

# It All Comes Back to Hogwarts

*by ViktorsVixens*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

## Hogwarts

*Chapter 1 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Minerva knew she was going to have a difficult summer when Rolanda Hooch announced that she had decided to hang up her broom at the end of the school year at the Leaving Feast.

Sighing deeply, she voiced her thoughts, "How on earth will I find a new Quidditch instructor?" She had to find one as soon as possible.

One possibility was Ron Weasley. He wanted the job very badly, but Minerva was afraid that Ron was simply looking for a way to find willing, nubile, young witches to fill his bed. The rumours about why he'd been let go from the Cannons hadn't mentioned anything about that, but when she'd asked Hermione, the answer had been a raised eyebrow and a long stare.

Hermione was running the Department of Magical Games and Sports now. She would know if there was any reason that would disqualify Ron. Minerva solved that problem by placing a clause in the magically binding contract that said that Ronald would not have any sexual contact with any of the students. Unsurprisingly, he turned her down flat.

The first day of July brought a completely new candidate to Minerva's attention, thanks to an owl from Hermione.

Viktor Krum had retired from professional Quidditch at the age of twenty-eight. Minerva knew he didn't need a job, but she hoped he would apply. She had seen the name of his nephew on the roster for Hogwarts. If she remembered correctly, Viktor had adopted the boy after his brother and sister-in-law died in a tragic Portkey accident. That might be enough to bring him back to England, and if he still carried that torch for Hermione...

If the flying instructor fiasco wasn't enough, Draco Malfoy, the new History of Magic teacher, had received some disquieting news, Minerva knew.

The terms of Draco's inheritance were convoluted to say the least, but the solicitors had informed him on his 24th birthday in June that he now had one year in which to marry and sire an heir or he would lose everything. He had been going through the names of all of the available witches, but had yet to find one who would be able to give him that heir in a year.

Then, July 1st, he saw the announcement in the *Daily Prophet* that Ginny Weasley was engaged to marry Michael Corner.

Draco's first thought had been that it was a shame, all that fecundity going to waste on Corner. Then he sat up straighter and considered the possibility of taking her away from Corner. But how? He wasn't certain that the Weaslette would even speak to him.

"It might help if you don't refer to her as 'the Weaslette' you know," Harry spoke from the doorway of the lounge.

"Did I say that out loud?"

"Yes, Malfoy, you did."

"Don't you usually call me Draco?"

"You usually don't sound like Malfoy anymore."

"Sorry, Harry. Hey, what are you doing here?"

"Viktor was held up doing a few things for the Bulgarian Ministry as a Quidditch Ambassador before coming here, so I'm going to cover for him until he can get here on September 15. Since Minerva called a staff meeting, I'm attending in his behalf."

"That is good. I missed having you around."

"I've missed you too, Draco. But I heard about your inheritance, and I figured you wouldn't really want me around right now."

"It's hard, Harry. You know how much you mean to me, but it isn't as though I don't like women as well."

"Same for me, Draco, but I don't want to be second fiddle, you know?"

The two men sat quietly contemplating their fate over a pot of tea. They both understood the realities of their situation and were resigned to it.

Minerva heard them and smiled sadly. She knew it would take an extraordinary witch to handle both men, especially since they were so powerful. She thought Ginny Weasley might, but she hadn't wanted to settle down as quickly as Harry had wanted, and so she was off doing her thing.

Minerva wasn't certain what made her choose to marry Michael Corner, but she hoped the girl knew what she was doing. There were so many factors at work there, and well, it wasn't Minerva's place. She knew the Weasleys only wanted their girl to be as normal as possible.

The staff meeting was over quickly. The only point of interest was that the wards were to be tweaked to keep Ronald Weasley out. It seemed that he had become obsessed with being allowed on the Hogwarts grounds to "meet" the girls that were of age. Due to this, all the other Weasleys needed to come by if they planned to come onto the grounds at all.

"It would be nice if you could meet with them, Harry. Take Draco along with you."

"Right, they are really going to love seeing me, especially with Malfoy in tow. Nothing for it--has to be done. Come on, Ferret-boy, we have the Weasleys to visit."

As they walked out of Minerva's office, Draco commented, "Do you have to call me Ferret-boy? That was a highly embarrassing episode in my sheltered life. Besides, that's what you call me when..."

"Shut it, Draco. We need to figure out how to approach the Weasleys about the ban on Ron coming to the school AND about you marrying Ginny. I think Molly had her heart set on Gin marrying me, but she loathes Corner; that I do remember. You will be saving her baby girl from a fate worse than death."

"Oho, really? Molly Weasley is not the mother-in-law I had envisioned, but needs must when the devil drives."

Harry and Draco Apparated to the gates of the Burrow and were walking to the door when they heard a commotion coming from the kitchen.

"Mum! I can't believe you said that to Michael!"

"He didn't deny it, did he? And you didn't follow him, so you must have had some hint of it, Ginny-love."

The boys were very quiet, both of them thinking that they might overhear something that would help Draco in his battle against Corner.

"Mum, how would anyone even begin to know what being aSept means? There hasn't been one in years."

Draco and Harry looked at each other in awe. Then you could see a dawning awareness in both of themSepts usually were powerful enough to require two husbands. If Ginny were amenable, then maybe they could all be happy.

With a final, longing look at Draco, Harry knocked on the door.

"Harry! What a delight! I was just mentioning you to Michael, but he had to leave quickly."

Ginny mumbled something under her breath, something that vaguely sounded like "permanently."

"Well, you might not be as delighted with me when I tell you what Minerva sent us over to tell you."

"Nothing could be that bad, Harry."

"Yes, it could, Ginny. What do you all know about why Ron was let go from the Cannons?"

Molly sighed. "What did that boy do this time?"

"He hasn't done anything. It is what he wants to do. You know he wanted that flying instructor job at Hogwarts, right? Well, Minerva put a clause in to forbid him from touching any of the female students, even if they were of age. He turned her down flat, but he's been overheard telling people in the pubs that if there are willing of-age witches, then why shouldn't he take advantage of it. The Board of Governors has demanded that the wards be adjusted to exclude him from any part of the grounds. I'm here to tell you that if any of the rest of you wants to visit Hogwarts at all, you will have to visit Minerva in the next week and get added back to the wards individually."

Molly looked extremely put out, but oddly enough, not at Harry. "Oh, love. You thought I would be upset with you, didn't you? You would think that boy would learn after that pregnancy scare with the head coach's granddaughter."

Draco stopped making eyes at Ginny and turned to Molly. "Isn't she only fifteen?"

"Yes, but they were in India at the time, and that made her legal there. It is the only reason he was only fired and not in Azkaban."

"So, what did you tell Michael about me that made him run off, Molly?"

"Oh, just that Ginny may have more needs than he could possibly fill."

"Mum!"

"What, dear? It is true. Harry would have a much better chance."

"I thought Harry decided he was gay?"

"You know, I'm right here."

"Well, I thought you had decided that you preferred blokes."

"Not exactly, Gin. If you want to talk about it, why don't we go to Hermione's flat? It is private and warded to the gills."

"All right. Let me go get my bag."

Molly smiled. "If you two boys are planning to ask her what I think you are, you will make me so very happy. Just wait until I tell Arthur! He will be pleased as punch."

"Even though I'm included?"

"You've shown you aren't your father, love. And you would be much better suited than Michael Corner."

Harry grinned at Molly and punched Draco's arm. "Close your mouth, Draco. Say thank you to Mrs. Weasley. Come on, here's Gin. Let's get to Hermione's place. She said she was expecting company tonight."

"Bye, Mrs. Weasley, and thank you." Draco suddenly felt like his brain was being Portkeyed while the rest of him was stationary.

Harry took Ginny's hand, grabbed the back of Draco's jacket and Disapparated to Hermione's flat in London.

He spoke the code words to gain entry to the flat, *'Bditelnost!'*

Ginny commented, "I see your Bulgarian is getting better, Harry. Trust Herms to use 'vigilance' as her password for entry. Come on. Find a seat. What do you and Malfoy want to talk to me about? I am guessing you heard the part about me being a *Sept*."

Draco answered her first, "Yes, we heard. But, Ginny, there is another reason we wanted to talk to you. My solicitors have informed me that my inheritance is tied up with an insane proviso. I must marry and sire an heir within a year. I wanted to tell you that first before we talk to you about our living arrangements."

Harry reached over and took Ginny's hand in his, as he spoke. "Gin, it is time we explained about us. We are both bi, not gay. We moved in together because it was convenient. We keep Grimmauld Place for when we need to be in town and the Manor for when we want to be in the country. What Draco is trying to tell you is that we want to offer you a triad marriage. I know one of the reasons we broke up was that I wanted kids right off and you didn't. It has been a few years now, so maybe that has changed. If we do this triad marriage thing, you could give Draco an heir and then the three of us could settle down into domestic bliss. The kid or later kids would always have at least one parent around all the time. There are tremendous advantages to this, and I know that Draco always fancied you, even in school. Would you consider this?"

"I thought the two of you had broken up?"

"We were temporarily separated while this whole inheritance thing was going on. But if you are willing to break your engagement to Corner and say yes to us, then we can all be happy."

"I don't want to be a third wheel, or a broodmare. I deserve more."

"Would you only want us to be with you? Or could you stomach us being together as well?"

"Kiss each other."

"What?"

"Kiss each other, now!"

"Bossy witch!" Draco muttered as he drew Harry close to him. The two started with a tentative kiss then got lost in each other.

Ginny watched, wide-eyed. She had thought they were joking. Then, when she realized they weren't, she wanted to know if she could manage this. However, those two together were the hottest thing she had ever seen. She stood up suddenly.

Harry broke away from Draco. "What's wrong?"

"Who said anything was wrong? And who told you to stop?"

Harry shrugged and turned back to his lover. Shortly thereafter the boys felt a third person insinuating herself between them. An unclothed self.

"Bloody hell!"

"What's wrong, ferret? Don't like what you see?"

"Are you kidding, woman? You are the most beautiful, creamy-skinned..."

At that point, Ginny reached up and kissed Draco while Harry was running his hands up and down her body.

"Oh, I didn't need to see that!"

The newly engaged trio jumped apart. There was Hermione, a grin on her face, with Viktor following behind her, his eyebrows almost lost in his hairline. Harry waved a hand, and all three of them were fully clothed again.

"What part of 'I will be back with company shortly' did you not understand?"

"Sorry, Herms. We lost track of time."

"I can see that. Ginny seems to have lost track of Michael as well."

All five friends laughed.

"Viktor, are you just taking a break or are you back early?"

"Just a break, Harry. I will return on the 15th of September as planned."

"Good enough. See you two later!"

Harry, Draco, and Ginny relocated to Grimmauld Place through the Floo. Viktor and Hermione heard Ginny say, "I guess we need to discuss today's events...all of them," as the triad stepped into the flames.

# Revelations

## Chapter 2 of 9

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Viktor turned to Hermione with a question in his eyes.

"Yes, she is the *Sept* that the *Prophet* reported; the first one in almost four hundred years. The Weasleys were alternately thrilled and mortified. Molly must be over the moon if Gin is going to wed Malfoy and Harry. She detests Michael Corner."

"I heard a rumour about Weasley's firing from the Cannons, love. I know he applied for the job at Hogwarts as well. What happened? I thought he would have landed the job simply because he was an alumnus."

"Minerva asked me about his firing and I didn't answer her, except with a look. The rumours don't even do justice to what really happened. And he refused to sign the contract with the clause that he wouldn't try to bed any of the students at school. You had no such problems."

"They are junior fan girls, most of them nearly young enough to be my daughter. No, thank you. I prefer a more sophisticated, older witch, one that I can finally marry. And I am not just saying that because of Alexei."

"We need to talk about that, Viktor. After Karoly and Elisaveta died, you devoted yourself to taking care of Alexei. Your mother helped, but you took the brunt of it. He was three years old. You left him with your parents when you came to fight in the final battle. I was so amazed to see you there, but you saved my life more than once that night. We never quite got around to talking about Alexei and our feelings until I took the job as head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports."

"It was my fault, love. I had concentrated so hard on providing a family for Alexei that I forgot that I needed you to complete that family. When I realised you were not going to marry Weasley, I rejoiced. But I wanted there to be no hint of impropriety about your job or our relationship. Taking our vacations in the Muggle world with Alexei was the best suggestion you ever made. He adores you, almost as much as I do."

"But is he ready for another family upheaval? You said his nightmares came back when he got his school letter. I think you should bring him here while you go on this Quidditch Ambassador trip for the Bulgarian Ministry. Maybe I can suss all this out. You know, Harry may have some insight on Alexei. They both lost their parents at an early age."

"I think Alexei would enjoy meeting the Hero of Hogwarts, but not the way he was when we walked in," Viktor said, rolling his eyes.

"I'll arrange a private tour of Hogwarts with Harry as guide for Alexei. Oh, by the way, Minerva is so delighted you took the job, she is almost incoherent."

"I think that is enough talk about Harry, Minerva, and Hogwarts. We have more important things to discuss."

Much later as they lay in bed, Viktor asked quietly, "Would a December wedding suit you, love? That makes it ten years since the Yule Ball. It would be nice to have two reasons to celebrate that date."

"Have the wedding at Hogwarts in the Great Hall? Yes, Viktor, that would be perfect. Shall we tell Alexei when you bring him back next weekend?"

"That suits me perfectly. I'll warn my parents. I'm quite sure they will want to make a fuss. Just, please, don't take Alexei to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. I don't want him exposed to Ron. The twins are reasonable since they both have married, but the fact that Ron is working there makes me uneasy."

"I'll see if George doesn't have an urgent package to go to Charlie in Romania. That would remove Ron and your objections, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, you could invite the twins to the wedding if you want. As long as Ron is banned from Hogwarts, I am happy. I want you to get Alexei's robes made and his supplies bought. He is going to need his own owl, too. You need to order a dress, as well. I will pay for everything. Do you think Harry would serve as Best Man? You will want Ginevra as your attendant, right?"

"Why don't we talk about this later, Viktor? I have other things on my mind..."

"No, love, we need to get some sleep. I promise I will wake you early. But I need my rest now; after all, I am retired."

That comment started a pillow fight that ended with Viktor's wrists tied to the bedposts and Hermione having her way with him.

They laughed and loved most of the night, only falling asleep as dawn broke on the horizon.

Viktor was up first, going to the kitchen and making breakfast for his lady. He sent a Patronus message to Harry, asking him to come over after lunch.

When he woke Hermione, he asked her the question that was foremost in his mind.

"Love, we need to talk about children. We'll have Alexei, but maybe a couple of our own, as well. It would make my parents very happy."

