

Chapter 6

The Christmas break had come to a close. So many days had passed, but Harry felt no better than he did on Christmas night. Harry opened his trunk and began to fill it with his books and clothes. He paused to think for a moment. A weird tightening in his stomach began to take hold of him. *This will be the last time I will pack my trunk to go back to Hogwarts. The next time will be in June, just before I walk out the doors of a place I called home for seven years.* He continued to pack the rest of what he needed for his last term. He closed his trunk then stood up, turned around and sat down on it. He sat with hands folded and his head bowed down, as if in prayer. He stared down at his trainers.

What happened, Ginny? What did I do? Why did you leave me? My last year... I thought I could at least count on you. These thoughts tore into his heart.

Harry had experienced loss in his life. He was no stranger to heartache. He lost his parents at age one. He'd lost the godfather who he had grown close to in the two years that Harry knew him. He'd lost his greatest mentor, Albus Dumbledore. *Why is this pain so different? Why does it hurt so much? Why does it cut so deeply?* he wondered. The answer finally came to Harry. He loved her with all his heart. She was his soul mate, and he was certain that she felt the same way about him. At least, he thought she did. Professor Albright's voice from the base of the stairs suddenly interrupted his thoughts.

"Dobby, Kreacher, go get Harry," Professor Albright commanded.

Dobby and Kreacher fought each other to reach the top of the stairs. They raced down the hall to Harry's room and, while trying to enter it, wedged each other between the doorframe. Harry looked up and laughed in spite of himself.

"I couldn't imagine who it was that sent you two up here." Harry chuckled.

Dobby escaped first and ran right to Harry. "Harry Potter, Professor Albright..." Dobby began, short of breath, but Harry cut him off.

"I know; she wants me to come down for supper," Harry interrupted.

Dobby smiled, relieved that Harry was in a more cooperative mood. Kreacher looked on.

Harry came downstairs to the kitchen to find Professor Albright already eating. Strangely enough, Dobby and Kreacher each grabbed a chair and sat at the table to eat as well. Finding this odd, Harry stopped for a moment. Without saying a word, he walked

over to the table and sat down across from the professor. Professor Albright put a plate of food in front of him. Harry picked up his fork and poked at the small mound of stuffing.

“Is something wrong with your supper?” Professor Albright asked, giving her usual glance over her bifocals.

“No,” Harry mumbled. His mind was on Ginny.

“Harry, did you get a chance to talk to Hermione and Ron about the Horcruxes?”

“When was I going to?” Harry grunted. “It was Christmas. You know what happened then! I guess my mind was somewhere else.”

“Harry, I know your heart is aching, but you must stay focused,” Professor Albright cautioned.

Harry looked up at her and rolled his eyes defiantly.

“Harry, it is imperative that you tell Ron and Hermione. You must find those Horcruxes and destroy them. And Harry, don’t be hurt by Ginny’s actions. I get a terrible feeling she’s not acting on her own accord.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked. The professor’s statement piqued his curiosity.

“What I mean is that I think there may be an outside source influencing Ginny. It would not be far-fetched to think that someone or something has managed to find out Ginny’s and your secret. If that is so, it would not surprise me if this being isn’t trying to tear apart the one thing that could destroy You-Know-Who.”

“But who could it be?” Harry asked anxiously.

“I wish I knew. Unfortunately, my Transfiguration classes and duties at the Ministry leave me very little time to help you look. That’s why it’s important that you speak with Hermione and Ron immediately.”

“I will,” Harry agreed. His eyes were more alert. There was a look of determination on his face, and Professor Albright was relieved to see it. Harry’s appetite returned, as he dug into the chicken and stuffing.

A quiet moment was shared among all at the table. Then Harry broke the silence.

“Professor, I was wondering,” Harry began.

“And what would that be, dear?” Professor Albright responded, looking up from her half empty plate.

“If they took your wand away, how are you able to teach? Where did you get that wand that you use in class?”

“Professor McGonagall provided me with a regulation assigned wand. It only works within the confines of Hogwarts, and is limited to only Transfiguration class demonstrations. Its magic is extremely limited,” the professor explained. “She gave it to me the day that the three of us were in her office.”

“Really!” Harry replied.

“Why, yes, dear. What do you think Professor Snape used in his class all these years? Even though he supposedly came back to this side, he still committed a serious crime.”

“Really! Wait. Snape used his wand outside of Hogwarts.” Harry was quick to point out.

“Yes, but he was given a fully functioning wand by the Death Eaters,” Professor Albright clarified.

“So, Snape used a special wand too, eh?” Harry responded, ecstatic to hear this news.

“Certainly. You’ve heard of Igor Karkaroff? He too was assigned one, even though he was the headmaster of Durmstrang,” the professor revealed, watching Harry’s ever-growing expression of delight. “Didn’t you notice that many of the professors at Hogwarts had their turn in Azkaban, or stood in front of the Wizengamot?”

Harry continued to stare in amazement at what Professor Albright was saying.

“Even your beloved Hagrid. The only difference, of course, is that Hagrid was allowed to keep a fully capable wand in his possession, albeit it worked better as an umbrella, than it did as a wand. He needed it, or so Professor Dumbledore argued.” Professor Albright took a sip of water. “So, where do you suppose Severus Snape may be? Professor McGonagall mentioned that he escaped after that night,” Professor Albright recalled, referring to the night Professor Snape murdered Professor Dumbledore.

“We all think he’s hiding out with Draco Malfoy. That’s the one good thing about this year. No Draco! The coward!” Harry mumbled under his breath. “If I could get my hands on both of them...” Harry threatened, gritting his teeth.

“There, there, Harry. No use wasting your energy. As far as I see it, good riddance to bad rubbish.”

“They should be punished for what they did! The bloody murderers!”

