voldemort, being Harry’s mentor, kind of a father figure.”

“Yes, very good, Ernie. A connection between two important historical figures, history books like that. They get to link different eras. But what is the particular significance of his defeat of Grindelwald, other than that it made the wizarding world safer for a time?”

There was a silence, then Harry raised his hand. “Do you mean, what about it could be in a history book that would be useful for people to know?”

“Yes, exactly,” said Dentus.

Harry was solemn. “That at one point before Grindelwald’s final defeat, Albus tried to capture him instead of kill him; he got away and killed twenty-two more wizards and many more Muggles, for which Albus felt responsible. That when Albus finally did kill him, he was depressed and suffered a major decline in his

magical ability for some time afterwards. That he decided that killing was simply wrong, no matter the reason, and he based the rest of his life around that idea.”

The whole class stared at Harry, including Dentus, who was clearly amazed and emotionally affected. “He told you this?”

“Yes,” Harry said simply.

“Yes, Harry,” said Dentus slowly, “that would definitely be useful for people to know. Historical figures often have major decisions to make, responsibilities to bear. Their decisions can cost or save lives, betray or protect principles. They can set the tone for their times, in ways positive or negative—and whether they are positive or negative may not be known for a long time after the events occur.

“Harry... you’re sure he wouldn’t have minded you talking about this publicly?”

Harry nodded. “I’m very sure.”

“Then... not today, but would you be willing to talk about it in a future class?”

“Sure,” agreed Harry quietly.

“Thank you. Now, what Harry said was an excellent example of what really is relevant about history: the choices people make when the stakes of those choices are as high as they can be.” Harry suddenly remembered what Dumbledore had told him about life being a learning experience, and the afterlife being the true reality. He found that it gave him small comfort when he thought about the Hogsmeade dead, or Dentus’s wife. He was sure it would have given Dumbledore equally small comfort when he thought of the twenty-two-plus lives he felt responsible for.

“Now, let me go back to my first question, when I asked how Harry would be remembered if he defeats Voldemort. Susan’s answer was correct as far as it went, but not complete. Hermione, what is your answer to that question?”

Hermione was also solemn; Harry wondered if she knew what he was thinking because of what Dentus had said. “He’ll be known mostly for the energy of love.”

“Why?” asked Dentus.

“Because it’ll have an enormous impact on wizarding society, both for its effect on how magic is done and for its effect on the people who use it.”

“Yes, exactly, very good. If Harry defeats Voldemort, that will affect this generation, but not much more. If that were all he did, he would be a name in a history book, as Professor Dumbledore will be. But if the use of the energy of love becomes widespread—as it almost certainly will—then he will have done something that will have a profound impact on future generations, and he will certainly be remembered for it. It may be that his defeat of Voldemort would have more significance to this particular generation than would the energy of love, but we are thinking in terms of history.”

Ron raised his hand. “Would it be remembered by history that the whole reason he came up with it in the first place was as a weapon to fight Voldemort?”

“A very good point. I suspect it would be an aside, perhaps a paragraph or a part of one. Now, in that situation, what Harry discovered would have had a huge impact on wizarding society, but it is questionable how much of use people would actually learn by reading about that. There is a well-known phrase which neatly sums up the value of learning history. Does anyone know it?” He scanned the room; no one raised a hand. “Okay, then. Hermione?”

“Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them,” she quoted.

“Yes, that’s right. As individuals, we learn from our own mistakes, and hopefully, do not repeat them. As a society, history is our collective memory. If we ignore it, we will repeat mistakes over and over, generation after generation. This has already happened more than once. Not repeating the mistakes of the past is, in my opinion, the most valuable aspect of learning history.

“Another is one I made reference to earlier: the decisions, the choices made which affected history. Sometimes, what is and is not a mistake is far from clear. Value judgments must be made. Was an action, or the lack of it, a mistake solely

because it had a bad outcome? History provides a context to make such judgments, and from studying them, apply them to current situations.

“A third important aspect of history is that it tells our story, so to speak; it tells us how we became who we are, as a society. It tells us how things got to be the way they are now. Again making an analogy to individuals, we each have our own individual history, with decisions and turning points. Knowing about a person’s history tells a lot about who they are now, and the same is true for a society.” As Dentus continued, Harry felt sure that he wasn’t going to have any problems staying awake.

\* \* \* \* \*

Harry and Ginny stepped out from behind the bushes in their favorite couples’ place at ten minutes to six. “Now,” she said humorously, “what were you going to say when I stopped you from talking by pressing my mouth against yours?”

Harry smiled and put an arm around her. “That was a good quote,” he said, recalling the only thing she had said to him when they reached the couples’ place. “‘No talking. Just kissing.’ Short and to the point.”

“Well, we can talk anywhere,” she pointed out. “We can’t walk around and kiss. If we could, we’d be doing it a lot more.”

“That’s true. It wasn’t anything so important, I was just going to tell you about my telling the teachers about Hermione and the phoenix. They were pretty surprised, but I think they were even more surprised about Neville almost getting chosen. I told them about how he’s changed. They can see it a bit, but not as well as we can, obviously.”

“Yeah, Pansy told me all about it, of course, since neither of us had a class after three. I wasn’t that surprised about Neville, any more than I was about Hermione. Neville may be less shy, but he’s usually pretty calm and gentle. I can see why a phoenix would find him attractive.

“She also told me about Mandy asking about why she, Ron, and I weren’t considered. I never would have thought of it, honestly, for any of us. I guess I always just think of you as the exceptional one.” She grinned at him, then continued, “But I was thinking about it. Maybe Fawkes didn’t want to say it this way, but I think there are reasons other than taste.” He looked at her quizzically. “Think about it. In what ways are Ron, Pansy, and I different from you, Hermione, and Neville?”

He shook his head. “Really, nothing leaps to mind.”

“Well, I had some time to think about it. Not being all frustrated because I wasn’t considered, you understand. But it is an interesting question, and it says something about phoenixes if what I think is true. I thought of two things. One, on Sunday night after we fought off the mercenaries and you turned over the tank, you got mad at McGonagall for making you take the rest of the Hogwarts wounded back before helping them, even if it meant some of them died. Hermione agreed with you, and so did Neville, but the rest of us agreed with McGonagall. It seems possible that a phoenix is attracted to someone who would make the choice you would make. We know they’re very peaceful creatures.

“The other one has to do with stuff you’ve been through. You and Neville with the Cruciatus Curse and Lestrage, and Hermione with Skeeter. You all did things that were really wrong, under incredible stress, and came to certain realizations after you recovered. Probably those lessons are learned really well from such a serious experience. Maybe a phoenix recognizes that, and is attracted to the knowledge that the person knows without a doubt they won’t do that kind of thing again. The rest of us haven’t been through that. We can learn from your experience, but it’s not the same. It changed them, and again, probably made them more attractive to a phoenix.”

Harry nodded. “I hadn’t thought of the first one, but I actually did think of the second one in class, I just forgot a minute ago. I would have mentioned it, but obviously it’s not the kind of thing I can start talking about in class. I still don’t

think Fawkes can give me a better answer than they seemed like the ones most attractive to a phoenix, but what you say makes sense, both of them. I assume you're not bothered, you don't seem to be."

She shook her head. "Like I said, I'd never even considered it. Now that I think about it being the case that using the energy of love makes it more likely... I don't know, it's not the kind of thing I have a special desire for. If it happened, of course I'd be happy, but... you have one, I guess that's enough for me. I have to wonder about Ron, though, how this is affecting him. You know how he is, it's hard not to think that deep down, he'd really like one. He'd be really proud. But I'm sure he was listening to what Hannah said, so he's probably trying not to want one. I really hope he's not bothered."

