

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Intro - Foreword

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter

Ostentatious title, huh?

Well, I figure that even Hermione wouldn't be able to fault the accuracy of the title this way.

Yes, this is my one and only dream journal.

I know, I know. I've been told before to keep a dream journal. Trelawney, the fraud, did. Snape, the bastard, did. Even Madam Pomfrey did, though at least in her case it was for my good and not hers.

I think she was worried about my mental health.

Can't blame her, really.

Cuz I am, too.

Well, not any more, so much, but back then . . .

Where was I?

Dream journal. Right.

I'll be writing down the more interesting dreams in here.

Well, interesting of the "Wow, that was strange but still interesting to read about later." variety. As opposed to the visions (I wrote those down, too, but those aren't dreams). Or the standard Cedric, Sirius, Dumbledore, Dursley, or Voldemort nightmares. Or the dreams that I've been told that most teenaged guys get.

The one with Padma, Susan, Hannah, Cho, and Daphne (why the bloody hell was Greengrass in that one?) with a large bottle of extra-dark Honeyduke's chocolate sauce, for instance.

No, I think I'm going to keep that dream to myself.

Anyway, these dreams that I'm going to be writing down. Not all of them are happy, and not all are depressing. I'm writing them down because they're interesting. Well, at least I think so.

Incidentally, I understand that many people try to relate their dreams as being "fuzzy" or "hazy" or some such. Mine aren't. Does that make me strange, or everyone else?

Anyway, the timeframes are all over the place. In some I'm younger, some I'm older. In some cases I know more than I did at the time. In some I'm not surprised to see people alive who shouldn't be.

You know, the general "in a dream, everything seems normal no matter how impossible it actually is" stuff. So don't cry to me that such and such a thing can't happen. I KNOW most of this can't happen.

Doesn't mean I can't dream it, though, right?

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter The Last Wizard Standing

This first dream I'm going to relate took place during my seventh year, however the events of the sixth certainly weren't what had happened to me in reality.

I woke up feeling awful. Not in the "Ow, my foot's sore." way but more along the lines of "Find the sadistic bastard who just stabbed me in the gut and twisted the knife. After you've beat them unconscious, please kill them. Then kill me to put me out of my misery." Yeah, THAT kind of awful.

I briefly considered opening my eyes to determine where I was. It took a very short time, roughly the same amount of time Snape spends smiling at Gryffindors in a week, before I decided opening my eyes would be a really bad idea.

Instead, I just listened. The whole "not moving a muscle" thing sounded like a REALLY good idea just then.

No noise of any kind.

There was no telling whether that was a good thing or a bad thing at that point.

Okay, now to try to announce that I'm among the living, no matter how much I wished otherwise. "Hllgh?"

My grasp of the English language knows no bounds.

"Harry?" Hermione's voice.

Oh, good; I was safe. "Hrnyne?" Now, this is just getting ridiculous.

"Oh, Harry. I'm glad you're waking up."

Speak for yourself. "What. Hap - p'n'd?" Better, but my desert-dry throat still didn't like cooperating.

There was a long pause. "Don't worry about that right now." Pomfrey's voice, so that meant Hogwarts hospital wing. Again. "Now, how do you feel?" she asked.

"Aw - ful."

"Mr. Potter, I think that's the first time you've honestly answered that question for me."

I tried to grin at that, I really did. I can just see the smile she has to be wearing.

"Well, I'm glad to see you laugh, even if it is at me. Now, am I correct in thinking that you're very sore all over, headache, and moving hurts?"

Good guess. "Yes."

"That's what I expected." A goblet was pressed against my lips. "This is a pain potion, Mr. Potter."

Oh, good.

Blech. Potion number seven on my personal list. Strong, but short-term.

How sad is it that I could recognize pain potions by taste?

Not that Snape had taught me that skill. No, this dubious skill I had gained from long, personal experience in that very room. Talk about hard-won knowledge.

"As I'm sure that you will want to know what happened, I'll leave now and let Miss Granger explain what happened to you. I'm leaving a dose of Dreamless Sleep Potion for you to take after she finishes speaking with you. See that he takes it."

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," Hermione said.

Pomfrey's footsteps receded toward her office.

The silence held and I started to become very concerned. Hermione was NEVER this hesitant to talk.

"What happened?" I finally asked. True to predictions, the pain was gone, and I could talk normally.

"Well," she began hesitantly, "as best we can figure, Voldemort created a magical disease. Maybe it was a curse; we aren't sure. Either way, that's what happened to you."

"Am I okay?" I experimentally opened my eyes to slits. The light-dark patterns I could see told me that I was in "my" bed in the infirmary. I turned my head far enough to look toward the blurry Hermione at my bedside.

"You will be," she answered, smiling at me. I couldn't see the smile, of course, but I could hear it easily enough.

Knowing the next step, I started moving my hand toward her. She's had this thing about holding my hand when I'm newly awakened. Not that I particularly minded.

Seeing my hand move, she plucked my glasses off the bedside table and slipped them onto my face before taking my hand into both of hers.

Vision thus restored, I took a proper look around. Only one other bed was occupied, but the occupant had her back turned to me.

"How's everyone else?" I asked, bringing my attention back to Hermione. If I was this sore, it stood to reason that something had happened. Considering my track record, I felt that the possibility of some of my friends being hurt was well justified, even if I'd been told it was a disease created by Voldemort.

She hesitated again, causing all of my warning instincts to light up at once. "What aren't you telling me?" I demanded

She licked her lips and carefully said, "It's been two weeks, Harry. A lot has happened."

"What?" I asked again, panic trying to fight through the waning pain potion.

"I'll let Dumbledore explain it," she temporized. She pulled the other potion bottle off of my table. "Drink. It'll be explained to you when you're feeling better."

Unable to fight the combination of fatigue, returning pain, and determined witch, I quickly fell asleep.

When I next awoke, it was to considerably less pain. Without assistance, as nobody seemed to be at my bedside at the moment, I reached over and retrieved my glasses.

It was apparently the middle of the night. The other bed was still occupied, but the woman was now facing me, eyes bright in the dark room. "Wotcher, Harry."

"Tonks?"

"That's me," she chirpily replied.

"What happened to you?"

She didn't answer for a moment. "What have you been told?"

"Nothing much," I grumbled. "Voldemort got me sick or something."

"Or something," she repeated darkly. "Yeah, well, I'm not the one to explain it. Honest truth is that I don't understand most of it, so I couldn't really tell you even if I wanted to."

"That only answered half of my question, Tonks. I also asked what happened to send you to the Hogwarts infirmary."

"Oh, that. I was wounded in an Order raid."

I blinked hard at this. To my knowledge, the Order had never conducted a raid. "WHAT?"

"Let Dumbledore explain it," she said quickly.

"Is everyone okay?"

She hesitated for only a second. "Everyone on the raid came through it fine. Well, I'll heal. Remus, Hestia, McGonagall, and Gwen are all fine."

"What happened to you?"

She mumbled something.

"What was that?" I asked her to repeat herself.

She sighed. "I said, 'I tripped.'"

I tried. I really did. The laugh came out anyway.

"I have a good excuse this time! I was kinda distracted dueling Aunt Bellatrix."

My good mood was gone in a flash. "Did you get her?" I asked lowly.

"Remus did," Tonks answered simply.

"Good," I said in great satisfaction.

Pomfrey, wearing a dressing gown, poked her head out of the door to her apartment. "I thought I heard voices. How are you feeling, Mr. Potter?"

"Better."

"Good," she said with a nod. "I'll inform Professor Dumbledore. He'll want to talk with you immediately."

"It's the middle of the night!" I objected in surprise. She wasn't really going to wake Dumbledore, was she?

Pomfrey shrugged. "He said immediately when you awoke and could answer questions." At my incredulous look, she explained, "I'd usually be concerned for his and your sleep, but Albus needs precious little sleep anymore. You've been asleep for two weeks, so I don't think missing a few hours will do you any harm," she said in a dry tone and with a grin. "I'll call him immediately. He'll likely be in momentarily. Shout if you need anything."

I looked over toward the washroom, measuring the distance and trying to come to a decision.

All bustling efficiency, she levitated me into the room and let me do my business. Back in bed, I was only blushing mildly as I thanked her.

She waved it off. "Nothing we haven't had to do before, Mr. Potter. I left your wand on your table, so you should be able to help yourself to some degree." She turned her head, "Miss Tonks, how is your leg?"

Tonks nodded. "Better; it hurts less. I only need one more dose of Skele-Gro, right?"

I winced in sympathy, remembering my own experiences with that potion.

"Indeed." Pomfrey glanced at the clock. "In about six hours." She looked back over at me. "I'll inform Albus you're awake." She headed back to her apartment.

"How are you, really?" both of us asked simultaneously. We both laughed.

"You answer first," Tonks invited.

I shrugged. "Feeling better. Still wish someone would explain what happened to me, though."

She winced. "Yeah, I can't blame you. Honestly, Harry, I'm not the one to explain. If Dumbledore doesn't explain what happened then I will. But give him a chance first, okay?"

Her pleading expression curbed my impatience, at least for the moment. I needed answers soon or I wouldn't be responsible for my actions. Instead of taking out my frustrations on her, though, I said, "Fair enough, for the moment. So, how are you, really?"

"Honestly, I'll be fine. I dodged a curse by Auntie Bell, tripped, fell, and broke my leg. She hit my lower leg and foot with a Bone-Shattering Curse after that, though. I'll be fine, eventually, but that Skele-Gro bloody well HURTS."

Her grimace and pout made me laugh. "I know, I know. Had to re-grow all the bones in my arm once after Git-roy Lockhart removed them."

She stared at me for a moment. "Why in the name of Magic did he remove all the bones in your arm?"

"I'd broken it playing quidditch. He claimed he could fix it." I shrugged, not understanding the man's reasoning any better now than I had at the time.

"What a prat."

"Hey!" I answered in annoyance.

"Not you, you ponce. I meant him."

"Oh."

The door to the infirmary opened and Dumbledore entered. I was shocked to realize that the man's incessant twinkle was nowhere in sight. Even in the middle of the night, I expected his eyes to light the room. They always had, after all.

"Harry!" the man said jovially. "How are you doing, my boy?"

Between the overly cheerful tone and lack of humor in his eyes, I was now very much on my guard. "I'm told I'll be fine. I'm also told that you'll explain what happened to me."

Dumbledore sighed and seated himself beside my bed. "Indeed, that is one of the reasons I needed to speak with you as soon as possible after you awoke. First, however, I have a few questions. Please answer honestly, even though they may seem quite odd for me to ask. Forgive me, but

they are also going to be quite personal. Are you ready?"

Confusion, panic, and apprehension fought for dominance in my brain, causing me to be even more on guard. "Yes, sir," I answered cautiously.

"How is your relationship with Miss Chang?"

Whatever I had been expecting, that wasn't it. "Uh, we dated two years ago, briefly. It didn't work out." The man had to have known this already. What was going on?

He nodded. "And Miss Weasley?"

"We dated some last year but broke it off amicably. Sir, why are you asking me about this?"

"In due time, dear boy. In due time. Miss Granger?"

"What about her?"

"How is your relationship with her?" he repeated patiently.

"She's my best friend, sir."

"I am aware of this, Harry. I was wondering if you had any . . . romantic interest in her."

I stared at him in incoherent confusion.

"Professor, maybe you'd better explain a little to the poor kid. His brain is probably about to fry as it is," Tonks's voice came from out of the dark.

"Perhaps so, Nymphadora," Dumbledore agreed. He turned back to me, ignoring her growl. "Miss Tonks is correct. I had best explain the situation to you. Before that, however, I must ask: what is the last thing you remember before waking up a few hours ago and speaking with Miss Granger?"

I thought back and drew a blank on what could have happened. "Friday afternoon we won the Quidditch Cup after beating Ravenclaw. I went to bed sometime after midnight, I think. Nothing unusual happened after that that I can remember."

Dumbledore nodded and sighed. Leaning back in his chair, he brought a hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose.

It was this visible display of tension that was the most alarming thing about the entire situation. Voldemort could be knocking on the front gates, and he wouldn't look this upset.

His hand dropping again, he peered at me. "Please prepare yourself, Harry. What I am about to tell you is going to be quite a shock."

I was dying. Cho, Ginny, or Hermione was dying. Cho or Ginny had been captured. Cho or Ginny were dead.

All of these and more alarming thoughts flew through my mind in a split second.

I closed my eyes and took a breath, consciously calming myself. Undirected thought wasn't accomplishing anything more than making me panic.

"What's wrong?" I asked, close to panic. Close to panic was better than full out panic, right?

"There is no immediate danger," Dumbledore immediately said, apparently seeing my tense posture.

Knowing that there was no need to immediately jump up and run off to a rescue at least helped. The panic in my gut uncoiled just a little.

"Okay," I said, keeping my eyes closed and taking a deep breath. "Nothing needs to be done right this second. Now, will you tell me what IS wrong?"

I heard him sigh again. I opened my eyes and saw the sad expression etched on his suddenly old and weary looking face.

"Voldemort attacked that Saturday morning."

I blinked in confusion. Being attacked and hurt enough to cause me to be in the hospital? That should have awakened me, right? I'd always remembered the mental attacks as well, so . . . What was it? "I don't understand, sir. Voldemort attacked the castle?"

"No. Voldemort attacked the world."

Still confused but now frowning, I repeated, "I don't understand, sir."

"He did not attack any one place. In a sense, he attacked everywhere at once. Tell me, have you ever heard the term 'biological warfare'?"

"I have heard it, sir, but I don't remember much about it."

"I'm sure Miss Granger could give you a better explanation as it is a muggle term, but as I understand it, it is the use of diseases as a weapon of war."

A vague recollection came to me. "Ah, that was what it was. I remember it from primary school. Using germs in a gas over cities or something like that. I don't know whether it's ever been done, though."

"In a sense, it has. As closely as we can determine, Voldemort magically altered some disease during his first rise to power. In the intervening twenty years, everyone in the world has caught it. In its dormant state, there was nothing to show that anyone had caught anything, so there was no way to know it even existed. However, early Saturday morning he performed a ritual that activated the disease. All over the world and all at once."

I'm sure I paled. "What has it done, sir?"

Dumbledore's face was grave. "To the muggles, nothing. They are completely unaware that anything is amiss. To the wizards . . . Any wizard under a certain power level slipped into a coma and died before we awoke Saturday morning."

