

Protectors

Colin Creevey sat at the Gryffindor table during this Spring evening. Several of the seventh year Gryffindors had just come back in from Care of Magical Creatures, and he was looking forward to a cup of hot tea to chase away the chill.

Smiling at the Head Girl, he took a seat and started to pull supper together.

Dinner was progressing smoothly, most of the talk centering around their upcoming NEWT exams, when Colin and the other senior Gryffindors became aware of excited chatter near the doors of the Great Hall. Turning that way, he spotted someone that everyone in the Wizarding World recognized on sight.

Harry Potter, wearing a forest green robe and cloak, was striding purposefully between the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables. Ghosting along in his wake, Hermione Granger was following, wearing an identical outfit.

The students' excited chatter followed the pair. Harry had been hugely popular the previous year, his seventh, after defeating Lord Voldemort early in the year. Rumors abounded about what exactly happened, but Harry and Hermione, the only other one that had apparently been there, refused to explain what happened. They'd simply dumped Voldemort's decaying body in front of Headmaster Dumbledore as he was standing at the school's entrance on the night of All Hallow's Eve.

That picture had garnered Colin job offers from almost every wizarding magazine and newspaper in the country. Colin even had a picture of Snape's face immediately thereafter. This second picture was his most prized possession.

This action had gotten Harry and Hermione chocolate frog portraits, Order of Merlin First Class, and job offers from everyone from Dumbledore down to Fudge.

Unsurprisingly, the pair were the instant heroes of the wizarding world.

After that point, nobody dared to risk even annoying the Boy-Who-Won. Even Draco Malfoy had slithered off into some dark hole and stayed away from the Gryffindors all year.

Though they never made a big issue of it, Colin happened to know that Harry and Hermione had become a couple shortly thereafter, slowly drifting away from Ron whom couldn't deal with all the notoriety his best friends had had heaped upon them by the adoring public.

As the imposing and recognized duo continued down the aisle, more than one student greeted them by name. Both of them totally ignored everyone until they stopped beside the place where Ginny Weasley was sitting.

Then, to the stunned surprise of everyone in the Great Hall, Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Won, and Hermione Granger, the Girl-Who-Helped, dropped to one knee and bowed in clear submission to Ginny Weasley.

Ginny's jaw dropped open in shock.

She had no idea where Harry and Hermione had disappeared off to after graduation. Only a vague, "something like an auror" explanation was given before the pair disappeared.

Now, the boy she'd had a massive crush on since she'd first seen him, the savior of the wizarding world, defeater of the most powerful Dark Lord in recorded history, himself reputed to now be one of the two most powerful wizards alive, was currently kneeling before her.

HER.

Clearing her throat into the suddenly oppressive silence, she asked, "Harry? Hermione?"

Without looking up from his kneeled, head bowed position, Harry formally declared in a ringing voice, "Ginevra Weasley, I pledge my hand, head, and heart to your protection. On this I swear." He made what appeared to be a stylized movement with his right hand over his forehead, chest, and to his side where Hermione was similarly kneeling.

Immediately on the heels of Harry's shocking declaration, Hermione spoke up, "Ginevra Weasley, I pledge my hand, head, and heart to your protection. On this I swear." She made an identical movement with her hand, indicating Harry.

After her hand came to rest upon her bended knee, neither made a single movement.

Ginny was rooted to the spot, not comprehending what her two friends were up to.

After fifteen timeless seconds of inactivity, the Great Hall started buzzing, everyone either recounting what had just happened or speculating on

what it meant.

Headmaster Dumbledore came striding up to the frozen tableau. Hoping the ancient wizard could help her understand what was going on, she asked, "Headmaster?" Unspoken questions paraded across her face.

"Miss Weasley, they appear to be pledging themselves to your protection. I would recommend you accept their offer."

She looked from the top of one bowed head to the other. Neither looked up or moved at all. She desperately wanted to look them in the eye to see what was going on. "What if I don't want their protection?" she asked Dumbledore, still not sure why all the fuss was occurring.

"You are permitted to deny it, however I would recommend you accept it for the time being. We can discover the reasoning later, and you can renounce the protection if you wish at that time. For the moment, I would think that they would be more comfortable standing instead of kneeling on the floor."

