

## Chapter 2

September was just around the corner again. Some leaves had already started changing to the beautiful ambers, burnt oranges and reds. The air offered a fresh breeze, with a slight hint of chill. Harry was lying in his bed. He was almost feeling glad that Professor Albright talked him into returning to Hogwarts for his last year. As he lied in bed, in the second floor bedroom, he looked out the window to watch the daylight grow brighter. Finally, he decided to get up, get washed and dressed. Harry had a train to catch.

Harry made his way down stairs to get some breakfast. On his way down he could see Professor Albright coming up the walkway. He walked over to the door and opened it to greet the professor.

"Professor, what are you doing here so early in the morning," Harry smiled.

Professor Albright looked up at Harry and replied, "Checking to see if you are prepared for your trip."

"Well I was just going to make myself some breakfast. Would you like to join me?"

"That would be lovely," Professor Albright replied, looking up at Harry proudly. Harry led the professor to the kitchen then he began preparing breakfast, which consisted of toast, jam and tea.

"So, are you excited about going back to Hogwarts?" Professor Albright asked.

"Yeah, I guess," Harry replied hesitantly.

"All your friends will be there. Ginny will be there," Professor Albright mentioned, carefully studying Harry's expression.

"Yeah," Harry scoffed, with a mouthful of toast and jam.

"Harry, it was very noble of you, what you did at Professor Dumbledore's funeral. Breaking off your relationship with Ginny was a very thoughtful and responsible thing to do."

" 'cuse me, Professor, but I really don't want to talk about it," Harry grumbled, staring at his tea.

"I understand. Let me just say this. It's not a noble act to live one's life, while denying themselves love. Believe me. I know this first hand. If you are ever going to defeat the Dark Lord, Harry, you have to be willing to accept the support from those who love you. Your mother proved this to be true almost seventeen years ago."

"Professor," Harry began defensively, "do you really think I can defeat Voldemort?" His question was meant to be rhetorical. Professor Albright winced at the Dark Lord's name. She thought for a moment then gave her answer.

"Let's see. You, who haven't even finished your studies, only six years of training, limited knowledge of spells and curses available to you, against the greatest evil wizard of his age, over fifty or more years of magical knowledge and experience to his credit, loyal followers..." Professor Albright had not finished her sentence when Harry interrupted her.

"He's going to kill me. Isn't he?" Harry shuddered, staring straight ahead.

"Well, considering all that has been taken into calculation, that would be the logical conclusion," Professor Albright responded. "But, ...and this is very important, Harry. You have the old magic working in your favor. If you open your heart to Ginny, you will not only have your mother's love you will have the love of a woman, whose love is unconditional. Together, these two loves will not only make your victory over the Dark Lord possible and promising, but ... probable!"

Harry could not speak, but only stare at the professor. In his mind, he questioned her sanity. He reasoned that she was very old and must not have known what she was saying. Yet, in his heart, he was certain she was right.

It was approaching ten o'clock. The train, as was customary, would be departing for Hogwarts at eleven. Harry returned to his bedroom to finish last minute packing.

Hedwig was starting to get anxious. She sat on the perch that Harry built for her, which he placed next to his dresser. Harry rose from kneeling next to his trunk. He finished stuffing the last bit of clothing and books. He walked over to Hedwig and petted her side gently with his index finger.

"Are you as anxious as me?" Harry asked her. Hedwig responded with a coo. Harry took a snack from his pocket and fed it to Hedwig, while the two shared a thoughtful moment. Professor Albright called to Harry from the base of the stairs.

"Harry, we should start our journey now, if we don't want to miss the train."

Harry turned toward the direction of Professor Albright's voice then turned back to Hedwig.

"Com'on," Harry said, encouraging Hedwig to step onto his arm to be led into her cage, "That's it. There you go." Harry closed Hedwig in her cage. He grabbed his trunk and Hedwig's cage and made his way downstairs. As Harry dragged the trunk down the stairs, the trunk made quick, loud thuds as it landed on each step.

"Harry dear, the taxi is waiting for us outside."