"Mine too, Viktor. I have been offered another job. One that is much less stressful. I got the Department of Magical Games and Sports sussed out to where the next head can find things, and there are safeguards in place so no employee can make money betting on the teams. I nominated Percy for the job. He is taking over the first of the year. Minerva wants me to come back as Deputy Headmistress. I'll be Head of House for Gryffindor and teaching Ancient Runes. Minerva does not care if one of her teachers is pregnant. So we can start on the family right away."

"You know how much I love you, don't you? Today I want to take you to buy your wedding dress. If we go to Muggle stores, we can avoid anyone finding out too soon."

"I'll owl Gin to come over this morning."

"Harry is coming at lunch to discuss some things. Perhaps you and Ginevra could start both looking at wedding dresses?"

After a quick, but filling breakfast, Hermione and Viktor shared a not so quick, yet fulfilling shower, then got ready for company.

Harry, Draco, and Ginny arrived shortly afterwards.

"Gin, you look great! I love that sundress on you!"

"Thanks. Are those dragons embroidered on your jeans?"

"Oh, yes. Viktor's aunt did them for me. Most people just think they are a delightful flight of fancy, so I can wear them anywhere."

Harry and Viktor smiled bemusedly at their women. "Draco, would you be staying with us, or do you wish to go shopping with the girls?"

"I win!"

"Excuse me?"

"Harry had said that you just wanted to speak to him, and that I had to go shopping with the girls. I said that your letter said nothing of the sort, and I would be welcome."

Viktor looked at Hermione, who nodded. "Actually, Draco, if you do not mind, I would prefer that you stay. Come to think of it, why don't all of you stay, and then we will go to dinner at Mario's. If we call the shop you were thinking of looking at, Hermione, I am certain they will hold the place open for you."

The friends all looked at each other, then sat down, Hermione snuggled up next to Viktor on the two-seater sofa, and Ginny between Harry and Draco on the sofa. They all looked expectantly at Viktor.

"Harry, did Hermione ask you about the private tour for Alexei?"

"Yes. We will do it Tuesday, if that is all right?"

"Perfect. The reason I wanted to speak to you all is why I do not want Alexei near Ron. I do not believe that your brother would harm a child, especially a boy, but his appearance and attitude is very much like that of Sergei Bodayov."

"The Russian Keeper that had a mysterious illness that ended his career?"

Hermione snorted.

"I take it there wasn't a mysterious illness?"

"No. He was a predator, a paedophile, and he didn't care if the children he touched were boys or girls. He had set his eye on Alexei, and my brother took exception, as any good father would. So, one day, when he tried to touch Alexei, wards went off, and my brother and sister-in-law hexed him into oblivion. He no longer has his male parts, the pleasure sensors in his brain are fried, and he barely remembers his name. But what happened next, well, the Bodayovs control most of the Portkeys in Russia. I do not believe that my brother and his wife died in an accident, and Alexei has had nightmares about travel ever since. However, back to your brother, Ginny, his attitude, that the girls are there for the taking, that he deserves them, that is very much like Bodayov. I truly do not want him near my son."

"Don't you worry, Viktor. If it is okay with you, I would like to tell a bit of that to my Mum and Dad. Mum is already bothered by Ron's behaviour, and if Hermione's eyes roll anymore, they are going to fall out of her head. But they will make certain he is not around, if Alexei is."

Hermione sighed, knowing she had to tell them the complete story. "None of you know what happened with the Cannons. Not all of it, certainly. It seems I'm going to have to tell you now. It is the reason the Board wants him banned from the wards because of the severity of what happened." Hermione took a deep breath. "The miscarriage that Louisa had scarred her so badly that she will never have children. It was apparently the third miscarriage she had. He started having an affair with her when she was eleven. For all his talk of waiting for the girls to be 'of age', he doesn't wait. After he said he certainly couldn't marry a girl who couldn't bear him children, even though it was his fault that she couldn't, the Cannons decided they weren't going to cover for him anymore, star Keeper, war-hero, whatever. They have kept this quiet for Louisa's sake."

"No, Hermione. Just, no." Ginny looked both devastated and disgusted.

"I'm sorry, Gin, it's true."

"He never said anything to Mum. He told her, which she didn't believe, that Louisa slipped a potion in his drink and got into bed with him because he would never touch a witch that young."

"He was supposed to tell her. It was part of his severance terms."

"I'm going to take care of that now." Ginny stormed off.

"So, what happens to Ron when Mrs. Weasley contacts the owner of the Cannons with her apologies?"

"Ron ends up in Azkaban for violating his severance terms. They were very specific."

"How long?"

"Louisa was a seventh-generation witch. Not the seventh child, seventh female in seven generations that Ginny is, which is why she is a *Sept*, but any witch born with significant sevens in her birth Arithmancy is always considered a possibility. He ruined that. The penalty is ten years in Azkaban, and if it turns out Louisa is a *Sept*, then life."

Harry looked stunned. He had never thought his oldest friend was capable of such perfidy. The Ron he had known in school had apparently changed beyond all measure. He excused himself, threw powder into the Floo and cried, "Grimmauld Place."

Draco had seen how affected Harry was, and how irate Ginny had become. It would be up to him to help them both deal with the truth about Ron. He glanced at Viktor and saw the older wizard silently appraising him.

"There is a chemist in Bulgaria, Draco. He can give you the recipe for a potion that will suppress Harry's potency until Ginevra conceives your heir. Here is his direction. Your godfather can make it up for you. You are going to have to be patient with both of your lovers. They have suffered a severe shock. Ginevra should recover first; she has anger to keep her on a more even keel. Harry will be slower to accept this new revelation. His disappointment will cloud his outlook on things for a while. Given time, he will rebound. Hermione and I have decided to marry at Christmas. We would like you three to be part of the ceremony."

"Yes, Draco, Viktor is right. Harry has always had a blind spot about Ron. He will have trouble accepting all this, but he will. We want him to perform the binding ceremony and you and Gin to be our attendants. Alexei is also going to need Harry's help dealing with being bereft of his birth parents. You could help Harry with that, by introducing the boy to your cousin Teddy. I know you take an active interest in Teddy's life."

Draco took the chemist's direction, shook Viktor's hand, kissed Hermione on the cheek, and Flooed off to the Burrow to retrieve Ginny.

Viktor turned to Hermione, asking, "What happened between you and Weasley, love? You do not have to tell me if you don't want."

"It was before I took the job at the Ministry, Viktor, about six years ago. You were all wrapped up in caring for Alexei, and I was lonely. I started seeing Ron occasionally, but it was never serious. One night we came back from a dinner at the Burrow and Ron attacked me. He wouldn't take no for an answer. I Disapparated out of the flat to Minerva's house in Hogsmeade. Moody and Minerva came back with me to the flat. Ron had pretty much destroyed it in his rage that I got away. Moody had the Ministry

put a notation in his file that he had a fixation about forcing witches. I never was alone with him again. Molly didn't question it. I think she knew that something wasn't right with him anymore. It's funny, though. Ron always wanted to be a better Quidditch player than you, and the fact that I preferred you to him may have unhinged him a bit."

"Wasn't that the year that his old girlfriend was found floating in the lake outside Hogwarts with her throat cut?"

"Yes, that was three weeks later. You think he had something to do with that, don't you? It certainly fits. Poor Lavender, she really cared about him. Oh, Viktor, now I really am scared. What if he decides to do something even more horrific?"

"He will have to go through me to get to you or Alexei. I don't think he wants to have to face me. Durmstrang taught me everything about the Dark Arts and how to counteract them. I haven't forgotten a thing. Karkaroff warned me that Ron would eventually want you. I knew you had too much sense to take him seriously, though."

## Alexei

### *Chapter 3 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Just then, the fireplace lit up and a very young voice called through. "Papa? May I come through? Baba and Dado said I should call and ask Aunt Hermione. Please?"

Hermione looked at Viktor, then said, "Yes, Alexei, bring your trunk; you can stay here while Papa goes off on his tour for the Ministry. I have some exciting things planned for you to do before school starts."

"Yes, Alexei, come on. We were just going to go to dinner. You can come with us."

"Yes, Aunt Hermione, Papa, I will only be a minute."

They could hear him saying goodbye to Viktor's parents before he closed the Floo-call link and re-opened the transport link.

A thin, muscular boy, tall for his age, appeared with a miniaturised trunk in the Muggle backpack he was wearing. His wide, happy grin reminded Hermione, forcefully, of how Viktor must have looked at that same age.

He shrugged off the backpack, bowing formally before throwing himself into her arms for a hug. His adopted father hugged the two of them and kissed the top of the boy's head.

"Will you see him settled in, love? I will see if our friends are coming back for dinner."

Hermione ruffled the boy's hair and picked up his backpack. She led him down the hall to the spare bedroom.

"Come on, scamp. We'll unpack your things so you won't have to do it later. I am so glad to see you. There is a nightlight in here in case you need it, Alexei."

"Aunt Hermione, I am trying very hard not to have nightmares anymore. Papa says they will go away again, but I don't want to disturb you if I cry out."

Viktor's voice sounded from the doorway. "I don't think your nightmares will be a problem anymore. We have something to tell you, Alexei. Come in the sitting room; we need to talk."

Hermione held onto Alexei's hand as they walked down the hall.

Ginny and Draco were sitting on the couch when they got there. Viktor introduced them to Alexei.

"Sit next to Hermione, Alexei. You know I am going to be one of your teachers this year at Hogwarts, correct?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Well, Draco Malfoy is going to be another of your professors. He will be teaching the History of Magic classes. Your Aunt Hermione will be teaching there as well, Ancient Runes. She has also finally, accepted my proposal of marriage. She will become your Mayka this Christmas. We will be a family again, Alexei, a whole family."

The boy just sat stunned for a moment; then he threw his arms around Hermione and kissed her cheek. His happy grin was infectious.

The fireplace lit up again, and Harry called through. "If we are going to Mario's, let's get going. The Moodys are meeting us there."

Draco winked at Alexei and said, "Well, young man, you are going to be in the thick of it tonight. There will be heroes from both Wizard wars, teachers, the Headmistress from Hogwarts, Aurors, Quidditch stars, and lots of engaged folks as well."

Alexei just sent him a quizzical look, but followed the others into the fireplace to Mario's restaurant.

Minerva and Alastor were talking to Harry in the lobby. They all turned to look when Draco and Ginny came through. Viktor, Hermione, and Alexei brought up the rear.

Alexei stopped still when he realised who the dark haired man with the glasses was.

Harry stepped forward and stuck out his hand. "Hi, Alexei, I'm Harry Potter. I am very glad to meet you. Your dad has told me a lot about you. Would you like me to show you around Hogwarts on Tuesday?"

Alexei shook Harry's hand and tried to reply, but all that came out was a squeak. He tried again.

"I am honoured to meet you, sir. I would like that very much."

A booming voice made the comment most of them were thinking. "Good lad. You have done a great job, Viktor. He is a son to be proud of."

"Thank you, Alastor. Alexei, this is Alastor Moody and his wife, Minerva McGonagall. She is Headmistress of Hogwarts. Alastor is a hero from the first Wizard war. He was an Auror, which is what Harry is now."

"How do you do, sir? I am most pleased to meet you, Headmistress." Alexei shook both their hands and grinned at them.

Harry patted Alexei on the shoulder and said, "You get to be my dinner partner tonight. Your dad and I have been friends for ten years, now. I'll tell you what he looked like with a shark's head."

That comment earned Harry a long look from Viktor. Hermione smothered a laugh and rolled her eyes at Harry.

When they got to the table, Viktor sat between Hermione and Alexei. Ginny sat between Harry and Draco. Harry took the chair next to Alexei so they could talk. Minerva sat next to Draco with Alastor between her and Hermione.

Viktor bribed the waiter to make sure no one bothered them before making his announcement.

"You must all congratulate me. I have won the best prize of my life. Hermione has agreed to marry me at Christmas."

Everyone laughed and congratulated both Viktor and Hermione. Harry leaned over and asked Alexei, "Are you excited about that, Alex? I know she'll be a great mum for you. She always acted like she was my mum when we were in school." He accompanied that statement with a wink.

Alexei, grinning madly, answered, "Oh, yes, I know she will make Papa happy. She already makes me happy. I have loved her for as long as I can remember."

Draco took that moment to make another announcement. "Since we are exchanging happy news, let me just say that Ginevra Molly Weasley has accepted Harry's and my proposals. We will be married just before term starts."

Everyone started to talk after that. The wine flowed freely and the food was excellent. Harry did his best to draw Alexei out, asking questions about the boy's nightmares and his fears. He formulated a strategy about which things to show the boy at Hogwarts.

He remembered, all too well, the ache and loneliness of being a boy who had lost his parents. He wanted to show this boy that he was going to have two parents who loved him very much and a host of 'courtesy' relatives to teach, spoil, tease, and love him.

Alexei was quickly becoming something of a younger brother or a nephew to Harry. He got Alexei to talking about Quidditch and flying and was amazed at the boy's intellect. He knew Hermione would nurture that intellect better than anyone.

"So, Alexei, what position are you going to try out for?" he asked.

"I will probably start at Chaser, like Papa did. His teammates taught me how to play a couple of years ago."

Harry made a snap decision that endeared him to Viktor. "Well, I think could get permission from your flying teacher and the headmistress for the two of us to do a bit of flying on Tuesday. How would you like that?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Thank you."

Minerva just winked at Harry while Viktor raised his glass in a silent toast.

"I'll even tell you what it was like to have a dragon chasing me during the first task of the Triwizard Tournament."

Soon it was time to return home. The Krum contingent made their farewells and Flooded away to the flat.

Minerva McGonagall looked at Harry and asked, "Have you decided what to show him? I'll let you have the run of the school tomorrow, if you want to revisit some things. He seems like a normal eleven year old. He has the benefit of two people who adore him and will nurture him."

"Vik and Herms will be terrific parents for him. I think the Mirror of Erised, the Chamber of Secrets, and I am going to give him the Marauder's Map. I like the kid. With an athlete for a father and a brain for a mum, he is going to be unbelievable." Harry smiled as he thought how lucky Alexei was.

The newly engaged trio was sombre as they returned to Grimmauld Place.

Once they settled on the sofa, Ginny safely ensconced between Harry and Draco, Harry turned to her and asked, "Gin, love, what happened when you told your Mum?"

"Oh, Harry, it was awful. Mum and Dad were there with Bill, Fleur, Victoire, Dominique, and Louis. Bill is not one to hide things from his children, and when I finished talking, Victoire sighed in relief. This stopped Mum from saying anything remotely nice about Ron because Vicky was on her lap. So, when Mum asked her why she sighed, she said that her Uncle Ron was starting to make her uncomfortable if they were in a room alone because he was getting 'too close.' She then said she was glad she didn't have to say anything because she knew it would hurt everyone's feelings. Did you know Fleur could change into a full Veela if angry enough?"

