

CHAPTER 7

BACK TO HOGWARTS

Harry stepped out of the fireplace and was greeted by Professor McGonagall. “Welcome, Professor Potter,” she said, with a smile in her eyes that did not extend to her mouth. Harry was not bothered; he was well used to her undemonstrative nature. She shook his hand, and gestured him out of the room. They exited to find themselves in the main room of the Hogsmeade Owl Office, where over a hundred owls stood ready to make deliveries.

Harry looked around. He had been in this room before on a previous Hogsmeade visit, but not in the room with the fireplace. “Professor, why doesn’t this fireplace get used more? Wouldn’t it be a lot faster than the Hogwarts Express?” They walked out onto the main street of Hogsmeade, towards the Hogwarts gates.

“Yes, it would, but the Hogwarts Express has been running virtually since the invention of the train,” she explained. “It is a tradition we would not like to lose. It gives the students a chance to renew acquaintances and catch up on news. Also, the Owl Office is not affiliated with Hogwarts, and so we cannot just use it any time we please. We request its use for teachers for whom Apparation is not suitable and other unusual situations.” She paused. “Such as a teacher who is not yet old enough to Apparate.” He was almost sure he saw a small smile there.

“Professor, how is it going to work with me being a teacher, dealing with the other teachers? I mean, you always refer to each other as ‘Professor’ when mentioning them to a student, or when talking to each other, unless you’re on a first-name basis. How is that going to work with me?” He had been wondering about that for a while.

“Just the same as with any other professor, except when you are actually in classes as a student,” she replied. “At those times, you will be treated no differently than any other student, with one exception. You will not be given detentions.” Harry looked at her, surprised. “Professor Dumbledore,” she continued, “feels that to do so could undermine your authority at the times you are teaching. He will inform you later of the standard of behavior he expects in return for this consideration.” Her tone added the message of, ‘and if you don’t adhere to this standard, you’re going to have to answer to me,’

“Basically,” Harry guessed, “that I don’t do anything that would ordinarily get me given detention?”

“To start with, yes,” she answered sternly. “Generally, in my classes you have behaved satisfactorily, though not ideally, so I foresee no problems. But I would personally recommend that you behave as a student in the same way that you would like students in your classes to behave. You will soon find out what it looks like from our side of the fence.

“Now to get back to your question, when not in classes as a student, you will be treated exactly as an ordinary professor would. Other professors will refer to you, in or out of your presence, as “Professor Potter,” unless they feel they have your permission to use your given name. If someone does whom you would prefer not to, simply say, ‘Professor Potter, if you please,’ and they will comply with your wishes.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Harry said. At McGonagall’s sharp look, he added, “You know who I mean, Professor. I’ll be surprised if he doesn’t gag.”

“Did I mention, Professor Potter, that we do not criticize fellow professors?”

Harry sighed. “Professor Dumbledore did,” he admitted. “Well, I suppose I can do it if he can.”

Her face still registered disapproval. “You will do it unconditionally, regardless of the behavior of others. If any teacher steps outside the bounds of

appropriate behavior, they will be spoken to by Professor Dumbledore or myself. Most teachers have no difficulty with this. I do not expect that you will either.”

“No, Professor, I didn’t think I would. It’s the teachers who have to do things differently, not me.”

They were walking through the Hogwarts gates, Harry still carrying his extra-light trunk over his shoulder. He looked around at all the familiar sights, highlighted by a bright, clear summer day: the lake with the squid, the Whomping Willow, the Quidditch pitch off in the distance, and of course the castle. As they passed Hagrid’s hut, McGonagall shouted, “Hagrid! Are you in there?”

From inside the hut, Harry heard a dog barking, and Hagrid shouting “Jus’ a minute, jus’ a minute.” In a few seconds, he came out, saw Harry, and grinned broadly. “Good ter see yeh, good ter see yeh.” He patted Harry on the back more lightly than usual; Harry did not go flying forward as he had expected. Harry reached up and patted him on the back; even though Harry had grown a bit over the two summer months, he couldn’t come close to reaching Hagrid’s shoulder. ”A professor! Well, Harry, I got ter say, nothin’ yeh do surprises me anymore. I’m as proud of yeh as I was fer myself when Professor Dumbledore made me a teacher. Congratulations.”

“Thanks, Hagrid,” said Harry. “I’m looking forward to taking your N.E.W.T. class. I bet you’ll have some good stuff lined up.”

“I will, don’t yeh worry. Now, yeh’d better be movin’ along there, yeh’ve got lots ter be doin’ today. I’ll find yeh when yer not so busy, we’ll have a cuppa.”

“Good. See you later,” Harry said cheerfully. He continued walking toward the castle with McGonagall. “It’s good to see him here, like always,” Harry commented. “Last year when he wasn’t here, we were pretty concerned. It doesn’t feel quite right if he’s not around.”

“I know what you mean, Harry... I’m sorry, I really should say, Professor Potter...” She paused for a second, and Harry jumped in, hoping not to interrupt.

“Professor, please... I don’t plan on calling any teachers by their given name... except Hagrid, of course... but I still want you and Professor Dumbledore to call me Harry if you’d like. It really wouldn’t seem right otherwise.”

She looked at him with what could be affection, but Harry found it hard to tell. “Very well, I shall keep that in mind.”

They walked up the steps to the main entrance of the castle, and went inside. As it had during his Hogwarts visit a month ago, it seemed too barren to Harry, too in need of students walking and running in the hallways. They’ll be here soon enough, he thought. And then they’ll be expecting me to teach them.

McGonagall led him to her office. “I always meet with the new teacher first; conducting orientation is one of my responsibilities as deputy Headmistress. This meeting is to let you know what you will be doing over the next two days.” She went on to detail them: “There will be a meeting with me to discuss school regulations and the teacher’s general responsibilities, a tour of the grounds, a talk with Professor Dumbledore and I about how you plan to approach your classes, then a private dinner with Professor Dumbledore. Tomorrow, there will be a staff meeting in the afternoon, and a staff feast and social event after dinner. On Sunday, your time will be your own until 6:00, when you will join us at the teachers’ table for the students’ welcoming feast. Do you have any questions so far?”

Harry shook his head, but he was reeling a bit. A private dinner with Professor Dumbledore? All this seemed so foreign to him, like what someone else should be doing, not him. All he could do, he thought, was go with it, and hope that Dumbledore knew what he was doing.

The first meeting went all right, Harry felt. Professor McGonagall had explained some of the teachers’ extracurricular responsibilities, such as occasionally patrolling the grounds and supervising detentions, but explained to Harry that he would be excused from most of them, as he had his studies to attend to. She told him that he would have the usual teachers’ prerogatives of assigning detention and

taking points from the houses of offenders, not only in his classes, but anywhere in the school except when he was in a class as a student or in Gryffindor Tower. She went over the school rules with him—just for form’s sake, as he already knew most of them (“having broken quite a few of them yourself,” she added).

They then walked the grounds, but mainly just chatted, as again there was not much that Harry had to be told that he did not know. He enjoyed the walk, as it was a nice day. Hagrid joined them for part of it, giving his perspective on the familiar sights.

Back at the castle, Harry went to Gryffindor Tower to unpack his trunk, which a house-elf had undoubtedly taken from where he had left it in McGonagall’s office. She had told him that normally she would be showing the new teacher his quarters, but she and Dumbledore knew that Harry would want to stay in his usual Gryffindor quarters, so he went there instead. It felt strange, again, being in the room he had shared for five years with Ron, Neville, Dean, and Seamus, but alone this time. He unpacked his things and flipped through the book he’d gotten from Hermione, reviewing his tentative plans for his classes. At a few minutes before four, he went to Professor McGonagall’s office, carrying the book with him. He and McGonagall then set out to Professor Dumbledore’s office.

She paused when they reached the gargoyles that guarded Dumbledore’s office. “Lemon drop,” she said, and they were allowed to pass. The door to Dumbledore’s office was open; he was obviously waiting for them.

“Minerva, Harry, come in,” said Dumbledore cheerfully. He motioned them to sit down, then did so himself. “Well, Harry, first of all, please tell us what you have in mind for your classes. You need not be overly detailed. For now, we wish to know how you are generally thinking.”

Harry took a deep breath before starting. “Well, I was planning on using this book,” he said, holding it up to show them, “as a very general guide as to what to teach at what time. But I also wanted to ask for advice from both of you.”

McGonagall looked at Dumbledore, then Harry, in dismay. “The school could have provided you with a copy of that book. You need not have purchased it for yourself,” she said.

“I didn’t. Hermione bought it for me for my birthday,” he explained.

McGonagall and Dumbledore looked mildly surprised. “Quite a gift,” she commented. “That book is not inexpensive.”

“I didn’t know that,” Harry said, slightly surprised. “Well, you know Hermione, nothing’s too good when it comes to study.”

“Or her friends, it appears,” observed Dumbledore. “In any case, yes, Harry, that is a good place to start. What general modifications do you plan to make?”

Harry had thought about this. “I’m thinking in kind of the same way as I did with the D.A.,” he said. “Since Voldemort and the Death Eaters are out there, the first thing I want to do is work on the stuff that’ll have value against them. So I’ll be emphasizing those things and not doing so much on stuff like grindylows, which are on the O.W.L. but aren’t really relevant to our situation.” He looked at them, waiting to see what they thought.

Dumbledore nodded his approval. “Excellent, Harry,” he said. “That is exactly how I hoped you would see it. We are in a difficult time, and so the lessons should be more of a practical nature.”

Harry smiled, and related to them Ron’s joke in Diagon Alley about Harry’s teaching to his expertise of surviving dangerous situations, and Mrs. Weasley’s reaction.

Dumbledore nodded. “It is understandable that Molly would think it inappropriate, but Ron was exactly right. I did not choose you as a teacher for your encyclopedic knowledge of everything that might be encountered on an O.W.L. test. You have demonstrated the ability to use these spells in difficult situations, and last year you demonstrated the ability to teach them. Now, have you thought about how you plan to conduct your classes in general? For example, more practice or more lecture, and so forth.”

That was easy. “Much more practice, much less lecture,” said Harry confidently. “I’m not sure what I would have to say, anyway; as you said, I’m not an expert on most of this. I guess that most of the lesson time will be taken by practice.”

“That sounds entirely reasonable,” Dumbledore agreed. “But if I may make a suggestion...”

Harry nodded eagerly. Dumbledore continued, “When it is appropriate, you may want to consider occasionally talking about the situations in which you have used some of what you will be teaching them. Tell them about Voldemort. Tell them about dementors; the third years and younger students may never have seen them. If you are comfortable with it, using your personal experiences to illustrate what you are teaching may have a great motivational effect.”

Harry considered it; it was not an idea he immediately took to. Talking to strangers about very personal experiences was not something he was keen on; giving the interview to the Quibbler in February had been difficult. But he was prepared to take anything Dumbledore suggested very seriously.

“I hadn’t thought of doing that,” he said. “But I guess I can see what you mean. When we had that meeting in the Hog’s Head last year, I wondered if people had just showed up to find out about what happened last June, and they were pretty impressed when Ron and Hermione were telling them about all the stuff I’d done. I mean, to be honest, it’s not something I’m exactly eager to do. But I will... as I think about it, telling them about Voldemort, maybe even spending a whole lesson on it, is probably a good idea,” he continued, now thinking out loud. “Half of them will jump out of their chairs when I say the name, but if they start hearing it enough, they’ll get used to it... probably most students have this exaggerated fear because of all this business about the name.”

“Quite so, Harry. I’m glad you see that,” said Dumbledore. “This could be very valuable to the students. Ironically, the fact that you are not eager to do so makes you all the more qualified. It will be obvious that you are not attempting self-

aggrandizement.” To Harry’s puzzled look, McGonagall supplied, “People will know you are not boasting.”

“Ah, yes,” said Harry, embarrassed that he hadn’t known that word. “Okay, well, when I can find a time that seems good, I’ll try to do that.”

“Good. Thank you, Harry,” said Dumbledore. “Now, let’s look for any possible lessons in which you might need special supplies, so we can get them for you in advance.”

“Oh, wait, there’s one other thing I wanted to mention,” said Harry. “I know this is usually N.E.W.T. standard, but I’d like to teach the Patronus Charm, or at least try to, to third through fifth years. I know not everybody will get it, but the chances of anyone having to defend themselves against dementors is much higher these days. So I thought that would be a good idea. A fair number of people in the D.A. managed a Patronus before we got caught.”

“Of course, Harry, you may do so. To be clear, this chat we are having is not so that we can control and micromanage how you teach your class. You do not have to clear things with us; you may do as you like in your class. We simply wish to know what you plan to do. We would not be doing our jobs if we did not,” Dumbledore said.

Harry nodded, then had a thought, and asked a question which he might not have had he thought about it more. “Professor, did you have a chat like this with Dolores Umbridge?”

McGonagall bristled. “Professor Potter, that is a matter far removed from the purpose of—“

”Minerva,” Dumbledore interrupted. She looked at him in surprise; it seemed to Harry that Dumbledore must not have often interrupted her. “Harry suffered sufficiently last year to deserve an answer to his question.”

“Suffered?” She looked puzzled, because she knew Dumbledore wouldn’t have said what he said without good reason. “Being thrown off the Quidditch team

and having three weeks' worth of detentions is unpleasant, I agree, but 'suffer' seems too strong a word for it."

"Minerva, do you recall that before Professor Umbridge left us this year, I had a chat with her, in which she was most forthcoming with truthful answers?" Harry wondered how Dumbledore had managed that, and realized that there was still a lot he didn't know about Dumbledore's abilities.

"Of course, we discussed that. Why?"

"Because she told me what she had Harry doing in those detentions." He then described the pen she had made Harry use to write lines, and how it worked.

McGonagall's mouth dropped open. She stared at Harry, horrified and astonished. Her mouth moved, but no sound came out for a few seconds. Finally, she managed, "Why... why on earth did you not come to me and tell me this? I would have put a stop to it even if it meant having to restrain her physically!"

Harry had a determined look on his face; he was remembering those detentions, and the effort it took to endure the pain and not show it. Dumbledore was regarding him seriously. "If you have been watching Harry's face for the past few seconds, Minerva, the reason should be apparent."

She stared at him more intently; he saw realization dawn in her eyes. "It was a battle of wills... you didn't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing she got to you." She was still amazed, but now for a different reason.

"That was the main reason," Harry confirmed. "The other reason was... Ron told me to go to you, that you'd stop it. I said, yeah, but how long until there's another 'educational decree' that says you get sacked for criticizing her? It just wasn't going to do any good in the long run. But, yes, even if I thought you could have stopped it, I wouldn't have done it." Harry wondered, looking at her face, whether he had been brave, stubborn, or just stupid. All he knew was that it had seemed very important at the time.

"I think," Dumbledore said, "that nobody who knows about this would ever question Harry's toughness. And that is why I feel that Harry deserves an answer to

his question. But I think the larger question you have in mind, Harry, is how did things come to pass that she was forced on us in the first place?” Harry nodded. “The fact is that I was outmaneuvered bureaucratically and politically; I did not foresee that particular line of attack. No doubt I should have, and I am sorry that you and others have suffered for it. Once she was in, there was little we could do. It was also true that a few people I approached about the position declined, and we later understood that they were pressured by the Ministry to do so

“Now, to answer your actual question, yes, we did have this chat with her. She told us exactly what she planned to do, which was exactly what she did in fact do. We expressed our concerns; she was adamant, and made sure we knew that her plan had the Ministry’s support. We recognized the limits of our power, and made no attempts to press her further. Trying to force her to do as we wished would have failed—you cannot make someone be an effective teacher—and would certainly have prompted further Ministry action, a rationale you will note is similar to what you mentioned a moment ago. Sometimes we must allow something bad to happen so that something worse does not happen later.”

Harry understood, and said so. “It was a pretty hard year.”

“For us, too, Harry,” McGonagall said. “We were not physically tormented in the manner that you were, but the teachers were under siege last year. We could not speak freely in the staff room, and those ‘observations...’” She shook her head in disgust at the memory.

That prompted a memory, and Harry smiled; he told McGonagall what satisfaction all the Gryffindors had derived from her treatment of Umbridge when her class was observed. Dumbledore smiled, as did McGonagall, though a small one. “We’d seen her push around so many teachers, it was so great to see. It made us feel better.”

“Well, now that the Ministry has its attention more properly focused on Voldemort, we are once again being left alone,” said Dumbledore, more or less closing the subject. “We may have challenges this year, but they will be different

challenges.” The conversation went back to teaching. Dumbledore and McGonagall gave Harry some tips based on their years of experience. After about an hour, they stopped, and Harry followed Dumbledore to his quarters, where they would have dinner.

Harry walked into one of the few rooms at Hogwarts in which he had never been before. Dumbledore’s quarters were larger than Harry expected, with a spacious living room, a study area, and a bedroom. Dumbledore offered Harry a seat in a very comfortable old chair, and sat down on a nearby chair himself.

“So, Harry, how are you feeling about things now?” Dumbledore asked.

“Very strange,” Harry said honestly. “Like I’m not where I’m supposed to be. If this was a dream, someone would walk in and discover that I’m just pretending, and I’d be thrown out.”

Dumbledore smiled. “Be assured that if anyone comes through the door, it will be a house-elf bringing our dinner. But I know what you mean. The feeling will subside. You will adapt to it, and in a few months, perhaps you will be thinking that being a student is harder than being a teacher.”

Harry chuckled lightly, and said, “I hope you’re right. That would be nice.”

Harry took the opportunity to ask some questions about Hogwarts history; he discovered that Dumbledore had been headmaster for forty-one years, the longest tenure ever. Dumbledore told Harry stories about teachers who had long since gone. Harry was fascinated. He told Dumbledore that he wished there was a class called ‘History of Hogwarts,’ and that Dumbledore taught it.

“If there were such a course, Harry, then there would have to be a test for it. You would find that stories can be a lot less interesting if you know you will be tested on them. You start looking for the trees, and lose view of the forest.”

“Wouldn’t that be true of any class?” Harry wondered.

“To an extent, yes,” Dumbledore conceded. “But the class you propose would have no value other than entertainment, so testing would ruin it. I’m sure you have noticed that very few of your actual classes could be called entertaining.”

Harry grinned. “Well, a few, maybe. The one in third year where Neville put his grandmother’s clothes on a boggart pretending to be Professor Snape comes to mind.”

“Yes, I heard about that,” said Dumbledore. “I believe that Professor Snape was... displeased.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Harry said, not noticing Dumbledore’s deliberate understatement. “He made Neville’s life in Potions really difficult for the next few months. Even treated him worse than he treats me, for a while.” Harry paused, wanting to ask Dumbledore a question but not sure if he should. He decided to go ahead.

“Professor, were you told the reason that Sn— sorry, that Professor Snape stopped teaching me Occlumency last year?”

“Yes, I was told. Why do you ask?”

“Well... first of all, I shouldn’t have looked in the Pensieve. It was a huge temptation, but I still shouldn’t have done it, and I know that.” He paused, about to continue, but Dumbledore commented first.

“I do not judge you harshly for that, Harry. In fact, I do not judge you at all.” At Harry’s very surprised look, Dumbledore continued: “I feel that Professor Snape should not have tried to protect his memories by placing them in the Pensieve. It made the situation even more unbalanced in his favor than it already was. He could gain access to your most personal memories without risking his. This is part of the reason that I suspect his motives for using the methods he did. In any case, do continue.”

“Well, I saw what my father did to him, and I hated it. My father behaved like a bully. Even if I assume, as Sirius said, that Professor Snape gave as good as he got, I can understand why Snape hated him. But what I’d like to know is, why did

he hate me, from the very first? Why blame me for what my father did? I've never understood that."

Dumbledore looked thoughtful. "I would say first that the fact that your father died a hero has a lot to do with it, as does your instant, and to his eyes unearned, celebrity. I daresay that if your father had died a random and anonymous death, and you were unknown... he might not be pleasant toward you, but it would not be as it is now. I believe he feels that James Potter was posthumously lionized in a way that obscured his true nature, and especially since you look so much like James and have many of his abilities, it is easy for him to transfer those feelings to you. You give him, in essence, a second chance to get even with James Potter somehow."

Harry was still not sure he understood how this could drive Snape's behavior, but it did make sense in some ways. But something Dumbledore had said is passing bothered him more. "Do you think that being a bully was my father's true nature?"

"No, of course not," Dumbledore assured him. "He could be arrogant, even bullying, to his enemies, but there was nothing he would not have done for his friends. Look at what he and his friends did for Remus. It is the sort of thing that you, Ron, or Hermione would do for each other. As Sirius told you, he grew out of the sort of behavior that you saw in the Pensieve. The person he became is the important thing, and he became a good, brave, and honorable person. You have nothing to be ashamed of, though in a way it speaks well of you that you are."

"I know I'm not like he was in that way. I don't go out of my way to look for opportunities to harass Malfoy, for example. If he leaves me alone, I leave him alone. Does Professor Snape really not see that? Is it so important to him to see me as my father that he can ignore reality?"

"Again, Harry, I cannot say, but I do know that it is in the nature of many people to ignore a reality that does not suit them. You need look no further than Cornelius Fudge's behavior over much of the past year. Deep down he knew

perfectly well that Voldemort was back, but he seized on the fact that he had not seen Voldemort with his own eyes as an excuse to avoid dealing with what he did not wish to. It happens all the time, and none of us is immune to the temptation. One of the great personal challenges we all face is facing up to unpleasant realities.”

Harry pondered this. Resignedly, he said, “I guess I shouldn’t complain. I got a lot of good things from my parents. If I picked up an enemy from them, well, that’s life, I guess.”

“I would not describe Professor Snape as an enemy. Perhaps you are that to him, in his mind, but he need not be that to you. Assigning him that role only solidifies it in the reality that he is attempting to create. I would describe him as a person who is trying to do what he feels is right—he is, as you know, a member of the Order of the Phoenix—but is very wounded in some ways. He is trying to cope with those wounds, but does not prioritize the ones associated with your father. Instead, he is venting the pain from those wounds onto you.

“Let me give you some advice. You may take it or leave it as you choose, but for your own sake I hope you will take it. I encourage you to make this a project, one for your emotional health and development. Forgive Professor Snape. When he treats you badly, do not respond in kind; remember that he is wounded, and have as much compassion for him as you can summon. Try to let his hostility roll off you; use the Occlumency training from this summer to aid you in clearing your mind. Do not respond to his challenges or provocations. Do not judge the success of your endeavors by changes in his behavior; what you are doing, you will do for yourself, not for him. The better you can manage it, the more you will benefit. This may not seem obvious, but I assure you, it is true. It will require a good heart, which I know you have. It will also require emotional control and patience, which you can learn, and are vitally important to success later in life. I have done my best to embody these traits, and any success or regard I have gained is largely due to what mastery I have achieved in this area. In addition, practice in this area will help you

keep emotional control in other instances, for example, any future confrontations with Voldemort.”