Harry nodded. "Let's walk over to the Quidditch stands, see if that team from the Ministry to get rid of the plane is here yet, and we can look at the phoenixes. They should still... oh, that's right, I have to talk to Sprout about how much the phoenixes are going to eat. I know that Fawkes wants as many of them left there as possible, and I think Sprout does, too."

They started walking. "Funny, that Hermione wouldn't have been chosen if this whole lutas thing had never happened," remarked Ginny. "Things happen, and things you never would have expected happen because of them."

"Yeah," he agreed. "Like, Malfoy used that device to drag you down into the Chamber, and..."

"I like to think we would have happened anyway," she replied. "I don't want to think we needed Malfoy to help us along."

"You know what I mean. It's not like I'm giving him credit or anything. He did something horrible, and he's rotting in a cell where he belongs. Too bad the dementors left Azkaban."

"Funny to hear you say that. Albus never wanted wizards to have anything to do with them."

“I’m not saying I disagree with him,” Harry clarified. “Just that that’s what someone like Malfoy deserves. But, no, when I think of all those years Sirius suffered for something he didn’t do, it’s hard not to agree with Albus about that. Putting people in there is a kind of cruel punishment. But just because some people deserve cruel punishments doesn’t mean we should do them. They were wrong about Sirius, they could be wrong about other people in the future.”

“Too bad we can’t just do it to the ones we’re sure we’re right about,” she said, half-seriously.

“Yes, that would be good... wow, quite a few people out here,” he said as they got near the Quidditch pitch. Some unfamiliar people were combing through the wreckage of the plane and the stands, and about forty people seemed to be watching them. Some people were flying; Harry remembered that this was the first day the magic was back, and therefore the first day that flying was possible. There were no Quidditch practices, just people flying for fun.

Then Harry saw something that made him stop and stare: all ten of his Slytherin second years on brooms, with Ron in their midst. What’s going on here? he thought. He walked toward them and was soon intercepted by Pansy.

“Hi, Harry, Ginny,” she said, smiling. “Have a nice time?”

“Very nice, thanks,” said Ginny.

“What’s going on?” asked Harry. “What’s Ron doing with the second years?”

She gave him a serious look. “Could you two walk with me, we can go sit in the Quidditch stands. The ones that are still there, anyway.”

Confused, he agreed, and they started walking. “Why do we have to sit down for you to tell me what’s going on?”

“Well, it’s a bit of a story, and I’d just rather tell you there. Also, people will know they should leave us alone if we go out of our way to sit someplace like that.” Reaching the stands, they walked up and sat.

“Okay, Harry,” said Pansy, in the manner of one about to tell a long story. “Of course you know I didn’t have any classes after your class, while you were having History of Magic. I spent a while telling Ginny about the Hermione thing, then the second years found me. Naturally, they pumped me for any details about your class. So I told them the story too, and then about the other stuff from your class, and what you planned to do. They were pretty keen when I mentioned the combat flying. Apparently, they think the castle will be attacked too, especially after what just happened. If it happens, they want to be able to get on brooms and join the fight. Not just ten of them flying all over the place, but as a unit, together. They know they’re not that strong, but they think that if they work together, they can at least help. The fact is, I think they’re right. Now, I know what you’re going to say—”

“You mean, the little detail that they could all get killed?” asked Harry, sarcastically. “You’re encouraging them? How can you do that?” Harry had to try to calm himself down.

“I’m not thrilled, Harry, and I understand how you feel, so I’m not going to get mad at you for taking that tone with me, as if you’ve forgotten that I care about them too,” said Pansy, her tone a warning. “I’d rather they didn’t. But I spent some time talking to them, and they really want to. They say they know it’s dangerous, that they understand the risks. I know you’ll say they really can’t, not until someone they care about dies. Part of me agrees with that. But they also didn’t hesitate to point out that you, Ron, and Hermione were doing equally dangerous stuff, maybe more so, when you were their age. They say, who are you to be telling them to stay out of harm’s way, let the older students and teachers take care of everything?”

“When I was their age, I’d have been thrilled to let others take care of everything! The only reason we did that stuff was that nobody else was going to!”

She stared at him, seeming to see through him. “Yes, that’s the way it happened to work in the situation. But if the castle had been attacked, are you going to tell me that twelve-year-old Harry Potter wouldn’t have grabbed a broom



and run out to do what he could? You tell me that, Harry, and I'll go back there and try again to talk them out of this."

Harry was silent, frustrated. He knew she was right, that he would have done exactly that, even defied Dumbledore to do it. He hung his head, staring down.

"I know how you feel, I really do," she continued. "I did try to talk them out of it. But they're pretty determined. They say there's nothing stopping them from practicing flying as a group if they want to, and they're right. They just want to do it right, as you said in your class, to know what they're doing. They know you can't teach them, that it would be favoritism. So they asked me to ask Ron to help them fly better first of all, then they can work on the combat part later. Like me, Ron knew you would have this reaction, so I was around in case you showed up.

"They know you'll be concerned about them, Harry. They know you won't like it. But they really do wonder how you can have that attitude when you would have done just the same thing. I talked to them about Hogsmeade, about how horrible you felt. They understand, as well as they can, but this is something they're choosing, not something that you should feel responsible for. Except, of course, in that your general bravery inspires them to want to do this. They don't want to think about the castle being attacked and them just sitting around being safe. I know you can understand that."

"Yes, I can," agreed Harry, very reluctantly. "It's just... well, I don't need to say it, you've already said everything I could say. I'm just scared, Pansy. What if one or more of them dies? They're so young, there's a better chance of it happening."

"That may be," she agreed. "And there was a good chance of you dying, doing what you did when you were younger. But Albus didn't stop you, he let you do what you wanted."

Harry chuckled humorlessly. "As Neville won't let me say, I'm not nearly the person Albus was. He could let me run off and do those things—"

“He loved you, Harry,” she reminded him. “Do you think he didn’t suffer when you did all that stuff, nearly got killed? Of course, he did. I know you’re not him. And remember, you’re with the two people who were there that night when you woke up, after Hogsmeade. We know how you suffered, and I’d suffer too, if anything happened to them. But you have to accept the fact that they want to do it. You know that, you just don’t want to admit it, because you’re so afraid of what might happen.”

Harry was silent again. Speaking for the first time in the conversation, Ginny said simply, “She’s right, Harry.”

He sighed. “I know. That’s what’s so frustrating.” Looking at Pansy, he said, “I remember when I was having this kind of reaction last year, with Albus, about your safety. He said I had to honor the risks you wanted to take. Even though they’re younger, this is kind of similar. You know how I worried about you...”

“I know. I feel bad for you, because I know. But they want to do this, like I wanted to last year. We’re stuck with it. I’m going to worry, too.” She stood. “Come on, let’s go. We’ll go talk to them, and you can tell them that you’re proud of them, because I know you are. And you can tell them that you’re worried, because they know you will be anyway, and that it means you care about them.” She, Harry, and Ginny left the Quidditch stands, and headed toward Ron and the second years.

That evening’s dinner was indeed a feast, as the house-elves were overjoyed at having their magic back, and celebrated in the only way they knew how. Harry, Ron, and Ginny did some early evening flying after dinner, then came back inside and met the other three in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom.

Harry moved the desks out of the way, but as he was about to arrange the last six in the center, Pansy stopped him. “Harry, I have an idea. Why not just put all the desks to one side, and conjure a carpet, like you did for the first years? We’d probably be more comfortable sitting there than at the desks.” The others agreed,

and Harry did as Pansy asked. They sat down, Pansy saying, “Oh, yes, this is definitely better. You conjure up a nice, thick carpet, Harry.”

