

## CHAPTER 10

### FAWKES

Harry walked into Gryffindor Tower to get dressed, then went back to the Great Hall, where breakfast was underway. Harry saw a large group of first years at the Gryffindor table; he realized it was all the Gryffindor and Slytherin first years. He knew that the five male Gryffindors were busily spreading the word.

He walked to his usual spot, where he saw Ernie Macmillan and Justin Finch-Fletchley talking to Ron and Hermione. To his surprise, on seeing him, Ernie and Justin both shook his hand and patted him on the shoulder; Ernie a bit awkwardly, Justin more naturally. Harry was touched by their support, and thanked them.

“I have to say, Harry,” said Justin, “if this is part of what being Harry Potter is all about, then you’re welcome to it.”

“Is it really worth this, Harry?” asked Ernie. “Is it really worth suffering like this?”

“It absolutely is, Ernie,” Harry said vigorously. “We have to stop being afraid to say his damn name. Look what he’s doing, he’s really feeling threatened. If I have to suffer a bit to be a poster boy for saying the word ‘Voldemort,’ then I will. It’s worth whatever happens, even if only on principle.”

“Poster boy?” Ernie asked.

“Muggle expression, I’ll explain later,” replied Justin.

“Well, the Sorting Hat sure did its job when it put you in Gryffindor, Harry. You’re as brave as anyone I’ve ever met,” said Ernie solemnly.

“Thank you, Ernie, I really appreciate that.”

“You know, David told me that he said the Hat almost put him in Slytherin,” said Justin.

“Really?” Ernie was dumbfounded.

“I pleaded with it not to,” confirmed Harry. “Thank God, it listened to me. It said I would do well in Slytherin, but I’d already met Malfoy, and I didn’t want to be anywhere near him. A close call.”

“I’ll say,” sympathized Ernie. “Well, you have our support, Harry. If there’s anything we can do for you, let us know.”

“There is one thing, actually.” He gave Justin a knowing look.

Justin got it. “You’d like us to say ‘Voldemort.’”

“That’s it. Would you like some points for Hufflepuff?”

Justin chuckled. “That’s all right, I’m not in your classes. I might as well be, though; my brother won’t shut up about you.”

Ernie cleared his throat, and said, “Well, I would encourage all the Hufflepuffs to say the name...” he took a deep breath, “Voldemort... but I think our first years are doing it already.”

“Thank you, Ernie, and you, Justin, I appreciate the gesture. And Justin... David’s a good guy. We’re lucky to have him in Gryffindor.”

“Thanks,” said Justin. They walked back to their table, and Harry sat down.

“That was really good of them,” Hermione commented. “They went out of their way to come over here, to be supportive, and they even said ‘Voldemort’ when they were both uncomfortable doing it.”

“You’re right, I can use all the support I can get right now,” Harry agreed.

Just then, Luna Lovegood walked up; Harry hadn’t talked to her yet this term, and was looking forward to saying hello. She walked up to where he was sitting, leaned over, kissed him on the cheek, and walked away without a word.

Harry gaped in surprise in her direction as she walked away; Ron and Hermione giggled and tried not to laugh out loud. Ron got himself under control and said, “Well, who needs words, anyway.”

Hermione shrugged. "She got her point across, I'd say."

"Hard to argue with that," Harry agreed.

They were able to eat in peace for a while before the Slytherin first years, apparently now fully briefed by the Gryffindor boys, walked up to Harry, with the five Gryffindor girls behind them.

"Are you all right, Professor?" asked David Septus, anxiously.

"Yes, I'm all right, thanks. Ron woke me up, and I was all right soon after that." He added wryly, "It was the part before I woke up that was the problem."

Andrea Creevey looked at him anxiously. "David said that Professor Dumbledore said that it's a..." She struggled to remember.

"Hideously painful torture," supplied Hedrick.

"Yes... and you're going to face that again, and again, just to keep saying his name? How can you do that?" She was almost pleading.

"How can I not?" he replied. "Nobody seems to really understand this, but—"

"I understand," interrupted Helen Clark. She faced the others. "It's part of what he was telling me yesterday in his office. I told you all this, but it's true for Professor Potter's situation too. Voldemort is trying to stop what Professor Potter is doing. He's trying to hurt Professor Potter to make him stop us saying his name, to make us want to stop saying his name. But even if he hurts one person, or more, we have to keep fighting, because if we don't, Voldemort wins. We just have to keep fighting." The rest fell silent.

Harry was bursting with pride. He looked her in the eyes and said, "You took what I taught you about your situation, understood it, and recognized that it worked for my situation, too. What more could a teacher ask of a student?" She blushed.

Harry glanced around and saw that a lot of people were listening; all the rest of the Gryffindor sixth years, Ginny and most of the fifth years, and various

Hufflepuffs, including Justin and Ernie, who were still in hearing range. Harry was glad, he wanted as many people as possible to understand this.

He looked around again, this time to see Draco Malfoy approaching; oddly, without Crabbe or Goyle. The Hall seemed to quiet down. He gave Harry his usual sneer. “So, you’ve got quite a crowd, Scarhead. Bet you love that.”

“That’s Professor Scarhead to you, Malfoy.” Harry remembered the joke he’d mentioned to Dudley, and thought he had to try it. “Say, Malfoy, where’s Moe and Curly?”

Hermione, Justin, Dean, David, all three Creeveys, Eric, and a few scattered others burst out laughing; the rest, including Malfoy, looked confused. Looking at Malfoy’s confusion only made some laugh harder; Hermione was holding onto a very bewildered Ron to try to steady herself. Harry enjoyed the scene. Even though only a minority were laughing, Malfoy was still upset not to know what they were laughing about.

“Anybody who doesn’t get it, ask someone who’s laughing now, they’ll explain it to you later,” said Harry helpfully to the others. “Now, did you want something, Malfoy?”

Warming to his topic, Malfoy regained his smugness. “So, you said his name one too many times, and look what happens. Tortured in your sleep, from miles away. You can’t get away from the Dark Lord, Potter. Still claim to not be afraid of him?”

“Who, Voldemort?” Malfoy blanched. “Are you talking about Voldemort, Malfoy? Is it Voldemort to whom you’re referring? If it’s Voldemort you’re talking about, Malfoy, then why don’t you just say...” Harry intended to stretch out the pause for dramatic effect, but his plan was changed when before he could say the name, ten Gryffindor and ten Slytherin first years shouted, as one, “Voldemort!”

Malfoy practically jumped out of his skin, causing laughter all around. Harry looked at the students and said, “I’ve never been so proud.” Some smiled, some laughed, and some blushed.

“Are you stupid, Potter? You woke up screaming a few hours ago! Have you forgotten that already?”

Harry stood and stared directly at Malfoy. “No, Malfoy, I remember it quite vividly. And it will motivate me to keep saying the name ‘Voldemort’ for as long as I breathe. I don’t give up. I know you can’t understand this. If it had happened to you, you’d be crawling around, trying to find out whose boots you could lick to make it stop, to get on their good side. You can’t understand any other way to be. That’s how you were raised, and for that, I feel sorry for you. But you’re wasting my time, so get back over there and enjoy spending time with the people who’ll agree with anything you say. It’s only there that you can be comfortable.” Harry pointedly sat down and took another bite of his food as a way of dismissing Malfoy. Malfoy cast another disgusted look, shook his head, then turned and left. A round of applause went up, which included, Harry noted, some Slytherins.

“See, Malfoy and his crowd, they don’t stand up for each other,” said Ron. “Where were Crabbe and Goyle, when they could have been standing next to Malfoy looking, you know, big and stupid? Could’ve really helped him.”

“Well, then I couldn’t have made the Three Stooges joke,” Harry observed.

Hermione burst out laughing again. “Oh, Harry, that was so hysterical! It was the best joke I’ve ever heard you make! And the best part was, he didn’t even understand it!”

“Lot of us didn’t either, though,” pointed out Ron. “It’s a Muggle thing, I assume?”

“Yes, it is,” said Hermione. Harry got back to his food as she explained it to Ron and others around them.

Dozens of owls suddenly appeared in the Great Hall. Harry didn’t take much notice; this happened every day, and there was almost never anything for him. But today there was; one letter dropped onto the table in front of him, then another, then two more, and more still. By the time the owls had gone, nine letters lay in front of him. Ron and Hermione were wide-eyed.

“Wow, you must be popular,” said Helen. “Do you always get this much mail?”

“In fact, almost never,” replied Harry. He opened one and started reading. He glanced up at the Slytherins in front of him, looked back at the letter, and looked up again. He opened another letter, read it quickly, then opened a third one and skimmed it. He looked at the Slytherins. “I will read them all later, believe me, but just for now... do they all say more or less the same thing?” Nine Slytherins nodded. “Does she know?” Harry asked. They shook their heads.

“What are you guys talking about?” asked Helen, in confusion and annoyance.

“Helen, last night, when you were telling them about your meeting with me... did you tell them how you were willing to be singled out, to have your name used so we could catch Malfoy, even if it was dangerous for you?” She nodded. “Well,” he continued, his voice choking up with pride, “your nine classmates each wrote me a letter, saying much the same things you did, about Malfoy’s behavior and about the candies. They did it because it meant that if I used your letter as evidence, it wouldn’t be just your letter, it would be all ten of you. They divided the risk among themselves, so it wouldn’t only be yours.”

Helen was silent for a moment, then tears started trickling down her face. Harry glanced at Hermione, who looked like she might start crying herself. Helen walked toward her classmates, clearly overwhelmed, and started touching people randomly and thanking them between tears. A few girls got out tissues for her. Finally she said, “Thank you all so much... I don’t know what to say.”

Harry got up and knelt next to the Slytherins. “I’m really, really proud of all of you. I mean that. I know how she feels. They’ve,” motioning toward Ron and Hermione, “done stuff like that for me many times. It’s great to know that you have friends, people who’ll share the difficulties with you. It’s one of the best things about life.”

He looked at the clock; it was getting close to when they had to leave for their respective classes. “Look... we don’t have much time left, and I wanted to say something, about what I said to Malfoy when he came over here. Everything I said was the truth, but I don’t want you to have a wrong impression. The phrase Professor Dumbledore used, that it’s a ‘hideously painful torture,’ is very accurate, and I’d be lying if I said I’ll go to sleep tonight not thinking about what might happen in my sleep. It’ll be really bad. My point is, I don’t want to make it seem like it’s no big deal. I don’t want you to ever walk into danger without understanding what you could be getting yourself into. Don’t be casual about it, understand it, accept it, and face it. I’ve done the first three, and the fourth comes later. All I can do is, like Ron said to you,” gesturing to Helen, “is not to think too much about it.”

Ginny knelt by Harry. “We would do it with him if we could.”

Hermione added, “We would do it for him if we could.”

Harry looked at them with gratitude, then said to the first years, “But because of this,” moving his hair to show his scar, “they can’t. Only I can do it.”

Hedrick said, “David tried to explain it to us, but there’s still a lot we don’t understand, about how Voldemort can get to you. I know there’s no time now, but...”

Harry nodded. They had become close to him in a very short time; he would give them what time he could. “Ron, what time are the Quidditch tryouts?”

“Six-thirty,” answered Ron.

Harry quickly calculated times. “Okay, I have a class until four o’clock. If you want to come to my classroom then, I’ll answer questions and explain anything you want. How about that?” They nodded eagerly and thanked him. “Okay, you’d better get going, and so had I. I have a class, too.” They moved off.

Ginny started to stand up, but Harry grabbed her wrist. “Ginny, wait... I still have to figure out what to do about the Slytherin fifth years and the Snackboxes. You’ve been in classes with them. What’s your impression of them? What kind of people are they?”

“It’s almost hard to say; I haven’t really talked much with any of them. None of them seem to have much of a strong personality. All I know for sure is that there are no Malfoys, no one who obviously gets off on power and being mean. I’d be willing to bet that at least some don’t like him because he probably treats them badly, since they’re younger. I’m sorry I can’t tell you more than that.”

“That’s enough for what I need, thanks. We’d better get going.”

By the time they reached the classroom, all the other students were already there. As Ginny took a seat and Harry walked up to the front, applause suddenly broke out. Harry reflexively looked around, as if trying to work out who the applause was for, which generated some laughter. He put his bag down on the desk, and faced them.

“Thanks, but I’m kind of wondering, can someone tell me what that was for?”

There was silence for a moment, and a Slytherin girl with long, dark hair raised her hand. “I’m not sure I can say for everyone, but I think for two things. One, we’ve never seen anyone talk to Malfoy like that, and I for one loved it.” Voices murmured their agreement. “He’s done nothing but push us around since the day we got here. Two, I don’t know all the details, but I know the basics of what happened last night. I have an uncle who was once subjected to the Cruciatus Curse. He told me how horrible it was, how words can’t begin to express the pain involved. Even thinking about it still scares him. So, the idea that you went through that a few hours ago, and you’re willing to do it again, just so we can say... V—Voldemort... well, I know Gryffindors are supposed to be brave, but this is beyond bravery, it’s like...” She groped for a word, then finally said, “Well, you know what I mean.”

He looked at her sincerely. “Thank you, Juliet.” He paused. “Was that the first time you ever said Voldemort’s name?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, that’s twenty points for Slytherin.”



Ginny said, “Damn, I should have said his name as soon as we walked into the room. I know you only give the twenty points once.”

“Sorry, Ginny, you wouldn’t have gotten it anyway. It’s only for people who haven’t said the name before, and I know you have.”

“Well, that hardly seems fair.” she pouted.

Harry smiled. “Now, let me take the roll, before I forget.” He walked over to the podium and did so. When he got to Colin Creevey’s name, he said, “Colin, I taught your sister on Monday. I really like her. She’s very spirited.”

Colin smiled. “Yes, sir. But Dennis and I like her anyway.”

Harry chuckled. “Yes, Colin, I can see how that could be annoying at times.” He glanced at Ginny as he said it, recalling that she could be described as spirited too, and that it probably annoyed Ron from time to time. He finished calling the roll.

“If I remember the last names right, two of you Slytherins have brothers or sisters who are first years, is that right?” He saw two heads nod. “Well, you should be proud of them. They’re a great group.”

A short-haired blonde girl raised her hand. “My brother’s told me all about what’s happened. I’d really like to help him.”

“You can,” Harry pointed out. “You can support them, help them out when they need it, help stand up for them. They could use the help of older students. They’re brave, but it’s hard for them because they’re so young.”

A dark-haired Slytherin boy at the back named Thomas Dalton raised his hand. “Professor, I think you know, I think the whole school knows, that Malfoy gave us candies from those Skiving Snackboxes and told us to take them to get out of your class, like a few of the third and fourth years did.” Harry nodded. “Well, he jinxed a few of those that didn’t, and he made some nasty threats against us if we don’t. One thing you learn in Slytherin, sir, is to take Malfoy’s threats seriously. I think most of us are afraid not to do what he asked. He’s talked to each of us about this, like three times, he’s really serious about it.”

Harry nodded. "I understand, and I sympathize, I really do. But I do have to give you all detentions if you do, I really have no choice."

"I understand that," said Thomas. "But we also heard that you know he's doing it, and you threatened to give him an hour of detention for every one of us that skives, is that right?" Harry nodded. "So, I was wondering," Thomas continued, "why is Malfoy still pushing us to do this? When he'll get tons of detention?"

"I can't be sure," Harry said, "but I think there's a few reasons. One is that it's me, Harry Potter, who he hates. He's furious that I've been made a teacher, as you saw at the feast, and he really wants to do something to hurt me. Now he's even more furious that the first and second years like me..."

"It's not only them," said Juliet. "I've heard third and fourth years say it too. They just don't say it very loudly."

"I understand. Anyway, so his anger at me is at an all-time high, which is really saying something. He wants to get me really bad. That's why he was gloating about what Voldemort did to me, he loves it." He saw many dark looks, from all students regardless of house. "Secondly, he thinks he can get away with it. I have no firm proof, since it's all things he said, he thinks he can deny it, and since he's a prefect, get away with it. He's used to getting away with whatever he wants, and his hatred of me may be blinding him to the risks he's taking."

"Can he get away with it?" asked Thomas.

"No," answered Harry, deciding at the last second not to equivocate. "The other teachers are going to support me, they approve of the threat I made to Malfoy. He's making a deliberate attempt to undermine a Hogwarts teacher, and they take that seriously. He's made a huge mistake, he just doesn't know it yet."

"So, if we use the Snacks, he gets ten hours of detention, and we get one each?" Harry nodded, as did Thomas. "Seems like a fair trade to me." Everyone laughed

"You understand I can't officially approve of this," Harry pointed out, choosing his words carefully. "If I approve, it becomes all right, and nothing

happens to Malfoy. So, I officially disapprove of you using the Snacks. Is everybody clear on that? Now, if you should at some point not feel well,” he continued humorously, “you should go down to Madam Pomfrey’s, and stay there until the end of the class time.” He looked at the Slytherins expectantly.

There was silence for a few seconds. Then, understanding what Harry was waiting for, Thomas exclaimed, “Well, I’m not going to do it now. I don’t know about everyone else, but I want to see the lesson. I’ll do it with fifteen minutes to go.”

Harry made sure no one else intended to take theirs immediately, and proceeded with the lesson. More than the others, he modeled it on what he had done with the D.A., because as fifth years they already knew a lot of the spells he would be emphasizing for personal defense. The lesson focused on Protection and Disarming; Harry told them that he knew they already knew them, but he wanted to be sure they had the fundamentals before moving on.

With fifteen minutes to go, suddenly Thomas developed a nosebleed. “That’s a nasty nosebleed you’ve got there, Thomas. You’d better get down to Madam Pomfrey’s.” Some students chuckled as Thomas picked up his bags and left; suddenly three students vomited, three fainted, two developed fevers, and there was one more nosebleed. Harry Vanished all the blood and vomit on the floor as the last of the Slytherins left.

“Well, I didn’t think teaching was going to be such a messy business,” he said. “Let’s give them a few minutes to get down there.” They continued practicing for a few minutes. Harry then said, “Okay, I think they’re all there by now. I have to let Professor Dumbledore know. This shouldn’t take long.”

He pulled out his wand, and waved it as Dumbledore had shown him. “Fawkes,” he said. A second later, Fawkes came bursting into view. There was a gasp; most of the students had never seen Fawkes before. Harry grasped Fawkes’s tail and said, “Professor Dumbledore’s office.” Suddenly, he was there.

“Ah, Harry, I was wondering where you were,” said Dumbledore genially. “I gather this means that the Slytherins felt it necessary to use the Snacks to protect themselves from Mr. Malfoy, but their hearts were not in it, since they stayed for most of the lesson?”

“That was my impression, Professor,” Harry confirmed.

“Very well, then. I will head over to Madam Pomfrey’s; you go ahead back to your class.” He headed out the door, Harry said, “the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom,” Fawkes took off, and he was back in the classroom.

The remaining ten Gryffindors broke into applause, which Harry understood was for Fawkes, not for him. “Yeah, he’s pretty great,” Harry agreed.

“I’m amazed that Professor Dumbledore let you use him!” enthused Ginny. “I’ve never seen a teacher do that before.”

“Oh, you mean I was supposed to ask?” Harry joked. “Well, I told him I didn’t want to be gone too long, so he let me use him.” He noticed that Fawkes had perched on his shoulder; he reached up and stroked him. Fawkes’s feathers were amazingly soft, like silk. Harry had to make himself stop. Turning his head to look at Fawkes, he said, “Fawkes, you can go back to Professor Dumbledore’s office.” He waited a minute. “It’s okay, Fawkes, I’m done. You can go back.” Fawkes continued not to move. Harry waited another few seconds, then said, “Or, you could stay here a while longer.” Most of the students grinned, amused at his predicament.

They resumed their practice, and Harry called a halt shortly before the bell. “Now, there’s just a few minutes left, so why don’t we just stop here. You can get an early start to your next class, and I can figure out what to do with Fawkes here.”

“No, just keep him there,” urged Ginny. “Then in your next class, Luna Lovegood will say, ‘Excuse me, Professor, did you know there’s a phoenix on your shoulder?’ And you should deny it, of course.”

Harry smiled. “See you all next week,” he said, and headed back to his office. He sat down in his chair; Fawkes hopped onto the desk and regarded Harry,

who started petting him. "I'd love to know what this is all about, Fawkes," he said. He thought about traveling back to Dumbledore's office and trying to leave Fawkes there, but he knew that phoenixes were extraordinarily magical creatures, and that in the end, Fawkes would do what he wanted. Harry would just have to wait until he could talk to Dumbledore

The next class went well, despite the slight distraction of Fawkes' presence; Luna did manage to tell an improbable story that her father once published about a phoenix. The class was good, partly because it had the highest number of D.A. members of any of Harry's classes. After the class, Harry headed off to lunch. As was usual when he taught, Ron and Hermione were there first.

"Cool, Harry! You stole Fawkes!" joked Ron. "You're not hiding him very well, though. Kind of conspicuous."

Harry explained what had happened. "I just have to wait until I can talk to Professor Dumbledore, I don't know what's going on."

"Phoenixes are really smart, Harry," said Hermione. "I'm sure he has a very good reason for doing this, you just don't know what it is."

"Well, I'll be interested to find out. I attract enough attention without having a phoenix on my shoulder." Harry paused and looked up. "It's kind of nice having him around, though. He's nice, and his feathers are really soft."

Hermione said, "We want to know the whole story of the dream, of course, but we know you're going to tell your first years at 4:00. We thought we'd just join you then, so you don't have to do it again." Harry said that sounded fine.

The rest of lunch was uneventful. Parvati and Lavender came over to admire Fawkes, as did Hannah Abbott and a few others. At about 12:40, as Harry was considering heading over to the staff room, a golden dog entered the Great Hall and headed for Harry. He jumped up into Harry's lap, and buried his head in Harry's chest. Hermione smiled radiantly; Ron looked curious. "Well, I don't want to keep him waiting," Harry said, and got up. With a phoenix on his shoulder, following a golden dog, Harry headed to Dumbledore's office.

Dumbledore's office door was open. "Harry, thank you for coming. Ah, there he is. I was wondering where Fawkes had got off to."

"Couldn't you have called him, Professor?"

"I prefer not to unless there is a real need. I don't like to disturb him."

"Sorry, Professor. When I got back to my class, I told him he could go ahead back to your office, but he just stayed. I was wondering what to do, but I just decided it was better not to argue with him, and wait to talk to you."

"A wise move, Harry. Phoenixes tend to know what is best. If one does a certain thing, he is bound to have a good reason."

"So, why has he done this, sir? Why does he stay with me?"

"Fawkes has decided to care for you for the duration of your crisis. He will stay with you, almost twenty-four hours a day, until the danger from Voldemort has passed."

Harry knew enough about phoenixes to know that this was a very good thing. "That's great, sir. Is this something you told him to do?"

"One does not 'tell' a phoenix to do something, Harry, one requests it," Dumbledore explained. "One does not 'own' a phoenix, one cares for it, or serves as a companion to it. I could have requested that Fawkes do this, but it would have been highly presumptuous of me. It would be a bit like telling a person whom they should love."

Harry didn't see how the analogy worked. "I don't understand, sir."

"Fawkes will stay with you and care for you, Harry. He will sing to help you to sleep, and throughout your sleep, to assist you in your struggle with Voldemort. This is not a task a phoenix undertakes lightly. It is a serious commitment, and phoenixes are very discriminating creatures. They will not do this for just anyone, to put it mildly. I am pleased that Fawkes has chosen to do this for you, but as I said, it is such a serious thing that it was not for me to suggest."

"Is this going to hurt Fawkes? Will he suffer like I will?"

Dumbledore smiled proudly. “You are very worthy of his attention, Harry. You are undergoing a terrible ordeal, but you are still worried about Fawkes, as you would for anyone following you into a dangerous situation. To answer your question, he will suffer no discomfort. He will mainly have to... concentrate harder than usual, I believe would be the human equivalent. To put it another way, he is joining you in your fight. We fellow humans can give you emotional and moral support; Fawkes can do more. He will be of great help to you.”

Harry had no difficulty believing that. He turned his head to look at Fawkes. “Thank you, Fawkes,” he said, petting him. “This means a lot to me.”

“It means something else that is not critical for you to know just now, but I will tell you anyway, because you would want to know. As I said, phoenixes are highly discriminating. What he is doing with you is a form of bonding, and phoenixes only bond with those they feel would be good custodians or companions. What I am saying, Harry, is that by doing this, Fawkes is indicating that he has selected you to be his next companion, after I am gone.”

Harry felt stunned. His first reaction was that he didn’t want to contemplate Albus Dumbledore being gone. He had come to depend on Dumbledore, especially recently. He hoped he would not be inheriting Fawkes for a very long time. His next reaction was to feel honored. A phoenix chose him as a companion? It was a lot to get used to. He voiced his first reaction.

“Sir, I really don’t want to think about you being gone.”

Dumbledore nodded. “No, we do not wish to think of that about those for whom we care, and I am honored that you feel that way. But we cannot ignore facts, either. I do not mean I will die tomorrow, or next month. But I am quite old, already a distance past normal life expectancy. Fawkes knows this. I have for some time been urging him to think about the future, and he has chosen you. After this crisis is over, he will still be my companion, but he will also be yours. It is a kind of changing of the guard, so to speak. He will spend time with each of us as he feels is appropriate, or where he feels the need is greater. It is normal that the phoenix

spends more of this interim time in the presence of the older custodian, but it can vary from phoenix to phoenix.”

“Wow... sir... I’m really stunned. I mean, this is very serious. This is a very big thing. I’m just really honored.”

“It is indeed an honor, Harry. I am glad you recognize that. The worldwide phoenix population is not high, and not all phoenixes choose to companion humans. The percentage of those that do is estimated to be less than a quarter of all phoenixes.”

Harry still couldn’t quite believe it. He didn’t know that much about phoenixes beyond what he knew about Fawkes, but it had always been his impression that only people of great stature, like Dumbledore, could attract them. “Why did he choose me, Professor? It can’t be just because of this crisis, since he’s going to be with me for the rest of my life, right? Why me and not someone else?”

“Were I to ask him, he would not be able to answer with any specifics. Phoenixes have a keen sense of intuition; they can know the best thing to do without knowing what we would refer to as the ‘reason’. He simply feels, or knows, that you will make a good companion. It may help you to understand the nature of a phoenix’s bond with its companion. Once the bond is well established, you and he will be able to communicate in certain ways without words; there will be a sort of mental link. Phoenixes are very calm; that will affect you on a consistent basis, and help you achieve the emotional control that we have discussed. The communication is two-way; he will feel what you feel to a great extent. This is why phoenixes are so selective; were a phoenix to bond with a chronically depressed or emotionally unstable person, the phoenix would suffer along with the companion. Phoenixes are very sensitive to anger and hatred; it affects them very strongly and negatively.”

Amazed, Harry immediately wondered whether Fawkes had made a good choice. “But, sir, isn’t he going to be in trouble, then? I mean, look at how I was last year, I was angry or upset a lot of the time. I seem like the least likely person for a phoenix to choose.”



Dumbledore gave Harry a small smile, suggesting that he knew more than Harry did. “It is not your past that attracts Fawkes, it is your future. He would not do this unless he felt that you were, or would soon be, the kind of person that a phoenix desires as a companion.”

Harry almost asked Dumbledore to repeat what he had said, so surprised was he. “Wow... I don’t really know what to say to that. I... I guess I’ll just try extra hard to make sure that happens. I don’t want him to have to suffer.”

Dumbledore nodded as if he had known Harry would say that. “That you feel that way is part of the reason he chose you. I do not want to say that phoenixes are never wrong, but it happens so rarely that one might just as well say so.”

Harry exhaled, still stunned. “This is so incredible. I mean... I don’t know, it’s just been an amazing day.”

“If today has been, or will be, an extraordinary day, it is because of your crisis,” said Dumbledore. “The regard, affection, assistance, love, and support will flow from those who know you, in great quantities. They hope to fortify you in your time of need. You are on the front lines in a battle. They cannot be with you physically, but they want you to know they are there with you in spirit.”

Harry felt overwhelmed. “I guess I see what you mean, everyone’s been so concerned. Justin and Ernie came over, a few other people... and all of my first-year Slytherins... they still felt under threat from Malfoy, but after they found out what happened to me, they came over anyway, they didn’t care. Oh, by the way, did you hear what they did?” Harry told him about the nine letters he got, the context of the situation, and how proud he was.

“Indeed you should be proud, Harry, because they were doing what you taught them, and showing real courage and solidarity. I firmly believe that they followed your example as well as your instruction. And that is why they braved Mr. Malfoy’s wrath and visited you.”

Shaking his head in amazement, Harry said, “I wouldn’t have thought I could feel this close to them after only a short time.”

“Your feelings were strongly engaged, as you said, because they were suffering for supporting you. You could identify with their struggle, similar in concept to your own, but you could not take direct action on their behalf. All that is bound to create a bond of closeness. The relationship you build with these students will last a lifetime.”

Harry nodded; he felt Dumbledore was well equipped to understand such things. But the mention of Malfoy’s name spurred another thought. “Oh, sir... how did it go, with the fifth-year Slytherins in Madam Pomfrey’s?”

“You will not be surprised to hear that they truthfully reported that they felt coerced into evading your classes by using the Snacks, and that they would rather not have done so. There was also an amount of unprompted testimony of a history of abuse by Mr. Malfoy; they did seem to have a lot to get off their chests. I am satisfied that they are blameless, and if you wish to rescind their detentions for that reason, I would support that. As for Mr. Malfoy, I will interview him tonight to determine an appropriate disciplinary action. His Head of House will be present, as will you, as this involves your class.”

“Do you mean you’re going to decide if my punishment will be enforced?”

“Oh, no, that is already done. Teachers have great discretion in such matters. In addition, even if he had not coerced them, as a prefect, he shared responsibility for their actions, which you pointed out to him. No, the meeting tonight will be to determine whether, and what type of, further sanctions are warranted. What they may be, and how severe, will depend on Mr. Malfoy’s testimony.”

In other words, if he lies, he’ll be in big trouble, thought Harry. Harry doubted that Malfoy knew that Dumbledore was a Legilimens, and so would lie ever more earnestly, not knowing he was digging a hole deeper and deeper. Harry found himself looking forward to it, but then looked at Dumbledore, and realized that such reactions were not something to be proud of.

“I understand, sir. What time will this meeting be? I have Quidditch at 6:30, and Occlumency with you at 10:00, so my evening’s a little tight.”

Dumbledore smiled. “Yes, it is a busy day. Let us make it 9:15, then. That should allow more than enough time.”

Harry thought of leaving, and tried to decide whether there was anything else he should ask. “Professor, I realize that becoming a companion of Fawkes’s is really important. Is there anything else that I should know about phoenixes that I don’t know, especially thinking of the next few days?”