Harry was having a hard time digesting this. Forgive Snape, even after Dumbledore knew how Snape had used Harry for a mental punching bag over the past year? After how terribly Snape had treated him? It didn't seem possible. But then, Harry thought, this is Dumbledore. I admire him for his power, but even more for his manner, his tranquility, that things never get to him. Is this how? Is it because he's mastered what he's saying I should work on? This, and Dumbledore's last sentence, made Harry think of a question.

“Professor, in June, I was amazed that you kept so calm when you confronted Voldemort. You didn't seem nervous or angry. I've seen you angry, but you weren't then. Is this a part of what you're talking about?”

“It is related, yes. It is important to maintain emotional control in dealing with anyone, but Voldemort in particular. He feeds off anger. It strengthens him and undermines you. You could give him no better gift than to deal with him in anger. Emotional control gives you the power to deprive him of a weapon he can use against you.”

The door to Dumbledore's quarters opened, and three house-elves walked in, carrying trays, plates, silverware, and glasses. They set Dumbledore's table and placed the food and drink on it. Dumbledore thanked them; they bowed, and departed.

“Well, it appears that it is time to eat, Harry.” He gestured Harry to follow him, and they sat at the table.

Harry did not take particular notice of the food; he was still preoccupied by what Dumbledore was asking of him. “I don't know, Professor. What you're asking... it seems like more than I can do.”

“Many things will seem like more than you can do, until you do them. Snatching an egg out from under a dragon would have seemed like more than you could do, until you put all your energy and will into finding a way to do it. This will

take time and effort. It will not happen at once. There will be setbacks, occasions when you will fail. But every step forward you make will strengthen you, and help you succeed more in the future. It could even save your life.”

Harry felt that Dumbledore was asking too much of him. He looked down, at his food, but didn't register it. “How can I just change how I feel about something, especially this? I mean, I don't know how I would even begin to do it.”

Dumbledore nodded understandingly. “The first step is to change how you react, if not how you feel. When you react, try to observe your reactions, as if you were standing outside yourself. Use the same calming and focusing techniques that you have learned in the Occlumency classes; focus at first on controlling your actions. If you always act based on your emotions, others can manipulate you easily, as did Mr. Malfoy on the Quidditch pitch last year. You must choose your actions, not have others choose them for you. It may feel as though you have no choice but to respond a certain way to a provocation, but we can all choose our actions. Like the dragon egg, it is simply a matter of wanting it badly enough, of being determined to do what it takes. You can do it, I assure you.”

Harry had been wavering between the ideas of telling Dumbledore he couldn't do it and telling him that he'd think about it, but something Dumbledore had said sent a chill down his spine. When Dumbledore said that Malfoy had manipulated Harry on the Quidditch pitch, it dawned on him that that was exactly what Voldemort had done in drawing him to the Department of Mysteries. He had counted on Harry to react with his emotions. But I had to go, he told himself, I thought Sirius was being tortured. No, responded another part of his brain, you had to do something, but you didn't have to go running off without thinking. This is what Dumbledore is talking about. You were terrified for Sirius, but you'd have helped him more by stopping and thinking, even if Voldemort had actually had him. If you'd done what Dumbledore is suggesting you do, Sirius would still be alive.

He winced internally, even though he'd already blamed himself dozens of times in his own head for Sirius's death. He also suddenly realized that it might not be a coincidence that what Dumbledore was suggesting would have had that effect. He's not asking me to do this for Snape's sake, Harry thought. He's trying to get me to control my emotions in general, and doing it with Snape is just for practice. And isn't this what I said I wanted to do, when I talked to Hermione in the library that day? To not have her get killed because I lost my temper and didn't think straight? Here's my chance, he's telling me how to do what I said I wanted to do. But does it have to be Snape? He sighed. If Dumbledore thinks I can do it, then maybe I can. At least, I should try. He looked at Dumbledore and gave a small nod. "I'll try."

"I am glad to hear it. Glad for your sake. It will help you a great deal, and I will do what I can to help you along. Now, let's tuck in, before the food gets cold."

They ate, chatting as they did so, about more mundane matters. After they finished, Dumbledore gestured him back to the chairs they'd sat on before. As they sat down, a thought suddenly occurred to Harry, something he'd wanted to ask someone about over the summer. He had no reason to think Dumbledore knew the answer, except that Dumbledore seemed to know everything.

"Professor, in June, in the Department of Mysteries... when we were trying to find Sirius, we came across that room, the one where you found us. There was that thing that looked like an archway, the one that Sirius fell through. What is that? What does it do?"

Dumbledore paused before answering. "No one knows, exactly," With a small grin, he added, "That is why it is in the Department of Mysteries. In fact, it is the reason the Department of Mysteries is where it is, and the Ministry of Magic around that. They were all built around that structure."

"How old is it? Who built it?"

"Ah, those are true mysteries indeed. No one knows the answer to either question; it has been there for as long as recorded history extends, and its creators

are unknown. As to your first questions... before I answer, let me ask you, why do you ask about this?"

Harry recalled how entranced he was by the archway and the black veil, fluttering when it had no reason to. "I heard voices coming from it... voices I could barely hear, but I was sure they were voices. I felt drawn to it, like I wanted to go through it. Hermione grabbed me and kind of snapped me out of it, and we left the room. But I know it was powerful, something about it. I mean, I was convinced that Sirius was being tortured, and I let myself get distracted? That's why I'd really like to know."

Dumbledore nodded sympathetically. "I understand, Harry. Let me ask you another question... Did anyone other than you react in this way? Did anyone else hear voices?"

"Yes, Luna said she did, too. Neville looked kind of entranced, but I don't know if he heard voices."

"And, Harry, can you think of anything that you, Luna, and Neville have in common that the others do not?"

Nothing came to Harry for a moment. Then, after a minute, a light dawned, and his eyes widened. "We can all see thestrals..."

"Yes, Harry, you have all seen death with your own eyes. But in the case of the veil, it is not necessary to have seen death personally, just to have lost a very dear loved one. What is known about the archway is that it calls to such people. It gives them the feeling that it is imperative that they pass through the veil. Countless people have followed its call over the centuries."

"If you pass through it, do you... die?" Harry asked uncertainly.

"All we can say for sure is that those who pass through it are never heard from again. Whether they are dead... that we cannot know, unless we strictly define death as once having been present on the planet, and now no longer being so. Those who pass through it may be physically alive in some other dimension or type

of reality, for all we know. Or, they could be dead. There are many theories, but no one can say.”

Harry thought of a question that Dumbledore would be able to answer. “What do you believe, Professor?”

Dumbledore leaned forward a little. “One school of thought, Harry, believes that the spirits of those who die go there, as a way-station on part of a greater journey. It could be considered a kind of resting area. It is believed that those drawn to it are able to sense their loved ones’ presence behind the veil, and the more the person was loved, the stronger the pull toward the veil. You lost your parents. Luna lost her mother. You both felt a strong pull; I believe that is the reason. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some people have had contact with the area through dreams, or spiritual endeavors. This school of thought fairly closely mirrors my beliefs. Again, though, nothing is known for certain.”

“I see.” Harry was inclined to adopt for himself Dumbledore’s opinions if he had none of his own as yet. He also found it comforting to believe that Sirius was still around someplace, in some fashion, even if he was not accessible. “And the archway and the veil... they’re just a physical path to this place, a connecting point between this world and that one?”

“Yes, exactly. But I cannot even take a reasonable guess at who built it, or why they did. The thing is shrouded in mystery. It is, in fact, often referred to as the Veil of Mystery. Or sometimes, the Veil of Life, or the Veil of Death... different names go in and out of fashion.”

“It was rippling... even though no one was touching it, there was no wind, it was still rippling.”

“Yes, that adds to its aura, both in the abstract, and when one sees it,”
Dumbledore said.

Harry was silent for a short time, thinking of Sirius. Dumbledore seemed to know it, and did not disturb Harry’s thoughts. Harry soon brought up a new topic of conversation, and they talked for a while longer. At 10:30, Dumbledore

suggested that they call it a night. “You will soon, as you know, have to be in the habit of getting up at 7:00 or earlier,” he pointed out. “Best to get started tonight; you will want to be at full alertness Monday morning.” Harry almost wished Dumbledore hadn’t made that reference to Monday morning; he was enjoying the glow of spending the time with Dumbledore, and didn’t want to think about worrisome things. But he knew that, of course, Dumbledore was right. He thanked Dumbledore for having him over, said good night, and left.

He walked along the hallways of Hogwarts, heading for Gryffindor Tower, his head buzzing with all that he’d discussed with Dumbledore. As he turned a corner, saw a black-robed figure approaching. He looked up to see a familiar face, in a familiar expression: Severus Snape, looking annoyed and disgusted. “Professor Potter,” hissed Snape, in a tone that put quotation marks around the first word.

Harry was about to react angrily to this, but suddenly thought, this is what Dumbledore wants me to do, here’s my first chance to do it. Control your emotions. Don’t react the way Snape wants you to. He felt himself calm down somewhat. He looked at Snape and nodded politely. “Professor Snape,” he replied. Making an effort to keep calm, he paused for a second, his eyes asking the question, ‘Is there something you have to say?’

Snape stared for a second, then his expression changed into one of mild surprise mixed with the usual loathing. Taking his eyes off Harry and looking straight ahead, he continued walking without another word. Harry wondered what the look he saw meant; it was as though Harry’s manner had surprised him. Well, he thought, if doing what Dumbledore said to do got me out of a confrontation with Snape, then it’s benefited me already.

He walked into Gryffindor Tower, through the common room up to the sixth years’ room. He changed into his nightclothes, and got into bed. It seemed as though a few dozen thoughts were competing for attention in his head. It was over an hour and a half later that he fell asleep.

Harry was in a room, a relatively bare room. As he looked down, he could tell he was sitting at a table. He was wearing long, black, flowing robes, and staring straight ahead. He heard a voice from the next room. “My Lord... may I enter?”

He noticed that his head was nodding. “You may.”

Bellatrix Lestrange entered the room. She kneeled in front of him, kissed the hem of his robes, and stood up again, not sitting at the table. “My Lord... did he talk?”

He laughed lightly, casually. “Of course he talked, Bella... everyone talks; the question is, do they have anything worth saying, or hearing. In this case, I believe he did.”

She looked at him hungrily. “If I could know, my Lord...”

He somehow knew that he was looking at her imperiously, with great disdain, even though he could not see his face. “You dare to ask me for favors... so soon after your failure?”

She looked abject. “Forgive me, my Lord. I am your most loyal—“

”Lord Voldemort rewards loyalty, but only when it is mixed with competence. What good is a loyal but incompetent servant? You have already had your punishment... or would you like a little more?”

She dropped to her knees. “I am yours to command, my Lord. I merely wanted to know so that I could more ably serve you—“

”Yes, yes, I see that you believe that,” he said, sounding almost disappointed. “Now, let us review, to make sure you remember... exactly what was your failure at the Department of Mysteries?”

“I was ruled by my emotions, my Lord. I was not thinking tactically, about the success of the mission. I put my own pleasure ahead of your interests. I failed to secure the prophecy.” The brisk way in which she said it made it sound like she had said it before, perhaps many times.

“Yes, very good, Bella. It is good that you remember. Malfoy at least kept his mind on what had to be done, though he too failed. He and the others will suffer for their mistakes as well, once they are liberated, which will be soon enough.

“As to the man... though you do not deserve the privilege, I will tell you. He also believes that the Legion is there for me to access, and he told me how he believes it can be done. It is roughly consistent with what the other two said, before I allowed them to die. I now believe it is within my grasp.”

“But they will have it very well protected, my Lord. The Ministry... Dumbledore...”

He felt a sneer form on his face. “The Ministry are fools, and they would still be hounding Dumbledore instead of looking for me if not for your mistakes. As for Dumbledore, he will be handled. Snape will take care of that.”

She looked as though she wanted to scoff, but dared not. She looked at him darkly and said, “My Lord, Dumbledore must have turned him. He has not shown any loyalty, he stays—“

He whipped out his wand and pointed it at her; her mouth was still moving, but no sound was coming out. She bowed her head in immediate repentance. ”SILENCE!” he shouted. “It is not for you to make such decisions! I gave him the test, and he passed it. If he were disloyal, I would know. Now, is that clear?” He waved the wand; she could talk again.

Her head was still bowed, her eyes down. “Yes, my lord.”

“Very well, Bella. You may leave.” She kissed his robes again, and withdrew. He walked over to the window, and looked at the partly cloudy morning sky. “They will follow me,” he said to himself. “They will follow me.”

Harry woke with a start. He knew instantly what had happened. That was not a random dream; he knew it came from Voldemort’s mind. The question was, was it deliberate, like Harry’s dreams of the Department of Mysteries last year, or accidental, like when he saw the snake attack Mr. Weasley. He knew what he had to

do. He looked at the clock; it was 7:30. Late enough, he decided. He quickly got into his robes and exited Gryffindor Tower.

He wondered whether Dumbledore would still be in his quarters or in his office, but he figured he should check the office first. When he reached the gargoyles, he quickly said 'lemon drop,' and was admitted. He heard voices coming from the inside of the office; Dumbledore must be talking with the past headmasters' portraits, he realized. He knocked on the door; the voices went silent. Dumbledore opened the door.

"Good morning, Harry! Do come in. I was just telling my predecessors..." He trailed off as he saw the expression on Harry's face. "What has happened?"

"I had a dream," he said, "one of the same kind as last year. The Voldemort kind."

Dumbledore pointed his wand at the office door, then again, and turned back to Harry. "Just a moment, Harry, if you would. I have just summoned Professors McGonagall and Snape. They should be here shortly."

Harry looked concerned. "Why are you sending for..." he wanted to say 'Snape,' but realized he shouldn't, so he trailed off instead. He assumed, though, that Dumbledore knew what he was about to say. Dumbledore looked at Harry seriously.

"Harry, I have told you more than once that I trust Severus Snape. I understand why you find that difficult to accept, but I ask you to do so, on my word. For security purposes, anything you can tell me, you can tell him."

"Sorry, Professor. I guess some things are hard to get used to. I'll try."

After Snape and McGonagall had arrived, Dumbledore said, "Harry was starting to tell me that he had a dream. It was the type of dream in which he sees from Voldemort's perspective. I stopped him, and sent for you. Harry, please continue."

"Excuse me, Headmaster," Snape interrupted, "but might it not be wiser to instruct Professor Potter not to tell anyone the dream, including us? We know that

his reception of it must be deliberate. You wanted him to study Occlumency to prevent events such as these dreams. Their information may harm us more than help. It may be to lead us into a trap, as he was led into one.”

Harry’s first thought was that it was quite a coincidence that Voldemort had vouched for Snape’s loyalty in the dream, and here was the real Snape, trying to prevent Harry from sharing the information. He could not know, of course. Could he?

“The danger is not in the information itself, Severus, but in how we use it or not.” He turned to Harry. “Please proceed.”

Harry related the dream, he was confident, virtually word for word; such dreams were always more vivid than normal dreams, and easier to remember. He tried not to look at Snape as he related the part about Voldemort being sure of his loyalty. He looked from one to the other; all had neutral expressions throughout, except that Harry thought he saw some eyebrows flicker when he mentioned the ‘Legion.’ He finished, and they exchanged concerned expressions.

“Harry, I must ask,” said Dumbledore gently, “did you practice Occlumency before going to sleep last night?”

Harry looked down, having wondered whether this question would be asked. “No, it was the first time in a month that I haven’t.” Harry was spared making an effort to look earnest; he knew Dumbledore would know if he was lying, and so didn’t have to worry about that. “I think it was all that stuff last night, the different surroundings... I just forgot.”

Dumbledore said, “Understandable. You will, of course, take this as a sign of how important it is to remember to practice Occlumency every night before going to sleep.” Harry nodded. To everyone, Dumbledore said, “We now must consider the possibilities. For example, it seems highly likely that Voldemort sent him the dream on purpose, but it is not impossible that it was spontaneous and unknown to Voldemort.”

“Headmaster, before you continue...” Harry knew what Snape was going to say, and he was right. “Should not Professor Potter be excused?”

“No, Severus. Harry’s access to information will be widened considerably. Last year, I gave him too little information, and we lost a man. I will not make that mistake again. I have realized that denying Harry information will probably harm more than it will help. He is integral to this fight. You know the prophecy; you know what it may come down to. He is young, but not inexperienced. He must have more information.”

“Headmaster, have you considered all elements of this? He is still immature, and highly impulsive, as we saw last year. He—“

”Yeah, I have the impulse to save a friend who I thought was being tortured,” Harry snapped. “Are you saying that’s a bad impulse?”

“You should have checked! This is exactly what I mean, Headmaster. Professor Potter,” Snape said sternly to Harry, “I know he was close to you. But in a movement like this, none of us can afford to act based on whatever feelings we have without considering what it might mean to the strategic arc of what we are trying to accomplish. You ran off to the Ministry without the first thought about that.” He glanced at Dumbledore. “I do not hope to dissuade the headmaster; when he makes a decision, he does not usually reverse it. But I am telling you, the time may come when you regret it. Would you walk into certain death if the headmaster asked you to?”

“Yes,” said Harry firmly, staring at Snape.

“Would you silently assent if he asked Miss Granger or Mr. Weasley to do so?” Harry bit his lip and said nothing. He knew what the answer was, and from the look on Snape’s face, he knew Snape knew. “Or,” Snape continued, “would you plead with him not to do so? Ask him to send you instead, when your survival may be necessary for our larger aims? We cannot afford that, Professor. You need to understand that. I will have little tolerance for arguments against actions because they might cause harm to this person or that person.”

Snape might have continued, but Harry cut him off. “So however many corpses it takes to beat Voldemort, it doesn’t matter? Individual lives mean nothing?”

“I think,” said McGonagall, “that Professor Snape meant that they do not mean nothing, but that they must be balanced against other considerations, sometimes in ways you would not easily understand.”

Making his voice more polite now that he was talking to McGonagall, Harry said, “I think I would understand if it was explained to me, at least. I’ve been through a lot.”

“Yes, you have, and that is one of the reasons you will be getting more information,” said Dumbledore, taking back the reins of the conversation. “But Professors Snape and McGonagall make a valid point; there are times when hard choices have to be made, and made with an emphasis on strategic ramifications. That is not easy for anyone to get used to, nor should it be. However,” he said, now addressing Snape and McGonagall, “Harry will not be in a decision-making role, so I refuse to condemn his unwillingness to send a friend to their death. But he has a role, and he will do better with more information. He will do his best, as we all do. He is deeply involved, not of his own choice. He is Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived. He cannot help but be at the crux of events. You must know that, Severus.”

Snape looked a little startled to be suddenly addressed by name. “You are no doubt correct, Headmaster,” Snape said, his tone leaving no doubt about how he felt about that fact. “I am simply concerned that he could inadvertently harm the movement.”

“I think, Severus, that Harry will find it within himself to do what he knows he must. Now, let us return to the question of this vision of Harry’s. Was it deliberate, or an accident? Opinions?”

“It must be deliberate,” Snape offered, still casting unpleasant glances at Harry, as if it was going to take some time for him to be used to Harry’s presence.

“I believe that it is highly unlikely that the Dark Lord would be so careless as to accidentally allow this to be seen.”

“But then the part that involves you doesn’t make any sense,” Harry pointed out. He was a bit hesitant to speak up in this company, but Dumbledore had as much as told him he should, and so he did. “Why should he want us to think that you’re loyal to him? How does that help him? In that case, if you are loyal to him, and this vision is deliberate, then he’s just exposed you, which is no good for him. So it would only make sense for him to do this if he suspected your loyalty. But if he suspected your loyalty...”

“I would be dead,” Snape confirmed.

“Not bad, Professor Potter,” said McGonagall approvingly. “You do catch on. But there can be wheels within wheels. It is possible that he considers Professor Snape a truly valuable operative, but is willing to sacrifice him to make us take more seriously what is contained in the other part of the vision. This business about the Legion.”

“Yes, excuse me,” Harry said embarrassedly, “but would you explain what this Legion is?”

“Certainly,” said Dumbledore. “It is really no more than a legend. The name ‘Legion of the Dead’ refers to the notion that there are, in the spiritual realm, a number of souls, or spirits, who are mired in darkness and have not moved on to whatever is next. It is said to have been prophesied that these spirits, which are in a kind of purgatory, would unite under a leader who was able to lead them out of their current state. Led back into the physical world, they would be put to evil uses by their liberator. They would not be physical as such, but could affect physical things. They would be, in a sense, like poltergeists. Any number of such beings could wreak great havoc. Voldemort either thinks he can retrieve and control them, or wants us to think he can.” He paused. “Your thoughts, Severus?”

Snape considered. “It is not inconceivable that he would make such an attempt. His focus is on gathering forces at this time. But I still feel that this is

almost certainly not genuine. I believe that the references to the Legion are little more than a distraction, and the discussion about me intended to make you uncertain. He feels that you will not condemn me without proof, so my usefulness may continue, but he will want you to worry about those close to you having divided loyalties. He may try to discover from me whether your behavior has changed; for example, if you seemed to stop trusting me, he could have me give you counsel opposite to what he truly desired you to do.”

“In which case,” McGonagall continued, “the question is, should we pretend we never heard what Harry was sent? Or should we pretend to have believed it, and so have security at the site increased, and have Professor Snape tell Voldemort that we are distancing ourselves from him?”

Harry had a thought. “Won’t he suspect us if we act like we believe him? I mean, he’s already deceived me once with false visions. Why should he think it would work again? Hmm... But then again, why send the vision at all if he doesn’t think we might believe it?” He looked pensive.

McGonagall regarded Harry sympathetically. “You can think yourself into knots with this sort of thing,” she said. She turned to Dumbledore and said, “I have to agree with Professor Snape; it is difficult to see this as genuine.”

Dumbledore said, “I would be inclined to agree, but there is another factor to consider. It was recently brought to my attention that there were a few scattered abductions worldwide involving Seers, especially ones renowned for the spiritual nature of their Sight. Six such Seers, from four continents, suddenly disappeared within a week of each other, over a month ago. Professor Trelawney came to me expressing concern that she might be targeted.” Harry saw McGonagall roll her eyes. Dumbledore continued, “In any case, this information supports the thought that the vision is genuine. Or, he is putting considerable effort into making us think it is.”