At the train station, Harry grabbed a trolley for his trunk and Hedwig's cage. Suddenly, it dawned on him. How was such a frail, old woman, like the professor, going to get to Hogwarts?

"Professor... uh... are you coming with us to Platform Nine and Three Quarters?"

"Yes, Harry. This is my plan."

"Well, how are you going to get through the gateway? I mean you have to get a running head start."

"I have it all figured out. Lift Hedwig's cage for a moment." Harry followed Professor Albright's orders with a puzzled look on his face. Once he lifted the cage, Professor Albright proceeded to sit down on Harry's trunk.

"Now," said Professor Albright, with her cane on her lap, holding out her bony, thin hands, "give me Hedwig's cage."

Harry's eyes bulged at the sight of Professor Albright, sitting on the trolley with all his belongings and Hedwig's cage on her lap. Hedwig's cage was so large that all one could see was Professor Albright's little, fragile legs dangling from underneath.

"Ok, Harry, push the trolley as hard and as fast as you can," Professor Albright commanded. Harry pushed the trolley as directed into the brick wall between platforms nine and ten. Instantly, Harry, Professor Albright and Hedwig were taken to Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Harry looked over to see the train. As he helped Professor Albright off the trolley, he could hear familiar voices, in the near distance, calling his name. It was Ron, Hermione and a voice that pulled most at his heartstrings.

Ron, Hermione and Ginny ran up to Harry, not noticing the old woman standing next to him. They had already loaded their luggage on the train. Harry was happy to see them, especially, Ginny. He had not seen any of them, since Bill and Fleur's wedding over the summer.

A thought in Harry's mind took him back to the wedding. It was a memory he looked back on warmly. Ginny, in all her good humor, asked Harry to dance with her. Harry reluctantly agreed provided that she would be careful of his two left feet.

The whole time they danced, Harry felt regret in the pit of his stomach. The fact that it was a slow song and required that they danced close to one another did not help things. As Harry glossed over his memory, he could still remember the scent of Ginny's perfume, 'Lilies of the Morning'. He remembered how warm her body felt next to his, the way her one hand rested on his left shoulder, while the other lied softly in his right...

"Harry ... Harry, say something!" Hermione demanded.

Harry woke out of his daydream. He acknowledged Ron and Hermione, but could not bring himself to look at Ginny.

"I'm so glad you decided to come back," Hermione declared.

"Yeah mate." Ron added. "It just wouldn't 'ave been the same without you-- our last year an' all."

"Yeah, Professor Albright talked me into it," Harry confessed.

"Yeah, besides who's..." Ron began, but stopped when it registered what Harry had said. "Wait, come again? Did you say Professor Albright, Harry?" Hermione had already tuned into what Harry had said, but let Ron do the interrogation.

"Uh... yeah," Harry replied. "Sorry, everyone, this is Professor Rose Malfoy Albright," Harry introduced, stepping aside to let Professor Albright enter the circle. Ron, Hermione and Ginny gazed at the old woman; their jaws dropped open and their eyes gaped wide.

"Hello children," Professor Albright smiled.

Hermione was the first to break the silence. "Who did you say you were?"

"Rose Malfoy Albright," the professor answered. Of course Ron, Hermione and Ginny responded exactly how Rose had predicted, but she was ready for them. "MALFOY?" Ron exclaimed screwing up his face, as if saying the name left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"How could you be a Malfoy," Ginny added, finally finding a place in the conversation.

Harry turned toward Ginny's direction, but avoided making eye contact.

"You'll learn children," Professor Albright began, "not all Malfoy's are bad, just as Harry learned from Sirius, that not all Black's despise half bloods."

"The next thing you know, you'll be telling us that not all Slytherins are bad either," Ron snarled.

"Right you are Mr. Weasley," Professor Albright confirmed.

"And how do you know that? Don't tell us you're a Slytherin too!"

"I was, indeed a Slytherin when I attended Hogwarts, Miss Granger."

The three stared in disgust at one another, then shot a look back at Harry. Harry could read their faces.

