

Beginnings (part 1)

“'Mione's gone mad!” Ron cried as he dropped like a stone into the armchair next to Harry's.

Harry looked up with little surprise. “Now what?”

“She wants to have the wedding in the graveyard so her parents can attend! Blimey! That's just not on, not on at all!”

Harry understood Ron's feelings and agreed with them, but he also knew that Hermione was still suffering from the sudden loss of both of her parents. “She's not over their deaths yet. Maybe it's too soon for you two to get married.”

Ron shook his head miserably. “Hermione and I both want to get married soon, but there are all these problems with the plans. If 'Mione comes up with an idea, Mum finds a problem with it. If Mum thinks of something, 'Mione doesn't like it. I'm stuck between the two of them, and I can't please either of them.”

“So please yourself. What do you want to do?”

“Elope. These wedding plans are driving me mad!” Ron tore at his hair in frustration, leaving it sticking up in a manner similar to Harry's own hair.

Harry grinned. “You trying a new look?” Perhaps teasing Ron would help him get over his temper. Or perhaps not.

Ron just glared at his best mate. “You're not helping! You're the bloody hero of the Wizarding World! *Do* something!”

Harry shook his head, completely bewildered. “What do you want me to do?”

Ron dropped his face in his hands and scrubbed at it wearily, then looked at Harry, his aching heart in his eyes. “Talk to her. Hex her. Put her under some kind of spell. Anything. Just help me, please?”

Harry gave Ron an uneasy look. What was he getting into? “Erm, which 'her' do you mean?”

“'Mione.”

Harry sighed. “I'll talk to her, but I won't promise you anything. OK?”

Ron nodded, then dropped his head in his hands again. “Thanks.”

Harry reached over and rubbed his friend's back. “It'll be OK, mate. I suspect everyone just needs more time. Why don't you plan on a Christmas wedding instead of marrying in October? It isn't that much of a delay, but it gives her more time to heal.”

“And gives 'Mione and Mum and me more time to argue,” Ron said in disgust. “They've always got on so well, but they can't seem to agree on anything now.”

Harry was puzzled. “Why not? I don't understand.”

“Mum keeps trying to help with the wedding plans, and you know what a planner 'Mione is.”

“Oh, OK. Now I get it,” Harry said, putting his book aside and getting to his feet. “Your mum needs a wedding to plan.”

“What do you mean? She's been trying to plan ours! That's the problem!”

“She just needs something else to work on.”

Ron looked a bit more hopeful. “You have an idea that would keep her from interfering with 'Mione's planning? That would be brilliant, Harry! Dad would love it, too. Maybe then she'd stop changing her mind about how the Burrow's being rebuilt.”

“Maybe so,” Harry said with a hopeful tone. “I'll talk to Ginny. Maybe we can get her working on ours so she'll leave you two alone. Would that help?”

Ron's face lit up. “Are you serious? You'd do that for me?”

Harry laughed. “I'd do that for me! We want to marry as soon as Ginny finishes school, so your mum has a long time to make plans. I think Ginny and I can deal with her. I'll talk to Ginny, and then Hermione, and see what they say before talking to your mum. How's that?”

“Brilliant!” Ron heaved a relieved sigh and slumped in the chair, relaxed at last. “You have no idea what a burden you've taken off my shoulders.”

“And put on my own,” Harry reminded him. “If I need help—”

“I'm there for you, mate!” Ron cried, giving his best friend a weary smile. “Thanks again.”

“Yeah. I'll go and find Ginny. She should be up from her nap by now.”

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A few weeks prior, Ginny Weasley had been shot by a man with a rifle who saw her in her fox Animagus form. Her wound was healed now, but she still tired easily, so she took occasional potions for pain and sometimes needed an afternoon nap. She stretched and yawned now, awakened by the soft footsteps of her love as he tried to sneak into their room.

"I'm sorry. Did I wake you?" Harry said as he sat on the side of the bed and tenderly smoothed her rumpled hair away from her face.

"I've slept enough. How's your studying going?" Harry and Ron were both going to Auror School at night as well as playing professional Quidditch by day, a schedule that seemed quite possible when they first planned it. They were finally beginning to adjust to it, though they'd found it quite difficult to manage at first.

"It's OK," he said, lifting one shoulder slightly.

His casual shrug didn't fool her. "What's wrong?"

"Well . . . it's Hermione," he said carefully. "She's come up with an idea for the wedding that has upset Ron. He asked me to help him."

Ginny was instantly suspicious. "Help him do what?"

"I told him I'd talk to Hermione, you, and your mum. I think I have an idea that might help in some ways."

"What's your idea?"

"I thought maybe you and I could talk to your mum about starting to plan our wedding. If we got her involved in it now, that would take some pressure off Hermione."

Ginny's eyes lit up. "*Our* wedding? Sounds good to me!"

He grinned. "I thought you'd like that. But then I have to convince Hermione that having their wedding in the graveyard just won't do."

"The graveyard? Why would she want to have her wedding there?"

"So her parents can attend."

Ginny shuddered. "That's awful. A wedding's supposed to be a happy time."

Harry sighed. "And Hermione isn't happy. I don't know if they should get married with her still grieving so much. She may make Ron miserable."

Ginny's brown eyes grew large and sad. "Ron's grieving too. We all are."

Harry gathered her into his arms and held her close. "I know, love. We'll get through it."

She pulled back and looked at him. "I know ~~we~~ will, but I don't know about them."

"We'll just have to think of a way to help them. This idea I had about getting your mum started on planning our wedding was the best I could come up with. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Let me think about it." She snuggled back into his arms, enjoying the steady sound of his heartbeat against her ear, and how her head fit just so in the crook of his shoulder.

Harry rested his cheek on top of her head. Like Ginny, it always delighted him how naturally they fit together. "OK. I'll be glad to let you take over the thinking part of this situation. I'm shattered. We had to learn ten new spells today and they're all so complex, my brain hurts trying to understand them."

Ginny pushed back and looked at him in surprise. "But I thought you knew spells they didn't know!"

"I do. But I have to learn these others. There are times I wish they hadn't let me skip over the first year defence classes. This one's a lot harder than the other first-year classes. And at some point, they want me to teach them the spells I know that they don't. I needed something else to do, right?" Ginny laughed, a sound that sent delicious shivers up his spine. He'd come so close to losing her when she'd been shot. He'd cherished every minute they had together before the accident. Now his time with her was even more precious.

Ginny cupped his cheek in her hand, running her thumb over his short beard. "And yet you've taken on Ron's problem."

Harry snorted derisively, a wry grin flitting across his face. "As he said, I'm the hero of the Wizarding World. So it's my job to save him."

"My poor hero!" Ginny said, pinching and patting his cheek like a maiden aunt might, making him laugh. "Don't worry, I'll help you."

"You'll learn the spells for me?"

"Right!" she teased. "Well, I'll help you study them if you want me to."

"I may take you up on that. Ron's been useless the last few days."

Ginny gasped. "He can't do that! He'll fall behind!"

"Yeah, I know. That's why I have to solve this problem, so he can keep up and help me with my homework." Harry kissed her on the forehead and stood up. "I think I'll go and talk to Hermione now. Then all I'll have left to do is talk to your mum. I saved the world from Voldemort, so this should be a cinch, right?" He gave her a crooked grin and opened the door.

"You can do anything you set your mind to, Harry," Ginny said with complete faith in him. "Except for having babies. I don't think you could manage that no matter how hard you tried."

"I could do *part* of that, but you'd have to help," he teased. She giggled and threw a pillow at him as he left the room.

Across the hall, Hermione had her door closed. Harry took a deep breath and blew it out, then crossed his fingers as he tapped on the door.

"Come in." Hermione's voice was low and sad.

"Hi." Harry bent his long frame around the door and made a comical face at her. "I hope you're indecent!"

"Oh, you," she said, smiling a bit. She sat on the bed surrounded by books and parchments, a quill in her hand, a blotch of ink on her nose, as was often the case. "What's up?"

"I wanted to talk to you. Is this a good time?"

"No, I won't help you and Ron with your homework," she said, dropping her eyes to her parchment again.

"That wasn't what I wanted to talk to you about. Ginny's got that covered anyway," he said, keeping his voice light and relaxed.

She lifted sad eyes to his again. "What is it, then?"

"It's about our weddings," he began.

Her shoulders tensed up immediately. "What about them?"

"I hear that you and Mrs. Weasley aren't getting on." He sat beside her on the bed, covering her hand with his, the perfect sympathetic best friend.

Hermione bit her lip. "No, we're not."

"Maybe I can help."

"How?" she said, looking at him with more animation in her eyes than he'd seen for a while.

"Ginny and I will set a date and get her mum working on our wedding. We know when we want to get married, we just haven't discussed it with anyone yet."

She smiled a bit. "When?"

"You know the two weeks after exams, when everyone's still at Hogwarts waiting for their results? We'll both be there, most of our friends will be there, and I'm sure Grandfather wouldn't mind letting us get married there."

"I thought you wanted a church wedding, Harry."

"I want a big fancy wedding we'll always remember with pleasure. Hogwarts is more important to me, and to Ginny, as well, than the church in Ottery St. Catchpole. We've spent most of our lives at school. So why not get married there?"

"It sounds lovely." Hermione's tone was wistful. "So you think you can keep Mrs. Weasley busy with your wedding so she'll leave us alone?"

"I think she'll need to be talked to so she understands that you want to plan your own wedding," he said, "but I think Ginny and I can come up with enough changes in our plans to keep her busy."

Hermione burst into tears and threw her arms around his neck. Once her words became more coherent, Harry heard her say, "Oh, Harry, you're the best! The very best!"

"And Ginny, too. She's agreed to this, you know."

Hermione sat back and wiped her eyes. "Thank you. I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"You look better already."

She laughed, a broken sound since she was still crying. "You're such a liar, but I love you for it."

A teasing grin crossed his face. "That's what all the girls say. The clamouring hordes that follow me everywhere? They all love me because I'm such a big liar."

"What clamouring hordes? I thought you'd got past the fan problem."

He smiled. "You haven't been near the stadium lately, have you? There are girls in line waiting for tickets to our first game tomorrow, and a lot of

them have 'I love Harry' shirts or banners." He raised one eyebrow suggestively. "Some have signs saying they love Ron, too."

She sat up straighter, her brown eyes flashing with fury. "They don't!"

Harry laughed out loud. "Actually, yeah, they do, but it doesn't mean anything."

Her face crumpled. "You don't understand. I've been simply awful to Ron. He may turn to someone else."

Harry rubbed her back to comfort her. "Don't worry. He loves you. He's absolutely miserable because you're unhappy. He's not interested in anyone else."

"I don't want him to be miserable."

"Do you want to talk about whatever it is that's causing the problem?"

She hung her head. "We're arguing about where to get married."

"I heard."

Her eyes flew to his face. "He told you?"

"I told you he was miserable because you're unhappy. He asked me to talk to you."

"Oh," she said in a small voice. "Then you know."

"About the graveyard? Yeah. What makes you think your parents will be there if you have the ceremony in the graveyard?"

"I just . . . I want . . ."

He sighed. He knew all too well what she wanted. He'd lived with the same desire his whole life. "You want to be close to them. You want them to share your life. But they're gone now, Hermione. You have to accept that."

She dropped her eyes to her clasped hands. Her fingers were so tightly interlaced, the knuckles were white.

Harry took her hands in his. "Did I ever tell you about what it was like after the last battle with Voldemort, when I was dying?"

"When you saw your parents and Sirius?"

"Yes. They told me they've been watching me all my life. Sirius even mentioned them watching me and Ginny fall in love. *That* was embarrassing!" He chuckled and blushed at the memory. "My point is, your parents are watching you wherever you are. You don't have to go to the graveyard to be near them. They're in your heart, in your mind, and they're watching everything you do. They wouldn't want you to have your wedding in the cemetery, Hermione. They wanted you to be happy, and they still want that for you."

Tears coursed down her cheeks unheeded. "I want to believe you—"

"Believe me," he insisted, putting a gentle hand under her chin, encouraging her to look at him.

Hermione gazed into those green eyes she loved so much. Finally, she sighed. "I don't know what to do."

"You could have it here, or at the Burrow when it's finished," he suggested.

"If it ever is finished!" she said with a sudden laugh.

Harry returned her smile. "I think they've agreed to a plan and may actually stick to it this time. The point is, you have options. Remus and Tonks would host it for you if you wanted to marry in Hogsmeade. Or you could have an outdoor wedding on my land at Godric's Hollow."

She looked thoughtful for a moment. "Harry?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know what my favourite place in the world is?"

"Hogwarts library," he said without hesitation.

"No, better than that," she said, then bit her lip nervously.

"OK, I'm lost. What place could you possibly love more than the Hogwarts library?"

"The library in the Chamber of Knowledge."

Harry's eyebrows shot upward in shock. "You want to get married down there?"

"Do you think Professor Dumbledore would allow it? I just want a very small wedding, just you and Ginny and the Weasleys and Remus and Tonks, nobody else."

"I'll talk to him about it," Harry said, feeling a bit uneasy about her request. "It's supposed to be a secret place, you know."

"Oh. Yes, well, um. . ."

"Make a second choice in case he says 'no,' OK?" Harry said, getting to his feet. "I'll talk to him after the game tomorrow."

"He's coming?"

"He said he wouldn't miss my first professional Quidditch game," Harry said, obviously quite pleased. "Remus and Tonks are coming too. I got all three of them season tickets, in the family box. They'll be sitting with the Weasleys and you, since we're all going to be related anyway."

"Wonderful! I know that makes you happy. I can see it in your eyes."

A warm smile crossed his face. "Yeah. It's great to have family and be able to live a peaceful life at last!"

She stood up and hugged him. "And you deserve it, too. I'm sorry my problems are keeping your house in an uproar."

He returned her hug and kissed the top of her head, then released her. "We'll survive. I'd better go. I still have to finish studying." He turned back as he reached the door. "I can't tell you how much we miss having you help us revise."

"I'll come down and see if I can help in a few minutes," she replied.

"Brilliant! Thanks!" He flashed her a grin and left, closing the door quietly behind him.

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"How did it go?" Ron asked, his anxious eyes locked on Harry's.

"Fine. No graveyard," Harry replied as he sat down and opened his book again.

"Harry, you're a bloody genius! How did you manage it?"

"It's my great wit and personal charm." He gave Ron a teasing grin. "We just talked about it. She's chosen a different place, but I don't know if it will work."

Ron's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Where did she want to have it this time?"

"In the library of the Chamber of Knowledge."

"That's a secret place!" Ron said. "Nobody but the Heir of Gryffindor—"

"I know." Harry sighed. "That's why I told her to choose a second place in case Grandfather says no."

"D'you suppose he'd actually agree?"

"She says she only wants your family, Remus, Tonks and me to attend, so for that few, and we're all family. . . ." Harry's voice trailed off and he shrugged. He thought it was an odd choice, and wasn't certain it was a good one, but he'd do nearly anything to get Hermione past her grief and off to a good start in her marriage.

"But I wanted the team there," Ron moaned.

"You could just invite them to the stag night." He chuckled. "They'd probably enjoy that more than a wedding anyway."

A fleeting grin crossed Ron's face. "That's true. Still, I need to talk to her."

"Let me know what you two decide before I talk to Grandfather, OK?"

"Yeah." Ron got up and left the library.

Harry could hear his heavy, limping tread going up the stairs. "Good luck, mate," he murmured.

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Harry thought his heart would burst out of his chest, it was pounding so hard. Even down in the locker room, he could hear the massive crowd that had gathered to see this Quidditch game. The London Lions were facing the British Champions, the Tutshill Tornadoes, in a pre-season game. Harry and Ron were the only new members of either team. The *Daily Prophet* and the magazines devoted to Quidditch had been running articles at least once a week ever since Harry and Ron began to practice with the team. The articles gushed so much about the two "handsome, noble young war heroes who now had the potential to be Quidditch stars" that both of them had stopped reading the articles. The expectations laid on their young shoulders were a bit hard to take on top of their normal nerves about playing in the professional league.

Their team mates passed, one by one, on their way to their own lockers. The men each patted their new Seeker and Keeper on the back, murmuring words of encouragement. Harry hoped his face wasn't as green as it felt. He hadn't been this ill before a Quidditch game in years, and Ron looked even worse than Harry felt. They were both dressed and ready, but kept nervously adjusting the laces on their boots.

Potter, Weasley," the captain said as he approached them. "Your families here today?"

"Yes," Harry croaked.

The man gave his young players a friendly smile. "We're all nervous before the first game of the season. If you want to, you can go and visit your families. We still have half an hour before the game."

"We can?" Harry brightened considerably. Seeing Ginny would do wonders for his nerves. "Thanks."

"Yeah," Ron gulped, trying to calm his roiling stomach. "Thanks."

"C'mon, mate, let's go," Harry said, dragging Ron to his feet.

"Take your brooms in case the crowd gets too thick for you to get back easily," the captain warned. "You can always drop into the stadium from the seats. Just listen for the announcements."

"Right," Harry said, grabbing his freshly polished Firebolt Excalibur. Ron grabbed his broom and followed Harry up the winding staircase that led to the family boxes above the locker rooms.

When they reached the doorway into the stands, Harry hesitated, looking for a sea of red hair, which would be the Weasley family. "There they are!" he said, then turned and looked at Ron. "You OK?"

"The fresh air is helping," Ron said. He looked as if he'd be sick any moment.

Harry turned and put his hands on Ron's shoulders, staring him in the eye. "Ron. If you couldn't do this job, they would not have hired you."

"Yeah." Ron didn't seem to have heard Harry.

"If I have to hex you, I will. Cheer up and calm down, OK?"