“I do not doubt that he would do such a thing,” said Snape. “He might wish us to worry about his intentions even if his message was not delivered by Professor

Potter. I believe we can conclude nothing from this information, one way or the other.”

“Again, I agree,” said McGonagall. “We should keep in mind that it is not impossible that it could be genuine, but we should take no action, act as if Professor Potter never relayed this to us.”

“Very well, that is what we shall do, then,” agreed Dumbledore. “I believe, then, that we are finished here for now.”

Harry thought of a question. “Professor,” he asked, looking at McGonagall, “you mentioned ‘security at the site.’ Which site did you mean?”

“I meant, the site where Voldemort would have to go if he were to try to summon the Legion of the Dead. The legend says that the only place from which the Legion can be summoned is the Veil of Mystery.”

Harry went to the Great Hall to have breakfast, his mind reeling with all he had heard. There seemed to be five different ways of looking at it from each side. He was beginning to appreciate the value of the Occlumency lessons even more; who knew how many similar visions he had been spared? He knew he would not forget to practice Occlumency before bed again for a long time.

Eating and thinking, he suddenly realized that there had been no conversation regarding the part of his vision which predicted an escape for Lucius Malfoy and his fellow Death Eaters who were apprehended in the Department of Mysteries. Were they going to prepare for that?, Harry wondered. Would they put extra security around the prisoners, or not do so as part of pretending they’d never heard about Harry’s vision?

Maybe Snape had been right, his uncertain side suggested. Maybe he didn’t have enough experience to take part in those meetings. He had certainly felt in over his head. But then he remembered that Dumbledore didn’t need him to make decisions, or even to necessarily offer input, but simply to be informed of what was going on. If that was all he needed to do, Harry realized, he could probably do it.

Harry spent the rest of the morning wandering around outdoors and preparing in more detail for the first week of lessons. He was still more worried about the disciplinary aspect of teaching than he was about the educational part of it. There was not much more he could do about that, however, than wait for the situation to occur.

The staff meeting started at 1:00, and lasted three hours. Harry had worried about it a bit, but need not have, as it hardly involved him at all. Harry only spoke for a short time; he gave the other teachers a brief sketch of how he was going to approach his classes. Professor Flitwick asked how he was going to handle detentions, given his schedule; Harry explained that Professor McGonagall had agreed to supervise any detentions he handed out.

Flitwick smiled. "That's very nice. Minerva, would you be a dear and supervise my detentions as well?" There was light laughter around the room.

"Certainly, if you wish to be a student and take the same course load as Professor Potter, I will be happy to supervise your detentions." There was more laughter.

"Alas, I'm not sure that would be worth it," said Flitwick.

"Speaking of detentions," said Snape, in a polite yet threatening manner, "if I hear, Professor Potter, that you are handing out unusually high numbers of detentions to students belonging to Slytherin House..."

Harry had already decided to push back if Snape pushed him. "...then it'll mean that Slytherins are deliberately testing my authority, and so I'll talk to you, and ask you to help bring them in line." Snape looked at Harry as if he couldn't quite believe what he'd heard; the other teachers exchanged glances and raised eyebrows. "I'll be sure," he continued, "to follow Professor McGonagall's example, and discipline students no matter which House they belong to."

Snape had not missed the implied insult. "Are you suggesting—"

"Would you like to see the statistics, Professor Snape?" McGonagall cut him off, irritated. "For five years running, you have the highest differential of all

teachers between points awarded and taken from your own house versus other houses. As for detentions, only..." she riffled through a stack of parchment, then read one for a few seconds, "5% of the total time you handed out was to Slytherins, compared with 18% for Hufflepuffs, 21% for Ravenclaws, and 56% for Gryffindors".

"Students of my house know better than to misbehave around me," Snape said acidly. Harry couldn't help himself; he audibly scoffed.

Snape glared at Harry. "You have a comment, Professor Potter?" The sneer surrounding the word 'Professor' was extremely clear.

"Yes, I do." Harry glared back; this was something he'd wanted to say for a long time. "Slytherins know better than to be disrespectful of you, I'm sure. But when their misbehavior is harassing other students, you manage not to notice. It's been like this in Potions for five years. A Slytherin, usually Malfoy, throws stuff at a Gryffindor. You never notice that, but if a Gryffindor retaliates, you notice immediately. If a Slytherin complains of being harassed, you take action; if a Gryffindor does you do nothing. Last year, a Slytherin hexed a Gryffindor from behind in the library, over a dozen witnesses saw it, and you did nothing. I could go on."

"I'm sure the staff weeps bitter tears at the cruel mistreatment your house has suffered," said Snape, bathing every word in unnecessary layers of sarcasm.

"I'm not asking them to, and you know it," said Harry, now on a roll. He thought about stopping to measure his next words, but instead, propelled by emotion, plunged forward. "I'm just making a point. I know what you do is deliberate. Slytherins are chosen for their ambition, as the Sorting Hat says every year. You're teaching them that if they keep on good terms with friends in high places, they can get away with more than others can, which I suppose is how it is in real life. What I'm saying is, you have a lot of nerve warning me not to do something you do yourself. I know you're just trying to put me on the defensive, to

make me not want to give Slytherins detentions, even if they deserve it. Well, it won't work." Harry continued to glare at Snape defiantly.

"Well, let us move on from this topic," said Dumbledore, who had said nothing for the past several minutes, staying out of the dispute. "Professor Potter has already been advised regarding handing out detentions; I will let him know if he missteps. Professor Snape, I would like to see those statistics change for the better next year. Now, what is next?"

Harry had little to say for the rest of the meeting. Snape continued to shoot him poisonous glares, which he met with eye contact every time. He remembered what Dumbledore had said the night before, but he felt that the situation was different. He knew he had reacted emotionally, but he hadn't lost his temper, and felt he had made a good point. Even if I can manage to overlook all he's done to me in the past, I'm not going to let him push me around, Harry thought.

The feast/social event for the teachers that evening was more enjoyable than Harry had thought it would be, largely because Snape was away "on an urgent matter," the teachers were told. Their lack of a negative reaction suggested to Harry that Snape was no more popular in the staff room than he was among non-Slytherin students. Either that, or they were used to his being unsociable.

Harry sat between Professor Dumbledore and Professor Smith, who he had seen numerous times around the school but had never formally met. Professor Smith taught Muggle Studies, and was very popular with the female students; he was tall, movie-star handsome, and was friendly and affable. He asked Harry about his Muggle experiences, and shook his head sadly at Harry's answers. "There'd be a lot more people who thought the way your aunt and uncle do, I'm afraid to say, if they knew about wizards. Another good reason not to make the presence of wizards known."

Intrigued by Smith's avoidance of the phrase 'our presence,' Harry asked, "Are you Muggle-born?"

Smith smiled. “Not only Muggle-born, but non-magical. I married a witch in my early twenties, which was when I found out about magic. I learned all I could about the wizarding world, it was fascinating. I met Professor Dumbledore about ten years ago and had an excellent chat with him, and when the Muggle Studies position opened up six years ago, he thought of me. I understand I’m the first Muggle to teach at Hogwarts for well over a century.”

“I guess I never thought of taking your class,” Harry admitted, “because I grew up with Muggles, and not very nice ones at that. I guess Muggles were something I wanted to get away from.”

“I can understand that,” said Smith. “But I’m sure you know that most Muggles are nowhere near like your relatives.”

“Funny, I was telling my cousin the same thing in reverse, after the first wizard he ever talked to was Malfoy.”

Smith’s face darkened. “Ah, yes. I heard about that. As well you should tell your cousin that. Malfoy and people like him are why my class is doing poorly.”

“How do you mean, ‘doing poorly?’” Harry wondered.

“I mean, enrollment is down,” Smith said. “It’s lower than any other elective class, even Arithmancy and Study of Ancient Runes, which are much harder. In my six years at Hogwarts, not a single Slytherin has ever taken my class.”

“Isn’t that just as well, since all the people who think Muggles are scum get put into Slytherin?”

“I can’t believe every last one thinks that,” Smith argued. “There must be some who are interested. They just fear they’ll be ridiculed if they do. That’s what people like Malfoy do.”

Harry continued talking to him about Muggles for a while, and after dinner was finished, everyone got up and wandered around chatting, renewing ties to friends and colleagues they hadn’t seen for a while. A bit like the Hogwarts Express for teachers, Harry thought. Harry did not have to try to circulate; every professor there approached him at some point to chat, and he found almost all, given that

Snape was absent, to be quite friendly. The only exception was Trelawney, who treated him with a certain cool formality; Harry wondered if he'd snickered too loudly and too often in her class for her to like him. Professor Flitwick came by and cheerfully discussed Harry's O.W.L. result and test, with which he was very pleased. He, and later Professor Sprout, thanked Harry for standing up to Snape as he did. Most everyone wished him luck and offered support. Harry was amazed at how nice they were being to him; he had expected at least a few besides Snape to be resentful of a sixteen-year-old teacher. But it seemed this was not the case. Harry thought it was likely that this was a result of their confidence in Dumbledore, but then he remembered that Dumbledore had hired Quirrell and Lockhart, so some of it had to be regard for him personally.

Near the end of the evening, Dumbledore asked for everyone's attention. Harry could have sworn he heard the sound of a spoon striking a wine glass, but Dumbledore was holding neither. The group quieted down quickly.

"My friends, a word, if I may... it is so very good to see you all again. You look happy and well. I am very glad to see comfort and good cheer in this room again." Harry recognized the allusion to Dolores Umbridge's presence; there was a small cheer. "And as we do every year... or at least recently, it has been every year...we ask the newest member of the staff to make a small speech and a toast. Professor Potter, if you would step forward?"

There was applause from the teachers, as Harry stood rooted to the spot in surprise until McGonagall put her hand on his shoulder and guided him forward. He felt totally at a loss. A toast? He thought of his Occlumency training. Clear your mind, he thought. It seemed to work; he felt less nervous very quickly. As the applause died down, Harry stage-whispered to Dumbledore, loudly enough for all to hear, "You could have warned me." This was greeted by chuckling, and Dumbledore's reply of, "Oh, no, it must be spontaneous."

Harry looked out and saw nothing but friendly faces, and it warmed his heart. "I, uh... I was pretty nervous, you know, about teaching this year, and the

meetings today, and... well, anything to do with this job, come to think of it..." Most teachers laughed. "But everyone in this room has been great. I really appreciate your support. Also," he continued, getting less nervous as he talked, "I want to thank Professor Dumbledore for his confidence in me." Dumbledore nodded in Harry's direction. "And for a toast..." He thought for a few seconds, then said, "Here's hoping for an uneventful year."

There was some laughter, and everyone held up their goblets—except Hagrid, who had to lower his—and repeated, "An uneventful year!"

As he drank, Harry thought, just once, just once would be nice.

CHAPTER 8

THE DEFENSE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS TEACHER

At 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, Harry was sitting in a comfortable chair in a room behind the teachers' table at the back of the Great Hall. Professor Dumbledore had asked Harry to meet him there before the feast. Having nothing to do, he decided to practice Occlumency. He closed his eyes, and felt his mind start to calm down. He wasn't sure how long he'd been at it when a voice said, "You do seem to be coming along with that."

"Thanks to you," said Harry. "Was there something you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Yes, it is about the feast and the order of events. As you recall, the Sorting is first, then I usually say a few words before we eat. All the teachers are seated at the staff table before the students come in. It has occurred to me that it may not be desirable to have you at the table at that time. Your presence would lead to much distraction; I would like everyone to be paying attention to the Sorting."

"Sure, no problem," Harry agreed. "I've been stared at enough for a lifetime as it is. So, how will we do it, then?"

"After the Sorting, I will say a few words, then tell them that I would like to introduce the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher to them. That is when you will walk up. I will not say your name until they can see you."

"You probably don't even need to," Harry pointed out. "Unfortunately, it seems I'm one of those people who needs no introduction." He chuckled wryly at his own joke.

“Yes, indeed,” agreed Dumbledore. “It is just for form’s sake, of course. I will then ask you to say a few words. You will say whatever you wish, then I will call for the feast to begin. Is that acceptable?”

“Of course, Professor. I don’t mind saying something, but there will probably be disruptions from the Slytherins. If there are, I’d like to know how you’d like me to handle it.”

“Why, in whatever way you choose,” Dumbledore said, in a tone suggesting he was surprised that any other way could be contemplated. “I will send in the dog when I am ready to announce you. You may relax here until then.”

Harry frowned, puzzled. “The dog? What dog?”

“Oh, you have never seen it... it is a little spell I invented a while back. It is simple, but amusing and useful. I summon a dog; it is gold and shines brightly when you first see it. It is something I send to people when I wish to summon them. When you see the dog, you follow it. As it gets closer to its destination, its brightness fades, and it fades away completely when you have reached the desired spot.”

“That sounds neat, I’ll be looking forward to seeing that.”

“Very good. Oh, and Harry, I wonder if you would oblige me by remaining at the teachers’ table for the duration of the meal. I know that you would prefer to eat with your friends, but I would like your status as a teacher to be emphasized at this time.”

“Yes, I understand, that makes sense,” Harry agreed.

“Good, I will see you in a while, then.” Dumbledore departed.

Harry sank down into the chair, seeing how comfortable he could get. Speaking in front of hundreds of students who would be shocked to see him... what was he going to say? He spent the next thirty minutes thinking of what he would say, trying different ideas, imagining how the Slytherins might react. Finally, he decided that he was thinking too much, and it was time to clear his mind again. He was having some success beating down his nerves when he was distracted by

something bright in the room. He looked over and saw a bright golden dog, a little over a foot tall. It was very friendly; it jumped onto Harry's lap and nuzzled him in the chest before jumping off and looking back at him, indicating that he should follow. Harry was surprised that the dog was substantial; he had expected it to be only an image. He got up and followed it.

He was behind the teachers' table and still out of sight when he heard Dumbledore saying, "And now, I have the pleasure of presenting our new Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor..."

Here goes nothing, Harry thought. He stepped up to the teachers' table, next to Dumbledore, who finished his sentence with, "... Professor Harry Potter!"

Harry took the podium. For the first second or two, the teachers applauded, but from the audience there was silence. Then a few Gryffindors started cheering; Harry could see Ginny, Ron, Hermione and Neville. Then there was a loud "WHAT??" from the Slytherin table, and naturally, it had come from Draco Malfoy. That prompted a low rumble of laughter, a kind of releasing of tension. Harry laughed as well, but it was partly at the look on Malfoy's face. Malfoy obviously couldn't believe it. Harry said, "Actually, I don't blame you; when Professor Dumbledore asked me to accept this position, I, you know, had to ask him to repeat it three times to make sure I understood him right." This got a moderate laugh. Harry started feeling more confident. These are just my fellow students, he told himself. I can do this.

"Most of you know that I led a group last year that was trying to practice Defense Against the Dark Arts, since it wasn't being taught to us. It was a great group and a great experience." He saw the two Hufflepuff prefects, Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott, look at him and nod. He nodded back. "I assume that gave Professor Dumbledore the idea to have me teach this class."

Harry took a slight pause and was going to continue when Malfoy spoke up again. It wasn't clear to Harry if Malfoy was talking to himself, another Slytherin, or

Harry himself, but he heard Malfoy loudly say, “No way! If he’s teaching here, then I’m leaving!” There was a dead silence following that.

I can’t let that go unanswered, Harry thought. A comeback thankfully popped into his head, and after the silence had stretched to five seconds, Harry looked at Malfoy and said, “You know, Malfoy, that’s a good plan. I totally support it.” That got a fair bit of laughter. Harry continued, “In fact, I think you’ll find there’s a lot of support for that plan of yours.” This got an even bigger laugh, and a cheer started and grew quickly. The cheer was clearly being made by those who agreed with Harry, and it grew to include a substantial majority of Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Gryffindor houses. Only the Slytherin table was silent. Malfoy looked as furious as Harry had ever seen him, and that was saying something.

Harry put up his hands to suggest that the cheers should cease; they did after a few more seconds. “As I was saying,” he continued, and even that got a small laugh, “I don’t claim to have big qualifications. What I learned from the group last year was that if you really want to improve, and you really try hard, you can.”

He was interrupted by a Slytherin seventh year who shouted, “Even Longbottom?” This got a laugh from some of the Slytherin table. Harry saw Neville embarrassed and angry.

Harry laughed derisively. “Especially Neville! I don’t think he got an Outstanding Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. by accident. Maybe you want to give it a try, knowing what you’re talking about before you open your mouth.” There was more laughter and applause. A look at the Gryffindor table showed Ron, Hermione, and Ginny howling with laughter, and a still-embarrassed Neville looking very pleased.

“Now, please, let me wrap this up, I know you all want to get to your food, and I do, too,” Harry said. He felt he had done well with the Slytherins who had heckled him, but didn’t want to push his luck. “I was saying, anyone can improve, I’m sure of that. I see my job just as helping people do that. So, your attitude in classes will be very important. Also, just so everyone knows, I’ll be teaching only the

first through fifth years. Since I'm only a sixth year myself, it would be hard for me to teach the N.E.W.T. class." Harry glanced over at Dumbledore with a 'can I tell them?' expression. Dumbledore nodded.

"Teaching the N.E.W.T. classes... and this is so cool... will be Professor Dumbledore himself." It did not take long for a new round of applause to develop, this one led by the sixth and seventh years of Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Gryffindor, and soon grew to include most of those houses, as well as half of Slytherin. Harry joined in the applause, looking at Dumbledore, and said, "It looks like I speak for most all of the sixth and seventh years when I say thank you, Professor, for doing this." Dumbledore inclined his head, to Harry and then to the students. Turning back to the students, Harry said, "Thanks for your support, and I'll be seeing most of you in class." He stepped away from the podium to widespread applause from all tables except, of course, Slytherin. Relief swept over him; he had done far better than he had expected. He wondered whether it was because he had spent the time before coming out trying to calm his mind rather than being nervous, as he knew he would have without Dumbledore's guidance.

He looked at Dumbledore again; he was not sure where he was supposed to sit. Dumbledore gestured him to a spot between himself and McGonagall, who got up as Harry was sitting down. Harry was surprised; he thought Dumbledore had planned to take back the podium after he was done.

McGonagall surveyed the students with one of her more severe expressions. "I had not planned to speak, but there is something I must make clear. Today is the first time in many years there have been disrespectful outbursts from the students during a welcoming speech." She cast particularly stern glances at Malfoy and the other Slytherin offender. "On this occasion, I will impose no punishment, as Professor Potter has already done so, in a fashion." She glanced at him as much of the crowd laughed for a second, then quickly stopped, as if fearing her disapproval. "But I must warn you, further expressions of disrespect will not be tolerated, no less with Professor Potter than with any other professor. He will be

both taking classes and teaching them, but he has all the rights and privileges of a Hogwarts teacher, including the right to take points from offenders' houses and give detentions. Professor Dumbledore and I have urged him not to be shy about using that power." That got scattered laughter across the three pro-Harry tables. "As Professor Potter is also a student, he will not have time to supervise detentions; I will be overseeing any detentions he hands out. And I assure you..." She paused, surveying all the house tables, lingering slightly on Slytherin, "...you want to avoid that. I believe there are plenty of unpleasant tasks that Mr. Filch needs done. Professor Dumbledore?"

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall," Dumbledore said, stepping back to the podium. "And now the time has come to fill our stomachs. Bon appetit!" Food suddenly appeared on everyone's plates and tables. Conversation in the hall rose to an immediate high volume, despite the presence of the food, and Harry was sure he knew what most of them were talking about. I should be used to that by now, he thought. At least he seemed to have the support of a strong majority. It was, he felt, as much as he could have hoped for.

After taking a bite of her food, McGonagall leaned over to Harry and said, "You handled that very well, Professor."

After he finished the mouthful of food he was working on, Harry replied, "I would really rather have avoided it, though. I just didn't feel like I could ignore it."

"Most professors could have ignored it, Harry, but that was a luxury you did not have. Most professors already have their respect; no students question the right of any adult to be a professor. You, however, must earn their respect, and you went a long way toward doing so tonight. I am quite sure that it will not be long until no one is questioning whether you should have been made a professor."

"No one except the Slytherins, you mean," said Harry, frowning.

"I cannot imagine that that should matter to you in the slightest."

She had a good point. “Yes, that’s true,” he admitted. “I don’t care what they think, really, it’s just going to be a pain to have to keep them in line.”

“If you give them detentions, Professor, I assure you it will be more painful for them than it will be for you,” she said with a tiny smile. Harry grinned. It felt very good to have both her and Dumbledore on his side.

Starting about halfway through the meal, students started coming up to the teachers’ table to talk to Harry. McGonagall, knowing this would happen, had told Harry that such visits should be kept to a couple of minutes or less, lest a crowd of students gather around the teachers’ table. First to come were Ron and Hermione.

“Harry! You were terrific!” enthused Hermione.

“Malfoy looked like he was going to go up in smoke!” gloated Ron.

Harry grinned happily. He knew he would have their support, but that didn’t make it any less appreciated. “Thanks,” he said. “I was really nervous at first.”

“You didn’t show it,” said Hermione. “And that was sweet, what you did for Neville. I don’t know if he was more embarrassed by the Slytherin’s insult, or your praise.”

“Harry, guess what?” exclaimed Ron. “McGonagall sent me an owl yesterday to tell me, I’ve been made Quidditch captain!” His face was glowing with pleasure.

“Excellent! Well done!” said Harry happily.

Ron beamed. “I’m glad you’re happy about it. Hermione told me you would be, but I was worried... after all, you’ve been on the team for five years...”

Harry shook his head. “That’s not what should decide that. You’ll be a better captain than I would have been. You know Quidditch backward and forward, you’ll be great at coming up with moves and game plans. I’d have been terrible. We’ll be keeping that Cup this year, I can feel it.”

“I should hope so,” said McGonagall, who had disengaged herself from her conversation with Professor Vector, who was on her other side. “Its presence in

Gryffindor is a luxury that I have become used to. Now, you two, please move along back to your table. You will have plenty of time to talk to Professor Potter in the common room after the feast.”

Ron and Hermione both smiled at her humorous intent in using his title, and nodded. “See you later, Harry!” they said as they walked away.

A minute later, Ernie and Hannah came by. “Harry, that was great,” said Ernie. “You really showed him who was boss.”

“It’d be nice if he remembers, but I don’t think he will... I wouldn’t bet against a full-scale Slytherin revolt in my classes,” said Harry.

“With Professor McGonagall there to supervise detentions? I don’t think so. Of course, we’ll be talking to our house later, about you and the D.A. You won’t have any problems from Hufflepuffs, that’s for sure.”