Nearby, Natalie MacDonald giggled. Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

Blushing, Ginny turned to the two kneeling figures. "Harry, Hermione, accepted."

Smoothly, the two stood and started calmly scanning around the room, hands hidden within the folds of their cloaks. Hermione moved around the end of the table and took up station on the other side of the Gryffindor table, across from where Ginny was sitting. Harry had already moved closer to Ginny, nearly touching her.

Colin finally screwed up enough courage to ask, "Harry, what's going on?"

Harry completely ignored him, still scanning the room and looking blandly back at the sea of faces that were all staring at him in unabashed curiosity.

"Harry?" Ginny asked timidly.

"Yes, my lady?" he responded promptly.

She paused for a moment at the overly formal address. "What is going on?"

"You accepted us as your Protectors," was the simple answer.

She digested that for a few moments as Professor Snape stalked over. "Potter, what is the meaning of this?" he snarled. When Harry totally failed to respond, he grabbed the slender young man by the shoulder.

It was over in an eye blink. Snape was suddenly sprawled on the floor, Harry's booted foot pinning his right hand to the floor, Harry's wand pointing at Snape's forehead. Hermione was suddenly standing on the Gryffindor table, her own wand also pointing at the Potions Master but her eyes still scanning the room. Showing his well developed self-preservation skills, Snape froze in position.

Immediately, angry mutterings could be heard from the Slytherin table. Dumbledore held up a hand and the Hall stilled. "Protectors?" he calmly asked.

"Yes, Headmaster?" Hermione asked, perfectly calm.

"Please release my Potions Master. He will not attack you or Miss Weasley." This last part was aimed mostly at the fuming man on the floor.

"My lady?" Hermione was clearly asking Ginny's permission before doing as requested.

Slowly coming to realize how much control she seemed to have over her two friends, Ginny said, "Agreed."

Harry and Hermione immediately moved back to their previous positions and again became silent, enigmatic guardians.

Snape slowly stood back up, his eyes never leaving Harry. "Albus?" he all but snarled the name, drawing it out and into an obvious question.

Dumbledore eyed his two former students with great interest. Finally, he turned to Ginny. "Miss Weasley, could you and your two Protectors please come to the staff break room? Explanations will be provided there."

"I . . . Yes, sir," the still overwhelmed teenager agreed.

Most of the professors followed the Headmaster and angered Potions Master out the door and toward their break room.

Harry subtly delayed Ginny so that she ended up behind the professors. He walked in front of her, and Hermione followed closely. Both still were looking in all directions simultaneously.

Ginny remembered the false Professor Moody's repeated declarations of, "CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" but this was beginning to go a bit far.

As they left the excited chatter of the Great Hall, Ginny became aware that the seething Potions Master was in a heated discussion with the Headmaster. Dumbledore seemed to be trying to calm the former Death Eater and spy.

It didn't appear that he was having much success.

The troupe finally filed into the medium sized room and most everyone took seats on the comfortable chairs. Hermione settled in behind Ginny's chair, and Harry took position in front of the door.

Dumbledore went to the fireplace, tossed a pinch of floo powder into the fire, stuck his head into the fire, and called out, "Amelia Bones." Everyone in the room could hear the conversation that took place between the headmaster and the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"Ah, Albus! To what do I owe the pleasure of this conversation?"

"Good evening, Amelia. I just wanted to know for certain that you sent Protectors Potter and Granger to us."

"They arrived then?"

"Indeed. I believe I know all the particulars about Protectors, but I would just like to inquire if any new pieces of information are available?"

"None. They are following the known pattern."

"Thank you, Amelia. I'll let you get back to your work."

"No trouble, Albus. Have a good evening."

Dumbledore pulled his head back out of the fire and took the remaining empty chair. His blue eyes were twinkling madly as he looked from Harry to Hermione. Flitwick and McGonagall were also studying their former students intently. Everyone else in the room looked lost.

Figuring that she had nothing to lose and that she was clearly in the middle of the situation, Ginny spoke up, "Professor Dumbledore? Could you please tell me what's going on?"

"Indeed, Miss Weasley. Mister Potter and Miss Granger are your Protectors."

Only Minerva McGonagall noticed the miniscule smile on Hermione's face.

"You've already said that, Albus!" Snape snarled. "What does it MEAN?"