Ron raised his eyes to Harry's. Normally bright blue, they were grey and cloudy-looking now. "I don't feel well."

"I can tell. Did you eat?"

"Toast."

"That's not enough, but it will have to do for now, I suppose." Harry tried not to let his frustration show. Ron was nervous enough.

"Harry?"

"What?"

"Hex me, please? A Cheering Charm, maybe? Just a little one?"

"You can't become dependent on such things," Harry warned.

"I won't. It's just that this is the first time."

Harry snorted. "Ron Weasley, you are not a Quidditch virgin!"

That startled Ron enough to finally focus on Harry. "What did you say?"

Harry was laughing now. "You heard me."

Ron stood and stared at his best mate, not certain if he should be angry, annoyed, or pleased that his stomach had suddenly settled down. "You hexed me, right?"

"Nope."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you just needed a good laugh," Harry assured him.

"Quidditch virgin," Ron said, laughing now. "That's funny."

"I thought so, too." Harry grinned at his friend, glad to see more normal colour in his face. He clapped his friend on the back and guided him toward the family box.

When the two young men emerged from the shadowy doorway, a cry rippled across the packed stadium. "POTTER! POTTER! POTTER!" along with some shouts of "WEASLEY! WEASLEY! WEASLEY!" and some distinctively female squeals of "Isn't he cute?" and "Oh, he's even better looking in person!" and other such things guaranteed to redden the young men's ears.

Harry blushed and ducked his head, but not before catching a glimpse of the stands. Some of the crowd had banners proclaiming their loyalty to him, some girls had on "I Love Harry Potter" t-shirts, and a lot of people were wearing big round-framed glasses that looked like cheap souvenirs.

Harry didn't know where the people wearing them look very silly. He swallowed hard, then raised his head, smiled and waved to the crowd as he walked. Ron stopped and stared at the crowd, his eyes wide, a slow grin spreading across his face.

Harry turned around when he noticed Ron wasn't following him. "Ron? Come on, Hermione's waiting for you."

Ron looked stunned. He raised a shaking hand and pointed. "Look, Harry! They have banners with my name on!"

Harry turned and looked where Ron was pointing. Some fans began waving frantically when they saw him looking. He returned their greetings as he said, "Yeah, they do. Give 'em a wave, that's what they want. Then come and see the family."

Ron stood staring a moment longer, then raised both arms in a gesture encompassing the entire stadium, a huge grin on his face as a roar of sound washed over him. *They're supporting ME not just Harry! WOW!* Feeling much better, he nearly danced to the family box.

"Mum! Dad! Did you see?" Ron called as he joined them.

"You'd think you were a professional Quidditch player or something," George said dryly.

"Yeah, really. What were those people thinking, putting ickle Ronnikin's name on banners like that?" Fred added.

"Leave your brother alone," Molly said, but there was laughter in her voice. "Are you boys hungry? I brought treats for you." She held a basket filled with Ron and Harry's favourite snacks. They helped themselves gladly, thankful their stomachs had finally calmed to a manageable level.

This was the first time the whole family had gathered for a fun occasion since the war. The banners with Ron's and Harry's names started the twins on one of their hysterical riffs, each one trying to top the other in funny comments. The result was laughter throughout the Weasley-Potter family box.

Remus, Tonks and Dumbledore were delighted to see the Weasleys and even Hermione red-faced from laughter and finally beginning to take pleasure in life again.

"D'you like the glasses, Harry?" Fred said, his eyes sparkling.

A wry grin crossed Harry's face. "You didn't—"

"They're our latest product!" George said, clapping Harry on the shoulder. "They're selling like crazy! If you win, they'll flash red and gold lights."

"Most of them are black like your glasses, but some are red and gold," Fred added.

"Lions' colours!" George cried, giving Fred a high five.

"Trust you two to find a way to make money from Harry and Ron's careers," Hermione said with a sniff of disapproval.

"I can't believe all those people willingly put on glasses like mine," Harry said, shaking his head and laughing.

"We've run out! We'll have to make a bigger batch for the next game!" George said.

"We're still working on something iconic to represent Ron," Fred said supportively when he noticed Ron listening.

"Make a red-headed action figure that limps, that'll do it," Ron said, not at all upset by his brothers' antics. The three of them started talking as Harry went to visit the others in the box.

"Charlie!" Harry said, reaching out to shake the man's hand. "I didn't think you were going to make it!"

"I came back just to see this game," Charlie said with a grin. "I couldn't miss your first game as pros, now, could I?" He'd recently started a new job at a dragon preserve in Wales.

"Glad you could make it!" Ron said, glancing up at his brother. "I'll bet you wish it was you in Harry's robes."

"I suspect Ginny's the one who wants to be in Harry's robes," Charlie teased, poking his sister, who turned so red, her freckles disappeared. All of her brothers laughed, but kept a careful eye on her wand hand in case she decided to repay them.

Ginny gave Charlie a withering look, then turned to Harry and smiled. "Neither one of us would look as good in those robes as Harry does," she said, taking his hand and rubbing his ring as she appraised his appearance. "You look so handsome!"

"Oh, this old thing," Harry said casually. "I found it on the bathroom floor this morning."

"You're silly." She ducked her chin, looking up at him through her eyelashes, flirting madly. "Are you busy after the game? I could be talked into a date. . . ."

"I was going to ask you the same thing." He chuckled and pulled her to her feet, then wrapped his arms around her and kissed her, causing an uproar in the stands. He laughed against Ginny's lips, making her laugh as well.

"What was that for?" she said, leaning back against his arms.

"For luck." He rubbed noses with her and stood with his forehead pressed against hers. "And to remind the fans that I'm taken."

Good on both counts, then," she said, sliding her arms around his neck and kissing him again, laughing as the stands erupted in hoots, cheers and groans as their kiss lingered.

"Harry has the best ideas," Ron said, pulling Hermione into his arms and following Harry's example.

When they pulled apart, Hermione was breathless. "What. . .what did you mean about Harry's ideas?"

"Well, kissing my fiancé for one thing, but coming up here to visit you guys was the best idea he could've had. I was having kittens down there. I feel better in the fresh air, and with the family all around." Ron looked fine now, his cheeks flushed and a happy smile on his face.

"You'd better win this one," Fred told Ron. "I've got fifty galleons riding on it!"

"It would've been smarter to bet fifty sickles," Ron replied. "This *is* our first game, after all!"

Harry had moved back a row to visit with Remus, Tonks and his grandfather. "Good seats?" he said as he dropped into one by Remus.

"The best!" Remus said, patting Harry on the knee. "You look wonderful. Ready to win this one?"

Harry shrugged. "As ready as I'll ever be, I suppose."

"You go out there and kick some Tornado arse," Tonks said, leaning around her husband to kiss Harry on the cheek.

"I'll do my best! How's the little one?" Tonks pregnancy was just beginning to show.

"I'm so glad the first three months are behind me!" she said gaily. "I feel much better now!"

"I'm glad to hear that!" Harry said. "I'll see you later. We're going to have to leave soon."

"Good luck, lad!" Dumbledore said as Harry passed him.

"Thanks! Oh, and I need to talk to you after the game, all right?" Harry said, remembering Hermione's request.

"Certainly! I can't wait to see you play. This is quite exciting!" The old man's eyes twinkled with delight.

"I hope you enjoy the game!"

"Oh, Harry, dear," Molly called, "we're having a little party out at the Burrow after the game."

"Is it finished?"

"Not yet, but near enough that we can begin to enjoy it again," she said with a warm smile.

"Great!" Harry looked up as they heard the announcements begin. "We need to go now, Ron!"

"Yeah," Ron said, blanching a bit. He seemed reluctant to let Hermione go.

"You'll be fine," Hermione told him, then pulled his shoulders so he bent down to her level, then gave him quite a thorough kiss. His eyes were goggling when she released him.

"That's what I like to see in my team's Keeper, eyes rolling in two different directions," Fred teased.

"Yeah, now if they throw two Quaffles at once, he'll be fine," George added.

"Good luck, sweetheart," Ginny told Harry, stretching her arm across the back of her seat toward him as he left his seat beside Dumbledore. "I love you."

"I love you too. See you later." He took her hand and gave it a last squeeze and stepped away from her.

The announcer was introducing the Lions now. As Seeker, Harry needed to enter right behind the captain. He jumped on his broom and zoomed out of the stands, whooping in joy as he dived toward the team entrance. The crowd cheered and screamed, finally getting to see one of Harry Potter's famous dives in person.

Ron followed, thrilled to hear the crowd cheer for him, as well as Harry. He grinned as he fell into line with his team mates. They were about to play their first professional Quidditch game, and Ron couldn't wait!

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After a hard-fought first half, the score was tied, 60-60. The Tornadoes were as good as their reputations, so the Lions were struggling for every goal. Ron was proving his worth as a Keeper, saving far more goals than were getting past him.

Harry soared high over the field looking for the Snitch, watching the action, occasionally admiring the fiery glint of the sun on Ginny's hair. He kept an eye on the other Seeker who'd been playing for the Tornadoes for several seasons. He'd won the championship for the Tornadoes two years straight now. Harry respected the other man's skills, but he knew he was a good Seeker, too. He just hoped he'd get lucky this first time out, and against such an adversary.

The Quaffle hurtled toward Ron again, who had been fooled by a feint just moments before. He reached for it and nearly had it! It bumped the tips of his fingers and went off-course. The Lions fans screamed in anguish as the ball hit the edge of the hoop and tumbled through.

Ron felt his stomach roiling again. *What a stupid mistake. I should've had that one!* He sighed and went back to cruising in front of the hoops, determined to not allow a ball past him again.

Harry saw the action and felt Ron's frustration even from this distance. He shook his head and went back to looking for the Snitch just as the other Seeker began a steep dive. Harry couldn't see the Snitch anywhere! Was the other man trying to lure him into a reckless dive? He didn't have time to think about it. Still scanning the sky frantically, Harry dived after the other Seeker, but pulled up when he saw a glint of gold out of the corner of his eye. It was at the other end of the field, actually just over Ron's head. Harry squinted, wanting to be sure, then raced toward his best mate.

Ron's eyes widened. Why was Harry pelting down the pitch toward him? He noticed Harry's eyes were locked on a point above him and glanced up. The Snitch was almost in Ron's reach, but he couldn't catch it. That would be an illegal move. He stayed perfectly still, hoping the Snitch would stay put until Harry got it and that no Quaffles came his way for the few seconds it would take Harry to reach him.

Just as Harry neared Ron, the Snitch took off straight up. Ron dived, knowing what Harry was going to do. Just as he'd expected, Harry pointed his broom right at the Snitch. If Ron hadn't moved, the tail of Harry's broom would've knocked him in the head.

"Go, Harry!" Ron yelled, encouraging his friend, then raced to block the Quaffle from getting through a hoop. He had to roll over and hang off his broom by one hand and leg to catch the ball. The Tornados fans groaned and booed, while the Lions fans screamed with joy.

"Did you see that catch?" the announcer cried, his voice cracking with excitement. "What a spectacular save! Well done, Keeper Weasley!"

As the stands rocked with cheers after his catch, Ron tossed the Quaffle back into play and then glanced at the family box. Hermione was jumping up and down and squealing. He'd heard her voice above the roar of the crowd. He smiled, glad to see her happy for a change, and equally glad that his bad leg was still strong enough for him to hang off a broom when he had to. He began his circuit of the hoops again and got back to the serious business of keeping the opposing team from scoring.

Professional Snitches were much faster and trickier than the ones used in school play. Harry pushed his Excalibur as hard as he could to catch up to the elusive ball. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the Tornado Seeker rushing to catch up with him. The Snitch suddenly zoomed straight down, past the other Seeker. Harry turned his broom and lay flat along it, urging it to even greater speed. The Snitch's path twisted as it flew past the other Seeker's outstretched fingers. The man growled as he missed, then turned to race after Harry in pursuit of the golden ball.

As Harry neared the ground, the crowd's cheers turned to screams. Harry Potter was famous for many things, including reckless dives, but no one could imagine how he could pull out of this dive safely. Hermione held on to Ginny, trembling in fear. Ginny was cheering herself hoarse, trusting that he could pull out of it, but the closer he got to the ground, the quieter she became. Neither girl had ever seen him fly so fast.

"He'll be OK," Fred said.

"He has to. We have a lot of money riding on him!" George added.

The announcer's commentary wasn't calming anyone's nerves. "WHAT A SPECTACULAR DIVE! Potter's going to plough himself, but what a magnificent effort! This is his first professional game, and he's giving it his all! Come on, Potter, pull up! We'd like to see you play more than one game! Pull up! PULL UP!"

Ginny cringed, but kept watching. She pulled out of Hermione's arms and went to stand by the railing. "He'll be fine. He has to be," she told herself. She didn't feel her father standing behind her with his arm around her. She couldn't blink, Harry was too close to the ground now for her to even take a breath. "Come on, Harry, pull up!" she murmured. She was afraid to scream now. If he heard her and got distracted, he could be seriously injured.

Harry was amazed that the other Seeker missed his grab for the Snitch when it passed him. The other man didn't turn quickly enough and was now several feet behind Harry in their race toward the ground. Harry's hair was flat against his head, the long ends whipping so hard behind him, he thought he could hear them cracking in the wind. He squinted, afraid to blink and possibly lose site of the elusive ball.

He felt the other Seeker pulling closer to him. Harry flattened himself as much as possible and reached for the Snitch. It was so close now, but it was close to the ground, too. Could he pull up in time? Could he?

The Snitch was nearly touching the grass now. The other Seeker was at his shoulder. Harry pulled up on his broom to level off, but he knew he was too high above the Snitch. He heard the thump and groan as the other Seeker ploughed himself, just as Harry hung off his broom and reached down to the top of the grass, his fingers finally closing around the struggling Snitch. He gasped, completely dazzled by the win. He'd done it! He'd won his first professional Quidditch game! He slowed his still-racing broom, then spiralled up to join his cheering team. They had converged on Ron, who was nearest, but now all of them were coming to Harry. He pumped his Snitch-filled hand in the air in joyful triumph.

From the ground far below him now, Harry heard the other Seeker call, "Well done, Potter. It was . . . a pleasure . . . to fly against you."

Harry looked down at the man, who was tottering in place, supporting himself with his broom, his face covered in blood, his nose obviously broken. *Glad I'm not the one who ploughed myself!* Harry was still panting with exertion, but he waved to the man and called, "Thanks, mate! Good game!"

"Potter! Weasley!" the captain cried. "Well done, both of you! I couldn't have asked for a better performance, and for your first game! Very well done indeed!"

"Thanks!" Ron said. Harry was still catching his breath after his dive.

Potter, I thought we were going to lose you for a moment there," the captain said, patting the young man on his shoulder.

"There was never . . . any danger . . . of that," Harry panted, a huge grin on his face.

"Your fans are waiting for you," the captain said, holding his arm toward the stands, which were rocking with shouts of "POTTER! POTTER! POTTER! POTTER!" The Weasley fans were screaming too. They and Harry's fans all waved their banners wildly, trying to get their heroes' attention.

"What do you mean, 'waiting for us'?" Harry said cautiously.

"You need to go and sign some autographs. Follow the lads, you'll see how it's done."

Harry and Ron followed the rest of the team as they peeled off from their celebratory huddle and zoomed around the pitch in a victory lap, then separated, each of them hovering on his broom in front of a section of stands, signing whatever was put in his hands. After a few minutes, they shifted sections, so everyone who wanted to got to visit with each player for a time.

"This is fun!" Ron said as he and Harry neared each other while switching sections.

"Yeah, it is. Good job today, mate!"

"Thanks! You too!"

Finally, the crowds began to disperse, and the young men joined the family in their section.

"Oh, I'm so proud of both of you!" Molly cried, standing up to hug her youngest son and his best friend in turn.

"Great game, boys!" Arthur enthused.

"Yeah, Ronnikins, you weren't a total screw-up!" Fred said, reaching out to ruffle his baby brother's hair.

"C'mon, Fred," George said, punching Ron lightly in the shoulder. "We have winnings to collect!"

"And more glasses to make, from the look of things," Fred said, noting that people who hadn't managed to buy a pair of the glasses were looking at those who had them with a great deal of envy. The glasses were still flashing red and gold lights, since the Lions had won the game.

"You are giving Harry a cut of those sales, aren't you?" Ginny said, giving her twin brothers her best evil eye. She looked far too much like her mother when she wore that expression.

"Yes, Ginny, Harry gets a cut," George said. He poked his twin. "C'mon, we need to—"

"Collect our winnings! YES!" Fred agreed.

Arthur mentioned one of Ron's saves, which started Ron on a detailed analysis of his entire performance. While the Weasleys were so distracted, Harry sat down by his grandfather.

"Wonderful game, Harry," Dumbledore said, patting the young man's knee. "I'm so proud of you! What a thrill! Thank you for the tickets!"

"I'm glad you could come!"

"I wouldn't have missed this for the world." Dumbledore watched the animated faces of the Weasley family as they all contributed observations about Ron's and Harry's performances. "They're healing now, aren't they?"

"Getting there," Harry agreed. "Speaking of that—Hermione asked me a favour, but it's not mine to give. That's why I needed to speak to you."

"What is it?"

"She's still having trouble accepting her parents' death. She wanted to have their wedding in the cemetery for a while because of that," Harry began. "I managed to talk her out of that. Her next choice is the library in the Chamber of Knowledge." He watched his grandfather's face. Dumbledore sighed and began to reply, but Harry cut him off. "She only wants the Weasleys, Remus and Tonks and Ginny and me there. And she still wants you to do the ceremony. The secret would stay within the family. Is that all right?"

Dumbledore sat with his chin in his hand, pulling on his beard from time to time as he thought. "Why there?" he said at last.