“And I’m sure the Ravenclaws will be doing the same thing,” added Hannah.

“And how about that, about Dumbledore!” said Ernie. “Can you believe it?”

“Incredible,” said Hannah.

“Absolutely, we’re just lucky to be N.E.W.T. students at this time. When I told Fred and George Weasley about this, they both wanted to come back.” Hannah and Ernie laughed.

“Why, I do believe that my ears are burning,” smiled Dumbledore, who had just ceased his conversation with Flitwick on his other side.

“I think Madam Pomfrey can help you with that, sir,” said Hannah, with the smallest of smiles. Harry was surprised; he didn’t know she had enough of a sense of humor to make a joke to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore laughed. “I daresay she could,” he agreed. “I appreciate your enthusiasm, and I look forward to seeing you in class.”

They thanked Dumbledore, said “See you later” to Harry, and went back to their table. Dumbledore said to Harry, “That didn’t go so badly, did it?”

“No, it didn’t,” Harry agreed. “I mean, the Slytherins... that could have been a lot worse.”

“I mean the others, Harry. Do not focus on what could have gone better, but focus on what you have, what you’ve achieved. You heard the support you have out there. And it is not because you are the Boy Who Lived; it is what you have done at this school. Always keep that in mind.”

Harry would have, but the thought was knocked out of his mind by what he saw when he happened to glance up. Approaching them was Marietta Edgecombe; her friend Cho Chang was waiting for her about ten feet away.

She looked up at Harry and Dumbledore nervously. Harry couldn’t avoid checking to make sure that all of Hermione’s jinx was gone from her face; it seemed to be. She said, “I wanted to say, to, well, both of you that I’m sorry about what I did last year. I was scared about what might happen to my mum if I was found out. But I shouldn’t have done it. I’m really sorry.”

She seemed sincere enough to Harry, but something in him was unyielding in not wanting to accept her apology, though he knew he should. Dumbledore spared him further thought by saying, “Of course, Marietta. We understand that under stress we all sometimes make mistakes, and we know you would not be here if you were not sincere.” He glanced at Harry meaningfully.

“Yes, absolutely,” Harry agreed, more wanting to believe it than actually doing so. He found something he could say honestly. “I know it’s hard to come over here like this.”

“I should never have joined the group in the first place,” she said, sounding distraught. “I didn’t want to, because of my mum, but Cho talked me into it. Still... I learned a lot, and you were a good teacher. I hope you do well with your classes.”

Harry was quite surprised. “Thanks... I appreciate it,” was all he could think of to say.

To Dumbledore, she said, “I’m really looking forward to your classes, Professor.” Dumbledore politely inclined his head. Marietta rejoined Cho and they went back to their seats.

Harry turned to Dumbledore. “I know that you’re going to say I should have forgiven her. Part of me knows I should, but part of me doesn’t want to because it’s still upset about what she did. She betrayed us all, and got you driven out of the school. How do we know that she isn’t just apologizing because you and I are in favor at the Ministry again? How can she be trusted?”

“Trust must be earned, while forgiveness can be given. We need not trust her to forgive her. And yes, it is not impossible that her apology could be motivated as you say. My practice is to hope for the best, but know that the worst could happen as well. She might well have learned from her experience. She might truly be trustworthy, now or in the future. In the end, you must rely on your intuition, which is different from your emotions, which rule your reaction now. Your intuition is the best decision-maker you have, and I have known you to use it unerringly in situations where your emotions were not engaged.”

That reminded Harry of another situation regarding judgment and trust. After checking to make sure that Snape was nowhere in hearing range, he asked. “Professor... please don’t take this as a criticism, I’m only asking because I’d like to know... when you asked Professor Snape to teach me Occlumency, were you listening to your intuition?”

Dumbledore smiled sadly. “My first wish would be to avoid the question entirely, to be honest. But, as with Umbridge, you suffered for my mistakes, and so you deserve an answer. No, I fear I did not listen to my intuition. I listened more to my heart. I wanted to believe that he could set aside a grudge in the service of an important task. As it was, he ended up yielding to the temptation to try to further both at the same time. I do not recall that my intuition strongly said otherwise, but I do not believe I tried so hard to access it. So, that was a case where I hoped for the best but it did not happen. When you listen to your heart, that can happen. But I still believe that it is better to be too hopeful than to be too pessimistic.”

Harry thought about that. He found it hard to be hopeful in some cases, but he had to admit that he didn’t have much experience with this sort of thing. He was

still inclined to trust Dumbledore, even though Dumbledore had admitted more than one mistake. Thinking about that gave Harry another thought.

“Professor, you’ve admitted mistakes to me three times in the past three months. I’m pretty sure that no one else has done that, once, in my entire life. I’m not sure I’d want to. How do you do it so easily?”

“By realizing that if you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself; if you do not admit mistakes to those who were affected by them, you end up not admitting them to yourself. Notice here again the concept of ‘what we do to others, we do to ourselves.’ If we do not admit our mistakes to ourselves, we cease to notice that we are making them. And if we cease to notice that we are making them, we can go terribly wrong, causing pain to ourselves and others. We must always be honest with ourselves, and part of that is being honest with those close to us. Admitting mistakes is a part of that as well.”

Harry looked pensive, then said, “Professor, I want to thank you for doing that. I mean, I didn’t really blame you specifically anyway, but it kind of makes me feel better that you did.”

“I think it is because you know that if you did blame me, I would admit it, and then you would feel better. It also means I respect you enough to tell you. However you would like others to act towards you, act towards them.”

“The Golden Rule,” Harry mused.

“Yes, well...” Dumbledore humorously shrugged as if mildly embarrassed, “...not everything I say is original. It is still true, however.”

For the next half hour, Harry switched between talking to Dumbledore and McGonagall. He enjoyed doing both; he found to his surprise that McGonagall was somewhat relaxed and friendly to him, especially compared to what he thought of as her normal character. It occurred to him for the first time that perhaps how she was acting with him now was in fact her normal character, and that how she came across to the students was not who she really was.

As he finished telling Harry a story concerning a welcoming feast almost fifty years ago, Dumbledore said, “I notice people finishing, so I will be saying a few more words. After I finish, you will be free to head back to Gryffindor Tower. Excuse me, please.”

Dumbledore stood up and moved to the podium. “Excuse me for interrupting your conversations. I notice that it is getting late, and I do not want you heading off before I mention a few pieces of school business.

“I believe that all four Quidditch teams have openings this year; there will be tryouts within the first two weeks of classes. Your house bulletin boards or your house’s prefects will have more information. Also, the first Hogsmeade weekend will take place on the last weekend of October, so third years, get your permission slips to your Head of House.

“One final piece of business. Those of you who were here last year will recall that a number of ‘Educational Decrees’ were issued, which regulated various aspects of life at Hogwarts. I would like to make sure everyone knows that those decrees have been rescinded and are no longer in force.” This was met with a resounding cheer.

“Thank you. Prefects, will you please show the first years back to their houses?”

He stepped down as Harry saw Ron and Hermione gather up the first years to take them back to Gryffindor. He was getting up to leave when he saw McGonagall approach him.

“Professor Potter, I’m glad I found you before you left. The students get these at breakfast, but I thought it would be better for you to have yours now.” She handed him a schedule, and waited a moment to see if he had any questions.

Harry’s first reaction was that it was a very neat, organized schedule. Then he realized why; unlike most days before when he had had different classes at different times every day, on this schedule, all classes started and ended at the same time. The mornings were when he would teach; he would study in the afternoons.

The schedule called for him to teach two double classes each morning to a different year's students every day. He saw that his Monday schedule was: 8:00-9:50 Gryffindor/Slytherin year one, then 10:00-11:50 Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw year one. On Tuesday it was the same thing except with second years, and so on until he was teaching fifth years on Friday. His afternoons were equally neatly done; he was taking five classes, and every one of them was a once-a-week double class. All started at 2:00, with one each day: Potions with Snape on Monday, Transfigurations with McGonagall on Tuesday, Charms with Flitwick on Wednesday, Care of Magical Creatures with Hagrid on Thursday, and Defense Against the Dark Arts with Dumbledore on Friday. Harry noted with pleasure that Potions took place on Monday, where it would be gotten out of the way for the week, and Defense Against the Dark Arts would be on Friday, leaving him with a good feeling before the weekend. It looked like exactly the schedule he would have chosen if he could. He noted with further pleasure that he had no classes as a student with Slytherins; all of his classes were with Hufflepuffs or Ravenclaws. It seemed too good to be true; he looked up at McGonagall.

“Is something wrong with your schedule, Professor?” He thought she sounded amused, but he could never tell with her.

“It's perfect, which is why I'm surprised. How did it happen that all my classes line up at 2:00, one each day? That's an amazing coincidence,” Harry pointed out.

Now he was sure she looked amused. “Well, I'm pleased that your native intelligence was sufficient to notice. It is not a coincidence at all, as you may have guessed. One of my responsibilities as Deputy Headmistress is supervising the assembling of the year's schedule. It is a difficult task, not to mention tedious. It was made much more difficult by the addition of a teacher who is also a student. I dealt with the situation by creating your schedule first; all others were created around that. So, there was no reason not to make yours, as you say, perfect. Your lessons will be finished by 4:00, so your evenings will be free for study and

Quidditch, while my evenings will no doubt be laden with supervising dozens of your detentions.” Harry looked up in surprise and smiled; he could not recall ever having heard her make a joke of any sort to him before. I bet she makes them more with Dumbledore or others, he thought.

“Well, let’s hope not,” he said. “Let’s see how it goes. As Professor Dumbledore says, let’s hope for the best.”

She raised her eyebrows a bit. “Well, good... I’m pleased to see that he’s rubbing off on you,” she said. “Good night, Professor Potter.” She walked off towards the teachers’ quarters.

Most of the students had filed out by now. Harry headed off to Gryffindor Tower, McGonagall’s words echoing in his head. “He’s rubbing off on you...” Harry realized what a great opportunity this year was; as a teacher, he would have more access to Dumbledore, and as a student, he would take a very important class from him. Dumbledore was also giving Harry a lot of advice, and Harry knew he could profit by understanding Dumbledore better, understanding how he was the way he was. The conversation about admitting mistakes had been interesting; it seemed that Dumbledore gained strength by admitting weakness. Harry hoped he would understand these things at some point.

He turned a corner and saw the portrait of the Fat Lady. Harry realized with a start that he didn’t know the password, and it looked as though everyone might already be inside. However, just at that moment, Ron climbed out of the portrait hole.

“Ah, there you are,” said Ron. “I was wondering, you didn’t come back...”

“McGonagall was giving me my schedule.” He showed it to Ron.

“Wow, never seen one like this. As for your afternoons, I’ve got everything you’ve got, except Potions. Won’t miss that. Hey, you’ve got no classes with Slytherins! As a student, that is. How’d that happen?”

“I forgot to ask her, but I’d bet it’s deliberate. After the incident on my birthday, I think they’re trying to keep me and Malfoy apart. A real tragedy, that.”

“Be brave, I know you’ll get through it somehow,” Ron answered in the same vein. “Maybe you’ll run into him in the hallways, find any old reason, and bang, he’s in with McGonagall.”

Harry shook his head. “Sounds good, but... if I have to explain to McGonagall why I did it, I’m going to want to give her a better reason than “I didn’t like the way he was looking at me.”

Ron laughed. “Knowing Malfoy, just stand near him for ten seconds, he’ll give you a really valid reason.”

“That’s true. Oh, by the way, what’s the password?”

“Pepperoni pizza.”

“You’re kidding,” said Harry.

“It’s all food this year. Don’t ask me why. Hermione’s idea. I know better than to ask.” Harry understood that Ron wanted to avoid getting bogged down in explanations he didn’t care about.

“Hey, speaking of Hermione, how are you on this Astronomy thing?”

Ron glanced around to make sure no one was listening. “Just between you and me, I’m not big on it. I got my ‘Acceptable’ pass, that’s good enough for me. I could do without this.”

“But as far as Hermione’s concerned?” Harry asked, glancing around to make sure she didn’t suddenly appear.

“Let’s go, full steam ahead, 100% behind her. I can’t wait to raise my Acceptable to an Outstanding. She was so thrilled. “That’s the spirit, Ron!””

“I can’t believe she believed you, it’s so unlike you. She must be really bent out of shape on this, to not see what you were doing. This is so important to her.”

“Which is why I’m 100% behind her. So to speak. Yeah, you should have heard her on the train. As soon as Malfoy and Parkinson leave the compartment, she starts in on it. Ernie was totally with her; he got Exceeds Expectations too, and by the time they’re done going on about it it’s the crime of the century, with historic

and worldwide moral implications, you get the idea. Like me, Hannah didn't care, but unlike me, she was free to say so. But I'm totally behind her, you understand."

"Of course," Harry agreed. "Just don't forget you are."

"Shall we?" Ron asked, pointing back to the portrait.

Harry nodded. "Pepperoni pizza!" The portrait swung aside, and Ron climbed in, followed by Harry. Harry was greeted by a loud burst of cheers, people clapping him on the back, and people talking to him.

"A teacher! In our common room!"

"How did it happen?"

"Looking forward to your class!"

"You really burned Malfoy!"

Harry shook hands with well-wishers and talked to a few people at a time; there didn't seem to be a single Gryffindor who did not wish Harry well. He noted that those who approached him tended to be older students; he wondered if the younger ones were too intimidated to approach him. The famous Harry Potter, now a teacher, a larger-than-life figure. He chuckled to himself at the idea; he definitely never felt larger than life.

He was even approached by Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown, both of whom had been in the D.A. but had kept a certain distance from Harry in general; he wondered if it was because of his disdain for Professor Trelawney, whom they both revered. Both congratulated him on his new job, and thanked him for his help in the D.A. the previous year ("Our parents were shocked that Padma and I both got Outstanding; now they're big fans of yours!"). He awkwardly thanked them and changed the subject to the excitement of taking lessons from Dumbledore.

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of a whistle. Harry looked around and saw no one with a whistle, but Ginny was trying to get people's attention, so Harry assumed she must have done it with her wand. Maybe a spell she learned from her mother, Harry thought. It sounded like something Mrs. Weasley might do.

“Everyone... I just want to give us a chance, as a group, to congratulate Harry on being the youngest-ever teacher at Hogwarts. And you were the youngest-ever Quidditch player, too! They’ll have to write new record books.”

Flush with their approval, Harry felt like cutting up a bit. He affected the air of pompous politicians he’d seen on Muggle chat shows, and said, “Yes, thank you, Ginny. My next goal is, after Professor Dumbledore retires, to become the youngest-ever Hogwarts headmaster.” To their widespread laughter, he added, “But first, I plan on becoming the youngest-ever teacher to give Malfoy over one hundred hours of detentions.” This got even greater laughter and cheers, and shouts of encouragement.

Ginny continued, “And we all hope to see you accomplish that goal. One other thing I wanted to say is to thank you for standing up for Neville.” Others voiced approval; Neville was smiling but still looked embarrassed. “And,” Ginny went on, “there’s something you deserve, but I think Neville will be too shy to give you, so I will.” She took a step forward, reached up, and kissed him on the cheek. This was met with cheers and laughter, the latter of which Harry assumed was inspired by his obvious embarrassment.

Seamus and Dean were teasing Neville, Dean saying “Go on, then, Neville, don’t be shy! He stood up for you, after all!” Harry laughed; Ron was in hysterics.

Neville was laughing, too. He stepped forward, and said, “Well, no kissing, Harry, but I do want to thank you. You stood up for me, and got him good.”

Harry shook his head, as if to say that it was nothing he needed to be thanked for. “Well, I wouldn’t have been able to say what I said if you hadn’t done so well on your O.W.L.”

Ginny’s little ceremony was over; people were returning to their own conversations, so Harry headed over to Ron and Hermione near the fireplace. He sat down in a chair they had saved for him and exhaled. “Well, that was quite an experience.”

“You mean Ginny kissing you?” Hermione teased.

Harry started to shoot her an annoyed look before he realized that she was teasing him. “No, the speech, of course. I’d never spoken to that many people before.”

“I know. You were so embarrassed when she kissed you, it was really cute.”

“Well, I just wasn’t expecting it.” He paused. “Better her than Neville, though.”

“Well, that’s quite a compliment,” said Ginny, having just walked over. “I’ll cherish that for the rest of my days... he’d rather be kissed by me than Neville...” She smiled wickedly.

He feigned annoyance. “Having quite a bit of humor at my expense tonight, aren’t you?”

“Well, to be fair,” she protested, “I didn’t kiss you just to make fun of you. I really do think it was great of you to do that.” She paused. “Your being embarrassed was just a side benefit.”

“Glad I could be of help,” Harry countered. “I guess it’s good, though; you should have at me now and then, so I don’t get too big a head from being a teacher.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Harry, we’ll make sure that doesn’t happen,” said Hermione. “We’re your friends. We wouldn’t let you get away with it.”

“No, I wouldn’t think so,” Harry agreed. “So, anything happen on the Hogwarts Express worth telling?”

“No, not really,” said Ron. “Malfoy was his usual horrible self, kept making cracks about you, your Muggle family, you know the routine. About us, a bit, too, but mostly you. Must still be hurting from the disciplinary hearing. I wanted so badly to come back with stuff about Dudley. But I didn’t, don’t worry.”

“Sorry... I just feel like my aunt does have at least some reason to be worried.”

“No, no big deal. I really also found myself wanting to tell him about you being a teacher, but Hermione was right, it would’ve been bad. Anyway, finally he

left. Things got a lot better after that. Later, after we joined Ginny and Neville in their compartment, he and his minions came by. ‘Where’s Potty? Off doing publicity photos?’ He seemed to be really curious. Boy, did I want to tell him.”

“Ron did pretty well, though,” said Hermione. “He said, ‘he’s off at the Ministry, giving testimony against your father.’ Malfoy looked really angry, and said, ‘you wait, they’ll be out of there soon enough.’ Ron was really quick, he just said, ‘Oh, thanks, Malfoy, I’ll be sure to tell my Dad to have them increase security.’ Malfoy got red again and stomped out.”

“Well done, Ron,” said Harry encouragingly. “You do that long enough, he might even start leaving us alone.”

“That’s a bit much to hope for,” Ron pointed out. “Hey, how about you? How was your weekend up here?” Harry started telling the story; it took about half an hour to cover the highlights. They were most impressed by his dinner with Dumbledore.

“Wow...” Ron exclaimed. “A private dinner with Professor Dumbledore... that must’ve been so cool...”

“I was nervous, but not for long. You know, I’m sure, he has this way of making you not feel nervous. But, yeah, it was pretty great. He told me all kinds of stuff.” He related some of it, including his answer about the Veil of Mystery. He suddenly remembered something. “Hey, Neville!” he said; Neville was reading a few yards away. He put down his book and walked over. “Yeah, Harry?”

“Remember that archway in the Department of Mysteries? The one you told us you had dreams about? When we were in that room first, what did you notice about it?”

“I wasn’t sure—I was standing a ways away from it—but I thought I heard voices coming from it, as if there were people inside it. Why? Did you hear that too?”

Harry explained what Dumbledore had said about it. “So that’s why Luna, you, and I heard stuff, but the others didn’t. It’s like with the thestrals.”

Neville looked puzzled. “Yeah, but Harry, you said he said you had to have lost a loved one? I never have. The reason I see thestrals is because a friend of my gran’s died while she was at our place, and I happened to be there. But I hardly knew her, and no one else I know has died.”

Harry frowned. “That’s really strange, but that is what he said. I’ll try to ask him again if I think of it. Oh, Hermione, how’s it going with the Astronomy test?”

She brightened. “I talked to Ernie on the train, and he completely agrees with me. He’s going to start talking to Hufflepuffs, and try to find out if anyone failed and is interested in joining us. We don’t want to make a big campaign of it because of possible backlash. But it’s nice to find someone who agrees with me.”

“We agree with you, Hermione,” said Harry gamely. Hermione smiled, a bit sadly.

“You two... it’s more right to say that you don’t disagree with me. You really don’t care one way or the other. It’s like the reverse of Quidditch. I watch the matches, I want you to win, but I can’t feel about it the way you do. You can’t feel about this the way I do. I wish you could, but I understand. I can be happy with the fact that you’d like to care, like I’d like to care about Quidditch.”

Harry and Ron looked a bit deflated, as though they’d been found out, but relieved that Hermione was being nice about it. “We do want to support you, Hermione,” protested Harry. “If you ask us to do something, we’ll do it.”

“I know. And I do appreciate it, and I’ll ask if I can think of something besides signing the petition. But sometimes... you need someone who feels the same way you do, it makes you feel like you’re not alone. But you tried, and thanks for that.”

They talked for a bit longer, then headed off to their respective rooms. Harry and Ron climbed the steps talking about Quidditch.

“...and the tryouts are Friday? Good, I’ll be able to come. No detentions to do with Umbridge this year.”

“You can’t know, Harry, you’ve got Snape tomorrow, after all. You never know when he’s going to get you for something.”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? Dumbledore’s decided that because I’m a teacher, I can’t be given detentions when I’m a student.”

Ron looked truly impressed by this. “So, you could do anything you wanted?”

Harry gave him a wan smile. “No, I couldn’t. If I do something that merits detention, the consequences are worse. I have to look Dumbledore in the eye and tell him why I did what I did. You remember what it was like with him when we flew the car?”

Harry could tell by the expression on Ron’s face that he recalled vividly how Dumbledore, instead of acting strict as most teachers would, gave off an air of saddened disappointment, leaving Harry and Ron feeling as though they’d let him down personally. “Yeah, I see what you mean,” Ron said. “Oh, well, it was a nice thought.”

They climbed into their beds. Harry’s mind was churning with nervousness about the next day, and not only about the classes he would teach. Snape was the teacher listed on his schedule, so McGonagall had clearly somehow convinced him to accept Harry. But he knew that the lesson would be a trial. Lying in the bed, Harry decided to make Potions a test of his ability to do what Dumbledore had asked of him. He had already decided to work extra hard in Potions and keep up with the others, as Snape would be looking for excuses to criticize him, having no doubt resisted Harry’s presence in the class. But now, Harry also planned to ignore every provocation, every insult, every sneer. Do what Dumbledore asked you to do, Harry thought. If he thinks you can do it, you can do it. He said I won’t succeed all the time, but I should try.

Not wanting to forget before he fell asleep, Harry concentrated on clearing his mind with the Occlumency exercises he learned from Dumbledore. It was not long before he was asleep.