“Draco murdered someone?” Professor Albright asked, even though she already knew the answer was no.

“No, but he was there and he didn’t try to stop Snape. He didn’t try to get help like I did. That makes him an accessory, doesn’t it?”

“Eat your supper, Harry, before it gets cold,” Professor Albright advised.

It was getting late. Professor Albright had retired to her room. Both she and Harry were heading back to Hogwarts the following morning. Harry went upstairs to his room and got undressed. He sat cross-legged on the bedspread and stared at its pattern as he thought. Dobby walked into the room and looked up at Harry. He could sense Harry’s sadness.

“Harry Potter is heart broken, because his Ginny is ill?” Dobby asked in a heartfelt voice.

“Yeah, something like that. Whatever you do, Dobby, don’t ever fall in love.”

Harry got up, crawled over to the head of the bed, pulled back the covers, and climbed underneath. Harry lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. He had one arm up and under his pillow. The weight of his head held his arm in place. This caused a strange thought to come to him. *How was Ginny able to hold my arm so tightly that Christmas Eve? Maybe Professor Albright was right. Ginny was acting under someone’s or something’s spell, but what and how?* Then another thought came to him. This thought made him smile. *If she was under some spell that night, I’d give anything for a re-match.* Harry removed his glasses, placed them on the nightstand, and drifted off to sleep.

At the train station, Professor Albright and Harry caught up with Ron and Hermione.

“So, are you all ready for your last term at Hogwarts?” Professor Albright asked the trio.

They had all grown so much since their first trip to Hogwarts. Hermione smiled and looked at Ron. Professor Albright smiled at Hermione.

“Where’s your sister, Ronald?” Professor Albright asked. Harry was glad that she asked.

“She’s already in a carriage. She’s sitting with Luna Lovegood, Colin Creevey and a couple of other sixth years,” Ron replied.

Harry’s heart sunk. Ginny did not even bother to wait for him. *Maybe it really is over.*

“Well, we had better get on the train and find a carriage before they all fill up,” Professor Albright advised, encouraging the trio to move quickly on board. Harry looked back at the professor with concern.

“No need to worry, dear,” Professor Albright assured, as she carefully stepped up into the train.

Harry supported her by putting his arm around her. They joined Hermione and Ron, who had found a carriage, three doors down.

While inside the carriage, Professor Albright got right to work discussing the Horcruxes with Hermione and Ron. She told them how Harry learned to use the Expono Animum spell and that he successfully destroyed the piece of soul in the locket. She went on to inquire about Hermione’s efforts to learn more about the Horcruxes.

“Hermione, Harry here tells me that you were going to do some investigation on school awards,” Professor Albright mentioned. “I believe you are on the right track. How far has your investigation taken you?”

“Er...well,” Hermione began. She did not want to admit that her investigation of the awards had been side tracked by her investigation of the professor. “ I had to put that on the back burner. Studies and all,” Hermione explained.

“Oh, I see,” Professor Albright replied, looking suspiciously over her bifocals at Hermione. She sensed that Hermione was not being completely truthful. Harry looked on, but he too sensed something was wrong.

“Well, I would love to stay and continue our little chat, but I think enough has been said. I need to go join the other staff members. Hermione, I trust you will pick up where you left off on your investigation,” Professor Albright confirmed, still peering over her bifocals.

“Yes, of course, Professor,” Hermione assured nervously.

The professor left the carriage and slowly walked to a carriage where some staff members had been sitting. Hermione did not hesitate. She immediately explained her inability to investigate the awards.

“Look, there was another reason why I didn’t continue my search for the awards,” Hermione whispered.

“Yeah, and what reason was that?” Ron interjected with annoyance in his voice. Hermione flashed him back a dirty look.

“I wanted to learn more about Professor Albright,” Hermione explained, leaning forward to where Harry was sitting.

“And what did you find out?” Harry asked defensively, insulted by Hermione’s intrusiveness.

“Harry, Professor Albright is no ordinary witch. She’s a very rare kind,” Hermione revealed.

Ron looked at Harry with a weird expression on his face.

“Yeah, how rare?” Harry asked skeptically.

“She’s a telekinetic,” Hermione replied.

“A tele-what?” both boys responded in harmony.

“A telekinetic,” Hermione repeated. “She can move and control things with her mind.”

“Yeah, so? We can make things happen,” Harry argued. “Remember when I made my Uncle Vernon’s sister blow up like a balloon, or the time I made the glass on the Burmese Python’s cage disappear? That was a laugh. Dudley fell right in.”

“No, Harry. This is different,” Hermione insisted.

“How’s it different?” Ron challenged.

“When you made those things happen, were you consciously making those things happen?” Hermione questioned.

“Well...er...” Harry stuttered looking at Ron. Hermione cut him off.

“Exactly. Well, she can! She can control things with her mind.”

“Well, how is that possible when the Ministry repossessed all her powers and confiscated her wand?” Harry argued.

“Harry, the powers that the Ministry took away were things that she had learned at Hogwarts. Her telekinetic abilities were something she had from the time she was born, and learned how to control before she entered Hogwarts. I guess you could say those abilities were grandfathered in,” Hermione explained.

“So, she doesn’t need a wand to move things or make things happen?” Harry asked nervously.

“Exactly. Whatever you do, Harry, don’t make her mad. You can keep your mentorship with her for as long as you like, just tread lightly around her,” Hermione warned.

Harry looked at Hermione then at Ron. Ron looked back at Harry. His eyes looked like they were ready to pop out of his head.

The train arrived at the station near Hogwarts. Harry stepped into the corridor and accidentally bumped into Ginny. His heart skipped a beat, and he turned bright red. He was unable to speak and his legs began to give out from under him. Ginny glared at him for a moment then proceeded down the corridor to exit the train. All this time, Professor Albright had seen what happened. She was concerned for both of them.