Harry shrugged. "She says that library is her favourite place."

"Think about it, Harry. None of them are the Heir"

"I know."

"Actually, it's yours now," Dumbledore said, startling Harry. "It's your decision."

"No, I mean, you're still the Heir. I don't want to make a wrong decision about it."

"You've shown wisdom beyond your years many times in recent history, lad. I trust you." He turned and watched the Weasleys, with Hermione in

their midst looking happier than she had in months. "And now that I've had a chance to think about it, if you'd like my opinion—"

"Yes, I would."

"I'd say to allow it. Hermione and Ron both risked their lives to help you. I think agreeing is a nice way to thank them."

Harry beamed. "I hoped you'd say that."

"What about you and Ginny? Where are you getting married?"

"I wanted to talk to you about that too." Harry told him what he and Ginny had discussed.

It was Dumbledore's turn to beam. "Oh, a wedding in the Great Hall! What fun! The house-elves will be delighted, and with you on the staff this year, I'm sure the students will be thrilled about it, as well."

"So it's all right?"

"Absolutely. I look forward to it."

Harry grinned, cheered as always by his grandfather's great delight in life. "Great! Thanks, Grandfather."

Dumbledore patted the younger man's arm as Harry rose to leave. "Thank you for keeping my life so interesting, Harry."

* * * * *

The Burrow was nearly finished. No longer a tall, crooked, jury-rigged looking building, it stood proud and square, two stories tall with eight bedrooms and seven bathrooms, a huge kitchen with a long table surrounded by chairs that matched, and a grouping of comfortable chairs in front of the fireplace. The detailing wasn't complete, and not all the rooms were furnished yet, but the house was ready for them to at least enjoy a meal there.

"Why eight bedrooms, Mum?" Charlie asked after getting the grand tour.

"One for your father and me, one for each of you, and the two extras are for boy grandchildren and girl grandchildren," Molly said with a happy smile. "Or guests. The rooms are big enough for couples, so we'll have plenty of room when you bring your wives to visit," she said with a smile at Ron, who was walking with his arm draped around Hermione's shoulders. Ron's ears reddened, but he smiled. At Ginny's patient look, Molly added, "or husband." Ginny beamed and tightened her grip on Harry's hand, making him look down and smile at her.

"So when's the wedding, Ron?" Charlie said as he settled into an easy chair. "Love the furniture, Mum."

She blushed with pleasure. The awards the Ministry had given them had purchased a lot of things Molly had only dreamed about before. "Thanks."

"Dunno," Ron said, answering Charlie's question. "This autumn, I think."

"You can have it here if you like," Molly offered.

"Um" Hermione's voice trailed off as she looked helplessly at Harry. He winked and nodded at her, which made her face light up with pleasure. "We've made other arrangements, but thank you so much for the offer."

"So you decided on a church wedding?" Molly said, handing Tonks a glass of milk as she and Remus joined the others in the living room.

"No. Harry and Professor Dumbledore are going to let us use a special place at Hogwarts," Hermione said hesitantly. She didn't know how much the others knew about the room and suddenly realized what a huge thing she'd asked of Harry.

"There's a hidden area under Hogwarts similar to the Chamber of Secrets," Harry said, sitting on the arm of the chair where Ginny had settled. "It was created by Godric Gryffindor and is called the Chamber of Knowledge. Only the Heir of Gryffindor and his family are allowed down there, and the family only when the Heir permits them. Some Heirs who have also been Headmaster have raised their families there."

Seeing some confused looks in the group, Ginny added, "Harry's the Heir of Gryffindor, so it's his now. Well, it's Dumbledore's, but he's sharing with Harry."

"He says it's mine now," Harry said. Dumbledore had returned to Hogwarts rather than attend the party. He had a great deal to do to prepare for the coming school year, and had taken time away from that to attend the game. "I asked him if it's all right for Hermione and Ron to get married there, and he agreed." He glanced down at Ginny and smiled, his eyes asking her a question. At her slight nod, he added, "He also agreed to Ginny and me getting married in the Great Hall after exams next spring."

Molly looked stunned. "But I thought you wanted a church wedding, Harry."

"Hogwarts is more of a home than I've ever known, and a lot of our friends are there, or can be there. Remus and Grandfather are on staff, and I will be too, at least part-time. It will make a lot of things simpler. There are plenty of guest rooms at Hogwarts, and others in Hogsmeade for anyone who has to travel and wants to stay overnight. But the main thing is, the security there is great, so we won't have to worry about being disturbed by people we don't want there."

Ginny added, "Since the end of the war, Harry's been pestered by reporters constantly. When they started reporting about his practices with the

Lions, even more people began following him around asking questions, wanting pictures and autographs. We want our wedding to be private, not a media circus."

"That makes sense," Arthur said, smiling his approval. "Good idea. And it's a beautiful setting."

"Yes, it will be lovely, I'm sure," Molly said, sounding a bit sad.

"Mum," Ginny said, reaching out and grasping her mother's hand. "Just because it's at Hogwarts doesn't mean we don't have a lot of planning to do. Dobby and Winky will work with the Hogwarts house-elves on decorating and making the food and so on, but you and Harry and I need to plan those things, find the right robes for you, me and Hermione, decide on what Harry, Ron and Dad are going to wear, who we're going to invite, what will be on the menu, we'll need help with the invitations . . . I'll be too busy with school, and Harry's too busy with everything he's doing, for us to manage by ourselves. We're going to need a lot of help from you."

"Oh!" Molly said happily. She'd brightened considerably as Ginny had gone down the list of things Molly could do to help. She looked at Hermione. "What can I do to help you, dear? And have you set a date?"

"Sometime in September or October, I think," Hermione said, shrugging. "Ron and I need to look at a calendar and set the date. We only want the family there, so there won't be a huge guest list. We need to maintain Harry's secret. Well, as soon as he shows you how to get in, you forget how it worked, but still—"

"It'll be fine, Hermione, don't worry," Harry assured her. He turned back to Molly. "She wants it to be in the library there. It's much larger than Hogwarts' library, and is a beautiful room." He looked at Hermione. "But you can have it anywhere down there, I suppose. I'll take you there and you can choose, how's that?"

Hermione beamed. "Thanks, Harry! But I want it in the library. That's the perfect place."

"The library it is, then," he agreed.

"How do you want to decorate it? Have you thought about that?" Molly said, frowning a bit. She couldn't see how she was supposed to help with a wedding in a secret place she couldn't get to without an escort.

"I love it the way it is," Hermione said.

"Maybe just some flowers?" Ginny suggested.

"Yes, and candles," Hermione said, warming to the subject. "And I liked the bows on the chairs at Remus and Tonks's wedding."

Ginny glanced up at Harry, who was playing with her hair and had lost track of the conversation. "Dobby and Winky would be allowed down there, wouldn't they?"

His eyes moved from the play of light in her hair to her eyes. He shook his head a bit as he came out of his reverie. "Hmm? Oh, in the Chamber? Yes, Dobby's been there before. He brought me meals there when I was researching down there last term."

"Where were you? You seemed to be a million miles away," Ginny said, her eyes gently teasing.

"I was just thinking that this time next year, we'll be married and Ron and Hermione will be nearing their first anniversary," he said with a tender smile. Ginny beamed and leaned her head against his chest, sighing contentedly.

Molly wiped a tear from her eye. "This is all so wonderful. I can't tell you how happy I am about it." Her chin quivered as she tried to hold back the tears. "Excuse me." She got up and ran upstairs.

"Now what?" Ron said as he watched the end of her robes disappear around the bend in the stairs. The ghoul that had lived in the Burrow before its destruction had gladly moved into the attic of the new house. Now he thumped impressively, echoing Molly's steps on the stairs.

Arthur was slowly, reluctantly getting to his feet. Tonks touched his arm. "Sit down, I'll go and see how she is. I think all these happy plans just got to her."

"Thank you," Arthur said, looking relieved and settling back in his chair.

"Dad, are you OK?" Charlie asked in concern.

"I'm fine. Just a bit tired, that's all." Molly's mood-swings were wearing him out, but he'd never admit to it.

"Were we wrong to talk about our plans, Dad?" Ginny wondered. "I thought it would make her happy for us to discuss them with the rest of you."

"No, dear, your mother truly is happy for you. She's looking forward to the weddings, but she's still, well, a bit fragile, I suppose. She'll be fine by the time you lot get married."

"She'd better hurry, then," Ron said darkly, "because we're getting married as soon as I can get Hermione down that slide." Hermione giggled and snuggled against him. Her good mood seemed to be lasting, for a change.

"Slide?" Fred said, sitting up and looking excited. "What are you talking about?"

"It's how you get into the Chamber," Ron explained, grinning at his brother. "It's wicked fast and really fun."

"Why haven't you invited us down there?" George asked Harry, looking a bit hurt.

"You weren't at Hogwarts," Harry replied, "or we might have dragged you into the library to help with the research."

"Do you have books on potions?" Fred said eagerly. "We're always looking for new concoctions."

"I'll let you look sometime, how's that? I'll be working at Hogwarts on Tuesdays and on weekends when we don't have games. I may go to the Chamber to study from time to time. If you come up when I'm there, I can show you around."

"Don't promise them too much of your time, Harry, or you won't have enough time to study," Ginny warned. "They'll love that library as much as the rest of us."

"I must say, I'm quite intrigued. I'd never heard of the Chamber of Knowledge before," Arthur said, smiling at Harry.

Harry returned his smile. "You'll like it. It's amazing." He turned to Charlie. "And the library has a whole section on dragon breeding, but the books are fairly old."

Charlie sat up, his eyes alight with interest. "Brilliant! I can't wait to see it."

Hermione was looking from one Weasley man to the next, a sudden look of horror on her face. "Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry!"

Harry looked at her in surprise. "For what?"

"Now everybody wants to spend time there. I didn't mean to impose on you, and look what's happened as a result. How thoughtless of me! I'm sorry."

"We won't be in the way," Fred said. "We'll just be in the library."

"So will everyone else!" Hermione snapped.

"Harry, if we find books that are useful to us, may we borrow them?" George asked with studied politeness.

Harry grinned. "Sorry. They can't be taken from the Chamber. Some are so old, they'd disintegrate if they were taken elsewhere."

The twins looked at each other excitedly. "Wicked!" they said as one.

"The best reference books are the really old ones," George explained in response to Harry's questioning look.

"The Restricted Section in Hogwarts Library is full of great stuff, but we couldn't take those books out either," Fred added.

"But we managed to copy what we wanted," George chortled. "That's how some of our better creations began, as potions or spells in those old books. We just tweaked 'em a bit, then built on the tweaked version."

"Your mother's coming back," Arthur said, glancing at the stairs. Tonks and Molly were returning, arm in arm.

Hermione looked miserably at Harry. "I'm causing you far too much trouble, Harry—"

"Have you heard me complain?" She shook her head. "Then stop worrying about it. I can always refuse to let this lot down there if they annoy me." He shot a teasing glance at the twins and was rewarded with a terribly wounded look from each of them. All three of them burst into laughter.

"So where are we, then?" Molly said too brightly. "What did I miss? Sorry about that, I got something in my eye."

"Yes, it was a bug or something with loads of icky legs," Tonks agreed, giving Harry, Ginny and Remus, whose seat was next to theirs, a huge wink.

Ginny grinned at Tonks. "We were just talking about the Chamber's library, Mum. You didn't miss much."

A tremulous smile crossed Molly's face. "Well, then, Hermione, Ron—what can I do to help?"

Ron and Hermione looked at each other uncomfortably. "Erm—" Ron began.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Mrs. Weasley, it would be wonderful if you and Ginny would help me find the right robes. And of course, we'll need to choose what the boys will wear." She turned to Ginny. "Since you're my only attendant, you can wear whatever you want."

Ginny liked that idea. "Great! I'll come shopping with you so our robes will look good together."

"Once the colours are decided, we can choose flowers and buy the candles," Molly said, starting a list.

"Oh, this will be fun!" Hermione said, finally smiling again.

"I'm looking forward to it," Molly said. "Maybe we'll find Ginny's wedding robes then, too."

"No, I don't want to look for mine yet," Ginny said. "If I have them, I'll want to get married sooner. I'll buy them during Easter break."

Her mother beamed. “Good idea, dear.”

Ron leaned over to Harry. “Thanks, mate. You seem to have this hero thing completely under control. You sure saved my sanity, at least.”

Harry grinned. “No problem.”

* * * * *

“Are you sure you like that one?” Molly said, watching Hermione turn this way and that. “This one has more ruffles.”

“No, I love this,” Hermione said, smiling at her reflection. She was in cream-coloured robes that went beautifully with her hair and eyes.

“These robes have a beautiful design,” Madam Malkin said as she tugged at the fabric to adjust how it flowed over Hermione’s trim figure. “I think it looks lovely on you.”

“Let’s put your hair up,” Ginny said, standing on the small platform next to Hermione. She gathered Hermione’s hair in her hand and, with a twist of her wrist that laid it against the back of Hermione’s head, created a simple but elegant fall of curls that framed Hermione’s face beautifully.

“How did you do that?” Hermione said in surprise. “That’s so pretty!”

“Easy. I’ll show you how,” Ginny said, taking a clip out of her own hair and clipping Hermione’s in place. “That’ll hold it for now.” Ginny fluffed her hair with her hand as she jumped off the platform and stood back to examine Hermione’s look from head to toe.

Hermione turned around so she could see the back of her hair and robes in the mirrors on three sides of the platform. “Wow! That’s great! Yes, I love these robes. And my hair! Ginny, thanks!”

Ginny grinned. “No problem. I’ve always wanted to try that style. Mine doesn’t have enough curl to look good that way, but yours is perfect for it.”

Molly had wandered off in the shop again and now returned with a small glittery something in her hand. “What about this?” she said, offering it to Hermione.

“What is—oh! It’s beautiful!” Hermione beamed as she bent to let Molly insert the small tiara into her hair.

“There. You look like a princess,” Molly said, tears glittering in her eyes. “Ron will be speechless when he sees you.”

“He’d better not be!” Hermione said with a laugh. “He has to say ‘I do’!”

“I’m sure he can manage that much, at least,” Ginny said.

Madam Malkin stepped forward, returning from poking about in her shop for a few minutes. “These will look lovely with the tiara,” she said, offering a jewellery box filled with a sparkly necklace, earrings and bracelet.

“Oh, they’re beautiful!” Hermione said. She took the box and admired the pretty things in it, then looked in the mirror at what she was wearing: the simple but elegant necklace Ron had given her when they were still in school, the sapphire earrings he’d given her on another occasion, and the charm bracelet with the book filled with pictures of Ron, Harry and Ginny. The memory of the look on his face when he’d given her each piece of jewellery touched her heart. “I think I’ll wear what Ron gave me.” She handed the box back with a smile. “Thanks.”

“Gold would look better with that cream,” Molly offered hesitantly.

Ginny took a step back from Hermione and tilted her head, studying the entire effect, paying close attention to the jewellery this time. “She’s right. Gold would be better.”

Hermione looked a bit disappointed. All the jewellery Ron had given her was silver except for her engagement ring. He couldn’t afford gold jewellery when he gave them to her. It had taken him months to save up for each thing as it was. He was only able to afford the gold engagement ring because of the signing bonus the Lions had given him.

“What’s your ‘something borrowed’ going to be?” Ginny said suddenly.

“I don’t know—“

Ginny never took off the ruby lion pendant Harry had given her, but now she held it in her hand, offering it to her best friend. “Try this.”

“No, Harry gave that to you!” Hermione protested.

“He won’t mind you getting married in it. Look in the mirror. The cream looks so much better with gold. You can borrow my earrings too.”

“Then I’ll match Harry’s earring,” Hermione said, looking at her friend and shaking her head in amazement.

“He won’t mind that either,” Ginny said with complete assurance.

“You’re so sweet to offer!” Hermione said. “Thanks. I’ll think about it. I can buy my own gold jewellery if I need to.”

“OK, but you’re welcome to wear mine if you change your mind,” Ginny said as she put her necklace back on. She was glad to put it back on. It had been a part of her for so long, she’d felt rather odd without it, but if Hermione needed it, she’d share.

It was Ginny and Molly's turns to look for new dress robes for the wedding. Before long, they were all burdened with bags and boxes full of new finery.

"Let's send these bags home so we can look for the other things we need," Hermione said. They took out their wands and sent Hermione's and Ginny's to Number 12 Grimmauld Place and Molly's to the Burrow.

The three women wandered from shop to shop looking for just the right candles, ribbons, flowers and other decorations. They were surprised when they came out of one shop to see Harry and Ron walking down the street, looking in each shop window they passed.

"There you are!" Ron said, beaming at his fiancé. "Having fun?" He glanced up and smiled at his mother. "Hi, Mum."

"Yes! What are you two doing here?" Hermione said, taking his hand and falling into step with him. Behind them, Harry was greeting Ginny and Molly.

"We're having a break from practice and thought we'd come and see how the shopping was going. We wanted to surprise you, or Harry would've called Ginny on her ring to find out where you were."

"We're surprised!" Hermione stood on tiptoe and kissed Ron, then stood back and beamed at him, holding both his hands in hers. "We're having such fun! We've got our robes and most of what we need. We sent them home just a few minutes ago."

"Ooo, then we'll just pop home and peep at them!" Harry teased.

"Harry Potter, behave!" Ginny said, trying her best to scowl at him.

"But you like me so much better when I don't behave," he said with a small pout that made her laugh.

"Yeah, I do," she said, then blushed as she remembered her mother was standing nearby.

Harry glanced toward Molly and was relieved to see she was window-shopping and doing her best to politely ignore the antics of the two couples.