“Only that, in addition to their song having magical powers, their mere presence has a calming effect, as I referred to earlier. You may already have observed this; it will help you get to sleep tonight, and stay calm and focused for as long as this crisis lasts. He will also leave for short periods of time, mainly to get food. You do not need to feed or water him; he takes care of that himself. All you have to do is treat him with respect and appreciate his presence.”

“I can do that without trying,” Harry assured Dumbledore. Turning to Fawkes, he added, “Thank you again, Fawkes. I’m honored that you chose me.” A thought about why he might have been chosen came into Harry’s head. “Professor... does Fawkes know that I’m the Boy Who Lived? Do phoenixes think in those terms?”

“No, Harry, they do not. They know emotions, and words to describe people and motions, and as I mentioned, are highly intuitive. For example, Fawkes knew when to come to you in the Chamber of Secrets without being specifically told. He did not ‘know’ the situation exactly as we did, but he knew what to do. In any case, Fawkes would not concern himself with such matters as abstract as your status. He chose you because he can see inside you, after a fashion. We often radiate our feelings from our face, especially our eyes. We always radiate our emotions, in ways phoenixes are sensitive to. A phoenix can tell exactly what kind of person you are simply by being around you. That is another part of how you were chosen.”

Harry found that hard to accept; he had never thought of himself as exceptional, except for managing to get into trouble. He wondered what it was that

Fawkes saw that he didn't. "I'm still pretty amazed, sir... well, I suppose for now I shouldn't think about it too much, just enjoy his company."

"Yes, that is an excellent idea, Harry."

Harry thanked Dumbledore, left, then went to the Great Hall to meet Ron and Hermione before their lesson with Dumbledore. They were still at the table, but now studying, not eating. Harry sat down, Fawkes becoming a permanent fixture on his shoulder.

Without preamble, he explained the situation with Fawkes. Ron and Hermione gaped. "Oh, my God, Harry!" Hermione squeaked. "That's amazing! I've read that only one in ten thousand wizards ever have a phoenix in their lives. That's wonderful!"

"You're going to have to learn all about them now," Ron pointed out. "I'm sure Hermione can point you to a good book or two." Hermione made a face at him. Then, he said, "Seriously, mate, that's great. Can't think of anybody who could use it more than you."

"Well, it'll be nice to go to sleep to phoenix song," Harry agreed.

"Yeah, that'll be cool, I'll get to hear it too." Ron said enthusiastically.

"That reminds me, should I even be sleeping in our dormitory, until this thing is over? I mean, I'm just going to wake you up again."

"Yeah, it's so inconvenient to wake up early because your friend is being tortured, better to throw you out instead," Ron mocked him. "I mean, come on."

"Dean and Seamus might not feel that way," Harry pointed out.

"Dean and Seamus should stay someplace else, then," Ron asserted. "I'm going to go talk to them, see what they think." He got up and headed down the table.

Ron was gone for ten minutes, coming back just before they had to leave for Dumbledore's class. "Okay, I've fixed it," he said, sitting down. "I talked to Dean and Seamus, then McGonagall. Dean and Seamus will stay in guest quarters until this is over. Hermione, if you want to, you and Ginny will be sleeping in their beds."

Ron happily took in Harry and Hermione's amazed looks; he seldom got to surprise them.

"Girls sleeping in a boys' dormitory? How did you get her to agree to that?" asked Hermione, very impressed.

"I told her that it would be very helpful to Harry to have his closest friends nearby," Ron explained. "I think the fact that we're prefects helps. When she said, 'Mr. Weasley, there is a reason that girls' and boys' dormitories are separate,' I got all indignant... 'Professor, with what's going on, how could you even think—', and she interrupted me and said, 'All right, all right.'" He smiled; it was the first time he had won an argument with McGonagall.

"Well done, Ron," said Hermione. "Of course I'll be there, Harry. I'm sure Ginny will, too."

"But you're not going to get a lot of sleep—" Harry started to point out.

"Oh, shut up, Harry," interrupted Hermione. "You would do it for us, don't deny it. Losing some sleep is minor compared to what it is for you. Of course, if you'd rather not have us there..." She raised her eyebrows.

"C'mon, Hermione," he said, a bit annoyed. "It's fantastic that you'll be there, you know that. And I get your point, I shouldn't worry about you when I'm way worse off. Anyway, thank you. It's very good of you."

"See, now, that was what you should have said in the first place. Come on, we'd better get going, we don't want to be late for Dumbledore's class."

As they got up, Harry looked at Ron and said, "Thanks, Ron."

Ron nodded. "No problem."

Most of the students were already there when Harry, Ron, and Hermione reached the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. Fortunately, there were three empty seats together near the front, which they took. On Harry's right was Justin Finch-Fletchley, with Ernie Macmillan in front of him.

"Say, Harry," asked Justin, gesturing to Fawkes, "What's up with this?"

Harry had decided that when explaining about Fawkes, he wasn't going to specifically include the fact that Fawkes had chosen him as a permanent companion. "Fawkes is going to stay with me while this is going on. Professor Dumbledore told me that his being around will be helpful."

"I don't doubt it," said Ernie, turning to join the conversation. "Phoenixes are seriously magical. I assume he's going to sing you to sleep?" Harry nodded. "Good, that's good. I'm not surprised that Dumbledore thought of this."

"Actually, he told me he didn't," Harry explained. "It was Fawkes's idea. He knew I was in trouble, and decided he wanted to help." Justin and Ernie exchanged impressed looks.

Albus Dumbledore strode into the room, and all conversation ceased, as if on cue. He carried no books, only his wand. He stood at the front of the class, to the left of the podium. "Good afternoon, and welcome to your N.E.W.T. Defense Against the Dark Arts class. Before we begin, so you will not be overly distracted, I would like to say a few words about Harry's companion."

Dean raised his hand. "What companion is that, sir?" The whole class laughed, including Dumbledore.

"Yes, indeed, Dean, he is rather difficult to miss. I believe you have not yet gotten to phoenixes in your Care of Magical Creatures classes, but I am sure many of you know that phoenixes have calming and healing abilities, especially their song. So, Fawkes has decided to stay with Harry until the current situation resolves itself. He is with Harry all day partly because his mere presence is helpful, and partly as a bonding process. He is getting used to Harry's... aura, if you will. For those familiar with the Muggle world, it is like tuning a radio to the strongest point possible. He is becoming comfortable with Harry. He is very well behaved... yes, Seamus?"

"You mean Harry, or Fawkes, sir?"

"Both, I hope," answered Dumbledore as the class laughed. "He should not be much of a distraction. And I am again referring to Fawkes, Seamus, not Harry," as the class laughed again. Harry looked around. Most people were looking at

Fawkes admiringly, but Hannah Abbott had a look of astonishment. She must know about phoenixes, she must know what this means, Harry thought.

“Now, let us proceed with the class. As Harry is doing in his classes, I will be focusing here on things which will be highly practical. But before we do any actual spells, I would like to discuss the mental element of spellcasting, which I feel is too often ignored.

“It is our mental energy, not our words, which works in conjunction with our wands to give effect to our magic,” Dumbledore explained. “This is shown by the fact that it is possible to do spells while remaining silent, which we will be studying soon. We give voice to our spells because it makes them stronger, but they are not made stronger by our voices per se. It is rather that vocalizing them causes us to focus our mental energy more strongly on the spell. Most wizards’ spells are not as effective when they are silent, but there are a few wizards whose mental energy is sufficiently highly focused that their spells lose nothing from a lack of vocalization. My intention is to help you learn mental disciplines which will help you do spells silently and effectively, and improve your overall spellcasting abilities.”

“Sir,” asked Hermione with her hand raised, “why is it that we’ve never been taught this, nor is it in any of our books? It doesn’t seem like the kind of thing that’s so advanced that it should have to wait until N.E.W.T. classes.”

“You are correct, of course, Hermione. I have long felt that the mental aspects of spellcasting have gone underappreciated by the magical community. People seem rather attached to saying the words, and tend to think that the words are the important things. What I am saying cannot be demonstrated by proof, but I am confident that it is true nonetheless.

“The most important aspect of this, and of spellcasting in general, is to focus your mind. It is particularly helpful to think, not so much of the spell you want to cast, but of its intended result.” Dumbledore took a small blue ball out of his robes, and tossed it to one side of the room. “So, if I want to Summon the ball, perhaps I will hear the word ‘Accio’ in my mind, but I will more be focusing on a

mental image of the ball flying into my hand,” as the ball did just that. “Now, I will go into various details of how to achieve this focus, and then we will try some practice.” Dumbledore talked for the next half hour, interspersed with periods of silence.

Harry could not recall being so interested, so engaged, in a lesson. He felt hyper-aware, filled with confidence. He wondered if that was Dumbledore’s influence, or Fawkes’s, or something else entirely. He didn’t want to question it, but just enjoy it. He found that he intuitively understood Dumbledore’s message, and eagerly sought to apply it.

After his explanations were finished, Dumbledore said, “Now, we are going to give this a first try. I want everyone, in turn, to come to the front and try three spells silently. First, turn a classmate blue. Second, Summon the ball. Third, do any spell of your own choosing which is not harmful. Lavender, why don’t you start off.”

Lavender successfully turned Parvati a light shade of blue, but could not Summon the ball, and her attempt to levitate it failed as well. The next three students did no better. Neville, however, turned Ernie a deep shade of blue, successfully Summoned the ball, and caused a book on his desk to rise and fall. He got a healthy round of applause from everyone, turning a bit red as he sat down.

The next seven students had varying degrees of success, though none was as successful as Neville until Hermione took her turn. She turned Ernie blue, Summoned the ball, and caused the end of her wand to light up like a flashlight. She sat down to applause. “Harry, your turn,” said Dumbledore.

Harry got up, full of confidence and focus. He pointed his wand at Ron, imagining him a deep shade of blue, which then happened. He Summoned the ball, wishing it into his hand. He had already planned his third spell; he pointed his wand at Hermione, concentrating. Then he said, “Hermione, have you ever read, ‘Hogwarts, A History?’” Harry saw her look indignant, and start to respond, but no sound came from her lips. As soon as she realized what he had done, she looked



even more indignant, put her hands on her hips, and gave him an unhappy look. The class roared its approval as Harry silently performed the counter-curse, and gestured to Hermione that she could speak again.

“You would find a way to do your spell and make fun of me at the same time,” she said. Harry smiled broadly, and feeling very happy, got another idea. He closed his eyes, concentrated, thought of the support he’d gotten today from nearly everyone at Hogwarts... and a large silver stag erupted out of his wand, and started galloping across the room. The class watched it with astonishment for a few seconds, and applauded loudly. Even Dumbledore looked surprised.

“Thank you, Harry, most impressive indeed. And lastly, we have Ernie.” Ernie got up, his body language suggesting he hoped to make as impressive a display as Harry’s. He pointed his wand at Harry, and nothing happened. He looked confused, then tried again. Finally, he adjusted his wand’s direction, and Harry turned blue.

“What was the difficulty, Ernie?”

“I was trying to turn Fawkes blue, but it didn’t work.” Some people chuckled.

“Well, you see, phoenixes are highly resistant to magic,” explained Dumbledore.

“I can’t say I didn’t learn anything today,” muttered Ernie. He Summoned the ball, then made it hop between his desk and Hermione’s. He sat down.

“Now,” said Dumbledore, “we will measure the effectiveness of your silent spells in a more concrete way. I will put a spell which has unique properties on myself. It functions as a kind of measuring device. Each of you will silently turn me blue. The spell I put on myself will identify the intensity of the spells you do, in the sense that it will be able to tell how effective the silent spell is compared to a vocalized spell. It will report a number, displayed in the air. If, say, the number is 62, then that person’s silent spells are 62% as effective as their vocalized spells. I chose that number because it is the average for early attempts. The average for fully

qualified wizards is 82%, and one cannot become an Auror without a minimum score of 90%. A very few wizards, of whom I confess myself to be one, have scored 100%, meaning the effectiveness of the vocalized and non-vocalized spells are the same.” People looked very impressed, but not surprised.

“Sir,” asked Ernie, “would... Voldemort be another of those with 100%?”

Harry glanced approvingly at Ernie, who nodded in acknowledgment.

“It seems highly likely, but we cannot know for certain, since he will likely not submit to a test,” said Dumbledore. “When he was tested at Hogwarts... he was known as Tom Riddle then, of course... he scored 91% on his first measurement, which is highly exceptional. Do not worry overmuch about your score. It does not measure natural ability per se, but just what percentage of it can presently be accessed without vocalization. A low score simply means that more practice will be necessary. This is just to give you an idea of where you are. Shall we?”

He pointed his wand at himself. “I have cast the measuring spell; now I will do a test.” He pointed again, and this time a gold number 100 showed up in the air next to him. The students applauded.

Neville stepped up. “79. Quite excellent, Neville, it is obvious that it will go much higher before long,” said Dumbledore as Neville stepped back, clearly very pleased.

Parvati stepped up; “60” flashed in the air. Ernie took a turn, and got 64. He looked distressed not to have done as well as Neville.

Seamus was next, with 54, followed by Dean, with 58. Justin scored 69, then Lavender a 52. Hermione took a turn, and was rewarded with an 85. She grinned proudly as she stepped back. Ron took his turn, and got 85 as well, as well as a few gasps from the class, who hadn’t gasped for Hermione, accustomed as they were to her getting the best score on everything. Ron looked quite satisfied to have done as well as Hermione. Harry stepped forward, intently focused. He pointed at Dumbledore, next to whom a gold 100 suddenly lit up. There was a huge gasp; Dumbledore’s eyebrows rose.

Harry was quite startled himself. He was feeling very confident, but not quite that confident. He glanced at his shoulder, and a thought occurred. “Sir... is that because of Fawkes? You said that phoenixes have a calming effect, and they help you focus. What we’re doing is pretty much trying to focus, right?”

“I cannot say for certain whether Fawkes had anything to do with your score, though it is entirely possible that he did. But since he has only been with you for about five hours, I would be surprised if he had a dramatic effect.

“But keep this in mind, Harry: Fawkes or no Fawkes, what that score means is that at the very least, you have the potential to score 100 in the future even if you have not been around Fawkes for a while. You will reach a point when the only reason to vocalize your spells is to let others know what you have done. This is a unique situation; no wizard has ever been bonded to a phoenix at such a young age that they were taking this test for the first time.”

“So, if I took the test after I hadn’t been around Fawkes for a few days, my score might be lower.”

“Indeed it might, Harry.”

“I know you don’t know, but if you had to guess... how would I have done?”

“My guess is that Fawkes is affecting your score, but I would be very surprised if your natural score was less than 90,” Dumbledore said.

“Sir,” asked Justin, does that mean that any of us could know our full potential, if we spent a few hours with a phoenix?”

Before Dumbledore could answer, Hannah cut in. “It doesn’t work that way, Justin. Phoenixes don’t bond with just anybody, and when they do, they do it for life.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes, Hannah, I saw your expression earlier, I realized you knew.”

Ernie said, “Wait a minute, does that mean...”

“... that he’s with Harry for life, yes,” replied Hannah. There was another gasp.

Seeing that this was a topic of great interest, Dumbledore spent a few minutes telling the class what he'd told Harry earlier about phoenixes. "But I am afraid that we must get back to the planned topics of the lesson now," said Dumbledore, to a few chuckles. Some people were still staring at Harry. As before, he didn't blame them.

The last few students took their turns, nobody scoring higher than 70. Dumbledore closed out the topic by saying, "Again, this is only a baseline against which to compare later efforts. The next time you try, you may find that your score has improved significantly."

"Yeah, Harry," teased Justin, "you might get 120 next time."

"Before we move on, I would like to point out one aspect of this, which may be unique to this class. We have Harry with 100, which even with the aid of a phoenix is quite amazing; his unassisted score is almost certainly in the low nineties, which is rare even for fully qualified wizards. Hermione and Ron both scored 85, very high scores indeed for first tries. Neville's 79 is also exceptional. Now, has anyone any ideas of why this would be? Is there an explanation other than coincidence for the fact that these four students happened to get high scores?"

Unsurprisingly, Hermione's hand shot up. Dumbledore surveyed the students; after a few seconds Ernie raised his hand as well. "Yes, Ernie?" prompted Dumbledore. Disappointed, Hermione lowered her hand.

"They've all been in dangerous situations, Harry the most, Neville the least."

"Was that what you were going to say too, Hermione?" Dumbledore asked. She nodded. "Yes, you are quite correct, Ernie. On several occasions, Harry has had to depend on his magic to save his life. That tends to focus the mind considerably. Ron and Hermione have been in similar situations, though fewer, and Neville, one. There is a high degree of correlation to their scores.

"Now, I would like to introduce a new spell, one which is highly useful in certain defensive situations. It is called the Diffusion Shield. It absorbs and to an

extent dissipates almost any kind of spell. One cannot cast it on oneself, only on others, to protect them. The more people casting it, the more effective it is. It is most useful, naturally, in combat situations, particularly when one member of the party has become wandless.”

“Couldn’t you just cast the Protection Charm instead?” asked Dean.

“The Protection Charm works well enough on the protected party, but not at all on the one doing the protecting. The Diffusion Shield provides protection to all under its influence, though more to the one who is the focus of the spell. So, the Diffusion Shield is far more useful in this situation.”

“Does it work on Unforgivable Curses?” asked Neville.

“Not so much is known about that, Neville,” answered Dumbledore. “There have, thankfully, been relatively few instances in which anybody could consider attempting to mount such a defense. And since the Unforgivable Curses are illegal and immoral, testing as such cannot be done. What little anecdotal evidence exists is mixed. One party of three is said to have died trying to ward off a Killing Curse; a party of five is said to have survived, though greatly injured. A group of four trying to ward off the Cruciatus Curse were all nonetheless incapacitated; a member of this group later said, ‘there was enough pain in that to take out ten people.’”

Neville, sitting behind Harry, muttered, “More like twenty.”

“You’re not wrong,” agreed Harry, turning his head.

Dumbledore continued as if he had not heard, though Harry was sure he had. “The incantation is ‘Diffusia,’ and we will practice it now. I want everyone in a group of four. Each group will take turns having one member be the recipient of the spell, which I shall cast. Blue, of course. The other three will try to Diffuse it.”

Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville practiced for a while, doing fairly well. Dumbledore explained that whichever of the group was the darkest blue was the best with the spell, since the others couldn’t protect him as well as he could them. It was agreed that Harry was the bluest, with Hermione a close second.

After they were done, Harry asked, “Can we try that against a more real spell, like we’d see in combat? How about the Stunning Spell?”

“That spell can be rather uncomfortable, Harry,” said Dumbledore. “If the Diffusion does not work properly, the recipient could be knocked unconscious.”

“Well, I’ll be the recipient, then,” Harry volunteered.

This was followed quickly by a storm of protest. Neville said, “No way,” Hermione said “Are you joking?”, and Ron said, “Absolutely not!”, all at the same time.

Dumbledore smiled. “I think your friends are saying, Harry, that now is not the time for you to be a test subject of any sort.”

“I’ll be the recipient,” Ron said. “Hermione’s always telling me I’ve got a thick head. Besides, with you three behind me, I probably won’t feel a thing.”

“Very well, Ron, although I will not want to be the one to tell your mother about this,” Dumbledore said. Harry and Hermione laughed.

“Well, I sure don’t plan to,” said Ron. Turning to the others, he said, “I’m ready when you are.”

“There’s nothing you have to do to get ready, Ron, other than get stunned,” pointed out Hermione. Harry, Hermione, and Neville nodded to each other to confirm their readiness.

“I would like there to be two people each near Harry, Hermione, and Neville,” said Dumbledore, “to keep them from being thrown off balance.” Each was backed up by two classmates.

“I will count down from five, vocalizing the spell when I reach zero. As I start to vocalize, cast the spell. Five, four, three, two, one, Stupefy!”

“Diffusia!” they yelled.

The red ball seemed to hit something a few inches in front of Ron’s chest, and it split into four. The smallest part hit Ron, and he was knocked back a step, but quickly recovered. The other three headed for Harry, Hermione, and Neville, and

hit them simultaneously. They were knocked back a couple of steps, and quickly caught. “Thanks,” Harry said to Ernie and Justin, who were backing him up.

“That went as expected,” Dumbledore informed them, “with Ron taking the least of the damage, which means that you three performed the spell quite well.

“Now, we seem to be out of time. That went excellently; thank you for your effort and attention. I will see you all next week.” The class applauded; Dumbledore nodded and headed back toward the office. The classroom emptied after a minute, but Harry asked Neville to hang back.

“I told the first years I’d explain more about my dream and how they happen, and Ron, Hermione, and Ginny are going to stay and listen too. If you want to, you’re welcome,” said Harry.

“Thanks, Harry, I would. I want to know what’s going on.”

“Hey, Neville,” said Ron, walking up to them, “I forgot to tell you... Seamus and Dean are going to sleep in guest quarters for a while. Nobody’s going to get a full night’s sleep in our dormitory. You can join them if you want.”

Neville glared at Ron, as though he’d been called a coward. “No way, I’m staying with Harry. Besides, I’m the only one who totally knows what it feels like.”

Ron gave Harry a ‘what did I do?’ look, nodded to Neville, and stepped back. Harry patted Neville on the back. “Thanks, Neville. Thanks a lot.”

“It’s nothing, Harry, really,” Neville said, though happy to have Harry’s obviously sincere thanks.

Dumbledore, having retreated to Harry’s office, came back out again. “I thought I would stay for a few minutes, Harry, if you don’t mind.”

“No, of course not,” Harry said, as a group of first years walked through the door. They appeared a bit startled to see Dumbledore, who smiled at them.

“Ah, you must be the Slytherin first years that Harry’s so fond of,” he said kindly.

Some smiled, some blushed, some looked down. “You mean he’s told you about us?” Helen asked, as though she couldn’t believe they were worth mentioning to a headmaster.

“More than once; he has been very concerned about you. He feels in a way responsible for your situation.”

“How could he be responsible? All he did was teach us a great class!” said Helen, as the others agreed.

“You are correct, of course,” Dumbledore allowed. “But he feels responsibility because it is your admiration for him which caused you to be threatened. In truth, he is not responsible at all, but it is understandable that he feels this way.”

“Things are starting to get better,” reported Helen, who turned to Harry. “Of course, the first years of all the other houses are totally with us. Some of us have been talking to some second years in Slytherin, and they seem to feel like we do. So we’re pretty happy about that.”

“I’m really glad, Helen. You’re all doing a great job,” Harry said.

“Is that a phoenix? I heard you had one, but I don’t know much about them. He’s really pretty.”

“Yes,” Dumbledore said, “he is. I will be explaining the situation after everyone arrives, as I understand it a bit better than Harry.”

Ten Gryffindor first years walked in, and were greeted by their Slytherin counterparts. Ginny walked in a few seconds later. Andrea Creevey said, “The Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff first years wanted to be here too, but they have a class now. So they made us promise to tell them everything.”

Dumbledore took the floor, took a few minutes to explain the situation with Fawkes, and emphasized that everything that could be done for Harry would be. “Harry is fighting a battle that only he can fight,” Dumbledore said in conclusion. “But we can help him, and we will.”



“Sir, why can only he fight it?” asked Andrea. “I heard it was something about his scar?”

Harry gestured to Dumbledore. “You’re the one who told me about it, you may as well be the one to tell them.” Dumbledore took a few minutes to do so. “So, his mind is connected to Voldemort in a way that we do not truly understand, and that Harry certainly would not wish. But since Harry is the first to survive a full-strength Killing Curse, his situation is unique.

“Now, I am afraid I must go, I have other business. But I am glad to have been able to talk to you all.” He acknowledged their thanks and left by the back door.

“There,” said Harry to the group after Dumbledore left, “is someone you really want on your side. Now, I guess I’ll just tell you about the dream, and then you can ask questions if you want to afterwards, okay?” The students nodded.

Ron walked over to Harry, holding the Marauder’s Map and motioning Harry to be silent. He pointed to where they were, and then to just outside the room, where a dot bore the name Pansy Parkinson. They exchanged raised eyebrows, and Ron mouthed ‘keep talking’ to Harry, who did. Ron quietly walked towards the door, looking around, drawing puzzled stares from the first years. Finally he saw what he was looking for: the ends of a pair of Extendable Ears. He walked back to Harry and said the word silently, making gestures near his ears to emphasize the point. Harry stopped talking for a moment, looked for the Ears, got out his wand, and focused on the Ears flying into his hand.

They heard a fairly loud shriek of surprise from outside the room, and the Ears flew into Harry’s outstretched hand. The students gasped in surprise.

“She’s running away, really fast,” Ron reported. “We’ll never catch her, so no point trying.” To the class, he added, “That was Pansy Parkinson outside the door. She was trying to listen to us using this,” taking the Ears from Harry and holding them up. He explained how the Ears worked, and where they were from.

“What with this and the Snackboxes, Fred and George are getting a lot of gold off Malfoy, at least,” Harry pointed out. “What do these cost, three Galleons each?”

“Five, I think,” corrected Ron.

“Oh, and well spotted, Ron,” said Harry. “I hadn’t thought of that. Thanks for keeping your eyes open.” Ron nodded. Harry stepped back and checked with Ron that nobody else was anywhere near the classroom. After Ron gave the all-clear, Harry told everyone about the dream. The hardest part to explain, and the only part he was not inclined to give total disclosure about, was how he drove Voldemort from his mind. At the same time, he knew it was important. First he explained what Dumbledore had told him about Voldemort’s vulnerability to love, and the reason for it. Then he told them what he had done in the dream, leaving out only the details of the images he summoned.

Hermione smiled and said, “Thank you, Harry, that’s sweet, it makes me feel really good. I promise we won’t tease you about it.”

“No, of course not,” Ginny agreed.

“Well, I don’t know if I can make that kind of promise,” said Ron, still a bit embarrassed at what Harry had said. Ginny and Hermione, standing on either side of him, simultaneously whacked him on the arm closest to them. “Ow!” exclaimed Ron, as the students giggled.

“Believe me, I’m not totally comfortable talking about it either,” admitted Harry to the group. “It’s kind of hard to tell someone that you love them, never mind talking about it to a group of twenty-five people. And this has never been easy for me, especially, anyway. But this is about fighting Voldemort, so I’ll deal with my embarrassment.”

He was just about to start talking again when Ginny walked over to him. She looked him in the eyes, and said, “I love you, Harry.”

Harry felt overwhelmed. He managed to say, “Thank you. I love you too.” She beamed, hugged him quickly, and went back to where she was before.

Harry smiled, and turned back to the group. “She did that, you may have noticed, so I wouldn’t be so embarrassed. If I have to be embarrassed, then she would be too. And I knew she loved me anyway, but I hadn’t realized how nice it was to hear someone say it.”

“Well, I’m a girl, so it’s easier for us,” Ginny said to the first years. “Boys aren’t encouraged to say things like that, but they still feel them. I mean, I know Ron loves Harry too, but he’d never, ever say so.” She grinned wickedly at Ron; the students giggled.

“I knew you were going to drag me into this at some point,” Ron muttered to more giggling and laughter.

“I know this focus on love may seem kind of strange,” said Harry to the group. “I didn’t really understand it at first, when Professor Dumbledore told me about it. But now I’ve seen it work, so I understand it better. And it makes sense. All Voldemort is, is evil. So it makes sense that love would weaken him, mentally at least. Normally, my reaction to this topic would be just like Ron’s. But if you’re trying to fight off Voldemort, you take any weapon you can get, and in this case, love is a good weapon.”

He finished telling them about the dream, ending with as accurate a description of the pain of the Cruciatus Curse as he could. The students looked pale, several of them cringing. “The only one I know of at Hogwarts who’s experienced this, besides me, is Neville,” Harry continued, gesturing to Neville. “It happened to him in the Department of Mysteries, after he came into a room with ten Death Eaters to try to save me. Do you think I described it okay, Neville?”

“I think you described it as well as it can be described with words,” Neville replied. “Which is not very well.”

“I see what you mean. Anyway, Ron shook me awake, but he had a hard time.”

“That’s putting it mildly, I was beginning to wonder if you’d be able to wake up.” To the students, he said, “I yelled at him, touched his arm, even shook him,

and finally he woke up. I was scared to death,” he admitted. “But what was worst was the look on his face. To have that much pain... I don’t think I’m going to be able to forget that look for a long, long time.”

“Okay...” Harry started again, not knowing what to say to what Ron had said. “Now you know what happened. Is there anything else that you’d like to know?” Harry spent ten minutes answering questions, until there were none more.

“Well, I guess we’re finished... I need to go have dinner and get ready for the Quidditch tryout, or else our captain will get annoyed at me,” he said, clapping Ron on the shoulder as he said the word ‘captain.’ “And one last thing... thank you all for your support, it means a lot to me. And yours too,” he added, turning to Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Neville.

As the first years headed out, a few lingered to admire Fawkes, then everyone was gone. “Well, it’s been a busy day, not to mention a long one,” said Harry to his friends. “I think I’m going to have a lie down for a few minutes before dinner. See you at six in the Great Hall?” The others nodded, and they all left together.

Harry lay on his bed, and found that once there was nothing in particular to occupy it, his mind went straight to remembering last night’s trauma and imagining the one tonight. He tried to work through what he might do, think of ways he might breach whatever defenses Voldemort had. Fawkes remained at his side, sometimes on his chest or legs as he lay in bed. At one point he pet Fawkes for fifteen minutes straight while thinking about what to do to Voldemort. In what seemed like no time at all, the clock on the wall showed five minutes to six.

After a quick dinner, Harry, Ron, and Ginny headed off to the Quidditch pitch. The position open for tryouts was Chaser; two Chasers had left Hogwarts last year. One Chaser position was taken by Ginny, moving from Seeker, where she had substituted for Harry when he was thrown off the team by Umbridge. To Harry’s surprise, and Ron’s, the position was won by Dennis Creevey, whose brother Colin and sister Andrea were in the stands cheering him on. Harry and Ron were

surprised because he did not strike them as the athletic type, and because he was Muggle-born; Muggle-born students didn't tend to make Quidditch teams all that often, because they hadn't been flying throughout their childhoods as the others had.

When he was told, Dennis was quite excited, and ran over to the stands to tell his brother and sister, who were equally excited, if not more. Harry walked over to congratulate Dennis, and was warmly greeted by all three Creeveys.

"Great job, Dennis. We're glad to have you on the team," Harry said.

"It's so cool that I get to play Quidditch with Harry Potter," Dennis enthused.

"Yeah, Dennis, but you might not get to play much if he catches the Snitch too fast," joked Colin.

"That would be all right," said Dennis.

"Fraid not... I've only once caught the Snitch in the first two minutes... that was my first year, I think. You'll get plenty of chances to play, Dennis. Colin, how come you didn't go out for it last year?"

"I'm not that good on a broom, as it turns out. But I'm a big fan, though. Learned all about it, read up on it, even picked a pro team to support. Did I tell you, Professor McGonagall is going to let me do the play-by-play, now that Lee's graduated?"