I paled even further. "How many?" I asked hoarsely.

"Slightly less than fifty percent of the male magical population of the planet," Dumbledore whispered, gaze distant.

My brain attempted to shut down.

Fifty percent of the wizards in the WORLD had DIED?

"There is more," Dumbledore went on softly. "Those that didn't die were also . . . affected."

"Wait," I croaked out. "You're saying that half the wizards DIED?"

"Yes."

"What about the witches?"

He shrugged slightly. "It seems that it was a gender specific curse. The witches, apparently, are all entirely unaffected."

Despite my tight throat, I swallowed. "How were the rest of us affected?"

"Technically, the answer is total sterilization." Seeing my blank look, he explained, "In simpler terms, none of us can ever again have children."

Oh, bloody hell.

"The wizarding world is going to die due to lack of children? What good could that possibly do for Voldemort?"

"My own theory is that the sterilization was unintentional. Killing off large numbers of underpowered wizards is something I can comprehend him attempting. Recall, he is convinced that pure-bloods are more powerful."

"So he was targeting half-bloods and muggle-born wizards?" Dumbledore nodded. "What a hypocrite. He's half-blood!" I objected.

Dumbledore shrugged. "True. However, with the rituals he performed upon himself, he ensured that he was above the power threshold."

I again swallowed against a constricted throat and attempted to order my thoughts. "You, me, and Remus survived. Who else?"

Tonks answered, "Everyone except Dung from the Order came through."

"You lost a few classmates, Harry," Dumbledore answered gently. "Misters Crabbe, Goyle, Boot, Cornfoot, Macmillan, Finch-Fletchley, and Thomas from your year. I have a full list for you to read later at your leisure."

As guilty as the thought made me, I was glad to hear that Ron was still alive. "What else?" I asked in a croak.

"Those of us who survived until Saturday morning were all exceedingly weak, physically, until some time on Tuesday."

Suddenly realizing something, my eyes flew open and I looked over at Tonks. "THAT'S why there was an Order raid. The Death Eaters were vulnerable!"

She nodded. "Remus's lycanthropy meant he was fine. All werewolves are sterile anyway, and the curse didn't affect werewolves. He joined us girls in the attack."

"And as almost all of the active Death Eaters are male -"

She nodded and completed my thought, "There were only three defenders. We got the whole group of them in ministry holding cells." She snorted. "Those who survived, anyway. Voldemort has been kept unconscious. Director Hammer cast the Stasis Spell herself."

My mind was still trying to keep up with everything. It didn't even register with me that this meant that the war against Voldemort was over.

Instead, I was sidetracked by the last thing that Tonks had said. "Who?" I asked.

"Director Connie Hammer. She took over the aurors when Director Bones became Minister."

"Huh? Why?"

Dumbledore came back into the conversation, "Of the male survivors, ninety-eight percent of us have been severely weakened, magically. Most are barely better than squibs at the moment. The Healers are confident that it is temporary, but for the time being, all the power in our society rests in the hands of the witches." He twinkled over at Tonks. "Most of them, fortunately, are doing well and not taking advantage of the situation."

"Why am I the only one in the infirmary?" I asked, suddenly. Everyone else was awake and moving around, but I was still laid up in bed?

Dumbledore hesitated a moment. "You reacted differently, Harry, and so it took longer for you to awaken. Speaking of which, how are you feeling?"

"Better," I admitted, slightly surprised at the honest answer.

"Splendid! I do not wish to overtire you, so I shall take my leave momentarily. For the moment, do you have any other questions?"

What a question. "Uh . . . Yeah, but I can't seem to think of any of them."

He chuckled. That annoying old man actually laughed at my shock and confusion.

"Then I shall leave you in the capable care of Madam Pomfrey and Miss Tonks. I believe they can answer any further questions you may have." Standing, he gave each of us a friendly nod and left.

"What do we do now?" I asked Tonks as Madam Pomfrey entered and started running diagnostic spells on me.

"What do you mean?" Tonks asked.

"Well, if none of the guys can have kids, then the wizarding world will just stop in a generation, right?"

Tonks frowned and tilted her head. "Hmmm," she sub-vocally disagreed.

"There are ways, Mr. Potter," Madam Pomfrey said from my other side, wand still waving over me.

I looked at her with something like fear. "Should I ask?"

Her lip twitched. "Nothing too embarrassing to discuss, Mr. Potter, at least in the generalities. Magical cloning is possible, but it has some . . . side effects. We can also magically create an embryo as the mix of a witch and wizard. This method is considered borderline Dark, but it gives us a lot of control over the resulting genetic mix. We can choose the gender of the child for instance, but it also tends to produce magically weaker children than a more . . . *natural* method of conception."

I frowned as I thought it through. "So to repopulate the magical population, we'd have to make it weaker?"

"If we used this method, yes," Pomfrey confirmed. "However, the muggles are unaffected, so any muggle-born children conceived AFTER the attack should be unaffected."

"So we should encourage Hermione's parents to have more kids?" I guessed where the conversation was heading.

She nodded. "That's one thing we're going to do, but that's only a partial answer. At most, they could have only a few more children. The odds of any one of them being magical are better than fifty percent, but still, that isn't very many. Even if all parents of all muggle-borns were willing, we aren't talking about too many potential children overall. No, the answer is something that Albus didn't tell you. One wizard had enough power that he came through the illness healthy. He can have children. Based on his power level, he's likely to have very powerful children."

I brightened. "That's good, right?" Something occurred to me, and I immediately voiced my worry. "He's not some pure-blood supremacist, is he? I mean, if I'm understanding what you're suggesting, you're going to encourage this wizard to have as many children as possible, correct?"

She nodded. "Correct. To answer your question, he's not at all discriminatory on blood status or ethnicity as far as I'm aware."

"Well, that's good, isn't it? I mean for the good of wizard-kind, anyway." I thought about it for a moment. "You know, I almost feel sorry for this guy." Tonks and Pomfrey looked surprised at this, so I explained, "Having the future of all wizards on his shoulders?"

"As opposed to a prophecy that a certain black-haired Gryffindor I know was the only one who could kill an otherwise immortal Dark Lord?" Tonks asked.

Well, when you put it that way . . . "Okay, I see your point. Still, I know a lot of guys who would think this is just perfect. Encouraged to have as many children as possible by as many women as possible? Talk about every adolescent male's fantasy." My eyes widened as what I'd just said registered. "Hey, he IS young, isn't he? I mean young enough to still have kids."

Pomfrey's eyes were laughing. "Yes, he is."

I waited, and so did the two women. "So you aren't going to tell me?" I rolled my eyes at the two who were apparently enjoying the situation. "Okay, where is he? I mean, in Europe, America, some tiny island in the Pacific, what?"

"Here in Scotland, actually."

"Well, that's convenient. Would I know him? Who is it?"

Tonks's eyes were sparkling. With obvious relish, she answered, "You."

I woke up at that point. Too bad, actually. It had the potential to be a very . . . entertaining dream.

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Happy Halloween

I think I was eight or so in this one.

I pressed the doorbell and heard the bell go off inside.

The instant the door opened, I held forward my bag and said, "Trick or Treat!"

Mrs. Kominski smiled down at me. "How cute, Harry! What are you dressed up as this year?"

"I'm one of Santa's elves!" I leaned in a little and whispered, "I know this isn't what an elf really looks like, but Mum dressed me this way anyway. She said this is what Santa's helper elves look like instead of regular elves."

My neighbor's grin got wider. "Is that so? Well, I think you look like a proper elf. But, Harry, if you're one of Santa's helper elves, where's Santa?"

I turned and pointed.

She gaze followed my finger, and her jaw dropped.

There, sitting in front of her house, was a sleigh containing a man wearing a plump red suit and a long, white beard. A large sack was on the seat next to him. Pulling the sleigh was a large deer, complete with little bells on the rigging and some sort of greenery woven into his antlers. Incongruously, he had the most ridiculous red clown nose stuck to the end of his face. He kept shaking his head, clearly annoyed with the nose and the branches in his antlers.

Santa, seeing her attention, turned and waved at our neighbor cheerfully.

She was still staring. "Um, Mrs. Kominski?"

She shook her head and blinked down at me. "Yes? Oh! I'm terribly sorry, dear. Forgot myself for a moment." She reached to a large bowl on the table next to the door and dropped a handful of candy into my bag.

"Thanks!"

"Harry?" she asked in an odd tone.

"Yes?"

She was looking at Dad and Sirius again. "Is that . . . Is that reindeer real?"

Mum and Dad had warned me about this question. As Mrs. Kominski was a muggle, I gave her that answer. "He's not a reindeer, but he's a real deer. Dad found him somewhere and trained him."

"I see."

"Bye!"

"Bye."

I ran back to the sleigh, laughing at the reaction she'd had.

As had happened at other streets tonight, a crowd of kids had gathered at the sleigh, all standing agog. Soldiers, firemen, and what looked like turtles wearing bright colors were mixed among the more common Halloween costumes.

Muggles had the strangest ideas of what witches, goblins, and ghosts looked like.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" Santa called. "Have all of you little boys and girls been good this year?"

Shouts of, "Yes!" and frantic nodding were the most common reactions. Some kids simply stared, instead.

"Well, I'll be along to each of your houses in two months. Meanwhile, I think I have a little treat for each of you to tide you over." He reached into the large sack and pulled out a handful of small candy canes, the kind of thing you can buy in the store. Santa cheerfully passed out the candy to the kids, though I saw a few of them go through the line twice.

The crowd finally left and Santa sat back down, taking the reins in his hands. "Let's go home, Rudolph."

Rudolph turned his head and gave Santa a dirty look before turning back forward and starting us in motion.

Sirius seemed to enjoy the attention we gathered as we went down the streets of Godric's Hollow. He smiled, waved, and, "Ho! Ho! Ho!" all the way back to Potter Manor.

Without bidding, Dad pulled us around the back of the manor and into an empty shed.

Once my eyes adjusted to the dark space, I spotted someone waiting for us there that I hadn't been expecting to see. "Uncle Moony!" I ran and jumped up at him.

He caught me easily. "Heya, Cub. How're you doing?" He looked over at the sleigh and his mouth twitched. "Did you three have fun?"

I giggled. "Uncle Sirius and I had fun. I don't think Dad did. Especially when Uncle Sirius steered us under that pine tree."

Remus put me down and walked over to Prongs, pulling pine boughs out of his antlers. "James, you actually let this maniac drive? Don't you know how many charms he has on that motorbike of his?"

Sirius looked up with a hurt expression. He'd been transfiguring his Santa suit back into jeans and a sweatshirt. "I'll have you know that I didn't wreck us. Is it my fault that his antlers stick up ten bloody feet off the ground?"

Remus, standing immediately in front of Dad, was looking up at just over eye level to reach the antlers. "Ten feet?" he asked, dryly.

Dad looked over at Sirius and snorted.

I laughed at them again and removed the bells from the harness.

Done picking pine branches out of Dad's antlers, Remus lifted the harness off.

Dad immediately changed back to himself. The big, red nose was still stuck to his face, though. Glaring at it, and looking very funny going cross-eyed to do it, he pulled out his wand and pointed it at the nose. "*Fidite*."

Nothing happened.

I giggled. Sirius snickered.

Dad glared at Sirius. "I 'ate you. Get dis bloody thig off of by face."

Sirius tried to look innocent. "Whatever do you mean, James?"

Dad looked murderous.

"Allow me," Remus said. He pulled his wand out and released the Sticking Spell.

Dad immediately started firing a wide variety of (mostly) harmless spells at Sirius. Cackling madly, Sirius ran toward the back door, dodging like crazy.

Shaking his head, Remus picked me up and headed the same way at a less reckless pace. He peeked into my bag. "What all do you have in there, Cub? Anything you care to share with your favorite uncle?"

"Sure!" I agreed immediately. I smiled at him. "I'll even share some of it with you, too."

"Why, you!" he laughed, tickling me for a moment. It was a game Sirius, Remus, and I had been playing for as long as I could remember.

"Hey, Uncle Moony," I said when I realized something. "You aren't wearing a costume."

"Sure I am."

I looked at him doubtfully. He was wearing normal work robes.

Leaning in to whisper in my ear, he said, "I'm dressed as a werewolf."

I rolled my eyes at him and went back to poking through my candy haul.

Getting inside, Remus called out, "Hey, Lily! Look what I found. Can I keep him?"

Mum, hands planted on her hips, was standing over Dad and Sirius who were both sitting on the couch. The fact that she was wearing an "elf" outfit that matched mine gave the scene just a touch of surrealism. The general disarray of the room hinted toward exactly WHY the two were in trouble. I stifled another giggle at their expressions of fear and chagrin as they cowered before "Santa's other helper elf".

Mum looked over at us at Remus's words. "No. I want to keep Harry. HE at least acts his age. You can take these two," she waved at the two seated men.

Dad and Sirius's expressions brightened immediately. Glancing at each other, they both jumped to their feet and rushed at us. "Pop!" they called, barreling into the suddenly wide-eyed Remus and enveloping him into hugs. Their momentum caused all of us to crash to the floor.

I easily extracted myself from the pile and went over to the couch as all three men tried to pick themselves up. Sirius "accidentally" tripping one or the other just as they got to their feet probably didn't help.

Mum shook her head. "What is with you, Sirius? Act your age, not your I.Q., would you?"

"Ouch," Sirius said, gazing admiringly up at Mum.

"I think he's on a sugar high from all that candy," Dad supplied, finally getting to his feet and nimbly avoiding Sirius's kick.

"That muggle candy is good stuff!" Sirius added, smiling brightly. His face fell abruptly into a pout. Glaring up at Lily, he said, "I was the one playing Santa. Why didn't you let me pick the candy to give away?"

"What would you have picked?" she asked patiently.

"Chocolate frogs," he answered promptly.

Now she looked amused. "And you don't think that the muggles would've found it strange when their chocolate hopped away from them?"

"Er," Sirius said, blinking rapidly. His face fell again, and he looked abashed. "Good point."

Mum shook her head. "What AM I going to do with you?"

"If you weren't married to that bloke over there," Sirius said, chucking a thumb at Dad, "I could make a few suggestions." He wiggled his eyebrows at her.

She got a disgusted look on her face. James leveled a stare at him.

Sirius raised his hands and smiled. "But since you are, I won't."