"Bill was trying to talk her down, Mum was in the fireplace talking to Coach Westerfield, who had just told her that Ron was going to have to go to Azkaban, when guess who walked in the door? He saw whose face was in the fire, and started to back out of the house when Fleur went after him. By the time we were able to pull her off him, he was begging for the Aurors to take him. St. Mungo's flat out said they could reattach a penis, but not if they couldn't find it."

Harry was stunned.

Draco on the other hand laughed at the end of the story. "So, Red, which one of you has his bits?"

"Dad. Hey, how did you know?"

"For all the tragedy in your story, you looked way too satisfied at the end of it. So I figured one of you found his bits and decided not to return them."

This made all of them laugh ruefully.

"It's an illness, right, Gin? Ron just didn't turn into this monster just because, did he?" Harry asked plaintively.

"Why would you defend him like that, when you were always ready to believe the worst of me? I guess you really just wanted Red, here, and I'm extra baggage?"

"I doubt that, Draco. He's probably trying to find something good because I saw him with Alexei tonight. He's only a little bit older than our child would have been if we had got married and had kids when he wanted to. He probably hates me now." Ginny finished in tears.

Harry looked at his two lovers in disbelief. His ex-best friend was a known paedophile, in Azkaban, possibly for life, and these two were giving in to their insecurities. He sighed, then decided to dive right in and stop this before it took over their lives.

"Have both of you gone insane? Ginny, I think I've always loved you, whether we were together or not, but you know how you said it always felt like I was not all there? I think I wasn't. When all three of us were together, that was right. Draco, ever since that day you asked me to start over, when I returned your wand, that connection, that rightness, it was there. You can't say we both didn't know something was missing. I think we have that something right here. When we went to the Ministry today to register the engagement and intended bonding, they pulled out that contract, from Merlin only knows where, that protected a *Sept*. And our signatures turned gold, right? So, you know as well as I do that it means that all three of us were willing to make this work and to love each other. How can you think that I would think any less of a blond or redheaded child, especially one created by the two people I love the most? I can't think of anyone I could love more."

By the time Harry finished, both his lovers were in tears, but these were happy ones.

Ginny and Draco looked at each other. "Harry," Draco spoke tentatively, "I have to agree. I will be thrilled to meet Ginny's and my child, but I can't believe I will be any less thrilled to meet your and Ginny's child."

Ginny smiled. "Not to mention the child we will have that will be all of ours."

The boys looked at her. "Well, why do you think that *Septs* are so protected? They believe Merlin was the child of a *Sept* tri-bond. It is thought that Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff were the same. Although that was a bit strange, to have four at the same time. We are going to have at least three children: one for Draco, one for Harry, and one for the *Sept* bond. Are you willing to have him or her be a Weasley, which is traditional, or we can make up a name, as well?"

After that, they very happily sat down to discuss names, children, and Harry's day with Alexei. It was decided he would go alone, and Draco would go and "make sure the girls don't get dresses that make them look like those crocheted toilet paper covers."

Hermione woke to the sound of the bedroom door opening and Viktor's voice saying, "Carefully, Alexei, set the tray on the bedside table and hand her the teacup."

The boy did just as he had been instructed and handed her the cup as she sat up.

"Thank you, Alexei. Why don't you sit on the bed and help me eat this huge breakfast. Maybe Papa will join us?"

"Mama Hermione, I didn't have any nightmares last night. Papa let me help him make your breakfast. He says I should start keeping a journal of things that happen to me."

"What I said, Alexei, was that you should write down things that make you happy or sad. Or things that interest you, so that you can ask questions about them later."

"Oh, that's right. Anyway, could we please buy a journal for me to start writing in today? Uncle Harry sent an owl a little bit ago and said he was going to go to Hogwarts to scout out what he is going to show me on Tuesday, but that Uncle Draco and Aunt Ginny want to come with us shopping."

"I can only *imagine* what Draco had to say about shopping for wedding dresses. What did Papa have to say to that?"

"I simply told Harry that we were going to shop in the Muggle world to keep gossip to a minimum. Apparently, Draco agreed to that without a murmur."

"He keeps on surprising, doesn't he? Hey, that was my last bit of toast, Alexei! Scoot. I have to get dressed." She winked at Viktor as he and Alexei beat a hasty retreat.

Ten minutes later, the three were ready to Floo off to Grimmauld Place. Alexei grabbed the container of Floo powder and handed his father and Hermione a handful while taking a bit for himself. He grinned hugely and snuggled close as they all stepped into the green flames.

Hermione said, quite distinctly, "Number twelve, Grimmauld Place," and they were off, whirling to their destination.

As they stepped out of the fireplace at Harry's, Draco and Harry were waiting for them. Ginny had not arrived yet.

Harry quickly related the story about Ron and Fleur after sending Alexei down to the kitchen to ask the new house-elf for some tea. Hermione gasped, but Viktor only shook his head.

"Yes, that is good. It is essentially what Karoly and Elisaveta did to Bodayov. I am sorry because he was your friend, but he would have got much worse, done many horrible things. When Ginevra arrives, we should go to Diagon Alley first to get Alexei's supplies, then we can go to a designer's shop in Marylebone to look at wedding dresses."

Hermione turned to stare at Viktor as if he had grown an extra head. "Designer? Viktor, those dresses will be horribly expensive."

"I am aware of that, love. You really don't know how much money I made playing Quidditch, do you? The dress will not make a dent in my Galleons."

"And you, Draco? I know Harry was left well off by his parents, but aren't you having inheritance problems?"

"The inheritance in question, Herms, is one from my father's great aunt, Hepzibah Prewett Fudge Oglethorpe. She married several times and outlived every one of her husbands. They all left her quite well off, and she was not fond of her grandson, Cornelius Fudge. She wasn't particularly enamoured of my father, either. She was the 'white' sheep of the family; she hated Dark Magic and all it entailed. When I began to redeem myself, after the war, she summoned me and interviewed me for hours. I left her house totally confused about why she had wanted to see me in the first place. When she was ill, I visited her and brought her flowers. She was, by then, my only living relative. This past month, when the solicitors told me I had to marry and produce an heir, was the first time I knew she had left me a huge fortune. I attended her funeral and actually cried, last winter. I didn't know I had it in me to do that." Draco actually sounded bewildered by the whole thing.

"There are times, Draco, when you are as insufferable as you were in school. Let's not go there; I get it, you can afford a nice dress for Gin."

"And here comes the lovely Ginevra Weasley. Thank you, Alexei; you must have the perfect touch with that house-elf. I can't seem to get her to do anything. Shall we have tea before we go?"

"Sir, Uncle Draco, she does not understand English very well. She is Bulgarian, so I spoke to her in Bulgarian. If you want, I will try to teach her more English while I am staying with Mama Hermione. The house-elf's name is Cestita, Papa."

Draco looked very confused. "What does that mean in Bulgarian, Alexei?"

"It means happy. She is not happy now; she thinks you don't like her. She can converse with Uncle Harry, but not with you. It makes her sad."

"I'll have to do something about that. You can advise me, Alexei. Come on, if no one is going to drink their tea, we might as well be off."

Both Ginny and Hermione were amazed at Draco. He was actually considering the house-elf's feelings. Harry had Flooed off to Hogwarts just after Ginny arrived.

The five of them went through the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and then to Diagon Alley. Books, robes, and an owl were purchased in record time. A quick peek in at Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, where Ginny asked the twins to look after Alexei's owl until they returned, earned Viktor some fangirl harassment.

The group quickly left the Wizarding area. Outside on Charing Cross Road, Viktor hailed a taxi, which delivered them to Marylebone.

Draco was astonished at how easily Viktor managed in the Muggle world. When asked, Viktor said, "At home, I grew up around Muggles. My parents wanted both Karoly and I to know both worlds. Even though I am a pureblood, I have never understood the class distinctions the English have."

"That's why we clicked so well fourth year, Draco. He understood me and we could actually talk about things."

Both Ginny and Hermione looked at dresses for several hours, but found nothing they were wild about. It was decided that they would go to Chelsea to a Greek restaurant Viktor knew, to have dinner. On the way, they passed several second hand shops on King's Road. Hermione saw a dress in the window of one and immediately told the taxi driver to stop.

Viktor paid the taxi and they all walked into the tiny shop. The dress Hermione had seen was blush pink, tea-length, and made out of silk covered in Alençon lace. It fit her



perfectly.

Ginny found a pale teal dress that accented her hair and figure. They also found a darker teal dress for Hermione to wear as Ginny's maid-of-honour. They bought all three dresses immediately.

## Family Dynamics

### *Chapter 4 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Harry was a bit nervous about meeting with Alexei. As much as he loved Teddy, he was expected to love his godson. This boy just called to him somehow. He puttered around Hogwarts, getting everything prepared. He wanted everything just right.

Alexei was equally nervous. At dinner he peppered the adults with questions about Harry; he seemed especially amused by the stories of Draco and Harry's rivalry.

"It makes sense, Uncle Draco."

"What does, Alexei?"

"You and Uncle Harry needing a wife to make it all work."

Ginny and Hermione exchanged amused looks.

"Why do you say that, Alexei?"

"Because, Mama Hermione, like Dado says, the best way to keep two magnets is with a buffer. Uncle Harry and Uncle Draco are like magnets; either drawn together strongly or repelling each other. Aunt Ginny will be the buffer. And if the whole thing is put together correctly, it takes an immense force to separate them. Otherwise they are together forever."

"Out of the mouths of babes, my love."

The other three adults agreed with Viktor's assessment.

When he saw that the adults seemed to like his comment, Alexei regaled them with stories full of an eleven-year-old's wisdom.

He fell asleep over pudding, the day having been too much for him.

As the adults started to go their separate ways, Draco turned to Hermione. "Granger, you know, I can see your influence on Alexei; he reminds me so much of you at that age. Yes, before you say anything, I WATCHED you. You, Harry, and even the one we aren't naming. All I can say is that I like Alexei so much more than I liked myself at that age. Promise me that you and Viktor will be godparents to our first child. I want him or her to grow up like that, intelligent, opinionated, wise, and loving."

Hermione turned to Viktor with tears in her eyes. She had grown fond of Draco because of Harry, but there had been a last barrier there, one where she felt he would never truly accept her. That was now gone. She threw her arms around Draco. "Of course. We would be honoured."

"That is true, Draco. I agree." With that, Viktor strode through the fire with his precious, sleeping, starting to get heavy burden.

Hermione beamed at Draco and Ginny, then followed Viktor.

Once through the Floo, Viktor put Alexei to bed, only stopping to move the owl cage that was sitting next to the fireplace. Hermione fed the small bird and covered its cage.

She and Viktor had a late cup of tea as they talked over the day. "Remind me to never leave Alexei with Arthur Weasley too long."

"Why is that, my love? Arthur has no aberrations like his son."

"Oh, no, nothing like that, Viktor. It is just that Alexei would feed Arthur's Muggle obsession to the point the two of them would surely get into trouble. But, you know, it might be fun to watch."

"I think Draco surprised you tonight, Hermione. He has surprised me a lot in the last ten years. He was such an insecure boy during the Triwizard year. It was only after the war was over, and he no longer had to keep up the pretence of pureblood superiority, that he began to grow as a person."

"Why do you see so much more in my classmates than I ever did? You were so quiet during the Triwizard, but you talked to me as an equal. I never quite figured out whether you just had no use for any of the other students or just didn't want to waste time talking to them."

"I did talk to a few, love. I found that Neville, for all his timidity, had as solid a grasp of his classes as you did. And, in Harry, I saw a lot of myself. He and I started a tentative friendship that year that has grown."

"I saw that you introduced Harry to your parents at the third task. He was quite a bit in awe of you. He knew, even back then, that Ron and I were a bad match. He just didn't want to admit it."

"He seemed really happy when you started seeing me again, though, love. I think he must have felt our connection was more than just a school romance. He has made some astonishing captures as an Auror. He fought Dolores Umbridge single-handedly after she killed Draco's parents. Bringing her in won lots of accolades for him. I'm happy he has finally found love of his own. He deserves more happiness than he has had previously. Dumbledore and Snape yanked the boy around as if he were a marionette. That always bothered me."

"What time in the morning are you leaving? I know Alexei will miss you almost as much as I will."

"I'll wake both of you before I go. We can have breakfast one last time. I'll be back on September 15th, just in time for your birthday. Alexei has given me specific instructions on what to buy you from him. I think you'll be impressed. Let's go to bed, love. I need some fresh memories to keep me content while I am on this blasted tour."

Well before dawn, Viktor was up, showered, dressed, and cooking. The smell of Turkish coffee brought Hermione into the kitchen. Alexei was not far behind. Viktor set plates of eggs and bacon on the table along with a pot of tea made exactly the way Hermione liked it. There was Blackcurrant juice for Alexei. The three had a companionable breakfast until just before Viktor had to leave.

As Viktor was draining his last cup of coffee, he remarked to Alexei, "You are to mind Hermione. She, Harry, Draco, and Ginny are all to be considered family. I think Draco is going to take you to the Burrow today to meet his young cousin, Teddy Lupin. Ginny's niece, Victoire, will be there as well. Teddy lost his parents in the Battle of Hogwarts, Alexei. He is younger than you, but I hope you will be friends. I have left funds for your necessities with Headmistress McGonagall. Tomorrow is going to be a big day for you: your own private tour of Hogwarts with its most famous graduate. Harry is a good man, Alexei. He overcame a lot of pain and misfortune to defeat the Dark Lord. Hermione fought at Harry's side during that last year of the war. She masterminded many of the strategies that were used. Her knowledge of Ancient Runes and Potions made Harry's task easier. He has admitted that he could not have succeeded without her help. So, young man, be nice to her. I love her and I know you love her."

Alexei looked at Hermione with new respect. She had never told him this about her and Harry.

He looked at Viktor and said, "Thank you for telling me this, Papa. I am very lucky to have you both as parents. Have no worries, I will cherish her as you do."

Viktor reached to tousle the boy's hair before sending him off to get dressed for the day. He refreshed Hermione's cup of tea and kissed her thoroughly.

"I will return for the *Sept* wedding. Tell them, please. Alexei may get his head turned by being singled out by Harry. Be sure to squelch any pretensions he might develop. I love you more than you know, Little One. Take care of yourself and the boy. I will see you soon."

"Oh, Vitya, he won't get any pretensions. Alexei is very level-headed. Harry, I think, needs this as much as Alexei does. It will give Harry a new perspective on being an orphan and on his present friendships. It will definitely be good for both of them. I want you to take care on this tour of yours. There are still lots of ditzy females who still think you are waiting just for them. Watch what you eat and drink, love."