"Great! Good for you," said Harry. "Did she give you a lecture on how—"

"I have to be fair and neutral and so forth, yes." Colin acknowledged. "I may have promised more than I can deliver. We'll see."

"Well, she'll be sitting right next to you, ready to yank the microphone away."

Colin grinned. "Yeah, I remember the time Lee swore, and she did that. As long as nobody whacks Dennis with a Beater's club, I should be fine. I thought I'd do a bit of research, to drop in bits of information here and there. For example... 'And Draco Malfoy, the Slytherin Seeker, dives for the Snitch. Malfoy, whose father

is in custody pending charges of supporting Voldemort, has failed to secure a Quidditch Cup victory for Slytherin in four years.' How's that?"

"No, Colin, I'm sure she won't find that objectionable at all," kidded Harry.

"Harry, could I ask you a favor? Now that we're all three here together, my parents wanted to get a picture of all of us. But I also wondered, since we're all in your classes, if you'd join us in one." Colin looked a bit anxious.

"Sure, Colin, I'd be happy to," said Harry. Colin beamed and got his camera.

"Oh, yeah... last time I saw that thing, I was burping up slugs," Ron recalled, having just joined the group.

"I kind of wish you had let me take that picture, it would have been a really good one," Colin said, half-seriously.

"I have a feeling you wouldn't think so if you were burping up the slugs," Ron pointed out.

"I guess so. Anyway, this is a different camera. The other one was ruined when I was Petrified. It saved my life, though, so I can't really complain. Okay, here we are. Harry, could you take the first one?"

"Sure, how does it work?"

"You're Muggle-raised, it's just a regular camera, nothing special."

"Yes, but raised by people who never would have let me touch one of their cameras."

Colin looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Harry, I didn't mean to... I forgot, Ginny told me that your Muggle relatives don't treat you very well. I guess that's why you're so humble, you were never raised to think you were anything special."

"The childhood I had was a pretty high price to pay for not being full of myself."

"Yeah, from what Ginny said, it's amazing that you weren't all messed up. But it would be so easy for you to get a big head, I mean, just being Harry Potter would be enough to do it. Can you imagine what Draco Malfoy would have been

like if he'd been born Harry Potter? He'd have thought it was his rightful role to be the leader of the wizarding world. He'd have been insufferable.”

“Now, there’s a nasty thought,” agreed Ron. “Of course, then his parents would have died, so some good would have come of it. Here, why don’t I just take both, since I don’t know any less than Harry does about it. I’ll tell my Dad about it, he’ll be excited.”

Colin showed Ron what to do, and Ron took the pictures. Harry assured Colin that his photographic self would stay firmly in the picture this time. “Do you still have that one of me and Lockhart?” Harry asked.

“Yes, and you never stay in the frame for more than a second or two,” Colin said.

“Good,” smiled Harry.

It was 9:10, and Harry was walking to Professor Dumbledore’s office to witness the meeting at which matters with Malfoy would be decided. He didn’t know what Dumbledore was contemplating doing, but as long as it was something, he thought he would like it. He was especially hoping for something that would help protect the Slytherin first years, but was not optimistic, given that that was not the behavior for which he was to be judged.

Harry walked into Dumbledore’s office; Snape and Malfoy had not yet arrived. Harry said, “I think I’m getting more accustomed to Fawkes being around. Sometimes I start forgetting he’s on my shoulder, which is kind of strange. He flew around the field while we were doing Quidditch, but stayed out of everyone’s way. It was neat.”

“I am glad that you are enjoying his presence, Harry.”

“Can I ask you, sir... do you miss him, since he hasn’t been around all day?”

“No, not specifically, Harry. You see, Fawkes does sometimes remain elsewhere for periods of time, up to a few days at a time. Perhaps one could liken them to vacations, though it is not ‘work’ for him to be in our presence. Perhaps the

phrase ‘a change of perspective’ would describe it better. During these times he is, of course, available at any time should the need arise. You need not concern yourself with how his absence is affecting me, though it is typical for you to do so.

“In fact, if I may make an observation, Harry... ah, Professor Snape, Mr. Malfoy, please come in.” Malfoy stood in front of Dumbledore’s desk, with Harry to Dumbledore’s right, Snape to his left, nearer the door.

Harry sensed that Dumbledore was about to start, but he wanted to say something to Malfoy in front of witnesses, and this was a good opportunity. “I’m sorry, Professor, but before you start, there is something I need to mention to Mr. Malfoy, so if it’s all right...” Dumbledore nodded his assent.

Harry turned to Malfoy. “Okay, this is about how you’ve referred to me when we’ve talked. You know, Scarhead, get stuffed, and so forth. Now, just for myself, even though I’m a professor, I don’t care. I’m so used to you addressing me like that that it seems normal. But the other teachers have been unhappy with me that I didn’t give you detention when you did that. They say it doesn’t matter if I don’t care, that it affects all teachers if any student does that and gets away with it. And I can see their point. So, this is just to warn you. When I asked Professor McGonagall what how I should decide whether to do anything or not, she said I should take your behavior and imagine you had done it to her and not me. Now, I think that’s a little harsh, myself,” here Harry allowed himself a brief smile, “but I get her point.” Turning to Dumbledore, Harry said, “That’s all I needed to say, sir. Thank you.”

“Professor Potter,” said Snape politely but with a hint of his old attitude, “given your history with Mr. Malfoy, do you not think you could be biased when it comes to assigning punishment to him?”

Harry assumed Snape was doing this to put on a show of defending his prefect, trying to give Malfoy a little dignity. Malfoy appeared to be doing his best to be expressionless, but not very well.



“I don’t think so, but I can’t say it’s impossible,” Harry said agreeably. “If you’d like, I’d be willing to report whatever Mr. Malfoy does to Professor McGonagall, and let her decide what to do.” Harry knew this was no bargain for Malfoy; she would be tougher than he was.

“That is not possible, Professor,” Snape replied. “I simply suggest that you keep the possibility in mind.”

Harry nodded, then said to Snape and Dumbledore, “Excuse me, I’m just wondering, why is it not possible?”

“A professor cannot abdicate any such part of his responsibilities; that is why they are called responsibilities,” Dumbledore explained. “You will simply have to do as you see fit. Now, Mr. Malfoy... I wish that disrespect to a teacher were the least of our problems here today, but it is not. It appears that you have engaged in a campaign to undermine Professor Potter’s classes by demanding that his students consume a candy designed to cause the symptoms of illness where no illness exists. Do you admit or deny that this is accurate?”

“I deny it, sir.” Harry could have sworn he saw Snape roll his eyes. Malfoy’s fate is sealed now, Harry thought. I shouldn’t gloat, I shouldn’t gloat. But I want to.

“Mr. Malfoy, I have interviewed a dozen Slytherins who say they were strongly pressured by you to avoid Professor Potter’s classes in this way. I have letters from ten more who say they saw this or experienced it. Should I assume that all twenty-two are lying?”

“I guess so, sir,” Malfoy said unconvincingly. His attitude still radiated the message of, you can’t do anything, you’ve got nothing on me.

“Is it your feeling, Mr. Malfoy, that the school can take no action against you due to the fact that there is no documentary proof of your actions?”

This question seemed to take Malfoy by surprise. “No, uh, I mean, I don’t know, sir.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Malfoy, that was actually a rhetorical question. This meeting was not to establish that you engaged in such a campaign. That has already been

established to my satisfaction. This meeting was to determine whether you would take the opportunity to accurately report the facts of the matter, as is the responsibility of a prefect. You did not. Although a prefect, you threatened students if they did not eat the candy to evade Professor Potter's classes. You further ignored Professor Potter's explicit warning to reverse the instructions you had given, and instead, pressured the students even harder. It is therefore obvious to me that you have chosen not to conform to what the school expects of its prefects. You will hand over your badge now, please."

Malfoy's jaw dropped. Even Snape looked surprised. Harry fought to keep the elation off his face.

Malfoy was stunned and furious. "But you can't..."

"I fear you have left me little choice, Mr. Malfoy," said Dumbledore, appearing genuinely saddened to have to do what he was doing. "To say that you are unrepentant is putting it mildly. I must act to protect the integrity of classes at Hogwarts. Deliberate disruption of a teacher's classes is a very serious offense. Your badge, please."

Malfoy stared at Dumbledore as though he were seriously considering defying the request. For all the good it would do him, Harry thought. Finally, it seemed that Malfoy reached the same conclusion. Still furious, he reached up, took off his badge, and put it on Dumbledore's desk rather harder than he needed to.

"There are a few more things I must make clear, Mr. Malfoy. I have heard reports that you have cursed one or more of the younger students in your house. This is not what you are being disciplined for, but I take such reports very seriously. If I hear any more such reports, I will take further action. I strongly urge you not to curse, threaten, or abuse anyone.

"In addition, Professor Potter warned you that you would receive one hour of detention for every Slytherin student who ate the candies you provided. You will now report to Professor McGonagall to schedule those detentions. But his warning is still in force. There are reports that you have provided his first and second year

students with the candies as well, and insisted on their use. You will, politely, request their return from those to whom you gave them, and rescind your previous instructions.

“That is all. Professor Snape, if you would escort Mr. Malfoy to Professor McGonagall...” An emotionless Snape led a fuming Malfoy away, closing the door behind him. Dumbledore regarded Harry for a moment, then said, “I would say, Harry, that your attempts to keep your feelings off your face were fairly successful.”

“I tried really hard,” said Harry with amusement.

“Yes, I did notice. As it happens, while you have many talents, masking your feelings is not really one of them. While not crucial, it is a good skill to have in certain situations. I do think it will come to you, as time goes by. I take it that you are satisfied with the sanctions I imposed upon Mr. Malfoy.”

“Very satisfied, sir. I admit I hadn’t thought of what you did, but it makes sense. He’s always used that badge as, I think Ron said, a license to bully. I really hope this will make him less nasty in the Slytherin common room. I hate to think that he’ll take it out on... it’s funny, I was going to say ‘my’ first years. They’re not really, but you know what I mean.”

“Ah, but they are really, Harry. In the sense of the school regulations, they are not, but in a real sense, they definitely are. They have chosen you as their leader, the one whose example to follow, to trust. It is a great honor and a great responsibility, and I believe you have already experienced both aspects of that situation.”

“Yes, sir, I certainly have. Well, I guess I ought to go back to Gryffindor Tower and start getting ready for bed, and for your Occlumency lesson. I’m getting kind of tired.”

“It is not at all surprising, given your lack of sleep. There is one other thing, Harry: now that Hermione and Ginny are sleeping in your dormitory—which, by the way, you should realize is a very strong measure of Professor McGonagall’s regard and concern; I am amazed that she allowed this—I thought it would be simpler to

have the Occlumency lesson there. So, I will see you there at 10:00.” Harry thanked Dumbledore and headed back to Gryffindor Tower, Fawkes still on his shoulder.

“Pepperoni pizza!” Harry said to the Fat Lady, and the portrait hole swung open. The common room was filled with activity, but most of it ceased as Harry came in. From Ron and Hermione, everyone knew where Harry had been, and all wanted to know what had happened.

Harry almost asked for everyone’s attention, but then realized that he already had it. He could not keep a smile off his face. “Draco Malfoy,” he announced to the room, “is no longer a Slytherin prefect.” Huge cheers went up, the loudest being from the first years, who sympathized with the Slytherins in their struggle. There was nobody who was not very happy.

“Well, c’mon, tell us everything!”, encouraged a fourth-year girl.

“I’m sorry; I’d like to, but I really can’t. I was there as a teacher, and it’s supposed to be private. Much as Malfoy deserves to have the details of his humiliation spread around the school,” he grinned as there were more cheers, “I’d be violating Professor Dumbledore’s trust if I repeated everything. But anyway, the details aren’t important; the result is.” He sat down with Ron and Hermione.

“But you’ll tell us later, of course, right?” asked Ron.

“Obviously.”

Harry talked with Ron and Hermione for a while, reveling in Malfoy’s fall. Soon it was near 10:00, and Hermione suggested that they get into their bedclothes before the Occlumency lesson, so they could go to bed right after it. They headed off to their respective dormitories, Hermione gathering Ginny along the way.

Five minutes later, Harry and Ron watched Professor Dumbledore enter their dormitory room, followed by Hermione and Ginny in their nightclothes. “Bet you got a few stares,” said Ron to Hermione.

“Not really, we had told most everyone what was happening already,” said Ginny. “I was amazed that nobody made any kind of jokes about it. It’s such an obvious target. People are really taking this seriously.”

“Well, I believe we know why that is,” Dumbledore said. “Now, let’s have all four of you on Harry’s bed, two sitting forward, two back.” He went through the standard exercises, and introduced a few new ideas. Near the end of the time, he did a test, gently trying to slip into Harry’s mind. Harry cleared his mind; in a few seconds, in his mind’s eye, he saw the golden dog jumping on his lap, then Hermione talking with John when she was explaining the meaning of what the dog was doing, then Hermione hugging him and saying she loved him, then Ginny saying she loved him. The images stopped; Dumbledore put down his wand.

“Sir, that was strange... I usually get images of embarrassing or stressful things, but that time... I don’t know how much you saw...”

“You received images of love and affection, yes,” Dumbledore finished for him. “That was my intention. In any case, it was not easy for me to get in, even given the friendly welcome I received. It will be harder for Voldemort than it was last night, should he attempt it. This causes me to suggest, Harry, that you add this to what you planned to do to experiment. When you face him, do not give in to anger or rage, even if he taunts you. Keep in mind the images you saw. Come from a place of love. It will make things harder for him.”

Harry nodded. “I’ll try.”

“I know you will. Now, since I saw this, I should mention it; I saw what the dog did, and of course I understand its significance. Hermione, do Ron and Ginny know?”

“Yes, I told them earlier,” Hermione said.

“Good, that will save some time.” Dumbledore looked at Harry; even though Dumbledore’s expression didn’t change, Harry was sure he could see affection in Dumbledore’s eyes. “Harry... interestingly, I did not even realize that the

dog could do what it has done. I tend to forget that I invest a lot of myself in my spells, and my emotional state is a part of them. So, I should not be surprised.

“It is true, as Hermione and John speculate, that I feel for you as one does for a close relative, such as a son or grandson. I never thought to mention it specifically because it did not really occur to me as a conscious thought; I cannot even say when it happened. I believe I unconsciously assumed you knew, as my actions may have indicated my feelings, but it is true that your childhood experiences may have left you ill-equipped to interpret such things correctly.

“So, this is an opportunity to clarify things. I love you, Harry. I care about you a great deal. I wept for you at your loss of Sirius, and I take great pride in your accomplishments, such as what you have done with the Slytherin first years, and the bravery with which you face this trial. If I had a son, I would have been proud for him to have been like you.”

Harry choked up as he never had before; he was sure he was going to cry. He reflexively held it back. Instead, he impulsively moved off the bed and hugged Dumbledore. Dumbledore gently returned the embrace. Hermione was crying; Ron and Ginny looked as though they were trying hard not to.

After a half a minute, Dumbledore released Harry. “Thank you, Harry. I believe that now would be a good time to go to bed. Is there anything in particular you would like to be done, any instructions?”

“No, not really... I just hope someone will get to me as soon as possible if it happens. I don’t know when I would have woken up without Ron’s help, and... it was strange, just after it happened, Ron was holding my shoulders, and I just grabbed at his, I don’t even know why. I just felt like I needed to touch him, to touch someone.”

Dumbledore nodded. “That has been known to happen in such situations, though it is rare that it actually can be acted upon, as most people receiving the Curse are not in a position to be attended to immediately. But yes, in such a situation, we feel we need human contact. So, I suggest that when it happens, the

person at your side hold you immediately, and continue doing so for a time. It will no doubt be helpful to a faster recovery. I daresay one of the girls would volunteer for such duty.”

Harry smiled, unable to resist. “I was hoping for Ron, actually.” Ron turned red and gave Harry a ‘very funny’ look. Ginny and Hermione howled with laughter.

Dumbledore smiled and said, “As you wish,” making the girls laugh even more.

“So, Professor, what will happen?” asked Hermione. “I mean, if one of these dreams happens, Ginny or I will hold him, then what?”

“First, Fawkes will come and get me. In fact, Fawkes may recognize the dream as it is happening, in which case he will get me, and I will be here before the dream ends. In any case, we will then wait until Harry is prepared to give us an account of the dream, at which time I will have Fawkes bring Professors McGonagall and Snape.”

“Snape? Why him?” asked Ron.

“Don’t worry, Ron, it’s okay,” Harry said. “He’s been laying off lately. He’s been positively polite, for him.”

“Professors Snape, McGonagall, and myself are key decision-makers for the Order, so it is important that all three of us hear the account firsthand. After we hear it, we will want to confer, to some extent in private. It will be necessary to discuss things of a high-security nature, so we must go elsewhere. Harry will simply need friendly faces by this point, and you can take it from there.

“I must be off now; I will send Neville in on my way out, and then you should all go to sleep, except for the whoever takes the first watch.” Dumbledore took Harry’s hand. “We will be here for you when you need us.” He released it and walked out.

“He’s amazing,” said Ron. “I don’t know how anybody can be like that.”

“He sure is,” agreed Ginny. “It was so sweet, what he said.”

“Okay, Ginny,” Hermione said, “we should split up the night between us. One of us should take the first half, like maybe up to 3:00, and then wake the other, who’ll do the second part of the night.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Ginny agreed. “So who does which part?”

“Let’s flip a Galleon,” Hermione suggested. “Dragon side I go first, phoenix side you go first.” Ginny agreed.

It came up dragon, so Ginny climbed into Seamus’s bed, and Ron and Neville into their own. Hermione took a seat in the chair Dumbledore had conjured not far from Harry’s bed. She picked up a book she had brought, and opened it. As they got comfortable, Fawkes’s song, which had been a pleasant background noise, increased in intensity. Harry felt more comfortable, and in a flash had the thought: phoenix song, my friends here... this would be great if it wasn’t for the fact that I’m going to get tortured in a few hours. Then in the next instant, he thought, don’t think about that. Think about the beautiful song, think about your friends, think about how lucky you are to have them. He opened his eyes a bit and looked at Hermione, who was already looking at him. She smiled, and mouthed ‘I love you’ as she touched her heart and made a gesture which he knew meant the same thing. He smiled at her and closed his eyes again. He reveled in the feeling for a moment, then started to do his Occlumency exercises. He was able to focus on them sufficiently that within twenty minutes, he was asleep.



## CHAPTER 11

# THE PRICE OF LEADERSHIP

Harry wandered through a department store looking at socks. He thought of Dobby, because the store was having a sale on unmatched pairs

Suddenly, he was standing in a graveyard. He started walking, having decided to keep walking the whole time, to see if it could prevent him from thinking he was immobilized. Come from a place of love, Dumbledore had said. Harry thought of his friends, listened to the phoenix song. Again, Voldemort materialized in front of him.

“Keeping busy, Potter?” The familiar voice sounded greatly amused.

“Yeah, I was very busy being supported by all my friends, thanks. How about you? Plans for world domination still on track?” Keep thinking about love, Harry thought. Keep that feeling in mind.

Voldemort ignored the question. “And will this support help you, in here, where they cannot reach you?” he sneered.

In spite of his effort, Harry suddenly stopped walking in surprise. Could Voldemort really not understand this?

“Of course it helps,” Harry said, in a tone that suggested that it was obvious. “Do you not even understand how people work? Is any trace of humanity that far behind you?” Think about love, he thought. He saw Ginny’s face. He saw Dumbledore’s.

“I did not come here to discuss my humanity with you, Potter. You will cease using my name, and cease encouraging others to do it.”

“Yeah,” Harry replied, “but you know I’m not going to do that. So why are you really here?”

“If you do not stop what you are doing, you will continue to suffer.”

Harry almost rolled his eyes. “No kidding? Thanks for telling me, I had no idea. I thought you were just here to socialize.” He thought of Hermione, of Ron.

“You dare to mock me?” Voldemort looked disgusted and outraged. “Do you know what happened to the last foolish individuals who mocked me?” His tone suggested that he couldn’t believe Harry was so stupid.

“Umm, let me guess... you had a good laugh, and then shared tea and biscuits? Oh, no, wait, you tortured and murdered them, I’ll bet. See, the problem is, torture and murder are what you do anyway, whether people mock you or not. And especially me... you’ve been trying to kill me anyway, since you got back, so it’s not as though I have a lot to lose. I think I’ll keep on mocking you.” He listened to the phoenix song.

Voldemort was snarling, obviously furious. “Very well, Potter... I weary of this discussion anyway. I will weaken you, and destroy you, and the last voice you hear will be your own, pleading for mercy before you die. You will regret your attitude.” Knowing what was coming, Harry readied to dodge out of the way. But what to get out of the way of? Voldemort did not seem to be holding a wand.

“Crucio.”

All Harry knew was pain. He was screaming, but he was barely aware of it. He did manage to have a thought this time: I have to wake up, he thought, but it was a dim one, next to all the pain. Then he was grabbed, by whom he didn’t know, and shaken. He reached out, and felt something solid. More by reflex than by thought, he grabbed it and held on. The sixth year boys' dormitory swam into view. He stopped screaming as he looked down and saw red hair below the shoulders of whoever was holding him. He moved back just enough to see Ginny’s face, near tears and terrified. He took a deep breath, and said to Ginny, “Thanks.” Then he held her again, fiercely, feeling like he never wanted to let go. She squeezed him so hard he had to make an effort to take his next breath. “Sorry,” she whispered, and eased off, squeezing him nearer the shoulders instead.

Looking up, Harry saw the deeply concerned faces of Ron, Neville, Hermione, and Professor Dumbledore, who were at the side of his bed. He appreciated their concern, but he didn't feel like he could talk just yet. He kept on holding Ginny; it seemed like something that he had to focus on, that he drew strength from. He just held her, and she him, for as much as two or three minutes, he wasn't sure. He started feeling better, more quickly than he had the morning before. Holding Ginny a little more tightly, Harry found his voice. "This really helps," he said seriously.

"Part of the effect of the Cruciatus Curse is to make one feel cut off from everything, everything except pain," Dumbledore said. "After even a short time of such isolation, human contact is very healing." He paused. "Are you ready to tell us about it, or would you like more time?"

"I guess I should go ahead and do it," he said, starting to slowly disengage himself from Ginny. "Much as I'd like to, I can't hug Ginny all day."

Playfully grabbing Harry again and holding him tightly, Ginny said, "Sure you can." He chuckled and let himself be held again, not protesting.

Dumbledore chuckled as well. "You can hold her for as long as you like, Harry. I will have Fawkes fetch Professors Snape and McGonagall." Fawkes was gone instantly, but echoes of his song remained. Within less than a minute, Snape and McGonagall were in the dormitory, and Fawkes resumed his song. Snape and McGonagall conjured chairs at the side of Harry's bed and sat.

Harry finally, reluctantly, let go of Ginny, but he kept an arm around her shoulder, and she, one around his waist as they turned so that both were facing the side of the bed. Hermione walked over to the bed, sat on Harry's other side, and took his free hand. McGonagall took in this scene with obvious discomfort; it looked as though only iron self-control was keeping her from criticizing the blatant display of affection in front of her. Harry couldn't help but smile.

"What is it you find so amusing?" McGonagall asked, but Harry thought she knew.

Feeling more fond of her than careful, Harry said, “The look on your face. I know what you’re thinking, what you’re trying not to say, and how hard it is. I appreciate the effort.”

Embarrassment, annoyance, and affection all flashed across her features in seconds, though in such subtle ways that only people who had spent much time around her would have noticed. Affecting a stern expression, she replied, “My expression of support will take the form of allowing you to have this moment of humor at my expense.”

“Thank you,” he said, looking at her with unabashed fondness. She looked down, and he thought he saw a small smile on her face.

“The dream, Professor Potter?” prompted Snape, in the tone of one whose forbearance was being sorely tested.

“Yes, sorry,” he agreed. He told them about it, every detail he could recall. He saw eyebrows raised near the end, especially Ron’s.

“You deliberately mocked him?” Ron exclaimed, eyes wide. “What in the world did you do that for?”

“I believe, Mr. Weasley, that he was trying to anger the Dark Lord, to provoke him. To try to goad him into a mistake of some sort.”

Harry nodded to Snape. “It doesn’t look like it did much of anything, but it seemed at the time like it was worth a try. He had this look of outrage, as if he was shocked that anyone would mock him, like he couldn’t believe it. I thought that might be a weakness.”

“It may yet prove to be one,” Snape replied. “The result of this endeavor may not be one that is immediately apparent. One thing which is highly likely is that he will redouble his efforts to harm you.”

“That was also what I had in mind,” agreed Harry, as he saw Ron and Neville look shocked at the idea. “The harder he tries, the more likely he is to make a mistake. I was hoping that I could provoke him into trying again tonight, maybe it

would be harder for him to do it two times but he might try anyway. If I could get back to sleep, I think it's worth trying."

"It is profoundly brave of you to wish to try, Harry," Dumbledore said gently, "but I think that you will not be able to get back to sleep. The stress of the Cruciatus Curse tends to keep one awake for a while. I suggest that you think about some kind of diversion. As for me, I must leave, and discuss this with Professors Snape and McGonagall." Snape grasped Fawkes's tail, said "Headmaster's quarters," and was gone.

Neville asked, "Why did he have to use Fawkes?"

"He can't be seen leaving Gryffindor Tower," Harry explained. "There's probably people who heard me scream outside the dormitory door, and if they see him, it'll be all around the school. People would wonder why."

"Neville," said Dumbledore seriously, "I must ask you not to reveal to anyone Professor Snape's presence here, or any inferences it may cause you to make. Can you do that?"

"Of course, sir," Neville said. Harry got the impression that Neville only kept indignation out of his voice because it was Dumbledore he was talking to.

"Thank you, Neville. Minerva and I will be off. Harry, I am of course at your disposal at any time." They left.

"Oh, Harry," said Hermione, burying her head in Harry's shoulder. "You're so brave, I really fear for you sometimes."

Harry looked puzzled. Ron, seeing this, said, "I think he's trying to work out whether that's a compliment or not, Hermione."

"You know exactly what I mean, Ron," she said, a bit sternly.

Ron sighed. "Yeah, I suppose I do." To Harry, he said, "It's like, it's great that you're so brave and everything, but sometimes I think we wonder if you're a little too brave... if you know what I mean. I mean, one of those in one night, that's plenty."

“Maybe you’re right... I just want to win this, I want to beat him,” Harry said.

“You will, Harry, you will,” assured Ginny. “And we’ll be right here with you.”

“Hey, how about another fly? That was good yesterday. Ginny, you can come with us.”

“That sounds good,” Ginny agreed. “Hermione, you might want to try to get some sleep. It wasn’t that long after I relieved you that this happened, you couldn’t have hardly gotten any sleep.”

“No, I think I had just dropped off when it happened,” Hermione said. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to, but I’ll give it a try. If I can’t, I’ll just take a nap in the afternoon. You all have a nice fly.” She gave Harry’s hand a last squeeze and climbed into Dean’s bed. Ginny Summoned her broom from her dormitory as Ron and Harry grabbed theirs, and they headed out the portrait hole.

Only the very beginnings of dawn were visible as they strode out of the castle. “Why were there no Gryffindors in the common room?” Ginny asked. “Some of them had to have heard it.”

“Bet you anything there were some, and McGonagall sent them back to their beds on her way out,” said Ron. “Well, Harry, you lead. We’ll follow.”

They kicked off the ground, and again, Harry felt a refreshing breeze. Fawkes left his shoulder and flew freely, never straying far from Harry. They had flown for about five minutes when Harry saw a lone figure run out of the castle toward the Quidditch pitch, which they were flying over. Harry wondered if it was one of the first years and whether he should ignore it, but it was still very early, so he decided he’d at least find out who it was. Maybe Hermione wanted to tell them something, or even Dumbledore.

“Ron! Ginny!” He got their attention, and pointed toward the ground and the lone figure, who was still running. He motioned for them to follow, which they did.

Harry had just headed for the ground when he heard a terrible scream coming from roughly where the figure was. A huge burst of adrenaline flowed through Harry as he went into an all-out dive. He yelled over his shoulder, “Fawkes! Get Dumbledore!”, but he couldn’t see Fawkes now. Harry assumed he must be doing it already. The figure continued screaming; Harry peered to try to see who it was. He was almost close enough...

It was Hermione.

Harry felt dread as he zoomed down even faster. As he focused on getting to the ground as soon as he could, out of nowhere, he was hit by the pain again. Every square centimeter of his body felt excruciating pain, and he forgot that he was on a broom, where he was, and what he was doing; there was just the pain. He fell off his broom, but he had no idea that he had done it.

Fairly quickly—faster than either of the last two nights, but Harry still couldn’t say how long—the pain stopped, and Harry slowly became aware of his chaotic surroundings. He thought he was falling, but he realized that Dumbledore was holding onto him. If he had been falling, he wasn’t anymore; Dumbledore was holding Fawkes’s tail.

“Harry! Grab his tail!” Dumbledore shouted, moving Harry’s hand to near Fawkes’s tail. He held it with all his strength. “Do you have it?” Dumbledore again shouted. “Yes,” Harry shouted back. Dumbledore made a motion that Harry couldn’t see, then released Harry. Harry couldn’t imagine what Dumbledore was doing. How could he release him and Fawkes? He was in midair too, wasn’t he?

Harry had no further chance to worry about it; still carrying Harry, Fawkes disappeared, and reappeared just above the ground on which Hermione lay sprawled. Harry released Fawkes, who immediately started to sing. Hermione weakly looked up at him. “Oh, Harry...” Harry sat on the ground, pulled Hermione to a sitting position, and held her tightly; he had to fight back tears. This war he had started had claimed its first victim other than himself. In despair, he wondered whether there would be more, and who they would be.

Harry was soon made to wonder if Hermione was reading his mind. She looked into his eyes, and said, "It's not your fault, Harry. Don't ever think that it is." He tried to answer, but choked up instead, and he put his head on her shoulder and hung on. He briefly wondered who was comforting who. I guess both of us, he thought.

After a minute, she said, "Oh, Harry... I thought I had some idea... you and Neville are right, it just can't be described..." She trailed off as Neville came running up.

"Hermione! I thought I heard you scream! Did they do the Curse on you?" he asked, breathlessly.

Still holding Hermione, Harry nodded. "Both of us."

Hermione's body jerked suddenly as she looked at Harry. "You too? Again?"

Harry realized it made sense that she hadn't known; when he was attacked, it was the initial few seconds after hers, and he knew that she was bound to be badly disoriented. "They got me in midair, I fell off my broom. Professor Dumbledore saved me, but I don't really know what happened. He had Fawkes drop me here, I guess so we could take care of each other."

Hermione held him again; Harry knew that she was now thinking of what happened to him, rather than to her. "It wasn't that long, less time than with Voldemort. I think you had it longer. I heard you scream too; I was diving toward you when whoever it was got me."

"Nott," she said.