Remus rolled his eyes and turned to me. "How has your Halloween been?"

"The best!" I enthused through a mouth full of chocolate. "Happy Halloween, Uncle Remus!"

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter The Sacking of Vernon Dursley

I don't know if I was still a student or not, not that it really matters.

"Who is the next one?" I asked Vice-President Cummings of Grunnings Drill Company.

Cummings looked at the page in front of him. "Vernon Dursley."

And now for the main event . . .

A polite knock on the door sounded only moments before Uncle Vernon entered the room with an obsequious smile. "Mister Vice-President? You asked to see me, sir?"

Brown-nosing bastard.

Cummings looked over at him. "Dursley, yes, come in. Take a seat."

He did just that, taking a place at his boss's right side, papers stacked oh-so-neatly in front of him, pen beside the stack. He looked at Cummings attentively, apparently waiting to learn why he'd been summoned. *You'll be in for a rude shock on that one*, I thought with glee while keeping a polite expression on my face.

Cummings waved a hand at me. "Mr. Griffin here has purchased enough Grunnings stock that he is now has a controlling interest."

Uncle Vernon immediately sat up straighter and smiled at me. Probably the first time he's ever done that without it involving a lot of blood and / or pain on my part. Not that he'd recognize me. A Glamour Charm made sure of that.

Cummings continued, "Mr. Griffin has assured me that he is not planning on suggesting any changes here at Grunnings, but he wanted to meet the senior staff."

Uncle Vernon smiled even wider at me and extended his hand. "Vernon Dursley, sir. Pleasure to meet you."

I smiled slightly and took his hand for a moment. "Yes, yes," I said, trying to sound as bored as possible. "I simply want to get a sense of the people in charge. Tell me a bit about yourself, Mr. Dursley." *Let's see if anything you say is actually truthful.*

Chest puffing out, Uncle Vernon started nattering on to me about what a wonderful person he was and how valuable he was to the company.

After less than a minute I got to the limit of my patience listening to such drivel, and I held up a hand. "I've already read the company reports of your employment, Mr. Dursley. I'm more interested in what you're like outside of work. Civic activities, volunteer work, church, family, that sort of thing."

Uncle Vernon looked panicked until the end of my statement, then his expression brightened. "Ah, yes. My family is quite important to me. My wife, Petunia, is active with a neighborhood group of friends and in her flower garden. We've a son, Dudley, who attends Smeltings. He's a successful pugilist as well, my boy is. Division champion in his weight class! Of course, he has his own circle of friends as well. Good group of boys."

I hadn't seen such a pile of steaming dung since the dragons left after the First Task.

Acting as if I believed every word of it, I nodded politely. "No other family, then?"

"Well, I have a sister, Marge. She has her own place out in the country. Breeds purebred bulldogs."

Without looking, I could hear Hermione, wearing her own Glamour, start leafing through the folder of papers she had brought in.

"And your opinion on what Her Majesty's government should do with criminals?" I asked next.

Uncle Vernon looked at me with a slight frown, an expression more suited to his pet walrus. Sorry, his son. "I'm afraid, sir, that I don't quite understand your question."

Which word didn't you understand? "Ah, sorry. Do you advocate punishment through incarceration and monetary fines, or do you advocate more strict or more lenient punishments for those who break our laws?"

Uncle Vernon set his face into hard lines. "The stricter the better. Drifters and thieves stealing valuables from us hard-working folk? And what do

they get for it? A slap upon the wrist and continue sponging off of society. No, sir. Put 'em to hard labor so they EARN their keep."

Hermione stopped her search for a moment and made a small note on the pad in front of her. No doubt to ask him later if he also believed in harsher punishments for child abusers.

I continued to lead him deeper into a grave of his own making. "And your opinion on alternate lifestyles?" Dursley again looked confused, or perhaps constipated, so I explained my question, "Oh, unwed couples living together, for instance. Same gender couples as another example. Any living arrangements that are outside of the usual family structure."

"I . . . strongly disagree with such living arrangements. A family should be man and wife taking care of their children."

"You don't believe in adoption, then?"

"Oh, certainly. I meant to say that the couple should take proper care of all of the children in their custody."

Like me? "I see." Okay, time to set the hook. "Based upon your obvious moral stance, Mr. Dursley, may I assume you believe in honesty, fair wages, and being even-handed in your business dealings as well?"

Dursley nodded firmly. "Yes, sir."

"Ah," Hermione said, drawing the attention of all of us. Good thing she said something. I was about to throw up at what Uncle Vernon was saying. "I knew it was here," she went on, pulling a sheet of paper from the stack in front of her. She looked over at Uncle Vernon. Her voice was a low, sinuous purr that wrecked havoc with my concentration. "You live at Number Four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, correct?"

Apparently it was doing the same to his concentration, too. He pulled his hanging tongue back into his mouth (okay, maybe it wasn't that bad, but the dirty old man was obviously leering at my girlfriend) and nodded to her.

"According to the records, there is another minor living at your address. A nephew, one Harry Potter."

Uncle Vernon jerked as if someone had hit him with an electric cattle prod. "How . . . How did you learn about him?"

"Ah, you do recognize the name, then," I stated. "Tell us, how is the lad?" *Other than sitting across the table and enjoying tormenting you?*

"Uh, he's . . . he's away at school at the moment." Uncle Vernon suddenly looked very uncomfortable.

"Nephew?" Cummings asked, entering the conversation again. "What's this about a nephew, Dursley? You've always claimed not to have any more family living with you."

"Petunia's sister's boy. He was left with us as a small child." Uncle Vernon, now a pasty white, hooked one finger under his shirt collar and pulled it out a little bit.

Cummings was looking toward his employee, so when Uncle Vernon looked my way, I smirked and suppressed the Glamour Charm for a few seconds.

He yelped and jumped backward so quickly that he fell out of his chair. I forcefully kept myself from laughing at him as Cummings helped him back to his feet.

Uncle Vernon slowly climbed back into his chair, staring at me. After a few seconds of studying my "Griffin" appearance, he shook his head.

"Are you okay, Dursley?" Cummings asked, looking at his subordinate closely.

"What? Yes, yes. I'm fine," he waved the man off. "Now, where were we?"

Cummings's eyes narrowed for a moment.

You really shouldn't dismiss your boss like that, Uncle Vernon, I thought with hidden glee.

Voice low, Cummings said, "You were about to explain why you have had your nephew living with you for years yet never mentioned him nor ever brought him to the company picnics or health fairs."

"Ah, yes. Well, I'm a bit embarrassed to admit it, but he's a very . . . disturbed youth. Always in some sort of trouble. Spends most of the year at Saint Brutus's Secure Center for Criminal Boys. I do what I can with him, of course, but unfortunately there is only so much I can do in the time I have him under my roof."

Good attempt at a save, but it won't do you any good. We can finally spring the trap.

Going according to plan we'd set up, Hermione rifled through the pages again. "How very odd," she said in a puzzled voice. "According to his primary school records, he was not a disciplinary problem, unlike your own Dudley Dursley."

Oh, nice touch, that.

"Something bothers me," I said, drawing Uncle Vernon's attention away from her. The more things we throw at him, the quicker he'll fumble

something major. "A moment ago you claimed you were away at school. Now you're saying he's in some sort of juvenile detention center. Which is it?"

"Ah, both?" He apparently tried to sound assured, but it came out sounding like a question.

Without prompting, Hermione pulled out a cell phone. "What is the number?"

Oh, girl, I'm going to kiss you silly once we're out of here.

Vernon blanched. "I d-don't remember."

She shrugged. "Okay, I'll call information for the number. Where is it?"

"In – in one of the London suburbs. I don't recall which."

Hermione hit a series of numbers and put the phone to her ear. I vaguely wondered if she was actually talking with someone on the other end. "Yes, I'm trying to find the number of a facility called Saint Brutus's Secure Center for Criminal Boys. It should be in the London area." She paused. "You don't say? I'm quite certain it's called Saint Brutus's. Some sort of juvenile detention center." Another pause. "How very odd. Well, thank you for your time." She turned off the phone. "There apparently is no such place," she reported as she tucked the phone away.

Cummings turned to Dursley with a stern look. I quickly copied his action.

Uncle Vernon, paling even further, looked at his boss in fear. Then he turned to look toward me.

Suppressing a spell for a few seconds is so easy to do. I'm sure my wicked grin was approaching epic proportions.

This was finally too much. Uncle Vernon surged to his feet, face sporting a color that wasn't typically found in nature. One beefy finger pointing, he shouted, "You! You little bastard! You're doing something with your freak powers, aren't you? So help me, I'm going to give you the worst beating of your life for this one! Let me go! I'm going to kill this little freak!"

Cummings was trying to hold the rotund man back from lunging across the table and making good on his bellowed threats. "We need some help in here!" Cummings yelled, losing the battle against the much larger man trying to move past him.

The door burst open and a graying but wiry man came in and immediately tackled Uncle Vernon.

"Get off me! You're one of those freaks, too, aren't you? Well I'm on to you now. You can't fool me." From his pinned position, he looked over at Hermione. Spittle flew with every word. "I bet you're one of the freaks, too, aren't you, bitch? No doubt a whore, too, with the way you look. No idea why you're in on this charade with the little freak, but I'll take care of him, you mark my words! Get off me! You're just begging for a lawsuit the likes of which even your freak solicitors couldn't handle. Get off me, damn you!"

Cummings, keeping an eye on the still struggling form on the floor, shouted toward the open door, "Someone call the constables! Dursley's gone mad."

Gone mad? Doesn't that presuppose he wasn't there already?

I looked over at Cummings. "Miss Granger and I seem to be agitating him by being in the same room. Shall we leave and continue our conversation elsewhere?" No sense bellowing at each other in order to be heard over the steady stream of ranting.

"Yes, yes, grand idea," Cummings agreed absently, still watching the two on the floor.

Uncle Vernon was clearly outmatched, but that didn't stop his ineffectual struggling.

Cummings apparently decided that the situation was under control and waved Hermione and me out the door. "Let's continue this in my office for the moment."

Outside of the conference room, one of the executive assistants reported, "Police are on the way, sir." Her eyes slid from the conference room door to Cummings, a question clear in her expression.

Cummings sighed and shook his head before turning back to me, absently straightening his rumpled clothing and hair. I didn't bother pointing out the rip on his sleeve. "I apologize for that, sir," he said to me. "I have no idea what came over him. I've had reports of temper problems with him before but nothing like this. He's such a profitable salesman that I've overlooked his problems. For that, you have my most abject apologies."

Playing the understanding business owner, I waved him off. "No fault of yours. If he was a good salesman, then I can understand why you kept him on." Now to twist the knife a little. "On the other hand, based on what just happened and the rather disturbing revelations about young Mr. Potter, perhaps -"

Cummings held up a hand. "Please, sir, say no more. The rest of the board and I will terminate his employment immediately and ask the authorities to investigate him with regards to Mr. Potter's welfare. If Dursley could attack you like that and shout such threats, there's no telling what Mr. Potter's condition could be." He looked back at the conference room door for a moment, ignoring both the indecipherable shouting from behind the door and the administrative assistant blatantly listening to every word. "I don't believe I recognize the man who came in to help."

I looked over to the door, too, smiling fondly. "Oh, that's my driver. I assure you, Remus is quite capable of handling the likes of Vernon Dursley."

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Finite Totalus

This one was late seventh year.

"Can you imagine the uses for that spell?" I asked as Hermione and I entered the Great Hall. We were coming from Charms class and had just learned a wonderful new spell.

Hermione sighed at my question. "Like Professor Flitwick said, it's a very difficult charm to cast. It takes a lot of energy."

"Well, yeah, but then I'd only have to remember *one* charm to undo any of the effects Fred and George do to us during their Wheeze testing. It took you two days to look up the counters to the last one they sent to Ron," I pointed out. It wasn't a critique of her, and she knew it. The layering of the charms had also required Professor Vector and Madam Pomfrey to help unravel.

Hermione tried not to grin at the recollection. "You do have a point, I suppose. I know that Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor Flitwick have the power to cast it. I expect that Professor -"

"Hey, Potty!" a voice shouted from immediately behind my left ear.

Instincts kicking in, I drew my wand, turned, and cast the first spell that came to mind. "*Finite Totalus!*" Okay, not the best dueling spell in the world, maybe, but I was proud of my reaction time anyway.

Draco Malfoy smirked at me, not even bothering to try to avoid the spell. "Casting a spell at a student who doesn't even have his wand out? I'm afraid I'll have to dock you points for -" Malfoy's face twisted up in confusion as he broke off what he was saying. He brought his right hand up and grabbed it with the left one, his face grimacing. Next, he ran his hands quickly over his chest and then down his legs. It looked like he was the victim of an Itching Hex. "What'd you do to me?" he demanded, hands rubbing all over himself and writhing in place. "Do something," he next commanded Crabbe and Goyle, voice edging toward panic.

The two lumbering Slytherins were clearly at a loss as to what, exactly, to do. They drew their wands but didn't aim them at anything.

I just watched the whole scene in utter confusion, panting a little from the power of the spell I'd just cast.

Snape, McGonagall, and Dumbledore arrived from the direction of the Head Table while Malfoy was still dancing in place.

"What'd you do to him, Potter?" Snape snarled.

"Nothing!" I insisted.

McGonagall's lips thinned. "We saw you cast a spell at Mr. Malfoy, Mr. Potter. We know you cast *something* at him. What was it?"

"Finite totalus," Hermione answered, watching Draco curiously.

Dumbledore's eyebrows crawled upwards. "Indeed?" he asked blandly, tone totally at odds with the intent expression he was suddenly wearing.

Draco, meanwhile, was visibly changing. His hair grew out a few inches first. Next, his face's lines shifted slightly, becoming slightly more rounded. Most noticeable, however, were the changes to his body. His stance changed subtly and he suddenly had two objects poking forward from his chest.

My jaw dropped open.

Draco Malfoy had changed into a young woman. She was beautiful in a classical sense; the Malfoys and Blacks did not produce homely magicians, Bellatrix notwithstanding. Despite the physical beauty, there was nothing at all alluring about the new version of Malfoy. There was no softness of expression or manner.

Meanwhile, Malfoy, eyes huge, was looking down the top of his (her?) robes.

All of the other students in the stunned silent Great Hall were blinking in utter consternation at the unexpected sight.

