

Finding Harry

by blue artemis

Hermione and her friends and family were not content conquering Voldemort. This story is what happens next. This is the sequel to *Dumbledore's Hubris* and will probably make more sense if you read that first.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 9

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"I can't believe that bugging old man! How dare he destroy us because Harry had strength and potential!" James yelled his frustrations to the heavens, running his hands through his hair.

"James, love, yelling isn't going to help." Lily soothed.

Remus sat on the sofa with his head in his hands while Sirius paced back and forth, his jaw clenched in anger.

"Lils, don't tell me you aren't angry," James responded.

"You know I am. But yelling is not going to accomplish anything, and we don't want to scare Harry when he gets here. Wherever *here* is, today."

Remus spoke from the sofa. "I think this is the Gryffindor common room."

The rest looked around and smiled at the memories the space evoked. They turned toward the portrait-hole which had swung open, as though someone had spoken the password.

Lily rushed toward Harry, her arms open to embrace him, slightly bending her knees, when she paused; the man coming toward her was taller than she, and she wasn't particularly sure if he would welcome her hug. "Oh, honey. We really didn't want to see you this soon."

Harry looked into sorrowful green eyes, very much like his own. He shook his head. "I thought you wanted me to go to my death peacefully?" He looked around at his parents, Sirius and Remus.

"It would have done you no good to fight it, pup. Dumbledore made it so you never had a chance." It was amazing he could get anything out of his mouth, though, considering how tightly he had his jaw clenched. Harry's puzzled expression deepened when Sirius attempted to smile.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"Just listen." Lily ran a soothing hand down her son's back. Harry looked at his mother, puzzled about what she might want him to hear when Hermione's voice flooded the room. He whirled around, trying to find his best friend, but she wasn't there. He froze, arrested by her words.

"I came to see if I could get his body away. He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named has won. Harry is really dead. He may have had control of the Elder Wand, but he didn't know it and went to his death just the way the idiot headmaster wanted him to. A living being with a will could not be a Horcrux. If he had been, Harry would have been possessed ages ago. I wish I had known that was what the stupid old man based his whole 'Greater Good' on. If I ever get a chance, I'm going to torture his portrait with the knowledge. Harry died for nothing."¹

"Too bad the Pronglet didn't pick anywhere out in the open, instead of the common room. Then we could see what was going on," Sirius complained.

"You are an idiot, Padfoot." Remus strode over to the mirror hanging over the side table and tapped it. The mirror enlarged and the images of Hermione, Viktor and what looked like Severus Snape's corpse became visible.

A burst of vitriolic bickering broke out somewhere behind him, capturing Harry's attention. Lily waved her wand and James and Sirius were Silenced. Harry watched his family in bemusement, then thought about what he had heard. "Are you kidding me? Hermione figured out Dumbledore was wrong? Why didn't she... never mind. I wouldn't have listened to her, and neither would the old man. He only wanted us together as long as it fit into his plan because I *had* to save the world." Harry's eyes narrowed and his expression was grim. "I was a perfect little puppet, wasn't I?"

James walked over to Harry and waved at his mouth frantically. Harry smiled then waved his wand at his father, "*Finite!*"

"Son, your life was a set up. All of our lives were a set up, I believe. I'm not certain why Dumbledore wanted to have us killed, but maybe we can find out. Hermione is most certainly going to be someone to keep an eye on for a while. Then maybe we can figure out what to do." James paced as he spoke, his words tinged with despair and uncertainty, his hands in his hair again.

"Well, first off, dear, we find a way to get Harry back to the land of the living. We are in that in-between place right now; he isn't dead exactly, so he needs to go back and finally live. Secondly, stop running your hands through your hair. If it was untamable before, it is impossible now."

The Potter men looked at each other and grinned.

"Absolutely, Lily."

"Thanks, Mum."

The other Marauders looked on, then Remus clapped his hand on Sirius' shoulder while Sirius smirked.

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Hermione sighed. She was sitting in her small office at Gringotts, contemplating her life. She didn't seem to be particularly *necessary* at the moment. She had completed her basic apprenticeship with the goblin Ward-Master, Roklag, but in order for her to become a recognized Ward-Master, she had to design her own ward systems. She had completed a set for her home that had pleased her master, but she needed to create two more. She was doodling on a piece of paper, waiting for Severus to come by and visit with some news and take-away for lunch. *I'm so glad I overheard him talking to Viktor all those years ago after the Yule Ball. After everything, I'm so glad to have an uncle to love.*

She checked her list. Arthur Weasley had asked that she redesign the wards for the Department of Mysteries. *Wasn't that a surprise, my first day as an Unspeakable and I find out Arthur is the boss. He hides out in plain sight so well.*

As a secondary job, he asked her to find his family, what was left of it, and see if they were content. He hadn't heard from Charlie in a while, and he wasn't certain what had happened to Bill. Rabastan had enough of a healthy respect for the Head Unspeakable to make certain he got to see his daughter often, and Percy had learned a harsh lesson. He made certain to eat with his father at least once a week. Hermione chuckled to herself as she thought of Rabastan Lestrange. After being freed from Bella's Imperius and marrying Ginny, he had become a good friend: funny, intelligent and smart enough not to anger his new-found family. Looking down at her list, she sighed again.

"My dearest darling niece, is that a sigh of discontent?"

"Yes, Uncle Sev, it is. I need a project."

"Hermione, child, most people would be overwhelmed with what you consider not enough."

"I know, Uncle Sev, but that is just, I don't know, *school work*. I need something more worthwhile, I guess. And by the way, don't you think I'm a bit old for you to be calling me child? That was fine when I was fourteen, but now, with your wife only a few years older than me, it is a bit much, don't you think?" Hermione's voice conveyed both affection and asperity.

"A new name for you? I can think of a few... harridan, harpy, hoyden... "

"Is alliteration your new pastime, then?"

Severus snorted. "Keep that up, and I shall take points whenever you call me Uncle Sev."

They both burst out laughing.

"Back to what I was saying before you interrupted me, that is excellent. Then that means you will be happy to get Hogwarts back in working order."

"I thought it was?" Hermione was confused.

"The castle was portioned off. The parts that are usable are just that, but we want to restore it to its former glory, and that will take a bit more precise work from those powerful enough to do it. I believe a re-working of the wards would fit the last requirement of your Mastery."

"How Slytherin of you! In any case, helping re-design the wards for Hogwarts sounds wonderful, Uncle Sev." Hermione winked, knowing no points would be taken.

Severus smiled. He was very pleased his family would be with him at the school.

Hermione interrupted his reverie. "What will Katie be doing?"

"Hopefully raising our child and working on whatever schooling she wishes to pursue." Severus bowed his head, hiding under his hair, uncertain of Hermione's response.

"Child? She's pregnant? Oh, Uncle Sev, I'm so happy for you!" Hermione threw her arms around her favorite relative.

She quickly turned to her things, ready to join her husband at Hogwarts. "Uncle, is it all right with you if I surprise Viktor? He isn't expecting me for another couple of weeks."

"Be my guest, Hurricane. He could use the lift; he's obviously been missing you. But don't you want to eat first?" Severus held up the bag of fish and chips that he and

Hermione would indulge in once in a while.

Hermione grinned and pulled some plates out of her desk drawer in answer.

A/N: Many thanks to kyria, sempra and Bambu. The full thanks and origin of this story will be at the end of the final chapter. (It is complete; it is just in beta right now.)

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 9

Harry discovers just how much of a pawn he was.

After listening to Hermione expound on the evil that was Dumbledore, Lily and the Marauders gathered around Harry on the sofa. Harry looked at his loved ones, awe in his expression, and once again, with tears in his eyes, asked, "Why do I have to go back?"

Lily couldn't resist this time and threw her arms around her son. She was very pleased when he leaned into her embrace. "Sweetheart, you aren't dead. Your body is alive somewhere, so you shouldn't be here. Unfortunately, your connection to your physical self is a bit tenuous right now. We need to find a way to strengthen that for you."

Harry smiled. *So this is what having a mum feels like.* When he looked at his dad, Remus and Sirius, they were nodding like they were puppets on Lily's strings, prompting Harry to ask, "Where is my body?"

"We aren't sure. Something is keeping it hidden," Remus replied.

"If I understand the last few days, and your explanation of what can and cannot be seen from this in-between place, then my body can't be hidden by a wizard or witch because we would see that. So, something else, something powerful... I know! A house-elf!" Harry exclaimed, pleased with himself for thinking of it.

James and Sirius scoffed at him. "Harry, remember Kreacher. How in the world could you even think house-elves are powerful?" Sirius jeered.

James added, "They love to work and cook and clean. They aren't powerful."

Harry just looked at them in disbelief. "You know," he said, "I kept hoping beyond hope that Snape was wrong about you two and you weren't stupid pureblood bullies. He was right. You *are* no better than all those Slytherins who thought they were better than everyone else just because they existed. Harry leaped to his feet. "Did you know Dobby was able to blast his former master down the hallway without a wand? And you mentioned Kreacher? He kept Regulus' secret and was a masterful fighter and a great help once he realized we wanted the same thing. He survived a poison that would have killed Dumbledore if Snape hadn't been forced to kill him under oath. Bah. I don't even want to look at you two right now." Harry paced back and forth, his voice rising as his steps quickened, he turned his back on the two men abruptly and marched over to the mirror.

James and Sirius looked at each other questioningly. "What the hell is he talking about, Prongs? House-elves aren't good for anything but simple work no one else does."

"I'm not sure, Padfoot. Maybe all those years of living with Lily's crazy relatives warped him."

Remus shook his head at the idiots he called his best friends. Death had finally given Remus Lupin a backbone. "You just don't get it, and probably never will. You never apologized to Severus for the way you treated him; you assume Harry thinks just like you. He doesn't. He was mistreated and ostracized for most of his childhood and thought of as a savior for the rest. I wish I had been half as brave as he is. At least then I would've had friends who believed in me and didn't use me as a murder weapon."

He walked over to Lily and Harry, who were trying to figure out who might have his body.

James and Sirius were quietly arguing on the sofa. "Padfoot, maybe we need to look at this from Harry's point of view. Lily's looking at me like she did for most of our first five years of Hogwarts. I'd like to think I've grown past being a toe-rag."

"Why do you think you're wrong, Prongs? Maybe it's them." Sirius was implacable.

Suddenly there was an odd whine from the mirror, sort of an alarm, or the whiny noise made by someone getting too close to a microphone. All five of the occupants of the common room turned to look. The mirror showed the Atrium at the Ministry of Magic.

A frighteningly benevolent Voldemort addressed the large gathering while gesturing to his guests of honor, Hermione standing at Viktor Krum's and Severus Snape's sides and Katie Bell at the far side of Snape. "We are here today to witness her questioning, under a truth spell, of the only wizarding portrait of the so-called great Albus Dumbledore. After that, we will witness his final destruction at the hands of Severus Snape, who asked for nothing."

The gathered assembly gasped as one as the portrait was unveiled.

"Hello, Miss Granger. Have you decided to set aside your childish grudge and come to me for advice?" The portrait of Albus Dumbledore was smug in his self-aggrandizement.

"Oh, no, sir. I have some questions for you. Now, first of all Vir Du Fabrica, Dico Verum!"

The portrait of Albus flinched when the spell hit him. "Now, Miss Granger, anything you ask me could be vital to winning the war. Are you certain you want to do this in this sort of venue?"

Hermione laughed. "You mean no one has told you, Albus? The war is over. We lost."

The portrait looked stunned. "That isn't possible. The last was in Harry. My plan should have worked. Didn't he give himself up willingly?"

Harry gritted his teeth. He *had* given himself up willingly, just as Dumbledore had planned. At his side, James clenched his fists and shifted closer to the mirror. Sirius made a comment about Dumbledore's probable ancestry, and Lily shushed him as she leaned closer to the mirror.

The Dark Lord laughed. "He most certainly did, Albus. Your sacrificial lamb was quite willing to be a martyr. But why would I pass up an opportunity to finally kill him? And yes, I now live! Britain is bowing to my will and I am reshaping society. It will be a paradise, Albus, and you will have nothing to do with it."

"We'll see about that," Harry muttered.

Albus's painted face looked pained. "I was not interested in shaping society, Tom."

Hermione interjected icily, "No, not society. You were only interested in playing chess with real people as your pieces." She turned to the Dark Lord. "May I begin the questioning, sir?"

"Most certainly, Miss Granger."

Hermione turned to the portrait. "Why did you turn your back on Slytherin?"

"I needed a scapegoat."

"Why did you hurt Severus so badly when he was a student? Why would you choose Sirius over him?"

"He wasn't valuable. At the time, I thought I could influence the Black heir to give me his money as the Potter heir did."

"Why did you turn on Sirius?"

"He would never raise a martyr. I needed someone who would worship me."

"Why did you abandon Harry to Petunia?"