"I will send the announcement of our engagement off to the papers today. And I will bring you the ring I bought almost ten years ago. I was too unsure of myself to give it to you then. Send the date of their wedding to me. I will find them an appropriate wedding present. Kiss me one last time, and I will be off."

Hermione put every ounce of her love for him into the kiss, and he reeled with the passion it evoked. But he resolutely took his leave and Disapparated out of the flat.

Hermione went to get dressed for work and looked in on Alexei. He was in the study, using her laptop, looking through the old clippings on the Battle of Hogwarts. Without turning his head, he said, "You really were the brains of it all, weren't you, Mama Hermione?"

She reached over and kissed the top of his head, saying, "I was merely one of the army of the Light, Alexei. Just like your father was. Even Draco wound up on the side of the Light where he never thought he would be. Ask him about it today. You are coming to work with me. Draco will pick you up there. So wear something you can roughhouse in. The other children at the Burrow aren't as old as you are. They will probably want to run and play younger kid games."

He answered her with a grin that forcibly reminded her of Viktor, "I brought many of my Muggle things from when I was smaller. Colouring books, puzzles, and that kind of thing. Would it be all right if I gave them to Teddy and Victoire?"

"You are so much like Viktor, Alexei. I can't wait until I am your mum in truth. I love both of you so much. Come on. Let's get ready. I miss him already."

An hour later, they arrived at the Ministry to find Draco already there and waiting. He grinned and told Hermione, "I'll take very good care of the young scamp, Herms. We will see you later. Gin and I will take you both out to dinner tonight."

Draco walked Alexei through the Atrium to the large public fireplaces. He enjoyed watching Alexei's face as he saw the huge Atrium filled with colourfully robed people, the fountain with its rather improved statues and the bank of fireplaces.

"Uncle Draco, where are we going again?"

"We are going to your Aunt Ginny's parents' house. Her mum watches my cousin Teddy, who is five years younger than you are, and Victoire, who is Ginny's niece; she is Bill and Fleur's little girl, and she is six younger than you are, I believe."

"Fleur Delacour, the Beauxbatons champion, is married to one of Aunt Ginny's brothers?" Alexei's eyes were wide. *These people I am to consider family are all famous*

Draco laughed delightedly as they waited their turn for the Floo. It was nice to see that his infamy didn't really translate out of Britain. When they reached the fireplace, Draco threw in the powder, called out "The Burrow" and walked into the flames holding tightly to Alexei's hand.

They arrived at the Weasley home hand in hand, gracefully stepping out of the fireplace. Arthur Weasley looked up to see Draco Malfoy stepping willingly into his home, holding tightly onto a dark-haired boy who was smiling up at him delightedly and had a startling vision into the future. Ginny had spent some time with her family, explaining what both Harry and Draco had told her, the way she felt safe as well as desired with them, and they all were willing to give the whole thing a chance, especially since Harry was involved, but they weren't sure of Draco.

"Welcome to the Burrow!"

"Thank you, Mister Weasley; you are quite gracious to allow us into your home," Draco spoke sincerely. "This is Alexei Krum, Viktor's son."

Alexei piped up: "I will be Mama Hermione's son as well."

"Well, young man, in that case, welcome to the family. Hermione has always been like a daughter to us, which will make you our grandson."

Alexei smiled excitedly at that, then as most children do, switched topics rapidly. "Uncle Draco said that there was a boy named Teddy here I could play with, as well as your granddaughter Victoire. May I meet them?"

Molly had bustled into the living room by this point. "Of course, dear. They are outside with some of the even younger children. Let me take you out there."

Alexei and Molly chatted contentedly to each other as she walked him out to the back yard. She had heard Arthur tell the boy that he would be their newest grandchild, and she was determined to make him feel at home.

Draco looked at his father-in-law to be and worried. *I hope Mrs. Weasley was right and he is happy for us. But I know I look quite a bit like my father, and they never did get along.*

"Well, Draco. You seem quite fond of Alexei."

"Yes, sir. He reminds me very much of Hermione as a child. You can see her influence, and it was why I asked her to be Ginny's and my first child's godmother."

Arthur raised his eyebrows. This was certainly not a clone of Lucius, no matter what he looked like.

"It is good to hear that, Draco. I think she and Viktor make a good couple; they complement each other well."

"I agree. And I'm very glad that Ginny agreed to give me and Harry a chance. I love him very much, but I always knew I would have to give him up to have an heir. Harry

also wanted a family, and so, we had decided to part; then fate, or magic, or circumstance, or something made it so he and I could both have a witch we could love and still be together. I'm still kind of amazed." Draco realized he was babbling and started to lower his head and turn to follow Alexei and Molly. He didn't notice Arthur moving quietly toward him until the man had his chin in his grasp and tilted his head upward to study him. *I didn't realise he was this tall.*

Arthur looked Draco in the eye, holding the younger man's chin firmly in his grasp. He must have seen what he wanted, because he nodded to himself, then clasped a hand on Draco's shoulder, something Draco had never felt before, as his own father wasn't given to physical forms of affection. "Welcome to the family, son. Marriage is not an easy thing, but if you ever feel the need to talk, especially to someone who has pretty much seen it all, I am here for you."

Draco smiled and, almost without thinking, stepped forward and gave Arthur a hug. Molly saw this from the kitchen and wiped a tear from her eye. It was so hard to see that Ron had lost his way so badly, but to see this young man come so far from what he had been, enough so that her Arthur could set aside his animosity toward any Malfoy, gave her hope.

She walked back into the room and smiled at Arthur. Together they walked out the back door to watch the children. Draco stood off to the side, with his hands in his pockets, watching. Alexei was organising the children in a simple game of hide and seek. He was picking up the little ones, hiding them and then shushing them when they giggled. After a bit, he pulled some things out of his backpack and set the littlest ones to colouring the colouring books, the older ones to putting together the puzzles and he was going to show Teddy how to fly a kite. He looked back at the adults and grinned.

Molly looked at Draco and made a decision. She went back into the house and made tea. She had already prepared sandwiches and juice for the children's lunch, but she wanted to include Draco with her and Arthur. She just had a feeling the young man needed some special attention.

Taking the tea tray outside, she saw that Draco had taken a seat at the picnic table close to where the children were playing. He was re-tying the shoelaces of one of the smaller tots as she put the tray down. She handed him a cup and sat down next to him.

"You certainly aren't what we expected, Draco. Your father would never have shown the kind of caring I see in you. My Ginny would never have accepted the two of you if she hadn't seen something more than a typical Malfoy."

"Mrs. Weasley, I don't know what to say. I feel like I am a huge fraud. The whole Malfoy heritage is like a millstone around my neck. I never knew what family, real family, meant until I saw all of you after the Battle of Hogwarts. I was so amazed that you were all hugging and laughing and crying together. It boggled my mind. I wanted that kind of closeness. Then unexpectedly, some of my old classmates offered friendship where I had expected the cut direct. Harry was the first, then Viktor, even Neville. I took the overtures of friendship like a drowning man will grasp at straws. I tried to do what I could to help make amends for the things my father did. Maybe, I'll eventually feel like I am not such a worm. But, our mutual relative, my Great Aunt Hepzibah thought I was doing a good job of redeeming myself. I liked her. I was truly sorry when she died."

"She was my gran, Draco. And had the sharpest eye for seeing a person's true worth. I am glad she thought that. It sort of makes sense, her leaving you that fortune and making the stipulation that you marry within a year. I think she knew Ginny was a *Sept*, and that somehow you, Harry and Ginny would be perfect for each other. You're like that rose bush she gave me years ago. It took over twenty years for the blasted thing to bloom, but now it is the most prolific bloomer in my garden." She leaned over and kissed the young man on his cheek before going off to feed the children.

Draco was reeling. His biggest fears had been Ginny's parents' reactions, and those had just been dispelled with acceptance and love. He put his head down on the table and cried.

Alexei came to sit down. "Why are you upset, Uncle Draco? Is something wrong?"

"No, Alexei, I'm not really upset. I am just surprised. I expected Ginny's parents to be wary of me because I am a Malfoy. But they accepted me. Me, whose father was the Dark Lord's biggest supporter. I think I am in shock."

"But you came back to the side of the Light; Mama told me so. She implied that you were never really on the Dark side."

"She said that? She really is perceptive. I was really, really scared when my parents were involved with the Dark Lord. I knew I could never do the things they wanted me to do. I was a coward, Alexei. I ran from the fighting, and when your Uncle Harry saved my life during the last battle, I knew I wasn't worth saving. But he did it anyway and offered his hand to me in friendship. Your Papa did the same thing. They stood by me when I was trying to atone for simply being a Malfoy. Hermione just kind of watched me for a couple of years, and then she offered friendship as well. By that time I was feeling much better about who I was becoming, not who I had been."

"I think Mr. and Mrs. Weasley like you. They certainly have been smiling at you a lot. Teddy is really cool. His hair colour changes when he is happy, mad, or curious. He is a nice boy. I did not realise that all the people Papa said were family are famous."

"Well, scamp, almost everyone you've met so far fought in the Battle of Hogwarts. We need to introduce you to Neville Longbottom. He killed the last of the Dark Lord's Horcruxes. Neville is a mild-mannered fellow who will be another of your teachers. He is married to the lady who runs the Leaky Cauldron now. He is another of my good friends."

"I am glad you have friends now. Oh, look, Mrs. Weasley is beckoning to you."

"I think she wants the both of us. Let's go see what she wants."

Molly had decided that it was time the littlest ones were down for a nap. She wanted Draco to read a story to them while she talked to Alexei. Draco good-naturedly agreed and went off to practice being a father. Arthur was looking on as Draco read.

Molly took Alexei aside and made him an extra sandwich. "I know boys your age are always hungry. I know your Uncle Harry was, poor mite. He grew up in an awful family, Alexei. His mother's sister raised him, but treated him as if he was a nuisance. I know Viktor loves you just like his own and Hermione, too. I saw pictures of you as a little tyke when Viktor started seeing Hermione treated him. He is so proud of you. I originally had hopes Hermione might marry my youngest son, but he lost his way, and your Papa was a much better man for her. You are still our grandchild in a way. Hermione was always like a second daughter to us."

"Thank you for everything, Mrs. Weasley. I had a really good time. I'm glad Uncle Draco brought me. Would you mind if I called you and Mr. Weasley Gran and Gramp, like the others do?"

Molly promptly started tearing up and had to resort to her hankie. "Oh, Alexei, that is just fine. I know Arthur will be as happy as I am." She pulled the boy into one of her signature hugs and released him when Arthur walked up to them. Arthur also hugged the boy tightly.

Draco was standing with Molly while Arthur talked to Alexei.

"You have more family than you'll know what to do with, young man. If you have any problems, you just come talk to any of us. And you, too, Draco Malfoy," Arthur said.

Draco tried to shake Arthur's hand, but Arthur pulled him into an enveloping hug, as did Molly.

When Draco and Alexei finally managed to arrive back at the Ministry of Magic, Alexei turned to Draco and put a hand up. "High five, Uncle Draco. You aced that confrontation!"

Draco put his hand out in the same configuration as Alexei's, and the boy hit it as he spun around and hit it again. Draco smiled and asked, "Is that a Bulgarian custom, Alexei?"

"No, it is a Muggle thing, Uncle Draco. When you win big or one of your friends has done something really great. I guess I am going to have to teach you more about Muggles."

"Yes, Alexei, I think I definitely need to start learning more about Muggles...about a lot of things actually. Let's go find Herms and tell her what kind of a day we had."

"I won't tell about you crying, Uncle Draco. Promise."

"Actually, I am going to tell Herms and Gin both about it. I haven't felt this good about myself in a very long time. A lot of that feeling better is due to you, Alexei. You are turning out to be a huge help for me. You explained the magnet idea about Harry, Ginny and me. Then you explained the problem with the house-elf, which by the way, you need to teach me how to communicate with her. The things you are opening my eyes to are so numerous I can't begin to list. I have had a wonderful time today."

Alexei smiled at the man. Sometimes he thought grownups forgot how to use common sense. "Look, Uncle Draco, there's Aunt Ginny and Uncle Harry, oh, and Mum Hermione, too."

The three were waving madly at Draco and Alexei.

## Casualties of War

### Chapter 5 of 9

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

As the two groups met in the middle of the atrium, Draco linked arms with Ginny and Harry.

Hermione took Alexei's hand in hers saying, "Draco, Ginny, Harry, and I had to give statements to the Quidditch Board today about Ron. It looks like he'll be in Azkaban for a very long time. The Healers at St. Mungo's found that the reason he had become so warped was because of spell damage from the last battle that had never been treated as well as the incident in the Ministry at the end of fifth year. It means that they can fix him, maybe. Unfortunately they do believe he had some of those tendencies anyway, but without the spell damage he would have kept them under control. Harry had the worst of it, I think. They had called in a Legilimens to look into Ron's mind, and Harry had to be there during that. But Ron still has to serve a term in Azkaban for the things he did because he could have asked for help when he realised he was not behaving normally. Harry is going to talk to Molly and Arthur and meet us at the Leaky Cauldron for dinner. Neville asked us all to come because he has some news for us."

"I didn't think I could face telling Mum and Dad all that. I knew Harry could do it better. How did the day at the Burrow go?" Ginny asked.

"We'll tell you all about it over dinner. Though, I think Harry may hear a bit of it when he talks to Molly and Arthur. Alexei and I had a great time together. He is helping me with all kinds of things, aren't you?"

"Yes, Uncle Draco. I met Teddy and his hair is so cool. I gave the younger kids all the colouring books and the puzzles, and I gave Teddy a kite to fly. Gran and Gramp both talked very seriously to me. They told me I was as good as another grandchild and to call them those names."

Ginny laughed and kissed him. "You are a treasure, Alexei. I'll bet Mum made extra sandwiches for you and talked to you about how Harry was always hungry, too. I just hope she takes the news about Ron without falling apart."

"I'll make sure, Gin. I'll break it gently, I promise. I will see you all at the Cauldron later," Harry said as he headed for a now empty fireplace.

"I came to a decision today," announced Alexei, "I am no longer going to call you Aunt Hermione. Papa won't care if I use Mayka or Mama, so I think I will call you Mama because we are in England and speaking English."

Hermione just tightened her grip on his hand and kissed him. She couldn't speak because emotion had completely taken her voice away.

Draco made a suggestion that everyone thought was perfect. "Why don't we drop off Alexei's backpack at your flat, have a drink and then Floo to the Cauldron?"

Hermione could only nod. They took the next empty fireplace and arrived in time to let Alexei's little owl out to hunt at night.

Ginny went to the kitchen to prepare drinks for everyone. Alexei dropped his backpack in his room. Hermione went into her bedroom to write a quick note to Viktor about Alexei's decision. Draco tried to help Ginny who shooed him back to the dining room.