Harry smiled, then looked at her curiously. “The rest of you could do that if you wanted to, couldn’t you? I mean, I know conjuring is usually seventh year, but Albus was able to teach me pretty fast. There’s no reason you shouldn’t be able to.”

“Except that we’re not awesomely powerful,” remarked an amused Neville, reaching over to pet the phoenix on the carpet in front of Hermione. “It’s either that, or practice a lot. We should practice more, and of course we will get stronger, so we’ll be able to do more soon. But you can just conjure up pretty much anything you want, so it’s easy for you to forget that most of us can’t. I mean, you learned that dog spell in, like, one minute. It’s pretty safe to say that we couldn’t do that.”

“Oh, is Professor McGonagall going to do a cat spell, Harry?” asked Ginny.

“Yes, she is. I haven’t been summoned with it yet, but a few teachers have, they were telling me it was pretty.”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Hermione. “Just after you went off to fly, she summoned me with it. It’s really nice. She just wanted to congratulate me, talk to me about it a bit. She was really pleased, which was nice. She had already heard all the details, of course.”

“Yeah, the teachers were telling me when Archibald and I got to the staff room after History of Magic,” added Harry. “Apparently the word had spread like wildfire, most everyone knew by five o’clock. Still, I told the story anyway, and they were pretty interested. Then I said I had to leave for an important meeting.”

The others chuckled. “I’m sure they were fooled by your tremendous subtlety,” joked Pansy.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t trying that hard. John just said, ‘Tell her we all said hello, and we look forward to seeing her in class.’ I said I would.”

“You didn’t, though,” said Ginny.

“I tried to, but you weren’t interested in hearing anything I had to say, if you’ll remember.”

“If you had told me before we got to the couples’ spot, I would have listened,” she said, as if it were obvious. “We have to have our priorities.”

“Sorry, I forgot,” he responded agreeably. “By the way, Ron, how did the second years fly?”

“Not bad, they’d obviously already practiced a bit over the summer.” He looked at Harry hesitantly, as if expecting him to say something. “Look, I know you’d have rather I said ‘no,’ but—”

“No, it’s not your job to tell them what they should or shouldn’t do,” said Harry resignedly. “Turns out it’s not mine, either.”

“Just wait ‘till we have kids,” said Ginny sympathetically.

“I feel like they are,” responded Harry. “I’m their father, and Pansy’s their mother.”

The others chuckled. “And yet, you’re only five years older than them,” said Hermione.

“They grew up fast,” he suggested. “Must’ve been magic.”

“I know what he means, I’ve felt that way too,” said Pansy. “Here I had to argue him out of his reaction when I really felt the same way as he did, I just had time to get used to it. The second years already had to argue with me, I didn’t want them to have to argue with Harry as well. But, Harry did very well. He told them he was proud of them, and didn’t linger on the worry angle. They assured him they’d be very careful, which he pretended to be reassured by.”

“I was there, he wasn’t very convincing,” added Ron. “Not that I blame him, I understand why he’s worried. But I do think they’ll be okay. That bunch knows how to stick together, and that’ll help if something happens.”

“I really hope so,” agreed Harry. He knew he would worry, but he knew he could easily spend all his time worrying, so he tried not to think about it. “So, how are you feeling right now, Hermione?”

“Still wonderful,” she reported. “It’s too bad, you weren’t able to really enjoy Fawkes like this, because of the crisis you were in, and you didn’t really know what

it meant to be chosen. I get to enjoy it, and it's really good. It's an incredible feeling."

"That's great," said Harry. "I don't suppose you've had any communication yet."

"Not that I know of. As you told me, she bonded with me a little at night, but not completely, since she still hadn't decided. I think I'm still at the stage you were at once where it's hard for me to work out which impressions are mine and which are from her. I think it was slower for you because he was still bonded to Albus as well. I'll probably have an unusual experience, because I'm her first one. I had never thought about companioning a phoenix before, but now I'm really looking forward to it."

"And, conveniently, you've already read 'Reborn From the Ashes,'" noted Harry.

"Yes, so what I need to know, Fawkes can tell me, through you."

"You know, Hermione," said Ron seriously, "I didn't have a chance to tell you this in class, but I'm really, truly happy for you that this happened. I think you totally deserve it."

She smiled blissfully in response. "Oh, thank you, Ron..."

"No problem. I just wanted to say that before I started in on teasing you about it."

The others chuckled. "I knew he was going to say something like that," said Ginny.

Hermione's smile didn't change, however. "He's not fooling me. He meant the first thing, and now he's just trying to cover it up."

Patting Ron's knee, Pansy said, "Why, that would be so unlike him."

"Damn, they have me figured out," whispered Ron loudly, as if to himself.

"Harry," asked Hermione, "why don't you have Fawkes come, they can be together."

Harry paused for a few seconds. “He wanted to let you two be alone, so to speak. He didn’t want to distract her from you.”

Ginny, Pansy, Neville, and Hermione laughed. “I guess we’re going to have to leave if they start distracting each other,” joked Ginny.

“I doubt they’d care if we were around or not,” said Hermione. “I think humans are the only creatures who care about having privacy for that. Of course, they probably wouldn’t do it if only because they’d know how embarrassed it would make us. Not to mention the thing about them only doing it if the phoenix population needs to be increased. Anyway, Harry, have him show up, I don’t mind. He can ask her if she minds, but I doubt she does.”

Fawkes materialized a few seconds later. “I guess she doesn’t,” observed Harry, as the two phoenixes seemed to look at each other for a few seconds, then turned toward Hermione. “Hermione, have you thought about a name for her?”

“Oh, yes, I’ve already picked one out. It just came to me, all of a sudden. I’m calling her ‘Flora.’ It’s partly because it’s a girl’s name, partly because the whole reason she ended up here was that herb, which is a kind of plant, which ‘flora’ means, and a little bit because it starts with ‘F,’ the same as Fawkes. So if we’re talking about them, we can say ‘Fawkes and Flora,’ it’ll sound better.” Hermione looked around to see what the others thought.

“I like it,” said Pansy, as the others agreed.

“Very well reasoned,” commented Ron.

“So, I was thinking,” said Neville, looking around the room, “instead of that thing we were talking about where we have an open pendant channel to Pansy, we could just meet here to do homework regularly, couldn’t we? I mean, I don’t know if anybody’s going to miss us in the common room, we usually stay in our group anyway.”

Hermione looked reluctant. “Well, I am Head Girl, I should be there...”

“Yeah,” said Ron, “but the fifth year prefects, what were their names... Jennifer, and... Dave, that’s right... they’re supposed to take care of that, right? I

mean, you're the Head Girl for the whole school, not the Gryffindor common room. If anything, you should be patrolling the halls. Then again, I'm sure Ernie's got that covered." His expression clearly suggested that he thought Ernie was taking being Head Boy far too seriously.

"Yes, but I don't want to shirk my responsibilities just because he'll do them if I don't. But I suppose you're right about the common room. I would think we'd be able to do this sometimes. It is nice to be able to do."

"Are you sure, Hermione?" asked Pansy. "If you're uncomfortable—"

"No, it's okay," Hermione assured her. "I really would like to. It's just that, you know me, I feel like I have to do everything. But I can do Head Girl stuff other times. It's fine, don't worry."

"That's good," said Pansy. "I would like to do this, too." Moving over closer to Ron and putting an arm around his waist, she added, "There are some things about doing it this way that are much better than the pendants."