Harry got up at 6:50, which was earlier than he strictly had to, but this was the first day, so he wanted extra time, as did the others in his dormitory; he was the last to get out of bed. He dressed quickly, put his Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers' book and his Potions text in his bag, and headed off to breakfast in the Great Hall. Ron and Hermione were already there and had saved a place for him, at the end of the hall closest to the teachers' table. They had sat there consistently for most of their time at Hogwarts so that if Malfoy wanted to come by and cause trouble, he would have to do so in the full view of teachers. Naturally, Malfoy only tended to come by when no teachers were around. Harry sat down.

"So, how are your schedules?" he asked.

"Not too bad, even Hermione's, even though she still has ten subjects," Ron answered, his tone suggesting that not all was well with Hermione. "Thank goodness in N.E.W.T. classes there's only two lessons a week, so even on Hermione's worst day, she only has five lessons, and I've got four on mine. But of course, you're supposed to study more outside, so it doesn't seem that much easier."

"Nor should it, Mr. Weasley." Professor McGonagall stopped as she headed to the teachers' table. "These two years will be the most demanding academically of your time at Hogwarts."

Ron sighed. "Yes, I know that, Professor. When I think about all that work, a joke shop starts to look pretty good."

McGonagall raised her eyebrows slightly. "Did your brothers tell you that I dropped in on their shop last week?" The surprised looks on their faces told McGonagall that they had not known. "They seem to be doing quite well. I told them that I was there doing reconnaissance; I want to know what sorts of things I'll be confiscating this year. The fact is, I also wanted to express my appreciation for their actions last year. The students were not the only ones whose spirits they lifted."

Harry, Ron and Hermione all looked even more surprised now; this was McGonagall letting her hair down, compared to her usual manner. Harry said, “Yes, I was telling them at the shop that they should have gotten a Special Award for Services to the School.”

“Well, Professor, if you were serious, you could attempt to see that they get it.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Is that something I can do?”

“You can put them up for one,” she explained. “If a teacher thinks a student deserves such an award, the teacher can suggest it to the headmaster, who will consult other teachers for advice, and then decide. None have been given out for last year.”

“Wouldn’t it be too late?” Hermione asked.

“The deadline is six months after the ‘services’ have been performed, so there would still be time.”

“Well, then I am going to talk to Professor Dumbledore about that, because I really do think they deserve it,” said Harry. “They could put the plaque up on the wall near that swamp they made, that would be fitting.”

“You are quite fond of the twins, Professor,” she observed.

Harry nodded. “They’ve been really good to me.”

Ron scoffed. “I’d say it’s more like you’ve been really good to them.”

McGonagall gave Harry a quizzical look. “Ron’s referring to how they got the gold to open their shop,” Harry explained. “It was from me; I gave them my Triwizard winnings.” Ron and Hermione chuckled at the look of incredulity on McGonagall’s face; it wasn’t something they saw often.

“I just didn’t want to keep it,” Harry answered her unasked question. “It should have been Cedric’s. I tried to give it to his parents, but they wouldn’t take it. Seeing the shop, I know I did the right thing.”

“You felt the money was... tainted somehow? Because of Cedric’s death?”

“Maybe partly that, and partly that I was helped to get that far; Barty Crouch was trying to steer me through it. Dobby got me gillyweed after he heard what he thought was Professor Moody talking about it to you in the staff room; I would’ve failed the task otherwise. I didn’t deserve to win, I didn’t deserve the money.”

McGonagall looked concerned, and sat down next to Harry at the Gryffindor table. “Is that really what you think, Harry?” He nodded. She assumed a stern expression. “Listen to me. Do you think the other students had no one helping them? Their headmasters did all they could for them, I’m certain of it. Professor Sprout may have helped Cedric, for all I know. Only a great deal of self-control prevented me from helping you. You were three years underage, thrown into the contest against your will... if anyone deserved extra help, it was you. What matters, in any case, is not how you got the tools to do what you did, the important thing is what you did. You flew brilliantly against a very dangerous dragon. In the second task, you found the captives first, and were willing to sacrifice your score to make sure no one was harmed. In the maze, Barty Crouch did remove some of your obstacles, but I am certain you could have found your way past them. You saved Cedric from the giant spider, when you could have let him be attacked and taken the prize. You deserved the prize, because you competed well, and you showed character and humanity. Now, you two,” she concluded, looking at Ron and Hermione, “you will remind him of this from time to time, I hope?” She got up, walked over to the teachers’ table, and struck up a conversation with Professor Smith. Ron and Hermione looked stunned, as did Harry.

“Well, she sure told you, mate,” said Ron with an impressed look.

“She’s right, of course, Harry,” said Hermione earnestly. Harry wasn’t sure what to think. He wanted to believe McGonagall, but he had told himself that he didn’t deserve it for so long, it was hard to let go of that opinion so suddenly.

A flood of owls came pouring into the room, as happened every day, but especially the first day of the term, as parents sent things the students forgot. Harry

involuntarily looked down the table at Neville, but it seemed that he had forgotten nothing this year. A good sign, Harry thought.

Hermione got up and walked over to near the Hufflepuff table, where Ernie Macmillan had been waving at her. Harry looked at Ron, "Astronomy?"

"Must be," Ron agreed. "They'll be comparing notes on who's willing to join them, and how to get the Ravenclaws involved."

"Ravenclaws can't get involved," Harry pointed out. "They weren't there. It was just us and the Hufflepuffs."

"Oh, I'd forgotten that," Ron said. "Well, then it might be easier to get people to go along, right?"

"Seems so," Harry agreed. "Ernie'll be working on the Hufflepuffs, and Hermione on the Gryffindors. But I'm not sure how much influence she'll have. She doesn't get along that well with Parvati and Lavender. Neville will be in, I assume, but she doesn't know Dean or Seamus that well, either. Maybe we should talk to them."

"Good idea," agreed Ron. "After all, I'm a prefect, and you're... well, you're Harry Potter. Maybe we can get them to help."

Hermione came back to the table. "Ernie says three of the Hufflepuffs failed, so they'll be with us. He's going to work on the other ones."

"Too bad more of us couldn't have failed. At least you did your part, Harry," said Ron solemnly.

"They didn't follow my shining example," agreed Harry. "Am I the only Gryffindor that failed, Hermione?"

"No, Neville did, too. Five out of eighteen failed, which is a much higher percentage than usual. That should help, too. It's also unusual for no one to get an Outstanding. My next thing to do is to ask Professor McGonagall if I can find statistics on the average scores for the Astronomy O.W.L. test. If ours are substantially lower than usual, that helps my petition."

“Well, good luck. Wow, look at the time, it’s already ten to eight. I should get going. Want to be ready when the students get there.” He got up; Ron and Hermione did too.

“You’ll do great,” said Ron.

Hermione walked up to face Harry, and smiled mischievously. “So, will you get embarrassed if I give you a kiss for luck?”

Harry smiled back. “Probably. But go ahead, anyway.” She did, then she and Ron walked away, giving Harry last words of encouragement. He picked up his bag and headed to the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom.

He walked in through the office door; each classroom had an office for the teacher attached to it. As he sat down at the desk, the thought crossed his mind that this was where Umbridge had sat last year. It gave him motivation; he felt part of the reason he was in the chair now was to keep others like Umbridge out.

Harry did not have a specific lesson plan for this lesson. The day’s students would all be first years, some of them knowing almost nothing about the magical world, so he would have to go a little slowly. He knew how it had been for him in his first year, and he wasn’t going to forget that now. He wanted to be sure that no one was left behind, not understanding what he was talking about. He also reminded himself of his intention to treat the class somewhat like it was a big D.A. He didn’t think of himself as a teacher so much as an older student, who should give advice and help to younger students as needed. He felt nervous, but thinking of it as the D.A. helped ease his anxiety.

Just then, the bell rang, signaling the start of class. Harry walked out of the office into the classroom. He was greeted by twenty faces, faces that looked impossibly young. He looked at the roll sheet, which was already at the podium he stood at. He looked up again, and saw expectant faces—some nervous, some gawking, some eager, but none disinterested.

“Well, this is your first class, so let me welcome you all to Hogwarts. I hope you enjoyed the feast last night, and weren’t too scared at the Sorting.” A few students chuckled, obviously the ones who had been scared. “I was, when I was Sorted. I thought I was going to have to do something. If I’d known it was just putting on a hat, I wouldn’t have worried at all.” There were a few more chuckles. A boy raised his hand. “Yes?” Harry asked. “What’s your name?”

“David Finch-Fletchley, sir.”

Harry raised his eyebrows. “Justin’s brother?”

“Yes, sir.” David looked nervous but intent. “Can I ask, did the Hat talk to you? If it did, what did it say?”

Interesting, Harry thought. No one’s ever asked me that question before, and it’s the first question I’m asked here. This is going to be a pretty different experience.

Harry could have deflected the question, but impulsively decided to be open, and share what had happened. “Yes, it did. I understand it talks to some people, not to others. It said several things to me, including that it was having a difficult time choosing a house for me.” Harry wanted to be honest, but he didn’t think it was a good idea to tell ten Slytherin first years that he had pleaded not to be put into their house. He decided to tell the truth, but change the emphasis. “The Hat couldn’t decide between Gryffindor and Slytherin. It finally chose Gryffindor.”

Students were mumbling and exchanging surprised and impressed looks. “Why did it choose Gryffindor?” David asked.

“I think, mainly because I asked it to. I had made a couple of friends on the train, and they went into Gryffindor, so I wanted to go there.” This stirred more murmuring. A student near the front said, “You mean you can choose where you go?” David said, “I wish I’d thought of that,” which caused a small murmur of laughter.

Harry was curious. “I assume you would have chosen Hufflepuff?”

“Well, yes... nothing against Gryffindor, seems like a great house, but I expected to be in Hufflepuff. I heard that most brothers get put in the same house.”

“They often do, but not always,” said Harry. “Did the Hat talk to you? Was that why you asked?”

“Yes, it did,” David said. “It said it knew I wanted to go into Hufflepuff, but I was different from my brother, so it couldn’t put me there. It said I would do well in Gryffindor.”

“In that case, asking it wouldn’t have done any good. It already had a strong opinion. In my case, it chose what I wanted because it didn’t have a strong opinion. Or maybe because it knew it was important for me to be with my friends. I don’t really know.”

Harry was about to move off the topic when David raised his hand again. “Sir, those friends, are they Ron and Hermione?”

Harry was startled. How did he know that? Ah, Justin’s brother, he thought. “I see your brother has told you a few things about his classes?”

“Oh, yes, and lots about you, and how Ron and Hermione help you. I remember when I was seven, that was the year he got Petrified, and so did Hermione, but you and Ron went into the Chamber of Secrets, and you killed the great serpent that had taken Ginny Weasley.”

Before Harry could answer, a girl piped up, “That’s right, we asked Ginny about you last night, and she said you saved her life.”

This caused greater murmuring. I’d better stop this before it gets out of hand, Harry thought. Who knows how many stories they’ve heard. “Okay, I think I want to stop this discussion before it gets too far. If you want to ask about stuff I’ve done in another class, that’s okay, but there are some other things I think we should do today. Now..” he saw a boy in the back with his hand up. “Yes?” Harry asked.

“Please, sir, just one more... you met You-Know-Who? You fought him? How did you survive?” Harry felt the energy level of the students rise even more. They really want to know about this, from someone who’s seen Voldemort with his own eyes. He wanted to move on, but he couldn’t ignore the question.

“I met him, yes. I fought him, yes. How did I survive?” He paused for effect, then looked at them seriously. “I was incredibly lucky.” The students laughed. Harry smiled. “It’s true, really. Again, I can’t tell you the whole story now, but maybe some other time.”

Another girl spoke up. While raising her hand, she said, “That’s okay, sir, I have the article, the interview you gave about when You-Know-Who came back. I can show anyone who wants to see it.” This generated more interested comments.

“And you are...?”

“Andrea Creevey, sir.”

Harry smiled. “How many more Creeveys are there?”

“I’m the last one, sir. My two brothers were in your Dumbledore’s Army group last year,” she said, Harry suspected, more for the benefit of the other students than for him, “and they said it was really great, they learned so much. Did you learn a lot from fighting You-Know-Who?”

Harry was starting to get tired of hearing that phrase. Be patient, he told himself, they’re only first years, they don’t know. But I’m going to have to tell them.

“First of all... you’ve all been saying ‘You-Know-Who.’ I know it’s what most people say, but it’s not what I say. His name...” Harry paused so they could steel themselves, “... is Voldemort.”

Harry could have predicted the reaction: several shrieks, a lot of gasps, a few other random noises. Harry gave them a very serious look. “I know some of you will be scared to hear that. I know you’re not used to it. But Professor Dumbledore told me five years ago to always use his name. He said, ‘fear of the name of a thing only increases fear of the thing itself,’ and he was right. We have to fight him, and how can we fight him if we can’t say his name? You’re going to have

to get used to it, and once you do, you'll think it's silly not to say his name. I want to hear you all saying his name in this class.

“Now, to answer your question, Andrea, no, I didn't learn magic from fighting him, I learned it because I knew I might have to fight him. I probably will have to in the future. He wants me dead.” Most students' eyes went wide. “It gives me a real good reason to keep learning.”

A sandy-haired boy near the front raised his hand. “Sir, You-Know- er, you-... do you want us to say his name?”

Harry nodded, encouraging the boy with his eyes. “If you can.”

The boy seemed to be gathering all his strength. “Sir, if V- Voldemort-“ He said it very fast; like ripping off a bandage quickly, Harry thought. He then exhaled sharply, as other students gasped. “...is the most powerful wizard in the world, and he wants you dead, how can you not be scared?”

Harry looked the boy over. “Before I answer your question, I want to know... what's your name?”

“Hedrick Flatt, sir.”

“And which house are you in?”

“Slytherin.”

“Do you know about the point system, Hedrick? How you can gain and lose points for your house?”

“Yes, sir.” Hedrick looked very nervous.

“Well, Hedrick, you've just earned twenty points for Slytherin.”

There was a collective gasp; apparently they knew that twenty points was a lot. “For saying his name?” asked Hedrick, flabbergasted.

“Yes. It was difficult for you to do it. It was brave of you. Obviously I can't give twenty points every time someone says his name. I will still give points, until you get used to it. But, Hedrick, you get twenty because you did it first. It's a good first step.. Now to answer your question... first of all, I don't agree that he's the most powerful wizard in the world. I believe the most powerful wizard in the world

is Albus Dumbledore. I should know; I saw them fight, just over two months ago. Voldemort...” There were a few gasps, but not so many this time, “...got away, but he wasn’t winning. He wasn’t going to defeat Professor Dumbledore. Now, you wanted to know how I can not be scared... that’s a good question.” Harry paused for a moment, considering how to answer; he wasn’t really sure. “The best answer I can think of is that I’m stubborn. I refuse to live scared. I don’t want to die, but I won’t live in fear, because that’s not really living. He wants us to be scared of him, he wants us to be afraid to say his name. I say his name as a way of defying him. He could kill me, but while I’m alive, I’ll live the way I want to.”

There was silence for a few seconds, then, to Harry’s astonishment, a few students started clapping, until everyone had joined in. Harry was truly embarrassed now, though pleased; he had to imagine that this was the students’ first exposure to anything but fear concerning Voldemort. Maybe this is why Dumbledore asked me to teach, he thought.

He walked back to the podium as the applause died out, and said, “Thank you. Now I need to call the roll. When I call your name, please raise your hand and say ‘here.’” He ran through the roll. There was one more familiar name; it turned out that ‘Brown, Heather’ was Lavender’s sister.

Harry walked out away from the podium again. He had discovered that he didn’t like standing behind it; he liked to move around, especially to move nearer to whatever student was asking a question. “Okay. Now, as you know, this class is Defense Against the Dark Arts. There’s a textbook, which I see everyone has. I advise you to read the textbook; there’s a lot of good information in there. But you’re not going to need to bring your textbooks to class anymore. We won’t be using it here. In class, we’re going to focus on practical things, not the kind of knowledge you get from a book. Normally, we would use the book. Does anyone know why we’re doing mainly practical things?”

No one moved or spoke for a few seconds. Then Andrea Creevey raised her hand. “Yes, Andrea?”

Looking pleased that Harry had remembered her name, she said, "Because he... um... Because Voldemort came back." It sounded difficult for her to say it as well. There was only a mild reaction now. They're acclimating to it better than I expected, Harry thought.

"Yes, that's exactly right, Andrea, very good. And ten points to Gryffindor." She beamed with pleasure. "It's because he's back. Now, that doesn't mean you're going to have to fight him. But the problem with him being back is, it's not just him. He has helpers, assistants. They are called Death Eaters." There was a bit of a gasp. Andrea raised her hand again.

"Are they the ones you fought in June? At the Department of Mysteries?" This caused quite a rumbling as well.

"How did you know about that, Andrea?"

"Neville told Colin, sir. And Colin told Dennis and I."

"I see. Yes, we had to fight some Death Eaters. Now, as I was saying, he has assistants, including them. There are also people who he can put under a kind of mind control, to make them do what he wants. They don't want to follow him, but if he controls them, they have no choice. There are also dementors, which he now controls. The more followers he has, the more danger everyone is in. Fifteen years ago, he was really powerful, because he had a lot of followers. Many people didn't know how evil he was until it was too late. Now we know, and we can fight him."

A Slytherin named Augustina Delva raised her hand. "How can we fight him?"

Harry was finding that the nervousness he had felt was fading rapidly, as he was focused on talking to the students. "You can't fight him with wands, Augustina, not yet. But you can fight him in different ways. You can fight him by saying his name. By not being scared of him. By making friends, both in your house and in other houses. By being kind to people."

Augustina was confused. "How will that help fight Voldemort?"

“Five points to Slytherin. Yes, Andrea? Do you know the answer to Augustina’s question?”

“I think so, sir. After Cedric Diggory was killed... my brothers told me that Professor Dumbledore announced to the school who killed him, and he didn’t say You-Know-Who, he said Voldemort. And he said that we had to be united, to make friends, so we could fight him as a group.”

“Exactly, Andrea. Groups are stronger than individuals. The better we make friends, the better groups we make. And being kind to people helps make friends.” The topic had come up in his dinner with Dumbledore; he now felt he understood it in a way he hadn’t at the end of his fourth year. “This is a very difficult point in wizarding history. To get through it, we have to try harder than we normally would. My way of trying is teaching this class. Your way can be doing your best to do well. The better you do, the better you can protect yourself and your friends if you ever have to. Maybe you won’t have to. I hope you won’t. But it’s better to be prepared.” He looked around; there finally seemed to be no more questions.

“Okay, now we’re going to start using our wands. The first thing to teach you is really easy, it’s a kind of test spell. It’s called ‘Blue.’ You point your wand at someone and say ‘Blue,’ and they turn blue. Now, everyone please get up, and move your desks to the side of the room. We want a lot of space. Now, get into pairs, and stand across from your partner. No, line up like this...” He eventually got them into two rows of ten, so he could observe them better. He felt even more comfortable now, doing things he had done in the D.A. “Good. Now, this side, point your wand at your partner and say, ‘Blue!’”

“Blue!” many voices shouted. The other row of students now had faces of varying shades of blue. There was an outbreak of laughing and giggling.

“Good, very good. The color won’t last for long, about fifteen seconds at most... see, it’s already starting to go away. Okay, now this side, go!”

The other ten turned blue, to more laughter. Harry looked for the bluest one, and found that his partner was David Finch-Fletchley. “David, look, your

partner is really blue,” he said encouragingly. David blushed. Harry continued, “Now, that spell doesn’t have much of a use most of the time, but it can be helpful in a class. I want to show you how. David, would you please do that spell on me?”

The other students laughed at David’s obvious nervousness at turning his teacher blue. He pointed the wand at Harry, said “Blue.” Harry looked at his hand, which was a deep shade of blue. He smiled. “I’ve always kind of liked blue,” he said, to which most of the class laughed again. “Okay, now let’s wait for it to go away... I asked David to do that because I want to show you something, and first I wanted you to see that the spell would work on me. Now, David, I want you to do the same thing again, okay?”

David nodded, raised his wand and shouted, “Blue,” just as Harry said, “Protego!” Harry looked at his hand, which was its normal color. Some of the students oohed and ahed. “Does anyone know what I did?”

David raised his hand. “You did the Protection Charm.”

“Yes, very good. Five points to Gryffindor.”

A Slytherin named David Septus raised his hand and said, “But he didn’t say ‘Voldemort!’”

The class broke up laughing. Harry smiled. “No, but you did, so five points to Slytherin.” Septus looked pleased. “But I don’t only give points for saying ‘Voldemort.’ Like other teachers, I give them for correct answers, and other things I want to encourage. I just think that saying ‘Voldemort’ is an important first step, and giving points is my way of saying I think it’s important.” Harry was very pleased to note that there had been no flinching at all when he said ‘Voldemort’ most recently. That was a good sign.

“As I was saying, yes, that was the Protection Charm. It’s one of the first things I want to teach you. Now, normally, we don’t teach this spell until the third year. It can be a little difficult. But some of you will be able to do it well, and everyone will be able to do it at least a little. It’s a very important one. I used it a lot at the Department of Mysteries.” The class exchanged impressed looks. “To use

this spell, you first need to imagine a shield in front of you. Everyone, do that now. Imagine a shield. It may help if you make it colorful, with its own design.” Some students chuckled. “Mine is gold and red, with my house’s symbol on it; choose whatever design you want. I think a design helps you see it better, and makes the spell better. Has everyone got the shield in their head? Okay, now for practice, hold your wands, imagine the shield, and say, ‘Protego!’”

“Protego!” shouted twenty voices.

“Okay, good,” said Harry. “Now, I want this side,” gesturing to the ten students on his left, “to do the ‘blue’ spell when I say—“

A Gryffindor near the back got overeager, and said ‘Blue!’ to his partner, who turned blue immediately. The rest of the class roared with laughter. Harry couldn’t help laughing a little himself. “A little too soon, there, Eric, but I like the spirit. Let’s wait a minute, for Devan to get back to his normal color. Okay, that’s good. Now, when I say to, you ten try to turn your partner blue, and you ten do the Protection Charm. Got your shields in your mind?” The ten on his right nodded. “Okay, go ahead.”

“Blue!”

“Protego!”

The results were mixed; some students were as blue as they had been before, but others were noticeably lighter shades of blue. Only David Finch-Fletchley was his usual skin color.

“David, I’m guessing you’ve done this before?”

He nodded. “Justin taught it to me.”

“Well, he obviously did a good job,” Harry observed. “Now, the results you saw were pretty good for a first try. What we’ll do now is practice some more, each group taking turns, and I’ll have a look at everybody.”