"I can carry this tray perfectly well by myself. You don't need to make a fuss because I had to testify against my brother today. But if you want to do something, you can take the message from that owl on the windowsill and give him a treat. Herms might want to send a message back."

Draco opened the window and took the message tied to the bird's leg. He handed the large owl several treats and told it to wait. Then he took the message to Hermione who was staring at herself in the mirror in her room.

"Herms, are you okay? There is a message. I told the owl to wait."

"What? Oh, thanks, Draco. I am just astonished that Alexei has gotten to Mama so fast. It is kind of scary, but it makes me very happy, too." She took the parchment and read it quickly. "Oh, the message is from Minerva, sending congratulations from the *entire* Hogwarts staff on our engagement. Apparently, Alastor did his own version of an Irish jig when he read the *Prophet*. She says that the disgruntled fan girls may decide to send some hate mail my way so she is going to come by tomorrow and set up hate mail repelling Charms. You can tell the owl there is no message to go back. Thanks Draco."

He obediently told the owl it was released to return to the school. Hermione had changed clothes and Alexei had changed shirts when they appeared for their drinks. The juice Ginny had conjured for the boy was an instant hit.

"It is simple, Herms. Orange, Pineapple, and a bit of Blackcurrant. Good for him and easy to do. You had all three in the cooler, so I improvised."

Hermione drank her tea as if it were water and she was dying of thirst. Draco had opted for tea as well. Ginny joined Alexei in drinking juice. When the glasses were cleaned and put up, they Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron.

Neville Longbottom met them with the biggest smile they had ever seen on his face.

"Welcome. I am going to wait until Harry gets here to tell you all our news. Congratulations on your engagement, Hermione. Viktor is a wonderful man. Who is this?" he asked, looking at Alexei.

Hermione put her arms around Alexei and said, "Neville Longbottom, this is Alexei Karolyevitch Krum, Viktor's adopted son, and soon to be mine. Alexei, this is our good friend, Neville Longbottom."

"Oh, he's the man who destroyed the last of the Horcruxes! I am glad to meet you, sir," Alexei said, then stuck his hand out to shake Neville's.

Neville chuckled and shook the boy's hand. "He certainly has the same good manners Viktor always displayed. Nice to meet you, Alexei. Let me get you all a table."

Shortly after they were all seated in a private room, Harry returned from the Weasleys. It was easy to see that he had been crying.

"Are you all right, Harry?"

"Not really, Neville, but I will be. I have a lot to look forward to, and that makes all the difference."

"May I ask what is wrong?"

"Ron is looking at fifty years in Azkaban even if they decide it really is spell damage, considering he killed Lavender and essentially raped and sterilised that little girl. The Legilimens vomited after she was done with him, so I don't even want to know what was in his mind. If they think he was still rational, then well, he's going through the Veil."

Everyone at the table was shocked. Then, ever the voice of reason, Alexei piped up. "I'm sorry your friend is going to prison or will be executed. But if he was not in his right mind, he should have asked for help. I'm eleven. His niece is five, and he was starting to look at her funny. That isn't right. How could he find children attractive? If you made my hair long and Victoire's hair short and hid us with robes, you could barely figure out which one of us is a girl. Even if he thought that other little girl wanted what he did to her, didn't he see it was wrong when he was looking at his own niece?"

Neville smiled. "Hermione had quite a hand raising you, didn't she? You sound quite a bit like she did as a child. I didn't know your papa until he was eighteen, so I can't say the same for him. You're absolutely right. When Lavender died, heck, when he attacked his *best friend*, any of this should have made him ask for help. We can hope for the best, but I think our friend Ron may have died a long time ago. We just realised it now."

Harry looked so relieved at Neville's words that Ginny hugged him. Draco put his arms around both Harry and Ginny for a few minutes.

Eventually, everyone calmed down and ordered drinks and dinner. As dessert was served, Neville and Hannah came over to the table.

"We just wanted you all to know we are expecting our first child. You are the first people we have told."

Ginny and Hermione jumped up and hugged first Hannah and then Neville. Harry and Draco shook Neville's hand and then kissed Hannah on the cheek.

Everyone was uttering congratulations, until Neville started laughing; then they all were laughing. It was the happiest thing that could have happened. Harry and Draco paid the bill, shook Neville's hand again and then they all Flooed back to Hermione's flat.

Alexei's little owl was waiting patiently to get in at the window, and there was another larger owl waiting to deliver a message. Draco let both in, took the message and opened the cage for the little owl. He told the large owl to wait for a reply.

"Herms, it is a letter from Viktor! I told the owl to wait."

She took the letter and tore it open.

*Beloved,*

*My first stop today was Durmstrang. The reporters did not want to know about the Quidditch Goodwill Ambassador trip at all, they only wanted to know when we are getting married. I almost laughed myself to death. I am sorely afraid that will be the routine for the next nine weeks. I miss you and Alexei very much.*

V

"Oh, no, Viktor says the reporters only wanted to know about when we are getting married, not about the Quidditch Ambassador Goodwill trip. He must be livid. Uh oh, nine weeks; that means we only have about six weeks to get ready for your wedding, Gin. Let me think. Molly, you, me and my mum; we can do this, Gin. Tomorrow night we will all meet here at the flat and discuss what *you* want and keep your Mum from running over your wishes. Is that okay? I think my mum would be happy to help. Especially when I break the news that Viktor and I are getting married, too."

"Herms, you are the best. You are right, with your mum and mine it should be easy, I hope."

"First things first, Gin. Where do you want this ceremony to happen? I would be willing to bet that the Ministry will give you a large reception room because of whom you are marrying AND the fact that you are a *Sept*."

"I absolutely do *not* want a media circus, Herms. I think Harry and Draco will agree with me about that. August 23rd is a good day. Why not use the ballroom at Malfoy Manor? It is big enough for the very restricted list of wedding guests. I guess I have more ideas than I thought."

Harry and Draco were nodding their heads, agreeing with everything she said.

Ginny looked at them and asked, "Would you each make up a list of *who you* want to invite? And have it done by tomorrow night? It would be a big help."

Draco looked unhappy. "Gin, the folks I want to invite are your family, Viktor, Herms, Alexei, and the Longbottoms. I don't really have any other friends."

Hermione shook her head and said, "Draco, you have the entire faculty at Hogwarts to invite. Some of your old housemates aren't bad. Blaise has been working for the Ministry for a couple of years. Re-evaluate your options."

Draco's look brightened at her words, and he conjured a quill and parchment to make his list. Harry had done the same thing a couple of minutes earlier.

Within a few minutes, they both handed a reasonably lengthy list to Ginny. She waved her wand and told the lists to combine and delete duplicates.

When she was satisfied with the list, she handed it to Hermione. "You can add names, too. They have essentially listed everyone I want to invite. If you can think of anyone else, go for it."

"No, I think this is a remarkably complete list. It comes in at under three hundred names. You did it. This is progress. We have the dress, the date, the place, and the guest list. Now we need to work on what to serve at the reception, what music to play, what the cake will be, and where the three of you will go for a honeymoon," Hermione replied. "Oh, and we need this by tomorrow if we don't want Molly taking over with what she wants."

Draco responded immediately, "Why don't we make up the list and present her with *afait accompli*? It would save a lot of hurt feelings and wrangling."

"Great idea. You three go off and decide this stuff. I have an eleven year old to get to bed."

"Night, Herms. Night, Alexei," the *new* golden trio said before Flooding off home.

"Mama, you should organise more things. You did that excellently. I will go to bed right away. Tomorrow is going to be exciting, I think. Uncle Harry talks to me like I am a grown-up."

"You are a scamp, Alexei. Get to bed. I have a letter to write."

Viktor's owl had been waiting patiently in the kitchen window while other things had been going on. When Hermione sat down at the kitchen table to write the second letter she was going to send to him, the owl hopped to the table and rubbed his head on her arm.

"I know, Danilov, I miss him so much. At least you get to go back to him."

The bird softly hooted at her in reply.

'Viktor,

*The wedding for Harry and company will be the 23rd of August at Malfoy Manor. We are working out the details so that Molly Weasley will not get to take over. I miss your smile and your kisses in the morning. Hurry home to us.'*

She tied that letter and her previous note to the owl's leg and opened the window for him. She ruffled his feathers before he set out.

"Take my love to him, Danilov," she called after the bird.

An answering hoot from the owl cheered her.

She dreamed that night of the Yule Ball and her first dance with Viktor. The awful scene that Ron had caused, how she had cried in Viktor's arms late that night, the bewildered look on Harry's face when she and Ron were screaming at each other, the exquisite kiss Viktor had given her as he walked her to the Gryffindor dormitory. How life had changed during and after the Triwizard Tournament. How Viktor had appeared during the Battle of Hogwarts and saved her life, not just once, but several times. He had even helped her when she and Harry went back to the Shrieking Shack to recover Snape's body, only to discover that he was still barely alive.

Viktor had used Durmstrang spells in Russian to save Snape's life. The spells weren't Dark Magic, just very, very old magic, taught only to the top students at the school. He had used the same spell on Lavender Brown later that day to heal the bites she had received from Fenrir Greyback.

Her gentle, kind, shy, wonderful Viktor, who surprised everyone because he was not the typical professional athlete.

He could be ferocious as he had been during the Battle, and yet, he had the softest heart, crying because he had not been able to save the youngest of the school defenders.

Morning found her smiling and singing to herself when Alexei came into the kitchen for breakfast. She poured him juice and set a plate of eggs in front of him.

"You are going to have to keep up with Harry today. I have an idea what he is going to show you, but I won't tell. You'll come to the office with me, and he will pick you up there."

"Yes, Mama, you look supremely happy today. I'll bet you dreamed about Papa."

"Yes, I did, scamp. About how I always knew he was the man for me, even when I wasn't much older than you are."

A short time later they Flooded into the Ministry where Arthur Weasley waved to them as he arrived. Alastor Moody was waiting outside her office. As soon as Harry got there and took Alexei away, Moody sat down and started to talk.

"Min wants to know if you want the Great Hall for your wedding. We'll decorate it just like the Yule Ball. She was over the moon when she saw the announcement. I have already talked to Filius about music. We made you a list of things we can do for the wedding."

He handed her the parchment, leaned over, kissed her forehead and left.

*I have fallen through the Looking Glass,* she thought.

## Sharing a Bond

### *Chapter 6 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Harry and Alexei arrived at Hogwarts in the Floo in Minerva's office. She walked down the stairs with them and told Harry, "The entire school is open to you. Take him where you will, but keep him safe."

Harry stood with his hands on Alexei's shoulders and grinned at Minerva.

"First things first, Minerva, I want you to come with us to the Great Hall. He needs to see it the way I first saw it, please."

She laughed and led the way.

With a flick of her wand, she had the candles floating in the air; Harry lit them with a wave of his hand.

"We came into the castle across the lake, Alex. It was night and the castle was very spooky. This tall fearsome lady in a green hat directed us to wait in that little room before the sorting. A Sorting Hat decides which House you'll be in. It wanted to put me in Slytherin with your Uncle Draco, but I wanted to be in Gryffindor, as my parents had been. So, I asked it to put me in Gryffindor, and it did. Minerva was the tall fearsome lady. Next, I think I want to take you outside and show you my favourite places."

"Bring him back inside when you both get hungry. Alastor and I will eat lunch with you."

Harry smiled and nodded at Minerva. "All right, Alexei. Let's start with the Black Lake. That is where they held the second task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament. Also, it has an inhabitant that is fun to play with."

"Is it a Loch monster? I've heard of those; they like to play with people on their lakes."

"You certainly are Hermione's son, aren't you? You sound just like your Mama when she was your age. No, it isn't a Loch monster, although we can go up to Loch Ness for a day trip some other time. Come along. Here is some bread and sardines. We can call to it."

Harry and Alexei headed to the edge of the lake, where Harry instructed Alexei to throw a piece of bread as far as he could. Suddenly the water churned and a tentacle rose up and grabbed the bread. Once the animal attached to the tentacle decided this was a good thing, the Giant Squid poked his head up.

Alexei turned to Harry wide-eyed. "I didn't know squids could get that big!"

Harry laughed. They took turns tossing bread and sardines to the squid, and then when the food ran out, they were playing an odd bit of fetch with a large stick.

A deep voiced boomed out from behind them, startling both of them. "How are ya doing, Harry? And who's your friend?"

"Hagrid!" Harry turned to Alexei. "Hagrid was my first friend ever. He is the Keeper of the Keys and the groundskeeper. He is also the Care of Magical Creatures Professor."

Hagrid blushed under the scrutiny from the intense young man. Alexei put his hand out and greeted Hagrid as he was taught. "Hello, Mr. Hagrid. I'm Alexei Krum. I will be a student here in September."

"None of that Mr. stuff, young Alexei. I am just Hagrid. 'Ermione is goin' ta be your mum, right? Well, any pup of hers is my friend as well. I have a unicorn foal and mum in the back I can take you to see if Harry here is willing to wait for you."

"Of course, Hagrid. I will just play with the squid for a bit more."

Hagrid took Alexei with him to see the unicorns. "The mare was having a bit of trouble, so I helped her. Once they are on their feet, they will return to the forest."

"Oh, they are beautiful." Alexei was in awe of the shining creatures.

"Here you go. Why don't you see if they will take this apple from you?"

Alexei took the apple pieces, laid them on his palm, and held it out flat, the way Hagrid instructed him. The mare came over first, sniffed the boy's hand, and snuffled up his arm, which tickled, but Alexei held steady, and once she approved, she took the apple and ate it. This made the foal come over, curious, and when Alexei held out another piece of the apple, the mare nudged the baby and it took the apple. Alexei laughed delightedly, especially when the foal took to nudging him for more treats.

Once the mare had collected her wayward child, Hagrid showed off a few of the other animals, then walked Alexei back to Harry.

Harry was sitting on a rock, looking pensive, but his face lit up when he saw Hagrid and Alexei speaking happily.

"Uncle Harry, it was great! The little unicorn was being pushy about wanting treats. I think its mother scolded it, though."

"Wonderful, Alexei! I think it is time to tour the castle." He turned to Hagrid. "Thanks, Hagrid."

"Any time, Harry. He is a great kid, just like you and 'Ermione were."

"Not Ron, Hagrid?"

"No, Harry. He had potential to be great, but he gave in to his bad parts. He stopped being a good kid a long time ago."

Harry nodded ruefully. "Did everyone see it but me?"

"No, Harry. This is us all looking back. However, look at your Draco. He started the wrong way and ended up good. Ron went backwards. He could have asked for help, or become a hermit, or anything to stop doing bad things. I gave up when he attacked 'Ermione. No one does that to someone they love unless they have gone wrong."