"Not what?" he asked, confused.

"No, it was Nott. Theodore Nott, the Slytherin sixth year, one of the ones whose father is a Death Eater."

"Did you see him?"

"No, but..." she released Harry and took out her wand. "Accio Map!" she said, and the Marauder's Map flew into her hand. "I took out the map back in the



dormitory a few minutes after you guys left... I was sure I was over-worrying, but I did it anyway. I saw Nott heading out to the pitch, and I knew it wasn't good. I ran out there as fast as I could, and started yelling for you. I never saw him; either he was hiding, or was under an Invisibility Cloak. I saw you start to fly down, and then..." She shook her head.

Harry looked at the map. It showed two groups of dots: one, which included Snape, McGonagall, and Nott, was heading toward the castle; the other, comprised of Dumbledore, Ron, and Ginny, was heading toward them. Harry looked up and saw them approach.

"Are you and Hermione all right, Harry?" asked Dumbledore.

"I guess the answer is yes, but neither of us feels great right now," Harry said.

"No, I would not think so. I would suggest you go to Madam Pomfrey's, but I suspect there would be little she could do for you. You may want to head back inside, to your dormitory. It is probably safe outside here now, but given what has just happened, inside would be better. Hermione, I assume you saw Nott on the map, and came out to warn the others?"

She nodded. "She very probably saved your lives, all three of you," Dumbledore said to Harry, Ron, and Ginny. "Nott had an Invisibility Cloak and was on a broom; he would have Cursed each of you in turn, causing you to fall off your brooms and be killed, then flown off, away from Hogwarts. It is highly questionable whether Fawkes could have summoned me in time to help you, and I could not possibly have saved all three in any case."

"Why did he do this, sir?" asked Hermione. "It isn't because..."

Dumbledore nodded somberly. "He cheerfully admitted it to me when I apprehended him. He was acting on Voldemort's instructions, given within the hour."

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Neville sat in a semicircle of five chairs in the Gryffindor common room at a few minutes before 5:00 a.m. The rules said that no one was supposed to be in the room until 6:00, but none of them really cared about the rules right then.

Harry was in misery. Hermione, the one Cursed longest and for the first time, should have been the one worst off, but Harry was drowning in a sea of guilt. I caused this, he kept thinking. This wouldn't have happened if not for what I did. He didn't say anything about it, because he didn't want to seem to be whining about his own guilt when Hermione had been Cursed. But the others could tell.

Neville simply came out and asked, "Harry, did you blame yourself for what happened to me at the Department of Mysteries?"

"Of course I did, Neville," Harry answered. "I was responsible for everything that happened there. I was the one who took us there."

"See, I don't think so," replied Neville with uncharacteristic boldness. "I don't think that you 'took' me there; I think that I made you let me come. You didn't want me, Ginny, or Luna coming because you felt responsible for us. But you weren't. We were. We chose to come. You need to understand that, Harry. Only I am responsible for what I do. Even if you ask me to do something, and I do it, I'm still choosing. You have nothing to feel responsible for. And Hermione... you know very well that she would have knowingly run full-on into a Cruciatus Curse if it even meant a chance at saving your life. And there was no reason to think anyone would be in any danger except you, and you chose that. Do you think Ron and Ginny blame you because they could have been killed by Nott along with you? We do this because we believe in you, Harry, and what you're doing. You don't help us by deciding that you're responsible for everything that happens to us.

"Do you know why I ran into that room at the Department of Mysteries? Ten of them and one of you, and I think I knew that I had no chance. But I couldn't live with myself if I had done anything else. I didn't want to have to look in the mirror and know that I ran away while a friend was cornered. You wouldn't

have wanted me running into that room. You would have wanted me to be safe. Maybe it was a stupid thing to do, but you didn't ask me to, I chose to. So appreciate what Hermione did and think about helping her, and stop feeling guilty. She deserves better." Neville looked around as if expecting someone to challenge him, then looked ahead again, as nobody did.

There was a short silence, then Ron said, "You know, Neville, I'm sure that's the longest I've ever heard you talk. You made a lot of sense." He looked at Harry.

"You should do it more often," said Ginny, to Neville. "He's right, Harry. We all know it. You know it too if you'll admit it. I understand why you feel that way. Something horrible happened to Hermione. But it's Voldemort you should be angry at, not yourself. Neville is really right. We all make our choices."

Harry was silent for a moment. He looked at Hermione to see if he would see an accusation in her eyes, but all he saw was a plea. He exhaled.

"Look... I know Neville's right, of course, especially about you, Hermione. This goes back to our conversation, remember, in the library on my birthday? You talked about this exact situation, about how it was your choice if you want to risk yourself for me. I guess I understood it in my head, but not in the actual situation. I know it's right. But if you were in my position... I know I have to get used to it. I just wonder if I can."

"I know it must be hard, Harry," Hermione said. "But remember what I said; imagine how you'd be if our positions were reversed. If you had to endure the Curse for a few seconds to save all our lives you wouldn't hesitate, and you'd be annoyed at us for worrying so much about it. Look at you. You're enduring the Curse for far less tangible reasons. They're important, and I agree with them, but you see what I mean."

"Again, you're right," Harry admitted. "I don't know what else I can say."

The others by unspoken agreement decided to leave it there, and let Harry work through whatever he had to work through. They talked for a while about various aspects of the situation. Harry, Neville, and Hermione exchanged

impressions of the Curse, while Ron and Ginny voiced their fervent hope that they would never face it. Sometimes they went silent for a few minutes at a time.

As 6:00 approached, Harry said, "You know, maybe we should all go back to the dormitory. People are going to start coming out here, and I don't know if I want to be asked twenty times what happened."

"We'll just tell them once," suggested Hermione. "We'll pick a time, like 6:30, and tell people that's when we'll tell anyone who wants to know what happened." Seeing Harry's reluctant expression, she added, slightly reproachfully, "Look, I know that speaking to a large group of people about something like this isn't your idea of fun. But they support you, they're concerned about you, they want to know what happened. We happen to be out here, and it seems wrong to hide."

He knew she was right, and felt somewhat abashed that wanting to hide had been his first impulse. "I didn't say I wouldn't do it," he said defensively.

She opened her mouth to respond, then changed her mind and said nothing. After a few more seconds she said to the others, "So, 6:30, then?" Ron, Ginny, and Neville nodded. Harry reflected that it was strange that he hesitated to do as Hermione suggested, but had made a special effort to tell the first years what had happened yesterday. He had done it mainly for the Slytherins, he knew, because he was proud of how they were defying Malfoy. Remembering how he'd felt at the Hog's Head, how he hadn't wanted to talk to that group, he wondered if he didn't mind talking to the first years because unlike this or the Hog's Head, it had been his idea. He also wondered if being a teacher and having more experience speaking in front of groups, even if for only a week, had made him less resistant to what Hermione was suggesting. He knew that last year, he would have strenuously resisted telling seventy people what had just happened. This is what I get for urging people to say Voldemort's name, he thought.

Hermione spoke, with more compassion this time, and Harry was again made to wonder if she could somehow read his thoughts. "It's important to let people know about this, Harry, because after getting people to say his name, you're

even more of a symbol. People are still nervous about saying his name, and what's happening to you is the reason why. They fear the consequences. Part of what you have to do is win this fight, but you have to do it publicly, so people can see. The more people know about what happened, the more confidently they'll say his name once you've won this, and that's the whole point of what you're doing."

He nodded solemnly, again knowing that she was right. He hadn't intended for his life to become a public spectacle, but he now understood that by urging others to say Voldemort's name, he had involved them in what had happened. Once word starts getting out, he thought, the Prophet's bound to send someone out. Boy, I hope it's not Skeeter. That thought prompted him to ask, "Hermione, whatever happened with Skeeter? The year's up, is she back reporting again?"

A hard expression came over her features, and she shook her head. "She called me in the fireplace after the school year ended, to make sure she could write again, since I'd said she couldn't write for a year. But we got into an argument, because she was being horrible and nasty. I tried to tell her that she shouldn't write about us, or write to hurt people... she seems to have a big problem with that. I ended up telling her, fine, you can wait another year, if you're going to be that way about it. She was really angry, but there's nothing she can do about it, and she knows it. Maybe she'll think it over, and decide that writing responsibly is better than not writing at all."

Harry's first reaction was to wonder whether that was such a good idea, but he didn't feel like debating Hermione right then. Also, he wasn't unhappy that if the Prophet sent someone, it wouldn't be Skeeter. He hated to imagine how she would twist what was happening

At 6:00, students started coming down from their dormitory rooms. Word about what would happen at 6:30 started to spread; people who were sleeping in were woken up. The first year boys had been awoken by Harry's scream and had not gone back to sleep. One of them, David Finch-Fletchley, approached Harry shortly after 6:00. Harry told him what would happen, and on an impulse, asked him if he

had arranged with the Slytherin first years how they were going to find out about the dream.

“Yes, I’m supposed to meet Hedrick at 6:15 to talk about whatever I know, and plan how to meet them to tell them more later.”

“If you can do this very quietly,” Harry said, “tell them that they, the Slytherin first years, can come with you to Gryffindor Tower and hear it for themselves.” David’s face lit up.

Hermione looked askance at Harry. “You do know that it’s against the rules for one house’s students to enter the common room of another house, right?” she asked. Harry just looked at her, and she sighed. “I was just mentioning it. You could probably break any rule you wanted right now and no one would say anything.”

“Just this one, right now. You think that can be done in time, David?”

David nodded. “They stay pretty close to each other. Hedrick’ll run and tell them, and they’ll all come. I’ll go try to find him now.” He ran off.

“These first years seem to do a lot of running, don’t they?” Harry mused. “I don’t remember running so much when we were first years.”

“Kind of depends on whether you include running away from three-headed dogs, I reckon,” said Ron.

“We didn’t have much to tell the other houses then,” Hermione said. “They do, and it’s nice to see all the first years united about something. That something being you, of course, Harry.”

“Good idea to tack that on, there, you never know when Harry’s going to be in one of his ‘thick’ periods,” joked Ron.

“Thank you for that, Ron,” said Harry, deadpan.

“No problem, mate.”

The room filled up quickly. Nobody said much to the five that had been in Harry’s dormitory, because they would soon be telling the story anyway. Two minutes before they were to begin, Harry saw the portrait hole open, and one by

one, the ten Slytherin first years came in. This caused a minor stir, but nobody particularly objected.

At 6:30, Harry stood up. The room was very full; he assumed that everybody from Gryffindor was there. As he was about to start talking, the portrait hole opened again, and David Finch-Fletchley appeared. He was followed by, to Harry's surprise, Justin and Ernie.

"Heard there was a spot of rule-breaking going on here, Harry," smiled Justin.

"Yes, and as a prefect, I had to check it out," added Ernie.

Harry couldn't help but glance at David, who shrugged in a please-don't-be-mad-at-me way. Harry smiled, and said to the room, "These are my friends, Justin and Ernie, from Hufflepuff. I didn't invite them, but I'm glad they're here. Now, these ten," he said, gesturing to the Slytherin first years, "I did invite, on my personal authority as a Hogwarts teacher." He paused for a second, then said with a small smile, "However, if nobody happened to mention this to Professor McGonagall, that would be all right with me." Most everyone laughed. "I've pushed her far enough with the rules, with Hermione and Ginny sleeping in our dormitory."

This did not cause a stir among Gryffindors, who already knew, but the Slytherins were quite surprised, and Justin and Ernie were astonished. "McGonagall let you... you mean she..." Ernie trailed off, still shocked.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Ernie Macmillan is speechless," grinned Justin. "Mark this day on your calendars." This got a big laugh; Ernie gave Justin a dirty look that Harry could tell was not serious.

"There is actually a good reason for it, Ernie," Harry explained. He told them about the need for and helpfulness of physical contact after the Curse, and that it was better for him if someone was standing by. "Now, for some reason," Harry went on, "my friend Ron here wasn't up for the job."

As the laughter died down, Ron responded, “Sorry, Harry, you’re just not my type.”

“Anyway,” Harry continued, “I invited the Slytherin first years because, besides the fact that I like them, they’re having a hard time in Slytherin, because of a certain ex-prefect, and I want to support them. I want them to know firsthand what’s going on with me.” The Slytherins smiled, and Justin and Ernie looked stunned.

“You mean, Dumbledore took away Malfoy’s badge?” asked Ernie. When Harry nodded, Justin and Ernie made animated gestures of triumph, which got more laughs.

Having given them the background, and with Fawkes on his shoulder, Harry told the story about the dream. As he proceeded, the gasps from the crowd got bigger and bigger as he mocked Voldemort more and more blatantly. Harry’s tea-and-biscuits comment got something between a laugh and a gasp. When he relayed Voldemort’s final threat, there was silence. Harry added that he wasn’t all that bothered by it, because it was probably nothing Voldemort wouldn’t do anyway. “He just wants to find another way to threaten me, and I think it frustrates him that his threats don’t work. Since he can’t really threaten me with much worse than will already happen if he catches me, if anyone’s going to defy him, I’m the perfect person to do it.

“Now, some of you are probably wondering why I went out of my way to mock him like I did.” There were quite a few murmurs of assent. “Part of it was natural; I think he was being a bit dense, as if everyone’s just going to bow before him if he makes a threat. But I was also hoping to make him angry, maybe get him to make a mistake.”

“Like what?” asked a fourth year named Jennifer.

“I was hoping to recognize it when I saw it,” chuckled Harry wryly. “I mean, if I know I’m going to get tortured anyway, I may as well try to accomplish something. So, he had enough of talking and hit me with the Curse. Ginny was



there to catch me, help wake me up, and cling to for dear life for five minutes or so. It is really amazing how that is. Nothing was so important as holding onto someone. Then I told Professor Dumbledore about the dream. But, unfortunately, there's more that happened this morning, so I'll just tell it, with help from my friends as needed."

Harry explained how they'd gone out for a fly, then asked Hermione to give them her version of the next events. "I used this magical device we have that lets you know where people are at Hogwarts," she said, not wanting to be too specific about the Map. "I saw that Theodore Nott was heading out onto the pitch, and considering what time it was, I knew I had to warn them. I ran out, yelling to them; I didn't see Nott, but I knew he was there. I saw Harry start to come down. Then the next thing I knew, I was on the ground in unbelievable pain. Nott had done the Cruciatus Curse on me." Most gasped, especially the younger students.

"I can't believe it... I know he's a sixth year, but isn't he still a bit young to be doing that kind of thing?" asked Ernie.

"His father's a Death Eater, Ernie," Harry pointed out. "They probably teach it to their kids at a young age. Anyway, I still have no idea that Nott's there, I hear Hermione scream, I'm going to the ground at full speed. Then he hits me with it, and I fall off my broom." There were more gasps, and the Slytherins looked especially frightened. "I don't exactly know what happened next, so I have to hand it over to Ron and Ginny, who were behind me."

Ron stood next to Harry. "Well, I saw Harry scream and go over, and to be honest, I thought he was done for. I dove for him, was going to try to catch him or at least break his fall, but I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have made it. But a lot of other stuff was happening. First, when Hermione screamed, Fawkes disappeared. He'd been flying with us. I figured Fawkes was going to get Professor Dumbledore. A couple of seconds later, Dumbledore is there, holding onto Fawkes' tail. Now, several things happen at once here, and Ginny may have to help me. Dumbledore sees Harry falling. Fawkes disappears, and reappears next to Harry as he's

falling—and Fawkes stops flying, they both are falling with Harry. Dumbledore Summons Harry’s Firebolt, grabs Harry, and—still falling—grabs Fawkes’s tail. Fawkes starts flying again.” There were low whistles and other noises of appreciation from the audience. “They must have been ten feet from the ground at the end. Ginny, can you pick it up here? I think you saw more of the rest than I did.”

Ginny stood on Harry’s other side. “When Dumbledore got ahold of Harry, he had to do something with him, quick, if he was going to catch whoever did it. Remember, it’s been only about fifteen seconds or so since Harry got Cursed. But Dumbledore tells Harry to grab Fawkes’s tail, and Harry manages to do it. Then Fawkes takes Harry over to Hermione. They’d both been Cursed, they could hold onto each other. See how Dumbledore’s thinking of stuff like this, even with so much going on.

“Now, Fawkes disappears, and Dumbledore should be hanging onto nothing in midair, but he grabs Harry’s Firebolt that he’d Summoned. He immediately did a spell that sent a kind of a... wave of the color red, is the best way I can put it. It looked like it was designed to make everything it touched red; suddenly we can see someone on a broom who we couldn’t see before. Ron and I tear off after him, but it wasn’t like Dumbledore needed our help. Nott could’ve Cursed us off our brooms and made Dumbledore’s job harder, so we weren’t thinking really straight. We just wanted to get whoever did this.

“I don’t think Dumbledore ever moved. He sent another spell at Nott, and just yanked him toward him, like with a big hook or something. They set down, and Ron and I did too. Dumbledore takes off the Invisibility Cloak and sees who it is. Dumbledore says, ‘On whose instructions was this done?’ Nott smiles and says, ‘I have the honor of serving the Dark Lord.’” The room gasped. “Dumbledore asks him when he got the instructions; Nott says it was just minutes before Harry, Ron and I went out on the pitch.”

Harry took the floor again. “This makes sense when put together with my dream. I was going out of my way to get him angry. So, he finished talking to me,

contacted his spy at Hogwarts, and he must have basically said, kill Potter the next chance you get. He had a perfect chance there; he could have snuck up on all three of us, Cursed us off our brooms, had us fall to our deaths, and flew away. It should've worked. It would have, but... Hermione saved all our lives by running out there. She knew she was running straight into danger, but—

”But I followed the example you have set for us, many times,” she pointed out. And suffered like I've suffered, many times, Harry thought, but did not say.

“Anyway, so it looks like Voldemort was mad enough at me to try to order me killed, but given what happened, it looks like a bad idea. He had a spy at Hogwarts, and he got his cover blown just so he can try to kill me? Without a plan worked out well in advance? You don't blow a spy just because you're mad. I think I really ticked him off, and he took a chance, which failed. Not good planning. So, this can be seen in a good way overall.”

“Yeah, but maybe there's more than one older Slytherin he can use as a spy,” said a seventh year. “Malfoy, and those two baboons.”

“Somehow I don't think he's going to use Malfoy,” Harry said. “Anyone they use has a decent chance of being caught, and I don't think they'll take that risk. But Crabbe and Goyle, yes, I can see that. They don't do much but take up space around Malfoy.”

“We'll try to find out what we can,” said David Septus. “We'll let you know if we find out anything.” The other Slytherins nodded.

Harry walked over to them, and crouched to be at eye level with them. “Look... if you do that... please, be extremely careful. This has changed now, you're not just risking getting bullied by Malfoy. If you find another spy, and they know you found them, they could torture you, they could kill you. Think about that.”

The Slytherins mostly looked somber, but a few looked defiant. “Do you think he actually would? Kill us, if we found out something?” asked Helen.

“No, probably not, because that would blow his cover, too,” Harry admitted. “What would probably happen is that he would do a Memory Charm on

you, make you forget what happened. But we can't be sure. Not everyone can do a Memory Charm, and they can be broken. If you find a spy and he knows it, he could decide his best chance is to kill you and get out of the school before he's caught. You just can't know. But this is serious. I know you understand that idea, but it feels different after something really bad happens to you, or someone you care about." He glanced over at Hermione.

Hedrick stepped forward. "We'll be really careful, we promise."

Harry nodded. "Okay... well, we should finish up now, and go over to the Great Hall while breakfast is still being served."

"Can't, Harry," Ron said. He was looking at the Map, but holding it low and behind a chair so no one else could see it. "Pansy Parkinson's right outside the portrait hole."

"Great," Harry muttered. "Obviously, Justin, Ernie, and the Slytherins can't leave until she's gone. I'll step outside and tell her to go away. Nobody leave until I come back."

Harry climbed outside the portrait hole, and was face to face with Pansy Parkinson. "You know, this is an odd place for you to be hanging out," he said.

To his great surprise, she looked anxious. She said, "Oh, Harry, I'm glad it's you that came out. I want to talk to you. I want to help you."

Harry was stunned; this was the last thing he expected to hear. He said nothing, but his expression spoke volumes. Parkinson seemed to understand.

"I know what you're thinking, why should I believe her, she's Draco's friend, she's still with him, she just wants to find out stuff to help him. Is that about right?"

Harry nodded. "Also, 'she's dumping him like a hot potato because he lost his badge and his power, but if he ever gets it back...'"

She looked down. "Yes, I understand that too. The timing looks pretty suspect. And it is related, but not in the way you'd think." She paused, then looked at him intently, as if it were very important that he be made to understand. "You see, Draco's just gone off the deep end. He's been in a rage against you being made

a teacher. It got worse all week, especially after you embarrassed him both times in the Great Hall, and then last night, when he lost his badge, he just lost it. He says he wants to kill you if he gets a chance. I don't mean that as a figure of speech, I mean, he actually wants to kill you. I think he's serious.

"I had no problem with the Snackboxes thing at first. It was a prank, fine, no problem, no one gets hurt. But after you found out, and told him to stop it, I tried to get him to stop, told him it wasn't worth it. But he wouldn't listen. Something's changed... it's like, he's become this ugly person I want nothing to do with. I mean, he's always hated you, but he had some perspective, knew not to break the rules. And especially, now that he's not a prefect anymore, I think he just doesn't care, he's that mad."

She exhaled. "I've been thinking about this for a few days now. I'm not proud of a lot of what I've done, Harry. I've been really mean to you, and Hermione, for no reason except that it made Draco happy. I've been mean to other people, for him. I heard about what you said to the first years, that they should think for themselves, and what you said to him yesterday, that he should go spend time with the people who agree with everything he says. I realized I'm one of those people. I'm not sure how it happened. But I don't want to be that anymore." She stopped talking and looked at him expectantly.

Harry was still stunned; this was so opposite the character he'd seen of Pansy Parkinson. The obvious thing to think was that this was a transparent attempt to curry favor with those who she saw had more influence now. But there was something about her that told Harry that she was sincere, at least at this moment. All he knew for sure was that he could not afford to take her at her word.

He wondered if he looked as confused as he felt. "Pansy... if you were me, what would you be thinking right now?"

She looked frustrated and impatient. "I already said I know it looked suspicious. This isn't easy for me to do, Harry. Please don't play games with me. I want to know what you think."

“I’m not playing games with you, Pansy, at least I don’t mean to. But... did you hear what happened to Hermione this morning?”

She nodded. “Some of the seventh years saw what happened from our window. They said he Cursed Hermione, and then almost killed you. That’s another reason I’m here. I mean, I’m not saying I like her all of a sudden. It’s easy not to like her—you and Ron didn’t either, at first, you know, the look-at-me-I’m-so-smart thing. But I wouldn’t wish that on her, and I know it was brave of her to run out to help you. When Draco heard about it this morning, at first he was really happy, but soon all he could do was moan that Nott didn’t manage to kill either of you. I was disgusted.” She finished talking, then added, “But you still haven’t told me what you think.”

He nodded. “I asked if you knew what happened to Hermione because I wanted to make sure you knew how serious this is. People’s lives are at stake, Pansy. This thing I’ve started against Voldemort”—she flinched—“has gotten serious. What Nott did, he did on direct orders from Voldemort.” She gaped in astonishment, and he was sure she was not faking that. “He admitted it to Dumbledore. My point is that I’m kind of the leader of this, and there’s now violent resistance to it. If I trust the wrong person, people I care about could die, literally.” She nodded evenly, showing she understood.

“Now, that doesn’t mean I don’t believe you. What you say and your reasons for it make sense. Professor Dumbledore is always saying that people can change, and do. I want to believe you. Part of me does believe you. It feels like you’re telling the truth. But you have to understand that for now, I can’t confide in you with information that could hurt me or my friends if it got out. I think you can understand that.”

Again, she nodded. “I’m not saying I want to be part of your inner circle or something. I mean, you people get in a lot of trouble, and I’m not sure I want that. I don’t support... I’m sorry, I can’t say his name... but I don’t want to get killed by him, either. Anyway, I can help you without you trusting me. The question is,

should I be more open about it, or pretend I still like Draco and get you information you couldn't otherwise get?"

Harry was startled; she was offering a potentially major resource. "The problem with the second one, Pansy, is that you could end up dead. These people have shown that they will kill. I mean, you might be able to find out some helpful things, but I doubt they'd be worth risking your life over. You have to be the one to decide, but the first one seems a lot safer. I wouldn't ask anyone to do the second."

She smiled, but somehow even this was strange to Harry; he hadn't ever seen a genuine, happy smile from her, but only one reflecting satisfaction from having pleased Malfoy. "I think I'm beginning to see why the first years like you so much. You don't even like me, you don't know that I'm not lying to you, but you're still worried about my safety. Well, I'll think about it, and decide which one to do.

"I should go before I'm seen, but I want to say a few other things quickly. One, I really admire what you're doing with saying the Dark Lord's name. I'm too scared to do it, or to be seen to be doing it, but I still admire it. Also, a lot of older Slytherins were saying they thought there was something wrong with Nott, ever since he got back. They said, and I thought so too, that he seemed somehow a different person, somehow colder, like he'd lost his personality. I guess that makes sense, if he was a Death Eater all of a sudden. Anyway, I don't know if that's helpful to you or not, but I thought I should mention it. Lastly, I wanted to admit that I was the one trying to listen in on you yesterday. Draco gave me the Ears and told me to, but I was curious for myself anyway. I was shocked when you Summoned them away. It was you, wasn't it?" He nodded. "I heard about your 100, I shouldn't be surprised. I'm sorry about that, but I wasn't going to tell him what happened anyway. By the way, Draco got 78, he was furious at being lower than Longbottom. I'll go now, I'll talk to you again when there's a chance." She hurried off.

Harry's head still buzzing, he waited until she was out of hearing range, then said "Pepperoni pizza," and climbed in past the open portrait. He was met by curious stares. "That took an awful long time," observed Ernie.

Harry knew he couldn't say anything about what had happened in front of so many people. "She was giving me a hard time, saying that I had no right to say where she could walk or stand. I eventually got tired of her arguing and threatened detention, and she finally left."

"Should've threatened it a lot sooner," grumbled Ernie. "I'm pretty hungry."

"I'm a little hesitant to give detentions to prefects unless there's an excellent reason. That's something you should appreciate, Ernie."

"Well, I guess you have me there," Ernie agreed. "Ron, is the coast still clear?"

Ron checked the map, and gave the thumbs-up sign. Ernie and Justin were the first out, followed by the Slytherins, then finally the Gryffindors. Harry motioned for Ron, Ginny, and Hermione to follow him into his dormitory, which they did. They sat down on his bed, and he told them about his conversation with Parkinson. They seemed as stunned as he had been.

"She's always been so awful," Hermione said with disgust. "Do you believe her, Harry? I mean, you were the one who saw her, only you can judge."

"Everything she said made sense. Let's put it this way, if she's lying, she was extremely clever about it, like she knew exactly what to say to make me believe her. She didn't overdo anything. She said she didn't need to be trusted, and understood that I couldn't. She admitted that she still doesn't like you especially, Hermione, but that you didn't deserve the Curse."

"Very big of her," said Hermione, unimpressed.

"The point is, she wasn't all, 'oh, it's terrible about Hermione, that poor girl,' that sort of thing. She said you still have a look-at-me-I'm-so-smart kind of thing—"

"The girl obviously has no idea what she's talking about," interrupted Ron, smirking.



Hermione shot him an angry look. “I’m really not in the mood for that right now, Ron,” she warned.

He looked startled, then said, “Sorry,” and looked down.

Harry continued, “She’s not sucking up, I know that much. Also, she didn’t have to admit that it was her with the Ears; she didn’t know we knew it was her. Deep down, I think she’s genuine, but I, we, can’t afford to take that risk. I’ll take what information she gives me, but with a big grain of salt. I’m not giving her anything that could hurt us. I think she understands that. We’ll just have to see what happens.”

“Are you going to tell your first years?” Ginny asked, meaning the Slytherins.

“I thought about it, but if Parkinson is genuine and does end up risking herself, ten people is too many to know. And they don’t need to know, because I don’t exactly trust her myself, so there’s not much I could tell them anyway. They’ll deal with her as if she were hostile, which is probably for the best.”

Ron agreed. “She was right, the timing was extremely suspicious. Right after Malfoy falls from power. But like you say, it could be legitimate, and we’d be stupid to just tell her to get stuffed.”

“It doesn’t sound quite so stupid to me,” Hermione muttered. “But, yes, I understand.”

“Well, let’s go get some breakfast,” Harry suggested.

They started to get up, but Hermione looked at Ron. “Ron, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have snapped at you. I know we do that all the time, I’m just not in a good way right now.”

Ron nodded. “I understand, thanks. I know you haven’t slept. I assume you’re going to come back here after breakfast and get some sleep, right?”

“Yes, I did plan to. Harry, could you do me a favor? I’m still kind of emotional right now. When I come back to sleep, would you come too, and ask Fawkes to sing? I could really use it.”

“Sure. I can’t say for sure that he will, but I’ll ask him.”

“Thanks.” They headed off for breakfast.

They walked back into the dormitory an hour later, having had breakfast and fended off numerous requests for recaps of the night’s dream from many Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and a few Slytherins. Hermione took the initiative to patiently explain that Harry had gone through it once for the Gryffindors, and couldn’t really tell it to everybody individually. Ron would then add that the gist of it was that Harry refused again to cooperate, was defiant, and suffered the Curse again. That seemed to satisfy most people. Most people didn’t ask about the incident with Nott, not having yet heard that anything had happened.

They headed back to the dormitory, and Hermione got ready to sleep. There was nothing special for Ron or Ginny to be doing there, but they were still concerned about Hermione, so they stayed with her. She curled up in bed. Harry said, “After you’re asleep, I’m going to go see Dumbledore. Ask him about what he thought of the dream, and get his advice about Parkinson.”

“Okay, Harry,” Hermione said, “but take Fawkes with you when you go. It’s more important that he keep bonding with you than that he sing to me.” She had that pleading look again, and Harry swallowed the objection he had ready.

“I’ll tell you what,” he offered. He turned to Fawkes, as ever on his shoulder.. “Fawkes, I wonder if you’d be willing to sing for a bit, to help Hermione to sleep. When she’s asleep, I’m going to visit Professor Dumbledore. You can either come with me, or stay with her, depending on which you think is best. Is that okay with you?”

Fawkes’s response was to start singing. Hermione let out a contented moan as she got comfortable. “Thank you, Harry, and you, Fawkes,” she said.

Ron turned to leave, then looked at Hermione. “Umm, Hermione... I wanted to thank you for saving our lives.” Ginny, obviously proud of Ron, put her arm around his shoulder and nodded in agreement.

Hermione smiled. “I was glad to be able to do it. It makes what happened worth it, something I can be proud of instead of feeling like a victim.” Ron and Ginny thanked her again and left.