The next half hour was spent practicing the spell, and to Harry’s satisfaction, they did get better at it. He then talked for a while about basic ideas about magic, and ways for the students to get used to using magic if they didn’t

already know much about it. Before he knew it, he glanced up at the clock to see that it was 9:45. Wow, that was fast, he thought.

“It looks like we’re almost out of time. Before we finish it up, does anyone have any questions? Yes, Eric.”

“Voldemort,” said Eric. The class was silent for a second, then erupted in laughter when they realized what he was doing.

“Very good, Eric, five points to Gryffindor,” confirmed Harry, amused.

A Slytherin girl named Helen Clark raised her hand to ask, “Sir, this question has nothing to do with Voldemort, but...”

“...you wanted to get your five points,” Harry finished.

“Yes, sir... my question is, last night in the Slytherin common room, Draco Malfoy and a few other people were... well, they were..”

Harry nodded. “Saying really awful things about me.” She nodded. “And my friends, too, I’d guess.”

“Yes, sir. Why does he say that? I mean, I hope all my classes are like this.” There were definite murmurs of agreement.

Harry paused briefly, thinking. He knew it wasn’t quite proper for a teacher to speak frankly about another student, but he quickly decided, too bad, I’m going to do it anyway. “Draco Malfoy doesn’t like me because I don’t agree with how he thinks about things. For example, I like Muggles. I think they’re just as good as wizards. Malfoy thinks Muggles are worthless. Also, he judges wizards on whether they have any Muggle blood or not; I don’t think it matters. He judges wizards on how much gold they have; I don’t think that matters either. I think people should be judged on their actions, that’s all. But he hates me more than other people because I’m famous.” Harry briefly told them the story of their meeting on the Hogwarts Express, and how he’d put down Ron without even knowing him. “Now, the reason he said what he said is that he wants you to hate me, too. He wants all the Slytherins to hate me, so everyone will tell him he’s right. All he wants is for people to agree with him, to tell him he’s right. You can find out for yourself. If you say something

that he disagrees with, he'll insult you, he'll tell you you're stupid and no good. It doesn't matter what it is, that's what he'll do.

“He's also angry at me now especially because his father's in trouble. Do you remember I mentioned that my friends and I had to fight some Death Eaters at the Department of Mysteries?” They nodded. “His father was one of them. He and some others were caught, by Professor Dumbledore, and are now in jail.”

There was silence. Then David Finch-Fletchley asked, “Do you think Malfoy's going to become a Death Eater after he leaves Hogwarts?”

The class was rapt. Harry's first impulse was to say ‘yes,’ but then he remembered Dumbledore. “I don't know,” he said. “I hope not. It looks like he will; he was gloating after Voldemort came back, gloating at Cedric Diggory's death, saying he hoped that Hermione would be next, because she's Muggle-born.” Some students looked repulsed. “But we can never know what will happen in the future. Something could change. I hope it does.”

He looked at the clock again. “Okay, we're almost out of time. Let me say this before we go: Always think for yourself. You can think ‘Potter's class is good,’ or ‘Potter's class is terrible,’ or you can think that Quidditch is exciting or that it's stupid. You can think whatever you want. But decide by yourself. Don't let someone else tell you what to think. Don't think something because you were told to. Decide for yourself. That's another way to fight Voldemort. He surrounds himself with people who let him think for them. You owe it to yourself, to think for yourself. And try to practice the Protection Charm before next lesson,” he said quickly as the bell rang.

The students got up and started chattering among themselves immediately as they gathered their things for their next lessons. A few students approached Harry's desk. The first to get there was Helen, who said, “I don't blame you for choosing Gryffindor. I was really upset last night. Now I know he's totally wrong.”

Harry nodded sympathetically and said, “You can help change that. You and people like you can make Slytherin a better place.” She thanked him, and left. Two

Gryffindors just wanted to thank Harry, to say they enjoyed the lesson. He thanked them, and they left. Harry went back to the office to take a break.

Or at least he thought it was a break. He walked in to find Professor Dumbledore there waiting for him.

“Professor Dumbledore! You startled me, I didn’t think anyone would be in here. Did you come to tell me something before my next class?”

“No, Harry. I must admit to having had a keen curiosity about how you would conduct your class. I hope you do not mind; I have been here since class started.”

Harry was surprised. “Oh, well, of course I don’t mind. I’d be really interested in any comments you have.”

“Just one, Harry. Many teachers hide their true personality behind a shield; they put on a different persona, one of authority. Students always sense that, and it keeps them from making a personal connection with the teacher. You did not do that here; you were yourself. Keep doing that. That was as good a first class as I have ever seen. That is my comment.” He patted Harry on the shoulder and walked out the back door of the office.

Harry felt himself fill with pride. The students clearly enjoyed it, and to have Dumbledore say that... this would be a good time to remember the next time I need a Patronus, Harry thought. He glanced at the office clock; there was five minutes until the next lesson. Harry closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind.

The second lesson went much like the first; many asked questions about him and his past, and some wanted to know about Voldemort. Again, he gave twenty points to the first student to say Voldemort’s name, and again, the students clearly enjoyed it. Feeling quite good, Harry headed off to lunch. He found Ron and Hermione in their usual spots. He sat down.

“Well, I guess we don’t have to ask you how your classes went,” was Ron’s first comment.

“Why not?” asked Harry, confused.

“Are you kidding?” Hermione said. “The whole school is buzzing with it. Your first class started telling people in the halls on their way to classes, and it’s worked its way around. Apparently, they loved your class, and you’re giving points for people saying Voldemort’s name.” She shook her head in admiration, and smiled.

“Well, I want to encourage them. If people stop fearing the name, I really think it’ll be really good for our side. Actually, a Slytherin was the first to do it. I gave him twenty points.”

“Twenty points?” gaped Ron. “That’s not gonna help us,” referring to the House Cup.

“He deserved it. He was the first one, and that’s the hardest.” He shook his head. “In some ways, it kind of reminded me of the Hog’s Head. They really wanted to know about Voldemort, about the stuff I’ve done, that we’ve done. I made sure you two got credit.”

“Great, now these first years’ll be running up to me, all ‘wow, you’re friends with Harry Potter, can you tell us what it was like to fight with him?’” said Ron wryly.

Smiling, Hermione said, “Well, just don’t tell them you were assaulted by a brain. It won’t make you look good.” Ron just made a face in response; Harry chuckled.

“In a way, today may have been my easiest class,” Harry said. “These were brand-new students, Malfoy hasn’t had time to indoctrinate them. As the class levels get higher, I’ll get more and more resistance.”

“Maybe, but you’ll have a chance to win them over,” Hermione pointed out. “Almost all of them don’t hate you personally, but just because Malfoy told them to. If they like your class, they’ll forget what Malfoy wants. It may not happen at once, but over the long term, you can do it.”

“I hope you’re right,” Harry said.

“I am right. I was right when I said you’d be a great teacher, wasn’t I?”

Just then, two first-year Gryffindor girls walked past them. They waved at Harry, said “Hi!”, and walked on. About ten paces on, both giggled.

Hermione raised her eyebrows. “On second thought, why don’t I just go ask them what they think, of how good a teacher you are?” Ron snickered.

“Yeah, but you thought Lockhart was a good teacher, and you were a year older than them,” Harry pointed out. Ron laughed out loud.

Hermione pouted slightly. “Fine, here I’m trying to be nice to you, telling you how good you are, and you have to throw that back in my face.” She looked at him accusingly. Harry wasn’t sure how serious she was.

“Sorry, Hermione, I know you’re trying to be nice,” Harry said.

“Remember, Fred and George wouldn’t fall for that, Harry, but you do,” said Ron smugly.

Hermione made the same face at Ron that he’d made at her earlier. “That’s because Harry’s nicer than they are.”

Two more girls came by, Hufflepuffs this time. They waved, but didn’t say anything. After they walked off, Hermione said, “I’m beginning to wonder if this could start to be a problem for you, Harry. Remember that little fan club that always followed Viktor around and wouldn’t give him a moment’s peace? That could happen to you.”

“And if it does, Harry,” said Ron solemnly, “it will be my obligation, as your friend, to tease you about it mercilessly.” He shrugged. “I’d rather not, but there you are.”

“If you do, I’ll start telling them that you did it all, that I just got the credit.”

“Did I say I would tease you? I’m sorry, I meant to say ‘help’ and ‘support.’”

Hermione chuckled. “You laugh now, but it could be annoying.”

“Let’s just say that when I worried about the problems I’d have being a teacher, this was not even close to being one of them,” Harry said. “But it may not happen. This could go away.”

“Or, it could be worse. I mean, when I fancied Lockhart, I never for a moment thought I could ever have him. I knew it was just a schoolgirl crush. But you’re only five years older than these girls. They might think it was possible, especially in a few years.”

“Are you trying to make Harry feel better, or worse, Hermione?” asked Ron. “It’s hard to tell.”

“I’m just trying to prepare Harry for what might happen. But you’ll be fine, Harry. If it happens, just pretend you don’t notice, and be kind and polite. They’ll get over it.”

“I’m still hoping it won’t happen in the first place, but thanks, I’ll try to remember that,” Harry said. “So, I have an idea. Let’s change the subject to one that doesn’t involve making fun of me. Hey, I know... Hermione, you mentioned Krum. What’s going on with that? Have you heard from him lately?”

She shook her head, wearing an expression that suggested she was sad or indifferent; Harry wasn’t sure which. “Just a short letter, about four months ago. It didn’t say anything definitive, but it was enough to know that nothing’s going to happen with that. I didn’t really expect anything would, because we were so far apart, and it wasn’t as though I was ga-ga over him anyway. He’s nice, and everything, but... I thought of him as more of a friend, and I couldn’t get to know him that well. Also, he isn’t the best correspondent in the world. We’re on good terms, though, I think, there just isn’t the desire on either of our parts to make that kind of effort. So, does that answer your question, or were you just asking to change the subject and don’t really care?”

Harry raised his eyebrows slightly at the accusation. “No, I was interested,” he assured her. Not in quite that level of detail, he added to himself, but he knew that was how Hermione was.

The subject changed again, and it eventually worked its way around to Potions. Harry told them about his plan with Snape, and what Dumbledore had advised.

“Good luck, mate, that’s going to be tough,” said Ron.

“It’s a very good idea, Harry,” encouraged Hermione. “I’ll help you. If you get angry, just look at me, I’ll remind you to be calm. Remember, nothing he says means anything, it’s just words.”

“I’ll try. Actually, I think I’m going to head off. I wanted to spend an hour or so in the teachers’ staff room before Potions. See what goes on in there, if anyone has anything to say. It might be interesting.”

“Ooh, I wish I could go with you, Harry,” gushed Hermione. “I would definitely do what you’re doing. I want to hear all about it!”

Ron smiled. “Yeah, Harry, me too! It’ll be so cool to—“

”Oh, shut up,” a frowning Hermione said to Ron, who was now laughing.

“See you two later,” Harry said, and headed off for the staff room.

Harry had been in the staff room for the pre-term meeting, but never as the place where teacher relaxed between classes. He walked in, saw that there were seven teachers in the room, and that Snape was not one of them.

“Professor Potter,” said McGonagall, standing up to greet Harry. “The headmaster has just been in here, giving us his report of your lesson. It is just as well that you were absent; you were no doubt spared considerable embarrassment.”

“He told me what he thought after my first lesson,” Harry said, “so yes, you’re probably right. He was being very kind.”

“And your first-years as well, who are right this minute spreading superlatives about your performance? Really, Harry, if you wish to be modest, you must at least recognize enough of the truth to make it believable. I have been teaching at this school for forty years, and I cannot recall when the students were so excited about a lesson. Your early students came to my class directly after yours, and it took me ten minutes just to get them settled down! I had to threaten detentions, and so on. Then hands kept going up, asking all sorts of questions about you, the things you’ve done, what you were like as a first-year, and so on. We finally did get

down to business, but we did not get very far.” She gave him a piercing glare, but Harry was sure that it wasn’t serious.

“I’m sorry, Professor,” he said, smiling.

“No, you’re not, nor should you be. Without even trying, you have done what we all hope to do—you have inspired your students. You should be proud.”

“I am, I really am. I’m just also overwhelmed. I never in a million years thought this would happen. That’s really the truth. I was just hoping nothing bad would happen.”

“Well, it looks like nothing did, but you may have a problem with an overabundance of female interest,” smiled Professor Smith. “I happened to see what was happening as you ate your lunch.” He told the other teachers, who chuckled.

Harry feigned annoyance. “Don’t worry, Professor, Ron and Hermione have already teased me about it. It’s good of you to take an interest, though.”

“No problem, Harry. And I did ask you to call me ‘John,’ didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did, John. Sorry. Some things are a bit hard to get used to.”

Harry sat down on a sofa next to Professor Flitwick. Professor Sprout said, “I got your students after Minerva did. She had managed to calm them down a bit, but they were still talking about it.”

“You mean, they didn’t come in talking about their extraordinary Transfigurations lesson?” McGonagall asked Sprout, in her usual deadpan.

“Terribly sorry, Minerva.”

Snape walked into the room. “Professor Potter,” Snape said, surprisingly without his usual sneer or sarcastic tone, just a polite formality. “You have the Slytherin first years running around using the Dark Lord’s name as though it were a new Chocolate Frog card. I would not have thought it possible.”

Harry decided to be just as polite. “You don’t seem to think that’s a good thing, Professor. Don’t you agree with Professor Dumbledore that fear of the name—“

”Of a thing only increases fear of the thing itself, yes, I have heard the headmaster say that,” interrupted Snape. “I agree with him in principle. However, the wizarding community has made that name taboo for a long time. You are attempting to demolish a part of the social structure. Your actions may have unintended consequences.”

Harry thought for a minute. “I admit that it’s hard for me to know that, but it just seemed like a really good idea. Also, Professor Dumbledore totally approved of everything I did.”

Snape sighed, still being amazingly polite, for him. “The headmaster is not perfect, as he would be the first to admit. He also has a particular affection for you, which may cloud his better judgment.”

McGonagall took immediate offense. “Professor Snape! Really! If I did not know of the esteem in which you hold the Headmaster—“

”But you do, Professor. And you know that I am right.”

A golden dog nosed its way in through the barely open door. All the teachers kept an eye on it, wondering who it would be for. It walked up to Harry, jumped into his lap, pawed at his chest, and licked his face. Harry chuckled and petted it. “I really like this dog,” he said to the room in general, looking into the dog’s eyes. “It’s very affectionate. I never had one, but I would have liked one like this.” He petted it a bit more, then shooed it off his lap as he got up. He now noticed the teachers staring at him, or looking at each other with expressions that shared far more with each other than with Harry. Snape in particular wore a look that spoke volumes, but Harry couldn’t understand those volumes. “What?” he asked nobody in particular.

“You should not keep the headmaster waiting, Professor Potter,” said McGonagall, wearing her usual poker face. The other teachers’ expressions were no easier to read. Harry was sure something was up, but he had no idea what it could be, and they obviously weren’t going to tell him. Not wanting to keep Dumbledore waiting, however, he got up to leave, following the dog.

Harry reached Dumbledore's office in less than a minute; the dog had almost vanished when he walked up the steps to Dumbledore's waiting door. Harry found himself wishing that the dog could stay around for awhile as he entered the office.

"Ah, Harry, please sit down. I know you have a class in not too long a time; this will just take a moment. This is in the nature of a precaution; Professor Snape has received intelligence suggesting a greater-than-average likelihood that Voldemort will again attempt to access your mind while you are asleep. It may not happen at all, or it may happen but you ward it off in your sleep. I know you are being careful about practicing Occlumency, and there should be no problems. I simply wanted you to know about this information, since we have it and it relates to you."

"Thank you, Professor, I appreciate it," Harry said.

"No problem at all, Harry. Off you go then, you don't want to be late."

Harry went back to the teachers' room to get his bag, then headed off to Potions. He ran into Hermione on the way, and told her about Snape's odd politeness.

"Strange," she agreed. "You're still ready to deal with his usual attitude, though?"

"Yes, I'm not expecting this to continue," he assured her.

But to their great surprise, Snape kept up whatever he was doing. All through Potions, he made no special note of Harry, and did not bother him in any way. As they walked along the corridors after class, Harry told Hermione after the class that he was almost as unnerved by this as by Snape's usual unpleasant attitude.

"Why do you think he's being this way?" asked Hermione.

"I'm not sure, of course, but I have to imagine it's because I'm a professor now," Harry answered. "My guess would be either that he knows he has to treat me with a certain politeness for that reason, or maybe he was told to by Professor Dumbledore."

“Too bad he couldn’t have told him that five years ago,” commented Hermione. Harry nodded in agreement.

Just then, they were joined by Professor Smith, walking alongside them. “Hello, Harry, Hermione,” he said cheerfully.

“Hi, John,” said Hermione. Harry remembered that she had taken Muggle Studies for a year, but he was mildly surprised that she called him by his first name; he guessed that John had all of his students do that. “Did you want to talk to your fellow professor?” she asked with a smile at Harry.

“I did, actually. Harry, my office isn’t too far from here. Would you join me there for a minute?”

“Sure. Is it okay if Hermione joins us?”

“Hmmm... well, this is kind of personal, but I know how close you three are, so I don’t mind.” He steered them into his office. Harry wondered what could be so personal; he hardly knew John, after all. He hadn’t realized that John obviously asked all his students to call him by his first name.

John stood, leaning against his desk. “This is about what you saw in the staff room, where you saw people giving funny looks but you didn’t know why.”

Harry quickly explained to Hermione what had happened.

“Have you told Hermione about the dog?” asked John. Harry nodded. “How many times have you been summoned by it? Did it react the same way each time?”

“Twice, and yes, it was, like, normal friendly dog behavior.” Harry wondered what this was all about.

John looked at Harry seriously. “Harry, I’ve been at Hogwarts for six years. The other teachers and I have all been summoned by that dog dozens of times. The dog walks up to the teacher, and stands there until it senses that the teacher is ready to follow, and then it starts walking. It has never jumped into anyone’s lap, or behaved affectionately.”

“Maybe he changed its behavior recently,” Harry suggested.

John shook his head. “Another teacher was summoned shortly before you arrived in the staff room. The dog did what it normally does. It was only different for you.”

Harry was starting to wonder why that would be, when he saw Hermione’s eyes fly wide open. “You know, the problem with being Hermione’s friend is that I often end up feeling like I’m rather slow. She gets things much faster than I do. Okay, Hermione, what is it?”

“Harry... I think John is trying to say that the dog’s affection for you is a mirror of Professor Dumbledore’s affection for you. He probably doesn’t even know the dog is doing it, does he, John?”

John nodded. “The staff think not,” he agreed. “There was quite a bit of conversation about it after you left, Harry. The staff wanted to talk about it, but we were also a little embarrassed about doing so. We felt as if we had unknowingly invaded Professor Dumbledore’s privacy.”

Harry was still confused. “Well, I know he likes me, of course, but he likes a lot of people. Am I still not getting something?”

Hermione smiled at him tolerantly. “I think what John is saying is that what Professor Dumbledore feels for you is something stronger... more like what one feels for a family member. Like a son, or a grandson.” She looked at John, who nodded.

“That’s why the staff were so surprised, Harry. I don’t think the staff quite understood the depth of Dumbledore’s feelings for you, and they were momentarily taken aback by such an obvious expression, if unconscious. Most of them thought it was sweet, though. Professor Sprout particularly liked how you returned the dog’s affection with what she referred to as ‘innocent enthusiasm.’”

Hermione smiled at Harry. “That’s so sweet... you know, it says a lot about you that he feels this way about you.”

Harry felt overwhelmed; he knew that dealing with emotion was not one of his strong points. “What should I do?” he asked them both.

“I don’t think you should do anything differently, Harry, unless you really want to,” said John. “I’m just telling you because I don’t think it’s right that the teachers should know something so personal about you, but have you not know it yourself. But you should especially not do anything differently the next time the dog comes for you. You should pet it, do whatever you did before. Don’t be afraid to enjoy its affection. If you start acting awkward, the teachers will figure out that you know, and they’ll be more embarrassed. But there’s nothing to be embarrassed about, really. Now that the teachers know, like I said, they think it’s nice. So do I. Don’t worry about it. Just enjoy it, keep it in your heart. It’s quite an honor, and like Hermione says, it says a lot about you.”

Harry still felt overwhelmed, but what John was saying was starting to sink in. Is that why he was so angry about what Snape did to me in Occlumency that Hermione was able to notice it? he wondered. Why he was so kind to me after Sirius died? He felt very proud, because he had such great respect for Dumbledore.

“Okay, well, thanks for telling me,” he said to John.

“Sure, Harry. Take it easy. Hermione, it’s good to see you again. I really wished you could have stayed in my class. Very few students have the kind of enthusiasm for their classes that you do.”

She smiled. “Thank you, John, I wish I could too. See you later.” She and Harry left, heading for Gryffindor Tower.

As they walked, she said, “I guess you’re still pretty overwhelmed, huh?” He nodded. “Well, you probably shouldn’t dwell on it too much. I think the important thing is to try to be comfortable with it. I mean, you knew that Sirius loved you, that he regarded you like a family member. Were you comfortable with that?”

“I suppose so,” he said. “It wasn’t something that I thought about so much. It was always just, sort of, there.”

They were passing near the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. “Harry, could we come in here for a minute?” She guided him into the room and

headed for his office in the back. “I just wanted to be able to make sure we weren’t overheard. I thought it might be good to talk about this.”

Harry’s face was open, but he wasn’t quite sure what she was driving at. He motioned for her to go ahead and say what she wanted to say.

“I was just thinking that this might be difficult for you because... well, you were kind of emotionally disadvantaged as a child. Your aunt and uncle were mean to you most of the time. Basically, you had never been loved. You had never had anyone tell you they loved you, or act like it. That had to affect you. People need love, Harry. People need to know they’re cared about. I’m wondering if this information about Dumbledore is hard for you to process because there’s that lack in your past.”

Harry thought. “I’m not sure I could know that. You might be in a better position to know than me. I assume that’s what you think?”

“It seems likely. Let me ask you something. Remember that love isn’t only romantic, but also a feeling of great attachment, great closeness. Now, how many people can you think of that love you?”

Harry had never thought about this. “I don’t know... I suppose Sirius did... Mrs. Weasley, I guess...” He continued thinking.

“You can’t think of anybody else, Harry?” she asked prompting him with her eyes.

Harry saw what was in her eyes, then looked down, then back up. “You mean, you?”

With barely concealed frustration, she blurted out, “Yes, I mean me! Come on, Harry, you know it, you couldn’t not know it. I love you. Ron loves you, though he’d rather die than admit it. Ginny loves you. And so does Professor Dumbledore.”