Harry looked thoughtful. Hagrid had said the same thing that Alexei had. It really was that simple. If you are going wrong, ask for help, do not think the solution is going to fall off its broom and land on you. He resolved to stop feeling guilty for not seeing it. Someone as far gone in his illness as Ron would have been an expert at hiding it.

He walked Alexei up the main doors, enjoying the boy's look of wonder. About five minutes after he had showed him the third-floor corridor, which had housed Fluffy, they ran into Peeves.

Peeves started to taunt Harry, which he was used to and ignored, but Peeves made an almost fatal error. He began to make fun of Hermione, not knowing how defensive of her Alexei was. The minute the poltergeist mentioned bushy hair and something about her morals because of the Horcrux hunt, Alexei whipped out his wand and chanted something in Bulgarian. Peeves screeched in pain and disappeared.

At that point Minerva had come running, along with Alastor, who was in the castle with her. "What in the world happened?"

Harry answered, shaken by the control shown by the young man. "Peeves. He started in on me, which we ignored, but when he questioned Hermione's morals on the camping trip we had, Alexei cast something at him, and he screeched and disappeared."

Alastor nodded, pleased. "What did you cast, young man?"

"A Bulgarian poltergeist banishing charm. Basically, you say, 'Begone, foul spirit' and if you mean it, then the poltergeist has to go." Alexei hung his head, certain he would be banned from attending school now. He was utterly surprised by the headmistress's next words.

"Well done, young man! More of you children should understand the difference between posturing and flat out insults. Your mother is a model of good behaviour."

The headmistress called the castle ghosts, and they told her that Peeves was not permanently banished, but he now feared the boy. "As well he should. Baron, if you would tell him that disparaging the character of the students' parents is reprehensible behaviour, and if they find a way to banish him after that, it is his own fault."

The Bloody Baron nodded his assent and glided off.

"Now that we have had our excitement, shall we head into the Great Hall for lunch?"

"Yes, Headmistress. All that walking made me hungry. I'm so looking forward to being a student here now."

The adults were thrilled. "Thank you, Harry," whispered Minerva.

Harry, who had been afraid he had ruined the boy's day, was very happy to hear that he had enjoyed it.

"So, youngster, what was your favourite part of the castle?" Alastor asked.

"I liked the suits of armour, and the Giant Squid, and the Great Hall. Oh, and Hagrid and the unicorns. That was really cool!"

Minerva had contacted Hermione about what Alexei's favourite foods were before the visit, so the house-elves had prepared a variety of dishes, some of Alexei's favourites and some of Harry's.

Harry acknowledged Minerva's machinations with a grin and a wink.

While Harry and Minerva talked during the meal, Alastor was having a lively discussion with Alexei.

"How would you like to demonstrate that nifty little spell to your Defence class, young man? Seems to me that you may be a wee bit more advanced than your peers. Maybe we should test him before the other students arrive, Min?"

"Behave yourself, Alastor; you just want to tell the boy how his papa saved several lives at the Battle of Hogwarts. I am quite sure Hermione would let him visit over a weekend and you can tell him all the stories you think he should hear. Isn't that right, Harry?"

"Herms would probably want to come hear the stories, too, if I know her," Harry replied, chuckling.

Alastor looked at his Min and smiled the smile she had loved for over sixty years. "The boy has a right to know the kind of man his papa is. If we'd had more like Viktor, the war would have been much shorter. Even you have to agree with that, Harry."

"Alexei, he saved a lot of folks that night. He healed injuries that our forces couldn't. He and the Bulgarian team swooped into the fray and managed to separate the Death Eaters into smaller groups, which were defeated rapidly. He cast protective charms for many of our fighters. He deflected a falling wall that would have crushed one of the Weasleys. After it was all over and he had saved Hermione's life at least three times that night, he refused to take any credit for his assistance. I am very glad to call him my friend, my *best* friend now."

As Harry had been speaking, the house-elves had all crept out to listen. One stepped forward and spoke in a squeaky voice. "Master Viktor saved many of us. He understands elf magic."

The whole group of house-elves scurried back to the kitchens after that pronouncement.

Alastor looked at Minerva and asked, "Don't tell me they taught elf magic at Durmstrang?"

Minerva answered him the only way she could, "I have absolutely no idea, Alastor. We'll have to ask him. Harry, the Mirror of Erised is in the Chamber of Secrets. Why don't you take Alexei to see them both? You could end the day with a visit to the monument."

The boy was excited when Harry took him into the bathroom, which comprised the entrance to the passage to the Chamber of Secrets. The piles of bones at the bottom of the chute had been cleaned out years before. The shed skin of the Basilisk had been taken away to decorate the Slytherin dormitory by Snape while Harry was still in school. The ornate door still responded to Harry's Parseltongue command.

Once inside the door, they saw the Mirror of Erised standing off to one side near the stone head of a Basilisk where Harry had killed the real Basilisk. The skeleton had been removed after the Battle, and the Chamber had been cleaned out. Harry let Alexei look into all the tunnels and alcoves before removing the cover from the Mirror of Erised.

"This is a very special mirror, Alexei. Do you see the writing around the edge? You have to read it backwards, as if it is reflected in a mirror'*Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohs*'. Tell me what it says, Alexei."

"I show not your face but your heart's desire. Is that right, Uncle Harry?"

"Great job. Now look in the mirror and tell me what you see," Harry suggested.

The boy moved to stand in front of the mirror and exclaimed, "Oh, I see what you mean. I see Papa and Mama, there I am, and there are several little brothers and sisters. There is a picture of my real parents on the bookshelves in back. We all look so happy."

Harry was relieved that Alexei's vision had been such a positive one.

"Now, you look, Uncle Harry. Tell me what you see," Alexei asked.

So Harry stood before the mirror as he had his first year and was surprised to see, not his dead parents, but a family group comprised of Draco, Ginny, himself and four children; three boys and a girl. They all looked very happy.

He was very relieved again and showed Alexei the bloodstain from the Basilisk, which no amount of cleaning had ever been able to remove. They walked out of the Chamber and Alexei wondered how they were going to get back.

Harry knew that Minerva had removed the wards on the school so he and Alexei could Disapparate out of the corridor. He took the boy's arm quickly to Disapparate. They reappeared in the entry hall of the school. He led Alexei out into the afternoon sunshine and down to the small graveyard. The monument to the fallen of the Battle of Hogwarts shone in the sunshine.

They read off the names, and Harry told Alexei a little bit about each person. Then it was time to go. They walked back to the school and said goodbye to Minerva and Alastor before disappearing through the fireplace.

## Wedding Plans

*Chapter 7 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

Harry returned home to find Draco and Ginny surrounded by list upon list of things they wanted or didn't want for the wedding. He bent down and picked up one of the lists. "Oh, really?"



"Which list is that, Harry?" asked Ginny.

"The one that says we have a traditional Veela ceremony with everyone in the nude and us on a platform in a tree?"

"We threw that one out, love. That is the discard pile." Draco smiled beguilingly at Harry.

"Do you two want to hear my idea?"

"Yes," both Ginny and Draco responded.

"I was in Hogwarts and I saw a symbol today. I went back and asked the Grey Lady what it was, and she said it was the symbol of *Sept* wedding."

Ginny and Draco stared at the drawing Harry had made of the symbol. It was a square, with stars at each of the four points. What made it more interesting were the embedded symbols. The square was filled with a circle, which had a triangle in it. Where the points of the triangles met the lines of the circle and the outer square, there were stars. At the centre of the symbol was another square, but this square had the corners indented inward in semi-circles, it looked like an altar. Both Ginny and Draco looked up from the drawing expectantly.

Harry continued. "The stars can be replaced with candles; we stand in the middle. The guests would mostly be arrayed in front of the area where there is not a third candle. The ceremony is a regular binding with a witness for each of us. I know Ginny wants Hermione to stand for her, and I was thinking of maybe Neville and Viktor for Draco and me. What do you think?"

Ginny and Draco just stared at Harry. They had been planning all day long, and he managed to waltz in with... "That is the most perfect idea ever!" Ginny bounced up from her spot on the floor and threw her arms around Harry. Draco grinned and joined in.

"Perfect. It is homage to our past, and it celebrates us uniquely because only a *Sept* marriage could really use that set up. I love it." Draco really was pleased.

"What are we going to let Molly do, then? She has to do something, or she will be upset." Harry did not want to hurt his surrogate mother.

"Mum knows a lot about food magic. We thought we would ask her to do the cake. It will be a big job, but not like the whole catering or even most of the planning. We have everything decided, and I think she will be pleased. It is a good way to rehabilitate Malfoy Manor as well. The grounds will be blessed by our marriage, and it should sweep away whatever dark magic lingers."

The three went to sleep, pleased with their plans, and decided to tell the Weasley matriarch the next day.

"Oh, I love this pattern for the candles! Where did you find it?" Molly sounded delighted.

"Harry found it at Hogwarts. The Grey Lady told him it was the symbol for a *Sept* marriage." Draco's pride in his husband-to-be was very evident.

"And you and Ginny did the rest of the planning?"

Draco nodded.

"Yes, Mum, we did. I know we have everything planned, but we did want to ask you a big favour. We know how important the cake is, and we really would like your magic to be the one woven into the baking. Would you do that for us?"

"Oh, yes! I would be so happy to! And I can have you all add a bit of your magic to the batter, since we will be doing this at home." Molly bustled out of the living room and headed for her special stash of Prewett family recipes. She was quite certain there was a recipe for a wedding cake there.

From The Burrow, the trio headed to Diagon Alley to contract a printer for the invitations; from there they went to Draco's favourite French restaurant to get the catering set up, and then to Malfoy Manor to tell the elves what to expect.

After six stationery stores with horribly ostentatious designs, even Draco was starting to think they might never find anyone who could help them. They found a tiny little shop called Inkstain's Invitations and walked in. Zoila Inkstain was pleased as punch to be able to show off her work to the infamous trio. She was even more pleased when her design, based on the historical descriptions of *Sept* weddings, made the three exclaim in delight. "Oh, look, Harry! She got it just right!"

"She definitely did, Gin. What do you think, Draco?"

"Perfect. May I ask you a question, Miss Inkstain?"

"Of course, Mr. Malfoy."

"Why aren't you more popular? This is brilliant work."

"Unfortunately, I try to tailor my work to the couple, and most recently everyone was happy with very ostentatious designs that had no depth of character. No one was interested in what I have to offer."

Draco smiled. "I imagine you will have quite a bit more work after this. We are thrilled to have your original and thoughtful work on our invitations. And please, keep one for yourself. The artist should always be present to see how her work is received."

Zoila was beside herself. By the end of the day, all of Diagon Alley knew not only that the *Sept* triad wedding was going to be the event of the summer, but also that it was going to be the most original.

After the adventure with the invitations, the food tasting at The Golden Flute was sounding better and better, until they got to the restaurant and found an overwhelming array of food.

"Phillippe, what is this?"

"We wanted to give you a little of everything to try, Mr. Malfoy, Miss Weasley, and Mr. Potter. If you follow me, I will show you."

It turned out that the tables were arranged by what Phillippe thought would be the most pleasing as a set meal.

After trying the food on three of the tables, they all looked ready to throw in the towel.

"Let's just try one more."

"Fine, Harry. But if that one isn't it, we can carve up the Giant Squid for all I care." Ginny was exasperated.

"You might not care, but he would." Draco made both his loves laugh with that comment.

Luckily for the Squid, the fourth table was perfect. The appetisers were *pate* on toast points, chilled garlic shrimp, and a lovely steak tartare. The soup was a delicate potato leek concoction, its colour a lovely mint green. There was a choice of a delicate white fish with tomato and black olive sauce or carved beef roast with horseradish sauce or

a pastry wrapped duck breast with a forest berry sauce. The salad was butter lettuce with a very tasty dressing of olive oil, ground pepper, sea salt and a touch of white wine vinegar. A lovely cheese tray, featuring Port Salut, Brie, Stilton, and Cheddar, rounded off the savoury feast. Dessert would of course be the wedding cake.

"Who is preparing the cake?" Phillippe was very curious.

"My mother. She has an old family recipe."

"I can't wait to taste it, Miss Weasley."

The three returned home, glad they only had to think of each other and their vows for the next three weeks.

Well, they had thought that was what they were going to do. Alexei and Hermione were drafted into helping sort the ~~RSVPs~~RSVPs.

"Uncle Draco, why do we have to sort them? Who is going to say no?"

"You always speak the truth as you see it, don't you, Alexei?" Draco laughed.

"Why wouldn't I? Papa says lies have lives of their own, and it takes too much brain power to keep them straight. The truth doesn't change."

Harry and Hermione heard him and smiled. "He truly does sound like you, Herms. I'm a bit jealous of Draco for getting you and Viktor to be the baby-to-be's godparents."

"Oh, Harry. You know you are the closest thing I have to a brother. Your babies won't be left out." Harry just hugged her in response.

The five of them finished giving instructions for seating to the elves and began to set up the centre binding shape.

Hermione waved her wand and the symbol for the *Sept* binding appeared on the grounds. She turned to Alexei. "Tomorrow we will get up early and light the candles and ask for the Dawn's blessing."

"It sounds lovely, Mama."

"You remember what you are going to say at the opening?"

"Yes, Mama."

The morning came and found Harry, Ginny, Draco, Hermione, Viktor, Neville, and Alexei out lighting the seven candles and asking for the Dawn's blessing. As they finished, the candles flared and the lines of the *Sept* symbol lit up with a soft light.

"Oh, that is a wonderful sign!" Minerva's voice came from the edge of the binding symbol.

"Does it mean anything in particular, Headmistress?" asked Draco.

"Call me Minerva, dear. It means that Magic itself is pleased with your joining. When I heard that your signatures turned golden on the license contract, I wanted to be here early to see the Dawn's blessing. I hope you don't mind."

"We don't mind, Gran Minerva. You and Gramp Alastor are always welcome!"

Minerva teared up at Alexei's declaration. Not only at being adopted as his grandparent, but because he was comfortable enough to have done so.

"Alexei, you really shouldn't make announcements like that at someone else's home," Viktor chided his son gently.

"It is just fine, Vik. Alexei should feel like this is also his home. As should you and Hermione." Draco was startled when his response to Viktor earned him a hug from Mad-Eye Moody himself.

"Well, boy, you just proved to me that you are nothing like your old man. Yes, yes, I know he was trying to redeem himself at the end, but it was still a bit self-serving to me. You are the real thing, my boy. I'm proud of you."

Draco was stunned. He didn't think he would ever hear those words from someone like Mad-Eye. And to be told he was the cause of pride almost caused him to break down again.