"But then you might distract each other from your homework," teased Ginny.

Feigning earnestness, Pansy responded, "If that happens, I promise, Ginny... we'll get up and go to Harry's office." Everyone laughed except, naturally, Ron.

"Oh, Neville," said Harry, "thanks for helping out Blaise in class. He looked like he was having trouble."

"That's an understatement," said Neville. "It's like he barely knows how to hold a wand. I wonder how he managed to stay at Hogwarts all this time."

"I guess Malfoy and the other same-year boys wanted a punching bag," said Hermione sadly. "They've always been so horrible to him. I can only imagine what they did to him in their dormitory, behind closed doors."

"Malfoy told me stuff sometimes," said Pansy, looking ashamed at the recollection. "I'm pretty sure you don't want to know."

“I’m pretty sure you’re right,” Hermione agreed. “I always wondered why he got put in Slytherin. I’ll bet he wondered too.”

“Me, too,” put in Ron. “I always saw him as more of a Hufflepuff type.”

Neville looked sharply at Ron. “Did you ever think that way about me, Ron?”

“No!” said Ron, defensively and unconvincingly. Neville continued staring at him. Uncomfortably, he added, “Well, yes. A little. But not after the end of first year. Dumbledore was right, what you did was brave.”

“I’m not sure, but I may have had that thought too,” said Harry, trying to help Ron out. “Does that idea bother you, Neville?”

“No, not really,” said Neville. “I asked mostly because I had that thought, more than once, and well past first year. Especially since I was so interested in Herbology, and that’s what Professor Sprout teaches, I felt like I would have been a natural for Hufflepuff. I haven’t thought that since fifth year, but I thought it a lot before that. I just thought it was interesting, Ron, that you thought that about Blaise. It’s like, Hufflepuff has this reputation as the place where you get put if you’re not especially ambitious, clever, or brave. Being ‘fair’ isn’t really a quality that gets you anywhere in life.”

“I’ve always liked the Hufflepuffs, though,” said Hermione. “I think they’re my second favorite House.”

“Mine too,” said Harry. “Most of my non-Gryffindor friends are from there.”

“You wouldn’t pick Ravenclaw as your second favorite, Hermione?” asked Ron.

“Yes, I know, it seems like I should. But a lot of them are pretty snooty about being smart, like they’re superior to the other Houses. I don’t like that.” Ron raised his eyebrows and looked at her. “What? I may be smart, but I’m not snooty about it.”



Mimicking Hermione's voice, with a very superior tone, Ron said, "You're saying it wrong. It's 'wing-gar-dium levi-o-sah.'" Harry winced, knowing Ron had said something he shouldn't have.

Hermione stared at him for a few seconds, then looked down, obviously very upset. "What?" asked Ron defensively.

"It's just that—"

Hermione cut Harry off. "Don't tell him, Harry. If a person says something really hurtful, they should at least try to figure out why it was, so they hopefully won't do it again."

"Look, obviously I didn't mean it to be hurtful," protested Ron. "I thought that was just the kind of thing we said to each other sometimes. I know you're not like that now, but you used to be."

"What you said was too close to the bone, Ron," said Ginny, violating Hermione's desire for Ron to work it out himself. "It was a bit like what she said to you in Hogsmeade last year, about you not having a girlfriend. We do tease each other, but there are some things you shouldn't tease about. Like, I don't mind being teased about how I'm all over Harry, but I'd rather not be teased about how I was about him when I was ten, because it makes me feel like an idiot."

"Or me, about how painfully shy I was," added Neville uncomfortably.

"I know how I was, Ron," said Hermione, calming down a little. "What you said was hurtful partly because of what happened after that class, what you said then. And, partly because it reminds me of what Skeeter said about me this summer. Both in general, and how I dealt with Neville, which I'm trying hard to change. It just brings up a lot of stuff."

Ron sighed. "You know, Hermione, you know that I didn't mean—"

"I know," she said. "I know it was an accident, like if you swung your elbow and hit me in the head by mistake. It's just that knowing it was a mistake doesn't make it hurt any less. I'll get over it."

"I'm really sorry," he said.

She nodded, accepting his apology. "I know that, too. Thanks." She looked down at Flora, then she changed her position, lying on her stomach on the carpet. Eye level with Flora, she talked to her. "Sorry, Flora, this happens a lot with me. I get upset pretty easily, I cry pretty easily. I hope you knew that when you chose me. This must all seem pretty strange to you, you've never felt what someone else is feeling before, and it's probably not fun when it's sad." She reached over and petted Flora.

After a minute's silence, Harry spoke. "She knew, Hermione. She's communicating through Fawkes. She knew exactly how you are, both from being around you, and what Fawkes communicated to her before. She knows that being sad is part of the deal, and the impression I get is that she thinks you should no more apologize for that than for being human. The other main impression I get is that she looks forward to being able to communicate with you herself. She wants to be able to make you feel better."

Hermione smiled at Flora. "She does, already."

Hoping that the problem with Hermione and Ron was over, Harry changed the subject. "Neville, I mentioned Blaise partly because I was hoping you could work with him, tutor him in your free time. He could really use some help."

Neville was obviously surprised. "Why me?"

Harry, in turn, was surprised by Neville's reaction. "If you don't want to, that's okay," he assured Neville. "Pansy, how would you feel about it?"

Pansy looked very uncomfortable. "Um, I'd really rather not, Harry. I mean, I just think it would be better if one of the others did it, anybody but me. For Blaise's sake as well as mine." To Harry's quizzical stare, she continued, "I wasn't exactly nice to him either. I try not to talk about that time so much, or even think about it. You guys don't see me that way now, but you know how I was. I was never as horrible to him as Malfoy was, but bad enough. I don't think he's going to look at me as someone who can help him. I'm pretty sure that I hurt him worse than I ever hurt any of you."

“I’m sorry, Pansy, I didn’t think of that,” said Harry, now feeling bad that he’d asked. Ron moved closer to Pansy and put an arm around her.

“Harry, I wasn’t saying I wouldn’t do it,” protested Neville. “I just wondered why me, as opposed to anyone else.”

“I said on the Hogwarts Express going home in July that I wanted you to be my assistant. Did you think I was kidding?”

“Yes,” replied Neville.

“Well, I wasn’t. I didn’t ask you instead of anyone else for any particular reason, just that. I know Blaise doesn’t need expert-level help. I was just thinking of you as my assistant.”

“I understand. Sure, I’ll do it, I was just surprised. I guess I wondered if you asked me because I used to be like him.”

“You were never like him, Neville,” said Ginny. “You weren’t that bad off.”

“Sometimes I think I was just like him, and the only difference was that I was in a House where people were either nice to me or left me alone, and he was tormented by four sons of Death Eaters. I really do think that if I’d been in his place, I’d have ended up the same way.”

“I think,” said Hermione sympathetically, “that anyone who wasn’t bigger, stronger, and could do magic better than the other four was going to have a very hard time there. It was just a very bad situation.”

That’s putting it mildly, Harry thought. “Okay, thanks, Neville. I’ll talk to him about it, then let you know, so you can talk to him and find a time that’s good. I don’t expect that he’ll catch up to where everyone else is, but if he can even get close, that’ll be good.” Harry wondered if Blaise’s personality, and what he had been through, were as responsible as anything else for his lack of magical ability.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a very relaxed weekend for Harry, even though he had an Auror training session on Saturday, and an energy-of-love session with them Saturday evening. At Hogwarts, however, he had no homework to do, though he did spend some time with Hermione on Potions, expecting that Snape would push the class extra hard to make up for the lost day last week. He did more flying with Ron on Sunday, had a session with Snape, spent several hours with Ginny, and visited Arthur and Molly at the Burrow for an hour before dinner on Sunday to talk about the events of the last week.