Snape found his voice first. "Potter!" he bellowed. "I'll see you expelled for this attack! I demand you reverse this curse immediately!"

"I can't!" I protested. "I didn't do anything to him. Hermione already told you that I only cast the Finishing All Charm!"

"But . . ." Snape seemed incapable of believing that I wasn't somehow at fault, yet he also didn't know what else to say. If I weren't so shocked and worried, I would have found the sight to be funny.

"Make him fix it!" Draco demanded in a high-pitched, nasal voice. To emphasize his point, he stamped a foot. I managed not to laugh at both the voice and the utterly childish action. The Firsties were better behaved than this ponce.

"Let us go to the Infirmary where Madam Pomfrey shall check you," Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling like a pair of miniature suns.

Snape merely growled at Crabbe and Goyle, keeping them from following.

McGonagall used a more diplomatic approach to her lions, "Miss Granger, please stay here. I shall accompany Mr. Potter and see that he is not . . . unjustly punished."

I breathed a sigh of relief. I didn't see how I could be punished for casting a Finishing Spell on him, but "Snape", "Potter", and "reason" are rarely in the same sentence. Or castle as the case may be.

Hermione nodded. She continued on through the Great Hall and took her regular seat at the Gryffindor table. She was immediately besieged by students asking for a recounting of what had happened.

Meanwhile Dumbledore led the four of us toward the Hospital Wing. Draco spent the time whining to Snape in his very annoying new voice. Behind them, McGonagall and I didn't speak, but I was thankful for her silent support. I think I saw her mouth twitch once or twice, but I decided not to investigate too closely.

In short order, we all came through the doors of the Hospital Wing.

Madam Pomfrey looked up from Neville (his potions accident yesterday was severe enough keep him a couple days, I surmised) and came toward us, pulling her wand out already.

She paused in her approach and looked at Malfoy curiously.

Snape answered the unasked question, "Potter did something to Draco Malfoy." Venom was absolutely dripping from his words.

My jaw clenched, but I didn't say anything. Long experience had proven that trying to protest my innocence, provable or not, was pointless when it came to the utterly biased Potion's Master.

McGonagall, bless her heart, wasn't under such restrictions. "Severus! You heard what he and Miss Granger said when we confronted him. He only cast a Finishing Spell."

Snape glared at me. Trying to keep a neutral expression, I looked back, raising what feeble Occlumency barriers I had.

McGonagall made an exasperated noise. "Harry, may I check the last spell cast by your wand?"

I readily handed my wand over, and she cast, "*Prior Incantato* ." An indistinct shape formed in front of my wand, undulating slowly. The pattern evidently meant something to the three professors, because they all studied it for a few moments.

Dumbledore and McGonagall abruptly relaxed. Snape's scowl somehow became deeper.

McGonagall handed me my wand back with a smile. She turned back to Snape, face becoming implacable. "As they said, it was simply a Finishing Spell."

Snape sniffed disdainfully and pointedly turned away from me, much to my relief.

Hoping to escape the notice of the professors, I shuffled over to Neville. "How're you doing?"

"I'm fine," he answered distractedly, eyes on Pomfrey and Malfoy. "Harry, what in the name of Merlin is going on?"

I explained the situation to him quietly.

At the end, he looked up at me in a combination of humor, awe, and worship. "Should he change his name, then? I mean 'Draco' is male. 'Dracula', maybe?" he finished with a wicked grin.

I quickly smothered my snickers.

"'Dracine' is more likely," McGonagall whispered.

I almost yelped. I had no idea she was nearby, let alone that she'd overheard our quiet conversation.

Mortified, both Neville and I looked at our Head of House only to find her lips quirking up at the corners.

The doors of the Infirmary burst open and Pansy Parkinson barreled in, immediately making for Malfoy's side. "Oh, Drake! What has that half-blood monster done to you?"

I rolled my eyes at her dramatics.

Pomfrey had been casting diagnostic spells all the while and answered the question. "Mr. Potter did nothing directly, Miss Parkinson. Instead, he released a spell that had been there all along. Do any of you know about the Patrus Potion?"

McGonagall looked surprised, amused, and then neutral again all in the space of a heartbeat. Dumbledore blinked once before his twinkling resumed, even brighter than before. Snape looked livid. Pansy looked as confused as I felt.

It was Neville who answered, "You mean that potion is *real*?"

I turned to him. "Huh?" I asked eloquently.

"It's something of a myth among the pureblood families, Harry. It's a potion that will change a female baby into a male. The original purpose was to guarantee a male heir."

"It is no myth," Snape grumbled. "It does indeed exist, roughly as described. A simple Finite would release the change at anytime in the child's life."

"Which is why I found evidence of a very powerful Magic Locking Charm," Pomfrey added. "I would hazard a guess that Mr. Potter's spell shattered the spell lock - an impressive feat in itself - and then also the results of the potion."

"Rumor has it that the potion is classified as a dark art," Neville hesitantly added.

"Yes, indeed," Dumbledore agreed easily. "There is a heavy fine associated with proof that the potion has been used. I shall have to inform Lucius that it has been proven to have been used upon his . . . child. The list of possible perpetrators will be short, I suspect. It must be administered within hours of birth. It will not work properly after that point."

"My father wouldn't do that to me!" Malfoy protested, still in that voice that made me want to give in to my homicidal impulses.

"Are you absolutely certain?" Dumbledore asked him simply. When Malfoy didn't respond beyond a glare, Dumbledore went on, "I must take my leave. I shall contact Lucius to begin the investigation immediately. Please come with me, Severus. Good day, Minerva, Poppy, Miss Parkinson, Mr. Potter, Mr. Longbottom, Mr. Malfoy." He made it one step before he stopped again and turned. "My apologies. I meant, *Miss* Malfoy." He made his escape, a visibly fuming Snape in tow.

I bit my lip at Malfoy's expression at that. Neville was slowly turning red and shaking slightly.

After another few moments of gaping, Malfoy turned to Pomfrey. "Fix this," she commanded flatly.

Pomfrey kept her composure and answered calmly, "There is nothing to 'fix' in this case. Nothing is actually wrong with you."

"Dammit, I ordered you to fix me!"

I have to give the woman credit. She held her composure. "As I said, there's nothing broken. Now, you're perfectly healthy, so you're free to leave. If you have any questions or problems with any, shall we say, feminine needs, I will be happy to explain things to you."

Malfoy let loose a screech that made me wonder if Crookshanks was being tortured somewhere nearby.

"A WOMAN?" Malfoy bellowed. "I refuse to spend the rest of my days in the form of a worthless bitch!"

Pomfrey and McGonagall's eyes narrowed.

Pansy, though, had the more energetic reaction. "Is that all you think of me?" She hauled off and slapped Malfoy across the face, leaving a red handprint. Apparently done with berating her former boyfriend, Pansy burst into tears and ran from the room.

Pomfrey stood, ignoring the expression forming on Malfoy's face. "I need to go and congratulate Narcissa on her fine daughter. Good day."

Growling, Malfoy also moved toward the door.

McGonagall nodded pleasantly to Neville and me, following Malfoy closely. I spotted Crabbe and Goyle standing out in the hallway for a moment before the Infirmary door swung shut again.

The instant the door closed, Neville and I collapsed in laughter.

I pulled myself together and left after a quick goodbye to Neville.

Out in the hallway, everyone had already scattered. I headed back toward the Great Hall and my interrupted lunch when Ron came striding toward me.

"Hey," I greeted him, fighting the grin back down.

"Hey. I finished talking to Flitwick and tried to find you at lunch. Ginny said you were down here. You alright, Harry?"

"Yeah, everything's fine," I assured him.

"Good," Ron said, falling into step beside me. "Hey, I passed Crabbe and Goyle in the hall on the way down. Do you know who that babe was?"

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter What Now?

I think this was at the end of my seventh year, but I'm not sure.

I was sitting at a table along the side of the Great Hall, chin propped in one hand, idly watching the party as my other hand toyed with the butterbeer bottle in front of me.

I should be celebrating. I should be happy. Why aren't I?

"Hey, mate, what's wrong with you? This is your victory party, Harry!"

I sighed. "Yeah."

Hermione and Ron exchanged a glance and sat down across from me.

"What's wrong, Harry?" Hermione asked quietly. Well, as quietly as possible considering the boisterous party going on around the large room.

"What now?" I asked them.

"What now what?" Ron asked with a confused look.

"What should I do now?" I asked. "I killed Voldemort. Fine. Hooray for me. Now what?"

Hermione and Ron exchanged a longer look.

Before they could come up with an answer, though, we were approached by Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Ish the man of the hour! Come on, Harry. Shtand up and give us a shpeech." *Damn, Shacklebolt really knows how to tie one on!*

I was about to politely decline when some of the other aurors in the room started calling for a speech. The chant was quickly taken up by the students.

Sighing, I bowed to the inevitable by standing and climbing onto the table. The chanting stopped as everyone turned to look at me. *Here goes.* "I've been volunteered to make a speech, it seems," I said in an ironic tone. A wave of chuckles (and giggles from the more inebriated witches) came back at me. "Let's do the obvious one first: Tom Riddle is finally *dead!*" A deafening roar came from everyone before the applause started. I smiled at them for as long as I could stand it before waving them all back down again. It eventually quieted so I could continue.

"I may have cast the last spell, but I certainly didn't fight alone." I smiled down at the two who had followed me from the beginning. "First I want to thank Ron and Hermione for their help over the years." Applause.

"The Order for the training, help, and comradeship." More applause.

I nodded toward the Minister. "The Ministry and its aurors." Louder applause.

"And last but certainly not least, Hogwarts staff and students for introducing me to this world and helping me get started here." The loudest applause yet. Of course with more Hogwarts students in the room than the others, that only made sense.

When it all calmed down again, someone towards the back shouted, "So what're you going to do next?"

How ironic. The same question I just asked Ron and Hermione. "I don't know, actually. Anyone have any suggestions?"

Ron spoke first. "Play seeker for the Cannons!" I was not the only one to laugh. "What? It's a good suggestion," Ron objected.

"Go to Disney World!" Dean suggested. A double handful of people in the room laughed. All the pureblood magicians simply looked confused. Dean just waved them off. "Sorry, muggle joke."

Percy Weasley was standing near the knot of Ministry officials. "You could come to work for the Ministry of Magic."

I managed not to scowl at him. "I'll think about it, Percy, thank you."

"Bag every bird that you see," Seamus suggested with a heavier Irish accent than usual. He raised a shot glass to me in toast and gave an exaggerated wink. Most of the younger males in the room laughed.

"Come teach Defense." Headmistress McGonagall, composed as ever but with a glass of something clenched in one hand.

"Become an auror." Tonks, leaning heavily on Remus Lupin.

"Become a reporter," Luna Lovegood said. She shrugged at Ron's incredulous look. "What? It's a good job."

"Thanks for the suggestions," I said to the audience with a smile. "I'll think about them. Meanwhile, why am I up here talking to you while there's a party we could be having instead?" This generated another roar of approval from the crowd just before a set of W.W.W. fireworks ignited overhead.

I was just climbing down from the table when Parvati appeared from the crowd. Moving close to my ear so that she could be heard, she said, "Owl me when things calm down. I'll take you out for dinner." She snuck a quick kiss below my ear that raised goose bumps. "Chirp, chirp," she breathed into my ear.

Before I could react, she'd moved off, melting back into the crowd.

It took me several stunned seconds to connect what she'd said to Seamus's earlier comment.

Hermione was giving me a wry smile. "Subtle, she isn't," was her only comment on her roommate. "Harry, you could do anything you want. Run for Minister, professional quidditch, lobby to free the house-elves, whatever."

Mad-Eye thumped up to us. "Lass, nobody else has had the balls to tell you this, but your cause is futile." He went on, ignoring her darkening expression. "The problem has at least two parts. First, getting the witches and wizards to accept the possibility is hard enough, but I'll grant you would be worth the effort. The harder part, the impossible part, is the elves themselves. Have you ever even bothered to ask what *they* want?" Hermione opened her mouth to retort, but closed it again without saying anything. Moody nodded. "Didn't think so. Take the lesson to heart, lassie. Make sure someone wants the help before you try."

She huffed at him and stomped off, dragging a protesting Ron behind her.

Moody dropped onto the bench beside me. "Mind if I sit?"

I grinned at the gruff old auror. "Not at all, Mad-Eye."

"Came over here for a reason. Got sidetracked by Granger, but that's neither here nor there." He raised his hip flask in toast. "Thanks, Potter." I retrieved my butterbeer and tapped his flask.

We sat in comfortable silence for a moment, just watching the party going on around us. I absently made a mental note to stay away from the refreshments. George was sulking around that corner of the room.

"How're you doing, lad?" Moody asked me not unkindly.

I opened my mouth to answer, but he waved a hand. "Not physically. I can see you're fine, so don't bother sayin' it. I mean up here." He tapped his temple.

I sat quietly, searching myself for a moment. "Not too bad," I finally said.

"Guilt hasn't hit?"

"Why would I feel guilty for killing *him* of all people?" I asked.

"Because you're a human being."

I nodded, understanding what he said as well as what he didn't. "I've known this was coming for years. I'll be okay."

He accepted that answer at face value. "Those twin terrors of Molly's will be the death of me," Moody grumbled instead.

I just laughed.

He grunted, apparently seeing the humor of the situation himself. "Anyway, I heard what you said a minute ago. I don't know if anyone's asked you this question, but what would you like to do?"

Nowthere's a novel idea. Howabout asking Harry what he wants to do. I sighed. "In the long run? No idea."

He nodded. "Not surprising. Happens to a lot of soldiers just after the war is over. Give it some time and you'll find something to do with yourself. Take Minerva's suggestion, maybe. Heard you were good at teaching the D.A. a couple years back. You can teach these young innocents how to survive. Don't have to decide that right now, though. My question actually was what you wanted to do *right now*."

"I'm at a party that they're throwing for me, and you're asking what I want to do for the next hour?" The words should have been sarcastic, but somehow they came out neutral instead.

He snorted derisively. "You're no more happy to be here than I am, Potter. Being here is for their benefit," he waved at the partygoers.

I was not surprised that he knew and understood. "You heard me ask for suggestions. Do you have any?"

He shrugged. "Many. Depends on what you're after. You could go over to that Finnegan lad and you two could go bar crawling. Find that Patil girl and take her up on her offer. All sorts of things you could do, Potter. The question is: What do you want?"