"Actually, we have a good reason for coming to annoy you, other than just to annoy you," Harry said, tucking a flyaway strand of Ginny's hair behind her ear. "We just found out that we have a banquet coming up this autumn. We knew you were shopping today, and thought you might want to get some new dress robes for it while you're here."

"We've just bought new dress robes," Ginny began.

"For the wedding, right?" She nodded. "Sweet girl, we can afford for you to have more than one set of dress robes," Harry reminded her. "And there's a Yule Ball this year too. I need new dress robes for that and the banquet, as well as the wedding." He gave her a crooked grin, an impish light in his eyes. "I showered and everything. Want to help me shop?"

"I'd love to!" Ginny said, taking his hand and smiling up at him.

Ron and Hermione seemed to be lost in each other's eyes. Hermione had just told him about her wedding robes.

"Oy, Ron! Let's go shopping!" Harry said, breaking his friend's reverie.

"Uh, yeah! OK!" Ron said, wrapping a long arm around his fiancé's waist and turning her back toward Madam Malkin's shop.

A short time later, both young men had new dress robes and the girls had new ones appropriate for the banquet. Ginny's would be perfect for the Yule Ball as well as the team banquet. Harry also ordered teacher's robes for those times when he would be in the Great Hall with the other staff and needed to be dressed like them. He planned to use his Lions practice robes when he was teaching the flying classes since they were more comfortable to fly in than teaching robes.

As Ron was paying for his robes, Ginny touched Harry's sleeve to get his attention. "I need to talk to you."

"What's up?" he said as he followed her away from the others.

"Hermione needs gold jewellery to go with her wedding robes. I offered to loan her mine, but she wants to wear what Ron gave her. But everything he gave her is silver and the robes simply look better with gold. Can you talk to Ron about it? I won't have a chance with Mum and Hermione around."

Harry grinned. "No problem."

"You're the best!"

"No, you are," he countered.

"No, you are!"

"No, you are!" He bent down and rubbed noses with her.

There was laughter in Ginny's eyes as she looked up at him. "You're silly. And yes, that's one of the many reasons I love you."

And that appreciation of my finer points is one of the many reasons I love you," he said, wrapping his arms around her.

Ginny slid her arms around his neck. "I love you so much. I wish we were the ones getting married."

"It'll be our turn soon, love. And I do love you." He held her tenderly, gave her a soft kiss and froze with his lips still on hers, suddenly aware that they were being stared at by people who had just entered the shop. He pulled back and sighed. "We have an audience," he murmured.

"What price fame?" she said, leaning her head against his chest for a moment before stepping back.

He gave her a serious look. "The price is too much at times." He sighed again, then turned to rejoin the rest of the family. He smiled pleasantly at the gawkers who couldn't tear their eyes away from Famous Harry Potter, who was standing right there in Madam Malkin's shop like a normal person.

"Fans, eh?" Ron murmured as he glanced past Harry's broad shoulder.

"Apparently." Harry and Ron picked up their purchases and led Ginny, Hermione and Molly to the door.

"Um. . . Harry? I mean, Mr. Potter," one of the ladies in the group said. "I just wanted to say, um—" The middle-aged woman seemed suddenly flustered.

Her friends looked at her, then back at Harry, their eyes hungry to drink in every detail of his appearance.

"I'm sorry. I'm not usually so—well, I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done for us." The woman offered her hand, which Harry shook politely. "You and your friends—oh, and this is the rest of them, isn't it? General Weasley, and Hermione, and Ginny, of course! Oh, you're all even better looking in person than you are in the paper!" The woman glanced at her friends for confirmation. They all nodded. "What an honour!"

Soon all the women in the group were shaking hands and chatting to Ron, Hermione, Ginny and Molly. Most of them were Quidditch fans as well.

"Before you go," another said, "could I please have your autographs?"

Harry forced himself to smile. The Lions management had told him that such things were to be expected and that he should cooperate graciously no matter how he'd felt about autograph-seekers in the past. How he wished he could just move through life quietly, like everyone else! But he couldn't. He bit back his annoyance and pulled out the stack of Lions cards each team member was given to promote the team's games. The front had a photo of the player carrying the card, and the back had the team's game schedule. Harry took the quill from the woman and signed the card, to her great delight. Soon he and his friends were signing autographs for everyone in the group.

"Oh, I wish I had a camera!" one of the women gushed as she looked at Harry, who was bent over the parchment she'd found in her bag for him to sign "for her son." He'd already signed a Lions card for her. The woman seemed to be trying to smell him, and her hands lingered on his hand and arm when she shook his hand with both of hers.

"Erm, thanks. Be sure to come to our games," Harry said dutifully as he extricated his hand from hers. "If you'll excuse us, ladies, we need to go."

"Thank you!" the women chorused, waving as the four friends and Molly left the shop.

Molly was beaming. "I've never had anyone ask for *my* autograph before!" When the women found out that she was Ron and Ginny's mother, they'd pumped her for information about them and Harry. Molly had prattled on for a bit before seeing Ron's red face and ending her narrative about how cute he'd been in his nappies on his first baby broom. "That was fun!"

"Does that happen a lot?" Hermione said, looking up at Ron, who, as usual, had enjoyed the attention.

"Yeah, pretty often now. Whenever we take our breaks here in Diagon Alley, we run into Lions fans or people who want to talk about the war. That's why we carry these cards," he said as he stowed his stack of cards in his pocket. "Most of the shopkeepers know us well enough to leave us alone now, but we come across groups like that one fairly often."

"Often enough that we don't take breaks here as much as we did at first," Harry added with a sigh.

"I can't believe what some of them were saying about you!" Ginny said, glancing back over her shoulder to make certain that none of the group was following them.

"What are you talking about?" Harry said, noticing her annoyance.

"They were talking about how glad they were that you were in Muggle clothes—jeans—so they could admire your gorgeous arse!"

"Ginny! Language!" Molly said, but she laughed along with Hermione and Ron at Ginny's comment.

"My arse?" Harry twisted around to try to see what was wrong with his bum. "Yours is gorgeous, mine's just functional. It sits on a broom well, anyway." He grinned, teasing her.

"If I hadn't been with you, I hate to think what they would've done," Ginny said darkly.

Harry gave her a one-armed hug. "I hear that kind of stuff a lot. I'm beginning to get used to it. Ron gets the same kind of comments." He and Ron grinned at each other for a moment over their girlfriends' heads. He turned his eyes back to Ginny's face. Her temper was still showing. "You're not jealous, are you?"

Ginny huffed out an impatient breath. “Doesn’t it bother you?”

Harry shrugged. “It does, actually, but we’ve been told at every team meeting that we’re to be nice to the people and just let such comments roll off us like water off a kelpie’s back. People think the team belongs to them, that the members of the team are personal friends. That’s what our coach says, and that’s how the team management likes it. So we’ve just learned to cope with it.” He smiled. “When I tell you I’ve had a hard day, a lot of the ‘hard day’ is dealing with fans, but I’m getting better at it. I didn’t yell at anyone today. I used to, didn’t I, Ron?”

“Harry used to be quite protective of his personal space,” Ron said, “very much the way he was at Hogwarts with the fan girls. He’s loosening up in his old age.”

“Loosening up?” Ginny said, giving him a suspicious eye.

“I’m being nice to the fans and not being rude to reporters. It’s hard for me, you know that, but I’m getting better at it. I’ve learned that they just want to see us, and perhaps talk to us for a few minutes so they have a memory of meeting someone famous. I didn’t ask to be famous, but I think Ron has it right. It’s easier on everyone involved if I just go along with what they want for a few minutes than if I try to get them to leave me alone. And that way, everyone’s happy—even me when they finally go away!” He chuckled. “And I have so much to be happy about these days, these fan encounters don’t bother me the way they used to.” He glanced at his watch. “Rats, we need to go.”

“Already? But I thought—” Ron protested.

Harry gave him a meaningful look. “We have that thing to do before we go back to practice, remember?”

“What thing?”

“That thing,” Harry said, willing Ron to just cooperate with him. “What the coach wanted us to do?”

Ron finally cottoned on. “Oh, yeah! That thing.”

“Exactly. Let’s go,” Harry said, grinning at Ron. A couple of quick kisses later, Ron and Harry were jogging down the street, waving as they turned a corner.

“Why didn’t they just Disapparate?” Molly wondered.

“Harry said they had to do something before they left, but they had to hurry,” Ginny said, shrugging.

* * * * *

“What thing? Coach didn’t tell us to do anything,” Ron said, frowning in confusion as they rounded the corner away from the women.

“We need to go to Hogsmeade.”

“Why?”

“I need to get Ginny a birthday present. I’ve been so busy, I nearly forgot!” Harry said. “C’mon! Let’s go to Mr. Joyero’s.”

“Oh, crap! I completely forgot her birthday’s coming up! Let’s go!”

They Disapparated, arriving seconds later in front of Mr. Joyero’s jewellery shop, the site of all their jewellery purchases thus far.

“Mate?” Harry said, stopping Ron before he entered the store.

“What?”

“Ginny said Hermione wants to wear the jewellery you gave her for the wedding, but it should be gold to look good with her robes. You might want to look at some things here. Hermione’s birthday’s in September. Maybe the jewellery could be a birthday present.”

“Or a ‘just because’ present,” Ron said, a sweet smile on his face. Finally having enough money of his own to be able to buy things when he wanted was fantastic!

“Mr. Potter! Mr. Weasley!” Mr. Joyero said, reaching out to shake hands with them. “What a lovely surprise.”

“We have birthdays to shop for,” Harry began.

“And a set of jewellery to go with Hermione’s wedding robes,” Ron added, blushing royally.

“When are you getting married?”

“Um, we haven’t set the exact date, but it will be in September or October. We’ve nearly decided, but it’s not. . .well. . .”

“I understand. It’s complicated, getting everything arranged. What can I show you gentlemen?”

“You go ahead, Ron,” Harry said. “I don’t have a clue what to get Ginny. I’m just going to browse.”

Ron’s eyes widened in horror. “You’re not going to help me?”

"I'm right here if you need me, but you'll know the right thing when you see it," Harry replied, patting his arm. "Trust yourself. You'll be fine."

Ron gulped. "If you say so."

Harry chuckled. "I say so." He patted his best mate's arm again and wandered away, looking at the variety of things Mr. Joyero had in the shop. He came to a small but elegant display of mosaic picture frames he'd made. "Are you low on stock, or just showing a few at a time?" he asked the jeweller.

"Those are all I have left. They're selling very quickly. I'll take more whenever you have the time to make them."

Harry grinned. "Cool! I'm pretty busy right now, but once I get my life a bit more settled, I'll make more. They're fun to do."

Meanwhile, Ron had found something he liked. "Are those sapphires?"

"Yes, Mr. Weasley. Lovely, aren't they? They're Miss Granger's birthstone, if I recall correctly."

"Yeah, they are." Ron looked at the pretty pendant and earrings in the glass case, then turned and looked for Harry. "I need to buy her a wedding ring, too!"

"Maybe you should let her pick that out, Ron," Harry suggested. "She's going to be wearing it for a long time."

Ron nodded. "Yeah. Good idea. Whew! One less decision for me to make!"

Some time later, Ron had a small bag with a pendant, earrings and bracelet to match, all in gold with sapphires and tiny diamond accents, and Harry had a figurine of a cat playing with a ball of yarn for Ginny.

"I can't believe you didn't buy her jewellery," Ron commented as they left the shop. "You always buy her jewellery!"

"We have a house to decorate now," Harry said, a soft smile on his face as he pictured her delight in her present. "She's mentioned getting some pretty things to set around the house. She loves cats, so maybe she'll like this."

"She will," Ron said. "A house to decorate. . . ." He was quiet as they Disapparated and returned to their locker room at the Lions stadium. "I suppose I should be thinking about a house for us," he said at last.

"Well, there's Hermione's parents' house," Harry suggested, "but you're welcome to stay in my house as long as necessary. There's plenty of room."

Ron smiled. "Thanks, mate. One less decision to make right away. I appreciate that."

"No problem."

* * * * *

After dinner that evening, the four friends retreated to the comfortable chairs in the drawing room so the boys could study and Hermione and Ginny could work on wedding plans. After working quietly for a while, Ron stretched and got up, walking over to stand behind Hermione's chair. "Hi," he said, bending over her and giving her an upside-down kiss.

"Hi, yourself. Finished?"

"No. Needed a break. Want to go for a walk with me?"

"In the square?" Number 12 Grimmauld Place might be an elegant home inside now, and well-cleaned and attractive outside (although no one but wizards who were invited to come there could see it), but it was still in a terrible neighbourhood.

A playful look came into his eyes. "No. How about London? Or Paris? Or Dublin? Or Hogsmeade? I just need some air."

"Paris?" she said, her eyebrows raised. "I thought you never wanted to go to France again."

He smiled. "I need a break, Hermione. Where would you like to go?"

"Let's go to Hogsmeade. I haven't been there for a while."

"OK. Let's go," he said, offering her his hand. He looked across the room at Harry. "Back in a bit. I'm knackered. Fresh air will help."

"Right. Have fun," Harry said, giving Ron a grin. He knew Ron's plans.

* * * * *

A short time later, Ron and Hermione were strolling down the dark streets of Hogsmeade. All the shops were closed. Only the pubs were still open, but Ron led Hermione past them.

"I've never been here this late," Hermione said. "It's pretty with the lights coming through the windows of the houses."

"Yeah." Ron struggled with how to tell her what he wanted to say.

Hermione noticed his tension. “Something on your mind?”

“Well . . . yeah.”

“What is it? Something bothering you at school or work?”

“Nah, Harry and I have worked out how to balance all that now. It’s a lot easier now than it was at first.”

“Good. Then what’s wrong?”

He shook his head in frustration. “Nothing. I just . . .” He led her to a bench and sat down, drawing her down next to him. “Do you know how much I love you? Do you have any idea at all?”

She beamed. “I love you too.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you needed something for the wedding? Why did I have to hear it from Harry?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“I want you to have whatever you want, do you understand that? I’m not poor anymore. I can afford to buy you nice things. You just have to say what you want and it’s yours. OK?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I . . . I hope you like this,” he said, then pulled the package out of his pocket and placed it in her hands. He swallowed hard, knowing how particular she was about some things. “If you don’t like it, we can exchange it.”

“What—oh, Ron!” she said as she opened the jeweller’s box. Inside was a lovely pendant, a swirl of gold with sapphires embedded in one side of the swirl, diamonds in the other. The earrings and bracelet had the same swirling design, with matching stones.

Ron bit his lip, hoping the reaction he was seeing was genuine pleasure. “The only magical property the pendant has is a good luck charm. If you want, we can have more charms added to it. I didn’t want to do too much until I knew if you wanted to keep this set or not.”

“Why would I not keep them? They’re gorgeous!”

He brightened. “You really like them?”

“Yes! These are for our wedding?”

“And anything else you want to wear them to, but Harry told me about you needing something gold—” His comment was interrupted by her kissing him. Her bushy hair nearly engulfed him, she came into his arms so quickly.

“Thank you! Oh, sweetheart, you didn’t have to do this, but I’m so glad you did! Thank you so much!”

Ron beamed. “My pleasure.”

* * * * *

Early one morning in mid-August, Ginny woke up when Harry moved from the bed. “Whassup?” she muttered, rubbing her eyes, then stretching. “You have to go to work early?”

“No, silly,” he said, stretching across the bed to kiss her. “Stay right there.”

“Mmmm,” she said, still quite sleepy. “Hadn’t planned on—” Her comment was broken by a huge yawn. “Sorry,” she said, smacking her lips a bit and trying to watch him through one squinted eye.

“Hadn’t planned on what?” he said, a teasing light in his eye.

“Moving from this bed, not anytime soon, anyway.” She peered up at him, still not quite awake enough to focus well. “Why are you so happy this morning?”

He jumped on the bed, landing on his knees and bouncing her hard. “Because it’s your birthday! You’re a woman today! You’re seventeen at last!” He pulled a box from behind his back. “Happy birthday. I hope you like it.”

“It’s in Mr. Joyero’s wrapping, but it can’t be jewellery, it’s too big!” She sat up, fully awake now, and smiled at Harry. “What have you done this time?”

“You’ll have to open it to find out.”

She tore in to the wrappings gleefully. Harry always gave her the best presents. She couldn’t wait to see what it was this time. Finally, a porcelain figurine of a yellow and white kitten playing with a ball of blue yarn emerged. “Oh, Harry, it’s beautiful! It looks a bit like Crookshanks,” she said, turning it in her hands to admire it.

“I hoped you’d like it,” he said, quite pleased with her reaction. “You said something about the house needing some decoration, so I thought—”

Beginnings (part 2)

"This will be beautiful in that glass-fronted cabinet in the drawing room," she mused, "the one by the fireplace that had all those nasty things in it? Remember that awful cleaning job?"

"Yeah, and Sirius. . . ." Harry gulped, bit his lip, and forced a smile back on his face. Sirius, Harry and the Weasleys had worked side by side doing the initial cleaning of this house. It had seemed like warfare at the time, with the house fighting back at every turn.

"I'm sorry!" Ginny said, touching his arm. "I didn't mean to bring up sad memories."

"It isn't a sad memory, not really. I was happy then, for the first time that summer," he said, remembering the summer before his fifth year at Hogwarts. "I had something to do that was interesting even if it was hard work and dangerous at times, and I was able to spend a lot of time with Sirius. Remember his hand turning into brown leathery-looking stuff after that snuffbox bit him? He said it had wartcap powder in it, or something like that." He shook his head, smiling a bit at the memory.

Ginny smiled. "And then Mum sat on the bag of dead rats he was carrying to feed Buckbeak."