At lunch on Monday, Harry was asked by Pansy how his visit with the Weasleys had gone. "Fine, as I already told Ron and Ginny. They asked a lot of questions about Flora, they had read Hugo's article in the Sunday Prophet."

"I still can't believe getting chosen by a phoenix is such big news," said Hermione, Flora still on her shoulder, having remained there most of the time since Friday. She had been very surprised to receive twenty letters that morning from people who had read the article. "I mean, I know it's really rare, but is it all that interesting?"

"Must be," said Pansy. "Have you read all the letters yet?"

"Yes, I only had one class this morning, so I was able to. They were generally nice. One woman, I couldn't believe this, remembered the Skeeter articles from fourth year and said I must have grown up, learned the error of my ways, so she was happy for me."

The others chuckled. "Wonder if she was the one who sent you the bobtuber pus," suggested Ginny.

"It wouldn't surprise me," agreed Hermione, rolling her eyes briefly.

"Anyway," continued Harry, to Pansy, "it was partly about that, and... oh yeah, I forgot to mention this to you two, but it turns out now that Molly's actually in communication with Dudley, through the Internet."

"What??" asked Ron.

The others were surprised as well, except Hermione. “Well, of course, I explained to Arthur all about e-mail, and remember, Harry, you had that letter from Dudley with his e-mail address. I put it into the computer’s e-mail program. Arthur must have found it, mentioned it to Molly—”

“And her mothering instincts kicked in,” finished Ginny. “Were you upset, Harry?”

“No, but she was kind of nervous about telling me, so she must have thought I might be, which I guess I can understand. I think they exchanged a few messages over the weekend. Dudley’s back at school now, but apparently he’s been keeping informed about wizarding developments through those websites, I think that’s what they’re called, run by wizards. They’ve reprinted some Prophet articles, especially anything to do with me or Hogwarts.”

“They really are taking those wizarding secrecy laws seriously,” commented Ron with obvious sarcasm.

“Can’t they be prosecuted for that?” wondered Neville.

“Those laws don’t address the Internet, since it’s such a recent invention,” explained Hermione. “It’s kind of a loophole. I wonder if they’re going to get around to closing it before it’s too late.”

“They even put up the pictures from the article, the ones that Hugo took,” added Harry. “One of them, of course, was the one of me shaking hands with the Muggle Prime Minister. Seems Dudley was pretty impressed by that, and my aunt and uncle were as well, Dudley told Molly. Molly sent Petunia the article, of course, with the pictures.”

“You weren’t mad at her for that?” asked Ron, surprised.

“I really don’t care what she does, as long as she doesn’t ask me to do anything. Besides, I completely expected her to. Molly knew I was speaking directly to Petunia in what I said to Hugo, so she figured I wouldn’t mind if she sent it. So, evidently Dudley called home on Saturday and talked to both of them. Neither mentioned what I said about Skeeter’s article, but both mentioned that picture. I

shouldn't be surprised, I know them well enough to know that that's the kind of thing that impresses them. I know, it impresses most people, but them especially. Not that they suddenly love me or anything, just Dudley said it made an impression."

"So, I guess Mum's going to be in touch with Dudley, then," said an amused Ron, shaking his head. "Funny world. But isn't that really dangerous, showing a picture of you and other wizards with the Muggle Prime Minister on the Internet where anyone could see it? Isn't that serious evidence, proof of the existence of the wizarding world?"

As Harry expected, Hermione answered Ron. "No, it isn't. Muggle technology is getting very sophisticated, including with images. Using computers, you can make any image you want. I could make a picture of you shaking hands with the Prime Minister, and it would look perfectly real. No Muggles will take that picture seriously, unless they already know about the magical world. They'll just assume it was faked, part of the 'fictional' world these people create."

Ron nodded, impressed. "That's pretty convenient."

"Yes, it is, actually," agreed Hermione. "There could probably be a lot of evidence on the Internet, and still nobody would know anything. Until, of course, something happened, which is the danger that John was pointing out at dinner that night."

Harry grabbed his bag. "Well, I'm off to the staff room. I'll see you four in Charms, and you," he said to Ginny, "I'll see at three for your first Defense Against the Dark Arts N.E.W.T. lesson."

Ginny looked at the others, pretending happiness and excitement. "He's going to teach me the energy of love!"

Harry grinned at Ginny. "I think you've already taught me a thing or two. See you later."

Entering the staff room, he exchanged greetings with the other teachers as usual. Harry noticed that McGonagall wasn't there, so he assumed that she was in

the headmistress's office. They asked about his weekend, and how Hermione was doing with the phoenix. Then Sprout asked, "Oh, you just had your first lesson with the first years, didn't you? How did it go?"

"Very well," he said. "They were really keen."

"Hmmm," said John, feigning puzzlement. "Wonder why that would be..."

"I had the Gryffindor/Ravenclaw class on Friday," said Flitwick, "and even there, they were asking about you. They wanted to know if you were a good student in Charms."

"Obviously just an excuse to ask about him, period," observed John. "What did you tell them?"

"I said that since he's using the energy of love, when it comes to magical subjects, he can be about as good a student as he wants," he replied, with a smile and a glance at Harry. "Seriously, you know that I always have the seventh years do the exercise of imagining a new charm and explaining how they think it would work. I think for him I'm going to have to do it differently; I'll require him to come up with an actual new charm, one that works."

"I think the only way that's going to work is if you can convince me that someone's going to die unless I do," said Harry. "Those are the only times that I've come up with them."

"Have you tried to come up with others, in normal situations?" asked Flitwick.

"Yes, I have. It doesn't seem to work. I really am beginning to wonder if that's some peculiar aspect of the energy of love, that you can use any spell you want to if you need it badly enough. I mean, I can't think of anything else."

"That would be very strange," agreed Flitwick, "but as you say, the whole thing is so new, we can't know. It's understandable that you wanted to wait to teach it, not knowing so much, but the students aren't prepared to let you wait. What did you do with the first years, regarding that?"

“I had already told them about the background of how I came up with it, on the night of the fire, but they had more questions, and I answered them. It ended up basically taking up all of the class time. I don’t know how they’re going to do with it; I mean, some of them barely know any magic at all.”

“Couldn’t that be an advantage?” wondered Sprout. “Couldn’t it be that if you get them soon enough, that they start doing it that way more naturally?”

“I suppose it’s possible,” conceded Harry. “Again, one of the many things I don’t know. It could take all my life to work out how this works exactly.”

“I can think of less worthwhile ways to spend a lifetime,” said Flitwick.

Harry nodded; he certainly could as well. “Thinking of new spells, that reminds me... Archibald, do you think they’re going to make the Imperius Charm illegal?”

“Interesting question,” said Dentus. “For now, certainly, I don’t think so, not as long as you’re the only one who can do it. To make such a law would seem too much like a personal attack on you, and I think the public estimation of your integrity is such that people will be confident that you won’t use it without a good reason. I think nothing will happen unless people think you’re abusing it somehow, or if large numbers of people learn it.”

“Can your friends use it?” asked Vector.

“I don’t think I could teach them, except for Hermione, since I use it sort of in conjunction with Legilimency. I should see if I can teach her, though. As for abusing it, I honestly don’t think it would be possible to abuse it. I think the energy of love doesn’t allow for doing something for reasons you know are bad. Well, maybe ‘allow’ isn’t the best word. It’s not that you couldn’t, exactly, but that you wouldn’t. You might be able to do something misguided, but not something that’s deliberately wrong. I can see where they might want to make it illegal to be on the safe side, and I’m not sure I’d blame them.”