"Look," Harry began nervously, "I reckon we should be boarding the train. It leaves in five minutes." Harry turned to Professor Albright, "Professor, are you coming on the train with us?"

"No, dear. I must be getting back home."

"Home?" Harry asked with a confused expression on his face.

"Yes."

"Well, where's that?" Harry asked inquisitively, but before Professor Albright could answer, the train conductor yelled out, "All aboard!"

The train whistle blew just as Professor Albright tried to answer again, but it was no use. Harry waved back at the professor regretfully then leaped onto the train. He watched the professor in the distance as the train pulled away. Ron, Hermione and Ginny had already found a carriage. Harry wondered many things. Where did Professor Albright

live and how was she going to get there? There were no wizard taxicabs in London, were there? He decided to join the others.

Harry entered the carriage where the other three were sitting, but before Harry could barely get comfortable in his seat, the three bulldozed him with questions.

"So, who was that little old lady, really, Harry?" Hermione asked accusatively.

"I told you. Professor Albright," Harry answered with an annoyed tone in his voice.

"But Harry, what do you know about this woman? How do you know she is who she says she is?"

"Look Hermione, I believe her," Harry replied. "I know what you're thinking and you're wrong. I was with her for the past two weeks. She visited me at Sirius' house. She's a member of the Order. If she was going to do anything to me, she would have done it already."

"I suppose, but what made her find you?"

"Professor McGonagall sent her to talk me into coming back to Hogwarts."

"How do you know her intentions are good? Maybe it's some other plot to get you off track from finding the Horcruxes," Hermione proposed.

"Yeah, Harry," Ron joined in, "who knows who she is? She could be another spy for You-Know-Who."

"Ron, you're wrong. Look, I drilled her as much as I could. She was able to answer my questions without tripping up once. She told me about what happened to my mother's parents. No one told me before, not even my aunt and uncle."

"Well, she could be who she says she is," Ginny re-entered the conversation.

"Well, maybe so, but I think you should discuss this with Professor McGonagall the moment we arrive," Hermione insisted.

"You know, that's not a bad idea," Ron admitted, smiling at Hermione, "No wonder you got Head Girl this year!"

"Head Girl," Harry exclaimed happily. "Congratulations Hermione."

"Thanks," Hermione replied shyly.

The tension in the carriage began to subside and the conversation quickly switched to the anticipated events of the upcoming school year.

The train arrived at Hogwarts, and evening darkness was closing in quickly. All the students settled into their dormitories. Harry, Ron and Hermione stayed in the Common Room. They wanted to talk about the Horcruxes. They sat around a small table in the corner.

"So, Harry tell us about your hunt for the Horcruxes," Ron invited anxiously.

"What's to tell? I still have to get four. The fifth one is still inside Voldemort. I can't touch that one until the remaining ones are found and destroyed," Harry replied disappointedly.

"Well, do you know what the other four are?" Hermione asked.

"Well, I'm certain of three, Helga Hufflepuff's cup, Slytherin's locket and Nagini the snake. Nagini was a consolation prize for Voldemort not getting Griffindor's sword."

"So, what's the fourth," Ron asked.

"It's something from Ravenclaw," Harry replied. "I'm sure it is. Dumbledore and I figured it out before..." Harry's voice trailed off. The thought of Dumbledore's demise opened an old wound. "We knew it had to be something from Ravenclaw, but what exactly, neither one of us could figure out."

The trio was quiet for a moment. Hermione's brow was furled from being in deep thought. Desperate to change the subject, Ron asked questions about the following day's classes.

"Who do you think will be teaching the Dark Arts class this year?"

"Who knows," Harry replied. "One thing for sure, Snape won't be teaching either Potions or Dark Arts."

"And on that note, it's getting late. I'm going to bed and you two would be wise to do the same," Hermione insisted. The boys agreed and the three retired to their dorm rooms.

Morning started and the students began to gather in the Main Hall. The students were having breakfast. Harry was eager to get to his first class, Defense Against the Dark Arts. He was curious to see who the professor was. Breakfast was over and it was time to go to first period classes.

The Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom was full of all kinds of artifacts, weapons and tools commonly used by Aurors past and present. Many of these items were used to catch Death Eaters and other wizards that, as Hagrid once put it, had gone wrong. The classroom was filled with the chatter of students, but soon was silenced by the loud entrance made by Mad-eye Moody. Harry's heart leaped with excitement. He knew this was the real Mad-eye Moody. He was glad he took Professor Albright's advice. He was glad to be back where he felt like he was in his element.

Before Harry knew it, the day was half over. He, Ron and Hermione were sitting outside during the break session. Hermione knew that Harry had not spoken to Professor McGonagall yet. She decided to restate her suggestion about talking to Professor McGonagall, regarding Professor Albright.

"Harry," Hermione began, knowing full well what Harry's answer would be, "have you spoken to Professor McGonagall about Professor Albright?"

"No, not yet. I've been meaning to, though," Harry replied, a bit agitated that Hermione was pressing the issue.

"Well, how long are you going to wait?"

"Hermione, I said I'd go see her, and I will. I just haven't had a chance!"

"Well, what's keeping you?"

"The Horcruxes. I just can't stop wondering where they are, or what the last one might be."

"Harry, knowing who this old woman really is... well, don't you think if you knew, it might clue you in as to the whereabouts of the Horcruxes?"

Harry looked at Hermione and thought for a moment. Once again, as much as it annoyed him to admit it, Hermione had a good point.

"Look, at the end of the day, I'll go straight to McGonagall's office," Harry promised, surrendering to Hermione's assault.

Harry stood in front of the doors that once opened to Professor Dumbledore's office. He had to keep reminding himself that the office was home to the new head mistress, Professor McGonagall. As head of Hogwarts, she was left with the responsibility of maintaining a safe place to teach new wizards. Quite a responsibility, Harry thought.

The doors opened slowly to reveal the office now occupied by the woman sitting behind Dumbledore's desk. She sat straight up as if a pole had been placed down the back of her robes. Her hands were folded and resting on the desk.

"Come in, Potter," Professor McGonagall invited. "Sit down." Harry entered the office and sat down on one of the seats on the opposite side of the desk. "What's on your mind?"

"Professor, a couple of weeks ago, while I went to visit my parents' graves, I met up with an old woman. She claimed to be a Hogwarts professor."

Professor McGonagall's body language indicated to Harry that she was most interested in Harry's thoughts on this new being in his life. She moved forward into their conversation, straining her body against the desk. She did not look surprised, the way Harry would have expected. She had a slight hint of a smile in the corner of her mouth.

"What did she look like, Harry?"

"Well, she was quite old of course. She wore a large red and gold robe," Harry recalled, struggling with the description. Then he remembered the one important thing he noticed, "She didn't have a wand."

Professor McGonagall's face still held the same unsurprised expression, "And what did she tell you her name was?"

"Rose Malfoy Albright," Harry replied.

"And this concerns you?"

"Well, at first it did. I mean, she could have been a Death Eater, but the longer I spent time with her, the more I realized she was telling me the truth."

"So what's bothering you now, Harry?"

"Well, Hermione said..." Harry began to explain, but Professor McGonagall cut him off.

"Ah, Hermione! Harry, the old woman you met is, in fact, Professor Albright," Professor McGonagall reassured him.

"Professor..." Harry tried to ask another question, but again he was cut off.

"Harry, I contacted Professor Albright after I had heard you were not returning to Hogwarts. I just figured you would be more receptive to someone, whose mannerisms were more like Professor Dumbledore's, than mine."

Harry realized she was right. Professor Albright did remind him a little of the late headmaster. Harry needed to know what else Professor McGonagall knew about Professor Albright.

"Professor, did you know she was tried for killing seven Death Eaters?"

"Yes, Harry. I know a great deal about her, but it's not for me to tell you. If you wish to know more about her, you need to ask her, yourself."

"How am I supposed to do that? I don't even know where she..." again, Harry was interrupted, only this time it was by a knock on the office door.

"Come in," Professor McGonagall called out, leaning to one side to get a better view of the doorway.