"Do you have any idea of his power, girl? It is the same reason I wanted you to marry Ronald Weasley. Power. When the Potter heir married that Evans girl, the match of power was huge. I could not have another child loose in the world who would end up more powerful than I am. His poor nutrition and stunted growth was necessary to keep his magic under control."

"You wanted to match me up to Ronald Weasley because my power was going to be hindered by his?"

"Of course. If you married Mr. Krum, or Harry, your children would be very powerful. I have done my best to discourage powerful matches. In that matter, Tom did a lot of my work for me. He destroyed the powerful Muggle-borns or half-bloods, ensuring that the power was muted."

A growl emanated from the Dark Lord, who realized his whole blood-purification agenda fit right into the old chessmaster's plan.

Lily turned to Harry, her green-eyes wide in disbelief. "Harry, we really need to figure out why you wouldn't listen to that girl. She's brilliant."

"I know, Mum," Harry said. "Wow, we weren't even chess pieces. I don't even know what to call what he was doing."

They turned back to the mirror. Even James and Sirius were captivated by the things revealed, although they were whispering like school-boys.

"Prongs, how could anyone follow that snake-faced bastard?"

"I don't know, Padfoot, but then again, I never did. Not everyone could be as good-looking as we are."

Lily turned, ready to blast the two immature idiots, when she saw they were trying to keep the commentary light on purpose. James was running his hands through his hair again, and Sirius was unsuccessfully trying to keep the growl out of his voice.

A hissing voice interjected. "I have heard enough! Severus, do you have anything to ask this old man before you destroy him?"

"Yes, my Lord." Severus bowed to the Conqueror, then turned to the portrait. "You wanted me to die, didn't you?"

"Yes. I can't even imagine the power of your children should you procreate."

"What do you think of Miss Bell, Albus?"

"I am very glad she is interested in Oliver Wood. As with Miss Granger, it is best to keep her from a truly powerful wizard."

"What would you say if I told you she was my wife?"

"I would have to find a way to manipulate someone into killing her. You cannot be allowed to have children together, Severus. That kind of power is hard to harness."

"I truly hate you, Albus." Severus looked to his wife, who nodded at him, then pointed his wand at the portrait. "Fiendfyre!"

"Oh, go, Snape!" Harry cheered, pumping his fist into the air. He turned back to the mirror. "Wait, he's married to Katie? Blimey."

"Oi! Snivellus must've had his marriage arranged. I can't think of a witch that would have him otherwi---"

SMACK! The sound of Lily's hand hitting Sirius' cheek reverberated through the room. Sirius raised his hand up to his smarting cheek and looked at his best friend. James, who knew better than to disrespect Severus Snape after all this time, just shook his head, his hand fisted in his hair.

Harry's laughter rang through the room. "Mum, you're just like Hermione. Or maybe the other way around. She slapped Draco a good one third year. She had the same exact look on her face that you do now."

Remus and Lily laughed at that bit of nostalgia. Remus looked thoughtful for a bit. "Harry, where is Kreacher? He might know where your body is; you are still his master, especially if you aren't dead."

Harry grinned in excitement. "You're right, Remus. I hope he's at Hogwarts, like I told him to be." His speech grew rapid as he sounded out some ideas. "Maybe Hermione is there, and we can start something. Is there any way to contact someone down there, I mean without the Resurrection stone?"

Lily answered, "I'm not sure, Harry, maybe we can contact a ghost to find out? Then we could pass on a message."

Harry spun around on his heel, as though he were remembering something. "Too bad I can't just call a house-elf. They're great at carrying messages and keeping secrets."

"Who would you call?" asked Remus.

"Dobby!" Harry exclaimed. "He saved my life. I trust him more than just about anyone."

A pop was heard. "Master Harry Potter called for Dobby?"

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 9

A few more surprises and a lemon.

When Hermione returned to Hogwarts, her thoughts were focused on the intricacies of the school's wards and the happy news about Severus and Katie. She quickly stepped out of the Floo and through the headmaster's office, heading down to the living quarters for the professors. In her preoccupation, and her desire to surprise her spouse, she didn't notice passing Cho and Charlie on the way.

"Oh, Hermione!" The voice seemingly out of nowhere made Hermione jump into a defensive posture. Once she recognized Cho, however, Hermione smiled at her.

"I'm glad you're here," Cho said, entirely unaware that she had been in any danger from startling Hermione. "We're getting some strange emanations from a couple of sections of the old castle that really shouldn't be there. There are also traces of some type of magic that feels quite familiar, although I haven't identified it. But I'm not quite trained enough to handle the two sites by myself." Cho had spoken so quickly, she made herself breathless.

Hermione slowly tucked her wand back into its holder. Charlie smiled ruefully; he had noticed Hermione's reaction and was very glad she had been quick to recognize him and his wife. *I need to talk to Cho about this. We have become a bit complacent, but not everyone has, and we certainly don't need to be felled by friendly fire.*

Hermione hadn't noticed Charlie's ruminations. She said, "I'll look into it. It's too bad we haven't found Bill yet. He could help us. Why don't you find me after dinner?"

Cho nodded.

Charlie spoke quietly, his shoulders drooping at the thought of his brother. "You are certain he isn't dead, Hermione?"

She smiled up at him. "Yes. Absolutely. We just need to find him. Fenrir still won't give anything up." Her eyes shifted, focusing on the far wall, and Charlie knew she was thinking hard. She shook her head, waved vaguely and hurried in the direction of her and Viktor's rooms.

"It must be nice to want to see your spouse that badly, don't you think?" Cho asked Charlie.

"I wouldn't know. We haven't been apart for weeks on end." Charlie didn't add the "luckily" on the end. He figured it was implied.

Cho couldn't decide whether Charlie meant that he was glad they hadn't been separated for that long or he wished they had, so she just let the subject drop. She was too unsure of her marriage to push.

Hermione kept moving until she reached their shared quarters. She had several topics vying for top spot in her thoughts. Katie's pregnancy. Hogwarts' wards. Cho's little mystery. Charlie's distress over his brother. Hermione knew Bill was still alive. Access to *The Book of the Dead* was restricted to Unspeakables, and she had checked and rechecked Bill's status. The actual mystery was Harry, but neither she nor any other Unspeakable knew what the wavery symbols hovering over Harry's name meant. It was a mystery she was determined to solve. She shook her head at her wandering thoughts and started the intricate wand movements that would keep Viktor from noticing she was entering the room, when he came to the door.

"Nin! You are here early!"

"Being sneaky, Vitya? What did you add to my wards?" Hermione teased her husband with a smile.

"Just something to let me know if your magical signature was within fifty yards of the wards. I wouldn't have known you were approaching with your settings, otherwise."

Hermione beamed at her husband. "Just another reason I love you, you know. You can keep me on my toes."

Viktor picked up his wife and swung her around. He kissed her passionately. After they broke off the kiss, he asked, "Do you have some news for me? Is that why you are back early?"

"Oh, yes. I get to work on the wards here and help with the restoration of the closed off parts of the castle. It dovetails nicely with my current assignment because I am supposed to help find the victims of our imprisoned werewolf."

"With one certain red-headed victim in particular?"

"Yes, darling. You do remember who my boss is." Hermione laughed. Viktor was under a variation of the Fidelius and couldn't tell anyone about Hermione's work, but she was allowed to talk to him about it. It was a common request from the Unspeakables for their spouses, especially for those not married to other Unspeakables.

Viktor laughed along with his beloved wife, then followed her into their rooms. He began to slowly remove her clothing, backing her into their bedroom.

"Vitya! What has gotten into you?"

"I think you have what I want to do reversed, loff."

Hermione laughed and nodded her agreement. Delighted by her capitulation, Viktor gave up trying to remove her clothing by hand and Vanished all of it. He also gave up trying to get to the bed, picked her up and drove himself into her, bracing her against the bedroom door. Hermione gasped in pleasure. Viktor rarely was rough with her, but when he was, he always made it good for her.

They had just finished enjoying each other when they heard the Floo. Only a couple of people had unlimited access to their quarters, so they hurriedly dressed, then went to see who it was.

"Oh, my. Did I interrupt anything?" Katie Snape snickered at their dishevelment.

Hermione straightened their clothes and hair with a wave of her wand. "Just the cuddling."

"As long as it wasn't anything important..." Katie left off with a smile as Viktor growled at her playfully. "I just wanted to make sure you were coming to dinner. Sev would like to make sure Hermione eats and is not caught up in her warding."

"Uncle Sev knows my girl vell, doesn't he?" Viktor was amused.

"Your girl is right here, you know! And who is Uncle Sev to talk? He's the same way, not to mention most everyone else in the castle right now." Hermione huffed, then laughed. "We are going to dinner. Then I'm going to go with Cho and Charlie to see about this section of the castle where they found some strange magical emanations."

Viktor looked at her hopefully. "I would like to come as vell, if that is all right with you, loff." He continued, "The elves haff been so cryptic, talking about heroes and circles, I vonder if this is vhat they are talking about."

"It would answer a few questions, wouldn't it?" Katie replied, knowing both Viktor and Severus's frustrations with the elves' evasiveness.

"Certainly! We can use anyone with magical strength and experience. You know that I would love to work with you," Hermione answered.

Plans settled, the three headed for the Great Hall. The Great Hall had been one of the first things repaired and restored. Currently, though, there weren't any house tables, or even the High Table. There were a couple large-ish round tables where everyone fit and could enjoy each other's company.

As they entered, Hermione gasped. She had been expecting her usual companions at the "family" table: Draco, his wife Luna, Neville and his wife Daphne, Severus and Katie, and whichever of the Weasleys were present, considering both Charlie and Percy were on staff. Often, the elder Malfoys were present, when Lucius's duties as Minister did not preclude his presence, but sitting at the table with Charlie and Cho were Arthur and Molly Weasley. *How did Arthur get her back? I'm surprised she's in one piece, considering her condition when Voldemort gave her to Mr. Crabbe.* Remembering her training, though, Hermione restrained herself from asking a million and one questions. *I can't believe anyone tolerated me with the way I behaved. I'm so glad Narcissa took me under her wing. Dumbledore worked so hard to make sure Muggle-borns were kept ignorant.* Molly had looked at her fearfully, only to visibly relax when the intrusive questions didn't come. Molly may have ignored quite a bit of her upbringing on the advice of her husband, and to play up to Albus Dumbledore, but in times of great stress, she liked the world around her to behave properly. It also kept magical mayhem limited because there was no accidental magic released.

In a voice gravelly from disuse, Molly said, "Hello, Hermione. It is good to see you looking so well."

"Oh, Molly! I'm glad to see you. May I give you a hug?" Hermione asked, considering what the older woman must have gone through.

Molly nodded. Hermione reached the large table, inched past Draco and gave her a gentle hug, which Molly returned, pulling the younger girl close. "Thank you for helping my Ginny. Rabastan is seeing to her well, and if it weren't for you, she would have had the same problems as most of my family. My Ron gone because he could not keep quiet, and George, my George, asking to be with his brother on the other side of the Veil... I did no great service to my younger children, did I?" Her thanks alongside her quiet self-recriminations made Hermione cry.

Hermione nodded at the older witch through her tears. "I blame Dumbledore. He was the biggest evil of our day. More so because he didn't want powerful people in charge. I was always surprised he allowed you all to survive, given that, with the exception of Ron and Percy, all the Weasleys were magically powerful."

Arthur interjected, "I tried very hard to have him underestimate us, Hermione. But magic can be like a muscle. If you don't exercise it and develop it, it atrophies. Unfortunately, Ron was lazy, and so he never worked up to his potential. I sometimes wonder if Dumbledore didn't have some sort of compulsion on him. And while Percy is not as powerful magically, he almost has a sixth sense about survival and politics. That type of gift is a variation on an empath. His gift was sidetracked, especially because he could see that there was something wrong with Dumbledore, but he could not find a way around the system in place. His choices became questionable. He is much better now, especially with Susan working with him." Arthur spoke elegantly. She could see why he usually kept quiet. It was harder for him to hide his true nature when he spoke, revealing his wisdom and knowledge.

Figuring that no one else at the table would ask, even if they were dying to know, Hermione asked, "I hadn't heard anything through the Ministry grapevine, Arthur; so how is it you were able to get Molly back safely?"

"Voldemort did not dissolve my marriage, Hermione. He just gave Molly to Mr. Crabbe. After he fell, Minister Malfoy managed to get a quick writ through the Wizengamot, giving the Unspeakables authority to retrieve those spouses who were treated in this manner. We quietly contacted all the people who were given women in such a way last week, granting amnesty if they returned them to us relatively unharmed. All but one did, and he is currently languishing in Azkaban." Arthur's face turned grim. He had known Macnair was degenerate, but what the Hit Wizards had found in his home would turn the stomach of even the most hardened assassin.

Hermione hastily changed the topic. "Where are Ginny and Rabastan?" she asked, hoping it was good news.