"Don't look like that, boy! You have to go get dressed for your wedding."

The guests had arrived and were seated as the sun set over Malfoy Manor. The candles and the glowing symbol in front of them had them mesmerised.

A young voice came out of the trees lining the seating area. "Some people say that only two are needed for a true marriage. That is not always the case. Two magnets are strong, but they can repel each other just as powerfully. Place a buffer between them, and it takes an immense force to pull them apart. Such is the case here. Uncle Harry, Aunt Ginny, and Uncle Draco are far stronger together than apart." Smiles and applause were followed by a joyous laughter when the same young voice said, "Did I get it right, Mama?"

The guests smiled when they saw Alexei Krum take his seat next to the Weasleys while his Mama took her place by Ginny's mark. Her fiancée, Viktor Krum, and Neville Longbottom joined her. A small pop of elf-magic and the triad appeared next to their designated witness. They joined hands in a circle.

The Minister then spoke. "I cannot marry these three. All I can do is stand witness to their vows that will bind them to each other. What say you?"

Draco began. "I was incomplete for most of my life. Even when it was Harry and I, there was something missing. Now I know it was Ginny. Alexei had it right. We are stronger together. My loves, you make me a better man. I bind myself to you with these ribbons of passion, fidelity, and love." The Minister took ribbons, which changed colour as Draco spoke and wound them around the trio's wrists, beginning the binding.

Harry went next. "I've always longed for a family of my own. The Weasleys tried, but it never seemed to be enough. Then Draco had this idea, which I was willing to help him with, never suspecting that my own happiness would follow. My loves, I bind myself to you with these ribbons of family, love, and patience." Again, the Minister wound ribbons around three sets of wrists.

Ginny smiled as her loves spoke their vows. "I wasn't ready the first time Harry wanted to settle down. Then I thought I had lost him to Draco. Little did I know that the Fates were conspiring to bring us all together. My loves, I bind myself to you with these ribbons of love, home, and wisdom." As the Minister wound the last set of ribbons around their wrists, a glow began to emanate from the triple set of ribbons.

"I declare that I have borne witness to this binding, and per the powers vested in me by the Ministry of Magic and Magic herself, I present to you the triad of Malfoy, Potter, and Weasley. May your family prosper, be fruitful and happy." As his words faded, the glow turned into a flash, and the ribbons disappeared, only to become permanent marks on all three of their left wrists.

The applause from the guests was thunderous. For propriety and legality's sake, the witnesses signed the marriage certificate, and the celebration began.

"Vitya, do you wish we were doing something like this?" Hermione said, brow furrowed, as she and Viktor caught their breath after the fine food and exuberant dancing.

"No, my love. This suited them. Our wedding will suit us."

The gift that Viktor had brought for the triad was most unusual. It was a copy of the only history of *Septs*, their lives, their magic, and their marriages. It had been written by *Septs* for *Septs*.

## New Traditions at Hogwarts

*Chapter 8 of 9*

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

After the reception, Viktor and Hermione left Alexei with Minerva and Alastor, so they could have a few hours of privacy.

Viktor brought out the ring he had purchased the summer after the Triwizard Tournament. It was rose, yellow, and white gold twisted together to form the band, and then the colours separated to form petals of a rose which had a huge pink diamond at its centre.

He slipped the ring on Hermione's hand, and she gasped. The stone began to glow as Viktor smiled at her. "It knows you are the woman it was bought for. It will protect you, and remind you of me when we are apart."

"I love it, Vitya. You are so very good to me."

"We were meant to be together, love. I knew that from the first moment I saw you. You were so lovely, so intense; I knew I must wait for you."

"The waiting is over, Viktor. I sincerely hope the triad finds the same happiness we have."

"Come to bed, love. There are still three weeks before I come back to teach full time. I need your love to sustain me until then."

The afternoon of September 14th Hermione's Ancient Runes class discovered something touching about their teacher. A shadow had lingered outside the window of her classroom for a minute or two. She had looked up and blushed before dismissing the class and running down the stairs to the front doors.

Her pupils had followed, mystified. They had crowded around the doorway to see a tall man on a broom land, sweep Miss Granger and a first year boy into a bear hug. Then he had waved at them, telling Miss Granger her students were watching.

Just then, Headmistress McGonagall and the Defence teacher, Mr. Moody, had appeared in the hallway behind the students. Moody had laughed at the bewilderment of the students and explained, "That man is to be your new Quidditch coach and Flying Instructor, Viktor Krum. He and Miss Granger are to be married this Christmas. The little lad is Alexei Krum, Viktor's adopted son. Move along now, all of you. Give them a bit of privacy."

One young voice was heard to exclaim as the group moved off, "But Viktor Krum is way famous; why would he want to teach flying here?"

Moody laughed again and looked out at the couple walking in the grounds with the boy by their side. "Why, indeed, Miss Creevey? I think love may have had a lot to do with it. Don't you think so, Min?"

"I do, Alastor. And I think their wedding will just be the beginning of things. It was very good of you to let Alexei out of class early. Is he as advanced in Defence as he is in other subjects?"

Moody took Minerva's arm as they walked back down the hallway, saying, "Oh, he is that, my dear. The lad is at the top of his class in every subject. He helps the other students, Min. He is going to be Head Boy when the time comes."

"Alastor! Let the boy be. He'll be what he is. Did I tell you the Triad is expecting? They are going to name the boy Thuban."

"Draco must be over the moon, Min. And to name the child that, keeping up with the Black tradition. Isn't Thuban the other name for Alpha Draconis? Kind of arrogant, don't you think?"

"Harry picked the name, Alastor. To honour that Black tradition, the child will have a second name of Sirius. I hope we'll have another baby in the castle by next year. Hermione told me she is stopping her contraceptive potions. She and Viktor will make wonderful parents."

"They already do, my love. Alexei is living proof of that." Alastor kissed his wife and watched her blush.

When the first flying class met, Viktor was amused when the students all wanted to ask questions instead of learn to fly, except one student, Alexei.

Alexei demonstrated the basics for first time flyers. Then he showed off, at Viktor's command, what they were going to learn that year. An astonished Harry Potter was watching from the gateway. The first-year students were all crowding around Alexei, asking him every question they could think of about flying.

Viktor spotted Harry and walked over to him. "So, how goes married life, my friend?"

Laughing, Harry replied, "Fantastic. Gin is already breeding. We've picked the name Thuban for the child. I never, ever thought I would be this happy, Viktor."

"Just wait until you hold that child in your hands, Harry. A child born of the love you share with someone is the most powerful magic there is. Even if that child is not your own, it is still very powerful magic. I got to hold Alexei just minutes after he was born. Karoly wanted me to share in the magic that was his son, now my son. Congratulations."

"Just wanted to tell you to bring Herms to the Manor for her birthday this weekend. Draco and Gin want to make it a big celebration. The Weasleys, her parents, Neville and Hannah, your parents, everyone accepted the invitations. Molly is doing the cake, so be prepared for a really big to-do. The Moodys are coming as well. Do not tell her...it is supposed to be a surprise."

"I will tell her Ginny needs help with decorating the baby's room or some such nonsense. We will be there. Are the Weasleys bringing the children? Alexei would love to see his friends again."

"Yes, Teddy has been asking about his friend Alex. The kids will be there. See you this weekend, then."

The week sped by after an incident where two seventh-year girls tried to break into the Flying teacher's rooms. They were not to know that the Flying teacher and the Ancient Runes teacher shared quarters. The whole staff had a laugh about it. On Friday, the Ancient Runes class got another treat. Hermione called on a different student than Alexei, and he pouted.

"Mr. Krum, I know you know the answers to these questions. I want to see if any of your classmates know the answers."

Without thinking about what he was saying, Alexei answered, "Yes, Mama. I understand."

He realised what he had just said and turned scarlet with embarrassment. The class roared with laughter, and one boy leaned over and said, "I'm glad I don't have to have my mum as a teacher. Oh, yeah, both your parents are teachers here, aren't they? I wouldn't trade places with you for any amount of Galleons."

But after class, that same boy asked Alexei if he could help him with his Ancient Runes translations. It looked like Alexei was going to make friends despite having teachers as parents.

Viktor had a quiet dinner planned with Alexei and Hermione for Friday evening. Harry had given them permission to stay at Grimmauld Place for the night. Draco came by as they were heading to the fireplace in Minerva's office to say, "Hermes, Ginny wants you to come by tomorrow. She needs your opinion on the baby's room. Please, we can all have a birthday lunch together."

"Oh, sure, Draco. We'll be there around ten. I can't wait to talk to Ginny about the baby."

Viktor had done the packing, without Hermione's knowledge, for their trip to London, so there were plenty of changes of clothes for all three of them. Once they had arrived at Grimmauld Place, Alexei ran off to talk to Cestita, who reported that Master Draco was a very good master now. She showed Alexei her new tea-towel uniform complete with embroidered apron.

"But that is not being all, Master Alexei: Master Draco, and Master Harry have asked me to come to Malfoy Manor and be nursemaid to coming baby. They are going to make me take two days off every week, to do things for me. That is being strange."

Hermione had heard the whole thing and giggled at Draco's transformation. She told Alexei to go get dressed for dinner, that they were going somewhere fancy. When she returned upstairs, she saw Viktor had packed more clothes than what she thought they would need.

"Is there something you aren't telling me, Vitya? You and Draco have set something up to get me to help Ginny, haven't you? And Harry was in on it, too. It is okay. I do want to make sure the Triad is happy. And helping to plan for a baby is always fun."

Viktor breathed a sigh of relief that she had not guessed the real reason for the trip to Malfoy Manor. "Yes, love, it was discussed. Sorry I did not tell you. I had to come up with more creative ways of avoiding the more zealous fangirls. Draco suggested I consult his godfather, now that the man is no longer teaching. Snape has not gotten any more likeable in the intervening years. He finally gave me an aversion potion aimed at females who were still students. It seems to be working."

"He should be nicer to you, at least. You're the one who realised he was still alive when we went to retrieve his body. The Durmstrang spells you used almost certainly saved his life. It's too bad if his voice never regained the timbre it had before. You were right before that he and Dumbledore yanked Harry around like a marionette. I just do not like the man, even if he was a hero. Zip me up, please. I can't reach the zipper in this dress."

"I'd rather be taking it off of you. But we are due at Mario's, aren't we? Is Alexei ready? He seems to be making friends already. Or is it just because he helps the students who are having trouble?"

"You'd be surprised. He already has friends. And a female following. The Creevey girl is a year older and seems to like him very much. What Alexei thinks about girls, I do not know."

"Enough, we are going to be late for dinner. We can question him over dessert."

They gathered up Alexei and Disapparated to the restaurant. Mario himself was waiting to seat them, wanting to question Viktor about Quidditch. Viktor answered his questions and ordered the wine. A waiter came to take their dinner order shortly thereafter.

Alexei was fidgeting and looking anxious. Viktor asked him to be patient.

"But, Papa, it is her birthday. Can't I please give her my gift?"

Viktor rolled his eyes, then grinned and handed Alexei a small package wrapped in gold paper with a red bow. "Yes, scamp, give her the present."

Alexei solemnly stood up next to Hermione's chair and kissed her cheek. "Here, Mama, I had Papa get these made for you. The diamonds were in Mayka's wedding earrings, but they were ugly. I wanted to have something completely new for you. I hope you like them."

Hermione was so surprised that she almost couldn't open the package. The earrings were round pink diamonds set into rose gold settings shaped like roses.

"Oh, Alexei, they're beautiful. Thank you so much." She hugged him and kissed his cheek as he grinned madly.

Viktor was smiling at the two of them as he handed Hermione another package wrapped in gold paper. "This is the one I had designed for you. Happy birthday, my love. I hope it suits you."

Once opened, the gift was revealed as a rose gold locket shaped like a closed book with a pink diamond heart pendant hanging from it. A rose gold chain suspended the locket just at Hermione's collarbone.

"Oh, Vitya, oh my, I love it. I love you both. This has been the most wonderful birthday."

"Love, open the locket. Inside it are all of the letters we wrote to each other those years we were apart. I used your miniaturising spell to put all of them in there."

"Oh, dear, even the one where I was grumbling about Umbridge? I'm surprised that one didn't self destruct, I was so furious at that woman." The thought made her laugh.

After dinner, Viktor took his family back to Grimmauld Place and put Alexei to bed.

"We have to be up and at Malfoy Manor by ten, young man. Your friends will all be there. Now go to sleep."

"Papa, is it going to be another party for her birthday? It just seems like something Uncle Harry and Uncle Draco would do."

"Shhhh, scamp. We don't want her to guess. Good night, son. I love you."

"Night, Papa. I love you, too. Tell Mama I love her. And that I want a little sister or brother soon, okay?"

Viktor rolled his eyes at his son, trying very hard not to laugh.

Once back in the bedroom, Viktor conveyed Alexei's love to Hermione with words and actions. She had told him earlier of her decision to quit taking the contraceptive potions.

As they lay talking, he voiced the thoughts that had been on his mind all day.

"I'm glad we waited, love. Now, Quidditch won't separate us several times a month. We can focus on family and teaching. There are friends around and no danger anymore. I agree it is time we enlarged our family. I just don't want Alexei to feel like he is pushed aside by our own children."

"That won't happen, Vitya. He is as much my son as he is yours. You should know that by now. He even forgets and calls me Mama in class. He'll always be our first."

"Next summer would be a perfect time to welcome a new little Krum, my love."

"I am hoping that will be the case, if you cooperate, of course."

"Shall I show you my cooperation again, love?" Viktor chuckled.

"Yes, please, and much more slowly this time." Hermione giggled as Viktor's hands roamed over her body.

In the morning, there was a knock on the bedroom door. Viktor pulled on his red silk pyjama bottoms and answered the door. Alexei stood there with the little house-elf, Cestita; they were both holding breakfast trays.

Viktor laughed and waved them into the room. "*Mnogo blagodaria*, Cestita, Alexei."

Hermione was still sleeping when Cestita set the elfin crystal vase of roses on the bedside table next to her. *Dobro utro*, Mistress Hermione."

Alexei and Cestita scampered out of the room before Hermione was totally awake. Viktor was very glad his son had the little elf to aid and abet his good intentions. He bent to kiss Hermione who stirred, stretching and opening her eyes.

"Did someone bring tea? I smell tea and breakfast. Oh, Viktor, last night was heaven. Let me shower and we'll eat right here in the room."

He kissed her and let her run off to the shower. The trays were set on the small table in front of the fireplace when she emerged several minutes later. Her tea was fixed exactly the way she preferred it, and her toast had been spread with blackcurrant jam. Viktor was already dressed, having used the shower in Alexei's bathroom. He had laid out jeans and a shirt for Hermione to wear.