Harry strained his neck as he turned his head to see who it was. Harry's mouth opened and his eyes widened. The last person he expected to see was standing in the open doorway.

"Rose," greeted Professor McGonagall. She stood up from her chair, walked around the desk to where Professor Albright was standing in the office and put her arms gently around Professor Albright. Professor McGonagall helped Professor Albright to a seat next to Harry, who was sitting on the edge of his, with his mouth agape in amazement.

Professor Albright sat down next to Harry and looked at him. "Are you a Venus Fly Trap?"

Harry shook his head no, while his stare remained fixed on her.

"Then close your mouth," Professor Albright ordered. Harry closed his mouth instantly. "So, dear, how are classes?"

Harry was taken back by the professor's question. It was as if Harry was expected to think all of this was perfectly normal.

"Uh, ok," Harry replied, still confused with the latest events. Professor McGonagall and Professor Albright exchanged small conversation and then Professor McGonagall offered to show Professor Albright to Griffindor staff quarters, where she would be staying for the term. Harry followed them to Griffindor.

As Harry watched the two professors he noticed that Professor McGonagall slipped something into Professor Albright's hand. Professor Albright quickly slid it into her robe. After Professor McGonagall left Harry and Professor Albright in staff quarters, Harry went right into his interrogation.

"Professor, when did you get here? How did you get here?" Harry was growing more suspicious of the professor. Maybe Ron and Hermione were right. Maybe the professor was a spy.

"Well, to answer your first question, I arrived here about an hour ago. To answer your second question, Hagrid was good enough to bring me here."

"Here from where?"

"Harry, I prefer to discuss my permanent residence with you some other time."

"Why? Why is it such a secret?"

"Harry, it's not important right now. What is important is how you are doing."

"I'm fine, but confused."

"Harry, I feel a need to change the subject," Professor Albright said sternly, looking over her bifocals again. "So, how's Ginny?"

"I don't know," Harry groaned.

"I take it you haven't tried to talk to her."

"No, and I don't have any intention. Professor, I can't be with Ginny right now. I have to find..." he caught himself again, "...Snape, and I can't do that, if I have to worry about Ginny getting hurt."

"What makes you think she'll get hurt? You doubt her abilities to handle herself?"

"Yes... I mean no. Look, Volde... He tried to get to me through Ginny one time before. If He or his Death Eaters were to find out that Ginny and I were together, he'd try it again."

"And what makes you think Ginny would let this happen?"

"I dunno, but He's very clever. Besides, I just can't take that chance. If anything happened to Ginny, I couldn't deal with it. My mind wouldn't accept it."

"Well, so you do still have feelings for her, I see."

Harry looked down on the floor, avoiding Professor Albright's gaze. He knew she was looking through him. He could not hide the fact that he still loved Ginny.

"Harry, you know what your problem is? You think this is all about you. This war with Voldemort and his Death Eaters only concerns you. BUT-IT-DOES-NOT. Your parents' deaths, the scar on your forehead-incidentals! Mere incidentals. This war has been going on long before you, your parents or even I ever existed."

"Professor, if I get back together with Ginny, she's going to want to come with me. She's going to want to fight the Dark Lord right along with me. I can't let her do that. I can't allow her to risk her life!"

"Harry, what makes you think she would be helping you fight your fight? Didn't it ever occur to you that Ginny has her own battle to fight?" Professor Albright proposed.

Harry listened intently to the professor now. She was introducing him to a concept he had never considered.

"Ginny has had her family threatened by Him too, or are you forgetting Mr. Weasley's brush with death at the Dark Lord's hands? Ginny, also has been close to death at his hands, more than you have ever been. Harry, whether you accept this fact or not, Ginny has her own battle to fight, and she will need a strong man to be where she needs him most. Not in front of her, standing between her and the Dark Lord. Not behind her, hiding. She will need him by her side, fighting next to her, as her equal, partners in love and in war, on the battlefield and ... in the home." Professor Albright watched for Harry's reaction to this last sentence. By the look on Harry's face, she knew he understood what she meant. She wanted him to accept his destiny. She wanted him to realize that Ginny was meant to be his partner for life.