At that question, Molly lit up. "I'm to be a grandmother! They are at their appointment with the Healer today."

That announcement started some happy chatter at the table, which became silence when Katie Snape exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so glad I won't be going through this alone!" The rest of the table turned to Severus and Katie at her unexpected pronouncement.

"Yes, yes, fine, since my wife cannot keep a secret, yes, we are expecting as well." Severus's droll tone followed by a wince made the table break into happy chatter.

"What did you do to him, dear?" Molly leaned over to ask Katie.

"I pinched his thigh. The man can't keep good news to himself anymore, and I'm the one who cannot keep a secret?" Katie sniffed, then laughed when Severus, who had overheard her, leaned over to kiss her cheek. *Who would have thought I would learn to love his sarcastic sense of humor?*

Dinner was finished with little fanfare. Severus and Katie returned to their rooms; the headmaster always had some work to do. Arthur and Molly headed for home to wait for Ginny to contact them with the news from the Healer.

"Charlie, Cho, I am ready to go see this spot of yours. Viktor will be coming along with us," Hermione spoke briskly, her tone familiar to everyone who had been at school with her.

"I would like to come as well. Hogwarts seems to be pulling me in that direction," Luna spoke dreamily, but seriously.

"I'm coming too, in that case." Draco chimed in.

"Unfortunately, I need to return to my studies," said Daphne.

"I would like to go with you, as well," interjected Neville.

"Anyone else?" asked Hermione, looking around, then realized there was no one left. "Well, then, let's go!"

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 9

A new way of working together and a new discovery.

Harry smiled delightedly at Dobby. "Dobby! I'm so happy to see you, my friend! You were so brave to rescue us like you did."

Lily whispered to Remus, "I'm told only the strongest bond will cause an elf to sacrifice itself for a wizard."

Remus nodded. "Harry rescued Dobby from the Malfoys. Or considering everything we know now, maybe it was a set up, so that Harry would be protected."

Lily raised an eyebrow and tilted her head, trying to see *something* that would make the little elf sacrifice himself for her son.

Dobby threw his arms around Harry's legs, almost knocking him over. "Dobby would do anything for Master Harry. And anyways, you knows I could do it. Most people would not think so. What does Master Harry need Dobby to do for him?"

"I thought I told you not to call me Master. But that isn't what I wanted. Is there any way for you to contact the house-elves down at Hogwarts and see if they know what happened to my body?"

Dobby smiled slyly. "Dobby knows what happened to Master Harry's body. It was parts of plan."

Lily interjected, "Whose plan, Dobby?"

"The elveses, Missus. We knows we has to rescue Master Harry. He is one of Lady Hogwards' favorites. But all we knows how to do is keeps him steady, not hows to fix him. So Master Harry's body is as steadys as we can makes him." Dobby had a rather self-satisfied look. He knew he had done well by his Master.

"Dobby, where is my body?" Harry looked like he was about to jump out of his skin. Hermione could have told him it was the same look of desperation he had gotten just before they had decided to ride Thestrals to London.

"Secret elf place at Hogwards, Friend Master Harry, sir." Dobby was hopping around happily.

"Dobby. Dobby. DOBBY!" Harry had to shout to interrupt Dobby's dance of joy. "How do I get back to it?"

"I don't knows, Friend Master Harry. Too bad Missy Hermione isn't here."

"She isn't here, Dobby. But she might be at Hogwards."

"Ooh, then maybes she fix Friend Master Harry. I see whats I can do to tell elves."

"Thank you, Dobby!" came the chorus from Harry, Lily and Remus as Dobby popped out.

"Is that little elf always that boisterous?" Lily asked.

Harry fell to the floor laughing as Remus did an imitation of Dobby's enthusiastic actions. Lily shook her head at their antics.

Early February 1999

Instead of just Cho, Charlie and Hermione, the group that set off after lunch to investigate the strange magical emanations that Cho and Charlie found turned out to be Cho, Charlie, Hermione, Viktor, Luna, Draco and Neville. When Daphne returned to her rooms to continue her studies, she found a message asking her to go to the Ministry's department of Customs. It turned out she was needed help sort out a shipment of illegal pets that were found in the suitcase of a wizard from the Amazon. The man had disappeared in a poof of smoke instead of telling anyone what his purpose had been.

They arrived at the site, Cho turned to Hermione and then took a deep breath. She had worked closely with the girl over the last couple of years and dearly wished they had been friends at Hogwards instead of supposed rivals. They had accomplished so much, but she still felt that *frisson* of jealousy when she saw Hermione interact with her close friends, like Ginny LeStrange and Luna Malfoy. If Cho was being honest with herself, she knew how much she wanted that type of friendship and interaction. *No time like the present to start something new.* "So, Hermione, I did the basic sweep for unusual emanations on this area of the castle, and I found a couple of things. One of them is a variation of wizarding magic, and although I don't know enough about the type of magic in the ward, I think you might be able to figure out how to break it. Yes, I know you are a warder, but I know what kind of training the Goblins do, and I know *you*." Cho finished her statement with a wry smile.

Hermione returned the smile. Then seeing the bit of insecurity being displayed by Cho, she went with her impulse and gave Cho a hug. Hermione was delighted to have the hug returned tightly. Once they let go, Hermione spoke again. "So what was the second thing, Cho?"

"I have no idea. It is not like any magic I've ever seen and yet is so very familiar. But that one is much more subtle, yet stronger. I think we will have to leave it for later." Bolstered by the camaraderie, Cho felt far more secure in her decision-making skills.

"You are the lead, Cho; it was your find. You are just bringing me in, so if you want to leave the second site for later, that is fine with me." As much as she was hoping one of these sites might give a clue as to what was going on with Harry, she deferred to Cho. Hermione knew how hard it was to start making executive decisions, especially when you had to call in someone ranked a bit higher than you were. The goblins expected you to protect your lead on the site, no matter who you chose to collaborate with, and that meant anybody.

"All right. We need to figure out what we are dealing with here. We know our strengths, so lets put them to good use." The others nodded immediately, revealing the sense of purpose in the group. Somehow the emanations from the magic or the castle put them all on alert, and instead of a group of friends having an adventure by checking out something strange, it was almost like a group of soldiers. Each of them settled in to do their part in figuring out the best way to identify what was wrong in the area. Hermione began casting, with Viktor following with a spell he had devised to help "push" Hermione's casting. Their magic was so in sync that it worked quite well for them.

"Oi, Vik, what are you doing?" Charlie was intrigued. He liked going along with Cho to see what her job was like sometimes, and if he could help her, he wanted to know how.

"I am, what is vord, *pushing* her magic to its limit. Ve are very magically compatible, and I found I could do this. It sometimes finds something her original spells do not."

"Do you think you could show me?" Charlie looked back at his wife and gave her a charming little grin! *m a lucky bastard.*

Cho turned and smiled brilliantly at her husband when she heard him question Viktor. She was never certain that her husband didn't feel that he had to settle, but that enthusiasm for a spell created by Viktor to help his wife, who he so obviously loved, made her feel warm. *Small steps, girl; small steps.*

Just as Viktor was nodding his acquiescence, something buzzed one of Hermione's spells. "Viktor, could you cast your spell with me right here?" she asked, pointing to what looked like a collapsed wall.

They all gathered around as Hermione and Viktor cast together, and were quite impressed by the way their castings interwove with each other. The other couples all decided they needed to see if they could make their magic do that.

As the magic pierced the sophisticated ward, Hermione exclaimed, "Fenrir!"

"He's at the Ministry, Hermione. You just told us that at dinner." Neville was very patient with his friend; he knew how hard the war had been and had gotten used to people seeing things that weren't there.

She turned and gave Neville a hug. "You are always looking out for me, Nev. I know Fenrir is trapped at the Ministry, but I just meant that I finally recognized the magic. Fenrir liked adding some of his blood to his wards, which is why you could sense that they were wizarding wards, but they seemed to be an unusual variation. In order to break these we are going to need a tincture of aconite, milk and sunflower oil. And we will need to figure out the best runes to paint with them to weaken the wards, or bring them down entirely."

Luna spoke up from her place some distance from the wards, her hands up as though she were a mime in a box, "We need peace, healing, brotherhood, love and strength. And I think we will need some Muggle Vitamin D to add to the oil as a base. We will use the old Druidic runes and sigils."

Neville nodded as he heard what his friend had to say. "Luna, Hermione, would some artichoke and lemongrass work as a cleansing smoke? I have all the plants you two named, and the elves can get you the oil and milk; I know they use them in the kitchens."

The witches looked at each other and nodded. All of them were playing to their strengths and were coming up with a very powerful solution.

Draco had been frantically working some Arithmantic formulas. He looked up from his calculations with a smile on his face. "Neville's addition just threw this equation over the top. We were going to weaken the wards with what Hermione and Luna wanted to do, but that last bit gave us the edge to break through. It seems very important that we learn to do this for some unclear reason."

"The reason will probably show itself later, Draco. The elves have been restless about something, but I have not asked the right questions. I don't know what to ask yet." Viktor's comment was not as strange as it seemed. He had rallied the elves when Voldemort was in power, helping a few of them with Bulgarian healing spells that reacted to magical beings of any kind.

Their tasks decided, everyone began to do what was necessary to break through Fenrir's wards. Draco went with Neville to get the ingredients that were required, while Luna, Cho and Hermione prepared the site. Viktor was teaching Charlie the spell he used to enhance Hermione's casting.

"That makes me feel so much better," Cho commented while she helped her friends prepare the site in front of the ward for their casting, jutting her chin toward the two men.

"He was pleased with the choice from the start, Cho." Luna's sagacity sometimes startled her friends.

Hermione added, "And more than pleased by Christmas. He told his father how much you helped him and how he was confused by his feelings when you were separated, even for a little while; he was worried about a longer separation. He was so proud when you earned that apprenticeship." Hermione knew this because Charlie loved to talk to Viktor. They sometimes had Seeker games one-on-one that made Hermione realize just why so many people were surprised that Charlie never went into professional Quidditch. *I wonder why Cho never joined them? I think Viktor said they had invited her... she must have been a little insecure about playing against them.*

Cho smiled at her friends. She had fallen for her husband, but was afraid that it was one-sided. She was so glad to hear that she wasn't just creating feelings where there were none.

Draco and Neville returned just then with the aconite, milk, Vitamin D, sunflower oil and a cauldron. Viktor transfigured a nearby rock into a work table, and they joked and laughed as they prepared their ingredients. Neville also brought an incense burner and prepared his lemongrass and artichoke mixture to smoke. He set it up in the center of the semi-circle. When they were done, Luna painted the necessary runes. As she finished the last one, the semi-circle they had set up around the ward they were hoping to break glowed briefly. Hermione raised her wand to cast, then thought better of it and called Viktor over. Knowing what she wanted, he wrapped his arms around her, and with both their hands clasped over both wands, they cast the ward-breaking spell. Their combined magic and the protective semi-circle helped disintegrate the wards without causing an explosion.

Neville said what they were all thinking: "That was bloody amazing!"

"It truly was, Nev. Powerful too!" Draco was basking in the release of power.

"We seem to have melded together there for a bit. I think I rather liked it," said a bemused Luna.

"Are we all OK?" Hermione asked. "That was wonderful, but a bit draining."

She got nods from everyone present. Once they had settled down again, Hermione turned to Cho. "Are you ready to finish this?"

"Absolutely!" Cho's voice was triumphant. She would have a good report to give to the goblins.

Hermione and Cho began the intricate set of spells used by the goblins to determine if a site was clear of destructive wards. Once Hermione and Cho determined that it was safe, they all rushed into what turned out to be a cave made out of part of the dungeon. They heard a weak voice, and as they all pulled their wands, Charlie gasped, then ran.

The others followed him but stopped dead when they saw the stocky red-head fall to his knees in front of the emaciated figure. "Bill!"

Chapter 5

"The Weasleys are going to be so happy!" Harry exclaimed.

Remus smiled. "Yes, they most certainly are. But why in the world wouldn't that group try to break the other site now?" His eyes glowed yellowish, as though he were fighting an internal battle with Moony.

"I don't know, Remus. I don't know anything about this stuff," responded Harry, his eyes uncertain once again.

"No, loves. She is right. With an unknown, you tackle the one you are pretty certain you can break first." Lily spoke from experience. Her tone brooked no nonsense from the others.

"What exactly did you do for a living, Mum? You don't seem like the stay-at-home type." Harry grinned, so that she knew he meant it with affection.

"I was an Unspeakable, like your friend Hermione. I apprenticed with Perenelle Flamel to do some work with shields and potions and old magic. It is why you didn't die the first time. And once you were around, I could work on that in my lab at home. Houses don't normally explode from Avada Kevadras. The energy rebounded on the lab."

Remus stared at his friend with wide eyes. "I never knew, Lily."

She smiled. "You weren't meant to know, Remus."

The three got back to their scheming and watching.