Harry sat down next to the bed, and started petting Fawkes. He watched Hermione close her eyes. She opened them again in a minute, looking at him. Remembering last night, he smiled, mouthed the words “I love you,” and made the same from-the-heart gesture that she had made. She smiled, closed her eyes again, and was asleep in minutes.

Harry waited for about fifteen minutes before getting up to go see Dumbledore. When he did, Fawkes stayed on his shoulder. Harry gave Fawkes an ‘are you sure?’ look, then continued out. Fawkes let out a last, long note, then stopped singing.

Harry knocked on Dumbledore’s office door, which promptly opened. Harry walked in to find a man sitting across from Dumbledore. “Oh, I’m sorry, sir, I didn’t know you had—“

He was interrupted by Dumbledore’s welcoming gesture. “Not at all, Harry, we were discussing you anyway, so your arrival is fortuitous. Harry, this is Hugo Brantell, and he is working on a story for the Daily Prophet.”

Harry stiffened. He knew this was probably unavoidable, but his first inclination was to think that any reporter would be similar to Skeeter, and even if he wasn’t, the Prophet still was the instrument of the campaign against him last year. To his surprise, the man chuckled and stood. He was tall, in his mid-thirties, Harry guessed, with an expression that radiated both humility and confidence. “I understand your reaction, Harry, but let me put your mind at ease. I am not one of those who were writing negative stories about you last year. I am what Muggles would call a freelance reporter, and I refused to work for them at a time when they had such an obvious political agenda.”

“I have known Hugo for some time now, and have read much of his work. I am confident that he will be fair and straightforward in his article,” said Dumbledore.

Harry’s concern evaporated. If Dumbledore thought that, it was good enough for him. Hugo proffered his hand, which Harry shook, and took a seat.

“Now, Harry,” said Brantell, “there is something I want to tell you before we start. I have a very unusual magical ability. Professor Dumbledore is a Legilimens, which as you know means he can tell if someone is being truthful or not. This can be learned, though by relatively few wizards. I have this talent naturally, and a knack for understanding a person’s mood. Now, we can all read moods from faces and gestures; it’s a necessary human social skill. I have that skill to an unusually high degree. I don’t recall having ever been wrong in estimating a person’s mood.”

Harry couldn’t resist asking, “Have you ever met Professor McGonagall?”

Brantell and Dumbledore laughed. “Yes, on several occasions,” Brantell chuckled. “It is a bit more of a challenge. You’re quite fond of her, aren’t you, Harry?”

Harry raised his eyebrows. “I can see where people don’t get to keep many secrets from you. Yes, I am. She’s strict, but fair, and I think most of the students in her house know she likes them, even if she doesn’t show it much.”

“Now, before I ask you some questions, I believe Professor Dumbledore wanted to mention a few things to you. Oh, and I hope you don’t mind me taking the liberty of using your first name.” Harry shook his head. “Please call me Hugo. You will be referred to in the article as ‘Professor Potter,’ of course.”

“Harry,” said Dumbledore, “I thought I would explain why I agreed to this article, and tell you some of the ground rules, so you will know. First, there has been great interest from the Daily Prophet in doing an article about you ever since it became known that you had joined the teaching staff. As I am able to dictate who enters the Hogwarts grounds and who does not, I was able to impose some

conditions, such as who would be allowed to write the article. As I said, I am comfortable with Hugo's presence.

"I also agreed to allow the article because the interest in you is very understandable. Of course I respect your privacy, and I know that being the Boy Who Lived, you have had precious little of it. But being a teacher at Hogwarts makes you a public figure, after a fashion—you have an impact on people's children, so they will want to know about you. It is also the case that your campaign has been getting back to parents' ears; some approve, some are concerned, and a vocal minority are ruled by their fear and disapprove. I would like your reasons and activities to be a matter of public knowledge so that parents will understand why you are doing what you are doing. I know you hope that what you do will inspire the magical community in general; this will help that occur, if it is to occur.

"One of the ground rules is that sixth and seventh year students can be quoted by name, but others cannot, for family privacy reasons. Also, you will of course be using Voldemort's name, which the Prophet does not wish to print. But obviously we cannot have a situation in which you are saying 'Voldemort' but the article quotes you as saying 'He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,' as it would defeat the purpose of what you are doing. After some negotiations, it has been agreed that when you or any student or teacher use Voldemort's actual name, what is printed in the paper will be the letter 'V' followed by eight dashes. This was not entirely satisfactory to me, but the paper was highly reluctant to do even this much; they fear reactions from their readers, not to mention Voldemort himself. But they did agree to this, and also, to offer their readers a choice; if they use their wand over the article, Voldemort's full name will appear. All this will be explained to readers in a short accompanying article. Is all that acceptable to you, Harry?"

"If it's acceptable to you, sir, it's acceptable to me. So, go ahead," Harry said to Hugo.

"It is not difficult for me to notice, Harry, that you have a deep bond with Professor Dumbledore. You trust him implicitly. How did this come about?"

On the spur of the moment, Harry decided to open up, though his natural inclination would be to give minimal answers. Dumbledore had told him that Brantell could be trusted to be fair, and he remembered what Hermione had said about the whole wizarding community now being involved. He hadn't looked that far ahead when he had started, but he knew it was true. This could be my only chance to say what I want to say and have it not be twisted around, he thought.

"I don't know if I could say easily, Mr., uh, Hugo. But you know him; I can't see how anyone could get to know him and not like him. I suppose you could say that it evolved over time. He's never been anything but kind, patient, supportive, understanding, and very wise. He seems to always know exactly what to say or do in any situation. I can't think of anyone who could be a better role model for students than him." He looked at Dumbledore, who was smiling, apparently not at all embarrassed.

Hugo stared at Harry for a moment, grinning broadly. It struck Harry as an unusual reaction. "What?" asked Harry.

"I'm sorry, Harry... I'm smiling at what I picked up from your answer. Most people are embarrassed to say such things. Not only are you not embarrassed, you were positively happy for the opportunity to let Professor Dumbledore know how you feel. It's very... sweet, if you'll pardon the expression. Now, to move on a bit... which other people in the wizarding world would you say you are close to?"

"Well, the Weasleys, of course. Arthur and Molly Weasley are great people, they've always been very good to me. They regard me as one of the family, which makes me very happy. And of course their two youngest children, Ron and Ginny, are very close friends of mine. Also, I'm very fond of the twins, Fred and George, who looked after me quite a bit in their time at Hogwarts, and who now own a great joke shop in Diagon Alley—"

"Which you would like mentioned in the article?" grinned Hugo.

"I really would," agreed Harry, also grinning. "They were also on the Quidditch team with me, which was one of the ways they looked after me. They

were a great pair of Beaters, and if anyone took a cheap shot at me, Fred and George made sure they regretted it. A Seeker is pretty vulnerable, so it was nice to know that they were there. Apart from the Weasleys, I'm very close to Hermione Granger, who's a very sweet person. I'm also close to Rubeus Hagrid, the Care of Magical Creatures teacher, and the kindest man and best friend a person could want; Neville Longbottom, a very nice person; and Remus Lupin, who taught Defense Against the Dark Arts a few years ago. I'm especially grateful to him because he took extra time with me to teach me how to ward off dementors, which has saved my life more than once. There are other people in the magical community who have been good and helpful to me, but those are the main ones."

"Professor Lupin resigned at the end of that year at the insistence of parents who discovered that he was a werewolf, isn't that correct?"

"Yes, that's right, and I was very unhappy about that. Those people who complained didn't even know him, didn't know what a good person he is. I've found out through knowing him that being a werewolf is a manageable condition, if the proper care is taken."

"What are your feelings about being the Boy Who Lived, whose name and scar are known to every person in the wizarding world? It must be a very unusual life."

"Yes, it has been," Harry answered. "Of course, I was raised by Muggles, my mother's sister and her family, so I didn't even know about my history until I came to Hogwarts. I had no idea that everyone would know me; Hagrid had to explain it to me when he came to get me for the first year at Hogwarts. But yes, it was very strange. Can you imagine people coming up to you, recognizing you, and commenting on something that happened when you were too young to remember? Acting like you were someone special when you hadn't done anything to merit it? From my point of view, it was bewildering. I think I've gotten used to it by now, though."

Hugo went on to ask Harry questions about the D.A. and how it led to becoming the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, his campaign to use Voldemort's name, the situation with Fawkes, and the current dream encounters with Voldemort, ending with Nott's attempt on his life that morning.

"...so, even just this morning, both Hermione and Professor Dumbledore saved my life, which was one of the reasons I came up here in the first place, to thank him for that. But it's typical of the support I've gotten at Hogwarts. In the past few days, since this started, so much of Hogwarts has supported me and helped me, it's been really great. I really appreciate it."

Hugo got up; so did Harry and Dumbledore. "Thank you, Harry, you were very patient. What I'm going to do now is go around the school, talking to people, asking them about you and your campaign. Then I'll ask for some of your time just before dinner, to get your comments in response to what others have said. Is that okay?" Harry nodded.

Hugo left, and Dumbledore looked at Harry. "I am sorry not to have warned you about that, Harry. That took a good part of your morning. I felt that it was important for the wizarding community to understand what you are doing and why, to see you for who you are and not what the Prophet claimed for much of last year. Now, I gather you came up here to discuss a few things?"

"Yes, sir. But I did want to thank you for this morning as well. And of course, thank you too, Fawkes," he added, turning his head toward the phoenix on his shoulder. "I know he couldn't have done it without you."

"Yes, I am glad you recognize that, Harry. We were very pleased to have been able to help, although I admit to having had pangs of regret that I failed to discourage you from flying without adequate protection. Yesterday, I was there to look after you. Today, I was not."

"It's not like you could have known what would happen, sir. I thought we assumed that Hogwarts was secure. I should be able to go out onto the pitch alone



with no problems. You can't go rooting out any spy that there might be at any time."

"All true, I admit, but the feeling of regret is there nonetheless. But you know how I feel, Harry. I can see that you have been deeply pained over what happened to Hermione. Is that what you came to talk about?"

"Yes and no," Harry said. "My head knows that it was her decision and not my fault. Neville gave quite a speech about it, you should have heard it. But my... heart, I guess... is having a hard time catching on to the idea."

"I should hope so, Harry. The better your heart is, the more the people you lead will respect and love you, but you will also suffer in this way more. That is as it should be; that is the price of leadership. A life, an injury, should never be spent without regret. If we ever look at humans or other creatures as pieces on a chessboard, we forget what life is all about, and lose our humanity.

"I hate to say this to you, but I must. You are leading an important part of the resistance against Voldemort, something important to the morale of the wizarding community. Voldemort feels very threatened, and what happened this morning will not be the last such attempt. People you care about may die, and you will conclude that it was your fault, for leading the campaign. I have been through this. It is agonizing. We lost many good people, including your parents, in the last struggle against Voldemort. Many of those lost were carrying out my instructions. I wept, literally, for all those dead, all those tortured. I imagined myself at fault. I knew I truly was not, that those who suffered had chosen their actions and were proud of them. But, like you, I could not easily salve my conscience by telling myself this.

"You must accept your pain without becoming debilitated by it. Your head keeps you dispassionate, helps you to make hard decisions. Your heart reminds you that you are human, and cherish life and love above all else. If your heart is good, as yours is, the people under your leadership will know it, and respond. The Hogwarts community is stirred by your bravery, and is rallying to help you. They respect both

you and the cause you fight for. If some are injured or die, they know that you would have gone in their place if you could. There is nothing more you can ask of yourself. You must remind yourself that the cause is just, and the dead and injured, willing. You will be deeply pained, but know you must continue. You are not a good leader if both of those are not the case.”

Harry was silent for a few minutes, mulling it over. Dumbledore waited patiently. Finally, Harry said, “I think I’d rather deal with the Cruciatu s Curse.”

“I have had the same thought, Harry. At least that affects only the one person. No doubt that is why you felt this way about Hermione; you thought it was only yourself you were placing in danger. For someone like you, that seems ideal. But, unfortunately, life does not work that way.”

“I guess not, sir. I do want to thank you for what you said. It may not be some easy solution, but knowing there is no easy solution is helpful too. I can get used to the idea that I’ll just have to deal with this.

“But this topic reminds me of something else I wanted to ask you about—“

He was interrupted by knocking on the door, which opened to reveal Snape and McGonagall, who entered. “Yes, Severus, Minerva, I’m sorry not to be ready for you. Harry came to see me, and Hugo waylaid us a bit. By the time Harry got to what he wanted to talk to me about, quite a bit of time had passed.”

“I understand, Headmaster,” McGonagall said. Turning to Harry, she said, “I assume your look of distress is for Hermione.”

Harry’s eyebrows rose. “Is it that obvious?”

“I have seen a very similar look on Professor Dumbledore’s face on more occasions than I would care to recall. I sympathize with you, Harry, but as the headmaster has undoubtedly told you...”

“...there’s nothing for it, yes. Not what I wanted to hear, but it is something to work with, anyway. I’m glad that what I’m feeling is normal, that I’m not alone in feeling this way.”

“Indeed not, Harry. If the professors do not mind, and you do not, perhaps you can ask what you were going to when they entered.” McGonagall and Snape made no objection.

“Yes, sir... I was wondering, in both the dreams, Voldemort has made all kinds of threats against me, which, especially in the one this morning, are almost laughable. For myself, I have nothing to lose, and he should know that. But if he wants to threaten me, he couldn’t do it more effectively than by threatening people close to me. Why hasn’t he done that? It seems so obvious.”

“One would think so, Harry. Fortunately, he does not. This is a blind spot of his. He simply does not think in these terms. I have mentioned to you that for him, love and friendship do not exist. They might as well be alien concepts. He would laugh at a threat to his followers; he would evaluate it strictly in terms of its impact on his power. So, he does not think to threaten us in this way, nor do his followers.”

“But he must know, as facts, that love and friendship do exist, and impact people’s lives. I mean, why does he think I’m doing this?”

“He thinks you are doing this,” Snape supplied, “either to gain power for yourself, or in a vain and stupid effort to gain notoriety in the magical community. That is why he cannot understand why his threats have not been effective. They usually are. He is wondering whether you are not actually as deranged and attention-seeking as the Prophet has suggested.”

Harry looked at Snape open-mouthed. “You’re kidding!” he gaped. He looked at the others. “Well, this is a good thing, isn’t it? If he has that little understanding of the situation?”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Dumbledore. “He appears to be vastly underestimating you, which can only be to our advantage. He still perceives a threat to the awe and fear with which he is regarded, but it appears that he feels that if you are responsible, it is largely by accident, as if some members of the community are so misled as to believe in such a foolish person as yourself. He will probably still feel

this way even after tomorrow's article is printed. He will continue to threaten, and attack you if he can, but he does not know what he is up against.

“Recall the words of the prophecy: ‘He will have power the Dark Lord knows not.’ As I have already told you, one of those is love; you have demonstrated the ability to use it to push Voldemort from your mind. We now see that another such ‘power’ of yours is the ability to inspire others to rise up against him. He understands this not at all.”

“It appears, Professor,” added Snape, still amazingly even-mannered and not in any way hostile, “that your choice of tactics against the Dark Lord was inspired, though you could not in any way know this. I believe that he suspected that you were unbalanced for no other reason than that you were openly opposing him; what you did last night seems to have confirmed that impression. Who but an unbalanced person would mock him so, or be so disdainful of the Curse? The Curse inspires terror in those who have experienced it; that you are unbalanced is the only explanation he can accept of why it does not do so for you. He cannot recall the last time he was spoken to in such a way. I have attempted to reinforce this impression, with only minor exaggerations necessary.”

Harry couldn't help it; he laughed out loud. Snape looked a bit startled; Dumbledore smiled. “I'm sorry, Professor,” Harry said to Snape. “I know you weren't deliberately joking, but it was funny. I assume, then, that my impression was right, that he was really mad? I mean, he went and blew a spy because he was mad. That doesn't seem like a really good idea. If I can set aside what happened to Hermione, it seems like last night was an overall plus for our side.”

“Exactly right, Professor,” confirmed Snape. “He acted in anger, and lost an operative. But the decision, while impulsive, was not a foolish one. The Dark Lord did not yet know that Fawkes is with you, and if not for Fawkes, you and the others would have died, at his hands. Overall, last night was a plus for us, though more by chance than by design.”

“I'll take what I can get,” said Harry, as much to himself as anyone else.

“One thing I will say, Harry,” said Dumbledore, “is that you were in good form. Were the situation not so grave, I would have laughed out loud at the ‘tea and biscuits’ comment. No doubt it infuriated him greatly.”

Harry smiled. “It just seemed like a stupid question. I mean, what did he think I was going to say? So... does anyone have any ideas about what I should do tonight?”

“First of all, do you, Harry?” Dumbledore prompted. “Your intuitive choices have been good ones, and you are the one in the situation. Your ideas will be more important than ours.”

“Well, I haven’t had much time to think about it, but I was thinking of taunting him even worse,” Harry said. “It seems to be working.”

“We have considered the question, and that is one of the two main options we see. The other is an idea of mine, which I will run by you now. Do you recall that I suggested yesterday that you ‘come from a place of love’? I am thinking of suggesting that you talk to him while coming deeply from such a place. If you do this, you would focus on love while talking to him, let it emanate from everything you do and say. Express sorrow and pity for what he has become, but in a loving way. My thinking is that this would have two positive effects: one would be to further confirm his impression of you as unbalanced, and the other is that he would be disgusted and appalled. Those two facts combined may encourage him to abandon the current enterprise as fruitless.”

Harry considered for a moment. “Yeah, that’s good. I like the idea. It seems like it should work, or it could have unintended benefits. What I like most about it is that he won’t understand it. I’m not sure how he’ll interpret it, but if I can project it well enough it could affect him the same way it does when he’s tried to possess me.”

“Yes, Harry, that possibility had occurred to me as well. In any case, you should keep the flexibility to change your plans, if your intuition should lead you a certain way.”

“No, I really like this,” Harry said. “This is what I’m going to do.”

“In that case,” said Dumbledore, with a serious expression, “I would advise you to, until the end of this crisis, focus your efforts in that direction—not only in the dreams, but during the day as well. Two years ago, you spent hours one day working on the Summoning Charm, in preparation for the one time you would have to use it. If you spend as much time as possible during the day developing the frame of mind that you want to have when facing Voldemort, it will be easier to come from such a place mentally when you do encounter him.”

Harry could see that it made sense, even though it seemed strange. “How should I do that, exactly?”

“Simply stop frequently during your normal activities, and make a conscious effort to summon the feelings you have used before, especially when you drove him from your mind in the first dream,” explained Dumbledore. “The more you do this, the easier it will be to do, and the stronger it will get.”

A lot like learning a new spell, thought Harry. “I understand; I’ll do that.” He resolved to try as hard to do this as he did the Summoning Charm; he had seen how Voldemort had reacted to love, and he badly wanted to win this fight.

“Very well, Harry,” said Dumbledore. “Was there something else that you came to talk to me about?”

“Yes, Professor. I wanted to ask you... how you decide whether to trust someone or not. I’ve always known who was with me or against me, but now I realize it may not always be so clear.”

“Certainly, Harry, but... may I know why you ask at this particular time?”

Harry involuntarily glanced at Snape before answering. “There’s an older Slytherin student who’s come to me, offering to be helpful to me and what I’m doing, but it’s someone who I never would have thought—“

”Professor Potter,” interrupted Snape in an annoyed tone, “it is obvious why you have not said this person’s name. I assure you that whatever is said in this room does not leave it, nor will any actions indicate it. I would have thought you had known this by now.”

Harry looked at him seriously. “I do know that, Professor, about things that relate to Voldemort. But I didn’t know how you would feel about things that related to your house. You might feel that I was interfering and insist on handling things your own way.”

“Why should I think you are interfering, Professor? You have only turned my house upside down and caused a struggle for control and influence. I see no reason to think you are interfering in any way.” Harry got the impression that Snape was trying to keep the sarcasm out of his voice, but not very successfully.

“I think you know, Professor, that all I want is for the students who like me or my class not to have to fear saying so. I don’t think that’s too much to ask.” He paused. “Anyway... the person who came to me is Pansy Parkinson.”

Snape’s eyebrows went up a bit, as did McGonagall’s. Harry related some of what she’d said. “On the surface, I find it very hard to believe, given how she’s always acted. But what she says is believable, and she seemed sincere. My intuition, if that is what it is, says that she’s being truthful.”

“Always listen to your intuition,” urged Dumbledore. “If it is ever wrong, it is probably because you mistakenly took some other feeling for intuition. When you learn to always recognize intuition for what it is, you will make fewer mistakes.

“I cannot, naturally, offer an opinion on whether Miss Parkinson is sincere or not. You will have to make that judgment for yourself. But to answer your general question, obviously the person’s stated motivation for offering help is very important. There are many other factors to consider, of course. Almost too many to mention. May I ask how you responded to her offer?”

Harry related what he had said. “It seemed important to her that I believe her, as if something emotional was at stake for her, but I can’t imagine why.”

“It is sometimes hard for us to understand how other people think. The obvious possibility is that despite herself, what you have done has inspired her as well, and she suddenly realized better possibilities than being Mr. Malfoy’s sycophant. But, again, I cannot pretend to know. It must come down to your

judgment. Another of the burdens of leadership, I fear. I am sorry I cannot be of more help.”

Harry nodded. “I understand. I know I can’t tell her much. I don’t want anything to happen to my Slytherins.” To Snape’s expression, Harry said, “You know what I mean, Professor.”

“They might as well be yours, Professor,” Snape said, and again Harry was very conscious of Snape trying to keep his voice level. “I expect them to be starting a Harry Potter fan club any day now.”

“It appears that the club would quickly grow in membership,” chuckled Dumbledore.

“Speaking of your Slytherins, Professor,” said McGonagall in one of her sterner tones, “Two Hufflepuffs, including a prefect, and your Slytherins were seen heading away from Gryffindor Tower this morning, followed by the whole of Gryffindor house. What do you suppose might have been the reason for that?”

Harry knew full well that she knew what he had done, and suspected that she was not truly serious, so he decided to risk a joke. Not totally able to keep a smile off his face, he said, “I wouldn’t want to speculate on that, Professor.”

“I’ll bet you wouldn’t,” she scoffed. Dumbledore was smiling. “You are aware that that is against the rules?” she asked, but Harry was sure now her heart wasn’t in it.

“Hermione did mention that to me,” he admitted.

“At least she did that much,” McGonagall said resignedly. “Well, I suppose that given what is going on, I can’t pretend that it’s of great concern. I will ask you not to be too blatant about it.”

“I won’t, Professor. I only did it because—“

”I know why you did it, Harry. The impulse is admirable. It just... does not sit well with me. I am used to the rules being followed.”



“I understand, Professor, and I appreciate your tolerance.” He turned to Dumbledore. “Anyway, I think that’s all I wanted to talk to you about, Professor. I’ll let you get on with your meeting now.” He stood up.

“Always a pleasure, Harry,” said Dumbledore. Harry nodded to all of them and left. As he walked away, he mused that Dumbledore had not been able to offer him any specific advice about Parkinson, but he felt more comfortable with the situation anyway.

It was a slow afternoon for Harry. He went back to Gryffindor Tower, to sit with Hermione for a while as she slept. Fawkes sang, and Harry found it soothing to just sit there, watching Hermione and listening to Fawkes. It occurred to him that he had never really watched anyone sleep before. She seemed very content, he thought.

After getting some lunch, Harry went back to the kitchens to say hello to Dobby, which he hadn’t done since the term had started. As usual, Dobby was thrilled to see him, but very fearful for Harry for what he was doing, and in awe of what Harry was going through. Having heard more superlatives in a short time than he would have thought possible, Harry wished Dobby well, and headed off to see Hagrid, of whom he had not seen much either.

His knock on Hagrid’s door was greeted, as usual, by loud barking. Hagrid opened the door and welcomed Harry as Fang slobbered all over Harry in an affectionate sort of way. “Come in, come in,” said Hagrid.

Harry stepped in and, to his surprise, was greeted by Hugo Brantell. “Harry, what a surprise,” he said. “I was just finishing up talking to Hagrid here. Like most people at Hogwarts, I’m finding, Hagrid didn’t need much prompting to talk about you.”

Harry grinned at Hagrid, who looked embarrassed. Harry said, “Sorry, I didn’t know you were in here. I just wanted to visit Hagrid, since I haven’t seen as much of him as I’d like, what with all that’s going on.”

“Well, sit down, Harry,” Hagrid urged. “Like he said, we were almost done.”

“Did he tell you,” Harry asked Hugo, “that he got me my owl? It was the day he got me, before I’d even been to Hogwarts. I didn’t even know what owls were for. He got me one because it was my birthday, but I think he also just felt bad for me.”

“Yeh should’ve seen him,” said Hagrid to Hugo, sounding nostalgic. “Little tyke, wide-eyed, not knowin’ anythin’ about anythin’, I mean about who he was. So innocent, there was jus’ somethin’ about him that yeh couldn’t not like.”

“That was very nice of you, Hagrid,” Hugo said. “Owls aren’t cheap.”

“And mine’s a really nice one, too,” Harry added. “Snowy white.”

“So, Hagrid, what were you saying when Harry knocked?”

“Well, like I said, he and Hermione and Ron were always gettin’ inter stuff they shouldn’t have been. If somethin’ was happenin’, they had ter find out what it was.”

“Well, that’s not fair, Hagrid,” Harry protested. “I mean, for the first year, yeah, maybe, but I had to do it, I didn’t want Voldemort to get the Sorcerer’s Stone, so I think I had a good reason. And the second year, I got involved because I was the one hearing voices all over the school. If you heard voices that no one else could hear, you’d want to find out what was going on, too.”

“Well, maybe yer right,” Hagrid allowed. “Always jus’ seemed that way ter me.”

“Well, thank you, Hagrid,” said Hugo, standing up. “Thank you for your time, I enjoyed talking to you.” He reached up to shake hands with Hagrid, smiled at Harry, and then left.

“Nice man, nice man,” said Hagrid after Hugo had left. “Unlike that one a few years ago, he didn’ seem ter mind if I said nice things about yeh.”

“Sorry I haven’t been able to see you much, Hagrid,” Harry said. “I’ve been kind of busy...”

“That’s one way o’ puttin’ it,” Hagrid said. “I’m glad yeh came ter see me, yeh know it’s hard fer me ter come see yeh. Low ceilin’s. But I wanted ter. I’m glad everyone’s been supportin’ yeh so well. Yeh deserve it.”

“Thanks, Hagrid.” Harry said. “Let me ask you, do you think what I’m doing is the right thing to do?”

Hagrid hesitated. “It is, Harry, yeh know it is. Yeh don’ need ter ask me.”

“But you wouldn’t do it, if it were you,” Harry guessed.

“Only because I wouldn’ be brave enough,” Hagrid grunted in embarrassment. “Yer the brave one. I know it’s a good thing ter be doin’, I know the reasons. But yeh know how hard it is fer me ter hear the name, never mind say it.”

“But that’s exactly what I’m trying to change, Hagrid.”

Hagrid rolled his eyes and fidgeted, then sighed heavily. “All right... his name is... Voldemort. Yeh happy?”

“Yes, thank you, Hagrid.” Harry smiled and patted him on the back. “That’s the best way to support me. Keep doing that.”

“Wish I could jus’ give yeh money instead,” Hagrid muttered. Harry chuckled.

They talked for a while about recent events. Then Hagrid said, “Yeh know, Harry, I’ve been proud of yeh for a lot o’ things since yeh’ve been here. But Fawkes choosin’ yeh, that’s one o’ the big ones. Tell yeh what I think, I think he was used ter Dumbledore, and chose yeh because yeh have the same qualities Dumbledore does, or yeh have the potential ter.”

Harry was touched. “Thanks, Hagrid. I don’t know if you could think of any nicer thing to say about me than that.”

“Well, I should be off,” Hagrid said roughly. “Time ter go see Grawpy.”

“Oh, yeah, how’s he doing?”

“He’s fine, fine, vocabulary’s comin’ along. Still gets a mite impatient now an’ then, but doin’ better. Don’ need ter tie him down any more, that was a big step. I’d invite yeh ter come see him, but I know yeh’re really busy.”

Harry was certainly glad for the excuse; he had a feeling that Hagrid said ‘gets a mite impatient’ where others would say ‘throws a fit.’ He really did want to see Grawp again, but preferred to at such a time when he didn’t feel in danger of being accidentally crushed. Harry bade Hagrid goodbye, and headed back to the castle.

Hermione got up in mid-afternoon, feeling much better; she petted Fawkes and thanked him as soon as she saw him. Ron joined them for some Transfigurations practice and homework, and then Harry and Hermione worked on Potions for a while. Harry was not going to enormous effort to keep up with his homework in most classes—he knew his teachers would excuse it while his crisis with Voldemort continued—but he was determined not to lose a step in Potions. Harry didn’t assume Snape’s tolerant attitude would last, and so took nothing for granted.

Later in the afternoon, Hugo visited Gryffindor Tower to interview Ron, Ginny, and Hermione, before doing his final one with Harry. He asked for Ron first. Harry suggested they use the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, and Hugo and Ron went off. Hugo took a half hour with each of the three, then asked Harry for his final interview.

Harry asked if Hugo minded if they joined him for that interview; Hugo agreed but asked that they try not to comment unless asked a question, as his time was limited. They agreed, and walked to the classroom.

They sat down in students’ chairs. “Harry, I’ve been talking to Hogwarts students for seven hours today, and even after only a week, your students are effusive in their praise of your classes. Are you surprised by this?”

Harry nodded. “Very surprised. I mean, Hogwarts has never had a sixteen-year-old teacher. I didn’t know what to expect, and even though I led the D.A., I didn’t think it’d be the same as teaching. I was just hoping not to do badly.”

“You said you felt a lot of support from the Hogwarts community. Do you think it is support for you personally, or what you are encouraging others to do?”

Harry raised his eyebrows; he hadn’t thought about that. “You’d know better than me, you’ve been talking with people for seven hours,” Harry joked. “I honestly couldn’t say. I hope it’s both, but I’d really be the least qualified person to answer that. I’m just happy for the support.”

“The only reaction I got from most people today about you other than support was a general nervousness that more violence might come to Hogwarts, such as happened this morning. Are you concerned about this?”

“Yes, I am. I know it could happen. I hope it doesn’t. I do know that Hogwarts is a very secure place, and it couldn’t be in better hands than Professor Dumbledore’s. Especially after this morning,” he involuntarily glanced at Hermione, “I know that what I’m doing could bring danger to Hogwarts that otherwise wouldn’t have come. But the problem is, nobody fights Voldemort because they’re afraid of the danger, and that makes him stronger. Somebody has to do this, and it just happens to be me, and I happen to be at Hogwarts.”

“Some parents would say, ‘I appreciate what he’s trying to do, but he could be putting my children in danger.’ What would you say to that?”