It was late that evening, and the meal was served. Harry decided to have his first meal back at Hogwarts with Professor Albright in the staff quarters.

“So Harry, I think it’s time I talk to Ginny. I’ll speak to her after Transfiguration class,” Professor Albright announced.

“Well, I doubt it will do any good. For some reason she’s really mad at me,” replied a disinterested Harry.

“You know, I find it amazing that you can risk your life, fighting some evil wizard in a grave yard, but the moment you catch a glimpse of Ginny, your heart forgets how to beat, your knees grow weak, your legs go numb and your tongue swells up like a balloon. If I hadn’t known how much in love you are with the poor lass, I’d say you were allergic to her,” Professor Albright teased.

Harry realized the professor was playing the old game of ‘look-right-through-me’. *It’s probably part of her telekinetic powers*, Harry thought. He felt defeated. The professor was right. Lately, fighting Voldemort seemed much easier than dealing with Ginny.

“So, what do I do?” Harry asked. “I’m...in love with her...and if anything were to happen to her, I guess...I’d be...” Harry choked on the last word.

Professor Albright said it for him. “‘Done’, Harry?”

Harry nodded, looking down at his dinner.

“You know, I knew a bloke years ago who had the same exact problem you do now--The same exact one.”

“Yeah? And what did *he* do about it?” asked a thoroughly defeated Harry.

“Why the only thing he could do. He married me.” Professor Albright grinned triumphantly at Harry.

Harry quickly looked up, his jaw dropping open and his eyes bulging out. The professor let out what seemed to be a rather cliché kind of laugh for an old witch.

“Professor, I think I’m a little too young for that right now. Ginny’s only sixteen,” Harry informed.

“You know, that’s the problem with young people these days. They’re so afraid of getting old, they do everything they can to stay young, even at the cost of sacrificing the things that mean the most in life,” Professor Albright bantered. “You know, growing old isn’t really all that bad. It just takes a little getting used to.”

Harry had a thought go through his mind at this last sentence, and it left him with an additional ache in his heart. One day, probably soon, Professor Albright would die, leaving him feeling more lonely. He had grown attached to the old professor. To him, she was like a grandparent.

“Professor, just how old *are* you?” asked a worried Harry.

“Now, Harry, you know it’s impolite to ask a lady her age,” Professor Albright teased.

“Come on, Professor, seriously,” Harry persisted anxiously.

“Okay, Harry,” Professor Albright sighed, “out with it. What’s bothering you?” she snapped, with a no non-sense tone of voice.

“Well, it’s just that...I think of you as family. You’re like the grandmother I never had,” Harry replied sheepishly.

“What about your Aunt Petunia and your Cousin Dudley,” Professor Albright reminded.

“What about ‘em,” Harry scoffed.

Professor Albright giggled for a moment then said, “Harry, don’t be so quick to dismiss your Aunt Petunia. She may have her faults and was a bit unkind to you...”

“A BIT UNKIND?” Harry growled, with eyebrows raised.

“But, Harry, she’s family. Don’t you understand why she’s been so bitter to you, all these years?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders defiantly, not interested in hearing the explanation.

“When your grandparents were killed, Petunia took it very hard, especially the loss of her father. She was very close to him. The night they were killed, Petunia decided, that she would wash her hands of everyone and everything associated with the wizarding world. She blamed your mother for her parents’ deaths. It hardened her. After all, she lost both her parents at such a young age. Sound familiar?” Professor Albright explained.

Harry began to understand Aunt Petunia in a way that he had never considered before.

“Don’t be so quick to sell your Aunt Petunia short. She and Dudley are your family. Your Uncle Vernon...well, he’s another story.” The professor giggled.

Harry chuckled. He started to feel a little better about Aunt Petunia, but the question in his mind still kept him wondering. Professor Albright could see by the look on Harry’s face that he was determined to know how old she was.

“Okay, Harry,” Professor Albright replied, succumbing to Harry’s persistence, “in seven years, if I live that long, I will be eligible for membership in the Centigenarian’s Club.”

“The Centi-what?” Harry asked with a puzzled expression on his face.

“The Centigenarian’s Club. It’s for people who reach the age of one hundred,” Professor Albright explained.

“Oh,” Harry uttered, his mind racing to do the math. “So, you’re ninety-three?”

“Yes, Harry. Very good. Arithmancy has taught you well,” Professor Albright replied sarcastically.

“You mean you’re ninety-three-years-young, right?” Harry asked, hungry for reassurance.

“Well, I don’t know. Is there any such thing?” Professor Albright joked. “Finish your supper. It’s getting late.”

Harry did as Professor Albright directed, then he rose from the table, walked over to where she was sitting, bade her good night and proceeded to leave. As he started to walk away, Professor Albright grabbed his hand. They looked at each other without saying a word. Professor Albright smiled and nodded to give Harry the go-ahead to return to his dorm room.

The next morning was a shameful display of confusion and mishap. Students were rushing off to the Great Hall for breakfast. New students were getting stuck on the moving staircases and owls were flying amuck, delivering last minute items which students forgot to pack. They were at the mercy of their parents’ care packages. Harry spotted Hermione and Ron sitting with one another, and having breakfast. He walked over, dropped his books on the bench and plopped down next to Ron.

“Morning, Harry,” Hermione greeted. Not wasting any time, she started right in. “I was just telling Ron. Ginny’s been acting more anti-social than ever before. I’m really concerned for her. Do you think there’s anything Professor Albright could do?”

"I don't know. She said she would try to talk to her after class." Harry shrugged, pretending to be disinterested, and put a spoonful of cereal in his mouth.

"What could be causing her to be like this?" Ron asked, worried for his sister.