Far on the sidelines, Sirius and James were watching everything. "I don't get it, Prongsy, why can't they see how wrong they are?" Sirius paced back and forth frantically.

"What if they aren't wrong, Padfoot? When have you ever known Lily to be wrong? Or Moony for that matter? You know they're going to completely shut you out if you can't even consider their point of view." James' hair was up on end from his hands. He walked away from Sirius and toward his wife, son and other best friend.

James took a chance and a deep breath. "Harry, I thought you said Draco and his father were horrible people, Dark wizards the both of them. How is it that they are so involved in getting everything straightened out?" Lily and Remus looked at each other and smiled at the state of his hair.

"You know something, Dad, I don't know. It's going to have to be one of those things I ask Hermione. She obviously kept secrets better than anyone. But I'm not going to overreact when I get back. I want to know what happened. Why is Snape her uncle? Why are so many of those people I could have sworn were evil, not? I'm guessing Dumbledore wanted me to be as reactive as you and Padfoot, which is why Hermione never told me anything. Could you imagine how things could have gone if I had known that so many people I thought were evil, weren't? People wouldn't have had to die."

Lily smiled. It was good to see her boy could learn. *Oh, no, he's running his hands through his hair.*

James was quiet. He still didn't understand what was going on at Hogwarts. All he knew was that life as he understood it was turned on its head. But he remembered his seventh year, and the way he was able to win the girl of his dreams. "I don't get it, son. But I'm willing to try. Can I help you with your planning?"

Lily, Harry and Remus beamed at him, and James knew he had made the correct decision.

Sirius watched the entire proceedings with trepidation. He was losing his friends again, and there was no way he could blame it on anyone but himself *just don't get it. Next thing you know, James is going to make friends with Snivellus.*

Hermione held her hand to her mouth as Charlie gathered his very weak brother into his arms. She ran over and waved her wand over him to assess his needs, then cast a couple of healing spells. She and Draco both pulled potions out of their pockets, then smiled at each other. They gave him a general nutrition potion, knowing they shouldn't give him anything else until a Healer looked him over; they had learned that much during the war. Meanwhile, Neville had conjured up a glass of water, so Charlie could give it to Bill.

Cho had sent her Patronus up to the castle, and the small group was met by the elder Weasleys, Ginny, Rabastan, Percy, Severus and the Head Healer from St. Mungo's. Rabastan and Ginny had called for a Healer to accompany them to Hogwarts when they received Arthur's Patronus message, which he sent to the pair after receiving Cho's.

"No. I will carry him." Charlie was adamant when both Percy and Healer Solange wanted to conjure a stretcher. "He needs to know we're here for him, and he knows my magic."

The hopeful group strode quickly toward the hospital wing of the castle.

Charlie gently set Bill down on the bed the Healer indicated. "I didn't know the Hospital Wing had private rooms."

"I felt them to be necessary, considering some of the people we were treating when Voldemort was in power." Severus' explanation covered quite a bit, and he received many knowing nods in return.

Healer Solange quickly ran a diagnostic. "I see he was given a nutritive potion and some water. Well done, neither of those will interfere with the other things we need to give him." He smiled at the others. Then he turned back to Bill, who was aware of what was going on. "Mr. Weasley, I do have your diagnosis and a treatment regimen, but I don't want to invade your privacy. I can ask everyone to leave, if you wish."

Bill looked at his father. "Dad?"

"I trust everyone here with my life, son. I will be certain to tell you why later." Arthur responded with a smile in his eyes.

Bill turned back to the Healer. "It's all right. You can tell me now."

Healer Solange smiled. "Very well. You will need a nutritive potion regimen, starting tomorrow, probably lasting about six weeks. I will see you weekly, so we can make that decision as we get to it. In a couple of minutes I'm going to give you a powerful cleansing potion. You were given food infested with parasites a while back, and we need to get your body clear of them before we start. Even with your body as weak as it is, you only took advantage of about ninety percent of the potion you were already given; the parasites are using the rest. Once that is done, I will give you an antibiotic and an anti-fungal potion just to make certain your body is free of anything that might wear it down. I will give you a restorative potion to help your muscles that have atrophied, but you will need to do physical therapy on your own to get back to your regular state of health. You will eat only broth and bread for a few days until your stomach is used to food again, and then we will start with soft meals, small ones until we can build you back up to your regular amounts of food. Do you understand food magic?"

"Yes, sir. When magical people prepare food, some of their magic is transferred to it. When a person has been ill for a long time, it helps to eat food prepared by familial or bonded magic."

"Good, since you understand, you won't mind that you will eat what your mother, father, sister or brothers prepare for you as a preferred source for at least two months. After that we can add things made by friends and trusted elves. In about three months, you will be feeling yourself again. In about six months, you will be back to normal, if you follow my directions and work at it. As for magic, we will start small, just like the meals, and work our way up. Sound good?"

"Very. I thought I was going to die there alone. Who knew Charlie could look like an angel?"

Relieved laughter followed Bill's statement. He was obviously going to recover if he could make fun of Charlie.

That evening, the elves served a second dessert and tea, to feed those who were celebrating. They were joined by the elder Malfoys, who had heard of their discovery while at the Ministry.

"So, loves, please tell me exactly how you managed to break through Fenrir's wards. We have discovered a few more places with that particular magical signature." Narcissa had been instrumental in cataloging places that needed extra attention from the Ministry.

Draco brought out his notes. "Luna knew which runes to use, and what to add to the tincture that Hermione devised. Oh, and she and Viktor have been combining their magic; we may want to see if any other pairs can manage that. Then Neville added a cleansing smoke, and that was the final touch."

Lucius looked very thoughtful. His right hand closed reflexively on the head of his cane. He turned to look at his wife, who looked stunned. "How many pairs were there as part of your circle?" he asked the small group.

"There were three pairs. Draco and Luna, Cho and Charlie and Viktor and I. Then Neville joined us, and he was the one who came up with the cleansing smoke that gave us the final push to break the ward." Hermione answered thoughtfully.

"You had it set up in a semi-circle, did you not?" Narcissa was amazed by how naturally these children fell into ancient magics.

"Yes, Madam, we did." Viktor was unsure where this was going, but he felt compelled to answer truthfully.

"Amazing. You fell into a half-circle without even trying. I cannot even begin to imagine what you could manage with a full-circle, completely powered." Lucius was impressed, and it showed in his voice.

"What is a full-circle, Father?" Draco had never heard of this.

"An ancient way of calling power. But it has been historically difficult to find well-matched pairs who were willing to work together. A full-circle requires six or seven bonded pairs and then one unmatched witch or wizard. Each person or pair brings something different to the circle, together they are almost unstoppable, and can solve the most unsolvable magical dilemmas. The practice and knowledge has fallen into the realm of myth." Lucius sounded wistful.

Hermione was curious. "When you say bonded pairs, you don't necessarily mean couples, do you?"

"No, my dear. Had the Weasley twins been alive, they probably would have been a very powerful pair, more so than with their spouses, I would imagine." Lucius contemplated the situation he had used as an example.

Cho turned to Hermione. "I think that is what we are going to need to get through the other site."

"I think you are right. But I think we need to get Bill healthy first. It just seems very important." Hermione answered.

"I'm so glad that you are finally listening to your feelings, Hermione. Even the castle is happy about it." Luna's pronouncement would have sounded strange, except for the contented glow emanating from the stones surrounding them.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 9

Here there be lemons... and some more plot.

"Friend Master Harry, Dobby has great news!" Dobby was hopping about in his excitement.

"What did you find out, Dobby?" Harry looked hopeful.

"Friend Master Harry's friends has figured out the circle magic. They will needs the circle magic to free Friend Master Harry's body and return his Nefesh to his body."

Lily smiled. *Harry is right about these elves. And this one has enough energy to make Jane Fonda jealous.* She addressed Dobby directly, "Nefesh sounds like Hebrew, Dobby."

"Old language, Mistress. Not sure who speaks first."

"What is circle magic, Dobby?" Harry asked.

James couldn't believe what he was hearing, so he answered. "Circle magic is when a set of bonded couples and an unmatched witch or wizard collaborate magically, in a circle or semi-circle depending on the number, to solve the most difficult magical issues. If it wasn't more than a myth, it could've been used to stop Voldemort."

"Not myth, Friend Master Harry's Father. Is real. Was done partially to stop Voldemort, but they used standing stones. Then Missy Hermione and Missy Luna and others falls into semi-circle without knowings to rescue oldest Wheezy. They have idea now. Will be able to bring back Friend Master Harry."

Sirius had walked up to the group to hear what was being said, but Dobby's statement caused him to break in angrily, "What do house-elves know of circle magic? You are all worthless little beings, only good for cleaning." His fear at being left behind by his friends came out as inappropriate anger... only Lily remembered this unfortunate aspect of his personality, and she wasn't about to help him.

Harry raised his wand, angry at his godfather for disparaging his friend. Sirius stared at Harry in disbelief. "You would choose an elf over me?"

"Bloody right! You just let Dumbledore run my life and kissed his arse. Dobby gave his life for me!" Harry was so angry his cheeks were stained red and his voice was strained.

Sirius turned to Dobby with his wand raised and began to cast. Seeing that he was about to be attacked, Dobby raised his hand and banished Sirius. "Dobby is not being worthless! Dobby is being hero! Friend Master Harry says so!"

James, Remus and Lily were all agog at the casual display of powerful magic displayed by the elf.

"Dobby, where did he go?" Harry was very curious.

"In-between wasteland. Kreacher's Bad Master cans find way back if he can figures out what he dids wrong."

"You didn't kill him, did you, Dobby?" Lily was a bit worried. She'd never seen a house-elf behave like this before.

"Dobby doesn't kill. He only wishes to make Kreacher's Bad Master thinks. Dobby thinks that may bes very painful for Kreacher's Bad Master."

Dobby disappeared to the sound of laughter from Lily, Remus and Harry. James had a rather disbelieving grin on his face.

Hermione was practically floating when she and Viktor returned to their room. "I think it is wonderful that Narcissa will be teaching a class on ancient magics. I would have loved to have had something like that when I was in school."

Viktor picked his diminutive wife up and spun her around. He loved that she was small enough for him to pick up easily. "You are vonderful. Ve follow your lead and see where it takes us! The other couples vant us to teach them how ve do our combined casting, and the spell I use to *push* your magic."

Hermione smiled at him. "Well, then, we better have some fun tonight, because I don't know when we are going to have any time to ourselves for a whi... What?"

Viktor was looking at Hermione with the oddest look on his face. The best she could come up with was: torn, hopeful, and maybe a bit-predatory.

He raised an eyebrow, and pulled a length of silk rope out of his pocket. "Vell, loff, are you villing to experiment?"

It took about three seconds for Hermione to process what her usually quiet and restrained husband was saying. It took another three seconds for her knickers to become sodden with her response to his suggestion.

Hermione walked up to Viktor, who was holding the rope in his hand and raised her hand. He closed his eyes in anticipation of being slapped, when instead he felt his wife take his hand. He opened his eyes to see her pulling her skirt up then pushing his hand down the front of her knickers.

He felt her excitement at his suggestion, and his heart soared. She not only trusted him and his idea, but she enjoyed the thought.

He wrapped his arms around her and picked her up, carrying her to their bedroom. He tossed her lightly onto the bed, then took her wrists and bound them lightly to the headboard. "Loff, you know you can release yourself whenever you vish, right?"

She smiled and nodded, then tugged lightly against the restraints. They held fast.

Viktor turned and waved his wand at the fireplace. "No interruptions this time." He turned back to his wife, who was lying there looking at him, her arms tied above her head, and he had to swallow.

He reached into the same bag he had retrieved the silken rope from, and pulled out a soft cat-o-nine tails whip. He ran it up and down Hermione's body, then flicked it experimentally at her nipples. The sharp pain combined with the soft leather wrapping around her breasts had Hermione arching her back, wiggling from side to side and moaning. Viktor's smile in response to that was feral, making Hermione wiggle even more.

He ran his hands up and down her body, following his hands with his mouth and tongue, then when he reached her hips, he flipped her over. "On your knees!" he commanded.

Hermione tucked her knees under herself. She was certainly not a submissive person in general, but playing like this with Viktor was one of the most erotic experiences of her life. He waved his wand again and lowered her wrists so that her bum was in the air, and her most intimate self was on display.

"Haff you been bad, vife?" If she said no, he would set the whip aside and just continue with his love-making, but if she said yes... Viktor hoped she said yes.

"Oh, yes, Viktor. I've been very bad."

He dragged the whip along her bottom, making her writhe.

"Tell me, vife."

"I snuck into the castle, hoping to surprise you."

"Ah, yes. Vell, if it hadn't been for my adjustment to your vards, you vould haff managed. I belief you need at least ten svats for that."

"All right." Hermione's voice was a bit shaky, but from desire. She had realized her husband would never hurt her, and although she knew this would not be an everyday occurrence, it was certainly fun for now.