Harry paused. “I think that’s the toughest question you could ask me. I don’t deny the possibility. But, thinking about what you just asked a minute ago, I think a big part of the reason that so many people support me must be that they feel that what I’m doing is right. If they thought the effort wasn’t worth the danger, I’m sure I’d be hearing that from people. So far, I haven’t. As I think I said before, we can’t fight Voldemort if we can’t say his name, and no one else is. If someone else was, I wouldn’t have to. But I’m very sure we do have to. I’ve never been so sure of anything.”

“Harry, the other teachers expressed virtually unanimous support for you, and their admiration. The only exception was Professor Severus Snape, who would not comment, on this or anything else. Why do you think that is?”

Harry paused again. “I think it’s probably best that if he didn’t comment on me, then I shouldn’t comment on him.”

“Some other sixth years have told me that he’s been unusually harsh on you, singling you out for criticism, and worse. Is that true?”

“I’m sorry, Hugo, but again, I’m not going to say anything about that.”

Hugo nodded. “Okay, I understand. Would it surprise you to learn that, unfairly using my intuitive sense today, I discovered quite a bit of female interest in you?” Ron, Hermione, and Ginny all burst out laughing. Harry gave them a humorously annoyed look as Hugo chuckled at the scene. “Well, you did ask if they could sit in,” he observed.

“They’re laughing because they know that I’ll be embarrassed, of course,” said Harry. “But, yes, it surprises me. I’m not sure I’d believe you if you didn’t have that sense of yours.”

“Well, then, Harry, would it surprise you to learn that when I used the phrase ‘quite a bit of female interest,’ I was understating the case, to spare you embarrassment?” Ron, Ginny, and Hermione broke up again.

“Yes, Hugo, that would surprise me even more. I see you decided not to spare me the embarrassment in order to give my friends a good laugh. That was very nice of you,” Harry replied, his sarcasm fairly apparent from his tone.

“So, the obvious question is, why don’t you have a girlfriend?” asked Hugo.

Harry thought about not answering, but decided to try after all; he wasn’t sure why he did. “Well, there was someone I was interested in last year, but it didn’t work out. But to be honest, I’m just not sure I can think about having a girlfriend right now.”

Hugo stared at him, seeming to temporarily abandon his role as interviewer. “You’re scared...” he said softly, with compassion. “You’re afraid of what could

happen... either to her because of you, or to you and how it would affect her. That's why you won't do it." He looked deeply affected. Ron, Ginny, and Hermione were silent, somber.

Harry nodded. "I have a huge target on my head, all over me. It's bad enough that my friends are exposed to the danger that I attract. If I had a girlfriend, it would be even worse. I don't know if I could deal with that."

"But Harry," said Ginny, ignoring Hugo's request that she and the others not interrupt, "if you had a girlfriend, she would know all this, and want to be with you anyway. She would want to help you, she wouldn't care about the danger."

Harry looked at her. "Maybe you're right. Goodness knows you three are like that. Maybe she could deal with it, but I couldn't. I couldn't possibly enjoy having a girlfriend. I'd be constantly worrying. Maybe she wouldn't want me to, but I would. I know that. Of course, I'd like to have one. But I just don't think I could do that right now. You saw what I was like today, you saw what I went through with Hermione..." He trailed off.

"I'm very sorry, Harry," said Hugo, sincerely. "I can't imagine what that must feel like." He got up. "I've really enjoyed meeting you, Harry. All of you." He started to leave, then paused. "There are a couple of things I picked up from people that I thought you should know. Draco Malfoy... a few said the same things he did about you, but their hearts weren't really in it, not like Malfoy's is. He loathes you. He's so filled with hate, it was disturbing to talk to him. He said horrible things about you, but his true feelings are worse, Harry. I think if he thought he could kill you and get away with it, he would. I'm going to tell Professor Dumbledore the same thing. You need to watch out.

"Now, Pansy Parkinson, the Slytherin prefect... this was the strange one. She said some pretty nasty things about you, Harry, but she didn't mean them. In fact, I got the sense that she likes you, admires you, and that she only said what she said because it was what she wanted other Slytherins to hear. She was hoping I would print what she said, so they would read it. I see from your faces that this is highly

useful information, but also is connected to something you'd like to keep secret... ah, I see. Don't worry, I'm not going to tell anyone. She's disgusted with Malfoy, Harry, and wants to help you. Normally I don't go around telling people things I got from other people by using my ability, but with Parkinson, I think this is something she actively wants you to know, and with Malfoy, I want you to be on your guard."

"Thanks, Hugo," said Harry. "By the way, did you ever think about being an intelligence agent?"

Hugo smiled. "I did, actually, but I realized it would be too stressful. I like being a journalist better. Well, I'd better get going, I need to do my article in time for the Sunday Prophet, tomorrow."

Hermione was surprised. "That soon?"

"I write fast," Hugo replied. "Thanks again, you all. See you 'round." He left.

"So, what about Parkinson?" Ron asked. "Looks like you were right, Harry. Boy, I never would have thought it."

"I wouldn't believe it if Hugo hadn't said it," said Hermione. "We still have to be careful, though. She could change her mind, nobody can know that she won't."

"But I have to take her more seriously now," said Harry. "I'm going to see if I can find a way to talk to her."

"Give her detention," Ginny suggested.

"Well, there kind of has to be a reason," Ron pointed out. "Also, McGonagall is doing Harry's detentions."

"Couldn't he give her a few detentions, schedule them for the same time as Malfoy's, and say that Harry'll do them so Malfoy and Parkinson don't get to do them together?" asked Hermione.

"That could work," agreed Ron. "Say, Harry, you don't suppose she's one of the ones that's keen on you, do you?" He grinned wickedly.



“Don’t say that,” Harry said fervently. “Besides, maybe they won’t think that anymore after they read what I said about not wanting a girlfriend.”

Hermione laughed out loud. “Are you kidding, Harry? It’ll make them want you more than ever. They’ll feel like, you’d overcome your fear if you could see how much they love you. If something is unobtainable, people want it more.”

“That’s it, Hermione,” teased Ron. “Buck him up, lift his spirits.”

“It’s true,” she said defensively. “Sorry, Harry.”

Harry sighed, but said nothing.

“I assume everyone noticed that what Hugo said backed up what Parkinson said, that Malfoy actually wants to kill Harry,” Ron noted. “We’d be stupid not to assume he knows how to do a Killing Curse. He’s not going to do it in the crowded hallways, though. Only if he gets Harry alone. I think we’d better start thinking about how vulnerable we are at any time, because something could happen like happened to Hermione. We’re going to want to use the Marauder’s Map a lot more. We can’t just walk around the school like nothing could happen to us.”

“Ron’s right,” agreed Hermione. Ron raised his eyebrows, as though those were not words he heard often. “We have to be careful, especially in terms of Harry and his safety. Not only from Malfoy, but any other Slytherin spy.”

“How will we handle this, though? We all know how Harry doesn’t like to be protected,” Ron said humorously, as though Harry were not there.

“He’ll have to deal with it,” said Hermione in the same vein.

“It’s nice to be a part of the decision-making process,” commented Harry. “Do let me know what you decide, won’t you?”

“You’ll be the fourth to know,” Ron assured him.

“C’mon, let’s go get some dinner, I think it’s time,” suggested Ginny. They got up and started to leave the classroom, but as soon as they stepped out of the classroom, they saw Pansy Parkinson approaching from down the hall. Harry quickly said to Ron, “You’ve still got the Map, haven’t you?” Ron nodded. “Could

you stay in the classroom, keep your eyes open?” he asked, as Parkinson walked up to them. Ron nodded again.

Parkinson glanced at all of them, then Harry again. “I assume they all know?”

Harry nodded. “Let’s go into the office,” he said. They walked into the teacher’s office, while Ron, Hermione, and Ginny sat back down in the classroom.

Harry sat down at his desk and gestured Pansy to the other chair. Fawkes was still on his shoulder; Harry marveled at how he could forget Fawkes was there for long periods of time. “Well, I want you to know first that I’ve gone from ‘I want to believe you,’ to ‘I believe you.’” He gave her a small grin, which she returned.

“Thank you,” she said, sincerely. “What made you decide?”

“I had kind of already decided. I just really felt like you were telling the truth. But I just had my last conversation with Hugo before he wrote the article. He said that you said nasty things about me, but you didn’t mean them, that in fact you liked and admired me.” He couldn’t help but smile now, at her embarrassment.

“He’s pretty amazing,” Pansy said. “I just got the feeling that he was looking right through me. I put on an act, but I didn’t think he believed it. What else did he say?”

“That he could tell you were really hoping he’d print what you said, that you wanted the other Slytherins to know you’d said it.”

“Amazing,” she repeated. “Yeah, I did the usual stuff about how you have to be the center of attention, because you’re the Boy Who Lived, that sort of thing.”

“I’ll try not to be too offended,” he said.

“Are we safe here?” she asked.

Harry nodded. “The others are keeping an eye out. And in the worst case, if we were found, there’s nothing so overly suspicious. I’ll say I wanted to have a chat with you about your attitude.”

She looked amused. “Which would be true, really?”

“Pansy, can I ask you something?” She nodded. “I’m not trying to be critical, I’d just really like to know. What is it about Malfoy that you like, or liked, before he got like he is now?”

She considered his question. “He’s very confident; I think people find that appealing. He acts like he’s born to command. And he comes from a wealthy and powerful family, I guess that doesn’t hurt.”

“And it didn’t bother you that being nasty to people was a part of that?”

She gave him a glance, as if to assure herself that he was sincere in asking, then thought again. “All I can think is that it’s easier to ignore it when you’re the one doing it, or your friends. You think it’s justified somehow. But it started bothering me last year, I’m not even sure why. I tried to ignore it, but it wouldn’t go away. This year, I’ve been acting like I usually do, but my heart hasn’t been in it, to say the least.

“I think what made me go looking for you,” she said unprompted, as if she wanted to get this off her chest, “was what you’re doing with the Dark Lord. I know you want me to say his name, but I can’t. Not now. I’ve heard about the Curse, I know that it’s horrible beyond words. That you would face it voluntarily... it’s just an act of bravery that I can barely understand. That, combined with Draco’s attitude, just made it crystal clear to me just how... bankrupt I was, what I was doing was. Laughing at his jokes, hanging out with him... it just seemed so stupid. You’re trying to get people not to be afraid of the Dark Lord, and he’s obsessed with you being a teacher and wanting to hurt you. I just had enough. You can use all the help you can get.”

“That’s for sure,” he agreed. “But you seem to be doing it undercover, and like I said, I’m not sure that’s a good idea. You could still do a lot of good by steering away from Malfoy gently, or trying to talk him down from where he is now.”

She looked at him as if trying to figure out what made him tick. “I heard that you felt very bad for what happened to Hermione, that you felt responsible. Would you feel responsible if I did this for you and something happened to me?”

“Of course,” he said, surprised that she should have to ask. He continued, feeling as though she had shared a confidence, and that he should too. “I talked to Professor Dumbledore about it. He said that you’re not a good leader if you don’t feel this way, that it’s part of the price of leadership. Hermione and the others wouldn’t risk their lives for me if they thought I was going to be careless with them. But I don’t feel this way because I want them to risk their lives for me. They risk their lives for me because I feel this way. If you see what I mean. It’s very, very serious. I would feel that way about anybody, you included, who had placed any trust in me, put themselves in danger for me. I couldn’t feel any other way.”

She stared at him for a moment. “Sorry, that kind of thinking just seems... unfamiliar to me. I can understand it, but... Draco would laugh at it. His attitude would be, well, if they get hurt, then they didn’t do their jobs well enough.”

“And that’s why, I’m very sure, nobody in Slytherin would ever risk their life for Malfoy,” said Harry.

“That’s for sure,” she agreed. “Well, then again, Crabbe and Goyle might, since they might be too stupid to know that they were doing it.”

He chuckled. “Are they really as stupid as they seem? I never hear them talk, so I’m not sure.”

“To tell you the truth, I haven’t heard them talk much more than you have. They laugh at his jokes, mainly. Of course, that’s what I did, too.”

“Well, fun as it is to sit around making jokes about Crabbe and Goyle, since that was one of the things I didn’t like about you, I shouldn’t do it too.”

“I’m going to have to still do it, you know. It’ll look too strange to the others if I don’t.”

Harry looked at her seriously. “Are you really sure you want to do it this way?”

She smiled again at his concern. “I know how things work in Slytherin, I can take care of myself. I won’t do anything stupid.”

“Yeah, but you’ll still have to sit there and agree with Malfoy and laugh at his jokes, which you really don’t want to do anymore.”

“Yes,” she agreed, “but now I’ll be doing it for a reason, one I can be proud of instead of ashamed of.”

He nodded; he could understand that. “Pansy, could you tell me what’s going on in Slytherin these days? Is Malfoy still as powerful as he was, or are people going to abandon him because he lost his badge? I mean, even in fourth year, he had power and influence even when he didn’t have a badge. How does that work?”

She thought for a moment. “It’s still kind of early to tell. Draco’s influence doesn’t come from his badge so much, but from his personality and his family’s power. With his father in jail, that’s taken a dive, but I think he’s trying to use fear instead now. Now that everybody knows his father’s a Death Eater, he wants Slytherins to think he has some influence with the Dark Lord through his father, so they’ll fear him. He wants them to think that if they cross him, the Dark Lord will get them. He hasn’t had to make many threats; students younger than him are so used to being cowed by him that they never make waves. It’s only you and the first years that have changed things. The first years hadn’t learned yet that they should kowtow to Draco. They loved your lesson; you told them not to kowtow to him, so they didn’t. He couldn’t believe it. And what hurt him worse was that it wasn’t just one or two, it was all ten. He usually just makes an example of one or two, and the rest fall in line. He couldn’t make an example of all ten. He cursed one, but the others didn’t budge...”

Harry couldn’t help but smile with pride and interrupt. “I taught them that. I told them they had to hang tough to win, but they could. It’s a little like my situation with Voldemort. He’s trying to make an example of me, to get everyone cowed. But if I can hang in there and, you know, not be killed, then that’s a victory right there.”

She shook her head in wonder. “Anyway, Draco had a feeling you were responsible, and that just made him madder at you. But by then, your second and third years had had their lessons, liked them, and they saw what the first years were doing, and it was like they realized that they could do it too. They’re not quite as bold as the first years, but I think they’ll be sticking it to Draco pretty soon. I think the others will be waking up soon, too, if they haven’t already. I heard the fifth years all bailed on him. So, I think Draco’s power is falling apart, but it’s only beginning to. Maybe the rest will happen this week. Having to do all those detentions means less time in the Slytherin common room to make sure people aren’t saying things about him. So, that’s good.”

“I did warn him,” Harry said. “I’m still amazed that he did it anyway.”

“Like I said, he’s just losing it. He can’t deal with what’s happened. When he sees that article tomorrow, he’ll go berserk. He’ll get himself expelled if he’s not careful.”

“I was thinking, Pansy, we should have some kind of way of getting in contact if one of us needs to talk to the other. Obviously we can’t if either of us is in our dormitories, but that shouldn’t be urgent. I’ll try to work out something for emergency situations. I was thinking, if you want to talk to me, you should insult me when you see me... unless there are teachers around, then you really would get detention.”

“Besides, I’ll have to insult you from time to time anyway, just so Draco doesn’t get suspicious.” She shrugged in apology.

He shrugged in indifference. “I’m kind of used to it. But maybe then we should make it a specific insult, one that’ll signal me that you want to talk. Any ideas?”

“How about something about your scar?”

“Nah, there isn’t anything really to say about my scar, except that it’s ugly or something. Not one of Malfoy’s better insults. How about something about dementors?”

“Oh, you mean from third year, when you were fainting? Why were you fainting, anyway?”

Harry decided to share another confidence, since it wasn't anything that could hurt them if it got out. He wanted her to feel comfortable with him. He looked her in the eyes and said, “When dementors get close to me, I see my mother and father being killed.”

She gasped and covered her mouth with her hands. “Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry... I had no idea, and I kept making fun of you...” She looked distraught.

“Don't worry about it, Pansy. You're not that person anymore,” he said earnestly. “Really, don't worry about it.”

“I know, I just feel so stupid. I don't think I want to use dementors as a signal.”

“Okay, how about this,” Harry suggested. “You just call me ‘Professor Potter’ in a really snide voice. And if I want to talk to you... well, I can't insult you, I'm a teacher...I'll just stare at you, as if you've done something wrong. Then we'll try to meet in the Defense Against the Dark Arts room as soon as we can. If it's really an emergency, just go to Professors McGonagall or Dumbledore, tell them you need to see me.”

As he was talking, she had started petting Fawkes. “He's so beautiful, and his feathers are so soft...” Like Harry yesterday, she was having trouble stopping.

“You did get what I said, right?” Harry asked.

“‘Professor Potter’ snide, you stare at me, Dark Arts classroom, emergency go to McGonagall or Dumbledore. I was listening,” she said, a bit defensively. She stopped petting Fawkes.

“I didn't mean that you weren't, it's just that Fawkes can be pretty mesmerizing. I just wanted to be sure.”

“Harry... I want to ask you something, and I'm sure that people have asked you this, but if you could tell me...” He nodded, gesturing for her to continue.

“I overheard a few Gryffindor first years telling someone about hearing you scream, both nights. They were pretty vivid descriptions, and knowing about the Curse, I’m sure they were accurate.” She shook her head. “I couldn’t do what you’re doing, I just couldn’t. I know it. I really want to know how you do it. I don’t mean why, I know why. I mean how.” She stared at him earnestly.

He kept eye contact with her for a few seconds, thinking. “Honestly, I’m not sure that I could tell you. In a case like this, I treat it as something that has to happen, that I have no choice about, since giving in is unthinkable. And if you have no choice, there’s just nothing to do but deal with it when it happens.

“Also, there’s them,” he said, gesturing to the classroom in which Ron, Hermione, and Ginny sat. “They care about me, they would do anything they could for me; they have, many times. You can’t imagine what a source of strength that is. One thing I know for sure, I couldn’t do this without them. This is where Voldemort is weak, this is what he doesn’t understand. Love and friendship are powerful, and he doesn’t understand them at all. I mean, look at what almost killed him; the protection my mother gave me, by dying and with her love. He didn’t understand it, he still doesn’t.

“But that’s the best answer I can think of to your question. You say you couldn’t do it, but maybe you could if your situation was different. You can’t know.”

She appeared to be fighting back tears, but Harry wasn’t sure. After a moment, she asked, “He really doesn’t understand why you’re doing this? What does he say in the dreams?”

Harry was surprised this hadn’t gotten back to her, or maybe she just wanted to hear it directly from him. He related a lot of what had happened in both dreams. Her eyes got very wide when he had reached the end of the second one.

“Oh, my... I can’t believe you mocked him like that... why in the world...?”

“Like I said, he can’t threaten me any worse than he has. I want him underestimating me, I want him mad at me, so mad he won’t think straight. He was



so mad that he sent Nott after me right away last night, so obviously what I've done has been a good idea."

She was amazed again. "Leave it to you to think of a murder attempt as a good thing. I understand what you mean, but still..." She paused, thinking.

"You know what I feel like, Harry? I feel like I just heard music for the first time, or just had chocolate for the first time. It's like, there's this whole other thing that I never knew existed, and it's just amazing. I can't do what you're doing, but I can try to keep you safe while you do it, and I will.

"I suppose I should go before I'm missed for too long. I'll look for you if there's something I need to tell you."

"Pansy... thank you for doing this. It really helps. It could save my life, I don't know. But even if it ends up doing nothing practical... it still helps, believe me."

She smiled, and they left the office, stepping into the classroom. Ron, Hermione, and Ginny stood. Pansy walked up to them and faced them.

She took a deep breath before speaking. "I want to help you. I want to help him, what little I can, doing what he's doing. I know he believes me. I hope you will too. And I want to apologize to you, for how I've treated you in the past... especially you, Hermione, I've been extra nasty to you, and I'm sorry about that. I've acted like an idiot. You don't deserve it."

Hermione's face, stony at first, melted a bit, and then she did something that greatly surprised Harry. She raised her hand as high as she could, straining to go higher, mocking herself as she appeared in class at times, desperate for the teacher to call on her. Pansy, Harry, Ron, and Ginny all broke up laughing.

Pansy smiled at Hermione. "Thank you, Hermione. I appreciate that. But I still shouldn't have done it. If I need to give him a message and I can't find him, I'll give it to one of you instead. I'm sorry I have to treat you like my normal stupid self in public. But like Harry says, I have to be careful." She looked briefly at all of them, then lingered on Harry for a few seconds. Then she turned and left.

Ron took out the Map and watched the dot move away, then he looked at Harry, as the others were doing. “Let me tell you, mate,” he said to Harry, “Hermione says I’m clueless, and she may be right... but I don’t have to be Hugo to understand that last look she gave you.”

Ginny nodded. “It was pretty revealing, that’s for sure.”

Harry was puzzled. “What, are you saying she does fancy me?”

Hermione shook her head. “It’s more than that, Harry. It’s like... she’s never met anyone like you before, and she’s amazed. She wants to think that one day she’ll be worthy of someone like you, like something to aspire to.”

“I also got the feeling that she really wants to prove herself, to do something that’s really helpful,” Ginny added. “But, yes, you look pretty good to her right now.”

“Spending all that time with Malfoy, anyone who’s not a power-hungry bully is going to look pretty good,” said Harry.

Hermione sighed. “Harry, come to dinner with us, and I’ll tell you about how annoying it is for us when you put yourself down like that.” They headed out the door.

“I don’t mind it when he does that,” said Ron.

“Shut up, Ron,” replied Hermione.

## CHAPTER 12

# THE SUNDAY PROPHECY

Harry soared high into the atmosphere on his broom. Higher and higher he flew, until he could no longer see sky, only stars. He knew he shouldn't be able to breathe, but he could. He wondered where he should go. He could go anywhere, he could go as fast as he wanted. He gripped his Firebolt tightly...

...and he was back in the graveyard. He looked around, and almost by reflex, started thinking about love. He tried to bask in it, in the joy of it. He knew that nothing compared to it. It gave him strength as he waited for Voldemort.

Voldemort popped into view. He looked almost as angry as he had at the end of the previous night's dream. "Well, Potter, are you ready to give in yet? You will, eventually, you know that... why suffer unnecessarily? Now tell me, when talking about me, how should you refer to me?"

Harry looked somber. "Tom Riddle... you used to be called Tom Riddle. Do you remember him? Whatever happened to him?"

Voldemort glared at Harry. "I am not here to discuss history, Potter."

"But he must still be there, somewhere. You can't have totally killed him. I met him once. He could have been a nice person, if things had gone differently for him."

Voldemort sneered. "What do you know of Tom Riddle? Or of me, for that matter?"

"I know he was once a human being," Harry said, focusing on love, on caring. "I know he had feelings, a heart, the same things that all humans do. But he hurt so much that he started letting you in, and before he knew it, you had taken over. He was gone, or at least, pushed far, far back in your mind."

“He was a fool, Potter. Not as much of a fool as you, but still a fool. He was weak. But he was smart enough to let me in. I showed him how to be strong, to eliminate his weaknesses. But he still couldn’t do it. I had to take over, and he was happy to let me. But there is still some of him in me; the strong parts. The weak parts are gone, as they should be. Now, why do you care, Potter?”

“Because, Voldemort, what you call the weak parts are what make us human. Without them, we’re just you—evil, single-mindedly focused on power. There is so much more to life than power. I feel sorry for Riddle for having lost that, and for you, for not understanding it.”

Voldemort just stared, so flabbergasted was he. His expression changed; now he looked more dangerous than he ever had before. Think about love, Harry reminded himself. Come from a place of love. Listen to the phoenix song.

“I had not realized that you were this stupid, Potter. Perhaps I am wasting my time talking to you, but you still must be punished. It is you who does not understand, that there is nothing other than power.”

Harry looked at him with what was now approaching real pity. He shook his head sadly. “No, there is. You just can’t see that it’s there, because you’re not human. If you were human, you’d know. That’s why you can’t beat us, because you don’t understand us. I’ve learned that there is nothing stronger than love. There’s nothing better. If you don’t understand that, then I really do pity you.” Harry mentally luxuriated in a sea of love.

Voldemort looked like he would explode. “Crucio!” he screamed.

Harry was screaming again, the pain overwhelming him. But he found that he was able to think, to his great surprise. I have to wake up, I have to wake up, he thought. He felt himself being shaken, being grabbed. He flung his arms out, grabbed ahold of whatever was there, and the world came back into view.

He looked ahead and saw the extremely concerned faces of Ron, Ginny, Neville, and Professor Dumbledore, so he deduced that it was Hermione he was holding. He gasped for breath, and after a minute, pulled back a bit to see her face.

She gave him a pained smile and ran her hand through his hair a couple of times. He gave her the best smile he could, and fell back into her arms, his head resting on her shoulder. She squeezed him tightly. Fawkes was singing, having resumed as soon as he had delivered Dumbledore.

The others watched, silent, as Harry hung onto Hermione for a few minutes. Finally he said, "That one wasn't as bad as the others, somehow. I think I'm getting somewhere."

Ron scoffed. "I'd say 'not as bad' is a relative term, mate. Looked pretty bad to me."

"I noticed it too, Harry," agreed Dumbledore. "Very minor, a very small difference in the quality of what you suffered. It was perhaps at 90% intensity. Still horribly painful, of course, but it is something to work with."

"So how long do you think it's going to go on?" asked Ron impatiently.

"C'mon, Ron, you know he doesn't know," said Ginny quietly

Ron looked apologetic. "I know, I know, I just hate to keep seeing him like this."

"No more than I do, Ron, I assure you," said Dumbledore. "But Harry knows this, he knew it when he started. It will take as long as it takes. We are doing our best to see that it is over as quickly as possible."

Just then, the dormitory door opened, and five first year boys ran into the room. "Professor! Are you okay?" asked Eric as they crowded around his bed. Ron and Ginny looked a bit annoyed, but Dumbledore smiled.

Seeing Ron and Ginny's expressions, Harry looked at them over Hermione's shoulder and said, "Well, they do get woken up, seems only fair that they should get to come in if they want." Still holding onto Hermione, Harry leaned over and patted the shoulder of the closest one. "I'm okay, Eric, everyone, thanks. I just need to be held for awhile, and then it's okay."

“We know,” said a boy named Brian. “Some of the girls were saying they’d like to be the ones doing it.” The boys all giggled; Ron, Ginny, and Hermione laughed.

“See, Harry?” said Hermione, patting Harry on the back. “I’ve got the best spot in Gryffindor Tower.” Harry couldn’t help but smile.

Dumbledore stood. “I’m sorry, boys, but I must ask you to leave now. Harry will be all right, and there are things that must be discussed privately. I suggest you return to your dormitory before Professor McGonagall finds you out of bounds.” This was said with a smile, so the boys knew he was not reprimanding them. They nodded and filed out.

“Harry, I have brought this with me tonight. I thought it might help to have a different perspective, and Professor Snape can make more detailed observations,” said Dumbledore, moving aside to reveal his Pensieve. “If you do not mind doing it this way, I can help you put your memories into it. Then you, Professors Snape and McGonagall, and I can view it, and form impressions.”

Harry nodded, moving a bit away from Hermione but keeping an arm around her shoulders. “I don’t mind, but them, too,” he said.

“I am concerned that it may be too intense for them, Harry. They have never seen Voldemort before; it could be rather distressing.”

“They can come if they want to. If they don’t want to, they don’t have to,” Harry said in a tone that suggested that he would brook no argument.

“Well, I’m coming,” said Hermione firmly. “If he can live through these things, the least I can do is see them, so I know what he’s going through.” Ron and Ginny nodded their agreement. When Harry looked at Neville, Neville looked a bit surprised. “You mean, me, too?”

“If you want to, Neville,” Harry said. Neville gulped but nodded. Harry had a feeling that Neville was doing it for the same reason that he ran into the room at the Department of Mysteries.

Dumbledore nodded as if he had expected this, which, Harry realized, he probably had. “Very well, let me help you with this.” He moved the Pensieve beside the bed, on a rolling stand he had conjured. “Take out your wand, and focus on the events you wish to place into the Pensieve. In your mind, shift them from your mind to your wand. Imagine them as the silver threads you have seen me use. When you see the threads, simply move your wand to the surface of the Pensieve.” Harry did so. “Now, do you recall the dream?” Dumbledore asked.

“Very faintly,” Harry replied. “Like it was something that happened a long time ago.”

“Good, that is as it should be. Your memories will return in full force, of course, when you empty the Pensieve. I will ask Fawkes to bring Professors Snape and McGonagall.” They were there in a very short time. “Now, everyone please surround the Pensieve. It will only be necessary to put a finger into it.”

“They are coming too?” asked McGonagall.

“Harry was most insistent,” explained Dumbledore.

She looked at them and shook her head. “Don’t say you weren’t warned, this will not be pleasant.”

Ron looked at her aggressively. “It hasn’t been for Harry, either. We have to do this, Professor. You must know that.”

She looked almost amused by his fervor. “Very well, Mr. Weasley.”

“Everyone put their finger in.... now,” said Dumbledore. Eight fingers broke the surface of the bowl.

Harry’s world spun, and in a moment he was standing in the graveyard, in a group of eight. “Harry, this graveyard... this is where he came back?” asked Ginny. Harry nodded.

Suddenly Voldemort popped into view. Harry and the professors didn’t react, but the others all flinched. Ginny, standing next to Harry, buried her head in his chest for a second. Harry patted her shoulder in reassurance. The others watched, transfixed, as Harry and Voldemort talked. Harry, the Harry that was

watching, looked around at other details. He could hear phoenix song in the background. The horizon was dark and indistinct. Harry focused on Voldemort's appearance and expressions; he saw details about how they changed throughout the conversation. Ginny clung to Harry in sympathy as she watched.

The dream stopped a couple of seconds after Harry was hit by the Curse, which caused Harry's friends to flinch again. They were in an empty graveyard. Ginny put an arm around Harry. "You were amazing, Harry," Hermione said softly. "I don't know how you did that, stayed calm like that."

"I want this to be over," Harry said simply. "I have to focus on doing whatever I can to make that happen. It's a big motivator."

"I now must ask the four of you to exit the Pensieve," said Dumbledore. "I would like to see it again, and discuss sensitive matters with the other three professors. You can leave by concentrating on your true body, and moving your finger out of the bowl." In a moment, all four were gone.

"Thoughts?" Dumbledore asked nobody in particular.

"Quite effective," said Snape, surprising Harry. "You could not have done better, Professor Potter. How much of what you said was rehearsed?"

"Umm... I was going to try to mention Tom Riddle, and he gave me just the right opening for it. Other than that, nothing I said was rehearsed."

"It appears, then," said Snape, "that your... intuition was in fine form. He was confused and furious, which is desirable. There is enough truth in what you said to make him uncomfortable, your pity obviously sincere, your calm perfect. He is used to people being in abject terror at his presence. The headmaster is the only one I know of who could have put on such a performance. You did as well as he could have done."