Surprisingly, it was Professor Binns who responded in his dry, monotonous voice, "Protectors are an ancient designation for a group of people who are trained and act as bodyguards."

"Very true, Franklin," Dumbledore agreed. "They are the best bodyguards the wizarding world knows. Unfortunately, they're extremely rare. To the best of my knowledge, these two are the only two in Great Britain alive today. They always work as pairs. They always offer their protection, as opposed to being asked, and are utterly faithful to those who accept. How they choose whom to protect is known only to them." He settled himself a little bit more in his chair and steepled his fingers. "A Protector cannot be trained, he or she can only be born. Before coming of age, they tend to be highly protective of others. Once of age and having found their partner, the two typically go through training together and then spend the rest of their working lives protecting their chosen subject."

Snape scowled and glared at Harry. The Potions professor was utterly ignored. "How does his apparently being a Protector give him the right to throw me to the floor?"

"During the execution of their duties, Protectors are totally immune to the law. Your action of grabbing Mister Potter by the shoulder was viewed by him and Miss Granger as hostile toward one of the three of them. You were dealt with accordingly."

"Are you telling me that wizarding law doesn't apply to Potter any longer?" asked an incredulous Snape.

Dumbledore nodded. "Becoming a legally recognized Protector pair is extremely difficult, however. Don't think that this will cause either of them to become reckless, Severus. On the other hand, they WILL respond to anything threatening to either of them or to Miss Weasley."

Snape stood and advanced on Harry, stopping just short of touching him. "Couldn't resist gaining even more fame, eh, Potter? After defeating Lord Voldemort you had to find some obscure position above the law?"

Harry continued calmly scanning the room, giving every indication that Snape was invisible and mute.

"Answer me, you fool boy!"

"Severus, there is no point in trying to antagonize him," McGonagall chided him. "He's simply doing the job he was born to." She turned to Hermione as Snape sulked and dropped back into his seat. "Protectors?" she called, using the same form of address she'd seen Dumbledore successfully use.

"Yes, Professor?" Hermione asked.

"Do you require any special considerations from Hogwarts?"

"Yes. My lady is in the Gryffindor Head Girl quarters?" At McGonagall's nod, Hermione continued, "We request the Gryffindor Head Boy quarters for our use. Additionally, we will be adding several more layers of security to those two rooms."

The Deputy Headmistress paused a moment when she realized Hermione implied that she and Harry were going to be sharing the room.

"Agreed. Anything further?"

"No, Professor."

"How would you prefer we explain the two of you to the student body?" Dumbledore asked.

"Leave the two of us and our lady alone and nothing . . . untoward will happen." Though the words were filled with all sorts of warnings and connotations, the tone was matter-of-fact.

"Why did you choose Miss Weasley?" Professor Flitwick asked in curiosity.

"Please do not take offense, Professor, but that is an issue between us, our lady, and perhaps Headmaster Dumbledore if our lady wishes it."

When Flitwick nodded and leaned back in his chair, Snape rose to the offense again. "Will you be following her to her classes?"

Hermione looked mildly back for a moment. "Yes. One or both of us will go with her everywhere with the exception of the loo."

"What if I bar you from the potions classroom?"

"We'll go through the door, by force if necessary. We have sworn ourselves to this duty, Professor. Make no mistake, we will perform it until she is out of danger or she refuses our protection." Her tone was not a threat, simply a statement of fact.

"So I can refuse?" Ginny asked, twisting her head around to look at Hermione.

"Yes, my lady, you can. I would ask that you hear our reasons before doing so, however."

Ginny held Hermione's eye for a moment before turning and catching Harry's eye. She gave a short nod and settled back into her chair.

"Any further questions?" Dumbledore asked.

Snape scowled deeply but didn't say a word. Everyone else shook their head and muttered good nights to everyone else as they headed out the door.

Dumbledore also stood. "Might we have that discussion now?" he asked Ginny.

She nodded and followed the aged Headmaster toward Gryffindor Tower, her shadows following silently along. When they reached the entrance to the Gryffindor Head Boy and Girl quarters near the portrait of the Fat Lady, Ginny grinned slightly at Harry and spoke the password, "The diary of Tom Riddle."

As they entered the small sitting room that had the two Gryffindor Head quarters branching off from it, Dumbledore observed, "Fascinating choice of password, Miss Weasley."