Viktor smiled and then caressed her rump. He ran his fingers along her slit, stopping to pluck at her clitoris. He continued to do that with his left hand, then said, "One!"

Hermione jumped a bit at the sharp sting of the whip, which coupled with this hands playing her like a fine instrument was almost too much for her nerve endings to bear. When Viktor came to the tenth light swat, Hermione broke apart in his hands.

He laughed delightedly. "You vere amazing, my loff. Now tell me, how do you vish to finish off?"

Hermione's slightly dazed voice responded from the mattress. "Just mount me now and ride me hard, Viktor." Viktor was dazed by the passionate response, but Hermione was impatient to get what she wanted. "Viktor, now!"

At her second command of "now!" Viktor did just as his wife said. Tied up as she was, Hermione still bucked up to meet him, straining the grip he had on her hips. She started to tremble again, another powerful orgasm breaking over her, which sent him over the edge.

Before he collapsed on the bed, he spelled away her restraints, and then cast a cleansing charm. "Vould you like a healing charm, Nin?"

"No. I don't feel much more than a stinging sensation."

Viktor looked. "Your bottom is bright pink, but no velts. So, I vill accede to your vishes."

With that, he turned out the lights, and cuddling his wife to his chest, they fell asleep, replete.

The next morning, Viktor and Hermione had a bit of a tussle over her not wanting him to heal her bottom.

"Viktor, why did you want to do that in the first place if I don't get to keep any evidence? You know as well as I do that it will be all gone in a couple of days; none of our bruises ever last very long, and you didn't actually bruise me."

"I wanted to play, Nin. We are always equals, but sometimes, in bed, I like to be in charge. You did not seem to mind."

"I liked it, Vitya. I knew you weren't going to hurt me, and I could just give myself over and just feel. I didn't know my bottom was left out of our love-making until last night."

"You haff nerve endings there, same as anywhere else."

"Did Durmstrang have a class on sex or something?"

"Something."

Hermione resolved to find out more about this, but she just smiled at her husband and led the way down to the Great Hall.

Luna saw the way Hermione sat and leaned over. "His hand or a paddle?"

Hermione looked at her friend, who had a look of genuine curiosity on her face. "Neither. A butter-soft cat-o-nine tails."

Luna looked pensive. "Hmmm, I will have to tell Draco to ask him where he got it. We haven't used one of those before."

Hermione couldn't help herself and asked, "Luna, do you think the others play like this as well?"

"Oh, yes. But differently. Daphne and Neville like the outdoors; he's apparently gotten good at holding a Disillusionment Charm while making love. Ginny and Rabastan like to play-act being different characters, dressing as them and all. Susan says Percy loves to include food in their playtime. Cho and Charlie..."

"Like being in the air. Charlie told Viktor. That is when I told Viktor he had to think of something else because I wasn't about to have sex on a broom."

Both girls looked at each other and started giggling.

Viktor had been held up by Charlie at the door and arrived at the table just to see his wife's bemused face. "What is it, Ioff?"

"Luna. She watched me sit down and asked if you used your hand or a paddle, then when I told her about the whip, she said she was going to ask Draco about it. Then she told me about the different ways the others like to play. Something strange is going on, because I never liked that sort of gossip before. But it felt so natural to talk about it."

"Are you worried about it, Ioff?" Viktor had noticed her ease with her friends, but he thought it was just maturity paired with the situation they had found themselves in.

"No. It seems to be part of what is going on with all of us, but it seems necessary and right."

Luna chimed in. "I would have to agree. And now I'm curious too. But truly, all that type of play in the bedroom or elsewhere means is we trust our partners."

"Do you children mean to share, or is your whispered conversation private?" Severus' deep voice rang across the table.

"Fine, Uncle Sev." Hermione straightened up, making Severus nervous. He truly hated when she got that swotty look on her face. Hermione smirked at her visibly nervous uncle. "We find ourselves discussing the more adventurous part of our sex lives and wondering if maybe that type of play has something to do with how easily we fell into the old magic. Luna has said it has to do with trust, and I agree. What do you think?" Hermione challenged.

Severus blushed. He and Katie had not gotten that far when she got pregnant, although they had discussed the possibility.

"That is *exactly* why." Narcissa chimed in, startling the rest of the table, who hadn't expected any response from the very upper crust witch. "Very few wizards are willing to broach the subjects with their wives, believing they would be insulted enough to ask them to leave their beds entirely. But there are treatises written by Nimue explaining that playful, creative sex between the bound couples is essential to the magic circles, adding a level of trust that allows the sharing of cores to happen, instead of each person's core acting to protect itself, which stifles the flow of magic." Narcissa glanced around at the table of rather confounded people and smiled. "I've always been interested in the magic of the circles, so I read everything I could find about them."

"That makes sense, doesn't it, dear?" Molly turned to Arthur. "If you trust your partner with yourself, then your magic trusts them as well."

Bill looked down at his plate when he realized that Charlie and Percy were nodding, as was Neville. *Bloody hell! Even Ginny is smiling and nodding.* He hadn't expected that these couples, forced into their marriages, had found something that eluded him and his wife.

"Are you all right, Bill?" Hermione asked, noting that he had become shuttered.

"Physically, Nin, yes. Mentally, I'm not so certain, especially after that conversation. I am wondering about my judgement, considering I fell for a pretty face that was unwilling to even consider any of my wants or needs... but I think that is part of my healing." Bill's face was serious. Then he grinned. "By the way, why does Viktor call you Nin, anyway?"

Hermione and Viktor shared a secret smile. "When I first met her, I could not pronounce her name. I said Her-my-o-Ninny. Later, it was a joke between us, that I called her Nin. Now, I believe it fits."

Bill smiled. "I think it fits as well. I hope you don't mind my using it."

"Not at all. I certainly prefer it to 'Mione'."

The rest of the table laughed.

Charlie turned to his wife who nodded at him. "Oi, look, Bill. Cho and I were talking, and we realized we probably have a full-circle right here. The two of us, the Krums, the Longbottoms, the Lestranges, the P. Weasleys, and both sets of Malfoys, with you as the single one. But I think that trust is going to have to extend to you as well."

Cho shook her head. "Oh, for Merlin's sake, Bill, not sexually. But everyone else here trusts each other with their lives. We need to all include you in that group in our minds, not just those named Weasley." Cho saw the looks everyone gave her and decided if this was her family, then she could tease just as well as the rest. "You all remember I was a Ravenclaw? I'm not just a pretty face, you know!"

Charlie kissed her, happy that she was starting to feel comfortable teasing everyone.

After the laughter died down, Bill looked at the hopeful faces at the table. Katie and Molly looked at each other, then gathered their spouses and left the table to the fifteen.

Molly looked at Arthur, who nodded. "I do not believe I am stable enough for a circle of that magnitude, but you two seem quite happy together. If it is not too much to ask,

why weren't you a part of it?"

Katie grinned and left Severus to his answer. He had to learn to trust his friends.

Severus looked at his wife and realized he was not getting any help from that quarter. He also realized that Molly was quite respectful with her question, not the bossy, intrusive witch he had become accustomed to, and it brought him pause. "We hadn't gotten that far when Katie turned up pregnant. My desires are a bit dark so I don't want to hurt her. But we had discussed it."

Arthur nodded. "Every couple's sex life is very personal, and some desires are darker than others. As long as it is consensual and pleases the two of you, that is what matters. If you would like, I can tell you of a few things to try, which you can expand upon after the baby comes."

"I will think about it," Severus responded, discomfited. *I know everyone means well, but I am not accustomed to this..openness.*

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 9

Making plans.

Lily and Remus saw Harry's hopeful look at Charlie's pronouncement and smiled at each other over his head. They could see the esteem that the others held for Bill and thought he would be good for Harry.

"Hmph. I would have thought their fifteenth would have been a witch," James said cluelessly.

"No, Da. The fifteenth definitely had to be a bloke, trust me," Harry responded a bit hesitantly, his hand going through his hair.

James looked at his son, seeing his nervous tic reflected in the very familiar face, completely ignoring Lily and Remus who looked ready to banish him to wherever Sirius got sent, and nodded. "Fine with me. Blood adoption is a perfectly acceptable way to have an heir in my family. You wouldn't be the first to swing that way. So, you like the red-heads, too?"

Harry smiled at his father, one of his fears having been completely wiped out by the man's easy-going acceptance. Giving into an impulse, he hugged his father, pleased beyond belief when the embrace was returned. He let go, then turned back to watch the conversation at the table, eager to hear the beginnings of the plans to save him, even if the planners didn't know that was what they were doing.

"Fleur never wanted to try anything new. She said I was disturbed because I had been with both men and women. I could feel deep down she was wrong, but we were married, and so I was going to make the best of it."

"There is nothing wrong with acting on your feelings, Bill. If you didn't mind the wrappers on the people you chose to be with, that is your right." Hermione spoke decisively, her hands on her hips and her chin jutting out. Her defiant posture very familiar to Draco, who had seen it often when he had insulted her, waiting for someone to contradict her.

Daphne Longbottom chimed in. "Hermione's right. There are many families who have used blood adoption, or nephews as heirs, if they required a boy. I've heard that for all their reputation as sexual temptresses, married Veela are very traditional and repressed." Daphne was studying xenobiology. She refused to call it Care of Magical Creatures.

"Not really repressed, but very traditional, as though if they give into any sort of deviation, they are proving the gossip correct. It's hard to deal with, but I tried." Bill sighed deeply, his shoulders curving inward and his head bowed.

"Ve know, Bill. Ve saw her reaction to Voldie, and ve know vhat happened after. You tried to rescue her to your detriment. It hurt to vatch." Viktor's words calmed the eldest Weasley.

"Thank you. I would be glad to be your single for the circle. If we are rescuing Sleeping Beauty, it won't matter if its a him or a her." Bill smiled wryly.

"I believe ve vill be finding Sleeping... Harry."

The cacophony of sound and commentary from the table was deafening.

"Viktor, please, don't get our hopes up like that. You have no idea how much I miss him." Neville's voice broke and Daphne wrapped her arms around him.

"Something the elves said to me about a resting place for Hogwarts' Hero makes more sense now that ve are talking." Viktor's comment was almost made to himself.

"Elf-magic!" exclaimed Hermione.

Cho turned to her. "That must be why it felt familiar. We are definitely going to need a full-circle to break elf-magic."

"Well then, we better get Bill's strength up because he's going to need it, if that's the case!" Neville exclaimed, delighted at the thought.

The rest of the table laughed, an inclusive sound of joy that helped strengthen their nascent bond.

"Ha! They know!" Harry was dancing around happily.

"You know, Harry, when you get back, you might want to see if you could get private tutoring, and catch up on all that stuff you missed. You might also see if Severus is willing to re-teach you Potions, and you can learn Ancient Runes and Arithmancy. Otherwise you will just be Bill's trophy spouse--not that there's anything wrong with that." James chuckled at the look on the others faces.

"Prongs, that's just not right. Harry is powerful." That was Remus.

"Powerful and ignorant, by his own admission. That is like a witch with very little power and big... assets." James got ready to run.

He flinched as his wife smacked the back of his head. "Damn you, James. This--*insight* is what made me fall for you. You certainly can cut to the chase when you want to. Too bad it had to be at Harry's expense." Lily looked crestfallen.

James looked at a distraught Harry. He walked in front of him and, placing both hands on the younger man's shoulders, said, "Son, this is what you do. First you tell Severus that I apologize. He turned out to be the better man, and I wish him all the happiness in the world. You also go into the Potter vault and make him a copy of a book called *Mysteries of the Unknown*. Just a copy, mind you. It is a grimoire of Potter males play time with their spouses. He isn't the type to ask for help, so we will give it to him. You keep the original and add to it. There is a spell on the book that keeps you from having to read about your parents' exploits. Then you set up your tutoring. Your friend Hermione, your spouse-to-be and all their friends will help you, I'm sure. Then take your NEWTs. After that you can do what you wish and you won't have to be a trophy spouse. Oh, in the vault is an ancient rune puzzle. It looks like a solid gold globe. Give it to Bill as your wedding gift."

Harry nodded. Lily ran over to her husband and kissed him passionately.

"Bloody hell! I'm going to kill that elf next time I see him. James, what the hell do you mean Snivellus is the better man? How dare you turn your back on the Marauders!" Sirius yelled unthinkingly. He had just found his way back to them.

James looked over and saw his darling son cringing away from Sirius's almost insane rantings and lost his temper.

"You will not touch the elf that saved my son, Black. Nor will you accuse me of turning my back on anyone. You see these people? Lily, my wife and Harry, my son? This is who I owe my allegiance to. I don't know why I ever trusted you to behave like an adult. If you had ignored your insane impulses and taken my boy to St. Mungo's instead of turning him over to Hagrid as though he were a puppy you found, then Dumbledore's plans could have been thwarted. But no, you had to chase after the rat and ignore your responsibilities. Severus, yes, *Severus*, has never wavered in his support of Harry. Had Dumbledore not conditioned Harry to hate everything Slytherin, then he could have been part of that group of survivors instead of waiting in stasis. But no, the great Sirius Black knows all. Go to hell, Black. That is where you belong." All of the frustration James had felt at not being able to help his son, all the rage he felt at Dumbledore ended up directed at his apparently erstwhile friend.