"I don't know," Harry replied, pouring some pumpkin juice into his glass.

"Well, let's hope Professor Albright can talk to her," Hermione said optimistically. "In the meantime, I plan on going to the library after classes to look up those awards."

Transfiguration class was coming to an end and the students were preparing to leave for the midday break. Professor Albright eyed Ginny and watched her gather her books together.

"Miss Weasley, may I have a word with you?" Professor Albright requested from the front of the class.

The other students began to pile out the door. Ginny looked up nervously. She got up from her seat, picked up her books and slowly walked up to the front of the class.

"Yes, Professor Albright," Ginny replied.

"Ginny, are you feeling well, dear?" Professor Albright asked, studying Ginny's face carefully.

"Yes, I'm fine. Why?"

"Well, lately you seem to be distant and unfriendly to your fellow classmates," Professor Albright answered.

"Well, are my grades in Transfiguration slipping?"

"No. On the contrary, you are tied with Luna Lovegood for highest marks in the class."

"Well then, that's all that matters," Ginny replied coldly.

"Is it really, Ginny?" Professor Albright asked. A sad expression had settled on her face.

"Yeah," Ginny scoffed.

"And what about Harry?"

"What about him?" Ginny retorted defensively. "You didn't really expect us to be together forever, did you?" Ginny asked. A cold, callus look was in her eyes.

Professor Albright knew for certain. There was no question. Voldemort's evil was attempting to take a permanent toll on Ginny's life and Harry's fate. She knew she had to contact Hermione and get that information about the awards.

"No, you're right, Ginny. That's all. You may go," Professor Albright sighed.

Ginny turned around and walked angrily out of the classroom. Professor Albright went right to work. She grabbed some parchment and wrote a quick note to Hermione. She placed it in the beak of the owl that was used in class and sent it on its way.

Hermione's Astronomy class was cancelled, so she took advantage of the extra time and went straight to the library. As it turned out, the library had a special section in reference on the different Hogwarts competitions and awards. Hermione already had an idea on how to narrow down her search. She started back as early as 1950. As she flipped through the records, she read from the list:

**The information on students and awards are logged in the following order:
STUDENT, SUBJECT, AWARD.**

Eileen Prince, Potions, Ravenclaw's Silver and Sapphire Bracelet

Severus Snape, Potions, Slytherin Gold Serpent Time Piece

James Potter, Defense Against The Dark Arts, Gryffindor Small Hourglass.

Amos Diggory, Care of Magical Creatures, Hufflepuff's Cup with Badger Crest.

Lucinda Ayres McGregor, Transfiguration, Ravenclaw's Broche with Blue Diamond

Hermione's heart leaped with excitement. However, she was feeling confused about what she had found out. *Didn't Harry say that Hepzibah Smith bought the cup?* Hermione could not wait to ask Professor Albright about what she found. She quickly gathered her books, and ran back to the reference desk to return the materials she borrowed. She was in such a hurry to leave the library that she caused the owl, carrying the parchment from Professor Albright, to make a quick aerial U-turn.

"Oy, you bloody bird! You scared me half to death!" Hermione shrieked.

The owl dropped the parchment at her feet and, without even bothering to wait for Hermione's reply, quickly flew back to the Transfiguration class. Hermione picked up the note and read it.

Hermione,

I hope this gets to you soon. Our situation is grave. I hope you've already started your search into the awards. I pray that you have already come across some valuable clues. Time is running out. I'm concerned for Ginny. My greatest fears have been confirmed. She is under his spell, but how? I do not know. Please see me as quickly as possible.

Your friend and fellow Healer,

Rose

Hermione quickly ran to the Transfiguration classroom. On her way, she bumped into Harry and Ron.

"Ron, Harry, follow me. We had a new break in the case," Hermione announced excitedly, grabbing Ron's hand and jerking him in the direction she was running. Harry quickly followed behind.

"Hermione, slow down!" Ron yelled. "What case?"

"The case of the missing You-Know-What's silly," Hermione replied.

"Hermione, are you serious?" Harry asked anxiously.

"Yes! Now come on! We have to see Professor Albright," Hermione exclaimed.

The trio ran to the Transfiguration classroom and burst through the door. The sound startled Professor Albright, and she looked up from her desk quickly. She had been grading papers.

"Professor," Hermione called out, as she, Harry and Ron ran up to the front of the class, "I have wonderful news."

"You found the rest of the Horcruxes," Professor Albright responded hopefully.

"Yes! Well, not all of them. There is one that I can't quite figure out," Hermione admitted, a tone of disappointment in her voice.

"Well, let's see what you've found out and then we can go from there," Professor Albright suggested.

Hermione opened her book bag and placed her notes that she had copied from the awards records, down on the professor's desk.

Professor Albright and the boys quickly scanned the notes. Professor Albright ran her finger down the list. Harry's eyes almost popped out of his head when he saw Amos Diggory's name and the Hufflepuff cup.

"This is excellent work, Hermione," Professor Albright exclaimed, praising Hermione for her investigative skills. "You have a true knack for research. A very important quality," the professor emphasized, looking directly into Hermione's eyes and smiling. Hermione felt a sense of pride.

"Hermione, I could kiss you!" Harry exclaimed.

"Allow me, Harry," Ron chimed, as he put his arm around Hermione, and kissed her before she had time to protest. Ron pulled away and gave Hermione a big exaggerated smile.

Harry looked on, amused by the show. Professor Albright caught Hermione's eye and winked at her. Hermione was too concerned about the awards to humor Ron and his antics. She wanted to know more about what she had found out.

"Professor, Harry said that Hepzibah Smith purchased the cup and had the locket, so how did Regulus and Amos get the locket and cup?" Hermione inquired.