" So, with everything that has been said," Professor Albright continued, "my only question to you is, when the time comes, and it's only a question of when, not if, but when the time comes for Ginny to fight her own battle with the Dark Lord, where will you be, Harry? Where-Will-You-Be?"

The weeks at school passed quickly. Harry and Ginny maintained a close friendship, being cautious not to trigger any rumors about their relationship being anything more than just platonic. Quidditch practice and competitions were going well. Gryffindor's team was in first place. Harry, Ron and Ginny were in good spirits about this. Hermione tried hard to understand the game, but struggled.

Hermione had something more important on her mind. She was trying to deal with her feelings for Ron. For over two years she had been struggling with her emotions over him. How could it be, she would ask herself from time to time. Yet, the answer always seemed clear. Ron was sensitive, kind, funny and even more surprisingly, smart!

Hermione sat in the library staring out into space. Her History of Magic book was opened and papers were strewn in front of her on the desk. Suddenly, she was awakened from her daydream by the voice of an elderly woman.

"Hermione, dear," Professor Albright greeted, as she approached the desk.

"Uh, hi, Professor Albright..." Hermione respectfully returned the greeting. "What are you doing here?"

"I've been making my rounds," Professor Albright replied, fixing a place at the desk, across from Hermione.

"So, do you live close to the school?" Hermione began her inquiry.

"No dear. I live in London, not too far from the Ministry."

"Harry said you had been in trouble with the law."

"Yes, but that was years ago."

"He told us you killed seven Death Eaters after they killed your husband."

"What else did Harry tell you?" Professor Albright asked, displaying some annoyance.

"Well, the Ministry punished you by taking away your wand and title. Is it true? Were you an Alchemist in the Healing arts?"

"Yes dear. Does that interest you?"

"Well, I'm considering going into the Healing arts, after I leave Hogwarts."

"Well, then perhaps I can council you."

Hermione's eyes widened at the idea. She had become familiar with Rose Malfoy Albright, since the moment she was introduced to her. Hermione had been conducting her own secret investigation. By now, she knew more about Professor Albright, than Harry, but never led on about her knowledge. Hermione found out about the professor's assignment on a secret plan against the Death Eaters. She found out that Dumbledore made arrangements with the Ministry of Magic, to allow the professor to work for the Ministry's Defense Department.

"I'd like that very much," replied Hermione, smiling shyly.

"Now then, that's settled, let's talk about your other situation," Professor Albright suggested, looking over her bifocals.

"What other situation?" Hermione quipped with a guilty look on her face.

"The situation between you and Harry's other good friend."

"What? I don't know what you're talking about," Hermione denied defensively.

"Hermione, there's no need to hide it. It's plainly obvious your attraction for Mr. Weasley. Ronald is quite a strapping young bloke. I don't blame you for feeling the way you do."

Hermione realized it was no use. Professor Albright saw right through the facade.

"So, what do I do about it...I mean, my situation," Hermione asked in a helpless tone.

"Well dear, if I were you, I'd make myself a little more open to Ronald."

"How?"

"Well, when he makes a joke, laugh. When he says something, that is less than, er, intelligent, just smile. When he starts to talk about Quidditch, listen intently. Go to the games and make it clear you're his biggest fan."

Hermione listened to Professor Albright's advice and realized that these were all good points. If Hermione was ever going to get Ron to ask her out, and not just as friends, she was going to have to make herself approachable.

Professor Albright decidedly was on a mission to make a pair between Ron and Hermione and Harry and Ginny.

The professor, being a Slytherin, had her reasons. She had a plan, a strategy and she was determined to make it work. Her next two targets would be Ron and Ginny. She did not have much time before the Halloween Feast that Friday night. She needed to make it back to the Ministry to continue her work on the secret weapon against the Death Eaters.

Ron was walking down one of the stairways to the dining hall, when Professor Albright saw her chance to pull him aside and work the one magic she possessed.

"Mr. Weasley," Professor Albright called out. Ron turned toward her.