"Yeah. Charlie told me Beaky has sired loads of babies now. He seems to be quite happy over there." His eyes grew pensive as he remembered the courage of the grey hippogriff, flying despite being wounded after the attack in France. And Sirius. How he missed his godfather at times. This house was full of reminders of him, even after being completely renovated inside and out.

Ginny saw his mood changing despite his best efforts and rubbed his hand. "Thank you for the kitten, Harry. I'm sorry I brought up sad memories."

He waved his hand as if it didn't matter. "They're always there. Don't worry about it." He sighed, then slid off the bed, his shoulders stiff and bowed.

"Oh, don't go! I haven't thanked you properly!" Ginny watched him deliberately and very stubbornly straighten his posture as he walked away. After a moment, he glanced over his shoulder and winked.

"Be right back. I almost forgot something."

Ginny bit her lip. Sometimes Harry enjoyed talking about Sirius, but other times, a memory would hit him wrong and sadden him. There was never any warning, just a sudden change in his mood. With the threat of Voldemort gone, Ginny in his life and a job he enjoyed, Harry was happier than he'd ever been. At the same time, he finally had the peace in his life he'd never had before, peace that allowed him to remember, to mourn those he'd lost, and to wish things had been different. It didn't help that all the Weasleys and Hermione were still grieving over their lost loved ones. Harry tried to be supportive, cheerful, helpful in every way he could, but it hurt him, too, that Bill, Percy and the Grangers had died, as well as so many others. It was only August now, not that long after the battle that finally ended the war. The deaths of these loved ones would be a sore spot for all of them for some time to come, she knew that. Sirius had been gone for over two years now, but remembering him was still a bittersweet thing for Harry. She brushed angrily at a tear that tried to slide down her cheek. He'd been so happy when he woke her and gave her the present. How she wished she could take back that remark about Sirius! But she couldn't.

Harry had left the room and now returned with something held behind his back. His eyes were determinedly cheerful, a playful smile on his face. "I got you something else, too," he said, keeping his hands hidden.

She shook her head and smiled at him. "Harry, you're too good to me."

"Nothing's too good for my warrior princess. Now, you have a serious decision to make. Which hand?" He straightened and stepped back from the bed a bit so she couldn't peep behind him.

"The left," she said, then laughed as he shook his head while very obviously changing whatever he was holding to his other hand.

"Wrong! I guess you'll have to do without it, then," he said, the teasing light back in his eyes.

"Liar! I saw you change hands!" She carefully placed the porcelain figurine on the night table, then bounded out of bed to chase him.

Harry ran backwards a few steps, stopping with his back near the wall. "What'll you give me?"

"Me? You're the one hiding a present behind his back!"

He shrugged and put on his most reasonable face. "Well, maybe so, but still, you were rude and called me a liar."

"You changed hands! I saw you!"

"I'm simply crushed that you think I'd lie to you, my darling girl. Tease you, maybe. Lie to you? Only when necessary." He gave her a wicked grin. "Which hand was it again?"

"The right!"

He quite obviously shifted whatever it was to the other hand, then said, "Ouch! OK, that's enough." He pulled his hand from behind him and offered her a kitten, pale cream with darker yellow ears, pale yellow rings on its tail and bright blue eyes.

"Oh, Harry, it's gorgeous!" Ginny cuddled the tiny ball of fluff under her chin. "He's—is it a boy?" Harry nodded. "He's so beautiful! Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"I know how much you like Crookshanks, so I thought you might like to have a cat of your own. He's definitely part-Kneazle, so he should be an interesting pet."

"How do you know he's part-Kneazle? He doesn't look like one."

"You know how they react badly to suspicious people? He's shown that ability already. The twins were preparing to trick Ron a few days ago, and he let us know about it."

"Where did you get him?"

"I found him at the stadium. Ron and I tried to find his home, but couldn't, so I took him to Hagrid to make certain he was healthy and to clean him up a bit. He was a mess, eaten up with fleas and . . . well, you can imagine. He's a lot better now. I didn't know he was so beautiful until we got him cleaned up."

"Oh, Harry! You rescued him! That makes him even more special!" Ginny set the wriggling kitten on the bed and watched it bounce around, attacking the lumps in the covers. "He's darling! Thank you so much!" Ginny wrapped her arms around his neck and proceeded to thank him properly, which involved removing the kitten from the bedclothes so Ginny and Harry could return to bed.

"I love you so much," he murmured as he trailed kisses down her neck. He sat up long enough to help her get out of the Lions jersey she preferred to sleep in now, then slid out of his boxers and lay down beside her, his hand moving softly over the satiny contours of her body. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?"

"You make me feel beautiful, love," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him to her.

Harry slowly glided his hand down Ginny's body, watching her face as he did so. Soon kisses followed where his hand had led and sighs of contentment filled the room. As they rode the heights of passion, Harry cried out. Twenty needle-like claws were firmly attached to his bum.

"Get him OFF!" he cried, moving over so Ginny could remove her kitten's claws from Harry's bum. "Ow-ow-ow! Damn, that stings!"

Ginny laughed as she snuggled the kitten to her. "He's not hurting me, precious. He's loving me. Do you understand? If you don't, you'll have to stay outside the room, and I'd hate to do that." The kitten purred and patted Ginny's cheeks with his front paws, then licked Ginny's jaw.

"It's easy to see who he prefers," Harry said, wincing as he rubbed the claw marks on his bum. As he did his healing magic, the scratches disappeared and he finally sighed in relief. "Let's not go through that again, all right?" he told the kitten, stroking his ears affectionately. "Ginny's your mum, but I'm your dad, and you need to remember that!"

"I think he's got it now," Ginny said. "At least he waited until we were finished, but I would've enjoyed some snuggle time. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, but I think I made a mistake giving you that kitten," he said with a rueful smile. "You comforted him before you comforted me."

"I had just forcibly removed him from your arse, remember? I rescued you!"

"Yeah, I know. Thanks for that." He gave her a lazy grin and turned onto his back, opening his arm invitingly. "We can still snuggle."

"Mmm, this is better," Ginny said as she stretched out beside him, her head nestled in the crook of his shoulder, the kitten resting contentedly under her chin. "What shall we call him?"

"Trouble," Harry said without hesitation.

"Oh, Harry! That's a terrible name for him!" Just then the kitten moved, digging his claws into Ginny's chest as he did so. "OUCH! 'Trouble' it is!"

Harry looked at her in concern. "You OK?"

"I will be when you fix it," she said, moving the kitten and relaxing under Harry's gentle, healing hand.

"Happy birthday, love," Harry said, kissing her forehead and stroking her arm affectionately.

"Thanks." As the three of them fell asleep, the kitten's purrs vied with Harry's soft snores in Ginny's mind for her favourite sound in the world. Harry won.

* * * * *

With September upon them, Ginny returned to school on the Hogwarts Express. She missed Harry, Ron and Hermione, and so many others who had finished school and gone on to other adventures, or had died in the war. She tended to her Head Girl duties without the pleasure she'd expected to feel when dreaming about such things in her early years of school. She felt alone despite being surrounded by hundreds of people. Harry would be there for the Welcome Feast, but he was going to flash there in phoenix form, since he had Quidditch practice today.

After what seemed like the longest train ride of her life, Ginny saw the Hogsmeade station coming into view, with Hogwarts' towers visible in the distance. Hagrid's call of "First years! This way! First years!" was so comfortingly familiar that she ran to him and gave him a hug, surprising him.

"Well, and if it isn't Ginny," Hagrid said, smiling down at her. "How was your holiday?"

“Too short! It’s good to see you.”

“And you as well! How’s our Harry?”

“He’s great. You’ll see him tonight at the banquet.”

“I’m looking forward to that! Harry as a professor, and his first year out of Hogwarts. Who woulda thought?” He laughed. “It wasn’t that long ago that he was a little feller like this lot,” he said, smiling affectionately at the frightened-looking first years.

“How’s your kitten? What’s his name? He’s a cute little puss.”

“Thanks for taking such good care of him! Harry told me all about it,” Ginny said, lifting a small basket that held her kitten. “His name is ‘Trouble.’ Harry named him, but I had to agree, it suits him.”

“Trouble, eh? And I’m thinkin’ there’s a story behind that name,” Hagrid said with a knowing smile.

Ginny’s cheeks were bright pink, making Hagrid chuckle. She finally laughed herself and waved as she left him. “See you later,” she called as she ran for the thestral-drawn carriages.

* * * * *

When she came to her seat after the Sorting, Minerva McGonagall stopped by Harry’s chair. “Welcome to the staff, Harry! And did you bring Merlin with you?”

“He’s visiting Fawkes, but I can call him if you’d like.” Harry knew how much Professor McGonagall—make that “Minerva” now that he was on staff—enjoyed talking to his phoenix.

“Oh, don’t bother,” she said, patting his shoulder. “I’m sure I’ll get to see him sometime.”

Just then there was a bright flash over Harry’s head, and Merlin settled on his master’s shoulder.

“Hello, Merlin,” Minerva said, blushing a bit.

Harry cast the spell that would make it possible for her to understand Merlin. “Have fun, you two, but don’t cause any disruptions or I’ll have to give you detention!” Merlin ruffled Harry’s hair affectionately before flying off to sit on the back of Minerva’s chair.

Minerva chuckled. “Detention? You’re planning to enjoy being a teacher here, I see.”

Harry laughed as he tried to smooth his hair. Teachers should try to look their best, after all. “I hope to.”

She patted his arm affectionately and moved to her own seat, then sat and listened to the phoenix, who was already telling her some exciting tale.

“Welcome to another year at Hogwarts!” Dumbledore said with obvious delight. “And it’s going to be the best year Hogwarts has seen in many years! The war is over, we’ve mourned our lost friends and relatives, and a bright new future is ahead of us!” He went into his usual welcome speech, including all the items that were restricted or forbidden.

He glanced at the Harry, seated between Remus and Hagrid at the staff table. A broad smile crossed his face as he said, “I cannot tell you how pleased I am to introduce our new Flying Instructor to you. Not only is he an excellent teacher, as any past member of the D.A. will attest, but he’s also a fine young man as well as a professional Quidditch player. I give you Harry Potter!” He led a round of applause that evolved into cheers that rocked the Great Hall. Staff and students were all standing, many stamping their feet or pounding on the tables to add to the general din.

Harry sat red-faced and nervous until his eyes found Ginny’s. She was laughing, happy for him, proud of him, *there* for him. He smiled at last, glad to be back at Hogwarts.

* * * * *

As people began to leave the Great Hall after the feast, Severus Snape made his way over to Harry.

Harry was surrounded by old friends. The Creevey brothers, Luna Lovegood, so many others he’d grown up with, all stood in front of the staff table trying to speak to him. Ginny, bold as always, had come behind the table and now stood with Harry, holding his hand. She saw Snape approaching and tugged on Harry’s hand.

“What?” he said, looking down at her.

“Snape,” she hissed.

“Potter,” Snape said as he reached Harry’s side.

“Professor,” Harry replied. He’d saved the man’s life and nearly died in the process, but they were by no means friends.

“You’re on the staff now, Potter. You may call me ‘Severus.’”

“Thank you, Severus,” Harry said, trying not to stumble over the name. “And you may call me ‘Harry,’ if you’d like.” He smiled and offered his hand.

Shape shook his hand and held it for a long moment, then cleared his throat. “Good luck this year, Harry. I’m certain your students will enjoy your class. Welcome to the staff.”

“Thanks. I’m looking forward to working here.”

As Snape walked away, Harry’s friends goggled. “He was *nice* to you, Harry!” Colin said in shock.

“Saving someone’s life usually makes them more appreciative,” Ginny said, irony in her voice.

Harry smiled at Colin. “That’s ‘Mr. Potter’ to you, Creevey,” he said in his best imitation of a professorial voice.

“Oh, are you going to get all uppity with us now that you’re a teacher?” Dennis teased.

Harry grinned. “Nah. But if you see me when there are younger kids or other teachers around, try to remember the ‘Mr.’ bit, OK?”

“How are you and Ginny going to get away with—“

“There’s no ‘getting away with’ to worry about,” Ginny said archly. “Professor Dumbledore has no problem with us being a couple.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet!” Luna said, her huge eyes dreamy. “A student and a professor. Wow. Well, if it could happen for you, Ginny, there’s hope for the rest of us.”

Ginny and Harry looked at each other, trying their best not to laugh.

“Huh?” Ginny said when she thought she could control herself. “Harry and I have been together for years. It didn’t start when he became a teacher.”

“I know, but still. . . .” Luna’s voice drifted off. Today she had her hair tied up in a lopsided ponytail bedecked with a garland of kumquats. She had a kumquat necklace on, as well.

Harry put his arm around Ginny and faced his friends. “I have to leave soon. I’ll be back on Tuesday to start teaching. I’ll see you then.”

His friends called variations on “See, you, Harry!” and “Bye, *Professor!*” as they left.

Harry led Ginny to the small room off the Great Hall where he’d first met with the officials of the Tri-Wizard Tournament four years ago—it seemed like a lifetime. He looked around the room to make certain they were alone, then pulled her into his arms and kissed her fiercely. When they parted, she was gasping. Then she laughed.

“Where did that come from?”

He shrugged. “Dunno. I guess because when I felt overwhelmed earlier, I just had to look at you to calm down. I’m so glad you were here tonight.”

“Me, too. I wouldn’t have missed that look on Snape’s face for anything. When he shook hands with you and called you ‘Harry’? And told you to call him ‘Severus’? Priceless!”

“I’m glad he’s trying to be friendly. It will make things a lot easier for me,” Harry said, rubbing his cheek against her hair, breathing in her scent and wishing he had time to do more than just kiss her. “Why are we talking about him? I need to snog your socks off before I go back to that cold, empty house.”

“Ron and Hermione are still there!” Ginny protested. “And Dobby and Winky! It’s hardly empty and Dobby never lets it get really cold.”

He looked into her eyes for a long moment, then stared at her lips, which were red and full from the kiss he’d already given her. “You’re not there,” he said simply. “So the house is empty for me.” He brushed her forehead with his lips, then her eyes and the tip of her nose. “I love you so much, but I have to go, so give me those sweet lips.” Ginny gladly complied.

* * * * *

“Welcome to Flying Class!” Harry said as the first years trooped onto the field for their first class the next Tuesday. “Pick a broom and stand next to it. They’re all brand-new brooms, so don’t worry about which one you get.” He smiled at the children as they gazed excitedly at the new brooms Dumbledore had ordered using Harry’s teaching salary, just as Harry asked him to at the end of the previous school term.

“I’m Harry—erm, Mr. Potter, and I’m your Flying Instructor. I’m not wearing normal professorial robes because these are more comfortable to fly in. And to answer your question,” he said as he saw some hands shoot up in the air, “these are my practice robes for the London Lions Quidditch team. I use different robes on game days. I play Seeker for the Lions, just as I did for Gryffindor during my years at Hogwarts.

“Raise your hands if you’ve flown before.” He saw several hands go up, some more confidently than others. “Right! I’m glad some of you have already flown. Those of you who haven’t, don’t worry. By the time I’m through with you, you’ll all be wonderful fliers.” He grinned at them. Most of them had eager, excited faces, while others looked nervous and still others looked at the brooms in sheer horror. A few looked at him warily. Harry wondered if it was because they were afraid of flying or if they were afraid of him. He sighed and smiled at them, glad that most of them had got their “scar staring” out of their systems at the Welcome Feast.

“All right. I want everyone to do the same thing, so I can see the technique and skill levels of those who already know how to fly, and so the rest of you will learn how to fly properly. Even if you’ve done it differently in the past, please try things my way when I give you a specific task, all right?” He remembered Draco Malfoy and his arrogance about being able to fly before he got to Hogwarts. He also remembered with some glee the amount

of instruction Malfoy had required because he used the wrong grip on his broom. He shoved Malfoy out of his mind. He was a part of the past Harry was happy to forget.

"Hold your right hand over the broom beside you and say, in a very firm voice, 'Up!'" He watched as some brooms vibrated while others lay inert. "Don't give up! You have to believe that broom will come to your hand, or it will just stay on the ground. Keep trying!" Finally, after the class repeated "Up!" many times, some brooms started moving into the hands of the students. "Well done! Those who haven't managed it yet, try three more times. I think you'll get it."

One tiny girl was having no luck at all and was near tears. Harry squatted beside her so he'd be at her eye-level. "What's the problem?"

"I c-c-can't do it," she sniffled, trying hard not to sob.

"Show me what you're doing," Harry said.

The girl held a trembling hand over the broom and said, "Up," in a shaky voice.

"I see the problem," Harry said, kneeling now. He took her thin wrist in his hand. "You need to show the broom who's boss. If you act as if you're afraid of it, it won't come to you. Brooms are like horses that way, or so my girlfriend tells me," he said with a smile. "OK, now. I'll help you hold your hand still. Say 'UP!' with a lot of confidence this time."

The little girl looked at the handsome face so close to hers. She swallowed hard. She was right next to the famous Harry Potter! And he was being so nice to her! She bit her lip, then turned determined eyes on the broom. "UP!" The broom flew to her hand. "I did it! I did it!"

"Yes, you did," Harry said with a warm smile as he got to his feet. "You'll be fine. Just remember to believe in yourself, trust your magic, and remember, the broom isn't the boss—you are."

"All right. Thank you, Professor Potter."

"It's just 'Mr. Potter,' but you're quite welcome," Harry said, patting her back gently as he stepped away. He looked around and saw that the others all finally had their brooms in hand. "Well done, all of you! All right, now I want you to swing your right leg over the broom and just hover a bit. On my mark." He blew a whistle and watched as the class struggled to get on brooms that weren't always cooperative.

"If the broom isn't holding still for you, you're thinking ahead too much and making it move. If you picture it holding still in your mind, the broom will hang in the air wherever you put it so you can get on." Finally, all the students were on their brooms and hovering so their toes just barely touched the grass.