“I’m sorry, I’m not trying to be slow. Maybe you’re right about my childhood. It seems strange for me to think in terms of love; it’s more like it’s a theory instead of something that has any connection to me.”

“Well, that’s one of the reasons I wanted to talk about it,” Hermione said. “I think the more you think about it, the more you open yourself up and feel it, the more you’ll get used to it, and the better off you’ll be.”

“I just realized something... when you said you loved me just a minute ago... that was the first time anybody had ever said that to me,” Harry said, with a kind of surprised look, almost like he’d had a revelation.

Tears sprang to Hermione’s eyes; Harry could tell that she was thinking of what it must have been like for him, never having heard that. She rushed forward and hugged him. “I do love you, Harry,” she said through her tears.

He hugged her back tightly. He knew what he wanted to say, what he should say, but it was difficult. Finally he managed it. “I know. I love you too.” She squeezed him harder. “And Ron, and Ginny, and Mrs. Weasley, and Sirius... and I suppose Professor Dumbledore, too... I just had never thought about it like that. I guess you know you love somebody if you’d be seriously upset to lose them, like I was with Sirius.”

“Yes, that’s a good way of putting it,” she agreed, still holding him. “Let me ask you something...” She took a half-step back so she could see his eyes, still holding his shoulders. “Did you cry after Sirius died?”

“I think a little bit... I was sitting under that tree, the day after he died... I tried not to, though, I didn’t want anyone seeing me.”

“I know, Harry, but it probably would have been better if you had,” she said earnestly. “There’s a reason we cry. We need to release our feelings. It’s not healthy if we hold it in. There’s nothing wrong with crying. Look at me, I do it all the time, even for stupid reasons sometimes.” She smiled.

“I guess I don’t think there’s anything wrong in your case because you’re a girl. I always thought men weren’t supposed to cry.”

“A lot of people think that,” she acknowledged, “but it’s stupid. Men need to cry just like women do, they just suffer more for not doing it.”

“Well, I’ll try to keep that in mind the next time I feel like crying,” Harry said, half-seriously. “I should take your advice, you know this better than I do.”

“Yes, you should,” she agreed, with a smile. She let go of him. “C’mon, we’d better get back to Gryffindor Tower if we’re going to get any work done before dinner. You still wanted help with Potions, right?”

“Yeah, I did. But do you mind if we do it here? I’m just not in the mood to be around a bunch of people right now.”

“Sure, Harry,” she said quietly. “No problem.” She pulled out her Potions text.

“And Hermione... thanks.”

She smiled her acknowledgment, and they got to work. As they started working, Harry noticed that he felt more comfortable, a kind of satisfaction of being in the presence of someone who cared for him so much. He wondered if he had come to take Ron and Hermione and others who cared for him for granted. I don’t want to do that, he thought. Then don’t, he answered. He then asked Hermione to repeat the last thing she’d said, and he went back to focusing on Potions.

CHAPTER 9

CONSEQUENCES

Tuesday's lessons went roughly as Monday's had. In some ways, that was to be expected; the second years were more or less first years in terms of their Defense Against the Dark Arts knowledge, as they had never had a useful class under Umbridge. Harry's worry that the Slytherins might be more problematic proved unfounded; they seemed almost as enthusiastic as the Slytherin first years. He wondered if it was because after a year of Umbridge, any halfway decent class looked really good by comparison.

Wednesday's classes went well also, with a slight hitch with the Slytherins; two of the ten Slytherin students left the class in the first ten minutes with symptoms that were obviously from Skiving Snackboxes. He decided not to make an issue of it, and the other Slytherins stayed and appeared to enjoy the lesson.

Thursday presented an escalating problem; four Slytherin fourth years skived off of Harry's class using the Snackboxes. He knew he would have to act soon; he just wanted the violation to be sufficiently flagrant that the need for action would be obvious.

Harry was in the staff room at lunchtime talking to Professor McGonagall about the situation when an owl flew in and dropped a letter on his head. The letter fell to the floor, and Harry picked it up. It was from Helen Clark, the Slytherin first-year girl. He read silently.

Dear Professor Potter,

I wanted to tell you about what is going on here. It's really bad. You were right about Malfoy. He's really mad at all the first and second years

because they like you and your class. He's being terrible, making threats and saying awful things. Hedrick tried to write you a letter, but Malfoy caught him and did a curse on him. He's okay, but he was really upset. I'm writing this on my bed so no one can see me, and I'm going to sneak off to the owlery.

I also wanted to tell you that Malfoy is trying to make all the Slytherins get out of your classes using those candies that make you sick. He yelled at some of the third years that didn't use them, and now he's saying bad things are going to happen to the fourth and fifth years if they don't. He gave everyone in your classes the candies, but there's no way I'm using one, I don't care what he does to me.

He's so awful, Professor Potter. Why did the Sorting Hat ever put me here? I wish I had asked the hat to put me someplace else like you did. Please help us if you can.

Helen

Harry read the letter with mounting fury. I should have known this was going to happen, he thought. He was bothered less by the Skiving Snackbox campaign than the attacks on the younger students. Is there nothing he won't stoop to? wondered Harry.

"That son of a bitch..." he muttered.

The teachers stared; McGonagall dropped the folder she was holding. "Professor Potter! We do not use language like that--"

He glared at her and interrupted her. "Read this!"

Shocked at his anger, she took the letter and read. Her face reflected her growing dismay. The other teachers looked on, wondering what was going on. Finally she finished. "While your language was inappropriate, I sympathize with the sentiment. Would you like me to talk to Professor Snape about this?"

He shook his head. "Malfoy'll just lie to him, and then be twice as horrible to the first and second years. No, I'm going to go have a chat with Malfoy. Your evenings might be getting busy soon, Professor. Excuse me." He stormed out.

He headed toward the Great Hall, hoping that Malfoy was still there, with as many Slytherins as possible around. He got his wish; Malfoy was there with his usual group of sixth years. Snape was nowhere around, so Harry would get no opposition. He stood at the part of the teachers' table which was closest to the Slytherins. Malfoy was about a third of the way down the hall from Harry, but Harry had decided that he wasn't moving off that spot.

He raised his voice considerably. "Malfoy! Get down here!"

The hall came to a near-hush. Malfoy looked over in incredulity. "Get stuffed, Potter."

"I'm a teacher, Malfoy. You should say, 'Get stuffed, Professor Potter.'" Many of the students in the hall laughed. "Now, get over here."

"No way. Who do you think you are?"

"I think, Malfoy, that I'm going to give you an hour of detention for every thirty seconds that you're not over here, starting now. It's up to you."

Malfoy stared at Harry mutinously for about twenty-five seconds, then muttered something and walked over to where Harry was standing. "What?" he sneered.

Harry let his temper guide him. "Listen, Malfoy. I know you hate my guts, and I don't care. But you are not going to disrupt my classes. I'm not stupid. Do you think I don't recognize the symptoms of a Skiving Snackbox? Also, you're a prefect. You're supposed to be enforcing the school rules, not making sure they're violated. You had damn well better make sure it stops, do you understand me?"

Looking smug, Malfoy said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Potter. Do you mean those foul things the Weasleys sell? You wouldn't catch me in that shop of theirs."

“Yeah, because they’d throw you out, you had to have done it by owl order. You can deny it all you want, I know what I know. So, here’s the deal, Malfoy. Every student tomorrow, from whatever house... if anyone uses anything from a Snackbox, they get an hour detention. If anyone from Slytherin uses them, they get an hour detention, and you get an hour detention for every Slytherin that uses one. So, if all ten Slytherins use them tomorrow, that’s ten hours of detention for you.”

Malfoy fumed. “You can’t do that! You have no proof!”

“I don’t need proof, I can do this if I want. And don’t bother complaining to Professor Snape, he can’t overrule me. Now, I suggest you use your influence as a prefect to make sure that the students follow the school rules. Good day, Malfoy.” Harry turned and left. The students in the hall, most of whom could not have overheard the conversation, nonetheless applauded, knowing that Malfoy had been taken down a peg. Harry headed back to the teachers’ room.

He walked in and headed straight for McGonagall. “Professor, I apologize—“

She cut him off. “No need, Harry. I’m sure you have great affection for your first years, and this would be enough to anger anyone. What did you do just now?”

With the other teachers listening in casually but avidly, Harry told her. She pursed her lips.

“Giving detentions without solid proof is very problematical, Professor. We frown on it, because to be allowed to do so invites abuse. I know you are absolutely sure of this, and I’m sure you are right. It sounds very much like something he would do. But this starts to tread a very fine line.”

“Minerva,” said Professor Sprout, “given that this is Malfoy, I think that Professor Potter should be given some license. And the letter is evidence, of a sort. My feeling is that Professor Potter is well within his rights.” Other teachers chimed in to agree. It was obvious that Malfoy had no friends in the staff room.

McGonagall sighed. "I suppose you have a point. I simply want to impress on Professor Potter, as he is new, that we prefer a high standard of proof to a low one."

"It's not only that, Professor," Harry pointed out, "but this isn't just a few people skiving off. This is a direct, organized challenge to my authority. We knew something like this would happen. I have to take strong action, or there'll be no end to it."

"Very well," she conceded. "I would advise you, however, to inform Professor Dumbledore of these developments, and get his advice before proceeding."

Harry nodded and picked up the letter. "I wanted to anyway, but I wouldn't have wanted to bother him with it. But I'll be happy to."

"On occasions when you are contemplating giving out detentions of such a quantity, it is not a 'bother' for the headmaster to become involved," McGonagall said.

"I just hope he can do something to help those poor Slytherins," Harry lamented. He left for Dumbledore's office.

By the time he arrived, Harry had worked himself into more anger. He stopped in front of the office and took a few deep breaths. No point in dumping anger all over Dumbledore, Harry thought. He'll do what he can. Harry entered the office.

"Good afternoon, Harry. What is troubling you today?"

Obviously I'm still angry enough that it's on my face, Harry thought. "I got this letter a half hour ago from a Slytherin first year." Dumbledore read it, and Harry laid out the rest of what had happened.

"I wish I could have seen Minerva's face when you said that," smiled Dumbledore. "I do not see her looking surprised too often. Well, here is what I recommend. If more than a few Slytherins use the Snackboxes tomorrow, you will send them to Madam Pomfrey's, and make sure they stay there for the rest of the

period. I will visit them and question them. If I am satisfied that the statements in the letter are true, I will question Mr. Malfoy personally about the accusations. How will that be?"

Harry thought that sounded very reasonable; he was glad that Dumbledore was willing to use his talent as a Legilimens to this end. No doubt the idea of Malfoy tormenting first years was disturbing to him as well. "It sounds fine, sir. How will I let you know when I want you to come? It'll be in the middle of the lesson, and I don't want to lose too much time."

"You should summon Fawkes. I will show you how to do it." To Harry's surprise, Fawkes flew onto his shoulder; he felt that Fawkes seemed awfully light. "Now, Harry, move your wand like this, and say 'Fawkes.'" Harry did so. "Good. If you wish my attention, say my name while holding his tail, and he will take you to me. If you wish to go to another place, say the name of the place, and do the same; he will take you there. Do you understand?"

Harry did. He was amazed that Dumbledore was giving him permission to use Fawkes; Harry seriously doubted that the privilege was granted to many, if any, others. "Yes, sir, thank you. I was thinking, though, that it might be better if I questioned them before you did; I want to be on record as the one assigning the detentions if they're going to respect my authority. I can call you after I've finished. What do you think?"

"Yes, that will be fine," agreed Dumbledore.

"Thank you, sir. I just wish there was something I could do for those kids. It's doubly frustrating because Malfoy's taking his anger at me out on them."

"Yes, indeed, one finds that when in positions of authority, others can suffer the consequences of one's actions. It is often not pleasant."

Harry felt that Dumbledore must have been referring to recent situations in which Harry had suffered for Dumbledore's actions; he realized that the shoe was on the other foot now. "I didn't blame you for those things, sir. I hope the Slytherin first years don't blame me."

“I believe they will know who is responsible for their situation, and that it is not you,” Dumbledore said. Harry hoped he was right. He thanked Dumbledore and left.

He went to the Great Hall to look for Ron and Hermione, and he found them at their usual spot, chatting before their Care of Magical Creatures class. When they saw Harry, they broke into applause, as did several nearby Gryffindors. Others sitting nearby laughed at the scene.

As he sat down, Harry said, “Well, I guess I don’t need to tell you.”

“Part of it,” corrected Ron. “We know you gave Malfoy hell and threatened him with all kinds of detentions, and that you think he’s behind these skivings you’ve had and is planning more. The only thing we don’t know is exactly why you think it. We assume you have a pretty good idea, or else you wouldn’t have done that.”

“Also, ‘eyewitnesses on the scene,’ as the Muggle news shows like to say, said that they’d never seen you so angry,” Hermione said. “And also that you deliberately humiliated Malfoy by making him go to where you were, instead of coming to him.”

“And we couldn’t be more proud,” smiled Ron. “So, what’s the rest of it?”

Harry showed them the letter; they reacted much as he did. “I wouldn’t have thought he could get any lower... attacking first years! And him a prefect!” fumed Hermione.

“His prefect’s badge has never been anything but a license to bully, we’ve known that for a while now,” pointed out Ron. “But, yes, this is below despicable. I’d say that you restrained yourself well, mate.”

“I couldn’t yell at him for harassing the first years, much as I wanted to, because I can’t let him know about the letter. If he even knows it exists, even not knowing who wrote it, all the first years’ll be in trouble. So I had to focus on the Snackboxes.”

“Do you think they’ll still be in trouble?” asked Hermione.

“It all depends,” said Harry. “I think the second years will support them, as well as some of the third and fourth. I think the ones who didn’t skive are the type that aren’t in Malfoy’s pocket. There may be a kind of internal battle at Slytherin; not everyone there wants to be a Death Eater. People are just intimidated by the few that are there. If Malfoy’s power can be reduced, the younger ones may be safer.” He sighed. “I didn’t think anything like this would happen, but I guess I should have expected it.”

“That’s true, Harry,” said Hermione. “This was going to happen no matter what, if the young Slytherins liked your classes. Malfoy wasn’t going to stand for that.”

“The worst thing is, I can’t write her back, because somebody could yank it out of her hand when she gets it, and then she’s in a world of trouble,” Harry said. “But... there is maybe something I could do,” while looking down the table at a group on Gryffindor first years. He got up and headed in their direction. As he walked away, he barely heard Ron saying, “Well, he could’ve told us about it first...”

At 4:30, Harry walked into the library wearing his Invisibility Cloak. It had been a while since he’d used it, and he reflected on the irony that he was using it now to do something not at all against the rules. He looked through the stacks and found Helen walking through them, pretending to be interested in books. He walked up next to her.

“Helen,” he whispered.

“Professor? Where are you?”

“I’m right next to you. I’m going to show myself. Make no noise, okay?”

She nodded; he made sure no one was watching, then flipped up enough of the cloak that she could see him. She gasped, but silently.

“Professor! What is that? What are you doing?” she whispered.

“Stand next to me, closer.” She did. “We’re going to my office, it’s not far from here. Don’t say anything until we get there.” She nodded.

They walked silently out of the library, Harry leading, careful not to make noise or be bumped into by unsuspecting passersby. They went down the hall, turned, and walked down another hall, passing Pansy Parkinson along the way. They walked into the classroom and over to his office. He took off the cloak and shut the door.

“Okay,” Harry said. “Sorry about all that.”

“What is that?” she asked, looking at the cloak with awe. “I’ve never seen one.”

“It’s an Invisibility Cloak. I hear they’re really rare. It was my father’s. Professor Dumbledore happened to have it when my father died, and he gave it to me when I came to Hogwarts. It’s come in handy more than once.”

“Wow, it’s so neat, I’d love to have one.”

“Yeah, they’re pretty great,” he agreed, sitting down and gesturing for her to do so as well. “I asked David to have you meet me in the library for the same reason that I assume you wrote me instead of coming to see me; you could be in trouble from Malfoy and his friends if you’re seen. Right?”

She nodded. “But why didn’t you just write me back?”

“Anybody could walk up to you and grab a letter out of your hand, and then it’s the same problem. You can send an owl secretly, but you can’t get an owl secretly.”

“Oh, I didn’t think of that,” she admitted. Then she smiled. “I heard what you did to Malfoy at lunch. That was so great. All us first years were so happy.”

“I wish I could have done more,” Harry said earnestly. “I wasn’t that bothered about the students skiving my class. I would’ve done something about it, but I wasn’t angry. But how he’s treating you and the others... unfortunately, that’s the thing I’m most angry at, and can do the least about. I can give you advice, but that’s about it.”

“I know. We’ve found out that there’s not much we can do. The only one who could help us is Professor Snape, and he doesn’t seem to care. I didn’t know if you could do much, but I had to try.”

“It still may help, just not in a way you’d expect. I showed your letter to Professor Dumbledore, and he’s concerned as well. I didn’t show it to Professor Snape, and I don’t plan to. I won’t risk your name getting back to Malfoy.”

Helen looked like she might cry. “What can we do, Professor? It shouldn’t be like this. You said you had some advice?”

“There are things you can do. One of them is something I said in class—make friends, be together. For example... are all the Slytherin first years together in this? Do you all feel the same way?”

She nodded. “Yes, we do, all ten of us. And all of the second years too, we think. We’re not sure, but we think there might be some third and fourth years also.”

“Good. That’s a good start, right there. If you’re all together, there’s much less he can do to you. He’s a prefect, and I know he abuses his power. He can curse a student, like he did Hedrick, and get away with it. But he can’t curse all ten of you and get away with it. If you and the second years all stick together, he almost has to leave you alone. If he curses or insults one of you, the others can’t give in, they have to risk the same thing.

“You see, Helen, this is how bad people with power push around good people without it. They pick one person, hurt him, and say to the others, this will happen to you if you don’t do what we say. The people are scared, and they don’t fight, and the bad people keep their power. But if the good people are united, if they say ‘we’ll fight you even if you hurt one or five or ten of us,’ then the bad people can’t win so easily. They have to fight or run. Sometimes they run, sometimes they fight.”

“Like you fight Voldemort...” she said, seeing Harry’s point.

“Yes. He could kill me, he could kill my friends. He killed one in June, someone I really cared about. But we can’t stop fighting him, because then he would have power and could do any terrible things he wanted. We have to fight, to be who we want to be. Your situation is not that bad. Malfoy can’t kill you, and he can’t hurt you badly. He can embarrass you with curses, he can bully you, he can insult you. The question is, how much are you willing to deal with in order not to give up, in order to be the people you want to be? That’s what you and the others have to work out.”

“We hate him,” she said fervently. “We really hate him. I know I’ll do whatever it takes, and I think the others will, too.” Harry didn’t know if that was true for the others, but he could see it was true for her; she was clearly serious.

“This is a bit of what I meant in the class, about sticking together. The more people you have, the better, but you have to be careful that the people really are with you, and aren’t just saying they are. But if enough people are with you, Malfoy could lose his influence, and have much less power.”

“But he has lots of friends, doesn’t he? Those two big guys, the other prefect, some other people who laugh at his jokes?”

“Those aren’t his friends, Helen. Those are his allies, which is very different. Allies are together to have power, to share power. If Malfoy didn’t have power, most of them wouldn’t stay with him. Here’s the difference: Ron and Hermione are my friends. We care about each other a lot, and we’ve all risked our lives for each other. We fight for each other, like they fought with me at the Department of Mysteries. I promise you that there are no Slytherins who would risk their lives for Malfoy. That’s his weakness. You have to be friends with each other, like each other, help each other. That makes you stronger. You notice how I got a Gryffindor first year to help me? If he wasn’t friendly with some Slytherins, I couldn’t be talking to you now.”

“But doesn’t it take time to make friends?”

“Yes, it can. But sometimes it happens really fast. Sometimes you make friends faster if you have problems together, it makes you come together to solve them. One thing about life is, you never know what’s going to happen. It’s an adventure.”

She nodded glumly. “A really hard adventure, right now?”

Harry couldn’t argue. “I wish I could do more for you. I wish I could wave my wand and make it go away, or make Malfoy go away. I’ll do what I can, but it’s mainly you and the others. You have to stand up for yourselves, for each other.”

Now she looked determined. “We will. We’ll defy him, like you do Voldemort.”

Harry nodded proudly. “You remember what you said in your letter, wondering why you were put in Slytherin? She nodded. “I have a guess. It might be wrong, but I think the Sorting Hat put you and the others in Slytherin to change it. We need to be united to fight Voldemort, the Hat knows that, but Malfoy and his friends like Voldemort and don’t like Dumbledore. If you and those who think like you do can stand up to Malfoy, the people who want to think for themselves will join you, and then everyone in Slytherin can say what they want. Then all four houses can work together. You know how Slytherins are supposed to have ambition, and Gryffindors courage? I think the Hat put the courageous people in Slytherin this time, because it knew they would have to fight.”

She looked at him, glowing. Harry got the feeling she would run through fire right now if she was asked to. If he asked her to, he corrected himself. He had inspired this attitude in her. It felt strange to think that he could do that.

Harry heard the outer door of the classroom open. He reflexively moved to grab the Invisibility Cloak to cover Helen, but then he heard Ron yell, “Harry?”

Harry relaxed. “In here,” he shouted.

Ron and Hermione walked in. “Ah, here you are,” said Ron. Looking at Helen, Ron said, “Hi, I’m Ron, and—“

”And you’re Hermione,” Helen finished brightly. “Harry told me how you risked your lives for each other.”

Ron put his hand on Harry’s shoulder in a comradely gesture. “Yes, indeed... it’s a very dangerous life, being Harry’s friend, but an interesting one.”

Helen giggled. “You must be really brave,” she said. “How can you do that?”

Ron leaned over conspiratorially. “The trick is, try not to think too much. Once you’ve decided to do something, do it. If you think about it too much, you may not do it. One thing I’m very good at is not thinking. My teachers have said so.” Helen giggled again, harder this time.

“Are you the one who wrote the letter?” asked Hermione kindly. Helen nodded. “Well, that was very brave of you,” Hermione continued.

“We’re going to fight Malfoy,” Helen said proudly. “Me and the other first years, and some second years, we’re not going to let him tell us what to do.”

“That’s wonderful,” Hermione said. “But it’s not going to be easy, though. Malfoy’s nasty and mean.”

“I know,” said Helen defiantly. “Professor Potter told me it wouldn’t be easy. Some of us could get cursed or bullied. But if we stick together, we can do it.”

“If the others are as brave as you, I’m sure you can.” She turned to Harry. “Harry, we wanted to let you know the latest. The information goes from older Slytherins to younger Slytherins to younger Gryffindors to us, so it could be garbled, but they’re saying that Malfoy thinks you’re bluffing, or that you can’t make it stick. He’s apparently putting full pressure on the fifth years to skive off tomorrow.”