Sirius blinked, then as James' words registered and he realized that he had pretty much burned all his bridges, he disappeared.

"Where'd he go, Da?" Harry was wide-eyed. He had never expected that sort of defense from anyone except his friends.

"I'm not sure, son. But he better have learned to grovel before he comes back again."

Late February 1999

Molly was more than delighted to cook for her son, re-learning his favorites and being the mother she could have been, if Albus hadn't encouraged her shriller nature. Bill was thriving in this atmosphere of care and affection with no expectations. He was very curious about one thing, though. He decided to ask at the next family Sunday dinner.

"Gin-gin, I thought you and Harry were together?"

Ginny looked at her husband and smiled. He had never asked, but she knew he was curious as to the true story.

"We tried, you know? We thought that everyone had to be right, and we would be perfect together. He was really thoughtful and caring. But there was no spark. I know Hermione thinks that he was in love with Ron, but that wasn't true. He loved Ron because Ron was his first friend, and he wanted to have some success at having friends. He could see Ron was very jealous of him and didn't think that would be a good thing for a relationship." Ginny thought back, realizing how Harry's care of his friendship with Ron would look like a passionate love. "He did have a thing for red-heads, though. If that really is Harry in there, it will be good to have him back. When Ron started really believing Dumbledore, thinking Hermione was his for the taking, and that he deserved a better life no matter whether he worked at it or not, Harry became my confidant. He didn't know where to turn; he had been so conditioned to believe that he had to be the savior that Hermione could have tattooed her findings on his forehead and he wouldn't have believed it. He would be glad to know how well I'm being treated now."

Rabastan was secure enough in his marriage to tease his wife. "You would trust him with me, then? Even if I am a good-looking red-head?"

"He knows just how well I can cast a hex, my love. As should you." Ginny poked him in the side with her wand, making him jump and making the rest of the Weasleys laugh.

"It will be nice to have that boy as family for real, won't it, dear?" Molly asked Arthur.

"Yes, it will. I think he and Bill will make a good match," Arthur responded.

Charlie looked at his brother and snickered.

"What are you laughing at, Dragon-breath? Yours is the only girl he ever dated."

Cho blew a raspberry at Bill, making everyone laugh.

"So, Viktor, how exactly do we cast together?" Draco asked, and the rest of the unformed circle nodded in agreement.

Viktor beckoned Hermione over. "Choose the person who is more accurate with their spells, as opposed to more powerful. Hermione has a more delicate application of her power, mine is more forceful. That person should cast something that is very much their own like a signature spell or a Patronus. The other should concentrate on how that feels."

It seemed to be a universal that the women of the pairs were more accurate, while the men were more powerful. The array of Patronuses was beautiful.

"He's a good instructor," whispered Lucius to his wife. "I could feel that. I could also feel where my magic would fit with yours."

"Do you have something to share, Minister?" Viktor didn't like people talking in his classes.

Lucius looked like a deer caught in headlights. Narcissa snickered. Lucius hadn't looked like that since Minerva had caught him trying to sneak her a note through the window of the Transfiguration classroom.

Lucius tried flattery. "You certainly are Severus' nephew." Lucius swallowed as Viktor continued to glower at him. "I see my attempt to placate you did not help. Very well, I was telling Narcissa that your instructions were quite good. I could feel her magic, and where mine would fit in with it."

Viktor smiled at his misbehaving student. "Very good! That is exactly right. Now, some of you have seen Nin and I cast together, amplifying the same spell. But I do want you to see what happens with something as personal as a Patronus. You know Nin's is an otter. Mine is usually a winter wolf. Watch closely." Viktor's commanding presence made the others lean closer in anticipation.

Hermione and Viktor each cast their Patronus to show the others what it looked like. Then they took the now familiar posture, Hermione in front, Viktor with one arm wrapped around her waist, the other entwined with hers over their wands. "*Expecto Patronum!*" To everyone's immense surprise, a huge Siberian white winged tiger burst out of their joined wands.

The rest of the group applauded.

"I wonder what our joined Patronus will be," Draco said to Luna. Her Patronus was a rabbit, and his was a Lynx.

"I think it will be a moon-dragon. Wouldn't that be fitting?" Luna mentioned an animal that hadn't been seen in over 100 years. They were smaller than most dragons, and a pearly, opalescent white color.

"That would be perfect." Draco smiled at his unusual wife. He had grown to love her with a passion he did not believe was possible. He gathered her close, and sure enough, after they cast, there was a moon-dragon playing with the winged tiger.

Lucius and Narcissa had a Quetzacoatl as a joined Patronus.

Rabastan and Ginny had a large Kneazle.

Neville and Daphne had a Hippogriff.

Cho and Charlie had a Norwegian Ridgeback that looked an awful lot like Norberta.

Percy and Susan Bones-Weasley had an Abraxan flying horse.

Bill had a peregrine falcon as his Patronus. "Oi, Perce, I've heard how everyone else got married, but I haven't heard your story."

Percy took a deep breath and looked at his wife, who nodded. "I was helping Dad clear out one of the brothels one night, getting the girls to safety, when I came across Susan fighting off two big Death Eaters by herself. They had really hurt one of the other girls, and had started in on Susan when we got there. They were so intent on raping her they didn't even notice me standing there. I cast a severing spell, and luckily hit my targets dead on. One was decapitated, and the other had wounds that bled him out rather rapidly. I gave Susan my cloak, then we got her to safety. I was quite annoyed when I recognized her as part of the food service staff at the Ministry the next week when I went to visit Dad because I thought she should be recovering instead of working right away, but she ignored me and kept bringing me fresh, home-made biscuits. No matter what, I am still a Weasley."

Bill grinned and turned to Susan. "Won him over with a plate of biscuits, did you?"

Susan nodded. "Too right."

Viktor waited until the story was told, but then interrupted, not wanting his lesson to devolve into a gossip-fest. "Practice this joint casting. You need to make it seamless. As for the spell to *push* the magic, that is finding the holes or gaps Mister Malfoy mentioned and fit your magic in. Then you push it toward your target. Try it with ~~reducto~~ aimed at that debris by the side of the castle."

By the end of the afternoon, the exhausted pairs had a working knowledge of how to combine their magic, and they had managed each spell at least once. Bone tired, they headed into the castle for dinner.

"How is the training going?" asked Severus as the tired group sat down.

"Quite well, Severus. I can see why you do not want Viktor to leave his post. He's an excellent instructor." Narcissa smiled at Viktor and Hermione as she spoke.

Hermione smiled proudly at her husband. She liked having him be so greatly admired. She realized that she needed to broach a delicate subject with her boss, so she turned to him to speak.

"Mr. Weasley, I was wondering when you wanted to discuss my design for the wards at the Department of Mysteries?" Hermione asked her boss. She had been working on them since she had found out about the half-circle.

"Did you turn the schematics in to the goblins?" he replied.

"For the basic design, yes. They approved that part and now the details need to be hashed out with you." Hermione looked hopeful.

"You are asking at this table for a reason, I'm certain, my dear." Arthur looked bemused.

"I think we can use a half-circle to make the wards fairly impenetrable." The rest of the table perked up at that.

"If this works, I may have you ward the entire Ministry," interjected Lucius.

Hermione smiled wryly. "You will find my report on why a half-circle will not work on the entire Ministry on your desk tomorrow morning."

"I take it that is a copy of what you gave the goblins?" Lucius cocked his left eyebrow up at Hermione.

"As per the contract, Minister. My proposal for warding Hogwarts and the Ministry is included as well. But all of that is contingent on how well we do rescuing our sleeping hero," Hermione responded.

"I feel like saluting. Everyone is so proper. Or maybe I should curtsy. Does that make you the Queen, Minister?" Katie Snape caused the rest of the table to laugh with her dry comment.

"We have a lot to do, don't we? It is going to be so much fun!" Luna sighed happily thinking about it.

"You are such a Ravenclaw, darling." Draco leaned over and kissed his dreamy wife on the tip of her nose.

"What would you call learning new ways to use magic, utilizing your best talents and being with a large group of your best friends and family, then, Draco?" Luna was truly confused.

"When you put it that way... fun!" Draco blushed as everyone else teased him good-naturedly.

"Hermione, who do you need in your half-circle?" asked Neville.

"I have the information for Draco to run the calculations. I know he has clearance and he can tell us in the morning." Hermione nodded to herself decisively. "Sound good?" she turned to Draco and asked.

"Yes, fine. Where shall we meet?" Draco asked.

"You may all use the council room connected to the Headmaster's office," Severus responded. "Now, I bid you all good night; my wife needs her rest."

Molly looked up, saw the urgency on Katie's face and the slight blush on Severus's, and jumped to the right conclusion. She nudged her husband with her knee, then jerked her chin at the departing couple. Arthur saw what she was pointing out and grinned, a grin reminiscent of his deceased twins at their brattiest.

"Enjoy your... nap!" he called out.

Severus turned back, his blush deepening, then after a deep breath, decided to wink at Arthur and leave.

Draco looked confused. "What was that all about?"

Molly smiled. "Don't worry, dear, you will find out soon enough, I'm sure."

"Vhat vas going on, Nin?" Viktor asked his wife as they returned to their room.

"I believe that Katie's need to rest was a cover up for more *strenuous* activities. They do say a woman gets a bit more randy during her second trimester of pregnancy."

Viktor laughed delightedly. "Ah. Uncle vill have to get used to everyone in his business, it appears."

"I think he ended up with more family than he anticipated," Hermione answered. "He's handling the situation far better than I thought he would. He has mellowed."

"Maybe ve should emulate their example, vife. Vhat do you think?"

"I think that's an excellent idea."

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 9

Bill has to figure out why Harry, and he gets some help from unexpected sources.

The Next Morning

Draco had done his calculations and decided that the participants required to make best half-circle for warding the Department of Mysteries were: Hermione and Viktor, Percy and Susan, Draco and Luna, and Neville and Daphne, with Arthur Weasley as their single.

Hermione nodded. That is who she would have picked.

"I am the Minister; why was I not included?" asked Lucius. He sneered at his son, clearly insulted.

Draco could not answer because his calculations were for the best circle, not explaining why. He looked horrified at having offended his father. Arthur, on the other hand, smiled. "Because you *are* Minister, Lucius. The Department of Mysteries has always been kept separate from the general operation of the Ministry."

"Do you have any idea why the rest, Arthur?" Narcissa asked.

"No, I don't." Arthur smile was self-deprecating. This magic was beyond even the knowledge held in his department.

"I do," said Hermione. "Percy represents order and Susan represents nurturing; I represent magic, and Viktor represents air. Draco represents fire and Luna represents spirit. Neville represents earth and Daphne represents knowledge of the unknown. And Arthur is in charge, which makes him the ideal single."

Viktor smiled proudly. "You haff been studying this quite a bit, haffen't you, loff?"

"Yes, of course. Once Narcissa said there were books and treatises, you know I had to read them. She let me study them at my leisure, and they have explained so much. Those elements, with the wizards and witches representing them, are the basics, and then a full circle has some slight redundancy, whatever the magic requires. It's really fascinating." Hermione's lecture was rapturous, a familiar and endearing sight to those who had known her for a long time. It was good to see that the inquisitive young girl was still there, chewing on her lower lip and expounding on facts she had learned just as she used to a lifetime ago.

The group set up their half-circle, using the ward stones from their discovery of Bill as markers. Again, Luna painted the ward runes with the potion mixture created by Hermione, and Daphne and Neville fanned a protective smoke with a fan made of Augery feathers. They gathered together, then Hermione and Viktor cast the base wards, followed quickly by Arthur setting the passwords and permissions. A very bright light emanated from the runes, the cauldron, and the ward stones, and a pulse of magic was emitted, reverberating through the Ministry building, startling those employees that were present. The group was drenched in sweat, their combined magics so powerful that it felt like they had been running for hours, but they were invigorated as well.

"I think our work combining our magic has made this easier," said Draco.

"You call what we did easier?" Daphne was incredulous.

"I would have to agree, pet. It was much easier than last time." Neville nodded as he spoke.

They all looked at Hermione, who had a huge grin on her face. "Now we can figure out what we are going to need to help Harry," said Hermione. She began to bark out orders. "Draco, you find us the best date. Neville, Daphne, see what type of smoke and feathers or fur or scales we might need. Luna, you look up the runes. Percy, Susan, you will need to see if the Ministry is going to have any problem releasing all his possessions to him; I know Voldemort had a 'Museum of Victory' so his things will be there, and I will find out what happened to his vaults and properties. Viktor, you will figure out what I am missing and give assignments to the rest of the circle."