There must be one in every class, Harry thought as one boy zoomed away, showing off his flying skills. "Patterson, come back down."

"I know how to fly! I don't need to do this baby stuff." Patterson soared overhead, making the other children gasp in awe.

"Patterson, when I said I wanted everyone to do the same thing, I meant it," Harry said. He raised his wand and Summoned the boy's broom, bringing him gently to the ground. "Disobey me again and it's a detention."

Harry looked up as another boy squealed in fright. His broom was racing upward. "McComb, come back down!"

"I can't! It's just—I can't—HELP!"

The way the boy was rolling around on the broom, off-balance and tense, he was going to fall any moment. Summoning him wouldn't be the safest way to get him down. Harry sighed and turned to the child next to him. "May I borrow your broom?" The girl handed it over wordlessly, gazing up at him with wide eyes. "Thanks," Harry said, giving her a smile before leaping on the broom and going after the boy whose broom was now beginning to buck.

"Hold on tight! You need to relax and feel the movement of the broom," Harry called as he neared the boy. "It's your tension that's caused the problem."

"How can I not be tense?" the boy squeaked.

"I know you're frightened, Mr. McComb," Harry murmured as he flew next to the boy, his hand now protectively under the boy's elbow, "but your fear is making things worse. Just relax. I won't let anything happen to you. Take a slow, deep breath in," he demonstrated, "and then blow it out slowly. Now do it again. Feel better?" The boy nodded and Harry let go of him. "That's very good! Now I want you to push the front of your broom toward the ground, but only a little bit." Harry reached out and corrected the angle of the broom. "You don't need to do any dives yet," he said, grinning at the boy.

Finally, the two of them were on the ground. The other students grinned excitedly. Harry heard some of the things they were saying. They'd seen the famous Harry Potter fly! And he'd saved McComb's life! He was a hero AGAIN and they'd seen it! He smiled and shook his head, resigned to the fact that he was going to be "The Famous Harry Potter" no matter what he did.

"All right, we've seen what happens when you let your fear get the better of you. I want you to know this: Flying is FUN! There is very little in life that gives me the joy that flying does." Making love to Ginny was the only thing that compared to flying, in Harry's opinion, but he couldn't very well say that here. He grinned, amused by his thoughts. "You don't have to become a Quidditch player. You don't have to be the fastest flier in the Wizarding World. All you have to do is learn how to fly so you can use a broom for transportation when you want to. That's easy. You can all manage that. So let's get to work!"

With better spirits now, his class followed his directions with more or less success. Nobody got hurt, most of them learned to enjoy flying, and all of them enjoyed the class itself. When he dismissed them, Harry grinned. This was going to be fun!

* * * * *

September was flying by. Harry was so busy with Auror School, Lions practice and games, and teaching flying at Hogwarts every Tuesday that he barely had time to think. He was happy, though, truly happy for the first time in his life. He got to see Ginny every Tuesday and every other weekend, which wasn't nearly enough, but it was better than it might have been if he hadn't been a Hogwarts instructor. On the weekends when he was able to stay at Hogwarts, she stayed in his rooms with him. Dumbledore, McGonagall and the rest of the staff pointedly ignored the Head Girl and this particular instructor breaking the rules so flagrantly. Not only had they been together long before Dumbledore offered Harry the job, but Harry had made the world safe for everybody. He was treated with great respect by everyone on staff, even Filch, if a bit grudgingly. Harry found that aspect of his hero status to be a rather nice thing.

* * * * *

Hermione's birthday party in mid-September was a quiet affair at Grimmauld Place. She was eighteen now and a student at Oxford WIZARDING University. She still wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life, but she wanted to make a difference somehow, to make a contribution to the WIZARDING World.

"What are you studying?" Fred said at her birthday party.

"I'm taking every class I can manage," Hermione said, her face glowing with pleasure. "It's amazing what a variety of classes they offer."

"Do you know yet what you'll do after you finish uni?" Charlie said, reaching across Fred's nose to grab another brownie, this one liberally laced with caramel. "These are great, Mum!"

"Harry showed me how to make them," Molly said, smiling at her future son-in-law. "They are tasty, aren't they? I'll show you how to make them if you'd like."

"Yeah!" Charlie agreed. He was home for the weekend from the dragon preserve in Wales.

"Did I hear George say you two are going to Ireland soon?" Arthur asked Fred.

"Yeah, we're opening a shop in Dublin, and there's a supplier there we want to meet with. We think we can get a better price on some things there than from our suppliers in Europe."

Harry watched the conversations flow around the room. Arthur and Molly were finally living in the Burrow, which was now complete. Remus and Tonks were happy in their little house in Hogsmeade and had just started decorating their nursery. Fred and George were their usual irrepressible selves. Ron and Hermione sat quietly in a corner unless someone spoke to them. They seemed to be in their own little cloud of happiness, with their wedding just a month away now. All the decisions had been made, everything was in place, and now they just had to deal with the parties, teasing and waiting involved. Harry smiled, wishing he and Ginny were in that position. *Next June, it will be us! At last.*

Tonks moved across the room and sat by Harry. "You look happy."

"I am."

"I'm glad. Oof!"

Harry's eyes flew to her hands, which were holding her stomach. "What's wrong? Is the baby—"

"It's fine," she said, laughing softly now. "It just kicked the breath right out of me! I wish I knew what it was so I could stop calling it an 'it.'" She gave Harry an appraising look. "D'you think you can tell what it is?"

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "Me? Um. I dunno. How would I know?"

Tonks laughed and poked him playfully in the side. "Harry Potter, don't tell me you don't know the difference between boys and girls after all this time!"

Harry's ears went red. "Oh. Yeah, that!" he said, laughing with her. "I guess I was a bit thick."

"A bit," she teased. "Do you think you can do it?"

"I'll try," he said, then put his hand on her stomach. Tonks guided him to a spot on her side. "This is where it kicked me, if that's any help."

"OK." He held his hand in place, then moved it around little by little, finally coming to a stop a few inches away from where he'd started. "Got it." He grinned, a teasing glint in his eyes. "Are you certain you want to know?"

"Give over, Harry! What is it?"

"It's a boy."

"Are you sure? You can't possibly be mistaken?"

Tonks. I do know the difference between boys and girls, and this one is a very healthy boy."

"Healthy?"

"As far as I can tell, he's perfect in every way," he said with a smile.

Tonks threw her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. "Oh, thank you! I was worried about its health, with all we went through with the stress and—"

"I know. That's why I checked him out. And it's a 'him,' not an 'it,' remember."

Tonks gave him a resounding kiss on the cheek. "I love you, you know that, right? You're the best godson, the best ANYTHING, ever!"

He smiled fondly at her. "I love you too."

"I have to tell Remus! See you later!" With that, she got to her feet and ran across the room, grabbing Remus by the arm and dragging him away from his conversation with Arthur.

"Is something wrong?" Arthur said, giving Harry a puzzled glance.

Harry smiled. "No, everything's just perfect."

A moment later, they heard a glad cry from Remus and laughter from Tonks.

"What's going on?" Molly said.

"Tonks just gave him some news. I expect he's happy to hear it," Harry replied.

"What news?"

"That's theirs to share, not mine."

Molly frowned. "Is it about the baby? Is it all right?"

"Yes, it's fine."

* * * * *

"Mione?" Ron said the Saturday morning after Hermione's birthday. "You awake?"

She stretched and yawned. "Um-hmm. How are you this morning?"

"Well," he said, twining one of her curls around his finger, "I'm a bit lonely, actually."

Her eyes crinkled in amusement. "Lonely? I can't imagine why, with me right here."

"But you're all the way over there," he pouted. In truth, she was mere inches from him, a fact that made Hermione laugh.

"You're so cute when you want something," she teased, running a finger down his jaw. "And you're cute when you're face is all prickly too. Your beard is such a pretty shade of red-gold. It makes your face glitter."

"You like that, huh?" He grinned and rubbed his beard stubble lightly over her cheek, then began kissing her quite thoroughly.

Hermione slide her arms around his neck, sighing with pleasure. "This is such a nice way to wake up," she murmured as he nibbled his way down her neck, then began unbuttoning the old school shirt of Ron's that she liked to sleep in.

"Um-hmm," he said, kissing each bit of skin that he found as he undid the buttons.

Hermione arched her back as he got to her breasts. She tangled her hands in his wavy hair and held him there, savouring the pleasure he was giving her. "Oh, Ron, you're so good to me."

"Feeling's mutual," he mumbled as he went back to work on pleasuring her every way he could think of.

* * * * *

As they lay curled up together after a completely blissful morning's delight, Hermione said, "What do you want to do today?"

"Make love to you again. And then again. And some more after that," he said, playing with her curls.

"Mmm, I like the sound of that," she said, snuggling her head into the crook of his shoulder more comfortably. "But I was thinking."

"Uh-oh, that's a dangerous thing to do so early in the morning," he warned. "I've heard that it's bad for your health to think too much on Saturday mornings."

"You're silly."

"Glad you noticed," he said, kissing her on the forehead. "Now about my plans for the rest of the day. . ." His hand began exploring the more interesting parts of her body again.

She laughed, then sighed in delight. "Already?"

Ron gave her a slow smile, his eyes gently teasing. "Maybe. I'm getting married soon, so we have to have as much fun as possible before that. My wife may not approve of such things on a Saturday morning, you know."

"I happen to know she'll think it's a fine way to spend a Saturday morning, you funny man! Seriously, though, we have an errand we need to run. Today might be a good time."

He stopped what he was doing and forced himself to pay attention to what she was saying. "OK. What is it?"

"We need to buy our wedding rings. Could we go and do that today? We're getting married in less than a month."

"Yeah, we'll go to Hogsmeade after breakfast, OK? Now can you please stop interrupting me? I'm busy here," he said, getting back to business.

* * * * *

"Hi, Mr. Joyero!" Ron called as they entered the shop.

"Mr. Weasley! And the future Mrs. Weasley! How are both of you?" Mr. Joyero shook hands with both of them. "What can I do for you two today? Or are you just browsing?"

"We came to buy wedding rings," Hermione said, her cheeks turning a lovely shade of pink.

"Wonderful! I made some new rings recently," the jeweller said with a warm smile. "Now, mind, you don't have to take any of these, but I thought about the engagement ring Mr. Weasley chose and designed several rings that would look very pretty with it. Would you like to see them?"

"Oh yes!" Hermione said, her cheeks still flushed. She and Ron moved to the counter where Mr. Joyero placed two small trays of rings. Some were plain gold, some were more ornate, and some included diamonds or sapphires or both. Hermione's ring had a small diamond with a sapphire on each side, set in a delicate gold band that looked perfect on her hand. Any of these wedding rings would look wonderful with her engagement ring.

"Oh, they're all so beautiful!" she breathed. Her eyes lingered over the ones with diamonds and sapphires, but she pointed at a plain gold one with a single rose carved in it. "That one's nice."

"I like these better," Ron said, pointing to the ones with the gemstones. He looked up at Mr. Joyero, an eyebrow raised in question.

"These are much more affordable than you might think. I made them as samples, and I'd be pleased to sell them to you for not much more than my cost," he said.

"That's so kind of you, but you can't keep giving us such nice discounts," Hermione began hesitantly.

Mr. Joyero smiled. "Do you know how much business I have since the *Daily Prophet* reported Ron Weasley and Harry Potter shop here regularly? When the war was over and Mr. Weasley and Mr. Potter were recovering, and even after that, when you were finishing school, didn't you see all of the articles that talked about their personal lives?"

Hermione shook her head. Reading the newspaper had been the last thing on her mind while waiting for Ron and Harry to recover. She had read it sporadically after they were released from the hospital, still too numbed by everything that had happened to want to read the news in detail as she has before.

"There were several very nice articles about Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley, and you and Miss Weasley as well. They ran photos of your ring and Miss Weasley's, as well, and they even interviewed me for one piece. You two and Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley will always get discounts from me. Not only am I honoured to help you this way, but you truly are good for my business."

Hermione's eyes lit up with pleasure. "Oh! Well, in that case." She bent over the rings again. After a moment, she bit her lip and looked up at Ron. "Do you really like those best?" she said, pointing to the rings with the stones.

"You pick the one you want. You'll be wearing it for a long, long time," he said. "I like these two," he added, pointing to rings that had intricate designs featuring small diamonds and sapphires. He looked at Mr. Joyero. "Will these fit with her ring?"

"Yes, I made them to fit with a ring like hers," the jeweller assured him. "I always try to design rings that will be comfortable to wear. When any of these rings is paired with her engagement ring, they will mesh perfectly and be very comfortable for her to wear."

Ron studied Hermione's face. He could see she was trying to pick something inexpensive. "Pick what you really want, 'Mione. And yes, I'm serious."

She glanced up at him, saw his look, then took a nervous breath and pointed to one of the rings he'd chosen. "That one. May I try it with my ring?"

"Of course." Mr. Joyero held out his hand and Hermione gave him her engagement ring. He put it with the wedding band to show how they would lock into place with each other, making the rings fit her hand without feeling bulky. He handed the joined rings to Ron, who slid them on her ring

finger with a solemn expression.

Hermione held her breath as Ron slid the rings on her finger. They felt so right! "Perfect," she sighed as she looked at the two rings together.

"It's forever," Ron said. "Be sure."

"I'm sure."

"That's the one, then," Ron said, delighted that he had enough money to not have to scrimp on such an important purchase.

"And what about yours?" Hermione said. "What do you want?"

"Something simple. I don't want anything with stones," he said. "Playing Quidditch is rough. I'd just knock the stone out of my ring if it had one."

"Harry doesn't knock the stone out of his ring," Hermione said, a confused expression on her face.

"Keeper and Seeker are quite different positions, sweetie," he said patiently. "I just want something plain."

"I have just the thing," Mr. Joyero said. He moved to another section of his counter and pulled out a tray of simple gold bands. Some had more than one metal in them, others had ornamental engraving.

Ron's eyes lit up when he saw one with a line of Gryffindor lions engraved around the band. "That's cool!"

"Watch what it does," Mr. Joyero said as he put the ring on one of his fingers. He tapped it with his wand, and the lions began actually moving around the band.

Hermione was still looking. "What about this one?" she said, pointing to another ring in the tray. It had the Gryffindor lion carved on it as well, but the lion was a pale reddish colour with a silvery mane.

"That's beautiful," Ron said, smiling as his fiancé lifted the ring and slid it on his hand.

"That one is created with three colours of gold, Mr. Weasley. I used a rose gold for the lion's body, white gold for his mane and the tip of his tail, and yellow gold for the rest of the ring. It's shaped narrower at the back, like a ring with a stone would be, so it won't turn so easily on your finger and the lion will always be on top."

"I like it." Ron held his hand up for Hermione to examine. "What do you think?"

She smiled. "Will you like it forever?"

"I'll always be a Gryffindor, and now I'm a London Lion, too. I like it." He held his hand out and looked at the ring again. "Yeah. That one."

"Wonderful! I'll box them up for you. You remember the sizing charm from the engagement ring, correct?" Mr. Joyero said as he took both rings from the couple.

"Yes."

"Would you like your initials and wedding date inscribed inside the bands?"

"Oh yes!" Hermione said, delighted with the idea.

"Mr. Weasley's ring has room for more inscriptions, if you want to add anything," Mr Joyero told her.

Hermione thought a minute. "Could you engrave it with 'Life is nothing without your love'?"

"Yes, absolutely. Just give me a minute." He took Ron's ring and went back to his workshop.

"That's sweet, Hermione. Did you make it up?" Ron said, rather stunned by what she was having engraved in his ring.

"I've thought it for a long time. When you were so hurt in that battle, and I was afraid I'd lose you, I knew I'd die if you died. I can't live without you, Ron. That's the simple truth. I think my parents were probably happier that they went together."

His eyes as solemn as hers, he nodded. "I felt that way when you were so sick in the hospital after Malfoy cursed you on the Astronomy Tower. I know how it feels." They wrapped their arms around each other and held on tightly, their hearts pounding with the gamut of emotions pouring through them. "I love you, Hermione."

"I love you, Ron." She rested her head against his chest, feeling safe in his arms. "I love when you hold me this way."

"I do too," he said, resting his cheek on her hair. They broke apart slowly when Mr. Joyero re-entered the room.

"You're all set," he said, showing them the engraving inside the rings. "Anything else?"

"I think that will do for now," Ron said.

"Wonderful. Let me wrap these for you."

As the jeweller moved away, Hermione turned toward Ron and looked up at him with a glowing face. “Those rings are so beautiful! Thank you.” She stretched up on tiptoe to kiss him.

He bent to meet her halfway. “I love you.”

“And I love you. I can’t wait! Only a few more weeks.”

Ron wrapped his arms around her and rocked her back and forth. “It seems like forever, but it won’t be that long.”

* * * * *

It was a small but rowdy group in the private party room at the Leaky Cauldron. Fred and George Weasley were hosting Ron’s stag night. Harry, Charlie Weasley, and many of the London Lions players and staff were all in attendance. Ron was studiously avoiding drinking anything but butterbeer from a bottle he’d uncapped himself.

Harry was hard-pressed to keep the Lions from spiking the butterbeer bottles with something stronger. He was glad that the twins, at least, remembered the one time Ron had drunk himself into a stupor. Fred and George had agreed that strong alcohol was the one thing they would not press on their baby brother that night. Then they proceeded to press very realistic but fake spiders on him, making Ron scream like a girl until he realized they weren’t real. He still shuddered horribly as Harry vanished them one by one. Some were buried deep in the folds of Ron’s robes, others hid in the pockets, so it was hard to find them all.

“I’ll get you for this,” Ron growled at his twin brothers, who responded by giving him identical angelic smiles.