“How does that work?” wondered Dentus. “I mean, I assume you don’t stop having free will. Imagine that you suddenly decided to, let’s say, have a shop



clerk give you a few items on what he thought was a generous impulse. You know it's wrong, but it's not that wrong, as wrong things go. Is it really the case that anyone who used the energy of love would be sure that they wouldn't do that? We all give in to temptation once in a while. Okay, it's been a while since I've stolen anything from a shop, but you know what I mean."

"Yes, I do, and it's a good question," Harry admitted. "I can't swear that what I said is true, of course, it's just an impression. I don't mean to say that using this makes you some kind of perfect person. Maybe I should just say that it might be possible to do something wrong if it was minor enough, and that as the thing you're doing becomes more and more wrong, it becomes more and more difficult to do. I can easily imagine a situation where a person starts doing wrong things, and eventually feels so guilty about it that they lose the ability to use the energy of love. I do know, at least, that it's possible to be able to use it, then not be able to."

"Did that happen to one of you over the summer?" asked Dentus, filling in the blanks of what Harry had said

Harry suddenly wished he hadn't said it, since it came perilously close to revealing information he didn't want to reveal. "Yes, but I don't want to—"

Dentus cut him off with a gesture. "I wouldn't have asked, Harry. I know it's extremely personal." Harry nodded, now feeling bad that he had thought that Dentus would ask.

As Dentus finished speaking, a white owl with brown feathers and a few patches of brown on its belly flew into the room, and landed on Harry's shoulder. As the teachers looked on in surprise, Harry turned his head to look at the owl. It looked back at him haughtily, conveying the impression that it disapproved of him, that he had done something wrong. Suddenly realizing what it was, he broke out in laughter.

"What is it?" asked Sprout. "Why isn't it delivering something?"

"It's from Professor McGonagall," explained Harry, smiling. "At the end of last year, I asked her if she was going to do a dog spell, and as a joke, I suggested

that she do one where an owl would fly onto the person's shoulder and look at them disapprovingly. She said she'd probably do a cat, but she obviously did this one specifically for me, because of the joke. I think it's great."

The teachers were all looking at the owl. "That was sweet of her," said Sprout, "And she did a very nice job with it, it looks very good."

"Yeah, it's very pretty," agreed Harry. "Although I'm surprised that—owl!" he exclaimed in surprise and pain as the owl nibbled at his ear. "Why did it do that?"

The teachers burst out laughing. "The owl is to summon you, Harry," pointed out Dentus, still laughing. "I think that means you're not moving fast enough."

"Oh, right," said Harry, now seeing the humor in it. "Better go, then. See you in Charms, Professor." He briskly picked up his bag and left, the teachers chuckling as he did.

As he approached McGonagall's office, he was surprised to notice that the owl wasn't slowly vanishing, as Dumbledore's dog did. The door was open, and he walked in. Just after he did, the owl took flight, and slowly vanished as if flew through a wall.

"Good afternoon, Harry, thank you for coming," said McGonagall pleasantly. "Though you could have been more prompt."

"Yes, the owl reminded me of that. The teachers got a really good laugh."

Deadpan, she replied, "Excellent, that was what was intended. Please sit down." With a small smile at the humor at his expense, he did. "I called you here mainly to let you know that I had a conversation with the Minister of Magic earlier. The conversation touched on last week's events, and he wanted me to tell you that he recently spoke with the Muggle Prime Minister about what happened. Evidently Captain Ingersoll gave a full report of events to the Prime Minister before his Memory Charm was done, and Captain Ingersoll mentioned you most favorably. The Prime Minister was very impressed by what you accomplished, and wished to convey his appreciation that you managed to defuse the situation on Wednesday

morning in such a way that casualties were avoided. He is quite aware, of course, that Captain Ingersoll's troops were at no less risk than the rest of us."

"He doesn't think we should have anticipated what happened?" wondered Harry.

"I believe the Minister of Magic apologized to him on our behalf," she said, "If he displayed any displeasure regarding that topic, I did not hear about it." She waved her wand, and Harry saw three cats form and trot off

Looking in the direction the cats had gone, Harry asked, "Should I leave when they get here, or...?"

"No, this is a brief meeting for all four Heads of House; I called you first because I had a private message for you in particular."

"And to give the other teachers a laugh," he amended.

"Yes, indeed," she agreed. "I had a feeling that you would linger to explain the owl to them, so perhaps it was unfair of me. Still, it was a difficult opportunity to resist. Albus told me that you made a nonverbal joke at Mr. Weasley's expense the first time you used your spell."

Harry smiled at the memory. "It got a big laugh in the common room, I heard."

"Yes, so you can easily understand the temptation." She paused as they heard footsteps, and Harry stood as Flitwick, Sprout, and Snape walked in.

"We left promptly when the cats came," said Sprout, with just a hint of amusement. "I didn't want to take the chance of being scratched."

Harry tried not to smile as McGonagall nodded casually. "A wise precaution," she agreed. "I have information for you as Heads of House. The remainder of the current Quidditch stadium will be demolished, and a new stadium built. I am told that the soonest the new stadium can be ready is January, so the Quidditch season will have to wait until then, and be condensed. The first matches will be held when the new stadium is open; the second, on the first weekend of April, and the last, on the first weekend of June."

“I understand,” said Snape, “but the Slytherin team should still be selected now, as they will need time to practice.”

“Practice where?” pointed out McGonagall. “There will be no place to practice, for any team. I admit that I had not considered your current lack of a team in this, so I will agree to reschedule the first match for one month after the stadium is completed, and to give your team priority in scheduling practices. There will be no Quidditch practices for any team until then. Students may fly, of course, but not hold organized Quidditch practices, or recruit new team members. I believe each team has at least one opening, so no team will be complete until that time. You will so advise your house’s prefects and Quidditch captains. Are there any questions?”

“I have a question,” said Snape. Turning to Harry, he asked, “Professor Potter, I have been informed that last Friday, Mr. Weasley was flying with all ten of the Slytherin second year students. What was his, and their, purpose?”

Harry felt that he’d rather not say, but knew that Snape could just as easily have found out through checking his memories in a session. “They asked him to help them learn to fly in an organized way. They want to learn combat flying so they can join the battle if the school is attacked.”

McGonagall’s eyebrows went high. “I assume, I hope, you do not plan on teaching them.”

“Of course not,” he said. “I’m going to teach it to sixth and seventh years only. They didn’t ask me for anything; they know that as a teacher, I can’t do anything with them that I don’t do with everybody. For now, they want to learn to fly in formation. I assumed that they’d try to learn battle flying after I’d taught it to others, try to get them to teach them.” Probably Pansy, he thought but didn’t say, not wanting her to be called in and have to answer questions.

Harry thought he saw a grudging respect in McGonagall’s eyes. “Well, they can try to learn anything they want, but if the castle is attacked, I have no intention of allowing them to join the battle. If that happens, I will issue instructions to the fifth year prefects that all students fifth year and under will go to their dormitories.

In the meantime, I will consider the possibility of asking you and Hermione to have Fawkes and Flora assist in evacuating the younger students to safety. I applaud their initiative, but the risk is far too great due to their age.”

“Thank you, Professor,” said Harry, truly relieved. “I didn’t want to think about them going out there. They were pretty determined.”

“They can be as determined as they wish, but it will do them no good. That will be all, thank you for coming.”