"I don't know." I sat back and thought about it. If I could do absolutely anything right now, what would it be? The answer came after a minute of thought. It was surprising what it was, but maybe it shouldn't have been. "I want to see Sirius again. I want to see my parents."

He pulled his wand out and cast a Privacy Sphere around us before settling back comfortably and giving a nod. "Now we're getting somewhere. There is a way to do that, lad. If you are serious about it, I won't stop you, and in fact I'll help."

"What's that?"

"You have to die. I'll help you make it as quick and painless as possible if you want to do it.."

One eyebrow tried to crawl off my face. In truth, the thought had occurred to me, though not in quite these terms or for this reason. "I'm surprised you're even talking with me about something like this. You'd actually let me?"

"Aye. Suicide is legal in the wizarding world. After everything you've been through, I for one wouldn't blame you if you wanted to take that way out."

"I'm surprised you aren't trying to talk me out of even thinking about it."

He shrugged. "I've thought it often enough, myself. It'd be hypocritical of me to yell at you for the same thing, wouldn't it? One thing to think about, though. If you're gone, who protects them?"

"Who?"

He waved an arm to indicate the people on the other side of the Privacy Sphere. "Them. Everyone. In one sense, we're the same, Potter. We sacrifice ourselves for them. If you want some advice from an old war-horse: Don't do it anymore. It isn't worth it in the long run."

I frowned at him. "But -"

"Oh, it needs to be done. No doubt about that. But . . . the price I've paid is too high. I'm not talking about the eye or the leg, though those are the obvious ones. No, it's deeper than that. My heart and maybe my soul have been damaged by this. Maybe even destroyed." He gave a careless shrug before taking a hit off of his flask. "I'm too old to change, Potter. I just hope I go out fighting before being put out to pasture. You, though, you're different. You could easily become the next Mad-Eye, so to speak, if you let yourself. You'll keep fighting so long as there's someone to fight. Don't do it, though. You're too good a man to get caught in the trap I'm in. Yes, fight for them when you must, but don't let it consume you." He paused, his good eye staring off into space. When he continued, his voice was softer than I'd ever heard it. "Find someone. Settle down. Become an auror if you must, but don't follow the path I'm on." He took another drink and his eye focused again. When he spoke, his voice came back to the gruff tone I was used to hearing from him. "You got me sidetracked. Must be losing my focus. Bad habit, that. Anyway, yes, if you want to see your parents again I can help. Let me know." Without another word, he waved his wand to bring down the Privacy Sphere and then stomped off toward the doors.

I was still staring after him when Remus sat down in the place Moody had just vacated. "You okay, Harry?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah. I'm good."

Remus subjected me to a long scrutiny, apparently looking for something.

I rolled my eyes at him. He was too damn protective of me. It was touching but funny considering the circumstances. "Where's Tonks?"

He waved vaguely toward where the aurors where more-or-less congregated. "An auror friend of hers found us. The two of them were well on their way to getting giggly-drunk together. I came looking for you instead of staying for that." He searched my eyes again. "What'd you and Moody talk about?"

"He just gave me some advice."

Moony nodded acceptance. "So, have you decided what you want to do?"

I took a moment to answer, but it hadn't changed much from what I'd told Moody. "I want to talk to Mum, Dad, and Sirius."

Remus stood up. "Let's go, then."

I blinked up at him in surprise. "Where're we going?"

"I think it's past time you found out where James and Lily were buried."

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Never Let Go

Set during seventh year. Not that this is anything close to what my seventh year actually was like. Not to mention that some of the personalities are . . . skewed.

And I suppose my subconscious couldn't make a choice.

I leaned forward over my Firebolt, lowering my profile to squeeze out that extra ounce of speed. The air rushed past me, giving me the sense of exhilaration that only comes when I'm flying.

The other seeker inched up beside me and nudged me with his shoulder. At those speeds it can be dangerous to get bumped, but I'm prepared and don't deviate from my path. I lost him in my wake after the snitch darted off in a new direction.

Pouring on the speed, I edged toward my golden target. I reached forward, fingertips almost brushing the fluttering wings of that elusive ball.

Without warning, I suddenly found myself in the open air without a broom. The colored uniforms of the other players and the horrified faces in the crowd all swirled together as the laws of gravity and inertia fought over my tumbling body.

With a gasp, I sat up, unfocused eyes darting this way and that.

"Harry!"

I recognized that voice. It was comforting, safe. One of my flailing hands found a warm body sitting at the side of the bed I was lying in. Without thinking, I turned to the side and pulled the unresisting body close. "Help!"

Another body pressed against my back. "I've got you. I'll never let go."

"Never let go," agreed a second voice from the body in front of me.

"Never let go," I echoed in a mutter, breathing rapidly.

After a few seconds my heart rate came down, my mind started working properly, and I opened my eyes. The sight of the Hogwarts Infirmary was expected. Curled in front of me and nearly purring, Ginny held my arms where they'd wrapped around her. Another feminine hand resting on my hip suggested that Hermione was the one keeping my back comfortably warm.

Instead of shock over the potentially compromising position I found myself in with my two best female (platonic, darn it) friends, I closed my eyes and relaxed into the embrace. I was still spooked by the instant-replay nightmare that had just awoken me.

"Are you okay?" Hermione asked.

"I think so," I admitted after a few seconds of thought.

"What do you remember?"

"A bludger got me, and I took a spill."

She chuckled. "Nice try, Harry. You out flew your broom."

"Did not. Someone hit me."

"You want to see the omniocular recording? You spilled yourself, Harry."

"I *fell* off of my Firebolt?"

Ginny answered, "I talked to one of the broom representatives. Congratulations, Harry, you're the first person to ever exceed the safety charms they built into the thing."

"Wow. I'm honored," I said dryly.

Both girls laughed softly, making no move to crawl out of my bed.

"So how long am I in for this time?"

"That all depends on you," another voice answered.

I opened my eyes and identified the fuzzy, Pomfrey-shaped form coming down the aisle.

"Aren't you three cute?" she asked with a touch of dry humor in her voice. "Much as I agree that pinning him to the bed may be the only way to keep him safe, I must ask you two ladies to move."

I studiously ignored the mental images of the thought of those two pinning me down.

Ginny grumbled and tried to burrow further into my arms.

Hermione audibly sighed and started to get up, but for whatever reason didn't release my sheet covered hip. Because her hand didn't move when the rest of her did, she fell awkwardly back onto the bed.

"If you wanted to fall into bed with me, Hermione, there have to be easier ways of telling me."

"Very funny," she said as Ginny shook with silent giggles in my arms.

"Really, Miss Granger and Miss Weasley, please get up," Pomfrey repeated, voice now tinged with both amusement and exasperation.

I felt Hermione's hand pull at my hip. "I can't," she stated.

We all paused. "You can't?" Pomfrey asked in disbelief.

"I can't," Hermione repeated. "My hand's stuck."

I made a mental note to thank Fred and George. This kind of prank sounded like just their kind of thing, and I was definitely appreciating the results.

Now if she could just move the hand around toward the front a little . . .

Pomfrey waved her wand a few times. "There isn't any spell or potion holding your hand there, Miss Granger," she stated.

Hermione carefully stood up. Once upright, she braced herself with her other hand on my shoulder. "Tell me if this hurts, Harry."

"It hasn't hurt so far," I said. "I can feel the hand there, and it pulled a little when you tried to remove it before, but it didn't hurt."

The hand on my hip came away easily.

Hermione sighed. Then I felt the hand on my shoulder tug. Hermione gave a growl of frustration.

I couldn't help the snicker.

"Hush, you," she snapped.

"What's going on?" Ginny asked.

"She got her hand away from my hip, but her other hand is stuck on my shoulder now."

After more wand-waving, Pomfrey said, "No spells or potions here, either.

"Miss Weasley, please get up. I need more space to work," she continued.

Unfortunately, Ginny couldn't seem to get her hand away from my arm.

"Now this is just getting ridiculous," Pomfrey muttered, waving her wand once again.

After some judicious experimentation, we learned that both girls needed to keep at least one hand on me at all times. We tried arm, shoulder, and even Hermione's forehead, but nothing except hand worked. Through my clothing or the hospital sheets didn't seem to have any effect. It didn't seem to matter *where* they were holding me, just so long as they were.

On the reverse, I didn't have any limits on what I did. My holding Ginny's arm didn't allow her to release me.

"Oh, dear," Hermione said with a sigh and noticeable slump.

"What?" the rest of us asked.

"I just figured out what caused this. When Harry woke up, he asked us for help. You and I agreed to never let him go."

I blinked at her. "That counted as a vow?"

"If you sealed it, then yes it was," Pomfrey said with a deep frown.

"He did," Ginny agreed.

"I was waking from a nightmare! I was hardly coherent."

"Cognizant. You were coherent but probably not cognizant," Hermione corrected me.

I suddenly laughed. "Please never change, Hermione."

"Huh?"

Ginny giggled. "Here we are, *literally stuck to Harry*, and you're correcting him? I think we have bigger problems than his vocabulary, but you're still you."

"For which I'm eternally grateful," I finished with a grin.

"Yes, well, vocabulary aside, I need to bring some help in to deal with this. The results of magical vows aren't exactly my area of expertise," Pomfrey said as she headed toward her office.

The three of us were left alone.

"Well, we may as well be comfortable," the ever practical Hermione said.

After some false starts and nearly pulling Ginny off of her feet once, we all managed to get into chairs. I was in the center facing the door, the girls on opposite sides facing in the other direction with a hand on each knee. That was the best we could do to more or less face each other. Once we were arranged, an awkward silence fell.

Ginny's face twisted into a grimace.

"What?" I asked her.

"Just trying to imagine Mum's reaction to this."

"I'm more worried about Gred and Forge," I admitted. "Imagine what the two of them will do to us if we're literally stuck together like this forever."

"Two words, Harry: Bat Bogey."

"Ah. Never mind."

"Ron," Hermione said, apparently still on the issue of who would react badly.

"I know you fancy him -" I started.

She shook her head. "No, I don't."

I gaped. "But all those times you two wound each other up," I objected.

She snorted in disgust. "Some sort of unresolved sexual tension? That's what I keep being told by the other girls. Bollocks to that. He annoys me, so I annoy him back. Petty of me, but there you are. We certainly can't build a relationship out of annoying each other." She shook her head. "No, Harry, I've never fancied him. Besides, don't you think I would have reacted more when Won-won and Lav-lav were doing their best to fuse their faces together with mutual suction?"

"Ew. I could have done without that mental image, thank you," Ginny said.

I grinned at her nauseated expression. "I'll try not to interrupt when you and Dean want some time alone."

She rolled her eyes as I heard Hermione's snicker. "You haven't sussed it out yet, Harry?" Hermione asked, amused.

"What?" I asked blankly

"She's not been going out with Dean."

"Huh?" I asked. "Yes, she has. I saw them in a broom cupboard."

She rolled her eyes. "Marauders Map," she answered succinctly.

I blinked rapidly for a moment before turning back to Ginny. "It was all a setup?"

Her eyes flickered over to Ginny. I presumed they shared an amused look. "Yes."

"Why?"

Ginny reached over with her free hand and smacked me on the side of my head. "For you, you prat."

"Huh?" I repeated intelligently.

Now Hermione reached over with her free hand and smacked me on the other side of my head. "I'll use small words," she said with a grin. "She

never got over her crush."

"Though I fell for Harry instead of just the Boy Who Lived," Ginny interjected.

Hermione nodded. "Right. She had a crush on Harry. Through these years, you never saw her as anything other than Ron's little sister. So she wanted to make you jealous."

Privately, I thought that was a very juvenile thing to do. Not that I necessarily knew how adolescent relationships were *supposed* to work, though.

Hermione continued, "So she dated Michael for a while. You didn't seem to be getting jealous and Michael became . . ."

As Hermione visibly searched for a term, Ginny dryly said, "Adventurous."

"As good a word as any," Hermione agreed.

"What did he do?" I asked in a low growl.

"Nothing that you need to hurt him for," Ginny stated promptly. "His hands started wandering, but he backed off when I said, 'No.' He broke up with me shortly after that."

Hermione went on, "So Michael goes away. She still has the problem of trying to get you jealous. So she starts pretending she's dating the safest person in Gryffindor. Dean."

"How's Dean the safest? And isn't it kinda unfair to him to lead him on if you're just trying to get some other bloke jealous?" The fact that *I* was the other bloke didn't seem relevant at that point.

Ginny said, "He's safe because I know he wouldn't pursue me."

"Why wouldn't he pursue you?" I asked in genuine confusion. "You're pretty, smart, and a lot of fun to be around."

"I'm glad you think so," Ginny said with a blinding smile. "As to why he's safe, he bats for the other team."

I blinked, hard. "You're kidding me."

"Nope. I told him what was going on, and he agreed to help. Then he told me that he's been seeing Kevin for a couple years on the sly. This way, it looks like he's dating. He apparently had some trouble with homophobes previously."

Hermione grimaced. "It must have been during the summer." She shook her head in wry amusement. "The wizarding world is so conservative and regressive in all other areas. The one area they're more liberal is sexuality."

Ginny looked at her strangely. "Why not? Not like it takes a witch *and* a wizard to have a baby. There's these potions, see -"

"Stop," I begged.

She smiled beatifically at me. "Fear not, Harry. With how *potent* your . . . uh, *magic* is and the Weasley genetics, I'm sure we won't have to use any potions."

My brain threatened to implode as I heard Hermione sigh and say, "Ginny, there's a point of taste and subtlety in any conversation that you shouldn't cross."

"Am I about to cross that point?"

"No, no; look behind you."

She smirked at Hermione and then turned back to me. "There is one good side to being stuck together."

"What's that?" I asked warily. I definitely didn't like the predatory smile on her face.

"I can help wash your back in the shower, seeing as how I'm going to be there anyway."

I turned to Hermione. "Help," I pleaded in an unsteady voice.

She smiled. "Oh, goody. I get to wash your front, then?"

At this point my brain threatened to take a vacation.

I was saved from Permanent Brain Spasm Syndrome by Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick, and Madam Pomfrey entering the infirmary.

My expression of relief caused McGonagall and Flitwick to look perplexed. Dumbledore just twinkled.

Flitwick asked us to repeat the sequence of events as he waved his wand in increasingly complex patterns. McGonagall and Dumbledore watched closely but didn't interrupt.