Charlie roared with laughter at the look on Ron’s face and began to help Harry vanish the spiders. “Remind me to ban the twins from any stag night I might have,” he told Ron, still chuckling.

“You planning to get married anytime soon?” Harry asked brightly. He thought the twins might restrain themselves a bit more with him than they did with Ron, but he still wasn’t looking forward to his own stag night. He just wanted to be *married*. He didn’t care how or where it happened, as long as it was soon. June seemed so far away. He dragged his thoughts back to the party, and noticed Charlie’s look. “What?”

“You ask a question and then drift a million miles away before I can answer it,” Charlie said, chuckling at Harry’s bright blush. “Thinking about my baby sister, were you?”

A smile spread across Harry’s face. “Yeah.”

“I have to admit, I admire her taste in men,” Charlie said, clapping Harry on the back. “You fit in with the family, you’re a brilliant Quidditch player and an all-round nice guy as well as the greatest hero the Wizarding World has seen in years. She couldn’t have done much better if she’d tried.”

Harry ducked his head and blushed, truly touched by the man’s obvious sincerity. “Thanks, Charlie.”

A typical Weasley twinkle flashed in Charlie’s eyes. “And I don’t think I got my turn at giving you a Weasley initiation,” he continued, wrapping his arm around Harry’s neck and rubbing his hair roughly with his knuckles. He ignored Harry’s squawks of protest and continued until he tired of the exercise. “There. That should hold you.”

Harry was busy rubbing the sore spot where Charlie had rubbed his scalp. “Hold me for what? You nearly made me bald!”

“With all that hair? You’ll never be bald, Harry. Now Dad, he started balding early. So did Bill, actually. He wore the ponytail to cover up the bald spot on the back of his head, did you know that?”

“I thought he did it just to be cool!”

Charlie held his hand up and belched. “Wizard’s oath. He had a bald spot. That’s why his hair was always tied back, it covered the bald patch. Good ol’ Bill. I miss him.”

“Me too.” Harry quietly moved the glass of Ogden’s Old Firewhiskey away from Charlie’s hand and slid a bottle of butterbeer in its place.

“Thanks, Harry. You’re a good guy, you know that?” Charlie said as he lifted the butterbeer to his mouth. With a look of surprise, he added, “When did I start drinking butterbeer?”

“When you were fourteen,” Fred called from across the room.

“Oh, yeah!” Charlie said, then downed the contents of the bottle and let off another resounding belch. “Ahhh, that’s better.”

Harry was fighting a case of the giggles. He’d never seen any of the Weasleys drunk but Ron, and Ron had been a disgusting drunk, maudlin whenever he wasn’t being sick all over the floor. Charlie was more talkative and a lot funnier when he was drunk than when he was sober. Just as he thought that, his eyes locked with Charlie’s. Charlie gave him a very deliberate wink, his eyes as clear as Harry’s. *He’s not drunk! Why would he pretend to be?*

Just as he thought this, Charlie leaned toward Harry. “Everyone expects guys at a stag night to get drunk. I prefer to keep my wits about me, but I’m not going to spoil the party by being the sober big brother. Keep my secret, OK?”

Harry sat back and grinned at him. “Yeah, OK.”

Charlie saluted Harry with the neck of the bottle. "Good man. And I meant every word I said earlier."

Harry was touched. "Thanks."

Meanwhile, the twins were trying to make a magical projector work to show some bawdy film they'd found via one of their contacts in the joke business. "Nearly there, I think," Fred said as he contorted himself over the machine. "Yes! That's got it."

"Roll that film, Fred!" George said, leaning back in his chair and stretching his long legs out in front of him.

"Lovelies in London," the title read as the film began. The Lions, the Weasleys and Harry all whistled and cheered. The first scene showed a group of women dressed in scanty Muggle attire, sight-seeing at Big Ben, the Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, St. Paul's and various other places. The men all leaned forward expectantly. Surely there would be some action worthy of a stag night soon!

Harry thought the film had the quality of a home movie. He wondered where the twins had found it. It certainly didn't seem to be like any porn movies he'd heard about when listening to Dudley and his gang talking about such things.

The scene changed and the women were in a hotel room. They chattered about the sights they'd seen and some men they'd met in a pub as they started to change for dinner. As they stripped off their clothes, the men at Ron's party hooted and whistled, but something odd happened when the women got to their lingerie. The film seemed to jump suddenly, then to jerk a bit, and then it showed them fully dressed again, at dinner in a nice restaurant, where the film ended. The Lions, in particular, threw food at the twins.

"What the bloody hell was that?" one of them demanded, a bit angry that he'd been cheated of the dirty film he'd looked forward to.

The twins were dumbstruck. When he found his voice, and after putting up a shield to protect him from the flying food, Fred said, "You know, the seal was broken on the can when I picked it up."

"Who had access to it?" George wondered. They looked at each other, their faces white with shock. "Hermione!" they said as one.

Ron stared at them, his brows drawn together in confusion. "What about her?"

"She stopped by the shop earlier today and made us promise not to hex you! She was in the office alone for a few minutes before we were able to get away from the shop and talk to her."

Harry laughed out loud. Charming any dirty scenes out of the film sounded like the kind of thing Hermione would do.

"What do you know about this, Potter?" one of his team mates said, an amused look on his face. "You seem to find all this quite funny."

"You don't know Hermione like I do," Harry explained through his laughter. "She's perfectly capable of changing the film with some kind of spell. She's the cleverest witch I've ever met."

"Smartest witch at Hogwarts," Ron agreed, nodding sagely.

"Then why's she marrying you?" Fred demanded.

Ron just smiled. "She loves me." He popped a small hors d'oeuvre in his mouth and chewed contentedly.

"Well, it just shows she isn't as smart as everyone thinks she is!" George retorted.

Fred chortled. "Nor is Ron!" because just then, Ron changed into a giant red parrot. "Parrot Pasties. We've added hors d'oeuvres to our joke line," Fred explained to the Lions players, who were roaring with laughter now.

Harry sighed. "When does the effect wear off?"

"In half an hour. Or a day or two," George said, not acting terribly worried about when his brother might change back into himself.

"He's getting married *tomorrow*, in case you forgot," Harry said with infinite patience. They couldn't have allowed this to happen without there being an antidote, could they?

"This is a new product," George said, shrugging. "We don't have the antidote worked out yet."

"Actually, we don't have many of them made yet. I can't imagine how one of them got onto Ron's plate." Fred giggled as he spoke.

"Hermione will kill you for this, and Ginny will help," Harry warned. "You know that. And I'll hold you down for them to hex you. And your mother. . ."

"Mum! Oh no!" Fred said in mock terror. "OK, have it your way." He waved his wand and the parrot, which had been squawking plaintively, changed back into Ron, but a Ron with red feathers where he should have red hair.

"I still have feathers!" Ron snapped.

"And they're very becoming!" George chortled.

Ron squirmed in his chair. "I. Have. Feathers. Not just on my head," he snarled through clenched teeth.

The twins were silent, then looked at each other and burst out laughing. "You don't mean—" George began.

“Surely not there!” Fred added.

Ron just nodded, trying his best not to lose his temper at his own stag night.

“Oh dear, we can’t have that with a wedding night coming up!” Fred said, nearly breathless from laughter.

Harry was doing his best not to laugh, but it was just too funny. Ron had red feathers wherever he had hair. His arms had small red feathers that peeped out of the sleeves of his robes. Harry could just imagine where else Ron had feathers from the way he was squirming.

Ron’s head feathers stood up in an angry crest now. Harry put a calming hand on Ron’s arm as he pulled out his wand. “Hang on, mate, let me see what I can do.” He thought a moment, then tapped Ron with his wand, restoring him to his normal appearance. “Did I get it all?”

Ron looked greatly relieved. “Yeah. Thanks, Harry.”

Harry’s laughter finally escaped his control. “N-n-n-no problem!” he managed to say. “Glad to be of help.”

“Is this the extent of the entertainment?” a Lions player asked, not unkindly. “It’s getting late.”

We have one other thing planned,” Fred said. “Hang on.” He raised his wand and magically opened a door, and music began to play. A girl swathed in veils came sinuously into the room, making the men whistle and stamp their feet as she danced. One by one, ever so slowly, the veils came off. She had a pretty figure, but her face

“Hermione again?” George fumed.

“It was a redhead,” the dancer said. “She said it would wear off in an hour.”

“That’s my girl,” Harry said, grinning at Ron. “Our ladies have made certain that your stag night is one nobody will ever forget.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Ron said, looking uncomfortable.

“Weasley,” their team captain said as he got up to leave, “I have to say, this is the funniest party I’ve ever been to. I had a great time! I haven’t laughed so much in years! And the food was good too. Thanks for inviting me. Have a good wedding!”

Ron brightened up considerably at his captain’s words. Soon the other team members trooped by, each one sharing similar sentiments to the captain’s.

“See? It was a good party in spite of the twins,” Harry said, clapping Ron on the back. “And you’re not a parrot anymore, either.”

“Good thing! If I showed up at the wedding like that, there’d be a triple homicide—Hermione would kill me and both the twins!”

“Everything went exactly according to plan,” Fred said, giving George a high five.

Harry was confused. “I thought the girls messed up your plans?”

“Well, Hermione did change the film, but we conspired with Ginny about the dancer. The woman is a fabulous dancer but just ugly!” Fred admitted.

“She looks better with her veils on,” George agreed.

“Ginny’s charm was actually an improvement,” Fred added.

Ron finally managed to laugh, and suddenly everything that had happened during the party seemed to be quite funny. If it had been aimed at Charlie instead of him, Ron thought he would have enjoyed the whole party immensely. As it was, Harry was right. Nobody would ever forget this stag night!

* * * * *

It was October 12, Ron and Hermione’s wedding day. Twelve being a powerful number in the Wizarding World, the date was considered to be auspicious for a long and happy marriage. The entire Weasley family, Remus, Tonks, Dumbledore and Harry stood in the Headmaster’s office.

“What you’re about to see is a thousand-year-old secret,” Dumbledore told them with an easy smile. He gave Fred and George a particularly amused look. “Enjoy it while you can, because you won’t be able to remember how you got there. That’s part of the protective spell involved. The door will only open for the Heir anyway.” As the twins sighed, everyone chuckled at their pained expressions.

Harry got Godric Gryffindor’s sword out of its case and ran the tip of the blade along the side of Gryffindor’s portrait. The doorway opened and the torches within lit, gleaming softly on the polished surfaces inside. Dobby and Winky had spent a great deal of time cleaning the Chamber of Knowledge and making it ready for the wedding.

Harry replaced the sword, then stepped inside the wall and turned to his family. “The slide is long and fast. If any of you don’t want to ride it, I’ll change into a phoenix and Merlin and I can take you down that way. There are anti-Apparition charms on this part of the chamber, so you can’t just Apparate down there.” He looked at Tonks and Mrs. Weasley. “The slide might be a bit much for you two.”

“I want to ride it!” Tonks protested.

Harry looked at Remus, who shrugged and gave an “I can’t tell her no” look. Harry smiled, knowing the feeling well. He had a rather wilful woman in

his life, too. "OK, then I'll go in front of you and Remus can come down with you. That should be safe enough. If you want to slow down, let me know and I'll put a Friction Charm on the slide so it slows our descent."

"I want to ride it too," Molly said, her eyes as eager as the twins'.

Harry grinned. "All right, if you're sure. If it gets to be too much, let me know and I'll do the Friction Charm for you."

"Right!" Molly looked as excited as anyone else about going into the Chamber of Knowledge. Since it had first been mentioned as a site for the wedding, Hermione and Ginny had spent a good bit of time describing it to Molly. And now she was here!

Merlin lifted off from Harry's shoulder, picked up the shrunken bags that contained everyone's wedding finery and flashed away.

Harry grinned when he noticed Fred and George peering down the slide as far as they could see. "Want to go first?"

The twins beamed. "Yeah!" they said with one voice.

Ron grinned. "I'll go first so I can catch them when they fly off the end. I want to see their faces when they're coming down anyway."

"I'm going with you!" Hermione said.

"Hey! We wanted to be first!" George said.

Harry shrugged. "It's probably a good idea to have someone down there in case you're go down too fast to land safely." They all watched as first Ron, then Hermione disappeared around the turn in the slide, their hands over their heads, whooping with joy as they went.

The twins grinned. "Wicked!" they breathed.

"Your turn," Harry said. "Whichever of you goes second should wait a bit before going. You can't use the spacing Ron and Hermione did because you're heavier than she is. You might go too fast and run into each other if you don't have enough space between you."

"Right!" Fred said, racing to beat his twin to the slide. After a bit of jostling, Fred was whooping down the slide, with George not far behind him.

Harry sighed. "They're too close together."

"Don't let them get hurt!" Molly cried, trying to peer down the slide.

"Ron and Hermione are at the bottom. They'll look after them." Ginny assured her mother.

The twins were ecstatic about the ride, but Harry was right. George's weight was making him get too close to his twin.

"Back off!" Fred called when George's foot hit him in the back.

"Can't! I can't slow down!" George said, trying to brace his feet and hands against the sides to slow his descent.

Suddenly both of them slowed a little. "Thanks, Harry!" they called.

"That was me, thank you very much," Hermione said as they rounded the last turn and shot off the end of the slide, landing in a heap. "Are you all right?"

"Never better!" George said as he untangled himself from Fred.

"Wicked!" Fred agreed. "Let's do it again!"

"Not just now," Hermione said smiling at her irrepressible almost-brothers-in-law. Ron was doubled up laughing at his brothers and couldn't be bothered to comment.

Molly and Arthur came next, with a good bit of space between them. Charlie waited until the slide was clear, then went down at breakneck speed, whooping all the way.

"He's as much of a speed demon as you are, Harry," Remus said, chuckling at the delighted sounds fading in the distance as Charlie descended.

"Speaking of speed demons, my warrior princess, would you like to go next?" Harry asked his fiancé.

"My pleasure. You're coming after me, right?"

"I'll be there soon."

"See you at the bottom!" She jumped onto the slide and disappeared, squealing with glee the whole way down.

"Tonks, are you sure you want to slide? I can flash you down," Harry offered.

"I wouldn't miss this for anything!" Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"I'll hold onto her, Harry," Remus said, remembering his wife's clumsiness which was worse now that she was pregnant. "And you go ahead and

Have fun. I can do the Friction Charm if we need it."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," Remus assured him.

"OK. I'll be there to catch both of you." Harry leaned over the slide. "Clear the way! I'm coming down fast!" He grinned at the sounds of laughter floating up to him, then turned to his godfather again. "See you at the bottom." With a cheeky grin, he jumped on the slide and zoomed out of sight.

Dumbledore helped Remus get Tonks settled between his legs. "I'm going to brace us so we don't go too fast," Remus said. "And I'll put the Friction Charm on if it gets to be too much for you."

"Stop fussing, Remus! You'd think I was pregnant or something!" Tonks teased. "Let's go!"

Dumbledore gave them a gentle push and they started down, gathering speed as they went. Tonks leaned back against her husband, enjoying the rush of wind through her hair, which was sapphire blue today in honour of the wedding colours.

"Having fun? Or is it too fast?" Remus said, holding her tightly.

Tonks chortled. "This is a blast! I want to come again when I don't have a baby in my belly so I can go *fast*!"

"OK up there?" Harry called. "Do I need to slow you down?"

"We're doing fine, Harry, thanks," Remus called. "She wants to go faster!"

Harry laughed. "That can always be arranged."

"Not just now, thanks," Remus demurred.

Harry and Ron stood ready at the bottom when Tonks and Remus appeared. Harry put a Braking Charm on the couple very gently so that, when Tonks's legs cleared the end of the slide, she was able to stand up with Ron and Harry's hands under her elbows.

"Thanks, lads. That's the softest landing I could've asked for," Remus said.

"Our pleasure," Harry said, bowing dramatically. He grinned as he straightened. "You might want to clear the way. Grandfather likes to come down as fast as possible."

Sure enough, Dumbledore came down whooping like a young boy, his beard and hair flying, Fawkes and Merlin soaring above his head, all three of them apparently having a wonderful time.

With everyone finally at the bottom, Harry led them on a quick tour of the Chamber while Hermione and Ginny went to get ready. Once the tour was over, Harry showed the family some rooms where they could change and joined Ron in another room where they put on their wedding robes.

Ron kept fussing with his tie, tugging at his sleeves, his collar, until he was making things worse rather than improving them.

"Here, let me fix that," Harry said, straightening Ron's tie. "It's perfect. Now leave it alone! And keep your hands out of your hair, you're messing it up."

"I'm nervous. I don't know what to do with my hands," Ron whinged.

"Put them in your pockets. Twiddle your thumbs. Just don't mess with your robes anymore or you'll get sweaty handprints on them!"

Ron gasped in horror. "Oh, no! I haven't!"

Harry grinned. "No, you haven't. I was teasing."

"Don't scare me like that!"

Harry studied his best friend's face, which was white with bright red patches on his cheeks. He looked ill. "You're going to be fine, you know."

Ron gave a short, nervous laugh. "Yeah, I know."

"Come on, let's get your family settled and make sure the library's ready," Harry said, tugging on Ron's sleeve to get him moving.

"Yeah. OK." Ron took a deep breath and made himself follow Harry through the door.

The family was wandering through the Chamber, talking to the various Heirs portrayed in the paintings. Remus was chatting to James Potter, who was teasing him about his impending fatherhood.

"Tonks, I don't know why you married a grey-haired git like Remus, but I think he'll be a pretty good dad. He tried his best to keep me and Sirius in line."

"A task I failed at repeatedly," Remus said ruefully. "It's so good to talk to you again, James."

"Yeah, you too."