"Professor Albright, you're up early," Ron noted, smiling down on her wrinkled, bespeckled face.

"You certainly are a tall drink of water, Mr. Weasley," Professor Albright commented, looking up at Ron. She went straight to work, however, making sure to use every bit of time she had before the two made it to the entrance of the dining hall. "So, who are you taking to the Halloween Feast this Friday night?"

Ron was startled by her question. Why would Professor Albright be interested in his affairs? Not to be impolite, Ron humored her with an answer.

"Well, uh, I don't know really. There was someone I was considering, but I been having second thoughts."

"And why is that? Does Hermione intimidate you that much?" Professor Albright asked with the same look, peering over her bifocals, as was her character to do so, when catching someone off guard.

Ron was shocked by Professor Albright's blunt question. How did she know about Hermione? Harry must have said something to her, he thought. Then again, why would

Harry say anything to Professor Albright about him and Hermione? Ron knew he was cornered. He had no choice, but to give her an answer.

"Well, I'm not intimidated by her...exactly. I just can't tell if she likes me that way. I mean, I like her that way...I think, but I can't tell how she feels about me. For all I know, she still thinks about Victor Krum."

"Trust me, Mr. Weasley, Mr. Krum is no threat to you anymore. Let me give you some advice on how to tell when a young lady likes you," Professor Albright began her lesson. Ron listened eagerly.

"First off, if a young lady likes a bloke, she'll laugh at his jokes, smile when he shares his inner most thoughts, root for him when he plays his favorite sports. These are things that she does to let him know, in her own special way, how she really feels about him."

"Well, Hermione does root for me during our Quidditch matches. Sometimes, she can even be a bit embarrassing," Ron confided, letting out a small chuckle.

"Ah ha, now you see? There you go. That's a sign, a very good sign."

"Yeah," Ron agreed confidently.

They made it to the dining hall entrance. Professor Albright had to go find Ginny, so she bade Ron good-bye and good luck. Ron thanked the professor then quickly joined Hermione and Harry at the breakfast table.

Professor Albright spotted Ginny from the landing of the second stair well. She waited at the bottom for Ginny. Ginny happily greeted her.

"Good morning, Professor Albright."

"Why, good morning, dear," Professor Albright replied brightly, eager to work her magic. "I'm so glad I bumped into you. I've been meaning to talk to you for awhile now."

"Oh, I'd love to Professor, but I'm late for breakfast. I have an exam in Potions today."

"Oh, I see. Well this will just take a moment. I was wondering, how are you and Harry doing? I don't mean to pry, but you know, Harry is quite a sensitive young man and I'm concerned for him. You know, he's really very fond of you."

Ginny did not know what to say to her. As usual, Professor Albright caught Ginny off guard. What could she say to the Professor? Ginny knew how she really felt about Harry, but since Professor Dumbledore's funeral, she had been trying to maintain a friendship and nothing more, all at Harry's request.

"Professor, I like Harry very much, but he thinks it's best that we only be friends. He's so afraid of You-Know-Who," Ginny whispered.

"Yes, I know, but you can't deny yourselves love because of that. You'd just be doing the one thing You-Know-Who wants you to do. You'd both be denying yourselves the one thing the Dark Lord fears. It is the one thing that could defeat him."

Ginny thought about what Professor Albright said. It was true she and Harry were denying themselves the one thing that could probably defeat He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

"You know, the Halloween Feast is this Friday night. I couldn't imagine a better time to discuss getting back together with Harry," Professor Albright suggested. She could tell, by the look on Ginny's face, that the seed had been successfully planted. It would not be long before the fruits of her labors would yield the greatest harvest yet.

Friday was here. Professor Albright had already departed back to the Ministry. As she planned, the two couples were attending the party that evening, along with Harry and Ron's three other dorm mates, Seamus Finningan, Dean Thomas and Neville Longbottom.

The five dorm mates were dressed in costume as was Hermione and Ginny. Ginny was dressed as an old Druid witch; Hermione was dressed like a cat.