All of them nodded, more determined than ever to make their next miracle work.

"Has she always been like this, Nev?" Daphne was almost overwhelmed by the whirlwind that was Hermione in full research-driven glory.

Neville smiled fondly. "Oh, yes. From day one, going from train car to train car demanding to know if anyone had seen my toad."

Daphne hugged her husband tightly, thankful that the memories being evoked now were fond ones.

The Next Morning

"Does it feel to you as though the castle is holding her breath?" Katie Snape asked her husband as they sat for breakfast.

"Yes, Snitch, it does. I imagine that we will find out why as soon as the others join us." Severus smiled at his wife. To an uneducated observer it would look as though he grimaced less, but it was most definitely a smile, and one Katie had learned to cherish.

It's the little things. He says he calls me Snitch because he felt his happiness was as elusive as one. And that smile, just for me. Katie smiled back at her husband.

"Oi, I must've been more damaged than I thought. I was pretty sure I just heard Snape call his wife Snitch. And he smiled. That's it, the world is going to end!" Bill cheerfully sat down. His healing had gone far quicker than what Healer Solange had thought; he was almost a month ahead of schedule.

Severus waved his wand at Bill, and suddenly it felt as though his mother had smacked him across the back of the head. He turned around but no one was there. "What was that?" Bill asked.

"Just a little something I've been practicing for when you all get Harry back. If it is all sunshine and roses, he may think he actually died." Severus spoke in all seriousness.

Bill goggled at him for a bit, then burst out laughing, a hearty laugh that made everyone around him want to join in, even though they hadn't heard the joke.

As the rest of the "family" trickled in and sat down, Bill turned to Cho. "So, Doll, what happens now?"

"Once Draco briefs us, we will all work on our parts together or separately until we are ready. Then we head out, set up the circle, and rescue your prince." Cho spoke decisively. It was still her lead, even though she had deferred to Hermione on a lot of it. "You like nicknames, don't you?"

"Yeah. People only seem to call you by name when they are angry or don't like you. So, I like giving people nicknames. I hope you don't mind." Bill looked a bit worried.

"Don't worry, big brother, I'm just wondering why doll for me," Cho responded.

Charlie started snickering as Bill blushed before he answered, "BecauseyoulooklikeaChinadoll."

His mumbled response made everyone at the table laugh.

"I shall pretend to be a Gryffindor and jump in to rescue you now, Bill," Draco said, amused. "My calculations say that we should hold our rescue circle on Walpurgis Night. It will roll into Beltane, and that seems to be very appropriate, as it is a time of renewal."

Luna turned wide eyes to her spouse. "Dragon, you realize most of us will end up pregnant, right? That much magic on Walpurgis Night?"

Narcissa turned hopeful eyes to her husband, who looked as though he were about to bolt. She placed her hand on his knee to stay him.

"Lucius, dearest, it will be all right, I just know it. It feels right."

"Lucius, if you are worried about another child, because of the problems she had carrying them before, do not. Hermione had researched it for me because I was afraid of having a child of my own, knowing that many of the problems our contemporaries had conceiving and carrying children to term were probably tied to the Dark Mark. That Draco survived is a testament to both his strength and Narcissa's, together overcoming Riddle's malevolence. Her findings showed that if the Dark Mark was gone, then a child could be carried normally. As you see, Katie is not having any trouble." Severus spoke quickly to reassure his friend.

Lucius sat back down, his fears assuaged for the moment. "Hermione, my dear, please give me your research when you have time, ~~to~~ believe you and Severus, but I would like to see it on parchment with my own eyes."

"As Lucius, or as the Minister?" she asked, eyes soft. She had grown fond of the man, and to see his fears laid bare before the others was quite touching.

"Both, I believe. If we publish the results, we may stave off any fears of reproduction in part of the populace."

Hermione nodded. She could have a report ready for him quickly.

Draco continued his briefing, all of the pairs making notes as to what they needed to do. All of them were consumed by thoughts of the babies to come.

"Are there any questions?" Cho asked once he was done.

"Will our babies be safe?" asked Ginny, referring to herself and Katie, who were currently pregnant.

Hermione nodded. "Absolutely. Actually, all of our studies show that being exposed to that kind of benevolent magic, especially on Walpurgis Night, will only strengthen their inherent magic."

Rabastan smiled at his wife. "I could have told you that, little one. We have many treatises on Walpurgis Night and benevolent magic at the house. I will pull some out for you to read." At a look from Severus, he continued, "I will make a copy of them for Mrs. Snape as well."

"I guess all I have to do is get better then? Two more months at this rate, and I will be right as rain," Bill said.

"You also need to think about why you want Harry back because your spell, your call, that will be what brings him back to himself. Not just why you want him back; we all have reasons for that, for example, Hermione wants her brother back, Ginny and I want our friend and confidant, the Malfoys want to thank him, Severus and the Weasleys want to parent him, so on and so forth. But why do you want *him*, Bill? That is what you need to consider." Luna had lost her dreamy quality, and the others could see how she had the capability of being a powerful seer or empath. She was so good at hiding, no one knew what was the truth of her abilities.

Bill nodded. That was actually a tangible assignment.

"I love you, Luna. Thanks so much! I can't wait to see you!" Harry called to his friend when he heard what she had to say to Bill. He wanted to be loved for being himself. He hoped Bill took her advice.

Luna took on that dreamy quality once more. "I think Harry is happy about what we are doing. Don't worry, Harry, we can't wait to see you either," she called out to the ether.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 9

Wrapping up loose ends.

The Burrow -Ides of March, 1999

"Welcome, everyone! It feels so good to have the whole family over!" Molly Weasley greeted her guests cheerfully. She had invited the entire group who would form the full circle for dinner, as well as Severus and Katie Snape. "I haven't gotten to cook for everyone in such a long time. And I certainly didn't used to have the funds to do it the way I wanted, thanks to dear old Albus, so I want you all to enjoy." The Burrow had been rebuilt after the war, bigger, but still eclectic and warm, full of the energy of all the Weasleys. There were small portraits of the missing boys, who added jests and jibes to the conversation at the table.

The food was spectacular, two large prime ribs of beef, fresh asparagus, lightly steamed, with vinaigrette dressing, mashed potatoes, fresh baked bread, mushrooms sauteed in a butter-wine sauce and then for dessert, a lovely flan, some trifle, and in honor of Harry, treacle tart.

"Molly, this is sublime! Better than most of the restaurants I've ever been in," Narcissa complimented.

Everyone else agreed enthusiastically. More than one of the girls at the table swore they were going to ask Molly for cooking lessons.

"So, how is everyone doing on their assignments?" asked Molly.

Cho answered, "We're all spot on, Mum. We have, at Draco's request, practiced melding our magic in small ways to make sure we can do that as needed. It's been working well."

"Cho is underplaying how well things have been working. Together, usually in small quarter-circle groups, all of Hogwarts has been repaired and magically healed." Severus smiled proudly at all of his family.

"Also, the Ministry buildings have all been strengthened," Arthur and Lucius spoke in chorus, then chuckled. They had been finding many similarities, now that they were essentially family.

"Hermione and Viktor have been writing a book on how to merge magic for couples with compatible magic. It should be amazing and revolutionary once it is published," bragged Draco.

"Isn't that a bit much, Hermione?" Molly asked, garnering knowing chuckles from everyone.

"Not really, Molly. Viktor already had most of it written down, as part of his lesson plan for the rest of us. I'm just polishing it. Anyway, it is a good break from my researching and warding design. I'm not super-witch, I just get bored easily." Hermione grinned self-deprecatingly.

Viktor smiled at his wife, then turned to Molly. "Draco is helping break the spells down into Arithmantic formulas we are including in the book at the end, in a kind of index."

"I think I know why I want Harry back," said Bill.

That stopped the group cold. They all looked at him expectantly.

"You're all complete. Hermione and Viktor are just like one magical jewel with two interesting facets. And you see how much they love to learn from each other and work together. Draco and Luna would never seem to fit, yet they do, and well. I could say the same about each and every couple here. I did not have that with Fleur, and I want it." Bill looked at them, challenging them to find fault with him.

"That is an excellent reason, Bill," said Luna. "Now you just need to figure out why *Harry*, and not anyone else."

"She's right," interjected Hermione when Bill looked upset at not being able to say he was done.

She looked at Viktor because the rest of the explanation was his. "I haff been speaking to the elves. They cannot bring him back because although they have kept his body in stasis, his *coya*, what is vord, soul, is not fully anchored. If you do not know exactly why Harry, it may not work."

That explanation resonated with all of them. More than one couple squeezed their hands together in solidarity.

"I'm so glad we were always able to be together, love; you really *are* the other half of my soul," Hermione told Viktor as she took his hand. He looked shaken at the thought that they could do all this research and magical experimentation, and it would still not work.

Bill looked thoughtful, his scarred face ruggedly handsome. "I see that. I didn't have that connection with Fleur, and deep down I knew it was missing." He took a deep breath and came to a decision. "Fine. You know, all I know about Harry the person is the little I remember of him. I did find him attractive, in a 'hey, he might be hot when he's older' sort of way; the messy bed-hair and those eyes of his are amazing, and as much as everyone said he looked just like his father, his bone structure is a bit finer, at least what I remember from pictures. I bet if he were fed properly, he would look quite a bit different. He is smart, but didn't apply himself, he's brave to the point of idiocy, which I can appreciate, and he's loyal. I find all of that attractive and would love to have it in my life," Bill said to the room at large.

"He's gentle and has a really dry sense of humor, when he would let himself laugh at things. You would like that," said Ginny, seeing where her brother was going and joining in enthusiastically.

"He's fiercely protective of his friends and those he considers family," added Luna.

"I want to get to know him, the Harry who is friends with my wife and my best friends," said Draco.

"I admire his tenacity. He never let me break him, and I was ordered to try," Severus choked out over his emotions.

"He is a hell of a Quidditch player," said Katie, which made everyone laugh, including Severus, who squeezed her hand gratefully.

"He's my brother, and I want him back," Hermione begged softly.

"Thank you," said Bill. "This helps a lot. Maybe you can all give me some stories, those you wouldn't mind sharing, so that I can get to know Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived."

They all nodded, resolving to give Bill the best and the worst and the in-between, so he would have a complete picture.

While they were working on "Operation Getting to Know Harry," Hermione had found that Harry's vaults were being kept under goblin control. They were doing what they did best, protecting their interests. They really wanted him awake to pay what he owed them.

Oddly, Kreacher was quite pleased to find out that she had discovered this.

"Missy Nin has found way to return Master Harry?" Kreacher asked.

Hermione smiled at the fact that even the elves were calling her Nin now. "Yes, Kreacher. Viktor, my friends and family have found a way to do circle magic."

"And his mate, has you found a suitable one?"

"Yes, we found him Bill Weasley." Hermione was curious to see what Kreacher would say to that.

"The wolfy-Weasley?" Kreacher nodded approvingly. "Can Kreacher do anythings to help?"

"Yes, Kreacher. Tell all the elves that Volfy-Weasley vants stories of Harry to fix him in his mind. Anyone who vishes can tell him directly, or write it down," Viktor responded. He had a knack with the elves.

"Kreacher will go now. Good Master Harry helped Kreacher finish what Good Master Regulus started." He popped out proudly, glad to have a chore that would help his master.

"Have you decided what you are going to tell Bill, Viktor?"

"Yes, Nin. I am going to tell him of vhen Harry spoke to me before the third task, and told me that as long as I made you happy, then he vould be happy. He vas so young, and yet so mature. Efer since that day, I admire him wery much. I vas sad to know Dumbledore vas setting him up to die. Vhat vill you tell him?"

"There is so much, love. He was such a caring little boy. Ron only came to find me that first Halloween because Harry had guilted him into it. He came to talk to me every day when I was petrified second year. Did you know that? Third year, he was upset about the broom, but he later told me that he never doubted I cared about him; he had just wished I had done it differently. That fourth year, I was so afraid he would die, and he went into everything with that bravado, even though he was scared. Fifth, he was hurting so much, and none of us listened when we should, and neither did he. I almost died for him. I was willing to, but all I could think was that in his stupid need to save everyone, he had taken me away from you. Sixth year was a disaster, and that last year was such a horror, but he tried so hard. I wish he hadn't believed Dumbledore, but it was who he was. I think if he had thought that killing himself would work for whatever reason, he would have done it; it was just part of him being Harry."

The two wrote letters with their stories and sent them to Bill, then went to bed.

Bill started collecting all the stories he was being given by everyone about the Harry they knew. He thought Harry might like to see what everyone thought of him once he was back. Viktor's made him smile with pride, while Hermione and Ginny's stories made him cry. Katie amused him by telling him Quidditch stories and amazed him with what Harry could do on a broom even as an ickle firstie. The Malfoys astounded him with their candor, Draco telling him of their rivalry, fueled by jealousy. Lucius told him of his anger and reluctant admiration of the boy when he conned him into freeing Dobby. Narcissa told of the joy she had when Harry told her Draco was alive and her willingness to lie for him. All of the Malfoys reiterated that there was just *something* about the boy.