Harry decided to go straight to Charms, though he would arrive ten minutes early. His plans changed, however, when he saw Blaise walking ahead of him. He walked briskly to catch up. “Blaise!”

Blaise turned around, startled. “Harry? What did you want?”

“Could I talk to you for a minute in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom?”

Nervously, Blaise said, “Um, yeah, okay...”

“Thanks, it’ll only take a minute,” Harry assured him as they started walking. “Are you having a good year so far?”

Blaise seemed surprised at the question. “Um, yeah, okay,” he repeated. With a shy chuckle, he added, “Better than any other one, but that’s not saying much.”

“I can believe that,” said Harry. “It must be nice to have a whole dormitory all to yourself.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” replied Blaise as they entered the classroom. “Good thing you’re so hard to kill. The reason they’re gone is they tried to kill you, and failed.” He looked at Harry, as if gathering his courage to say something. “Harry... I’m really sorry.”

Harry blinked in surprise. “For what?”

Blaise took a deep breath. “I knew, last year... I knew Malfoy was going to try to kill you, he talked about it. I should have gone to you and told you, but I didn’t.”

Harry had to try not to laugh out loud. “Blaise, I knew he was going to try to kill me, from September. From January, after Goyle, the whole school knew. You really shouldn’t worry about it.” Blaise looked unconvinced, but said nothing.

“What I wanted to talk to you about was the class last Friday. I noticed you were having some trouble with dueling, and I thought it was probably because you didn’t take the class last year. I’m glad that you wanted to this year, but it might be hard to catch up. I was thinking it might be a good idea for you to have some extra help outside of class, and I thought maybe you could meet Neville, like once or twice a week, he could help you get caught up. What do you think?”

Harry knew he was sort of lying, since Blaise needed help because his magic was so poor in general, not because he hadn’t taken the class last year. Harry was happy to seize on it as an excuse, however. “Harry, I was thinking, I should really just stop taking the class. I’m nowhere near good enough.”

“No, that’s not a good idea,” Harry contradicted him. “This is an important subject, you’re going to want to be able to defend yourself. You can get better, and if Neville works with you, you will get better. He helps me teach the rest of our group the stuff we learn from the Aurors, and he’s good at it. He can help. Please, just give it a try for a while.”

“Um, yeah, okay,” said Blaise yet again. Harry couldn’t help but notice that Blaise seemed less than enthusiastic, but he hoped it was just uneasiness with the situation.

“Good, great,” said Harry, now a little uncomfortable himself. “I’ll talk to Neville during Charms, and he can talk to you afterwards to find out what’s a good time for both of you. You do have Charms now, right?” Blaise nodded. “Okay, good. Well, let’s go, don’t want to keep Professor Flitwick waiting.” Harry left the room, Blaise following.

Charms was with the Slytherins, though these days that only meant Pansy, Blaise, and the other seventh year Slytherin girls. Harry sat with his friends, as usual, and whispered to Neville about his conversation with Blaise. Right on time, Flitwick

entered the room, but as usual, Harry didn't see him until he had climbed the small staircase behind the podium that led to where he stood so that he could see and be seen.

“Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to your seventh year. We will be doing some very interesting things this year, and naturally, they will be difficult. This year's class will require a lot of study and practice, even more so than before.

“Before we do anything else, I will be talking about your main project for the first part of the year. Many of the things you learn in the next few months will be applicable to it, and I want you to start thinking about it as soon as possible. First, let me ask around, to see who may know. Harry, do you know what the project is to which I'm referring?”

Harry wondered if Flitwick had deliberately called on him to give him a hard time. “No, I don't.”

Flitwick nodded. “That's fine, of course; you're not required to know. If you had wanted to know, how would you have gone about finding out?”

That's easy, thought Harry. “I would have asked Hermione.”

Pansy and the Gryffindors broke up laughing; Flitwick smiled, and Hermione gave Harry a humorous annoyed look. “Well, at least you know where the information is, should you need it,” said Flitwick dryly. “Miss Granger, first of all, my sincerest congratulations on your recent good fortune.”

“Thank you, Professor,” said Hermione happily, Flora on her shoulder.

“You're very welcome. Now, what is the project to which I am referring?”

“The Ring of Reduction, sir.”

“Yes, that's correct. I would ask you to explain it to everyone, but you could probably do it as well as I could, and then I would hardly be necessary, would I?”

Harry glanced over to see Hermione's look of embarrassment.

“The Ring of Reduction,” Flitwick continued, “is something that is not all that useful from a practical point of view; one could go one's whole life without ever seeing or creating one, and be no worse off. Its value is primarily in its ability to

let you create an environment, so to speak, in which you can use charms you will learn in this class.

“Here is an example of one,” he said as he Summoned it from a shelf across the room; it crossed the room and hovered in front of the class. “I will enlarge it for the moment so you can get a better sense of it.” The main body of it was a cube, which before Harry’s eyes increased in size from one inch in each dimension, to one foot. The cube was white, and the only other feature was three gold rings which spun around the cube. The rings spun in a top-to-bottom direction at the rate of about one revolution per second, so he saw three rings spin around every second.

“The name is somewhat misleading, since as you see it is really a cube, not a ring. The rings circling it serve no function other than disallowing entry to those not authorized.”

“Entry?” interrupted Seamus, surprised. “We enter that thing?”

“You recall that I demonstrated the use of the Pensieve last year,” explained Flitwick. “This is somewhat similar, in the sense that by entering, you view an artificial environment. In the case of the Pensieve, it is a person’s memory. In this case, it is an environment created by the creator of the Ring. The main difference is that with the Pensieve, the viewer’s true body remains outside, though he feels that he is inside. In the case of the Ring, one is actually transported inside.

“The interior is perceived as a cube, or a room with the shape of a cube. There are two possible configurations. The simple one is that of one cube-shaped room; the more complex one consists of four cube-shaped rooms. In its actual state, the one-room Ring appears to be one inch on each side, as you saw, but when one stands within it, it appears to be sixty feet on each side

“The main point of a Ring of Reduction, besides Charms practice, is its artistic value. One creates an environment, and others can view it. For example, one common use of the Ring as artwork involves the creation of what could be called a three-dimensional painting. Such artwork, the most advanced examples of which



can be found in wizarding art museums, is very difficult to create, necessitating very advanced creative and magical ability. Later we will view a few examples, created by past Hogwarts students. For the most part, however, we will be confining ourselves to simple things. For example, beaches and sunsets are common forms for beginners. One can create an environment in which a certain spell or charm can be emitted at regular intervals, though one would have to be standing in just the right place to be affected by it. Only the most basic charms, however, can be set up in this way, and even that requires above-average magical power.

“Another common environment is a memory: a memory can be placed into a Pensieve and then recorded, as it were, in much the same way that Professor Dumbledore showed us images from Harry’s dream last year. Professor Dumbledore owned a Pensieve, which now belongs to Harry; he has kindly agreed to allow it to be used for the purpose in this class if anyone wishes.”

Neville raised his hand. “Exactly how do you get into one of these?”

“Thank you, Mr. Longbottom, I was just coming to that. Not just anyone can enter one, unless it is specifically set that way. Normally, the only people who can enter and view them are family members. Specifically, those with a strong blood connection to the creator of the Ring: parents, siblings, and children. Being a cousin or a nephew is not enough. If one is an adopted child; that too is insufficient to enter, no matter how close the bond is. But if one can enter, one can take along another person of any or no relationship. Actually entering is accomplished by tossing Floo powder onto the cube, and stepping on the cube while saying the name of the creator. If you take an extra person, you must hold their hand while doing this.”

“Stepping on it?” asked Lavender. “Won’t we crush it?”