She nodded, recognizing the implied question. "I use it to remind myself, Professor."

Even Harry gave a short nod as he and Hermione examined the room. Harry began a series of security spells onto the entrance and sitting room as Hermione did the same to both the Head Boy and Girl rooms. Ginny and Dumbledore took seats in front of the small fire and watched the two Protectors work.

Ginny was immediately lost as to the spells being cast, and Dumbledore raised an eyebrow at one or two, but made no move to stop the pair.

When he was finished with the spells, Harry moved to a place behind Ginny's chair, once more folding his hands into his robe.

Ginny turned in her seat to look at him in annoyance as Hermione re-entered from the Head Boy's area and took up station with her back to the reverse of the portrait guarding the room. "Harry, sit down. I can't talk to you and Hermione if you're standing around the room like this."

"My lady, we're on duty. So long as there is anyone in the room not on your specified trust list, we will not let down our guard."

"Trust list?" Ginny asked, looking back and forth from Harry to Hermione.

"Yes, your trusted list, Miss Weasley," Dumbledore answered, not the least bit annoyed. "Give them a list of people whom you trust implicitly and they will do nothing to impede them. They will even leave you alone with someone from that list, and will also relax, which is what I believe you were originally after."

She nodded and turned back to Harry. "On my trusted list, as Professor Dumbledore called it, I would like him, Professor McGonagall, and my family."

Harry and Hermione nodded. Harry spoke, "Acknowledged. Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Arthur Weasley, Molly Weasley, William Weasley, Fleur Weasley, Charles Weasley, Percival Weasley, Fredrick Weasley, George Weasley, and Ronald Weasley. Is this correct, my lady?"

Ginny opened her mouth for a moment before apparently changing her mind. She simply nodded.

Harry and Hermione both immediately relaxed a bit and took seats. "How have you been doing, Ginny?" Hermione asked with a warm smile.

"Fine," the younger woman answered, taken aback by the abrupt change in demeanor. She shook her head. "What is going on?"

"We're your bodyguards. We'll protect you from anything and everything until you say otherwise or the danger passes," Hermione answered.

"Except your homework," Harry added with a grin.

Ginny threw him a dirty look. "What danger?"

"You're aware the Death Eaters have a new leader since Voldemort was defeated?" Hermione asked.

Ginny nodded.

"They are a danger to you."

"Me?" Ginny asked in surprise.

"You," Hermione confirmed. "You're aware that you're the seventh child of a seventh child?"

"Yes, but I thought it was seventh son of seventh son."

Dumbledore answered, "At the time that that ancient prophecy was translated, the world was a decidedly sexist place. Women, even potential witches, were not highly regarded. With that in mind, the more proper translation would be seventh child of seventh child."

Harry nodded and continued, "We're worried that the Death Eaters will try to kidnap you and try to exploit your power."

"What power?" she asked in confusion.

"Nobody is quite sure, Miss Weasley. That prophesy is very vague, even going by the general prophesy standards." Hermione smirked but didn't interrupt the Headmaster. "All it really says is that the seventh child of a seventh child will have great power. Whether it's some uncommon ability such as being a True Seer as the Muggles tend to believe, or just a more powerful witch or wizard, nobody truly knows."

"The Death Eaters could be after me for an ability that I might not even have and don't know anything about?" Ginny was understandably upset by this news.

Harry and Hermione shrugged apologetically. "Better safe than sorry?" Harry offered.

What could only be described as a growl was the only answer from the fiery young red-head.

"Do you have any further questions of me, Miss Weasley?" the Headmaster asked, standing up.

"No, sir," the Head Girl answered.

"Protectors?"

"Yes, sir. Two things. Please remind the staff of our purpose here. We will not interfere with any of the workings of the school, but we will be doing our jobs."

Dumbledore's eyes smiled for a moment. "I will remind Severus that you're doing a job and that you're no longer students, therefore he cannot take points from you."

"I'm sure he'll find some way," Ginny grumbled, just loudly enough for everyone to hear.

"And I do apologize for this, Ginny, but we really have no choice if we're to keep you safe," Harry told her. At the young woman's resigned nod, Harry turned back to the Headmaster. "Lastly, is Dobby still here at Hogwarts?"

"Indeed. However, I daresay he will be here only so long as it take him to learn where you make your home, Mister Potter."