As soon as they finished breakfast, Cestita showed up and gathered up the trays and dishes. She moved the vase of roses to the table and, with a bit of elfin magic, made a circlet for Hermione's hair from the blooms.

"In honour of your birthday, Mistress. These are dragon roses and will not die. Have a wonderful day."

Hermione packed up their things after making sure Alexei had packed as well.

Cestita was waving to them as they all stepped into the fireplace in the library to Floo to Malfoy Manor.

## Surprise

### Chapter 9 of 9

Some years past the fall of Voldemort, five friends find their lives have changed.

When they arrived, Draco was feeding digestive biscuits to Ginny, who was slightly green. Harry explained, "Gin has been having morning sickness really bad. Molly said that the digestive biscuits and weak tea were the best remedy. But I think Draco may call in his godfather for a potion or two."

Hermione hugged Ginny, Draco and Harry before replying, "How is Severus these days? Has his demeanour improved any? It really is strange not to see him in the Potions classroom."

Draco laughingly answered her, "He is as supercilious as ever. He doesn't think Bill is up to teaching Potions as ruthlessly as he did, however."

Hermione just shook her head and asked Ginny if she was up to showing her the baby's room. Ginny brightened immediately and got up to lead her friend upstairs.

Draco and Harry shooed Viktor and Alexei to follow the girls.

Ginny said suddenly, "Oh, I forgot, the magazine that has the pictures is here in the ballroom; let's run in and get it."

Hermione followed Ginny into the very large ballroom to find all of her friends and family waiting for her with a huge cake and a banner that read, 'Happy Birthday Hermione.'

Everyone yelled surprise so loudly that the chandelier shook. Viktor watched his lady look around at everyone and laugh. She turned back to him and said, "You knew about this, I know you did. I feel like I have been subjected to the Wronski Feint."

"Nothing so drastic, love. Just a simple ruse to lure you here to a party with all our friends and family. They all love you as much as I do."

Everyone crowded around Hermione to give her their gifts or to hug her, so Viktor stepped over close to Harry, who was grinning like a lunatic.

"Thanks for getting her here early. This party may finally convince her that people do love her. She has always been very diffident. She never liked the spotlight, except for the Yule Ball with you. You have made her happier and more carefree than I have ever seen her. I have to tell you that Draco, Ginny, and I are overjoyed that you two will be getting married, finally. Herms is as good as my sister, so I guess you'll have to put up with me as a brother-in-law."

Arthur Weasley had walked up behind them and put in his own comment, "And you'll have almost the whole Weasley clan as in-laws as well, Viktor. The Moodys, too, I believe. I know Hermione's parents love you already. You are the best thing that ever happened to that girl. Thank you."

"The same goes for Hannah and me, too, Viktor. It is like watching a rose bush you thought had gone dormant spring back into full bloom again. And you are the reason." Neville Longbottom had joined the group.

Draco walked up, handed Viktor a glass of wine and said casually, "So, what are you hoping the first baby will be, Vik?"

Viktor almost choked on the mouthful of wine he had just drunk.

Draco just smiled and continued, "*Posdrawlenia* from the three of us. I am getting lessons in Bulgarian from your child. He has taken on the education of Draco Malfoy as some sort of quest. I am learning Muggle things, Bulgarian things, and a lot about myself."

Viktor started laughing so hard Hermione came to see what he was laughing about. She rolled her eyes at Draco and Harry, but kissed them both on the cheek. "Thank you for this party, guys. I appreciate it very much."

Harry looked at her and said very solemnly, "Without you I would never have been able to defeat Riddle. You kept me sane and on track for seven years, Herms. You kept Gin safe as well. You were always there when I needed someone to talk to, a shoulder to cry on, and a good friend. We all love you, as much as Vik and Alexei do."

Draco had a brilliant idea and acted on it immediately. "Everyone, not only is this Hermione's birthday party, it is now her engagement party. There is more cake and more wine. Drink up."

The party went on for several more hours until everyone was exhausted. The walls and halls of Malfoy Manor had never rung with the joy of friends and family the way they did that evening.

Once the younger children had been put to bed, the adults sat in the library chatting. Viktor's parents were talking earnestly to Hermione's parents while Molly and Arthur Weasley added comments every so often. The topic of discussion was the upcoming wedding. Both sets of parents were aghast that there was nothing to plan.

Hermione was wearing her dress from the shop in Chelsea. Viktor was going to wear a black tuxedo with a red cummerbund. The Great Hall was to be decorated by the house-elves; the menu was to be handled by them as well.

There was literally nothing for either set of parents to handle, until Draco Malfoy happened to walk by and dropped a word in Molly's ear. "There is always the reception and/or the rehearsal dinner. Her parents or his might like to organise those. I was never here, and you never heard those words from me, Molly."

"You're welcome, Draco. I knew those digestive biscuits and the peppermint tea would get rid of her morning sickness. It isn't good to give a pregnant woman too many potions," Molly said loudly, apparently in answer to whatever Draco had said to her.

They winked at each other and went back to their respective groups. The guest list was brought up to the engaged couple, who pared the list to friends, family, fellow teachers, and Viktor's former teammates.

Alastor Moody showed up a bit later, apologising that Minerva had been detained at the school. "The Creevey girl was distraught. She had brought some of her brother Colin's pictures to school and was going to give them to Hermione since they were of the Yule Ball. She was crying her poor little heart out that she hadn't been able to do that. She also misses Alexei. Anyway, here is the present from Min and me, Hermione. You take care of yourself, you hear. Night everyone." And he disappeared back into the fireplace.

Hermione opened the present after saying, "That was a bit out of character for Alastor, wasn't it? Oh, Viktor, look. There's a note from Minerva and all this lace."

She handed him the note, which he proceeded to read aloud, "Dearest Hermione, having discussed this with Alastor, we decided to give you my wedding veil. It is made of Acromantula silk and the spangles are Nessie scales. Yours will be the first wedding ever performed at Hogwarts, and we are thrilled at your choice of husband. Many blessings on you both. Love, Minerva and Alastor."

Hermione took the lace veil out of the box and showed it to everyone. It wasn't a large veil, more like a mantilla than a veil. The lacework was exquisitely fine. Molly said it was fairy work.

Rayna Krum, Viktor's mother, said that the spangles, which formed two roses on the sides of the veil, would probably change colour to match Hermione's dress.

Hermione gently folded the veil and put it back into the box. Her look at Viktor said she was suddenly very tired.

He took the hint and said, "Thank you everyone. It was a lovely party, but I think Alexei and Hermione are both worn out."

Harry realised that the present from the Moodys had somehow shocked Hermione and said quickly, "We have rooms set aside for you and Alexei. Come on, I'll show you to them."

Alexei followed Harry as Viktor took Hermione's hand. He knew she was dealing with some memory that was too emotional for her just then.

Once in their room, Viktor said, "You are not yourself, love. Please tell me what is bothering you."

"A long time ago, during the war, those of us in the Order were pretty much living in each other's pockets at Grimmauld Place. One night I snuck out of the room I shared with Gin and went down to the library to read. I was hiding in the only alcove with a curtain when Remus and Arthur came into the room; apparently, Minerva and Alastor, who were still estranged at the time, had had a whacking great row in the kitchen that night, and Remus was asking Arthur what was up with them.

"Arthur said they had married during World War II and stayed together until the year after the Marauders got to Hogwarts. That was the year that Alastor was injured so badly. Minerva had been carrying their only child, a daughter, at the time. When she came to St. Mungo's and saw his injuries, she lost the baby. Arthur made Remus promise not to tell anyone. Everyone was so overjoyed when they finally got back together that the story stayed *sub rosa*. I only know it because I was eavesdropping, albeit unintentionally. Their giving me her veil makes me feel so guilty for knowing. Viktor, I don't know what to do," she wailed, almost in tears.

Viktor held her and calmed her down, telling her he was going to get some tea for her. He left the room and went downstairs to the sitting room after ordering tea from a house-elf.

"Arthur, I think you and Molly need to come upstairs and talk to Hermione. She is feeling very guilty about something that happened years ago. I must let her tell you; I cannot break her confidence."

Arthur answered him, sighing sadly, "I think I know what it is, Viktor. This is about the night I told Lupin about Minerva and Alastor, isn't it? When we were all going up to bed later that night, Molly did a spell to see where everyone was. She told me Hermione was reading in the library. I knew the child had heard what I said. Yes, we'll come. Min and Alastor both know that she knows. I think that may be why they gave her the veil. They both love her like a daughter. Bloody hell, we all do."

They ascended the stairs to find Hermione sitting on the bed, holding the veil, crying like her heart was breaking.

Viktor gently took the veil and handed it to Molly. The Weasleys sat on the sofa near the fireplace and Viktor picked Hermione up and sat down in the wing back chair with her on his lap.

"Love, you must listen to what Arthur and Molly have to tell you."

When they had explained that both Minerva and Alastor knew she had overheard Arthur, she raised her head and stopped crying. "They don't hate me? I was so worried. I felt guilty that I had been eavesdropping. And I couldn't tell anyone that I knew. I was miserable that year."

Arthur reached over and patted her hand, saying, "They have known since right after that night, child. That was actually the catalyst that made them get back together. They

were impressed that you kept the secret just as I had asked Remus to do. Don't fret about this anymore. It is past history. You have a wedding to look forward to now. Ah, there is your tea. We'll just go on back downstairs. Thanks for coming to get us, Viktor. Get some rest, Hermione. We'll see you both in the morning."

Viktor closed the door behind them and returned to where Hermione sat on the bed. "Drink your tea, love. I'll run you a bath with some of these bath salts. Oho, the label on the bath salts says 'calming, soothing, sensual bath salts by SS Laboratories'; what do you want to bet that is Snape? The scent is Rosemary and Bergamot. Very nice. You just relax in there for a few minutes while I check on Alexei."

By the time Viktor got back to the room, Hermione was asleep in the tub. He lifted her out, dried her off, and put her to bed.

The next few weeks were spent preparing for their wedding and teaching. Celeste Creevey had attached herself to Hermione like a limpet. The girl wanted to know about her oldest brother, Colin, who had died at the Battle of Hogwarts. Alexei took her to the memorial and gave her the same talk that Harry had given him.

The festivities on Samhain that year were a bit more exuberant than previous years. The students were treated to an outdoor show of fireworks donated by Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes.

Hermione had been a bit down since finding that she was not pregnant yet. She had voiced her concerns to Ginny, who had sent her a potion in return.

"*You take this one and give your Bulgarian a couple of drops of Felix Felicis in his vodka. Do it tonight. Will work wonders, I promise*" bread the note accompanying the potion.

After they had herded the students back into the school after the fireworks, Viktor and Hermione retired to their quarters about eleven. Hermione quickly downed her potion and added the few drops of golden liquid to Viktor's nightly glass of vodka.

Viktor let himself be seduced by his beautiful fiancée several times that night, unaware of potions and schemes.

November sped by with rain and light snows. December brought the heaviest snow the school had seen in years. The landscape was covered in soft, enveloping white. Most of the students left for the holidays two days before the wedding.

Ginny, Draco and Harry had arrived early to help set things up for the wedding. Hermione had taken her friend up to the guest rooms they were to use and said casually, "It worked, Gin. The potion worked. I haven't told Viktor yet. I am saving that for right after the wedding. I am so happy."

Ginny, whose waist now had disappeared entirely, just laughed at her friend's delighted face.

"I am so glad. Now I won't feel alone in this condition. He should be ecstatic."

Christmas morning found Hermione alone, as Harry and Draco had hauled Viktor off the night before after the rehearsal dinner. The last thing she had heard as Harry was forcing Viktor out the door was, "No, Viktor, you can't spend the night with the bride. It is bad luck to see her before the wedding. We have a wonderful room prepared for you in the dungeons."

Ginny, Rayna Krum, and her own mother had come to help her get dressed. The circlet of Dragon roses that Cestita had made held the veil that the Moodys had given her. The spangles had indeed turned blush pink to match her dress. Neville and Hannah had shown up as well with a bouquet of hothouse flowers Neville swore were non-magical.

Finally, it was time. Hermione's father had appeared at the door to lead her down to the Great Hall. But at the top of the stairs, there were ten other men waiting for her. They formed an honour guard around her as she descended the stairs. Harry and Neville were at the front, followed by Arthur and Alastor, then the twins on either side of her and her father, with Draco, Bill, Charlie, and Percy following behind. Fred, to her right, kept telling her she didn't have to marry the Bulgarian, and she kept shushing him.

Suddenly, they were at the doors to the Great Hall. Two of Viktor's teammates held the doors open as the group passed into the room. They bowed slightly to Hermione as she passed by them.

The Minister of Magic asked the question, "Who gives this woman in marriage?"

All eleven men surrounding her said, "We do."

Her father gave her hand to Viktor, who kissed it. They faced Kingsley Shacklebolt, who moved aside for Harry to read the binding. Draco stood at Viktor's side and Ginny at Hermione's side. Alexei stood next to Harry.

Harry asked them if they were prepared for a journey of discovery and adventure. He warned them that it would not always be smooth sailing. He asked if they were very sure of their love for each other.

"As you both have answered yes to my queries, I direct you now to speak your vows to each other to complete this binding."

Viktor took both of Hermione's hands in his much larger ones, saying, "I pledge my life, my love, my fidelity, and my future to you. I take you as my wife with joy and undying love. I bring you all my worldly possessions, my faith, and my magic. I am yours now and forever."

He slipped the ring Draco handed him onto Hermione's right ring finger where it began to glow.

Hermione responded immediately, "I pledge my life, my love, my fidelity, and my future to you. I take you as my husband with joy and undying love. I bring you all my worldly possessions, my faith, and my magic. I am yours now and forever."

She slipped the gold band Ginny handed her on the ring finger of Viktor's right hand where it began to glow.

Harry smiled and said, "Those of you present who wish to add blessings or wishes to the binding may do so now."

The murmurs in the room swelled with the magic of the blessings.

Harry made one further statement, "Now, if the bride and groom will finish their additional vows, I will declare them bound."

Viktor and Hermione held out their hands to Alexei, who moved forward to stand with them. They said, in unison, "We take Alexei Karolyevitch Krum to be our eldest son, in love and faith. Henceforth, we are a family."

Harry smiled and said, "I pronounce you bound to each other and to this child. May your lives be filled with love and happiness."

The room erupted with cheers, and Viktor, Hermione and Alexei made their way back to the doors. At the doors, Viktor took her face in his hands and kissed her passionately. She only had time to whisper one phrase to him.

"We're pregnant, Vitya."

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Mayka...Mama

Baba...Grandmother

Dado...Grandfather

Mnogo blagodaria...Thank you very much.

Dobro utro...Good Morning

Posdrawlenia...Congratulations