Harry was stunned at such praise. "Thank you, Professor. That's quite a compliment."

Snape gave Harry an annoyed glance. "It was not a compliment, Professor. It was a statement of fact."



Harry had a half-smile on his face. “No, Professor, it was a compliment. You just didn’t mean it as one.” Snape did not reply; Dumbledore chuckled.

“Yes, Harry,” said Dumbledore, “it was quite inspired. I was particularly impressed that you were able to remain calm at just the moment you knew you were going to be Cursed. Your concentration did not waver. I suspect that most people could not have done that. I was also fascinated at your choice to highlight the dichotomy between Voldemort and Tom Riddle. What gave you the idea to do that?”

“I got the idea, I think, from that conversation we had when you asked me to be the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher,” Harry replied. “At one point, you said something like, it was as if he had been taken over by evil, and Tom Riddle was lost. I didn’t know if you meant it literally, but when I asked what happened to Riddle, I realized that Tom Riddle was probably very different from Voldemort, in certain ways, at least. So it seemed reasonable to think of them as two separate people. I couldn’t help but be saddened at the thought of the good parts of Tom Riddle being gone.”

“Most impressive,” mused Dumbledore. “So, Severus, Minerva, did you notice anything else about this dream? We should see it again before you answer.” With a thought, Dumbledore caused the dream to replay.

“Did you notice that the sky got a bit brighter near the end?” asked McGonagall. “It was as if the sun was coming up, or from behind clouds.”

“Does that mean what I think it means, Severus?”

“I believe so, but only Professor Potter can know for sure,” replied Snape.

“Know what?” asked Harry, confused.

“Harry, what was your mental state, especially near the end?” asked Dumbledore.

“I was pretty focused. As soon as the dream started, I was focusing on love, trying to feel feelings of love. Somehow I was able to keep doing it even after Voldemort showed up. I don’t think I ever got angry or annoyed or anything else,

just focused on love. I seem to be getting better at that. Kind of like the Summoning Charm.”

“Quite so,” Dumbledore agreed. “We think, Harry, that the fact that the sky became brighter near the end was due to a combination of your intense focus on love, and Voldemort’s fatigue. Your Occlumency skills are improving, so it is harder for him to break into your mind, and then he is faced with an atmosphere of love, which is very distressing to him. I believe this caused the Curse to be delivered with less than full intensity, and in the following nights, can be improved upon. I am now optimistic about your chances to keep him out or drive him out, perhaps as soon as the next few days.”

“That would be nice,” Harry affirmed. “I’ll be happy for this to be over.”

“Well, Harry, I can suggest no more for tomorrow than to continue in the same vein as today. If you keep calm and composed, focusing on love and not being distracted, I am sure you will achieve more success,” said Dumbledore.

“I understand, Professor,” Harry said.

The professors started to exit the Pensieve, and Harry did so, too. When Harry returned to the room, Fawkes had already delivered Snape back to his quarters. Before Dumbledore could start to leave, Harry asked, “Sir, would you mind if that was kept here for the rest of the morning? I’d like to be able to review the other dreams in the same way, see if I can notice anything.”

McGonagall looked as though she was about to object, but Dumbledore said, “Of course, Harry, I understand. I will return at about 8:00 to collect it. That should give you enough time.” He escorted a slightly discomfited-looking McGonagall out of the dormitory.

“So, was Voldemort anything like what you expected?” asked Harry, of everyone.

“Kind of worse, really,” said Ron, a bit pale. “Just... total evil.”

Neville was looking at Harry with awe. “I was really scared of him, Harry, and I wasn’t even in the dream. I can’t believe you were so calm. I saw it, but I can’t believe it.”

“Well, I’ve met him several times now. I sort of know what to expect.”

“You know what to expect from the Cruciatus Curse, too, but it still hurts,” replied Neville, obviously no less impressed.

“Harry,” Hermione asked, “did you ask for that to be kept here for the reason I think you did?”

Harry nodded. “If you’re interested.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Ron.

“Harry wants to be able to show us some of his memories, presumably ones of events that we weren’t around for.”

“I’d like to see even the ones you were around for,” Ginny piped up.

“The one I was thinking about, of course, was Voldemort’s return,” said Harry.

“You could show us that?” Ron asked. “Yeah, I really would like to see it, if... well, it was really hard for you. I thought it might be too private.”

“Not too private for you. After all, you’re all my close friends. I know that because you’ll be reading about it in the Sunday Prophet in the next few hours,” Harry joked.

Ron, in a decent impression of Professor Trelawney’s voice, said, “Yes, the fates have decreed it.” The others laughed.

“So, does everyone want to see it? It is a bit intense, I should warn you.”

Everybody nodded, even Neville, who Harry had thought might back out.

“Professor Dumbledore didn’t leave it here with this in mind, Harry,” pointed out Hermione. “I mean, I want to see it, but—“

”He knew what I would do, Hermione. McGonagall was going to object, but he cut her off. He could easily have taken this back. He wants me to be able to show you.”

“Okay, then.” agreed Hermione.

“Now, I’m going to start this at a point near the center of the Triwizard maze,” Harry explained. “Cedric and I are near the center, going for the Cup. If I do this right, it should start around when the spider attacks Cedric.” He started applying his wand to his head and imagining the strands of thought, which he deposited into the bowl. When he could barely recall the episode, he figured he was done. “Okay, it’s ready. Remember, if you want to get out, you can at any time.”

“Why would I want to get out?” asked Neville defensively.

“I was talking to everyone, Neville, not only you.”

“Oh. Well, okay then. I’m ready.”

They all put their fingers into the Pensieve. The next thing Harry knew, he was in the middle of the Triwizard maze, watching himself, two years younger, warn Cedric about the giant spider, and help Cedric beat it. He recalled how, so often after the event, he wished he had taken the Cup alone, in which case Cedric would still be alive.

It took about thirty minutes for the event to play out. Harry saw quite a few terrified looks on their faces as they saw Cedric be killed, Voldemort rise, give a speech to his Death Eaters, toy with Harry, and finally duel with him. All had either been told by Harry what had happened or read his interview on the subject, but it seemed that seeing it was completely different. From Hermione’s reactions, Harry would have thought she was not aware of what had happened. Finally it was over, and they left the Pensieve. They were quiet while Harry put his thoughts back. He looked at them, and couldn’t help but smile. “See, Neville, if you’d seen that before the dream, you would’ve thought the dream wasn’t so bad. At least I could wake up from the dream. Believe me, I wanted to wake up from that. Looking at it again, I’m still amazed that I got out of there alive.”

“You’re not wrong,” Ron agreed fervently. “That thing with the wands... I still can’t believe it, you were so lucky to have that happen.”

“Like I said at the Hog’s Head, I’ve had a fair bit of luck.”

They next watched the confrontation with Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets, since only Harry had been present for the conclusion. Ginny had been there, but was unconscious most of the time. She was fascinated to watch, but unnerved to see herself lying in the Chamber. She held onto the real Harry while the younger Harry was fighting the basilisk, and was obviously furious when she heard Riddle gloat over how easy she'd been to deceive.

After they got out, she looked at Harry and said, "You never told me he said all that stuff."

"I didn't think you needed to hear him gloat, Ginny. It was hard enough on you already. And later on, I just never thought of it." Ginny muttered something Harry couldn't make out.

The time was already 6:30, and they had to eat breakfast, so it was decided not to view anything too long. Harry wanted to view the dreams again, as he had told Dumbledore he would, so they did. Harry couldn't find anything that he thought would help him, though. He moved the Pensieve off to one side, they talked about the dreams for a bit more, and then they walked down to breakfast.

Most everyone was already in the Great Hall eating their breakfast. A few people shouted, "What happened?" or "How about the dream?" Figuring it was better to do it like this than be pestered a few dozen times during the course of the meal, he decided to answer. He stopped walking and said loudly enough for most of the hall to hear, "Pretty similar to the other ones, really. Voldemort told me to stop doing this, I ignored him, he threatened me, I told him he obviously didn't understand why I was doing it, he got angry when I was disrespectful... and I think that not cowering is his idea of being disrespectful... then Cursed me again. But I think I'm making progress in fighting him off. I don't think he can do it too much longer."

"How much longer can you keep doing it?" asked an obviously concerned Hufflepuff.

“At least one day longer than he can, that’s all I know for sure,” Harry said firmly. Most of the Hall cheered; Harry smiled and sat down with his friends.

“It really is sad,” Harry said as they started eating. “You saw what just happened there. It’s you guys mostly, but them too, that keep me going. Voldemort just has no idea, no clue about what that means. I really do pity him for that.”

Dozens of owls flew into the Hall with the morning’s mail, including many copies of the Sunday Prophet. To Harry’s surprise, an owl delivered one to him too; he assumed that Hugo had arranged to have him sent one. Ron and Neville looked at his, while Ginny looked at Hermione’s. They read in silence for a while, then people started making comments. Ginny said, “Oh, Harry, Mum’s going to be floating when she reads this, you were very nice. Next time she sees you, there will not be an un-kissed spot on your face.”

Neville had stopped reading suddenly, and looked up at Harry with a very emotional expression. “Thank you, Harry. You didn’t mention that many people. I’m honored to be one of them.” Harry nodded, appreciative of Neville’s gratitude.

“I’m sure Lupin will appreciate being mentioned too, Harry,” said Ron.

“I’m reading the main article; sounds like you two are reading the Harry interview,” said Hermione. “It seems pretty fair. Of course it’s favorable to Harry, but then again, the school supports Harry, so it should be that way to be accurate. Just a few minor quotes from Parkinson and her type to let people know that it’s not unanimous, but pretty close. There’s quotes from Ernie and Justin, supportive of course... and he quotes Cho too: ‘I’ve known Harry for four years, since we started playing Quidditch against each other, and he’s always been honorable, brave, and friendly. Also cute,’ she said, smiling. ‘I admire and totally support him, and what he’s doing.’ That was very nice of her. Funny, it doesn’t mention—“

”I asked him not to,” said Cho, having just walked up the aisle behind Hermione. Looking at Harry, she smiled and said, “I’d hate to be publicly known as the one who let you get away. Wouldn’t be good for my reputation.”

Harry got up; he found he wasn't anywhere near as uncomfortable around her as he'd been last year. "I wouldn't say it like that," he said. "It felt more like circumstances conspired to make it not happen."

"Could I talk to you for a minute?" she asked, gesturing him over to a wall, away from the tables, where they wouldn't be overheard. He nodded and followed her.

"I wanted to say a few things, Harry. One is that I'm sorry about how I acted a lot of the time last year. I couldn't separate my feelings about you from my feelings about Cedric, and I shouldn't have put you through that."

"Well, I wasn't too swift, either. I just had no idea how to act. I was too nervous all the time because of how much I liked you," he admitted. "You were the first girl I ever liked, like that, so I was kind of dumb." He smiled ruefully. "I wouldn't even know that; Hermione had to tell me."

"Thank you for saying that, Harry, that I was the first one you liked. That means something to me. I also read what you said about having a girlfriend, and I just started crying right at the table, it's so sad. But I made sure to stop before I came over, I think you've seen me cry more than enough."

"No, now that I'm not quite so confused, you can cry on me any time you want," Harry joked.

"Thanks. But what I wanted to say, about that, was... Harry, I don't think you've ever really been in love before, so you may not know this, but... no girl who loves you is going to care how big a target you are. Love doesn't work like that. I know what it's like to lose someone you love. But if you and I had worked, and if I was in love with you, I wouldn't have let that stop me. And if and when you fall in love with someone, maybe you'll want to stay away for her safety and yours, but you won't be able to. If you're in love, you won't care about risks or danger, you'll need that person. If you could put that person aside, for whatever reason, then you weren't really in love. I just thought you should know that."

Harry was silent for a moment. "I guess I don't know what to say to that," he admitted. "Maybe you're right. I just don't know. All I know is I don't want to put anyone else in danger."

"I know, and that's really wonderful. But I still think I'm right. So if I am, you can find me and say, 'Cho, you were right about what you said about love.'"

Wondering if she was right, he said, "If you are, I promise I will."

"Other than that, I just wanted to say the same kind of stuff that everyone's saying, about how I support you and how what you're doing is incredibly brave. If you ever want another person to talk to, about anything, feel free to come find me. I'd still like to be your friend."

He nodded. "Thank you, Cho. That means a lot to me. I'd like to be yours too."

"Well, I should get back to my table, finish reading the articles. But first..." She reached out to hug him, but slowly enough that he could politely back off if he chose. He smiled and returned the hug. "Of course, now people will start to talk again," she joked.

"They shouldn't, I've been doing a lot of hugging lately," Harry replied.

"Don't say that, I'll start crying again because of the reason you're doing it." She released him, quickly touched his face, whispered, "Take care of yourself," and turned and walked away.

Harry walked back to the table to see Hermione smiling. "See what I mean, Harry?" she said teasingly. "Even if something is unobtainable, girls will—"

"Oh, shut up," he said, in the same spirit. "She just wanted to make sure we're okay to still be friends, and to give me some advice." He repeated what she'd said about love.

"Well, she's right, of course," said Hermione, as if it were obvious. "I mean, I've never really been in love, so I can't speak from experience, but everything I've read suggests she's right. People say it's extremely powerful. You know that, you've been using love against Voldemort. It's not romantic love, but it's the same idea.



Romantic love is similar, but much more intense. You may not be able to help yourself.”

Harry looked at Ginny. “Well, I already told you something similar, just from the girl’s side of it,” she pointed out. “But, yes, it makes sense to me, too.”

Harry decided to have some fun. “What do you think, Ron?”

Ron looked slightly alarmed for a second, then saw Harry’s expression. “Oh. Should’ve known you were just having fun with me. Harry, I think you should listen to what the girls say, and do whatever they tell you,” he said, obviously joking.

“Why, Ron,” said Hermione, affecting great surprise, “I hadn’t realized your outlook was so advanced. Maybe you’re husband material after all.” Everyone except Ron laughed. “Anyway,” she continued, “I finished the articles while you were talking to Cho, Harry. They seem fine. He spends a few paragraphs on the possible danger to Hogwarts, but it’s not out of line, or exaggerated. Interestingly, Malfoy’s not quoted at all. I guess it was considered too extreme a view.”

“If I got the feelings off of Malfoy that Hugo said he did, I wouldn’t print it either,” agreed Ginny. “I’d try to leave out the obviously not at all well.”

“You can say that again,” said Justin, having just walked over, along with Ernie. “I ran into him yesterday, and he was three times worse than his usual self. Called me the usual Muggle-related stuff, asked how the Potter fan club was going, and said something about how I’d probably pay for the privilege of shining your shoes. Really weird stuff.”

Harry scoffed. “That’s stupid nonsense, Justin. Why, I’d let you shine my shoes for free.” Everyone laughed. “Yeah, he does seem to be losing it, doesn’t he?”

“The strange thing is,” Justin continued, “he usually pretty much leaves me alone, except for the odd Muggle crack.”

“Well, you are popular, after all,” said Ernie. “He should leave you alone.”

Justin rolled his eyes. “Ernie’s been on me about this ever since we got the article.”

“Yes, I saw that,” said Hermione. To the others, she added, “Justin’s described as a ‘popular sixth year Hufflepuff,’ while Ernie’s just referred to as a ‘Hufflepuff prefect.’ Don’t worry about it, Ernie, we’re prefects. We’re not supposed to be popular.”

“I know,” Ernie smiled. “I just don’t find things to give Justin a hard time about that often. You guys must be having a blast at Harry’s expense. Lots of good stuff in there.”

“You’d think so, Ernie,” said Ginny, “but I’m afraid the situation’s a bit too grim for too much of that. You wake up every morning seeing the look on Harry’s face when he’s Cursed, and you’re lucky if you don’t cry the rest of the day.”

“I guess that’s something we don’t have to think much about,” admitted Ernie. “So, did Professor McGonagall give you a hard time about yesterday?”

“She needled me about it, made sure I knew she knew,” said Harry. “That was about as much as she was going to do. It’s kind of like when you’re a kid, you get better treatment when you’re sick. Not coming down on me for breaking certain rules is her way of being nice to me.”

“Well, Harry,” Justin said, “our way is to come over here every day until this ends and check up on you. Just to let you know we care.” Ernie looked embarrassed, which caused Justin to smile.

“I appreciate it, both of you. Thanks,” Harry said.

“No problem, Harry,” Ernie said.

“And all those girls that like you, that the article mentioned,” joked Justin, “If you don’t need all of them, could you maybe send a few my way?”

“I wouldn’t think you’d need them Justin,” Harry replied. “You know, being so popular and all.” Justin smiled, Ernie laughed. They walked away, Justin giving Harry’s shoulder a pat as they passed.

“Hermione,” asked Harry, “Will you be going to sleep once we’re done here?”

“Yes, I thought I’d give it a try. Why?”

“Well, Ron mentioning Professor Lupin made me think, I thought it would be nice to write him a letter. Not that he needs me to tell him what’s going on, now he can read it all in the Prophet, but I’d like to know what he thinks. Anyway, I thought I’d sit by your bed when you went to sleep, ask Fawkes to sing, and write the letter.”

“Oh, Harry, you don’t have to do that. I’m better off than I was at this time yesterday. Unlike you, I haven’t been Cursed in the past twenty-four hours.”

“I know I don’t have to do it. I want to. Okay?”

“If you insist. Thank you.”

“It’s because of me that your sleep schedule is all weird, it’s the least I can do. I’ll take the Prophet, too, I haven’t read the whole thing yet.”

As Harry and Hermione got up, Ron said, “Remember, we have our first Quidditch practice at two.”

Back in the dormitory, Harry pulled up a chair next to Hermione’s bed. “You know, it’s really nice, being able to do this,” he said. “I wish you and Ginny could just stay here.”

Hermione chuckled as she arranged herself in the bed. “Dream on, Harry.” The she grimaced, and said, “Oh, sorry, that’s probably not the best thing to say to you right now. But you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do. It could never happen, and I know why. It’s just very nice. It’s so comfortable, having you and Ginny around all the time.”

“I know what you mean. I’ve enjoyed it too. I’m not Parvati and Lavender’s favorite person, nor are they mine. I’d like to stay, too. But obviously, I’ll be happy to go back to my usual dormitory, because...”

“It’ll mean this thing with me is over, I know. Me too, believe me.”

They were quiet for a moment. Then Hermione said, “I really can’t believe you were that calm with him, Harry. I could never have done that.”

“You don’t know that. You only couldn’t do it now, because you haven’t had the experiences I’ve had. Who’s to say, if you had, maybe you’d be the one who did

it, and I'd be here saying, wow, Hermione, I can't believe you did that. And you'd say, I just want the damn dreams to stop, Harry."

She chuckled at the improbability of the scenario. "I don't think so. I have my talents, but being calm hasn't always been one of them."

"Yes, and we all know how calm I was last year," he responded humorously. "No, I think the only reason I'm able to do this is because I absolutely have to—"

"That's different," she interrupted. "You've been emotional at times, but you've always been calm in crisis situations, which is really what this is."

Harry thought about that, and found it hard to deny. "Well, maybe, but in this case it's also because of this whole 'focusing on love' business. If you were in my position, Dumbledore would be telling you the same thing he's telling me, and I'm sure you could do it, probably better."

Hermione looked doubtful. "Maybe, maybe not... but that's not the same thing as being calm in the face of Voldemort, which I don't think I could do no matter how hard I focused on love. How are you doing with that, by the way? I mean, obviously pretty well, considering what I saw in the Pensieve, but how often do you try to do it, get feelings of love going like he suggested?"

"Pretty often," he answered. "Probably two or three times an hour since he suggested it yesterday, and I'll probably try to do it even more today, since we saw how well it worked this morning. This is obviously a powerful weapon, and my life could be at stake here, so I'm going to use it for all it's worth. From how he acts, I feel like to him it's as if there's this horrible smell, just revolting to him, and he has to do something difficult—keep the connection to my mind going—while having to smell this awful smell. That's a very encouraging thought, and I think it's true. So that gives me even more motivation to keep doing this, not that I don't have enough motivation anyway."

He could see in her eyes how much she supported him, and he had a feeling that he knew what she would say before she said it. "I'm really glad it's working so well. You will beat him. I'm sure of that."

“I’m not quite that sure,” he admitted, “but I am confident. And I appreciate your saying that. It helps.” They were silent for a few seconds, then Harry thought of something he’d meant to ask her. “I just remembered, I was wondering if you could make more of those fake Galleons, or something like it. I want to set up something where I can communicate with my Slytherin first years, and Parkinson. Is it possible to use them to signal that you want to meet, or a signal, like warning or distress?”

She nodded. “I think so. You should find me after your Quidditch practice, I’m sure I’ll be up by then. You can tell me exactly what you’d like to be able to do, and I’ll do my best. It’ll take a few days, I’ll have to look stuff up. But I’m sure I can do it.”

“Thanks. Well, I should stop talking, so you can get some sleep. Fawkes,—“  
Fawkes started singing before Harry finished the sentence. “Guess the bonding is really kicking in. Thanks, Fawkes.”

“Yes, thank you, Fawkes,” added Hermione, looking very contented.

Harry smiled broadly. She saw it, and asked, “What?”

“You looked so comfortable. I was just remembering yesterday, after you fell asleep. I was watching you, and I realized I’d never watched anyone sleep before. There was something very nice about it.”

“I’m glad, Harry. It’s interesting.. you probably had any number of chances to watch Ron sleep, but you wouldn’t have looked at him and said the same thing. I know you don’t look at me romantically, but I guess it just seems nicer if it’s someone of the opposite sex,” Hermione speculated.

“I guess it’s the same kind of thing as hugging. I’m happy to hug you and Ginny, but it would be weird to hug Ron.”

“You will, eventually. Men do hug each other, you probably just have to be older. But anyway, you weren’t always comfortable with hugging. I think the first couple of times I did it, you didn’t know what to do.”

“That’s probably because you were the first person who ever hugged me,” Harry pointed out. “It was just... unfamiliar.”

Hermione looked at him with obvious pity. “I’m sorry, Harry, sometimes I forget stuff like that. You really came out amazingly well considering what you went through. And now look at you. You hugged Cho without any discomfort, you said ‘I love you’ to Ginny and I. You’ve come a long way.”

“And ironically, I have Voldemort to thank, at least for the second one. I’m a little embarrassed to admit this, but I’ll tell you anyway. When Professor Dumbledore suggested that I use feelings of love to drive Voldemort out of my mind, I actually had to ask him how I knew whether I loved something, or just liked it a lot. I felt like an idiot, but I had to ask anyway. Now, I can summon up feelings of love quickly, and I’m sure I understand what it is. I have you, Ron, and Ginny to thank for that. But I never would be able to do it now if I hadn’t needed it as a weapon against Voldemort. I feel like I’m, I don’t know, a bit happier in general since I’ve been doing that.”

She smiled. “You should keep doing that, even after Voldemort is gone. I’m really happy for you, Harry. It’s like you had something really nice, and suddenly you can appreciate it better than before. Interesting... I wonder if that’s part of what drew Fawkes to you?”

“Could be... Professor Dumbledore said phoenixes can see through people, so if I was getting more comfortable with the idea of love, Fawkes would have known. But that’s interesting... in the last few days, a few similar things happened: Hagrid said he thought that Fawkes picked me because I had some of the same qualities as Dumbledore. Snape said this morning that only Dumbledore could have done as well as I did against Voldemort. Do you think that maybe one reason that Dumbledore’s the way he is because he ‘comes from a place of love,’ as he puts it? And if I’m managing that more, people think I’m similar to him?”

“It makes sense, Harry. Judging by how he acts, I wouldn’t be at all surprised if he always ‘comes from a place of love.’ And judging by how you acted in the

dream, I wouldn't be surprised if you could do it any time you tried. Dumbledore manages to do it even in crisis situations. If you did it for long enough, who's to say you wouldn't be able to do what he does? I think you'd find it's a good way to be, even if you're not fighting Voldemort."

"Yeah, that makes sense... hey, we should stop talking, you need your sleep."

"It's okay, Harry. We don't always get a chance to talk like this. It's like staying up late at a sleepover, it's nice. Listen," she said, looking at him seriously. "I know you're not going to want to hear this, but I really want to tell you anyway. Ginny and Cho are right, but there's another aspect to this. I'm sure that being in love is wonderful, even better than the love we have for each other as friends, and that's pretty good in itself. It's supposed to be the best thing about being human. What I'm saying is that if you want to defy Voldemort, you can't deny yourself, and this other person, such a basic and wonderful thing. You can't let him intimidate you into foregoing that. You're not really defying him if you don't live your life as you would have lived it if he wasn't around."

"I'm not denying that the danger exists, even that it's high. But Ginny's right, whoever falls in love with you will know it, and accept it. She may end up a grief-stricken widow, but she knowingly took the risk. It's not fair for you to deny people the right to put themselves at risk for you, and for themselves, if they want to. If you reject someone who falls in love with you because you don't love her, fine. But if you reject her, even though you love her, because you're concerned for her safety, it won't do her heart any good. She'll feel as rejected as she would be if you didn't love her. You'll hurt her worse by rejecting her than you would by loving her and exposing her to risk. And if either of you died, it would be horrible for the other one. But we can't go through life afraid. You've said that yourself."

He gave her a pained look; she extended her hand out to him, and he took it. He pondered for a few minutes, the only sound in the room being Fawkes' song. Finally, he said, "I guess this is like the thing yesterday. Part of me accepts your argument, understands it makes sense. But I don't know if I could actually do it."

What bothers me most about what you said is the bit about how she'd feel if I rejected her for that reason. I hadn't thought of that. I just thought she'd understand my reasons."

Hermione smiled sadly, and shook her head. "She'd understand them in her head, but not in her heart. Right now, I think you can understand the difference." When Harry didn't reply, she continued. "I'm not saying that you should find the likeliest girl and ask her out for Hogsmeade weekend. It even makes sense to me that you're not going out looking for a girlfriend. I'm talking about what happens if you wake up one day and find that you're in love. It could happen. Letting yourself love someone could be your greatest act of bravery."

How can it be an act of bravery to expose someone else to danger, was the first thought to go through Harry's mind. He realized that she must be referring to how badly he'd be hurt if something happened to whoever he loved, and that he'd have to be brave to risk that. He didn't feel quite that brave. Fortunately, it wasn't something he had to worry about just then.

"Well, I can't deny what you say. All I can say is that I'm sure I'll remember it, if the situation ever does actually happen. And... thanks. I know you're trying to help." She gave his hand a squeeze, and they let go.

"I'm just trying to make sure you have a life, that you don't deny yourself something that important... well, I guess I should go to sleep now. I love talking to you, but I'm really tired. Fawkes has got me all relaxed." She moved around, getting comfortable, then looked up at him and smiled. "It's okay, I don't mind if you watch."

He smiled in return. "I will, thanks." He reached over and picked up a quill and a piece of parchment. He pondered what to say for a while as Hermione fell asleep. Fawkes continued to sing. Finally, Harry started writing.

Dear Remus,



First, I hope you don't mind me using your first name. I think of you as more of a friend than a former teacher, so it just seems natural to use it.

I'm sure you've read the Sunday Prophet by now, so I don't have to take up several inches telling you about it. The article seems accurate and fair, so I'm not sure what I could tell you that would explain the situation better.

Everyone keeps telling me how brave I am. But I sometimes wonder whether 'stubborn' would be a better word. I wouldn't even give serious thought to stopping using Voldemort's name. And besides, if I did, he could get me to do anything he wanted just by threatening to do this again, and having given in once, I'd probably do it again. I just never saw myself as having any choice.

As far as the battle itself, it seems to be getting a bit better. In this morning's dream, the Curse's intensity was down slightly. Still really, really painful, obviously, but the fact that it's down at all means that I'm getting somewhere. Last night I focused on love in the dream; Voldemort didn't seem to like that, so I'm doing it again tonight. I've been getting much better at doing that, thanks to Professor Dumbledore. It's very strange, until August I had barely ever thought about love, and all of a sudden, my being able to stop these attacks totally depends on how well I can bring up feelings of love, and concentrate on them completely. Fortunately, Professor Dumbledore started talking to me about this the day you did that thing with the Dursleys' lawn (I loved it, you have to teach me how you did that sometime), so it wasn't a totally new idea. This is like a combination of Occlumency, where you have to focus on one thing, and repelling Voldemort, where that one thing is love. It seems like I'm a quick study when I'm threatened with something awful.

I really miss Sirius, especially at a time like this. I mean, everyone here has been great, and Professor Dumbledore has treated me wonderfully, giving me the maximum support and attention he can, it feels like. I'm not neglected, that's for sure. But I still wish I could talk to Sirius. I know he'd be proud of me. He would have wanted to be doing something like I am, to be at the center of the action. You must miss him a lot, too, I'm sure. It just occurred to me, I've been so wrapped up in my own sadness that I forgot how hard it must have been for you. You got your close friend back, after twelve years, and then lost him again. I should have thought of that.

Being a professor is really strange, but I'm starting to like it. You probably read in the article how much everyone's liked my classes. I admit that I'm surprised; I didn't think I was doing anything special. I wonder how much of it is that I'm Harry Potter. Hermione says she thinks it's partly how I teach, but partly what I represent—the idea of fighting Voldemort, and not being afraid of him—and that they're inspired by the idea of saying Voldemort's name, giving them a chance to do something brave and be proud of themselves. I don't know, but I'm really glad they like the classes. I remember when you were here, how much we all looked forward to your classes. It makes me happy to think that they might feel the same way. You were really good. Whenever I think about that, I get angry at Snape, for telling everyone about you so you'd have to go. It reminds me that now, Snape's actually being polite to me, with no trace of his usual attitude. Not friendly, of course, I don't know if he's even capable of that, but not nasty. He even praised my actions in this morning's dream, saying only Dumbledore could have done as well. It's pretty confusing to have him acting like this. I don't mind, obviously, I just wish I knew why.

I'm watching Hermione sleep as I write this, with Fawkes singing. I'm still amazed that Fawkes chose me. It's hard to think of a better thing to have happened to me. He's already saved my life once, and I have a

feeling he'll do it again before this is all over. But not only that, just the comfort of his presence, and the honor of having been chosen, are great. It's really overwhelming.

It's only been a short time since the article came out, so I haven't gotten that much reaction, but already Hermione, Ginny, and Cho have told me that I'm wrong to be scared of what might happen to any future girlfriend I might have, that I just have to accept the risk. Maybe they're right. It's just that getting others to share my risks has never been something I've been good at. I suppose I won't really know what I'll do until I'm faced with it.

Harry looked up and watched Hermione for a few minutes, lost in thought. Then he continued:

I guess that's all I can think of for now; I hope everything is okay with you. Harry.

P.S. I was thinking, next summer, on the day before my seventeenth birthday, how about you and I go to an amusement park. I'd like to do that. Let me know.