Harry and Hermione gave a little smile. "In that case, may we ask that he's the only house-elf to attend to the three of us?"

Dumbledore nodded and clapped his hands sharply. "Dobby!"

The eclectically dressed house-elf appeared in the room with a pop. "The Headmaster called Dobby, sir?" The elf noticed the others in the room and threw himself at Harry immediately. "Harry Potter, sir! Harry Potter sir came back to Hogwarts!"

Smiling, Harry tried to calm the excited house-elf. "Yes, Dobby. Hermione and I are back. At least until the end of the term. We're Protectors now, for Ginny here," he indicated the youngest Weasley.

Dobby stepped back and scrutinized Ginny for a moment before turning to Hermione. The house-elf studied her for several seconds before nodding decisively. Turning back to Harry, he much more calmly continued, "Dobby will do his best for Harry Potter sir and his Protector partner."

"Thank you, Dobby," Dumbledore interjected. "You are to attend to these three as long as they remain at Hogwarts."

The now strangely solemn house-elf nodded. "Yes, sir, Headmaster Dumbledore, sir."

"Unless there is anything further, I shall be off." When none of the four responded, Dumbledore smiled cheerfully and left.

"Do you have any orders for Dobby?"

Harry pulled two palm-sized trunks from within his robes and handed one to Dobby. "Please help me set us up in the Gryffindor Head Boy quarters."

Dobby bowed to Hermione and calmly followed Harry toward the Head Boy quarters.

Ginny watched them leave with a small frown. "Dobby seems a lot calmer than I was expecting."

Hermione smiled. "He understands what Protectors are."

Ginny frowned when Hermione didn't explain what she meant. "And . . . ?"

"In essence, we are servants. He understands that and respects that. Being his usual hyperactive self is distracting to the two of us, and he knows it. By being calm and helpful, he's doing his best for us."

"So once you're not longer my Protectors, he'll go back to acting like he was?"

"Probably."

"Weird." Ginny studied Hermione for a few seconds more before continuing, "Where have you two been for the past nine months?"

"Protector training. It's mostly the same as highly accelerated Hitwizard training with a few specialized additions."

"Where?"

"Bern, Switzerland. The only Protector training facility in the world."

"Wow. You guys are rare."

Hermione shrugged modestly.

"What was that pledge you swore?" Ginny asked next.

"My hand, my head, and my heart?"

"That's the one."

"My actions, my life, and my love."

Ginny looked at her strangely. "You pledged your love to me?"

"My love's life," Hermione corrected herself, nodding toward the doorway where Harry was just re-entering the room.

"After all," Harry picked up the conversation, "the idea is to pledge everything dear to me to your protection. What more do I have than my actions, my life, and most importantly, my wife's life?"

"WIFE?" Ginny gaped at them.

Harry and Hermione broke into identical grins. "Protectors always work in pairs. What, you thought that we WEREN'T a couple?"

"I knew you were a couple, but I didn't expect you to be married!"

Harry shrugged with a grin. "Surprise."

Ginny squealed and hugged a laughing Hermione. "Oh, you have GOT to tell me about the wedding." She grinned salaciously. "And the honeymoon."

Hermione laughed as Harry groaned. "I'm going to bed. G'Night."

That is all the further I wrote. Here are some notes I made as for the rest of the story:

They're bonded "Protectors". Utterly devoted bodyguards. Very powerful. Telepathic link and some sort of power-sharing between them. Perhaps one is primarily offensive and the other defensive.

One scene of some Slytherin upperclassman annoying Ginny. If the Slytherin pulls his wand, he's in really deep shit. Survives it, but spends a few days in the hospital. Snape, predictably, blows his top and is completely ignored.

Vindictive Snape starts pulling points like crazy, eventually causing a confrontation with Dumbledore and the other House Heads.

Everclosed robes. At least one wand each, plus a handgun? Sword, dagger, something? Gun on Hr, Gryffindor's sword for H?

They admit to Ginny that it is all a ruse. Ginny wasn't a real target, but they were protecting her as if she were. Draco and company, after fall of V, were out for Harry's blood. Seeing him protect Ginny, they'll assume she is a bigger target.

Let slip a "prophecy" and 7th child of 7th child fact to draw the bad guys to the bait?

Eventually, they will attack or try to kidnap Ginny.