"Well, I don't know if any of you know this, but You-Know-Who, when he was still known as Tom Riddle, worked for Borgin and Burkes, the antique dealers. After Hepzibah's murder, Tom disappeared, but not before hiding the cup. He took the locket with him. It was Professor Dumbledore that figured out what happened to the locket. Remember your trip, Harry?" Professor Albright smiled.

Ron and Hermione looked accusingly at Harry, but he did not look back. He waited for the twinge of guilt, about not including his best friends on his trip with Professor Dumbledore, to pass.

"But *that* locket wasn't there. It was replaced with a fake one and a note inside by the time Professor Dumbledore and I went to the cave," Harry was quick to point out.

"Apparently, Regulus Black had taken the locket from The Dark Lord's hiding place, after feeling guilty about trying to help the Dark Lord kill Harry's parents. The first attempt, needless to say, was a failure, and Regulus knew that the Dark Lord would hold him accountable for the failed attempt. The Dark Lord was eager to get his hands on that hourglass, besides killing James and Lily for more obvious reasons," Professor Albright added.

"*He* was the one that killed Regulus, right?" Harry inquired clarifying Professor Albright's story.

“Yes,” the professor confirmed. “Regulus knew that Grimmauld Place was a hidden sanctuary for him. As long as he remained there, he was safe from the Dark Lord. The thing was, he knew he would have to leave there eventually, so he contacted Professor Dumbledore to see if he could strike a similar deal, like the one Professor Snape had made. He and Professor Dumbledore agreed to meet at Hogwarts. Apparently, Regulus never told Professor Dumbledore that he had the locket. Perhaps he was going to use it as a bargaining chip, if Professor Dumbledore decided at the last minute to pull out on the deal,” Professor Albright informed.

“So, when did Voldemort kill Regulus?” Hermione asked growing impatient with all of the details.

“Regulus, was on his way over to Hogwarts a few days after Professor Dumbledore agreed to see him. Regulus never made it.” Professor Albright’s mouth closed tightly, as she watched the trio’s expressions on their faces. “So, good heavens! What was I saying, before we got onto all of this?”

“I think you were telling us about Tom Riddle and Hufflepuff’s cup,” Ron reminded her.

“Oh, yes! The cup! Anyway, Mr. Burke went to clean out Tom’s locker and accidentally found a secret compartment that Tom had made inside of it. It was in this secret compartment that Mr. Burke found the missing cup. I guess he figured there was no point in turning the cup in to the proper authorities, so he kept it,” the professor continued.

“Later on, when Professor McGonagall went over to Borgin and Burkes to purchase the antiques for the competition awards, Burke was eager to sell her the cup,” Professor Albright concluded her tale.

The explanation cleared up some of the mystery, but there was still one mystery left. There was one student that Hermione did not know-- Lucinda Ayres McGregor. She hoped that Professor Albright would be able to shed some light on this student.

“Professor, what do you know about her?” Hermione inquired, placing her finger on Lucinda’s name.

Professor Albright read the name and her face lit up. “Ah, yesss,” Professor Albright replied, with a snake-like hiss, reminding the trio of the house from which she hailed. “What do you know about Luna Lovegood?” she quizzed.

“Well, she’s completely mental,” Ron quickly responded.

“Ron, don’t be so cruel!” Hermione scolded.

Harry thought for a moment then remembered a conversation he had with Luna, after Sirius was killed. "Her mother was killed by accident, while performing an experiment," he recalled.

"An accident!" Professor Albright replied giggling. "Is that what they call it now!"

Harry stood motionless. A chill ran up his spine. He sensed a very horrible truth was about to be revealed. The other two appeared stupefied.

"Oh, how could I have over-looked this? Of course, that's it! *He* even managed to get Rowena's broche, that son of a gun! So *he did* murder her!" Professor Albright exclaimed, talking to herself.

"Murder whom? Who received Ravenclaw's broche?" Harry asked growing ever more frustrated with Professor Albright's behavior.

Ignoring Harry's frantic questions, Professor Albright peered at the trio. "You want to know who Lucinda Ayres McGregor was?" she asked.

The trio stared at her eagerly. As the tension grew, all was quiet.

"Lucinda Ayres McGregor was one of Hogwarts finest and most accomplished students in the discipline of Transfiguration that this school has ever known. She was also a descendent of Rowena Ravenclaw. The broche, which was considered absolutely priceless, considering that it belonged to Rowena Ravenclaw, was presented to Lucinda as the highest honor bestowed upon a student. It was considered appropriate at the time, because of Lucinda's lineage. She worked with me on a project several years ago. The only difference was she was not known as Lucinda McGregor. By the time she was working under my supervision, she had already been married to the owner of the Quibbler, Mr. Lovegood."

"Lucinda Ayers McGregor is..."Hermione began.

"Luna Lovegood's mother and may she rest in peace," Professor Albright added. "Find Luna and have her find the broche, and you will have found your fifth Horcrux, lady and gentlemen."

"Well, we need to contact Mr.Diggory and see if we can get the Hufflepuff cup," Hermione reminded.

"Never mind that right now. I'll take care of Amos and his cup," Professor Albright assured. "You just find Luna and quickly. We haven't much time."

"Oh, great! Ron and I have Quidditch practice after classes," Harry groaned.

“Don’t worry, Harry. You and Ron go to practice. It’s important that you keep an eye on Ginny,” Hermione advised.

“That’s my girl, Hermione! Now all of you go,” Professor Albright urged.

The trio raced out of the classroom. Professor Albright went to the back office to gather some things before heading back to the Ministry.

Quidditch practice did not go as planned. The more Harry would practice catching the Snitch, the more Ginny would try to knock him off his broom. Ginny even hit the Quaffle so hard, with the back of her broom that it almost knocked Ron off of his when he caught it. Harry flew over to Ron to check on his condition.