By the end, Flitwick nodded and said to his wand away with a smile. McGonagall pursed her lips but looked . . . resigned? Dumbledore twinkled more brightly.

"I know what happened," Flitwick announced with far too much amusement for the situation.

My heart dropped. "What?" I asked in dread.

"Oh, no need to be all so worried, Mr. Potter," he chided me with a smirk totally out of place on his usually cheerful face. "In short, Miss Granger and Miss Weasley swore an Oath to you. By your agreement, you sealed it. Their magic plus yours is holding them to the oath."

Both girls didn't look the least upset by this. "Um, can I just say that I release them?" I asked hopefully.

"It is, unfortunately, not that easy," McGonagall said.

"Of course not," I muttered. "Why do these things always seem to happen to me?"

"Because you're Harry Potter," both young witches chorused.

I groaned and buried my face in my hands.

McGonagall ignored the interruptions. "They literally have to hold you for the rest of your lives, literally or at least metaphorically."

"So what happens if they hold a piece of me?" I asked, looking up again and grasping at straws.

"I'm afraid I'm not following you, Mr. Potter. What did you have in mind?" Pomfrey asked.

"I don't know. A lock of hair or some blood or something."

"Not what I was hoping for," Ginny observed to Hermione *sotto voce* .

Flitwick's lip twitched. Dumbledore didn't even try to stifle his expanding grin. McGonagall's lips pursed, and I desperately ignored the flicker of amusement showing in her eyes.

I gave Ginny a sideways glance. "Unless you two want me to accompany you to the loo for the rest of your lives."

Both girls paled just a little bit.

Flitwick was looking thoughtful. "Not a bad idea, Mr. Potter." Everyone looked at him. "I meant the hair or blood," he explained with an eye roll. "Poppy?"

Pomfrey was already moving. She waved her wand and a I felt a slight tugging from the top of my head. Looking up, I saw what appeared to be scores of short hairs floating above me, already wrapping together. I heard Pomfrey mutter some sort of Sticking Charm and the small mass of hair, about the size and shape of a galleon, compacted just a bit.

Pomfrey plucked it out of the air and presented it to Ginny. The redhead held the disk of my hair in her free hand, and I felt her other hand pull at my arm. She shook her head and handed it to Hermione. The brunette had similar results.

Pomfrey next painlessly drew blood out of my arm. She absently answered Hermione's unasked question with, "The first half of a Transfusion Spell," as she directed the bright red liquid into a small collection container of the sort that I usually saw when harvesting liquids from plants for Herbology.

Both girls had no more luck with this talisman than the first. At McGonagall's suggestion, they each also tried while holding both, with no change.

"Now what?" I asked with waning hope.

"Originally you said that we had to hold him, literally or metaphorically, correct?" Hermione directed at McGonagall.

The older witch nodded confirmation.

"May I assume that any magical bond that still includes 'holding' him in some way would suffice?"

I did *not* like the grin she was sporting at this point.

"Yes," McGonagall said slowly, eyes narrowed as she gazed at Hermione. Flitwick also looked intrigued.

Dumbledore was in the throes of silent convulsions of laughter.

Pomfrey was looking at him in concern.

I felt little pity toward the man considering how hard he was laughing at the situation.

Hermione glanced at Ginny before turning to our Head of House. "I think I have heard of a vow that is not dark and fulfills the requirements."

"Please, Miss Granger, enlighten us."

"Well, the relevant line is, 'To have and to hold, from this day forth, until death do us part.'"

It's annoying how my dreams always stop before I learn how they end.

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Hedwig

This one took place just after my fifth year ended.

I'd just gotten back from yet another walk around Little Whinging.

I figured I had the right; lots on my mind. Recently dead godfather (killed right in front of me, even), failed attempt to cast an Unforgiveable Curse, mental connection to the darkest Dark Lord in living memory, plus a revealed prophecy. You know, the typical stuff on most teenagers' minds.

I'd stepped onto some gum during the walk, so I left my shoes on the front stoop, making a mental note to clean them later. I even remembered to avoid the squeaky step on the stairs as I ascended to my room.

Opening the door, I was brought up short by an unexpected sight.

A woman was reclining on my bed, reading through the letters I'd received from my friends. She was short, a platinum blonde, perhaps twenty years old, and wearing a white gown loosely gathered about her waist. One leg was propped up, showing a very long expanse of bare skin.

She looked up at me, clearly startled. I could see surprise and not a little bit of fear in her expression.

After staring for a bit, I came back to my senses and whipped my wand out and pointed it at her. "Who're you? Why're you in my room?"

She blinked her unusual amber eyes. A tentative smile, looking a trifle forced and uncomfortable, formed. "I live here," she answered, voice a harsh rasp that did not match her otherwise elegant appearance.

I frowned at her. "This is my room. How can you live here?"

She tilted her head in a manner that I found familiar but couldn't place. Without verbally replying, she simply lifted one arm in a gesture toward the window.

"What are you on about?"

She gestured again. "My perch."

I glanced at Hedwig's perch before focusing again on the crazy woman. "You're off your rocker. That's Hedwig's perch."

She blinked again. "I am Hedwig."

I stared, waiting for her to explain. She simply gazed calmly back. "You're insane," I eventually accused her.

With a sigh, she transformed into Hedwig. It was clearly an animagus transformation, but not at the same speed I'd seen McGonagall or Sirius perform it. After a few seconds, she transformed back.

My arm dropped as I stared at her.

"I am Hedwig," she repeated in her raspy voice.

"How can you be Hedwig?" I asked blankly.

"Animagus," she answered simply.

"Who . . . what . . ." I couldn't even complete a question.

She loudly cleared her throat. Wincing and one hand coming up to massage her throat, she asked, "May I have a glass of water?"

I frowned at her, wand coming up again to point at her.

She gave me an amused look. "My throat hurts. I hardly ever talk, Harry. I just want to make my throat feel better."

I still stood there, indecisive.

"I don't even have a wand." With a very amused expression, she held out her arms. "Care to search me?"

flushed and fetched her a glass of water from the upstairs lavatory.

She hadn't moved before I returned. She sipped at the water for a few seconds as I took a seat at my desk.

With a small frown of concentration, she said, "When I was fifteen, Dumbledore taught me the animagus transformation. I became an owl. On Dumbledore's orders, Hagrid gave me to you as an eleventh birthday present. In short, I've been spying on you since."

Eyes narrowing, I brought my wand up again.

She gazed sadly at me. "It is not by choice, Harry. I'm under a binding magical . . . contract of sorts."

"Then why did you reveal yourself to me now?"

"You surprised me. This wasn't planned."

"So you would have continued to spy on me for Dumbledore?" I asked, not even trying to keep the derision out of my voice.

She dropped her gaze to the glass in her hand. "I didn't have a choice," she whispered.

The silence held for long moments. "What kind of magical contract?" I finally asked.

She shrugged. "In simple terms, I am a slave." Something like amusement showed in her eyes at my gob smacked expression. "I was bought by Dumbledore five years ago. After the animagus training, I was presented to you as a . . . loan, I suppose. I am still owned by Dumbledore, however, and must act according to the rules he set forth."

Even through my anger at the meddling old fool, I was still able to think. "If he's managed to turn even my *owl* into a spy against me, is everyone I know spying on me?"

She looked at me sadly. "I believe so, yes."

My eyes widened.

"The Weasleys have been paid to report on you since before you met them. Miss Granger has been promised the Head Girl position and private tutoring as long as she keeps tabs on you. Personally, I think she was also drug across your path as a possible love interest - I heard that Potters have always been interested in intelligent women - or at least to make you dependent upon another of Dumbledore's agents."

"Dobby?" I asked, hoping at least some of the beings I thought were on my side were actual allies.

She shook her head. "Giving an elf clothes must be a conscious choice. Inadvertently throwing a sock at the elf, as I understand it happened, wouldn't do it. How could they do laundry otherwise? He's been acting under the orders of Malfoy all along. Dumbledore just integrated that into his own plans."

"Remus?"

"He's too dependant on Dumbledore's good will. One word from the headmaster and he'd be executed. He'll do anything asked of him."

"Sirius?" I asked next, hope dwindling.

"He was actually on your side. On the flip side of that, he was intentionally restricted to that . . . house to drive him to do something reckless."

That made me feel only slightly better as that plan had clearly worked. "Hagrid?" I asked.

"He knew. As a half-giant, he's addicted to the calming potions that Snape makes and Dumbledore gives him."

I hung my head. "Is anyone I know acting without an ulterior motive?"

She shook her head. "Probably not. Snape was told to antagonize you, a plan I suspect he was more than willing to follow. The Dursleys have had a geas on them from the beginning, designed so that they would treat you poorly. Your string of worthless Defense teachers was to keep you from being a serious threat to Dumbledore. Your various adventures - Philosopher's Stone, Chamber, and so on - were careful tests designed by Dumbledore. He wanted you trained in a very specific way."

"You seem to know a lot," I observed dully. Even through my emotional implosion, she sounded far too informed for someone who had presumably spent the past five years as a bird.

"It's amazing what people will say in front of an owl," she offered as an explanation.

I blankly stared at her as all the bits and pieces of information whirled about in my mind, crashing into each other and tearing apart my world.

I leaned forward and wept into my hands. Everything upon everything in my life had been built upon a foundation of lies. And at the cornerstone of everything stood Albus Dumbledore.

I don't know how long I sat there alternately crying and shaking in rage, blind to the world around me. How could he do that to me? What'd I ever done to him?

I wasn't worried about her doing me harm. How many hundreds of evenings had I slept with her in the room?

When I finally regained touch with the reality around me, I felt her rubbing one hand across my back and the other hand carding through my hair.

I gave a hiccupping little laugh. "Hedwig . . . er, you, always did that with . . . your beak when I was feeling down."

"I've always been on your side, Harry. As much as I was able, anyway."

In my cynical state of mind, I considered asking how she could expect me to believe her. I finally let it go, though. No point in asking a question that couldn't be answered.

Instead, I asked, "Something you said earlier; Dumbledore bought you? You mean he kidnapped you somehow?"

She shakily made her way back over to the bed and sat down again. "No, I mean bought. As in paid money to my clan and took me legally."

"Slavery is illegal," I pointed out the gaping hole in the argument.

"I'm not human," she said softly, looking at me fearfully.

Looking at her, a few of the small pieces fell into place. "Veela," I stated.

She just nodded, looking down at her hands nervously wringing a bit of her robe.

"Hey, don't be like that. Not like it's anything to be ashamed of."

She gave an inelegant snort, an action that clashed with her very elegant beauty even sitting in my bedroom wearing a simple white gown. "We're classified as beasts. Hence why my clan could legally *sell* me," she finished with a little apathetic shrug.

"You don't seem upset at being a slave."

She gave another little shrug. "So far it hasn't been so bad. When Dumbledore had control of me, he treated me reasonably well. Since becoming Hedwig, I've had a kind and attentive master. Besides, he's noble and kinda cute." She smiled at me, veela charm rolling off of her in waves.

The same strength of mind that granted me immunity to the Imperious Curse stood me in good stead. I was momentarily tempted to do something to try and impress her, but I shook off the notion immediately. "Stop that," I chided her.

She looked slightly ashamed of her actions. The aura decreased. "And he's resistant to the veela allure," she added to her previous thought.

"That's a good thing?"

"For a veela who doesn't want a mindless plaything? Yes."

"You sound like Fleur. Hey, do you happen to know -"

She raised a hand, stopping me from finishing the question. "Her mother is from one of the French clans. I was born and raised here in the U.K. in the only English veela clan."

Something was just not adding up to how freely she was telling me things. "If he placed you here to spy on me and monitor my mail," I waved a hand at the letters she'd previously been reading, "I can't imagine he'd have permitted you to speak with me."

Her expression turned a bit vindictive. "As I said, I must act according to the rules he set forth. This situation is outside of those rules - you surprised me, remember - so my words are not constrained."

"Your *words* are not. How about your actions?"

"If I am ever discovered, I am to do everything in my power to ensure you are to remain," she answered promptly.

"Remain?"

She stood and ran one hand down her white robes. Her voice changed to a low, insinuating purr that wrecked my concentration. "Think about it, Harry. Now that you know about me, I can stay with you." Moving ever so slowly, she started gliding toward me, showing none of the jerky awkwardness she had before. "Ignore Dumbledore. You have friends and allies." Straddling my lap, she lowered herself until she was sitting on my knees facing me. One hand came up and absently started playing with the hair on the back of my head. Her other hand lay, feather-light, upon my chest. She leaned forward and breathed into my ear, "You and I can have a good life together, Harry."

With what little remained of my working brain, I realized I had a choice:

I could stay where I was and continue with Hogwarts and my friends there. On top of that, it seemed I had a new . . . er, girlfriend. A veela to boot.

All I had to do was ignore Dumbledore's manipulations in absolutely every aspect of my life.

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Veela History

This dream is set well after Hogwarts.

I was experiencing one of the most wonderful sensations in the world: A pair of small, warm hands were rubbing the non-existent tension out of my bare back and shoulders.

I groaned softly. "You can keep that up forever."

Soft laughter accompanied a light poke on the shoulder. "Forever? But there are so many *other* things we could do instead!"

I looked over with a grin, admiring the unclothed form of Gabrielle Delacour - soon to be Potter - kneeling beside me in bed.

She tilted her head and posed for a moment, smiling coquettishly at me.

My I.Q. dropped 20 points in the blink of an eye, and it had nothing to do with veela allure.

She laughed again, clearly enjoying the effect she had upon me.

I shook my head and groaned. "Witch."

Instead of flirting back as I'd expected, her grin faded. "I'm not, you know."

"Your being a veela isn't exactly news," I reminded her. "And I've seen you casting spells, so I know you're not a squib."

She waved a hand irritably. "*Non*, not that. I'm not . . ." She frowned. "What do you know of veela?" she asked abruptly.

Realizing that this was shaping up into a real conversation, I sat up and turned to face her. "What do you mean?"

"How much have you studied veela?"

Hoping that a little humor would be well received, I leered and waggled my eyebrows. "I've studied one particular veela very thoroughly, I think. Up close and in depth."

She rolled her eyes but let a small smirk escape. "Very funny."

I shrugged and answered the question, "Not a whole lot, actually. Not much more than the average wizard. The allure, the avian form complete with fireballs, and that it's a gender-specific trait."