“No, you cannot destroy them, not even with magic. We can pick them up and move them, but not destroy them. They can only be destroyed by their creator.

“Before we start working on how to create them, you will view the ones left for you. Most of your parents took this class, all, I believe, from me. I have

removed their finished Rings from storage and brought them today. If your parents went here, you may view their Rings. For those whose did not, such as Miss Granger and Mr. Thomas, you should accompany someone whose did. If you view a Ring with four ‘rooms,’ you will see a vague outline of what will look like a door, straight across from your initial position; that will lead you to the second room. The third room will be found by proceeding to the center of the next room and turning directly left, and the same for the fourth. Everyone may stand and come to the front for their parents’ Rings.”

Harry and his friends stood. “So, how should we do this?” asked Ron.

“How about,” suggested Harry, “you and Pansy see each other’s, Neville and Hermione see Neville’s, and... Neville sees one of mine, Hermione sees the other.”

Ron shrugged. “Sure, sounds fine. Funny, he said it works for brothers, makes me wonder what Fred and George did. Probably you step into it and it turns you into a turtle.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me,” agreed Harry as they stepped forward. Harry, Ron, Neville, and Pansy all moved back to their desks with two rings each. One of Harry’s was only one room, while the other was two-by-two; Harry had thought that the larger one would also be shaped like a cube, but he realized that it was more a rectangle, half as tall as it was wide and long, and that it was the equivalent shape of four one-room cubes put together in two rows of two.

“Let’s do yours first, then mine,” suggested Neville to Harry, who nodded and put the larger one on the floor.

“How do we know which one is which?” asked Harry.

Hermione leaned over and held her wand over it; a name appeared. “Lily Evans,” she read.

“Not ‘Potter?’” wondered Harry.

“You put your name on them when you make them,” she pointed out. “She wasn’t ‘Potter’ until later.”

“Oh, right”. Offering his hand in an overly theatrical gesture, he said, “Neville, if you would take my hand...”

“Well, okay,” responded Neville in the same vein, taking it. “But only because Hermione said she wouldn’t be jealous.” Hermione laughed, as did Ron and Pansy, preparing to enter one of Ron’s.

“Oh, I wish I had a camera,” chuckled Hermione.

“Don’t worry, we’ll pose for you sometime,” joked Harry. “Right, Neville?”

“Absolutely,” agreed Neville. “Why, this is amazing! I can feel the energy of love flowing through him!”

Ron, Pansy, and Hermione laughed again, harder, so Harry decided to take the humor further. “Neville, are you sure that’s my hand you’re holding?”

“Oh, sorry.”

The other three were now in hysterics, and the other Gryffindors nearby were laughing as well. Flitwick walked by, chuckling. “It’s a well-known fact that two teenage boys can’t hold hands without making jokes like that. You should have seen your father and Sirius, Harry. They made so many jokes that people were starting to wonder about them.”

“I can just see that,” agreed Harry. “Well, Neville, we could amuse our friends all day long, but I guess we should get on with it.” Harry threw some Floo powder onto the box, and said, “Lily Evans!” as he stepped on the Ring.

In a flash, they were inside. Harry was momentarily disoriented as he looked around and saw the familiar sights around the outside of the castle: the lake, the Whomping Willow, and the Quidditch pitch. He looked around. “Pretty good,” he commented. “Hasn’t changed much, has it?”

“Everyone who comes back here seems to say that,” agreed Neville. “Yes, it’s good. It’ll be interesting to see how to do this.” He paused, then continued, “Um, Harry, he didn’t say we had to keep holding hands once we were in here, did he?”

Harry laughed and released Neville's hand. "Don't think he did, no. I bet my father and Sirius did, though, and kept making jokes."

Trying not to smile, Neville shrugged. "Well, if you want to..."

Harry laughed again and patted Neville on the back. "Wonder if the energy of love affects this kind of thing. I'm sure I'd have been way too embarrassed last year to make jokes like this."

"I'd guess, probably not the energy of love itself, so much as the fact that you have to deal with embarrassment to get there," suggested Neville as they started to walk around. "You talked about stuff in front of the whole school, in the Prophet. Once you've done that, holding hands probably doesn't seem like much."

"Makes sense. But it was never that hard for you, though, was it?"

"No, I guess not. I'm not sure why. Hermione's always said that was one of the big things she liked about me. Said I was 'just the opposite of Ron.'"

"I can see why she would say that. Ron's come a long way, though."

"Yes, he has," agreed Neville. "He still gets kind of weird about you and Ginny, though, which is funny since he really was happy about it. I mean, I know it's an act, but I kind of wonder exactly how much of an act it is."

"Well, it is his younger sister, who still isn't sixteen. And it probably doesn't help, from his point of view, that she's... very aggressive about that kind of thing."

"I guess so. Well, he'll get used to it." Smiling, Neville added, "That must be pretty nice for you."

"It is. I know I'm lucky that she's like that. But Hermione isn't exactly shy about that either, is she?"

"No," agreed Neville, who suddenly laughed. "I just had a funny thought... we'll come out of here, and Flitwick will say, 'Oh, I forgot to mention, everyone can hear anything you say in there.'"

Harry laughed as well. "Boy, I hope not. Next one?"

"Sure," said Neville, and they proceeded straight ahead toward the passage to the next cube, which grew more clear as they approached it. "I guess the door

can't be seen from a distance so the illusion isn't marred by seeing this big door in the middle of somewhere it obviously isn't supposed to be."

"That makes sense. Wonder if anyone's ever gotten lost in one of these."

"There must be some way to prevent that," Neville assured him.

"I hope so," said Harry.

Ten minutes later, they exited the Ring, and were in the classroom, back to their normal size. "Well, how was it?" asked Hermione.

"It was good," said Harry. "One room was like a picture of Hogwarts, one was dark but had spotlights that followed you, one had a lit area where if you put something in it, it would float, and one was a memory of her first day at Hogwarts—saying goodbye to her parents at Platform 9 3/4, a little bit of the train trip, and her part of the Sorting. It was interesting to see her at age eleven. So, you get to see my father's. Ready?"

He took her hand, threw down the Floo powder, and said his father's name as he stepped on the Ring. They were suddenly at the Quidditch stadium, watching a Quidditch match in progress. He looked up and saw his father, looking about thirteen years old, dive for the Snitch, and catch it. The crowd erupted in cheers, and his father was congratulated by his teammates. Very soon the scene shifted to another Quidditch match, and Harry saw a similar scene, this time obviously resulting in a Quidditch Cup win for Gryffindor. The scenes took almost ten minutes, and Harry counted eleven Snitch captures and four Quidditch Cup victories. When the memories finished, they were standing in an empty Quidditch stadium.

Harry felt conflicting emotions. He couldn't help but admire his father's obvious Quidditch talent, but there was something about it that bothered him; he just couldn't quite put his finger on it. "What did you think?" he asked Hermione.

"He was obviously a very good Quidditch player," said Hermione.

"Yes, he was," agreed Harry, suddenly understanding his feelings. "That was the whole point of it—how good he was. I told you a little about that memory of

Snape's I saw in fifth year. In that one, he was conceited and vain, he liked showing off. This is a lot like that, it's like his way of saying, 'look how good I am.' And of course you noticed that, you just didn't want to say anything."

"It's not necessarily vain to be proud of something you accomplished," she said, clearly not wanting Harry to think poorly of his father.

He couldn't argue with her; he understood that this one presentation didn't say everything there was to say about his father at age seventeen, but it fit in with the picture he'd gotten from Snape's memory. "Not necessarily, no. But one thing I know is, mine's not going to look like this."