“You all right, Ron?” Harry asked concernedly.

“Yeah,” Ron grunted. “Just wait ‘til Mum hears about this!”

Both boys watched Ginny, as she continued to fly erratically. She recklessly flew around the bleachers of the Quidditch stadium. Her teammates did everything they could to avoid her unpartisan-like conduct. Even Natalie MacDonald flew over to Harry and Ron for additional protection.

“Harry, you have to do something about her. She’s gone completely mental!” cried Natalie.

“Yeah,” Ron agreed. “You’re the captain. Do something!”

Harry raced over to where Ginny was continuing her disruptive tirade. He was careful to avoid putting himself in a position where she could ram her broom directly into him.

“Look, Ginny, if you want to be mad at me, fine. Don’t take it out on you teammates!” Harry yelled. It pained him to have to talk to her this way.

“I HAVE A BETTER IDEA. WHY DON’T I JUST BLOW OFF PRACTICE TODAY?” Ginny shouted back.

“Well, fine! If that’s the way you want it,” Harry barked.

“Fine!” Ginny snapped, as she raced off to the locker room. “Besides, I have a Potions test to study for!”

Harry slammed his hand down on his broom out of frustration. He immediately flew back to where Ron and Natalie were hovering.

Meanwhile, Hermione searched frantically all over the school, trying to track down Luna. After a long search, Hermione finally found her. It was no wonder how Luna earned her nickname, 'Looney Lovegood'. Hermione found her reading a book, sitting under a tree better known as the Whomping Willow. Hermione stopped a safe distance away from where Luna was sitting.

"Luna," Hermione called out nervously.

Luna looked up from her book. "Oh, hi, Hermione. Why are you standing so far away?"

"Luna, you *do* know that's the Whomping Willow you're sitting under, don't you?" Hermione stuttered, being cautious not to make any sudden loud noises.

"Yes, but don't worry. It's perfectly safe. This poor tree is just misunderstood," Luna explained, looking at Hermione in a manner that seemed to resemble an unyielding dream state.

"Well, do you mind if I had a word with you, preferably someplace a little less conspicuous?" Hermione requested, continuing her cautious stance.

"No, not at all," Luna replied, as she got up and walked over to Hermione, clutching her book close to her chest.

As the girls walked back toward the school, Hermione tried to explain to Luna the importance of her obtaining the broche while she tried not to give away any knowledge of the Horcruxes.

"Luna, I need to find the broche your mother won in the academic competitions. You see, I'm doing a...report...a class project and I need it for my display," Hermione lied.

"Oh, well, I can help you. I keep the broche in my treasure box, in my dorm room. It was given to me after mother...had her accident," Luna explained, a tone of sadness in her voice.

"I'm so sorry to hear about your mother," Hermione said sincerely.

"Well, it's okay, really. One day I will see her again," Luna responded.

"Luna, who gave you the broche?" Hermione asked to change the subject.

"My father did. After mother had her accident, father recovered the broche from her sweater. She never went anywhere without it," Luna replied.

"Really? Do you remember anything about her accident?" Hermione asked inquisitively.

“Well, not too much. I was very young when it happened. I do remember seeing a strange man at the window where my mother worked in the house. She had a small lab off from the kitchen. I remember running in when I heard the explosion. The man ran off when he saw me,” Luna recalled.

“Didn’t you tell anyone about this before?” Hermione asked, frightened by Luna’s story.

“I told father, but he just thought I was imagining it. He figured I was traumatized by what I had seen. Mother had been blown to bits,” Luna explained.

Hermione had no reply for this. She knew who the man was and realized how lucky Luna was that the man did not try to kill her as well. The girls continued to walk quickly back to the school. When they arrived, they immediately went to Ravenclaw’s dormitory.

“Wait here, Hermione,” Luna instructed.

Hermione did as she was told and waited just outside the entranceway to Ravenclaw’s common room. Minutes later, Luna returned, stepping out of the Ravenclaw common room to join Hermione in the corridor.

“Here you go,” Luna said, carefully placing the broche that was wrapped in a blue cloth, into Hermione’s open hand.

Hermione carefully examined the broche. It was awe inspiring for her because she appreciated its significance. Its antiquity, alone, was overwhelming. Even more so was its beauty. It was in the form of a sterling silver raven. The detail from its beak down to its feathers was extraordinary. The one thing that made it so valuable, however, was not the silver, but the raven’s eyes. They were made of exquisite, rare, blue diamonds. They were almost two carats each. Hermione could feel her hand starting to shake, she was so captivated by the broche’s breathtaking sparkle. She was also well aware of what this broche contained, and it was this knowledge that helped keep Hermione’s wits about her.

“Thank you, Luna.” Hermione smiled joyfully. “I’ll return it to you as soon as I’m done with my project.” With that, Hermione raced off to the Gryffindor common room. On her way she almost ran right into Professor Albright. The professor was carrying a small parcel.

“Oh, Professor, forgive me. I’m terribly sorry,” Hermione apologized, turning bright red from embarrassment.

“What’s your hurry, dear?” Professor Albright asked.

“Professor, I’m so glad I found you.” Hermione smiled excitedly. “Good news! I got the broche,” she boasted, holding it up in its blue cover.

“Well, I’ve got good news too,” Professor Albright replied. “I’ve got the cup.” She held up the parcel. They both beamed smiles at one another.

“Hurry!” Professor Albright chirped. “We mustn’t waste time. Gather the boys and come back to staff quarters.”

“Right,” Hermione replied.

They hurried off in separate directions. Professor Albright returned to staff quarters with the cup. Hermione made it back to Gryffindor’s dormitories where she met up with Ron and Harry. Both boys looked like they had been through a war.

“Rough practice?” Hermione asked, with a smirk on her face.