Neville sat and talked to Bill for a long while. Again, Bill cried. Neville told him of their long discussions, about their similarities and how Harry always believed that Neville could be a hero. "He made me believe it, you know. I just saw how misled he was, but Dumbledore had played him so well, he couldn't see it. Hermione saved the rest of us, but she always hoped she could convince Harry to join us." Daphne had not much to say, except that Harry never painted all of Slytherin with the same evil brush that Ron did. She did wonder what Harry saw in Ron, though. Bill could sort of agree there.

Percy told Bill of how annoying Harry and Ron could be, laying about when they should have been studying, which amused him no end. Susan told him of his kindness to everyone who was remotely kind to him, and what a good teacher he was during the DA days.

Charlie sat with his brother one day on a rock out by the Black Lake, the two dangling their feet and skipping rocks, much like they did when they were students, holding bottles of cold Butterbeer, and told him how amazed he was when Harry out flew the dragon during the first task of the Tri-Wizard tournament, and managed not only to out maneuver her, but got through without causing an injury to either the dragon or her eggs. "I remember that, Charlie. Both Harry and Fleur caught my eye that day, but he was so young." The brothers sat for a long while, enjoying the sun, when a familiar voice interrupted their reverie.

"What are you two doing drinking *cold* Butterbeer?" Cho thought everyone liked it warm, at least in Britain.

Charlie laughed. "That's my fault, love. One of my good friends at the dragon reserve in Romania is from California, and he drinks everything he can ice cold, even tea. I got to enjoy the taste of cold Butterbeer and I've since corrupted Bill here."

Cho nodded. "OK, hand it over." Charlie did, and Cho took a drink. "Not bad, but I think I still prefer a warm mug. Were you telling Harry stories?"

"Yes. Do you have one?" Bill raised an eyebrow at her.

"I was such a mess after Cedric died. I guess having your first love die a horrible, needless death at the hands of the Dark Lord's minion is not conducive to much of anything but lots of tears and misery. Harry was so kind, getting me through the worst of my depression, but I mistook it for something more. So, that Christmas of his fifth year, I kissed him under the mistletoe. Nothing ever came of it, of course, and I still can't believe I blamed Hermione for my own insecurity and stupidity, but I would really like to see him to tell him how sorry I am for using him back then. I realize now that I had no idea what love was really like."

Bill put his arm around his sister-in-law and pulled her close. "I'm sure he won't mind at all and forgive you easily, if even half of these stories I'm hearing are true."

Cho smiled at him through her tears.

"Cho, does that mean you know what real love is like now?" Charlie asked, then winced. *Bloody hell! She's going to think I'm some sort of needy pansy.*

"Yes, Charlie. I love you," Cho replied.

Bill took that as his cue to go back to his rooms and compile some more of the notes and letters.

Charlie couldn't speak, he was so overcome. He just pulled his wife close and kissed her with everything he felt for her.

"*I guess the girls were right,*" was the last coherent thought Cho had for a while.

Bill looked back over his shoulder at his closest brother and his bride and became even more determined to find a way to that kind of happiness. Bill treasured every comment, every scrap of paper, every odd conversation with a multitude of house-elves. *Who knew that Harry liked to go talk to the elves in the kitchens late at night?*

A picture of a complicated young man began to emerge from the snippets of Harry's life, one Bill could easily see himself falling in love with.

"Are we all ready?" Hermione asked. Cho had headed out to the site with Charlie, to map out the magic and get the area ready for the circle. The pairs and Bill all nodded. Bill had a firm idea of who Harry was and who he could be, and he had a clear vision of a future with him firmly in mind.

A respectful distance away stood a few reporters and people who had wrangled an invitation from Severus to attend. Few had ever seen any type of circle magic, but most had heard of it. The students of Hogwarts all stood where they could see, but far outside the sphere of influence of the fertility magic, a distance figured out by Draco. The reporters and most of the attendees were also out of the range, but there were a few, those who had convinced Severus that they fully understood what it meant to be in the circle's range of influence, who were allowed to be closer.

The pairs walked out of the castle and joined up with Charlie and Cho, who had delineated the area they needed to surround with their magic. The Hogwarts elves had shown them a place where there were plenty of crystals they could use for ward stones. Neville and Daphne set up their censer with powdered dragon scale, citrus peel and lemongrass. They smiled when Susan walked over with a green herb. "A pinch of rosemary for remembrance!" Luna painted the runes for strength, healing, forgiveness, power, and love with the potion Hermione had created out of phoenix tears, basilisk venom and treacle. There were some other things, but oddly, those were the primary ingredients. Severus had been quite thrilled to find out you could use both phoenix tears and basilisk venom in a potion if you used treacle as a stabilizer.

As midnight came upon them, they all began to chant:

Beltane's fires, protect this earth!

At dawn's first light, the veil thins

The wheel of life brings rebirth

*With love and magic, our task begins.*⁴

They finished the third round of the chant, then they all cast their joint Patronuses at the center of the circle. The beautiful, magical animals attacked the elf magic, until it lowered in a pulse of bright magic that was felt as far as Hogsmeade. As the light faded, the still body of Harry was seen on an altar of rock in the middle of the circle. Bill stepped forward, and thinking of all he had learned about Harry and everything he looked forward to learning with him, he cast his Patronus. When the falcon landed on Harry's chest and nuzzled him, the final barrier fell, and Harry's eyes opened. Bill helped him sit up, then as Harry faltered when he tried to stand, he swept him up into his arms and carried him toward the castle, against the backdrop of the rising sun.

There were some great sighs heard from the crowd at the romance of it all.

The circle followed Bill and Harry into the castle. Healer Solange was ready to check him over, and he decided he was well, but everyone needed to rest after all that magic. He sent the participants in the circle off to bed.

As they walked off, Molly smiled when she overheard Viktor say to Hermione: "So, loff, you vant to make baby?"

"Yes, Viktor, I most certainly do!"

That conversation was repeated over and over throughout the castle.

May Day 1999

Bill was sitting in the Hospital Wing, waiting for Harry to wake up. Apparently stasis was nothing like normal sleep, and he needed to catch up on that, from his time on the run over a year ago.

Harry looked over and saw him. "Hey," he said quietly.

"Hey, yourself, Sleeping Beauty. How are you doing?" Bill asked in response.

Harry ran his hand through his hair. Bill found it endearing, not knowing, not that anyone alive could know, that it was indicative of just how nervous he was. "I'm OK, I think. But of all the things I could hear when I was in stasis, I never found out what it was that happened for *you* to get me out. I don't want you to feel obligated..."

Bill interrupted, reaching out and placing his index finger over Harry's lips. "I'm not feeling obligated. I was alone, in a swarm of people who had paired up and paired up well, even if it was by the machinations of an insane Dark Lord. I wanted, no, want what they have, and I was willing to be considered to be the single in the circle to get you out. Then I followed Luna's instructions and got to know you through your friends, the bad and the good, and I knew when I was in that circle that I wanted you out so I could continue to get to know you. What do you think?"

Harry smiled in response. He nodded, afraid that he would choke up if he spoke.

"Good," Bill said, "Now, I think there are people here to see you if you are up to it." He had heard them in the corridor.

Harry swallowed. "I need to see Hermione, if that is OK."

"It is more than OK, Harry. I'm here!" In a move reminiscent of the scene in the Great Hall after she was un-petrified Hermione raced over to him and they hugged.

"I'm so sorry, Hermione, I should have listened to you. I heard you after the battle, from the in-between place. It looked like the Gryffindor Common Room. Remus did something to the mirror and we could see you, too. Can I just say that my Mum thinks you are brilliant? Oh, and can we set up some tutoring? I want to take my NEWTs. I don't want to be a trophy spouse." The sound of desperation in Harry's voice was, unfortunately for him, comical, and made his audience laugh.

"You want to take them as soon as possible?" Hermione asked gently.

Harry nodded. "I want to take Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, Charms, DADA, Transfiguration and Potions. That should give me a good background to figure out what I want to do."

Luna chimed in with what everyone was thinking. "Harry, when did you study Runes and Arithmancy?"

"My Mum, Remus and my Da all helped me. The place I was in was like the common room, and we found a whole set of books there for Seventh Year. And Mum was an Unspeakable. She really knew her Runes and Arithmancy. I spent lots of time getting to know them and they taught me all sorts of things."

"Potter, I mean Harry, you didn't mention Black," said Severus.

"I know. He couldn't grow up, not even dead, and Da told him off. Dobby says they will be reunited again when Sirius realizes why they were so upset with him. He's not in trouble or hurt, he just needs some time to see what his thoughtlessness can do to his friends."

"You've grown up, Harry," Hermione said with wonder in her voice, then hugged him again. "I will set up your tutoring. You can talk to Uncle Severus about setting up the testing. And once you are ready, we have to have a long talk."

"I know. Can we have everyone in the circle there? I have a lot of questions, and a couple of messages to pass on." Harry sounded eager, which made Hermione take pause. Her friend had come back changed, and it seemed it was for the better.

That night, they all came together, and they all told their stories. There were a lot of tears and a lot of laughter. Many wounds were healed.

Harry kept his promise to his father, and apologized to Severus, giving him and the rest of the couples in the circle a copy of *Mysteries of the Unknown*.

"Potter really said that?" Severus was flabbergasted. "Truly?"

"Yes, Uncle Sev, he really did." Harry was smiling mischievously.

"Did you just call me Uncle Sev?"

"Well, yeah. Hermione is the closest thing I have to a sister, making you my Uncle-in-Law. But Uncle-in-Law Sev is just too long."

The group erupted in laughter when Severus chased Harry around the room, then applauded when he caught him, hugged him and mussed his hair affectionately.

After looking through the Potter book, Viktor and Draco both swore to look for a version of that in their own homes in order to add to it, if there were such a volume, and if not, to start one of their own.

The next week, they set up a tutoring schedule. Harry laughed in delight when he saw his was color-coded. "Hermione, I'm so glad you are still *you*, even after everything."

Harry was ready for his NEWTs in two months, taking them right along with the seventh years. He passed all of them.

He and Bill got married on Lammas Day (August 1) and the circle used the power of their bonding to raise the wards at Hogwarts, with Severus as the single. Just as the winter wedding the year before, the display of power and the sparkling of the wards became the stuff of legend.

Katie and Harry both couldn't wait until they could join in. They figured there would always be some projects that could use a bit of circle magic.

Bill really liked the rune puzzle Harry gave him as a wedding gift. *Really* liked it. He didn't let Harry out of bed for a few days.

"That book is going to be full of their exploits," James said proudly.

"James, how could you watch that? That's your son down there!" Remus was caught between being completely horrified and a wee bit aroused.

"Hey, I'm dead, not comatose." James flinched after Lily whacked the back of his head.

"All right, you two. We've been here long enough. We have a Headmaster to torture." The unholy glee in Lily's voice made the two men flinch.

"Oh, I'm so glad I'm not the one she's angry at."

"I agree, Prongs, I agree."

As the Gryffindor common room faded from around them, they felt a familiar presence. "May I join you?"

The joy was palpable as the third Marauder rejoined his friends.

It was the dawn of a golden age for Britain; as for the members of the full circle, all of them were remembered in history with the same reverence as Merlin and the Founders. Dumbledore and Tom Riddle became footnotes, mere bogeymen for generations.

Eleven Years Later

"It is amazing, isn't it, Nin? Here we are, with our oldest heading off to school, and so much has changed: no vands, open government, peace. It is wonderful!"

"Absolutely, Viktor. And to think we started it all when I overheard you with your uncle."

The two looked at their friends, and the children who were scrambling to get on the train, and smiled.

Many thanks to my alpha and cheerleader, Kyria of Delphi, and the first look with a critical eye by sempra. Many thanks to bambu for her hard work and suggestions. A final thanks to Rose of the West and Kyria again for the final beta pass.

Prompt from Rageful Jewel: Is there a chance of there being a companion piece in which Harry, in the afterlife, learns that he died for nothing?

Endnotes: 1, 2, 3 are quotes directly from "Dumbledore's Hubris," the prequel to this story, by blue artemis (the quotes are in chapter 1).

4: written especially for this story by Kyria of Delphi. The idea of Viktor's sex-ed class was also taken from one of her stories with her permission.

Percy's story about Susan capturing him with biscuits is my slight re-telling of a story I read a long time ago in the *Los Angeles Times*. They were talking to then-Dodger catcher, Mike Scioscia, who was telling them about how his wife caught his attention. Most women waiting in the players' parking lot had other sorts of things on display. The future Mrs. Scioscia was leaning against his car with a plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies. I thought it would suit a Weasley.