She nodded before her face fell into a frown. "Do you know *why* the only veela are female?"

"Because God was feeling especially generous towards males that day?" I guessed.

This time, she glowered at me. A small ball of fire appeared, and she casually tossed it from one hand to another.

Taking the not-so-subtle hint, I said, "No, I don't know why it's gender based."

The fireball winked out of existence.

I breathed a mostly silent sigh of relief.

After smirking at my reaction, she frowned pensively and chewed on a corner of her lip.

"What's wrong?"

A long sigh escaped her. "I'm going to tell you something now that must *not* be repeated."

"What's that?"

"The reason for the veela allure is to lure males."

"That's what it does," I agreed with a puzzled nod.

"That's what it does, but you do not know the *reason* for it." She sighed and settled down on the bed comfortably. "Veela get their . . . nourishment from males."

I blinked. "You're . . . *feeding* off of me? Fleur from Bill?" I frowned. "I've seen you eating regular food."

She waved a hand. "Yes, but I'm talking about a different kind of energy instead of just food."

A bit of folklore came to the forefront of my mind. "You're talking about some kind of . . . succubus?"

She winced. "That legend is based on veela, yes," she admitted.

When she didn't continue, I said, "I don't understand. We've been . . . er, going out for over a year now, but I haven't aged anymore than I should've."

She shook her head. "You wouldn't." My confusion must have shown because she sighed and frowned. "Sorry, I'm not explaining this very well.

"Technically, I *am* feeding off of you. I'm absorbing, or perhaps siphoning or draining if you prefer, some energy from you when we're intimate."

She held up a hand at my expression. "Do not panic. It does *you* no harm. You replenish this energy within minutes.

"The legends of the succubus originated when veela tried to mate with muggles. They didn't have the energy available for the veela, so they ended up losing a bit of their life force.

"Therefore, they visibly aged.

"Wizards, on the other hand, have much more energy available for us. Hence, when we marry and have children, it is almost always with a wizard. Therefore, veela have had magic introduced into our bloodlines."

"Veela started out as non-magical?" I asked, curious as to the history of my girlfriend's species.

She nodded. "As far back as the stories of veela go, we have always had our avian form. Rumor has it that a powerful veela was once attracted to a wizard. He was magically powerful but rather weak-willed. With her allure, she seduced him."

I suppressed a shudder. I loved my fiancée, but her bird-form was downright scary. The thought of trying to do something with that without knowing the personality underneath was frightening in the extreme.

She must have seen my reaction because she shrugged. "At any rate, the children of that union were the first veela that could look human." She waved her hand to indicate her current appearance. "Over the generations, as more human magical blood was added to our lines, our ability to conjure fireballs appeared, and we spent more and more time appearing human. Finally, enough general magical ability appeared that we are now witches in our own right, only reverting to avian under extraordinary stress. "

I thought through all of this for a few minutes. She sat, calmly watching me.

"Thank you for telling me all of this, but why? I mean, if I have enough magic that I'm not adversely affected by . . . feeding you, why did you need to tell me all of this?"

"I could have hidden it from you," she admitted frankly. "I do not know if Fleur has told William, for instance. However, I felt that you deserved the truth."

"Thank you for that."

"There are a couple other reasons as well."

Uh, oh.

"You are a very powerful wizard," she went on. "As far as veela go, I'm a powerful witch, though nowhere near your level. It's possible that our veela children, if we have any, will possess other traits."

"Like human forms and fireballs were introduced to the veela bloodlines earlier," I said, understanding her point.

She nodded.

"Wait, you said 'veela children'. Why not just 'children'?" The fact that we were discussing *our* potential future children wasn't the least bit awkward. On the contrary, it was rather comforting.

"Historically, veela and human couples have few male children. We *do* have some, just not very many. When they happen, they're normal, human wizards. No veela traits at all. As far as the girls, if they come to term, they're always veela. Always."

"Why wouldn't they come to term?"

"A veela fetus is very," she pursed her lips, clearly looking for the right term before continuing with, "energy dependent. Not physical energy - though there is that, too - so much as they need a lot of magical energy." She grinned wickedly. "So I'll require regular energy infusions from you if that comes to pass."

I laughed. "Anything you ask of this humble servant, my lady." I gave her a brief bow.

"I'll hold you to that promise," she said with sparkling eyes. "Also, remember that I'm not likely to have many boys, so we may need to have several children if you want a Potter heir."

"You're saying this like it's going to be some kind of hardship," I observed dryly.

"I'm an eighteen year old veela, Harry. I can be very . . . demanding."

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Sever

This takes place summer before my sixth year.

Mr. Potter,

Due to He Who Must Not Be Named, his Death Eaters, and your own actions, we, the undersigned, have decided to sever all ties with you.

This is immediately legally binding. There is no appeal, so approaching any of us or our families will only result in punitive actions being brought against you.

Any ties, business or personal, between the House of Potter and House of Weasley are forevermore severed.

House of Weasley calls for a Sever with House of Potter.

Signed,
Ronald Bilius Weasley
Ginevra Molly Weasley

Any ties, business or personal, between the House of Potter and House of Granger are forevermore severed.

House of Granger calls for a Sever with House of Potter.

Signed,
Hermione Jane Granger

I numbly stared at the letter in my hands.

I suppose I couldn't really blame them. I'd gotten them all hurt, nearly killed really, mere weeks ago.

If they wanted to get away from me, who was I to stop them?

Ruthlessly quashing the tears, I looked up at Slipknot the goblin. "I'm sorry for taking up your time with personal correspondence," I said dully, holding up the just-delivered letter.

He waved a hand. "We were finished with the Will Reading of Mr. Black. Unless you have more business with Gringotts, I shall bid you a good day."

Looking back at the letter, I said, "I don't think I do, but I suppose it's possible."

He looked at me, raising one eyebrow.

"Do I have any business relationships with any Weasleys?"

The Potter account manager nodded immediately. "You are partial owner in Weasley Wizard Wheezes."

I frowned slightly, confusion forcing its way through the numbness that had taken over my emotions. Not knowing what to do, I handed the letter to the goblin.

He read it quickly, his other eyebrow climbing quickly to join its twin. "Indeed," he said musingly and with a small smirk. He looked at me. "I am not familiar with the House of Granger."

"She's a muggleborn witch," I answered. "My best - er, was, I suppose - my best friend."

"If she is muggleborn, she is effectively the Head of House Granger, then."

I shrugged. "If that's the way it's decided, I guess so."

"This is in order," Slipknot stated, holding the parchment up slightly. "As you are here, shall I attempt to execute all the particulars?"

"What's that mean?"

"All three who signed this must meet here in Gringotts to formalize the Sever. As you are in a business relationship with two of the Weasleys, they should be here as well. As neither Ronald nor Ginevra are Head of their House, that individual must be present as well."

I sighed tiredly, slumping back in the chair. "Do we need to meet? I can't blame them for how mad they are at me, and they said there is no appeal."

"The laws regarding a Sever are ancient and immutable, Mr. Potter."

"May as well get it done, I guess." Why not? Yet another thing happening to me that I have no control over.

Slipknot's assistants quickly sent off three owls and then fetched several more files for the goblin. I watched all of this passively, more than happy to sit quietly while Slipknot worked. In point of fact, I was quietly brooding on the mess that my life had recently degenerated into.

After a bit of a wait, the door opened to admit twin Weasleys wearing twin confused expressions.

"Harry?" twin one asked.

"What's going on, partner?" asked twin two.

"He is a full partner in your business?" Slipknot asked, looking up from the parchment in his hands. I absently wondered why he'd asked, as he was my Gringotts representative. He had to already know the answer, didn't he?

They shrugged in unison. "He owns a third of Triple W."

Slipknot nodded and made a notation on the file in his hands.

I frowned at them. "I gave you the money as a gift, guys. I didn't want a piece of the business."

They shrugged again. "Too bad," twin two cheerfully said as he dropped into a seat.

"So, why are we here?" twin one asked the goblin.

"As soon as the remainder of the parties arrive, we can -"

Slipknot's answer was interrupted by the door slamming open. Three more Weasleys and a Granger came storming in. A look of glee formed on Ron's face instantly. "Oh, that's an obvious violation, trying to talk to Fred and George."

"I lay claim to his liquid assets," Ginny immediately said.

"I lay claim to the Black library," Hermione said.

"And I claim to his personal possessions," Ron finished.

"As primary claimants, so mote it be," all three chorused, smirking at me.

I looked at them in blank confusion. What the hell were they talking about?

"Your attempt at theft is not successful," Slipknot said forcefully. "Misters Frederick and George Weasley are here at my invitation, not because Mr. Potter tried to contact them."

The faces of the three fell, and they took seats as far from me as possible.

"What the bloody hell was that about?" twin one demanded.

"Fred, language," chided Mrs. Weasley. Everyone ignored her.

"Now that the Head of House of all affected houses are present," Slipknot answered an earlier question, "we can continue the Sever."

Fred and George paled dramatically, and their jaws dropped open. "*What?*"

"By magical law, I'm Head of House Granger," Hermione said to the goblin, sneering at me.

"And I speak for Head of House Weasley," Mrs. Weasley stated, still standing behind her youngest children and looking at me darkly.

"You're aware of the claim for Sever, then?"

She nodded. "As proxy for Head of House Weasley, I support it."

The goblin nodded. "Very well." He started gathering some parchment from the file in front of him.

"A SEVER?" George shouted. "Do you four jealous fools understand how much this is going to cost us?"

Mrs. Weasley scoffed. "Cost? It'll cost us nothing except headaches. This irresponsible brat," she waved at me, "tried to get Ron and Ginny killed. We're getting away from him for good."

Fred chuckled darkly. "Oh, this'll do it, Mother. No doubt of that." He turned to the goblin. "As I recall, about a third of the business's value is galleons and the other two thirds is in our stock of merchandise."

"As such," George went on, "we have no choice but to give all the galleons to Harry. Is that correct, Master Goblin?"

One spindly finger traced down the page. "Approximately. Your business will have five galleons, two sickles, and five knuts remaining in liquid capital."

"Congratulations," Fred spat at his siblings. "You just destroyed Triple W."

"I don't want your money, guys," I objected, completely overwhelmed and confused by what was going on around me.

"You have no choice, Mr. Potter," Slipknot stated. "The laws are clear. If you as a group do not come to an agreement on the division of assets, Gringotts will do so for you. After all appraisal and filing fees, of course."

"No need to get Gringotts involved," Mrs. Weasley said soothingly.

"Stop being so dramatic," Ron said with a roll of his eyes. "You lost, what, a couple dozen galleons? I'll work off the difference myself just to get Potter out of our lives."

Fred and George glanced at each other before grinning evilly at Ron. "We accept."

Slipknot nodded. "Per your words, Ronald Weasley is magically accepted as indentured servant to the Weasley Wizard Wheezes business until the sum is paid. I shall leave it to you three to arrange his working off the twenty-three thousand, two hundred and seventy-two galleons, then," the goblin said, making a notation.

"WHAT?" Ron bellowed. "That's *decades* of -"

"Be silent, human," the goblin growled. "As a primary claimant, you cannot challenge things now, and you also agreed to 'work off' the money. You have nobody to blame but yourself."

Ron jumped to his feet. "Look, you little piece of -"

Slipknot waved a hand.

A flash of azure light caused Ron to slump over in mid-word.

Mrs. Weasley gasped.

"Control yourself, madam. I merely produced the goblin equivalent of a Stunning Spell." The door opened behind them and two armored goblins stomped in, lifted Ron by the armpits, and unceremoniously drug him from the room.

Mrs. Weasley began to follow, but Slipknot sharply said, "You are required here, proxy. He shall come to no harm in the lobby of Gringotts."

Mrs. Weasley nervously sat and started to wring her hands. "Let's get this over with, then."

"Are there any further monetary or business arrangements between House Potter and House Weasley?" Slipknot went on, unruffled.

"Not that I know of," I answered, now in a near-catatonic daze.

"No," Mrs. Weasley answered stiffly.

"Between House Potter and House Granger?"

I shook my head. Hermione did the same, giving me a dirty look.

"Very well." He pulled out a bowl with a thin purple liquid in it. "Head of Potter, Head of Granger, and proxy of Weasley, if you will all place a drop of blood into this, we shall see about any outstanding magical contracts."

"Magical contracts?" I asked dully, mechanically adding a drop of blood to the bowl.

"Magical vows, betrothals, like that," Fred answered without looking up from his head-hanging position. He and his twin looked devastated by what had just happened, not that I could blame them. I was feeling far out of my depth as well.

After Hermione and Mrs. Weasley had reluctantly added a drop of blood to the bowl, the goblin gently swirled the potion for several seconds. Taking a quill from his desk, he dipped it into the now opaque, lavender liquid and then placed it upon a blank sheet of parchment. When he released it, the quill started writing by itself.

"Is all this really necessary?" Hermione asked testily.

"It most certainly is, Head of House Granger," Slipknot answered sharply. "You want to sever all ties with the House of Potter. These procedures were put into place in ages past when one family became significantly indebted to another. Instead of paying the debt back, the debtor family called for a Sever upon the other. These steps are to ensure that neither House of Granger nor House of Weasley is attempting to escape a debt."

Hermione gave a harrumphing little noise and turned her head away from both Slipknot and me.

Slipknot, meanwhile, was reading the parchment. He gave a dark chuckle. "Oh, this is most entertaining."

"What's that?" a despondent George asked.

"Unfulfilled Life Debts."

"WHAT?" Mrs. Weasley screeched. Ginny went deathly pale.

Slipknot gave a truly scary grin. "Indeed. The simplest one is Ginevra's."

"From the Chamber of Secrets," I mentioned, as an aside.

"Is that where she was?" Fred asked, looking up.

"Yes," Ginny choked out, eyes huge as they fixed on the goblin.

"As you are not Head of House, are in good health, and not under any other binding magical contracts, the law regarding your attempt to use a Sever as an escape from a debt is as follows: your possessions, life, magic, and body are given to head of the wronged House," Slipknot stated.

Ginny's eyes rolled up and she fainted.

Slipknot looked at the collapsed girl in amusement for a few seconds before he turned to me. "Shall I have her removed, Mr. Potter?"

"Huh?" I asked intelligently, not completely keeping up with the conversation.

Slipknot shrugged and turned back to the parchment.