“Don’t start, Hermione!” Ron replied, looking worn and sweaty.

“Well, this might cheer you up,” Hermione chirped, holding up her hand with the blue-clothed broche.

“What’s that?” Ron asked, with a puzzled look on his face. Harry held the same expression.

“The broche, silly.” Hermione unrolled the blue cloth to reveal the broche. Ron and Harry stared at the broche for a second.

“Hermione, you got it!” Harry exclaimed, his face lit up with excitement.

“How did you manage that?” Ron asked.

“It was nothing really,” Hermione replied, with a tone of false modesty.

“Hermione, I could…” Harry proclaimed.

“Kiss me?” Hermione remarked finishing the rest of Harry’s sentence.

“Allow me, Harry,” Ron chimed, as he tried to wrap his arms around Hermione to kiss her.

“RONALD WEASLEY!” Hermione yelled, and in the nick of time ducked out of Ron’s grasp. “Don’t you dare touch me until you’ve properly showered!”

Harry laughed while Ron pretended to be insulted.

“Go on, both of you! Get cleaned up! We can’t waste anytime. We have to be back at Professor Albright’s room,” Hermione demanded.

“Yeah? And why’s that?” Harry asked.

“Because, she has the cup!” answered Hermione triumphantly.

Harry looked at Hermione in shock. His heart leaped with a new kind of hope. He looked over at Ron. Ron looked back at Harry then to Hermione. Lastly, both boys looked at each other and grinned devilishly. Not a second later, both boys lunged at Hermione to try to kiss her face. Hermione screamed and ducked out again, just in time for Harry and Ron to kiss each other. Both boys behaved as if disgusted by the experience, wiping at their lips furiously. Hermione laughed.

“Serves the two of you right! Now go to your rooms and clean yourselves up!” Hermione commanded. This time the boys did as they were told.

Back at Professor Albright’s room, the professor removed the Hufflepuff cup out of the colorful paper bag. She was careful to handle it gently. She knew its powers were strong, as long as it held a piece of *his* soul inside it. She heard a knock on the staff quarter’s door. Immediately, she hid the cup in her robe pocket. When she answered the door, Harry, Ron and Hermione were standing on the other side.

“Hi, Professor,” Harry greeted.

“Good. You’re all here.” Professor Albright smiled. “Come. Let’s gather in the center of the room.”

“Won’t anyone else see?” Ron asked.

“No, dear, we won’t do anything here. Follow me,” Professor Albright ordered, walking over to the fireplace in the staff common room. She ran her old, bony fingers along the engraved mantle piece, until she came across a carved flower. She pressed on it, and a partition of the wall, next to the fireplace, began to open. She walked through the opening and gestured for the trio to follow.

“What is this place?” Ron asked, wrinkling his nose from the strong, musty, and damp smell. They could hear water dripping somewhere off in the far distance.

“You are in the bowels of the castle,” Professor Albright announced.

“Lovely,” Harry mumbled sarcastically under his breath.

“I trust that you brought the broche with you, Hermione?” Professor Albright inquired.

“Yes, here it is,” Hermione replied, pulling the broche from the front pocket of her jacket.

“Very well. Place it on the floor. I’ll place the cup over here,” Professor Albright said, placing the Hufflepuff cup on the floor, a safe distance from the broche. The trio watched curiously.

“Now, everyone gather round, but don’t stand too close,” Professor Albright instructed. “Harry, starting with the cup first, I want you to demonstrate to Ron and Hermione how to destroy a Horcrux.”

“Right, Professor,” Harry replied, carefully positioning himself in front of the cup, but taking care to keep a safe distance. He wanted to avoid a performance like the one he had with the locket. “First,” Harry began, demonstrating his posture, as if he were teaching a class to Dumbledore’s Army, “I point my wand directly at the cup. Next, I say the incantation, *Expono Animum*, three times, careful to keep a good distance between the Horcrux and myself. You need to stand back a bit,” Harry warned, noticing Ron and Hermione’s proximity to the cup.

Ron and Hermione took a few steps back. Professor Albright hid behind a stone pillar. Once Harry saw that everyone in the room appeared to be a safe distance away, he began the incantations. His voice grew louder each time he said it.

“Expono Animum! Expono Animum! Expono Animum!” On this last incantation, Harry crouched to the floor, knowing what was coming next.

Ron and Hermione mimicked Harry. Hermione grabbed Ron’s hand. A bright purple light burst free from the cup, followed by the same black spot with yellow ring and finally the extremely loud, violent explosion. The sound caused stone and dust to rattle free from the walls.

After the shaking stopped, Ron sat up. “Whoa! Wicked!” he exclaimed. Hermione’s hair was all disheveled. Harry sat up too. He withstood this Horcrux-destroying procedure much better than on his first time.

“Well done, Harry,” Professor Albright praised. “Hermione, would you like to examine the cup?”

Hermione nodded, walked over to the cup and carefully picked it up. At first, it did not appear to be damaged. On careful examination, Hermione noticed a crack running through the badger. Hermione looked up and around at everyone. She said nothing, but merely smiled.

“Now who wants to try to extract a piece of soul from the broche?” Professor Albright queried, looking around.

"I'll take a crack at it. Er...no pun intended, of course," Ron joked, blushing from his own remark. Harry and Hermione laughed.

"Okay, Harry, review the steps with Mr. Weasley," Professor Albright ordered.

"Right," Harry replied. "Okay, Ron, point your wand directly at Ravenclaw's broche."

"Like this?" Ron asked, carefully lining up his wand directly with the broche. Ravenclaw's broche was a small target and would prove to be more challenging.

"That's good. Now say, 'Expono Animum' three times. Oh, step back a bit, too," Harry reminded.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, right," Ron responded, readjusting his footing.