Harry and Ron appeared just then. "So what do you think of Remus's bride, Dad?" Harry asked.

"I think she's gorgeous, although her hair defies logic. But it's a pretty colour," James said. "Actually, it's been several pretty colours since we've been talking. I've never met a Metamorphmagus before. I'm glad you came down here, Mrs. Lupin."

"That's Tonks to you, James. And I'm glad to have this chance to meet you. I've heard so much about you."

"All of it glowing praise, no doubt," James said with a broad wink at Harry.

"Oh, of course!" Tonks replied, then giggled. "Well, most of it, anyway."

"Close enough," James said.

"Erm, Harry?" Ron said, prodding Harry in the side. "Can we get on with it? I'm dying here."

"Sure, yeah," Harry said. "Sorry."

"Congratulations, Ron!" James called. "Hermione's a little gem. I hope you two will be very happy together."

"Thanks, James," Ron replied, feeling a bit odd, as always, to be talking to the teenager who would be Harry's father a few years after this portrait was done.

The portrait of Harry joined his dad in the picture frame and grinned at the real Harry. "I can read your mind."

"Oh really?" Harry said, grinning back at him.

"You wish it was you and Ginny getting married today."

"Yeah, you're right! But June will be here soon enough. We can wait."

"Yeah, right!" portrait Harry snorted. "Be a good best man!"

"I'll do my best," Harry replied. He raised his voice so everyone could hear. "If you'll all follow me, Dobby and Winky have refreshments waiting for you in the sitting room. You can wait there, and I'll let you know when we're ready to go, all right?"

"Cool portrait, Harry," Fred said, nodding at Harry's painting, which waved at the twins.

"Thanks. That's my dad there," Harry said. "Dad, this is Fred, and that's George Weasley, Ron's brothers."

"I would have known you anywhere, after hearing so much about you," James said. "It's a pleasure to meet you. Do you really cause as much trouble as Ginny says you do?"

"It's our duty," George said in a mock-serious tone.

"And our mission in life!" Fred added.

"Cool!" James responded with a broad grin.

"Come on, guys, let's get you where you need to be," Harry said, leading the twins toward the sitting room. "We'll talk later, Dad," he called over his shoulder.

"Anytime!" James replied, then joined his son's portrait in conversation.

After everyone was seated in comfortable chairs in the sitting room nearest the library, Dobby and Winky passed among the guests, serving snacks and drinks. Harry and Ron went into the library to make certain everything was ready there.

"It looks beautiful, Harry," Ron said, taking in the decorations, the candles, the flowers and the chairs arranged in rows for the guests. "I wouldn't have thought a library could be so pretty. Hermione will be so happy." Harry had been careful to keep everyone out of the library during the tour. They could look around in there and get the detailed tour of the Chamber after the wedding. Harry was doing everything he could to keep things moving. The less time Ron had to wait, the better.

Harry smiled. "It does look pretty. Dobby and Winky did a good job, and the girls and your mum chose nice colours. I like the dark blue with the ivory colour."

Ron's nerves were fraying. He wiped sweat from his brow, careful to keep his robes clean. Harry handed him a handkerchief so he could wipe his hands and dry his brow again. Ron smiled weakly as he dabbed the sweat off his face and hands. "Thanks, mate. You have the ring, right?"

"Right here," Harry said, pulling it from his pocket.

"Right. Of course you have the ring. You're competent. I'm the stupid one."

"Why do you say that?"

Ron held the damp handkerchief out as evidence, then had to wipe his face again. “I’m sweating buckets here! What made me think I could. . .I can’t believe. . .”

“Ron,” Harry said, grabbing his friend by the shoulders. “Do you love her?”

Ron’s eyes locked with Harry’s. He’d never looked more serious. “More than anything. You know that.”

Harry grinned. “More than chocolate frogs?”

“Huh?”

“Just checking to see if you’re paying attention.”

Ron returned Harry’s smile, relaxing a bit. “Yeah, even more than chocolate frogs . . . or Bertie Botts Beans . . .or Fizzing Whizbees.”

“She’ll be glad to know that,” Harry teased.

Ron was aghast. “Don’t you dare tell her that! Not on our wedding day!”

“Don’t be a prat! I wouldn’t spoil this for either of you. Are you OK now? I should go soon.”

“You’re going to leave me alone?” Ron’s voice squeaked as it hadn’t in years.

“Grandfather will bring everyone in as soon as I tell him Hermione’s ready. Do you want your dad in here to keep you company?”

“No. . .no. Mum will need him.”

“How about Remus?”

“No. I can do this myself.”

“Charlie? Last chance. I know the twins wouldn’t be your companions of choice right now.” He smiled, hoping his best mate would relax and enjoy his special day.

Ron took a deep breath. “I can do this. I’ll be fine. You go and make sure Hermione is as happy as she can be, OK? I want everything to be perfect for her.”

Harry pulled Ron into a hug. “You’ll be fine. She’ll be fine. And in a little while, you’ll be an old married man.” He clapped his friend on the back and left the library, breaking into a jog as he passed through the sitting room where the family was waiting. He didn’t want Ron to have to wait any longer than necessary.

“Everything OK?” Molly called.

“He’s a bit nervous, but he’ll be fine,” Harry said as he passed.

“Oh, we should go to him—” she said as she started to rise from her chair.

“Molly, if he wanted us, he would have asked for us to be in there with him,” Arthur said, pulling her back into her seat.

“He’s fine!” Harry said as he left the sitting room.

“Since Harry says he’s ‘fine’ even when he’s dying, that doesn’t reassure me much,” Molly sighed.

“He’s only getting married, Molly, not going to war,” Dumbledore said with a chuckle.

* * * * *

When Harry reached the room where the girls were waiting, he tapped on the door. “It’s me.”

“Hello, handsome!” Ginny said as she opened the door and saw him in his finery.

“Hello yourself, gorgeous! You look wonderful!” He followed her into the room and stopped, staring at his best friend. “Oh, Hermione!”

“What?” she said, startled by his comment. “What’s wrong?” She turned to the mirror and began to fuss with her hair.

“No, don’t do a thing. You look so beautiful! I wish we’d had Colin come to take pictures.”

“Remus brought Colin’s camera. Colin showed him how to use it,” Ginny said.

“Brilliant! I’m glad, because nobody would believe how gorgeous we all look,” he said, turning in place and preening a bit to include himself in the gorgeousness. The girls laughed, as he’d planned.

“Oh, thanks, I needed a good laugh!” Hermione said, giving him a hug. “You do look gorgeous, you know. If I weren’t getting married. . . .”

He's taken, you know," Ginny said, sliding her arm through Harry's.

"Ladies, ladies, don't fight over me. There's plenty to go around," Harry teased. "But seriously, there's a very nervous groom waiting for us in the library. Are you ready to go?"

"Absolutely," Hermione said with a beautiful smile. "Let's go and get me married!"

Harry pulled out his Famous Wizard card and sent a message to Dumbledore, then offered an elbow to each girl and escorted them proudly toward the library.

* * * * *

Noticing a vibration in his pocket, Dumbledore pulled his Harry Potter Famous Wizard card out of his pocket. "They're ready!" little Harry said with a cheeky grin.

"Thank you, lad," Dumbledore said, then pocketed the card as he smiled and stood, his hands outspread in invitation. "Shall we go to the library? The wedding party is ready."

In the library, the huge table had been moved aside and chairs set up on either side of a central aisle. Ron stood at the front, looking very lonely, but resolute and quite handsome in rich sapphire-blue robes with golden brooms appearing to fly about on the fabric. The chairs by the aisle had been decked with sapphire and ivory bows. Several baskets of ivory and pink flowers stood around the front of the room. Candles on tall stands lined the aisle, bedecked with pink rosebuds, sapphire and ivory bows and trailing ribbons.

Dumbledore walked to the front and stood by Ron, patting him kindly on the shoulder. Arthur escorted Molly to the front seat on the groom's side, then Remus and Tonks went to the front seat on the bride's side. Fred and George sat on the Weasley side, Charlie on the bride's side for balance.

Once everyone was settled, Dumbledore raised his wand and the soft music filled the room, seeming to come from the ancient books themselves. Ginny, in sapphire-blue dress robes, walked down the aisle holding a nosegay of pink and ivory roses with cream-coloured ribbons and streamers. Her hair was pulled up like a small crown on top of her with loose curls cascading from it down the back. Small ivory rosebuds were woven into a delicate tiara, the flowers creamy colour lush against the richness of her red hair. As she reached the front and stood across from her brother, she winked at him, making his frozen face finally break into a small grin.

The music swelled and Hermione and Harry appeared. Hermione was radiant. Her hair was up in a twist similar to the one Ginny had created in Madam Malkin's shop, a tumble of curls roiling down her back. The small tiara was set in place in front of the top of the twist. The sapphire and diamond jewellery Ron had given her winked in the candlelight, adding sparkle to an already dazzling effect. Madam Malkin had added golden stars spangled across the skirts of Hermione's robes. She carried three long-stemmed roses, ivory with pink edges, wrapped in cream-colored ribbon.

Harry was resplendent in elegant dress robes of a darker blue than Ron's. He held Hermione's trembling hand calmly in the crook of his elbow, placed his other hand on top of hers, then led her down the aisle.

After they passed, Remus knelt quietly in the aisle and began taking pictures. Fortunately, Colin had set the camera up so it didn't need a flash, so Remus taking pictures didn't disturb the ceremony at all.

When Harry and Hermione stopped in front of Dumbledore, the headmaster intoned, "Who gives this bride away?"

"Her parents and I do," Harry said, then bent and kissed Hermione tenderly on each cheek. "That one's from your parents," he murmured after the first kiss, "and that one's from me. You look gorgeous. I'm so happy for you!" He turned and put her hand in Ron's, clapping his best mate on the shoulder as Harry moved into position as best man.

Hermione watched Harry as he moved next to Ron, tears in her eyes. "Thank you, Harry," she whispered. She swallowed hard, then looked up at the man she was marrying. She took a shaky breath and turned to face Dumbledore, her tremulous smile quickly becoming radiant as she realized she was really, truly getting married.

"We come to this ancient place of learning to join this man and this woman in marriage," Dumbledore began. "There are many kinds of learning, just as there are many kinds of love. In this room, research has been done to find cures for illnesses, to find ways to end conflicts, to find ways to improve life. I'm certain that, at some point, research has been done to try to find the meaning of love, how to tell when a love is true and will last forever. In recent months, this library has been blessed to have two loving couples working in it, something I know the other Heirs have enjoyed." He chuckled. "They've told me so, many times." The audience laughed quietly at his comment. Soft laughter came from the portraits on the walls, as well.

"And now, in this room, two people become one, people who have shown the greatest love of all by being willing to lay down their lives for each other and for their friends. They have matured much more quickly than many people their age because of their experiences. I have every confidence that they are making the right choice by joining their lives together and becoming a family." With that introduction, he got into the ceremony itself by waving his wand and producing a spinning galaxy near the ceiling. Planets, stars and nebulae wheeled slowly above the gathering.

"The most powerful force in the entire universe is love. Love has brought these two people together. Love heals all wounds and forgives all wrongs. Love trusts. Love never fails. Love stands through everything life throws at us. These two people are publicly declaring their love for each other by the exchanging of vows and rings." He turned to Hermione. "Hermione Jane Granger, do you take this man to be your husband? Do you promise to love and cherish him, to be faithful and true to him, to stand by his side no matter what happens?"

"I do," Hermione said, gazing at Ron with her heart in her eyes.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley, do you take this woman to be your wife? Do you promise to love and cherish her, to be faithful and true to her, to stand by her side no matter what happens?”

Ron cringed a bit at the use of his middle name, which was included to keep his mother happy. When his brothers didn't giggle, he relaxed. He didn't know that Molly had cast a Silencing Charm on them. “Yes, absolutely,” he said now, gazing at Hermione intently.

“May I have the rings, please?” Dumbledore waved his wand over the rings in Harry's and Ginny's open palms, Levitating them and giving them a halo of light so everyone could see them well. “These rings are circles, unbroken. They are a symbol of your love, which is endless, circling each other forever.” The two rings circled each other in mid-air, then linked together. “The circle goes on forever, as does the love between two people whose souls are truly mated.” He separated the rings and plucked them out of the air, then handed Ron's ring to Hermione. “Place the ring on his hand and repeat after me.”

Hermione handed her bouquet to Ginny, then took Ron's big hand in her small one, marvelling again at the difference in size. She started sliding the ring on his finger as she said what Dumbledore had. “With this ring, I promise to be true to you, to love you, cherish you, and be your partner all of my life. My soul and yours are one.”

Then it was Ron's turn. He slid the sapphire and diamond-studded gold band on Hermione's finger, and vowed, “With this ring, I promise to be true to you, to love you, cherish you, and be your partner all of my life. My soul and yours are one.”

“The wands, please,” Dumbledore said quietly. Ron and Hermione pulled out their freshly polished wands and turned toward each other, touching the tips together.

Dumbledore waved his wand over the joined wands. “These wands can never be used against each other. They shall be partners in all that they do.”

Ron and Hermione repeated, “These wands can never be used against each other. They shall be partners in all that they do.” The wands were haloed in golden light as they spoke. When the light faded, they lowered their wands, their eyes locked in a serious, unwavering gaze.

Dumbledore stepped aside, revealing the three candles behind him. Ron and Hermione each passed a hand over a side candle, then lifted the now-lighted candles at the same time and lit the larger, central one together. They looked at each other for a long moment as slow smiles spread across their faces. They set the candles down and held hands again.

“And thus two souls become one in an unbreakable bond. You may kiss your bride,” Dumbledore said, grinning broadly, his eyes sparkling with joy. When they finally broke apart, Dumbledore gently touched their shoulders and turned them toward the audience, then said, “It is my great pleasure to present to you for the very first time, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Weasley!”

Molly sobbed as she clapped. Arthur beamed. Fred and George, finally released from their mother's Silencing Charm, whistled and stamped their feet in celebration. Charlie stood up and cheered along with Harry, Ginny, Remus and Tonks.

Ron blushed and Hermione glowed. Their eyes travelled over the gathering of their loved ones. Had anyone ever had a more beautiful wedding? They didn't think so. Ron turned to Hermione and bent down to whisper in her ear, “Do you feel married?”

“Yes! Do you?”

“Yes! It's the strangest thing.” He straightened and lost himself in her eyes, ignoring the hoots of the twins and the continued clapping of the rest of the family as he cupped her face in his hands and pulled her into a lingering, tender kiss, the first of many he'd give her in their married life together. He didn't blush, he didn't hurry. She was finally his, forever and always, and he couldn't believe his luck. When they finally parted, he wrapped his arms around her and just held her, still ignoring the commotion around them.

Harry and Ginny had moved together. With Ginny's hands occupied by two bouquets, Harry draped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her close.

“Ron looks different,” Ginny told Harry quietly.

“Yeah, he does. D'you suppose I'll look different like that when we get married?”

“I don't know. You look pretty smitten most of the time already,” she teased, turning toward him. “June's such a long time from now.”

“It will be June before you know it,” he said, wishing he believed his own words.

Ginny wasn't fooled. “Let's get married at Christmas!”

“We promised to wait until you were finished with school,” he reminded her.

Ginny shook her head impatiently. “Why did we ever agree to such a thing?”

“I have no idea,” he sighed, leaning down to kiss her. Soon they were kissing as seriously as Ron and Hermione.

“Can someone please tell me why we weren't allowed to bring dates?” Fred whinged. “Everyone's snogging but us!”

“Do you want to snog, Fred?” George teased.

“Not with you, thanks!” Fred snapped.

"Too bad, you don't know what you're missing!" George chortled. "And if we'd brought dates, they'd get the idea that they might be next. If we want to remain bachelors, free to party at will. . ."

"Yeah! Let's eat, I'm starving!" Fred said.

Charlie watched their conversation as if he was at a tennis match. He chuckled and followed them to the sumptuous buffet Dobby and Winky had prepared.

"A beautiful service, Albus, as always," Molly said.

"Well done, Albus. Thank you so much for officiating," Arthur added.

"My pleasure, indeed," Albus replied. They left followed the other Weasley men out of the library, leaving the two couples alone.

As the library quieted, Ron and Hermione finally came up for air and looked around them. "Where'd everybody go?" Hermione said. "Did we scare them off with our snogging?" She burst into giggles.

"Hermione Granger-Weasley," Ron said, trying to be stern. "Married women don't giggle."

"Tonks does," Ginny said helpfully.

"Say it again," Hermione said, leaning back against his supportive arms.

"Say what?"

"My name. My new name."

"Hermione Jane Granger Weasley. Mrs. Ronald Weasley. Which do you prefer?" he said, smiling at her.

"It sounds so strange, yet so right," Hermione mused. "Hermione Jane Granger Weasley. Hermione Granger-Weasley. I like that."

"So you're going to use both names?" Ginny said.

"Maybe. I don't know. I'd like to honour my parents somehow."

"Everything you do honours them, Hermione," Harry told her. "May I kiss the bride?" He held her shoulders and bent down, kissing her gently on the cheek.

"And I suppose I should kiss the groom, too," Ginny said, holding her arms out to her brother and kissing his cheek when he bent down to her.

"Thanks for everything, Harry, Ginny," Hermione said. "You've made this such a happy day for both of us."

"Yeah, what she said," Ron agreed.

"Articulate as always," Ginny teased, poking her brother.

"Hey! I didn't mumble when I took my vows, nor did I say anything wrong!" He looked at Harry in sudden panic. "Did I?"

"You were perfect," Harry assured him. "You have a party to attend, a cake to cut—"

"And a honeymoon to begin!" Ron added, sweeping his wife into his arms and swinging her around. "Let's get on with it!"