"She is his . . . *slave*?" Mrs. Weasley asked in a voice that sounded suspiciously like a squeak.

"Until her death," Slipknot confirmed. He looked like he was actually enjoying himself.

"That can't be legal," Hermione objected.

"I assure you, Head of House Granger, it is the law. We here at Gringotts pride ourselves in following the law to the letter."

Mrs. Weasley frowned severely. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, Hermione," she said, "but if a Gringotts goblin says it's the law, then it is." She turned to me. "I wish to . . . buy," she winced, "my daughter back from you."

"According to the Sever, no Weasley may do business with any Potter until the end of time," Slipknot pointed out.

"Through Albus, then," she choked out.

Slipknot shrugged. "Perhaps, but that is a conversation you can conduct later. In the meantime, we are fulfilling this Sever." He looked down at the parchment again. "The next Life Debt is owed by the absent Arthur Weasley."

"Nagini at Christmas," I commented, though nobody needed the reminder.

"Arthur?" Mrs. Weasley asked faintly.

"He is Head of House," Slipknot went on, ignoring the matriarch. "Therefore, all real estate, business shares, monies, vault contents, and voting rights the family owns are forfeit up to one hundred thousand galleons."

Mrs. Weasley collapsed back into her seat, face pale and eyes looking like saucers.

Slipknot ran a finger down another column. "According to the last audit, if you combine what is left of the Weasley Wizard Wheezes business, the Weasley primary residence, the total of your vault including the heirloom items, and sell the Wizengamot seat for the standard ten thousand, you will still owe Mr. Potter four hundred sixteen galleons and one sickle." He looked up. "I presume you and your remaining children will be able to sell personal possessions to make that paltry sum up."

Mrs. Weasley opened and closed her mouth, doing a credible guppy impersonation.

"Harry gets Triple W?" George asked incredulously.

"Unless one of your siblings has some fifty thousand galleons in personal items, yes."

George groaned and dropped his head into his hands again.

Fred gave the unconscious Ginny a filthy look before turning to me. "Would you hire us, please?"

"According to the Sever, no Weasley may do business -" Slipknot repeated.

Fred interrupted him, "If we legally change our last name, would that avoid the problem?"

"Fred!" Mrs. Weasley shouted.

George snapped at her, "Why would we want to keep the name, Mother? By tomorrow morning's Prophet, it'll be worthless. You, Ron, and Ginny have proven that it means nothing except gold-diggers and *idiots*."

"George!" she shrieked.

"Just the fact of a Sever is enough, but trying to perform a Sever with outstanding *Life Debts*?" Fred demanded. He turned to the amused goblin. "Will changing our name help?"

"If you were no longer Weasleys, Mr. Potter would have no difficulty in hiring you if he so chooses," Slipknot answered.

George turned to Fred. "It seems, dear brother of mine, that we have a bit of business at the Ministry when we're through."

"Indeed we do."

Both twins turned and gave their mother and sister looks of anger and loathing.

Slipknot lifted the parchment again. "The final Life Debt is owed by Hermione Granger," he read.

"Troll in first year," I said, shocked and confused beyond thought and just reacting to the situation.

Hermione squeaked and turned pale. "I d- don't know if my parent's house is worth -"

Slipknot waved a hand irritably. "The law was written by pureblooded wizards to protect pureblooded wizards; therefore, only current wizarding assets can be counted."

Against all expectations, she paled even further. "I . . . I don't have enough wizarding assets to cover a hundred thousand galleons," she choked out.

Slipknot shrugged. "Then you join the former Miss Weasley in personal servitude to Mr. Potter."

Fred and George gave identical, harsh, bitter laughs. "You three idiots," Fred said, shaking his head.

"You wanted so badly to get away from him that you did something so unimaginably stupid that you're now, all three of you, his slaves," George observed in dark humor.

"How's that for irony?"

Dream Journal of Harry J Potter Elementals

This dream happens well after Hogwarts. And after Voldy is Moldy.

Hey, I have to find my humor somewhere . . .

"Our next guest needs no introduction."

And yet you're going to introduce me anyway, aren't you?

"He's the defeator of a Dark Lord twenty years ago and registered Master of Defense, Harry Potter!"

See? I knew you would. And Trelawney thought I didn't have any Divination skills.

Obliging the guy waving me out in front of the crowd, I step around the corner and waved at the room full of students. Their polite applause dwindled down sooner than I expected, to my pleased surprise.

Once the noise fell off, I spoke, knowing the amplification field would catch my voice. "Hey, thanks, gang. So I'm here in Salem to talk to you about Elementals. Now, there is a lot of confusion over what an 'Elemental' is or exactly what an 'Elemental Mage' can do. So the first thing we're going to cover is exactly what an Elemental is. Who thinks they can answer that one?"

A few hands tentatively came up. I pointed to one and the student stood and spoke, "Control over one of the old-style elements or sub-elements. Earth, Air, Fire, Water. Or in your case, the Sub-Element of Lightning." He sat himself back down.

I nodded. "That's one of the more common answers." The kid looked happy until I continued, "Unfortunately, it's completely incorrect." I pulled out my wand. "*Aguamenti*." I let the spray of water fall to the stage where it may. Addressing the students again, I asked, "So, since I conjured water, does that make me a Water Mage?"

The kid looked angry. "*Sir*," he emphasized, "I said an Elemental Mage could control the Element."

"Okay, with various charms, I could make it fly about the room, smother a fire, drown an enemy, or even dance a jig. That doesn't mean I can control it any further than any other accomplished caster can do." I looked at the kid. "I'm not mocking you. Just pointing out that the definition of 'control an element' is true of all of us. If there is someone running around that could do all of this without casting any spells, I haven't heard about him. I was just trying to show you why your answer was wrong, not trying to pick on you." I paused while he nodded, still looking a little disgruntled. "Okay, next definition?" I asked, pointing at one of the others who had their hand up.

"Metaphysical manifestations of one of the Elements?"

"Oh, I assure you, they're very real. You'll be seeing one soon. Much closer answer, though. Any other guesses?"

Nobody volunteered anything, so I continued, "Okay, an Elemental is a conscious manifestation of one of the old-style Elements. Earth, Fire, Air, Water.

"Now, each of the four Elements produces very different Elementals. A wizard, or a mage as you call us here, can summon as many of any kind of Elementals they want, so long as we have the power to control all of them at once.

"Most of the Elemental Mages I've spoken with have a higher affinity with one element or another, but we can all control each of the four. I, for example, have a higher affinity with Earth; it more closely matches my personality. The only real benefit I have with this is that I can control more Earth Elementals simultaneously than any other type."

"All Elementals have several things in common. They all can communicate in the native language of their summoner. This means that if you had a Japanese Elemental Mage here, their Elementals would only be able to speak Japanese. This is an important point if you want to have multiple Elemental Mages working together. Even if the mage is multilingual, the Elementals are not.

"So long as the Elemental and I are on good terms, the Elemental will work with me. The worse the relationship, the more obstructionist the Elemental will be. Meaning, if I have an Elemental that absolutely hates me, it will try to interpret any orders I give it against the intent. So, I try to do everything I can to stay on good terms with them."

I pointed to a young witch with her hand up and a confused expression. "How do you stay on good terms with them?"

I nodded. "Good question. Try not to ask them to do things they don't like. Asking an earth Elemental to swim, for instance, would be a bad idea.

They may do it, but it wouldn't like it.

"Also, the Elementals are intelligent, so simply talking to them instead of ordering them around like they were dumb animals helps.

"They don't have any real needs or wants as we understand them, so any kind of bribery is pointless.

"Kindness and occasional flattery seem to work the best, I've found."

I pointed to another student, an upperclassman with a frown. "Sir, I thought that to summon an Elemental, you had to basically pull them from their home plane, for lack of a better term. Doesn't that mean they would resent you?"

I smiled. "Ah, someone who has read ahead.

"You'd think so, wouldn't you? But, one thing about all intelligences is that they are curious. So, an Elemental on this plane is learning about us. From what I understand, when one of my Elementals isn't with me, they tend to wander around, exploring."

The headmaster of Salem spoke up in a dry voice, "Why do I suddenly feel like an animal in a zoo?"

I chuckled, as did a fair number of the students in the room. "In a way, we all are. At least from the Elemental's point of view.

"Back to the Elementals themselves, though: they all can do basically the same actions. Guard, attack, ferry messages, whatever, but some are better suited than others at some tasks due to personality and preference.

"Let's meet one, and we can discuss them." I deliberately defocused my eyes and looked around the room, trying to find the next part of today's entertainment. Pointing, I called out, "Heather! Come on over here, please." The slight shimmer in the air moved toward me and stopped, hovering directly in front of me. Most of the professors watched it in interest, a few students in confusion, and the rest were looking at me in confusion. "Heather, please manifest enough that everyone in the room can get a look at you."

"Sure!" a feminine voice chirped, at once sounding hyper and not quite real, as if someone had miscast a Ventriloquism Spell.

Heather, one of several Air Elementals I regularly used, formed in front of me, looking more like a heat mirage or maybe smoke than any physical entity. "Hi, everyone! I'm Heather, what you would call an Air Elemental belonging to the Great Harry Potter, Defeater of the Dark Lord Voldemort, Elemental Wizard, and all around nice guy. Though his dating habits could use some work. You should hear what he said to Susan the other day."

"Thank you, Heather," I interrupted, shaking my head. "As it said, this is an Air Elemental. Air Elementals are best suited to be messengers and scouts. They are the quickest of the Elementals. As an Elemental cannot use any form of magical travel, they must physically move from one place to another, so speed is something to keep in mind for some circumstances.

"Personality wise, they are more outgoing and chatty." I looked at Heather in wry amusement. "Some may even call them gossipy."

Heather giggled, causing laughs of surprise from around the room.

"Any questions so far?" I asked.

"Heather?"

The Elemental appeared to bounce in the air toward the speaker, stopping directly in front of her. "Yes?"

Momentarily taken aback, the student took the opportunity to study the Elemental closely for several seconds.

"I feel pretty, oh, so pretty . . ." Heather started to softly sing.

"Did I mention Heather's sense of humor?" I asked as most of the class laughed.

"Sorry," the student said through a brilliant blush. "Sorry. What I wanted to ask is what you think of Professor Potter. I mean, he summoned you from your home, right?"

"Ooh, that's a good question," Heather responded. "Hmm. What I think of him? Well, first is that he's my summoner, to use your term. I must obey him until either he releases me, he dies, or I'm too hurt to remain here. But so far, he's been a pretty good guy to work for, so I have no complaints. And I know that I can go home whenever I want, so you could think of it more as a partnership than anything else."

"Wait," another student spoke up, "you must stay here until he releases you, but you can go home whenever you want? Isn't that contradictory?"

I answered, "All of my Elementals have a standing offer to be released whenever they want. They just need to ask."

Heather bobbed up and down in what looked like a nod. "Yep. He's a good guy, at least compared to some of the other summoners I've heard about. So, no complaints. Well, except for the odor in his apartment. Seriously, don't you know any cleaning charms, Harry?"

I looked toward the ceiling in a request for divine patience as the entire classroom broke into laughter.

"Anything else?" I asked the room, pointedly ignoring the question. When nobody answered, I nodded to Heather. "Thank you for your time, Heather. See you at home?"

"Naw, I'll be at Gred's place. Buh-bye!" It vanished.

"Sir, you consistently use the term 'it' when referring to Elementals, but that one was named Heather and sounded female."

"Elementals have no gender as we understand it. It chose the name itself, as it did the voice it uses. Heather has been with me for years, so it understands the concept of different genders and will accept being referred to as female, but it isn't."

"Anything else?" At the room full of shaking heads, I turned and looked down. "John? Sergey? Please manifest enough for everyone to see you."

Without a word, two roughly spherical lumps of what appeared to be clay formed on the ground next to me. Other than slowly undulating their shape, neither otherwise moved.

"Thank you," I said. I looked up and waved a hand at them. "These two are Earth Elementals. Do not let their size fool you. They can be as big or small as they want to appear. They're the physically slowest of the Elementals, at least when we're talking about travelling over distances. They tend to be quiet, so don't let their silence bother you. Earth Elementals are best suited to be defenders, either of people or locations. Earth Elementals are not the most overtly dangerous of the Elementals, but they are arguably the most powerful, especially when defending and working in concert with another Earth Elemental. They tend to come in pairs, though they can just as easily work alone or in larger groups as the need arises. Any questions?" The students, apparently intimidated by the silent rocks beside me, made no noise. I shrugged. "Okay. John, Sergey, thank you." They both vanished again, but I could see that they stayed in place.

"William?"

Without further prompting, a mass of flame appeared off to my right, hovering at shoulder height.

"This is William, a Fire Elemental. Say hello, William."

"If I must," it was a deep, bored voice.

I rolled my eyes. "Fire Elementals are the most offensively minded and directly dangerous of the Elementals, so they're usually used as fighters."

"Flatterer," William said, sounding mildly amused.

Without pausing, I continued, "Generally, they make for poor guardians, as they can be impatient. With those facts in mind, many people consider them to be arrogant and condescending."

"I take it back," William drawled.

The class laughed nervously.

"Can't you people take a joke?" William asked.

"You are intimidating," a calm, feminine voice observed as a large cloud appeared above me.

"Charlie!" William called, sounding delighted. "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

"This is Charolette, a Water Elemental," I said, waving my hand upwards.

"Hello, everyone," Charolette said, ignoring the Fire Elemental.

"Water Elementals," I said, "are the final Elemental that you haven't yet met. They are more of a generalist than the other Elemental types, not having any one role they're more prone to than others."

"Meaning," William interjected, "Charlie there isn't nearly as good in a fight as I am."

"True," Charolette placidly acknowledged.

"However," I added, "Charolette is better at many other tasks as Water Elementals are far calmer. They also work well with the other Elemental types, even if William here continually tries to rile Charolette up."

"Hasn't worked yet," John said in a hoarse voice from beside me. Sergey simply chuckled.

Smiling, I said to the class, "As you can tell, though John and Sergey aren't visible, they are still here. Elementals tend to spend most of their time invisible to most mages. The more sensitive of you can recognize them for what they are with a bit of practice."

Getting bored, William flared widely and then vanished.

I rolled my eyes. "Show off."

"The methods to summon one are long and complex, so I won't get into that here today."

"That's all that I have prepared today. So, anyone have any questions?"