"There, that looks good. Now go for it," Harry commanded, taking shelter behind another pillar.

Hermione crouched back down on the ground. "You can do it, Ron," Hermione cheered encouragingly.

Ron glanced at Hermione and nodded, then quickly looked back at the broche. He tried to concentrate, but the hard, quick beating of his heart created a distraction. Ron took a deep breath, swallowed hard, and began the incantation.

"*Expono Animum*," Ron blurted, looking nervously at Harry. Harry nodded back.

"*Expono Animum*," Ron repeated, now looking at Professor Albright.

"*Expono Animum*," he repeated for the last time. Only this time he closed one eye, turned his head slightly and winced, expecting the burst of purple light and loud explosion. At first, nothing happened.

Both Professor Albright and Harry peaked out a little further from the pillars they were standing behind. Hermione, supporting herself up on her knees, stretched her neck to get a better look. Ron looked around at everyone disappointedly.

"What went wrong? Nothing happened," Ron complained. He began walking up closer to the broche.

"Well, it was a very small target," Hermione piped up, trying to console Ron.

As Ron continued to approach the broche, a sudden burst of purple erupted from it. It was not followed by the black spot and yellow ring. It went straight to the explosion. This explosion seemed to be more violent than either the cup or the locket. It caused the

room to quake and larger pieces of ceiling and wall to come down. Both Harry and Professor Albright were knocked to the ground. Hermione screamed, fell back onto the floor, and covered her face with her arms.

Ron received the brunt of the explosion and was thrown back several feet. He was lying flat on his back with his arms and legs spread out. His wand had flown to a distant corner of the room. He was about ready to get up when he lifted his head and saw Hermione running over to him. He decided he'd feign injury in hopes that he would receive additional coddling from her.

"Ron!" Hermione screamed, running over to Ron's aid. She bent down and cradled Ron's head in her arms.

Harry rushed over. Professor Albright walked over to where the trio was.

"Ron, look at me! Open your eyes, Ron!" Hermione yelled desperately. She bent down even lower, and kissed him. She looked up at Harry, with tears welling up in her eyes.

Harry returned her look with his own look of despair. Then he felt the urge to laugh, but he held back. Ron had turned his head slightly and winked at Harry. Professor Albright noticed it, too, rolled her eyes, and shook her head. Professor Albright decided to give away Ron's cruel trick by giggling. Hermione looked up at Professor Albright. Harry started to gaffaw as well. The laughter was so contagious that Ron started in too. Hermione heard Ron, looked down at him, and hit him on the top of his head.

"RONALD WEASLEY!" Hermione yelled, abruptly getting to her feet and causing Ron's head to slap down on the cold, hard floor.

"Ouch!" Ron yelped, still laughing.

Hermione walked back over to where the broche was still lying on the floor. She picked it up and examined it. "Oh, no," she moaned.

"What's wrong, dear?" Professor Albright asked.

"The broche. One of the diamonds came loose," Hermione exclaimed, holding the broche up for Professor Albright to examine.

"No need to worry, dear. We can have it repaired," Professor Albright assured.

"Well, one good thing came out of all of this," Harry noted. "We've now found and destroyed five of the six Horcruxes. We already know where the seventh piece of His soul is," Harry reported, referring to Voldemort. "We just need to find the sixth one."

“The only problem is, none of us know where to look,” Ron replied, picking up his wand from across the room and slipping it into his back pocket.

“Well, we’ve accomplished quite a bit tonight,” Professor Albright declared. “I think you three should be running off to your dorms.” Ron and Hermione said good night to the professor and got a head start to Gryffindor. Harry hung back for a while to spend a moment with the professor.

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry uttered.

“A.W.M.L.,” Professor Albright replied.

“What?” Harry asked, confused.

“A.W.M.L. It’s an acronym, Harry. It means, ‘Always Welcome, My Love’,” Professor Albright explained.

“Oh, where did you get that from?” Harry asked smiling.

“David, my husband, and I had such little things that we shared,” Professor Albright explained, reflecting fondly on a memory with a twinkle in her eye.

“You miss him, don’t you?” Harry asked.

“Very much,” Professor Albright admitted, choking back a tear.

“What other things did you and Mr. Albright share?”

“Well, we both loved music. He and I would put some music on the old turntable, and we would dance around the drawing room. When Daisy, my daughter, was a little older, the three of us would make a circle and dance,” Professor Albright recalled.

“How long did you do that?” Harry chuckled.

“Until that night…”

Harry knew what the professor was referring to. His smile left his face, and the conversation turned serious.

“You never listened to music after that night?” Harry asked, finding it so hard to believe that someone could deny herself such a pleasure in life.

“Well, I just figured, what was the point? I had lost them. They were my whole world. What was the point of listening to music that reminded me of what I had

lost? David and Daisy made the music for me. After that night, it was no more David, no more Daisy...no more music.”

Harry found this to be absolutely heartbreaking. Professor Albright could see the sadness in his face. She did not want him to leave her on such a sad note. She tried to lift his spirits by acting as if the situation could be easily dismissed.

“Ah, Harry, water under the bridge.”

Harry found it remarkable how Professor Albright could recover so quickly. He, too, was desperate to change the mood. Then something the professor said caught his attention.

“Professor, did you say after that night, there was no more David and Daisy?”

“Yes, why?”

“You mean your daughter was killed by You-Know-Who, too?”

“Yes. Didn’t I mention that?” Professor Albright responded.

“No.”

“Oh, well. It was a very painful memory. I must have blocked it out,” Professor Albright replied nervously. “Now, enough questions. Off to bed!”

“Good night, Professor. I hope one day you and I can listen to some music together,” Harry grinned, as he left the staff quarters to return to his dorm.

“I hope one day you and Ginny dance together.”