Harry read the letter again, then folded it up to give to Hedwig later. He picked up the Prophet carefully, being sure not to make enough noise to wake Hermione, and finished reading the article. He thought that it was perhaps a little too generous to him, but then he thought that he deserved it, after what the Prophet had done to him last year, and Rita Skeeter the year before that. He got up and got his Defense Against the Dark Arts teaching book to help decide what to do for the coming week's lessons, and to read in general for more ideas. He got so lost in it that he didn't even notice Fawkes stop singing, and before he knew it, it was noon.

Harry decided to get out the Marauder's Map to find out where Ron and Ginny were. After a few seconds' search, he found them near the Quidditch pitch, probably just having had a fly and heading in for lunch. They were with Dennis Creevey and Katie Bell, so Harry assumed that Katie had been giving Ginny and Dennis pointers on their new position. He was about to put the map away when something caught his eye; there was someone in the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. He looked closer and saw a dot with the name 'Pansy Parkinson.' He exhaled in mild frustration; what was she doing looking for him? He suddenly realized that it could be important. He stood quickly, put the Map into his robes, and grabbed his bag and put his Invisibility Cloak into it. Still being sure not to make undue noise, he left the dormitory and headed towards the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom.

He arrived in a few minutes to see Pansy looking at the walls of the room, and was briefly reminded of Ron's 'Hall of Misfortune' joke. He walked up to her; she heard him and turned around. "Harry, thanks for coming. I was about to give up and go to lunch."

"What made you think I would come?" asked Harry, puzzled. "I don't know how you would think I knew you were here."

"The same way Hermione knew Nott was heading toward the pitch yesterday. He was under an Invisibility Cloak, she had no way to know he was there. You guys must have something that tells you where people are." She smiled a bit in satisfaction at having worked it out.

Harry grunted in displeasure. "I hope you're the smartest of the older Slytherins, I'd rather nobody else figured that out. Come on," he said, gesturing her to the office. They entered the office and closed the door.

Since she already knew enough, Harry decided there couldn't be much more danger in telling her the rest. He pulled out the Map and laid it out in front of her. She took only a few seconds to recognize what it did. "Wow, this is great," she marveled. "This gives you a big advantage."

He nodded. “Not to mention, helped Hermione save my life yesterday. I’m going to have to keep my eye on it while we talk. And if somebody gets close, I want you to put this on, quick.” He pulled out his Invisibility Cloak, and threw it over himself to demonstrate.

She was very impressed. “Is this the one they got from Nott?”

He shook his head. “It’s mine, from my father. I’ve had it since first year.”

She looked amused. “Draco always thought you had one of these, but he could never prove it. That time you threw mud at him in Hogsmeade.”

“It was a stupid thing to do. I could’ve gotten caught, I was lucky not to have.”

“Maybe, but I can understand why you did. The temptation must have been irresistible.” She looked up. “I came here because I realized something that could be helpful to all of us who are helping you. Everybody knows how much the Slytherin first years like you, and you them. I’d be amazed if it wasn’t the case that they’re going to keep their eyes open for you, let you know if anything happens in Slytherin. I think most of the older Slytherins just assume that’s the case anyway; at this point, the first years’ support for you is so open that they don’t have to fear reprisals. Draco’s not going to bother, he knows it’s a lost cause. I want you to tell them about me.”

Harry was startled. “No way,” he said automatically. “It’s too risky. There’s ten of them. I mean, I trust them, but they’re first years. They might say the wrong thing, say something too loud, be overheard. We can’t do that.”

She smiled at him, more with her eyes than her mouth. “It’s so sweet the way you worry, Harry. No one’s ever worried about me except my parents, and then, not even that much. But, first of all, being found out isn’t exactly a death sentence. No one’s going to kill me without a reasonable chance of escaping, and that would be hard. Draco would just stop talking to me, and that would be that. Secondly, if they know about me, it could be very helpful. They could tell me things, small details that might be significant, but that you or even they might not recognize as

significant. I know Slytherin really well, so I'd be able to recognize things for what they are. I can meet them easily to get information, I can go into their dormitories on my prefect duties. It's perfect."

Harry shook his head. "I understand that, but it's still too dangerous."

Now she looked at him evenly, seriously. "I hate to do this, Harry, but I'm going to tell them anyway. You know it's a good idea too. You're only trying to stop me because of the risk. Well, it's a risk I choose to take. I can tell them in Slytherin alone, but I thought it was better if I told them with you. They might not believe me if I tell them myself, but if you tell them, they will. Or is this one of those things that you're not willing to trust me with?"

He glared at her, then looked down, embarrassed. "No, I trust you. I wouldn't have believed I could, this fast, but I do. No, it's the risk. I just hate the idea..." He took a few steps around the office, frustrated. "I guess I'm going to have to get used to the idea of people taking risks for me that I'd rather they didn't."

She smiled. "You mean, like being your girlfriend?"

With an embarrassed grin, he shook his head. "I didn't even know I was thinking that. Hugo just plucked it out of my head, and I couldn't deny it when he said it. I've already heard from Ginny, Cho, and Hermione that I'm wrong, and being unrealistic. Maybe they're right. It's just really hard."

"Well, let me add my voice to theirs. I think most girls would agree. I couldn't sign it, of course, but I wanted to."

"Sign what?" he asked, but was distracted by her startled twitch. She pointed at the Map, which showed Malfoy approaching. He grabbed the cloak and handed it to her. "Sit down in the corner, and don't make a sound. Don't even breathe too loud."

She sat and pulled the cloak over her. Harry took a look to make sure no part of her was not covered, put the Map away, then pulled his teaching text out of his bag and opened it so that it looked like he was preparing. He also made sure that his wand was within quick reach, in case Malfoy decided to try to take advantage of

the fact that they were alone. Malfoy walked straight in, clearly not expecting to find anyone there; Harry assumed he planned to walk through the teacher's office to the classroom, maybe as a shortcut on his way somewhere else. Malfoy recoiled in surprise as he saw Harry. "What are you doing here?" he snarled.

Harry puzzled for a moment to make sure he'd heard the question correctly, then said, "I'm the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Malfoy, and this is the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher's office. I can try to explain further if you'd like."

Malfoy rolled his eyes. "I mean, it's noon on a Sunday. It doesn't seem likely that you'd be here."

Harry attempted to look irritated at having to explain himself. "Well, after a spot of torture, it's nice to relax in solitude with a good book. Now, why are you here?"

Malfoy looked at Harry as if he were obviously crazy, then smiled. "You really are deranged, Potter. You'll let yourself get tortured so you can have people pay attention to you? Tell you how great you are? You've always wanted publicity so much, now look how low you'll sink, how you'll degrade yourself, to get what you want."

Stay calm, Harry told himself. Think about love. Don't let Malfoy provoke you.

He looked at Malfoy sadly. "I said this after the first morning, Malfoy. You don't understand, but neither does Voldemort, so you're in good company. I'm really not going to explain myself to you."

"And you get these girls to feel sorry for you, like you're some kind of hero," Malfoy continued, as if Harry hadn't spoken. "It's pathetic."

"I don't see a lot of girls chasing after you, Malfoy. You shouldn't talk. Who's going to want to marry a future Death Eater?"

Malfoy looked smug. "I'll have no problems, Potter, and I'll do it without suffering and groveling. Pansy has the inside track, I might take her if she's lucky."

Harry almost looked at the corner to see if Pansy would move. “What an honor for her, Malfoy. I’ll be sure to mention it to her the next time I see her.”

Malfoy chuckled. “Yeah, like she’ll believe you. She knows what’s good for her, and that’s me. Women are drawn to power, Potter, not stupid heroics.”

Harry had heard enough, as, he suspected, had Pansy. “Whatever you say, Malfoy. Would you like to debate the meaning of life, or would you like to tell me what you’re doing here?”

“I was looking for Pansy, Potter. Don’t suppose you’ve seen her anywhere?”

“If this is an unlikely place for me at noon on Sunday, Malfoy, then it seems really unlikely for her. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

Malfoy stared at Harry, hatred in his eyes. “Do you know what will happen one day, Potter?”

Harry looked at Malfoy evenly. “Yes, Malfoy. We’ll look back on this and laugh. Professor Trelawney told me. Now, I’d like to get on with my book and solitude, but I’ll tell you what... in tomorrow morning’s dream, I’ll put in a good word for you with Voldemort. Let him know how well you’ve been supporting him here. Don’t say I never did anything for you. Goodbye, now.”

Malfoy was still looking daggers at Harry, but then his look changed to a scornful one, as if he realized he was engaged in a stupendous waste of time. “Pathetic, Potter. Truly pathetic,” he said, and walked away.

Harry closed the door and locked it, then put his hand up, palm out, toward the corner to indicate that Pansy should not get up yet. He took out the Map and looked at it as Malfoy’s dot moved away. He changed the gesture to indicate that she could get up.

Pansy took the Cloak off as she stood up, and handed it to Harry. She was looking at the door, a furious expression on her face. Harry thought of making a joke, but then thought better of it. “I’m sorry, Pansy. I would say that you showed great restraint in not throwing the Cloak off and strangling him.”



“I seriously considered it. I was wondering if spells would penetrate an Invisibility Cloak,” she fumed. “I feel like such an incredible fool. Not that I care what he thinks of me now, but all that time, that was his attitude and I didn’t know..”

Her expression changed from angry to pained. “But I deserve it, don’t I... I was no better, being a sycophant. Why should he respect me, when he could get my allegiance so easily.”

“He could have never respected you anyway, Pansy, no matter what you’d done. If you hadn’t been a sycophant, he wouldn’t have had anything to do with you. He doesn’t want friends he can respect, he wants allies he can dominate. But you’ve changed that, it doesn’t matter anymore.”

She looked at him with pain and urgency. “No, it doesn’t, but what he said was a reminder of how I’ve been stupid, how I’ve wasted years of my life. And the worst of it is, he was right about one thing. Women are attracted to power. I was. There were times when I imagined myself Mrs. Draco Malfoy, with a powerful husband and a big house and lots of nice things. That seemed like what was important. But what does a thirteen-year-old know?”

Harry was quiet. “I’m sorry, Pansy. I’m not sure I know what to say.”

She shook her head, near tears. “You don’t have to say anything, it’s nice of you just to listen.” She paused. “I feel like I’m in mourning... mourning for a part of my life that was spent badly, that was wasted. For a person that I should never have been, but somehow was. I know I’ve started a new part of my life, but I guess I have to get the old one out of my system first.”

Tears were trickling down her cheeks. She looked at him, and suddenly took a step toward him and leaned into him, her head on his shoulder, hugging him lightly. He was startled, but made himself not back off, as it would have been cruel. She sobbed into his shoulder. His heart melted; he knew she had hurt people and made bad choices, but at least she had realized her mistakes. He put his arms around her and hugged her back, moving his hands across her back a little, as

Ginny and Hermione had with him. He still didn't know what to say, so he stayed silent, letting her cry herself out.

She hung on for a little after she had stopped crying, then backed away to dry her tears and blow her nose. She looked at him every few seconds, as if wanting to know how he was seeing her, what he thought. Then she smiled again and said, "Harry, I bet Hugo had no trouble reading you like a book. Your eyes are very expressive. You're very concerned, and you feel bad that there's not much you can do for me. Also, you were a little uncomfortable about being cried on, but you hung in there anyway. Like the brave person you are."

He couldn't help but smile. "I'm glad you're comfortable enough to tease me. I wasn't that uncomfortable, just surprised. And I do wish there was something I could do for you, but I don't think there is."

"Actually, there is. When I decided I wanted to join up with the first years, I wanted to meet you as soon as possible. I came here a couple of times during the morning, hoping you'd find out I was here. This was my third try. And I was getting frustrated that I couldn't contact you, and I realized I was really looking forward to seeing you. Now, if your friends were here, they'd be teasing you, saying I was obviously keen on you. But here's why I think I felt that way.

"I'm attracted... not exactly to you as such, but to qualities you have, to what you represent—a better, nobler, nicer way to be. To the idea of doing something because it's right, and for others, not out of self-interest. You're like a symbol of that, and it's easy to want to be around that. You've also been kind and sympathetic, not to mention forgiving. But also, you're the only one I can talk to about this, the only one who, when I'm around, I can try to be the person I want to be. If I was open in my support for you, I could be who I wanted, talk to anyone. But because I've decided to do it this way—and no, don't try to talk me out of it again—when I'm not with you, I have to go back and pretend that I'm still what I was. Even in the short time since I've made this change, I understand that it's depressing to be around that, what I was. I know, I made the choice. I want to help so badly that I'm

content with my choice. But the way you can help me is by being here for me. If you could spend some time with me, maybe an hour a week, even if there's no real need, it would really help. I guess I just need emotional support. I hate to ask it of you, I know you're pretty busy, being a teacher and a student... but..." She trailed off.

Even before he thought about it, Harry knew that he couldn't say no. Even if he didn't want to, he was responsible for her, he owed it to her. But he was surprised to find that he didn't mind doing it at all.

"Pansy... this is funny, if someone had told me two days ago this would happen, I'd have said they were crazy... but I realize I've already come to think of you as a friend. And I'm happy to spend some time every week talking to a friend. It's no problem."

She gave him that look again, the one from yesterday that the others had said was very revealing. Then she hugged him again, this time for only a few seconds before letting go. "That's so kind of you to say, Harry, I really don't deserve it. But I appreciate it anyway." She chuckled ruefully. "This is really something Malfoy would think is stupid and pathetic. All you have to do is be kind to me, and I'm really happy. He'd say you're weak if you have to depend on someone else."

Harry shook his head. "He'll make a good Death Eater, he already thinks like them. We all rely on each other, that's one of our strengths. We get energy, strength, and support from each other. I should know, I've been getting nothing but that for two days now, and it's made me stronger. Including from you. Think about how it makes me feel—you started a new way of thinking, that'll help you have a happier life, partly because of me, something I did—"

"Mostly because of you," she corrected.

"Anyway, it makes me feel really good, is the point. So it helps me, too. You see what I mean. I mean, this morning Hermione hugged me out of the Curse. Justin, Ernie and Cho came by to be supportive. We went back to the dormitory and Hermione tried to tell me I shouldn't be scared to have a girlfriend. Fawkes sang. I met you, who wants to do what you can to support me. All morning,

nothing but support. Even when I wrote to Remus, I knew he'd be supporting me, even though he's not here."

"Remus?"

"Remus Lupin, remember, he taught this, third year."

"Oh, yes, the werewolf. I saw you mentioned him in the article. I didn't know you were that close to him."

"He was a close friend of my father's, and I've seen him from time to time. He's a really nice man, doesn't deserve the treatment he gets, being a werewolf."

"What did you write to him about? He must know everything from the Prophet anyway."

"I was going to the owlery to send it when I saw that you were here. If you'd like, you should go ahead and read it. It'll give you an idea of how I'm feeling." Harry almost surprised himself by offering, but he wanted to make a gesture. She had put a great deal of trust in him.

She eyed him, obviously also surprised, then took the letter he was offering, opened it, and read it. One time she glanced up at him, but mostly she read. After she finished, she handed it back to him. "An amusement park?"

"A reference to a joke I made a few months ago."

"And Sirius is... not Sirius Black?" Harry nodded. "But he was supposed to be trying to kill you in third year!" Harry quickly explained what had happened, and then how he lost Sirius in the Department of Mysteries. "So he spent twelve years in Azkaban for something he didn't do, and then we lost him fighting Death Eaters. It was really hard. He was my godfather, and even when he was on the run, was always trying to look out for me. I just wish..." he trailed off, realizing that he was starting to feel like he might cry.

"I'm sorry, Harry," she said, and it was very obvious that she meant it. "I guess he was kind of like a parent to you."

Harry nodded. "Kind of. I lost my own parents, of course, and the Muggles who raised me never liked me, hated the fact that I was a wizard. So I never had any

adults who really looked after me and cared about me, until the Weasleys, and then Sirius.”

“I didn’t know that, about your Muggle family. If Malfoy knew, that would be another whole line of insults you’d get,” she said disgustedly. Harry got the feeling that the disgust was aimed equally at herself, who would have been making the jokes along with Malfoy until a short time ago. “It’s funny... I grew up in a traditional wizarding home, not rich but well-off... but my parents... I don’t know, I guess they love me, but they’ve always treated me kind of formally. When I was a kid, I saw some of my friends interacting with their families, and some of them got hugged and kissed by their parents. Mine hardly did any of that. At the time, I never really thought about it. But when I hear you talk about Sirius, I feel like, that’s what a parent should be like. I feel really bad for you that you lost him, but part of me envies the time that you did have with him, even if it was short. You knew what it felt like to be really cared about.

“You’ve had an interesting life, Harry. It’s like somebody turned the intensity full on. The bad things you’ve had—parents and Sirius dying, Muggle relatives, being a target of the Dark Lord—have been really bad, and the good things—your friends, the support of the community, Fawkes—have been really good. I bet not many people meet you and don’t have some reaction.”

Harry nodded, then mimed the most common reaction people had to seeing him: a look, a double-take, eyes moving up to look at the scar, then back to the face. Pansy giggled. “It’s a whole sequence, isn’t it?”

She became more serious again. “Harry... you showed me that letter, you’ve told me lots of personal things about yourself. I’m grateful, it makes me feel good... but I’d really like to know why. I mean, there’s no way you do this with everyone.”

It was a fair question, Harry thought. “I’m not sure... I think when I’ve done it, it’s been an impulsive decision, like I just thought it was the right thing to do. Maybe it’s partly because... I know it must’ve been really hard for you to come to me. I might have laughed and told you to get lost, and you probably wouldn’t have

blamed me.” She nodded, her expression indicating that had been a concern. “And then you apologized, which couldn’t have been easy either. You trusted me a lot. Maybe I’m just responding to that, I guess... I wanted to show you that I could trust you, too. But now, if I tell you something personal, it’s because you’re my friend. I showed you the letter because it sums up everything I’m thinking right now. The only thing that’s going on that I didn’t mention is you. Owls can be intercepted, and it’s not something that he needs to know. But I wanted to tell him. Anyway, I hadn’t really thought about my reasons for telling you stuff like this. I think what I said is pretty much it.”

“That makes sense. I really want to thank you, you didn’t have to do it... I’m sorry, this is really none of my business, but... can I ask you another really personal question?” Harry smiled and gestured for her to continue. “What happened with you and Cho last year, and why did she come talk to you today? I was surprised when she hugged you. I thought you weren’t an item anymore.”

Harry told her what had happened. She listened attentively, and gasped and put her hand over her mouth when he told her about the jinx that had afflicted Marietta Edgecombe. “Wow... remind me never to cross Hermione.”

Harry finished up the story. “So, we really couldn’t get past that. Marietta was her friend, and Cho felt like she had to stand up for her. I can understand that, but I couldn’t forgive what she did, at least not so soon. All Cho lost was a nice diversion once a week. But the D.A. had been the highlight of my week, and Marietta cost me that, plus Professor Dumbledore had to leave, to protect me. What she did cost me a lot, and Cho didn’t, maybe couldn’t, really appreciate that. Anyway, I guess our tempers cooled over the summer, and Marietta apologized to Dumbledore and I at the introductory feast. I was a little slow to forgive her, Professor Dumbledore had to prod me. So today, Cho came over to be supportive of what I’m doing, and to make sure we were okay to be friends. I hope we can be, but the funny thing is, I haven’t actually talked with her all that much, I was too nervous when I was around her. I’ve already talked with you more, and about more

personal things, than I did with her. In a way, I really don't know her that well. But I think she's a nice person. It just didn't work out."

"Thank you for telling me that, too. I was curious how that turned out. I remember..." She looked down, upset. "I remember making fun of you and her on Valentine's Day, last year. I wonder how long it's going to take me to stop being mad at myself for what I've done."

Harry again said nothing, not knowing what to say. Finally, he said, "Maybe you should try to think more about what you're doing now, how that makes you feel. You can't change the past."

Harry felt from her expression that while she appreciated that he was trying to help, she was thinking that he couldn't really understand how she felt. "I think that's easier said than done. I know you're right, but it's hard. I'll see how it goes." She reached over and started to pet Fawkes again. "I hate to say it, but I guess we'd better leave soon. We still need to eat lunch, and I have to think of what to tell Malfoy about where I've been. So, how are we going to do this thing with the first years?"

"I've asked Hermione to come up with a method of communication, something where we can signal each other. I'll ask her to make sure that it also allows you and the first years to signal each other, in addition to me. I'd like to wait to tell them about you until whatever she comes up with is ready. Then I'll let you know, and we can arrange a meeting with all twelve of us."

"Okay, that sounds good. Much as I might be tempted, until that's ready, I won't contact you unless it's necessary." She looked at the Map carefully. "I want to find out where Malfoy is, so I can avoid him for a while. I wish this thing could tell you where someone had been, so I'd know where he's looked for me. Oh, good, he's in the common room, I can go have lunch without being bothered."

"One other thing, Harry... this is going to sound strange, me telling you to be careful, but I should. Like I said before, your eyes are very expressive. You have to watch out for that. I see how you look at me now, and I'm really happy about it."

But you can't look at me like that out there, you have to look like you don't care if I exist or not, and I have to do the same with you. If you look at me like you are now, even Malfoy will figure out that something's wrong."

He nodded his understanding. "Good point, I might not have thought of that."

She looked at the Map again, then at Harry. He saw that revealing look again. "Thank you, Harry, for everything." She turned and left. He waited a minute, gathered his things in his bag, and headed to the owlery, then on to lunch.

The rest of the day went by pleasantly for Harry. Quidditch practice was enjoyable; Ginny was already a good Chaser, and Dennis definitely had potential. It felt good to be on his broom again. Then he met Hermione, told her about the meeting with Pansy, and what he hoped for in a communications setup. He told the others more details about his conversation with Pansy, to make sure they knew that he now trusted her, and why. The rest of the day was taken up by schoolwork, dinner, and Dumbledore's Occlumency lesson. Harry felt he was doing very well with Occlumency and focusing on love, and was full of confidence that the night's encounter with Voldemort would go well. He fell asleep faster than usual; he didn't know whether it was because of his confidence, or just being tired.

Harry was walking through a park. He was looking for someone, but he wasn't sure who. He continued walking, but the scene changed. He was now in the room in the Department of Mysteries which contained the Veil of Mystery.

Harry looked around for a moment, then realized that Voldemort would be appearing any time now. Focus on love, he thought. He mentally slipped into the sea of love, more easily than before. Nothing else matters.

"You recognize this room, don't you, Potter? The room where your godfather died? If one of them was to die, I'm glad it was him." Voldemort was smiling his cruel smile, looking very satisfied.



Harry felt a flash of anger, accompanied by an equally fast realization: he's trying to goad you, make you lose your control. His words don't matter. Keep focused,

"I don't think so, Voldemort. I think you're just trying to goad me into anger, because your grip on this is slipping, and you know it is. If you could have chosen the one to die, it would have been Professor Dumbledore. He's the biggest threat to you. You fear him because he's powerful, and he understands you."

Voldemort again looked furious; Harry reflected that he hadn't even been trying to goad Voldemort, but had apparently succeeded just by telling the truth. "I fear no one!" Voldemort practically screamed.

"You fear him, but you can't admit it, probably not even to yourself. You fear him because you don't understand his strength. His strength is love, which you're not capable of understanding. It's natural to fear what we don't understand." Focus on love, he thought.

"If I do not understand something, then it is not worth understanding. I know all I need to know. You will be broken. Soon, you will never be able to sleep again."

Harry actually chuckled out loud. "If you had said that three days ago, I might have believed you. But now, it just sounds like a feeble threat. You're losing this fight, Voldemort." Relax, relax in a sea of love, he thought.

"Speaking of fights lost... you recall this, don't you, Potter?" said Voldemort with obvious relish. Harry saw Sirius being hit by Bellatrix's spell, staggering back, and falling through the veil. Then himself, agonized and distraught, screaming Sirius's name over and over again. The memories washed over him, threatening his control. Focus on love, he thought, fighting back the emotions that threatened him. He imagined Sirius standing behind him, hand on Harry's shoulder, giving him his love and strength, wanting him to stand firm and not have his death be used to Harry's harm. I have to do it for him, thought Harry. I have to stay calm. He felt the emotion fade.

“I loved him a lot, and he loved me. I miss him. But his strength is still with me. I can see him, cheering me on, wherever he is. He’s proud of me, I know that.” I might as well be speaking French, for all Voldemort understands of this, Harry thought. But it doesn’t matter. I’m coming from a place of love, that’s what matters.

“Really... would he be proud of this, Potter?”

The scene changed suddenly. They were now in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic; Harry saw himself crouching behind a statue, and heard Bellatrix yelling, “Come out, come out, little Harry!” He watched the sequence of events that occurred until Harry tried the Cruciatus Curse on Bellatrix. He saw the look on his own face, and barely recognized it as his. Still feeling love, he felt intense sympathy for this slightly younger self, at one of the worst moments of his life.

“I must say, Potter, I was impressed. Bella only told me of this today. You have more steel than I thought. Let me help you with this. Try the spell out on me. You must want to. What you did is a good start.”

Stay calm, Harry told himself. It was crystal clear to him what Voldemort was doing, and Harry almost felt saddened, it was so pathetic. “I did what I did because I was wounded, Voldemort. The part of us humans which is like you came out for a few minutes. But I’m better now, and I’ve learned. I’ll never even be tempted to do that again, and if I needed proof that it was dangerous, your suggesting that I do it would be that proof.”

“But I deserve it, don’t I? You said I was evil, after all...” He smiled.

“Whether you deserve it or not is not the question,” Harry said, still calm. “I don’t deserve it, and doing it to you is like doing it to myself. I respect myself too much to do that.”

Voldemort shook his head. “Still addled, Potter. If you did it to me, you would not feel what you are about to feel.”

Harry knew what was coming, and had a sudden inspiration. He took out his wand, and imagined an invisible shield surrounding him, a shield of light. He

imagined that it was composed of love. He focused on that love. He imagined it protecting him.

“Crucio!” screamed Voldemort. Harry screamed and writhed in pain, but immediately, he knew it was very different. The pain was still consuming and intolerable, but well below what it usually was. Neville had said the pain was enough for twenty people; this felt like it was enough for eight. At the same time, he kept screaming, and then felt himself being held. As he wrapped his arms around... whoever, the real world once again reappeared. He gasped for breath and held on tight. He saw red hair, and pulled back to look at Ginny’s face. She looked desperately protective, frustrated at being able to do nothing more than what she was doing. Then, suddenly, she kissed him on the cheek, very quickly. She looked at him again, and Harry saw more raw emotion than he had ever seen before. He couldn’t put words to it, at least not right away. After another second, she held him again, and he reveled in the comfort.

He looked up to see the faces of Ron, Hermione, and Neville. Where was Dumbledore? he wondered. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Dumbledore, who was sitting in a chair near the top of the bed. He shifted his position, moving Ginny over a bit, so he could see Dumbledore’s face while still holding Ginny. Instead of a concerned look on Dumbledore’s face, he thought he saw the smallest smile. Harry remembered how the pain had felt, but he smiled. “You noticed it too, didn’t you,” he said. Dumbledore nodded. Harry grinned broadly and raised a fist in triumph.

Ron, who wore his usual look of worry after the Curse, gaped in astonishment. “Harry, what in the world...” He trailed off. “What happened?”

Harry felt ecstatic, exuberant. He pulled away from Ginny a bit and smiled brilliantly. Ginny smiled back, but was still confused. On an impulse, he kissed her on the cheek as she had him, and held her once more. Over her shoulder, to the others, he said, “There was much less pain this time, much less. This’ll be over soon,

I can feel it.” Ron, Hermione, and Neville smiled too, though not too broadly; apparently, to them, Harry’s pain had seemed just as bad.

After holding Ginny for another few minutes, Harry asked Dumbledore, “Did you bring the Pensieve?” Dumbledore nodded, then Summoned it to a spot near the bed. Harry let go of Ginny, took out his wand, and started moving memories over. Dumbledore had Fawkes retrieve Snape and McGonagall, who were soon in the room. Dumbledore said to them, “There was a substantial reduction in Harry’s pain this time. We must watch carefully.” Everyone stood around the Pensieve, then at Dumbledore’s signal, put their fingers in.

There was a sudden gasp from all the students except Harry to find themselves in a different location, and one so familiar. Neville in particular looked very frightened, though, Harry thought, he had every right to be. Harry patted him on the shoulder; Neville looked at him, nodded, and calmed down.

As Voldemort tried to goad Harry, he saw the anger on his friends’ faces, to be replaced by satisfaction as they saw him resist the provocation. Then there were more gasps as they saw Sirius die, and Harry scream in desperation. His friends looked at Harry with pity; they had known what had happened, but none except Neville had been in the room at the time.

The Harry watching saw Dumbledore looking proudly at the Harry dreaming as he resisted this provocation as well. Then the scene shifted to the Atrium. McGonagall gasped audibly as Harry attempted the Cruciatius Curse, and looked angry as Voldemort tried to goad Harry into using it again. After Harry resisted, just as Voldemort prepared to Curse him, Harry saw something he hadn’t seen in the dream. He saw a shimmering, translucent energy field, roughly egg-shaped, surrounding him. He saw Voldemort issue the curse, and it made contact with the shield. Harry saw the shield vibrate, obviously affected by the curse, and he saw some of the curse get through. The dreaming Harry screamed, and the memory stopped. They were now back in the room with the Veil of Mystery.

Harry saw that everyone, with the exception of Snape, appeared emotionally affected by what they had seen, and even Snape looked astonished, though Harry didn't know why. McGonagall looked to Harry like she was trying to stifle her emotions.

“Harry, that was... unexpectedly, intensely personal. We could have made other arrangements for seeing this,” said Dumbledore. “In any case... it is truly remarkable that you were able to remain calm in the face of such intense provocations. But I must ask you something else now. At the end, just before he Cursed you, what did you do?”

“I visualized a shield, made of the energy of love. I imagined it protecting me.”

McGonagall, Snape, and even Dumbledore exchanged awed looks. Harry didn't understand what they found so amazing. Most of the students didn't, either, but Hermione looked to Harry as if she might.

“Did you plan, or prepare, to do this?” Dumbledore asked.

Harry shook his head. “It was just... an inspiration, I guess. The whole idea came to me in a flash, and I just did it, automatically.”

Snape finally spoke. “He shall have powers the Dark Lord knows not,” he quoted, obviously still stunned.

“Indeed... we had no idea,” said a still awestruck Dumbledore. Harry started to seriously wonder what was going on, but he knew it must be very big indeed to cause this reaction in Dumbledore. “Minerva, is this what we think it is?”

“I do not see what else it could be, Albus.” She looked back at Harry as if she had never met him before.

“Um... I'm not quite sure what it is that you see there,” Harry said. “What is it that you saw that's so amazing?”

Dumbledore turned to Harry. “We cannot be certain, Harry... but we think it is very possible that you have just invented a spell that will block the Cruciatus Curse.”