“Yes,” Harry said triumphantly. “I sure hope that’s right.”

“You want them to get out of your classes?” Helen asked, confused.

“No, not really,” Harry said, “but Malfoy could get into big trouble for this. He thinks he can get away with it, that he can lie about it. I think he’s wrong. That’s one way your letter helped. You told us about him pressuring you to eat the candies.

Since you put it down on parchment, and teachers have seen it, if Malfoy does it now, he can get into bigger trouble. It can't be used as real evidence, because then everyone would know that you wrote it. But it's still helpful."

"If you need it to get Malfoy in more trouble, you can use it, you can say who wrote it," Helen said, looking very determined. Ron and Hermione raised their eyebrows.

"But then he'd single you out for abuse, Helen. Your life would get even more difficult," Harry pointed out.

"Like Voldemort singles you out, and your life is difficult?"

Harry sighed, then gave her a very serious look. "Helen, I've suffered a lot. It's really hard, being the one who gets singled out. I just want to be sure you understand that."

"I understand," she said quietly.

"Okay. I still won't use it unless I have to, but if I think it'll do any good, I will. Now, we should get you out of here. We'll have to use the cloak again, walk around until we find someplace where there's no one around."

"It won't be that hard, Harry. I thought to bring this." Ron pulled out the Marauders' Map from his robes.

"Nice one, Ron, good idea," said Harry. "Let's have a look, then."

Ron set the map on the table. Helen moved closer and peered at it. It took her a minute to figure out what it was and what it did. When she did, she let out a gasp. "Wow... this is so amazing..."

"Look at this!" said Hermione indignantly. "Parkinson is still out there in the hall! She was there when we came in."

"She was around here when we came in, too," said Harry. "She's obviously on a kind of patrol, making sure no Slytherins come talk to me."

"I'm almost surprised they'd bother," Ron said. "Why should they care what first years do?"

“The fact that they care, Ron, shows how worried Malfoy is,” explained Hermione. “He wants to control Slytherin, and the first years have become a threat to that control. He wants to intimidate them. But it’s good, in a way, Helen. It means he’s worried.” Helen nodded with satisfaction.

“It’s too bad you can’t use a map like this to find Voldemort,” Helen mused.

“Are there any other Slytherins in places where you’re likely to be, Harry?” asked Ron, who was not close enough to see the map well.

“Let’s see... yeah, Nott seems to be hanging around the corridor leading to Gryffindor Tower, no reason for him to be there. I can’t think of too many other places that I’d be especially likely to be found. Okay, we’ll just have to slip by Parkinson again. It looks like if we go this way,” Harry said, pointing to the map, “there’s no one here, and we can take off the cloak and you can head straight toward the Great Hall entrance. Okay?” he asked Helen.

“Okay.”

“All right. Ron and Hermione, you go past Parkinson, and Helen and I’ll go the other way. I’ll meet you back in Gryffindor Tower.” He stood, grabbed the cloak, and gestured Helen to stand next to him.

As she did, she looked up at him with appreciation. “Professor Potter... thank you, for using this to come get me, for talking to me, for helping us.”

“It’s no problem,” he assured her. I just hope everything goes all right, he added to himself.

At 4:30 the next morning, Gryffindor Tower was dark, all its inhabitants asleep. In the sixth year boys’ dormitory, Harry was asleep, dreaming he was on his broom. Suddenly the scene changed; he was standing in a graveyard. He recognized it as the graveyard in which Voldemort had come back. The scar on his forehead started prickling. Harry took out his wand, alert, carefully looking around. He knew what he would find here.

Voldemort appeared in front of him, out of nowhere. He looked Harry up and down. Again, Harry felt frozen, unable to move. He saw Voldemort's eyes linger on him, his expression reminding Harry of a cat playing with a mouse before killing it.

“So, Potter... or should I say, Professor Potter... we meet again. It has not been often enough; I think I should drop in on you more often. We really should get to know each other.”

Harry found that, surprisingly, he could speak. “I don't need to get to know you,” he said loudly. “You're pure evil, that's all I need to know.”

“Really, Potter, such disrespect... I will be seeing you more, anyway, whether you like it or not. Your feeble defenses are not enough to keep me out of your mind. I simply have not chosen to venture here.”

“And why now?” Harry asked, but he thought he knew the answer.

“To punish you for your disrespect,” sneered Voldemort, looking as if he were looking at a bug. “Bad enough that you dare to utter my name. But now you encourage your students to do so. You mock me by giving them school points for doing so. You will pay for that, Potter. You will stop doing this, now.”

Harry laughed. “I'll do no such thing,” he sneered back. “You can kill me, you can torture me, but you'll never make me do what you want. We'll fight you, and we'll win.”

Voldemort looked smug. “What is the point of winning, Potter, when you are dead? Or when you would rather be?”

Harry was suddenly surrounded, practically unable to breathe, in the grip of evil. The world was shut out, only evil existed. Harry felt despair. ‘But I still exist,’ he thought. ‘I'm still here.’ Fighting despair, he remembered what he had to do. He summoned an image of himself hugging Hermione in his office, her saying she loved him. He saw Ginny, with admiration in her eyes, reach up and kiss him. He saw Ron put a hand on his shoulder, in his office yesterday. They love me, he thought. And I love them. I have to get through this, for them. He focused on

them, on his love for them. In less than a second he started breathing easier. He felt the evil recede. He was himself again.

“You disgust me, Potter,” spat Voldemort. “You sicken me. You parade your weakness as if it were a strength.”

“It is a strength!” Harry shouted, exultant, taunting. “It drove you from my mind. You can’t tolerate it. That’s your weakness!”

“Really? Let your friends protect you from this, Potter. Crucio!”

Harry screamed as loud as he could as the familiar pain of the Cruciatus Curse absorbed him, lancing into him at every point of his body, inside and out. He wanted to think, but he couldn’t; all he could do was scream. He felt himself rocking back and forth, and then he felt a pressure against his shoulders. He continued screaming, as he vaguely heard a voice shouting, “Harry!” He was able to open his eyes.

He stopped screaming. He was sitting on his bed, Ron holding him by his shoulders, looking stricken. Neville, Seamus, and Dean were standing next to his bed, ashen. Harry gasped for breath, feeling as if he’d run five kilometers. He grasped Ron’s shoulders, suddenly needing human contact. “Voldemort,” he breathed. “Cruciatus...” he gasped for breath again.

Neville went white. “I’m getting McGonagall,” he shouted, and ran off.

Harry slowly recovered his breath, still holding onto Ron. “Thanks...”

Ron still looked stricken. “I had a real hard time waking you up... I shook you, shoved you, but nothing. I was scared.”

“When you’re in that much pain, being shaken or shoved is not much feeling by comparison,” Harry pointed out. “But you did it. I wonder how long I would have been screaming otherwise.”

“I’d rather not think about that,” Ron said fearfully.

“Tell me about it,” Harry agreed, finally letting go of Ron’s shoulders.

They were silent for a moment, and McGonagall came rushing in, Neville close behind. She sat down on the bed next to him and felt his forehead.

“Was this a vision, like last year?” she asked.

“No, it was just him, in that graveyard where he came back... he talked to me, taunted me... he’s angry that I’ve been encouraging students to say his name, told me to stop... tried to possess me... then the Curse, and Ron was able to wake me up.”

McGonagall looked near tears, deeply upset. She stood, took out her wand, and whirled in a familiar way. “Fawkes,” she said softly. A second later, Fawkes burst into view. All the boys except Harry gasped. To the others, McGonagall said, “You four should try to get back to sleep. I assure you that Harry will be cared for.” She helped Harry out of bed. “Put your arm around my shoulder, Harry,” she said, putting hers around his waist. He felt he had barely enough strength to do it, but he did. She gripped him to make sure of her hold on him, then grasped Fawkes’s tail. “Dumbledore’s quarters,” she said, and the phoenix was gone.

The living room of Dumbledore’s quarters burst into view. Fawkes let them down, and McGonagall laid Harry out on Dumbledore’s sofa. He heard her knock on the door of Dumbledore’s bedroom. A few seconds later, Dumbledore opened the door. He took in McGonagall, and Harry on the sofa, and obviously knew at once what had happened. He strode over and sat in a chair near the sofa. “Are you able to tell us about it, Harry?”

Harry nodded. “But... it might be better to have Professor Snape here, while it’s still fresh... maybe he...”

Dumbledore interrupted him by putting up his hand. He looked at Harry in slight surprise and nodded. “Yes, that would be better. I just did not know if you would be disturbed by further company.”

Fawkes disappeared again and returned in about ten seconds, carrying a somewhat disheveled Severus Snape. Snape took in the scene in a second. “Another vision?” he asked Dumbledore.

“No, a dream. He interacted with Voldemort, not from Voldemort’s perspective,” answered McGonagall.

“Harry, did you do your Occlumency exercises before bed last night?” asked Dumbledore gently. Harry nodded. “The same way as usual?” Harry nodded again. The three teachers exchanged significant looks. Snape and McGonagall sat down near the sofa. Dumbledore looked at Harry with compassion and said, “Please tell us what happened, Harry, in as much detail as you can recall.” One of Harry’s hands was near Dumbledore, who took it and held it. It made Harry feel a bit better, as holding Ron’s shoulders had.

Harry told them the dream, being careful to omit nothing. When he finished, they all looked pensive, with Dumbledore and McGonagall distraught at what Harry had gone through. Snape appeared to be his usual calculating self.

“Professor Potter,” said Snape, “you may find this difficult to accept at the moment, but there are elements of this which may work to our advantage.”

Harry nodded, surprising the others. “I thought that might be the case,” he said. “I think I even thought it in the dream. It’s not like last year, when he was doing it for a specific purpose. Here, he’s just doing it because he’s angry, he wants to teach me a lesson. That’s got to be good for us. That’s why I asked Professor Dumbledore to call you, Professor Snape. I thought you might have some insight. Sorry to wake you.”

Snape looked to Dumbledore, who nodded. “I was going to tell you in the morning.”

Snape looked at Harry. “I would rather have useful information about the Dark Lord than a few extra hours’ sleep, Professor. You acted correctly. And you are correct about why it is to our advantage. Acting from emotion is usually disadvantageous; the Dark Lord knows this. I am surprised that he has done this, for this purpose.”

“But you warned me. You mentioned ‘unintended consequences.’ Professor Dumbledore told me, I assume from you, that this might happen.”

“I thought it could happen,” Snape admitted, “but I thought the probability was low, that the Dark Lord would not act out of emotion. It is not like him.”

“Maybe it’s not purely out of emotion,” Harry suggested. “Maybe he truly fears what might happen if what I’m doing catches on. I mean,” he continued, warming to his idea, “he loves that people fear his name, even his followers won’t say it. He feeds on fear. If I get the students saying his name without fear, it could spread to the rest of wizarding society, and it would not only be to his disadvantage, but it would damage his status. He would lose that satisfaction he gets from people fearing his name. Maybe he considers it very important to stop this here and now.”

The others raised their eyebrows and exchanged looks. Dumbledore gave Harry’s hand a squeeze. “It appears that you have at least as much insight as I, Professor,” Snape told Harry, surprising Harry greatly. “I find your conjecture to be reasonably likely to be accurate. I should have thought of it myself.”

Harry almost smiled. “Well, you didn’t get much sleep.” Snape raised an eyebrow; Dumbledore and McGonagall chuckled.

“It’s good to see that you have not lost your sense of humor, Harry,” said Dumbledore, giving Harry’s hand another squeeze, then releasing it. “I think you could use a nice cup of hot chocolate; I think I will make one for all of us.” He walked over to a counter.

“Harry,” McGonagall said, “perhaps it would be better if you were to temporarily forego—“

”Absolutely not,” he cut in, looking at her, eyes ablaze. “No way. That would be a sign of weakness.”

Snape surprised Harry again. “The professor is correct,” he said, causing McGonagall’s eyebrows to rise. “The Dark Lord would take it exactly that way. I would not have advised joining this particular battle, Professor Potter, but now that you have, to do anything but follow it through to its end would indeed be a sign of grave weakness. It appears obvious that you are ready, even eager, to join it.”

“I’m not eager to wake up in the middle of every night being tortured, for sure,” Harry said. “But I know I can’t back off of this. Not only because it’s a sign of weakness, but because what I’m doing is right.”

“The Dark Lord will expect this. He knows perfectly well of your... determination and courage,” said Snape reluctantly. “He knows you will not give in, and he will almost certainly be there again tomorrow night. Measures must be taken to prepare.”

“Quite so,” agreed Dumbledore, who returned, distributing cups of hot chocolate to everyone. Harry sat upright so he could drink his. He saw to his pleasure that his had marshmallows in it. He looked at Dumbledore, who winked.

“Which makes me wonder, what measures are those, and also, I did practice the Occlumency last night. How did he get in anyway? Is there anything more I can do?”

“Harry, Sirius told me once that you told him that you learned the Summoning Charm because you were going to face a dragon in twenty-four hours,” recalled Dumbledore. “This may be a similar type of situation. Now, we do have an advantage here. Despite his protestations in your dream, your Occlumency skills are not ‘feeble,’ and it must have cost him some effort to break into your mind. That is something we may be able to exploit. In any case, I am confident that you will be able to repel him eventually; your skills will improve with practice, and of necessity. The only question is how much stress and loss of sleep you will suffer until then. You could succeed in repelling him tomorrow, or it could take a week or more. There is no way to know.”

“Well, this is a battle I’m not going to lose,” Harry said. “He’s not going to beat me in my own mind. Eventually, he won’t be able to get in.” He paused. “Is there anything I can do while in the dream itself to fight him?”

“We cannot really know that, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “There is no information to go on.”

“I would recommend, Professor,” said Snape, “that you try things. Use your intuition, as the headmaster is fond of advising. Use your imagination. Nothing you can try can make your situation worse, and it could possibly help. He cannot kill you, he cannot harm you physically.”

Harry nodded. “Okay, I’ll try that. If I can, that is. This time, it felt like he had me immobilized, like at the Department of Mysteries. But I was able to talk in the dream, and I wasn’t then. So maybe I just thought I was immobilized. I’ll try to move, and do other stuff next time, if he gets in. I like the idea that I can fight him without the possibility of getting killed.”

“Yes, you can only be tortured. What a relief that must be,” said McGonagall dryly, obviously thinking that Harry had a bit too much bravado.

“Who knows, maybe I can even avoid being tortured,” said Harry stubbornly. “Maybe I only think he can, and so I feel it. Maybe if I step aside, or do something else, it won’t happen. Maybe Professor Snape was right.”

“It was only a conjecture, Professor Potter; I suggest you not get carried away by the idea.”

“Well, I believe that there is not much else we can do here,” said Dumbledore. “Harry, I will give you another Occlumency lesson tonight at 10:00, after which you should go to bed.”

“Can the others join me?” Harry quickly asked.

Dumbledore smiled. “Yes, I daresay you could use the emotional support. Now, I suppose you will not be trying to get more sleep?”

Harry shook his head. “It’s only two hours until I’d usually get up, anyway.”

“Well, I was thinking... it seems nice outside, and the sun is starting to rise... a good fly might be invigorating. I will join you; it has been too long since I have flown.”

Flying sounded good right then; flying with Dumbledore sounded even better. Harry knew that Dumbledore was asking mainly to give Harry support, and

he appreciated it greatly. Harry quickly agreed, and Summoned his broom. Snape and McGonagall said their goodbyes and departed.

Harry and Dumbledore walked out onto the Quidditch pitch, brooms in hand. Dumbledore had taken one of the Slytherin Quidditch team's Nimbus 2001s, pointing out to Harry that while they were provided by Lucius Malfoy, they were school property under the care of the head of Slytherin House. "I believe that Professor Snape will not mind me using it for a while," smiled Dumbledore.

Harry laughed. "I suppose not," he agreed. Malfoy would mind, but too bad, Harry thought. They kicked off the ground, and went up into the air. Harry did indeed feel invigorated, the wind whipping through his hair, the cool air giving him energy. He flew joyously for about five minutes, Dumbledore at his side. Harry couldn't tell who was leading or following, he just knew it felt good.

Harry looked down and happened to see a solitary figure running out onto the pitch. Harry shouted to Dumbledore, and they both descended. It was Ron, holding his Cleansweep.

"Why are you still up?" asked Harry.

"Are you kidding? Do you think we could go back to sleep? 'Right, Voldemort's just attacked my mate, I think I'll have a nice lie down.' Really, Harry, you can be a bit thick sometimes." Dumbledore chuckled.

"How did you know I was out here?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "I'll put it down to the lack of sleep, but you'd better get it together for your classes... a Firebolt climbing out of your trunk and zooming through the portrait hole is kind of hard to miss." Dumbledore was still smiling broadly.

"Okay, I get it... so I take it you'd like to join us?"

"C'mon... how could I turn down the chance to tell my grandkids that I once flew with Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore?"

Harry smiled. "With any luck, I'll be there to tell them how you made fun of me before we flew."

“It’s a deal,” Ron agreed. “Now, let’s go.”

As they kicked off, Dumbledore said, “I was going to show Harry some moves from my Quidditch days. I will be interested to see what you think, Ron.”

Ron gaped. “You played Quidditch?”

“Yes, I was primarily a Seeker, but I have experience at all positions. Follow me, if you would...”

They flew for over an hour, sometimes doing moves and sometimes just flying for the fun of it. Dumbledore finally suggested that they set down, and on the way down, Harry noticed a small group watching near the Quidditch field. Dumbledore was saying, “I should really do this more often. As one ages, one can forget to indulge in the simple pleasures of life. Or, as the Muggles say, stop to smell the roses once in a while.”

Harry asked Ron about the group that they were now walking toward.

“Oh, those are Gryffindor first year boys. They heard you scream, and they came running in just after McGonagall left with you. Then they spent the next fifteen minutes asking me questions about what had happened, your scar, your connection to Voldemort, everything. I think they had pretty much gotten it when your broom flew out. They were pretty impressed by that, too.”

“If Professor McGonagall had found you, Ron, she would have reprimanded you for not sending them back to their beds,” Dumbledore pointed out as they set down.

“I know, I just didn’t have the heart to send them back right away,” Ron admitted. “They were so worried about Harry. It would’ve seemed cruel.”

“I understand. It is not often that I approve of a school prefect breaking the rules, but this is one of those times.” Ron grinned.

The first years now came running up to them, their faces in awe as they saw who was with Ron and Harry. “Professor Dumbledore!” three said in unison.

“Hello, all,” Dumbledore greeted them. “You will be glad to know that Professor Potter is now fine.”

“Why were you flying?” asked one.

“Professor Dumbledore was... helping me take my mind off things.” Harry looked at Dumbledore with affection. “Thank you, sir.”

“Did he hurt you badly, sir?” asked David.

“You mean, Voldemort?” asked Harry pointedly.

The Gryffindors gaped at each other. “But sir, Ron said that he did it because he was mad at you for saying the name!”

“Yes, David, and the fact that he did it is proof that I was doing the right thing, and should continue doing it. Doesn’t it make sense that if Voldemort is angry at what you’re doing, it’s a good thing to be doing?”

“Yes, sir, but.. we heard your scream through a thick wall! Aren’t you afraid he’s going to do it again?”

“Oh, he’s going to do it again, that’s for sure,” Harry agreed. “And he’s going to keep doing it. That’s why I have to fight him. Now, the Cruciatus Curse is no fun—“

”What Professor Potter means to say,” Dumbledore interrupted with a slightly reproving glance at Harry, “is that the Cruciatus Curse is the most hideously painful torture known to man, but that he will face it anyway, to defy Voldemort.”

The first years gaped at him. Harry said, “Well, yes, those wouldn’t have been my exact words, but...”

“You have yet to learn, Harry, that there is a point at which modesty ends and dissembling begins. Please try to keep that in mind.”

“Yes, sir... anyway, yes, it’s extremely painful. People have lost their minds from having it done to them for too long,” he continued, to the still-awed first years. “But I have to keep doing this; I have to get people to say the name, so they won’t be scared of it. And I’m not putting anyone else at risk; the only one he can get to like this is me. But I’m going to stop him. I’m going to beat him.”

“But how can you beat him, sir?” asked David, as Harry saw Hermione and Ginny come flying out the castle entrance, running toward him at full speed.

“By keeping him out of my mind,” Harry answered. “With practice, I can do it. Professor Dumbledore’s going to help me.”

“Better brace for impact, Harry,” Ron advised, as Hermione and Ginny got nearer. Hermione was closer. “Oh, Harry!” she cried as she plowed into him, nearly knocking him over. She repeated it as she hugged him tightly, then stepped aside to let Ginny have a turn. He hugged both back, gently saying, “I’m okay, it’s all right.”

“But you’re going to keep doing it, aren’t you? You are, I know you,” asked Hermione anxiously.

“I have to, Hermione. You know that. I can’t give in to him.”

“I know, I know, I just hate it. I just wish I could do it for you.”

“I wouldn’t let you. You know that, too,” Harry pointed out.

“Well, you know we’ll do anything we can to help you,” said Ginny, still holding onto Harry’s left arm.

“I know,” he said, meeting her eyes as they walked. “Just knowing that is helpful, believe me.”

“Professor Potter could not be more correct,” said Dumbledore. Looking at Ron, Ginny, and Hermione. “Talented and resourceful as he is, he could not have accomplished what he has without your friendship and support.” He glanced at the sky, apparently gauging the time by the sun’s location. “Well, I must be off. I will see you three in class later, and all of you in my quarters at 10:00. Harry, if you need me for any reason, I will be available. Goodbye for now.” He strode off to the castle entrance.

“What are we doing at ten?” asked Ginny.

“An Occlumency session. He said we’ll have them every night until Voldemort can’t get in anymore. I’m going to beat this.”

The five Gryffindor first years started running ahead, no doubt to start spreading the word. “Hey! Wait a minute!” Harry shouted at them. Startled, they came skidding to a stop.

“Listen to me. You can’t stop saying his name. I know you might want to stop, to help me, but it won’t help me. If we stop, then he wins. If you want to support me, keep saying his name. Do you understand?” They nodded.

“Eric. What’s his name?”

“Voldemort.”

“David?”

“Voldemort,” David said firmly.

“Good. Now, go ahead.” They took off running.

Hermione looked at him. “You know, Harry, you may be a teacher, but right then you were a general, in a war. You were giving the troops their instructions, like in those Muggle movies.”

Harry nodded. “And we really are in a war, just a different kind.” They walked into the castle.