The five dorm mates were dressed like knights in shining armor. They wore gray sweat suits with the knightly armor silk screened to their suits, a belt that held a sword and faux armor gloves. Each dorm mate had a sign taped to his chest indicating which knight he was. Harry's sign said 'First', Ron's sign said, 'Last', Seamus' sign said 'To', Dean's sign said 'Tomorrow' and poor Neville's sign said, 'Not To'.

Hermione looked at Neville then asked, "Neville, why does your sign say 'not to'?"

"Because that's what Lavender tells me every night," replied a disgruntled Neville.

The group left for the party. At the party Hermione and Ron danced a slow dance together. Hermione did as Professor Albright advised. She laughed at Ron's jokes, listened to all his ideas, smiled a lot and even held his hand.

Ginny asked Harry if they could have a private moment together. Ginny wanted to talk to Harry about their relationship.

"Harry," Ginny began nervously, "something Professor Albright said, when she spoke to me earlier this week, made a lot of sense."

"Yeah," Harry giggled a little, "and what was that?"

"I know you're concerned about You-Know-Who doing something to me, if He ever found out we were dating, but I don't think that's a reason why we should remain just friends."

Harry felt that Ginny had a nerve to drag him away from the party to talk to him about something like this.

"I don't want to talk about this right now," Harry grunted. "If this is what you wanted to talk about, I think we should go back to the party."

Ginny became insulted by Harry's cold reply. "Why, Harry?"

"Ginny, don't spoil it. I was having a great time with you tonight, and now you have to go and spoil it!"

"Harry, I think Professor Albright is right. We shouldn't deny ourselves the love we have for each other. She even suggested we could see each other secretly."

Harry looked at Ginny for a moment. Professor Albright actually suggested they see each other secretly? And what's this about love? Love is something Harry just figured he was not entitled to. Everyone he ever loved was killed, but here she was. Ginny Weasley was standing before him. Could they see each other secretly? Would it be possible that he could be with Ginny, in spite of the impending danger? No! He could not take the chance. If something happened, if somehow their secret got out and something happened to her...his mind would not accept it.

Harry realized then, he did not just love Ginny as a friend; he was in love with her. She was the one thing that would cause him to lose his concentration. She was the distraction that held him back from his hunt for the Horcruxes. She is the one that repeatedly enters his thoughts uninvited. She is the one that visits him in his dreams. It is her death that would put him over the edge and make him do the unspeakable. She had control over him like some strange Imperious curse. She held it in the palm of her hands. She could make him lose control. How could it be? She was the one girl, the only girl that ever loved him unconditionally. She was the one girl, he knew, who was the only one for him. How could she be such a--threat?

"Harry? Harry!" Ginny repeated.

"Ginny," Harry began, escaping from his racing thoughts, "I would love to be with you. The idea of having a secret relationship with you sounds too good to be true, but if someone should find out..." Harry's voice trailed off. He turned to look away from Ginny. "Ginny, if we were to start dating again, you'd have to promise me something," Harry remarked sternly.

"Yeah and what's that," Ginny asked eagerly.

"That you would be careful."

"Careful about what?" Ginny asked, knowing very well what Harry was referring to.

"Careful about where you go, not to get caught anywhere, unsafe. Always let me or Ron or Hermione know where you are..." answered Harry, his voice trailing off. He could see by the look on Ginny's smirking face that she was not taking his concerns seriously.

"Harry, what are you so worried about?" Ginny giggled.

"He and his Death Eaters are out there, Ginny! Everyone I've ever cared about has been hurt or killed on account of them. My mind wouldn't accept it if something happened to

you," Harry confessed, feeling vulnerable as he looked down on the ground, avoiding Ginny's gaze.

"What would you do if something did happen to me," Ginny asked teasingly.

"I dunno know. Probably die of a broken heart," Harry replied, with a mournful expression on his face.

Ginny saw that Harry was taking the conversation extremely seriously. It began to dawn on her that Harry's fears were real to him, as if he had dreamt them.

"Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to tease you like that. I just can't believe that the guy that I've had such a crush on, loves me almost as much as I love him," Ginny replied tenderly.

"It really scares me when I think about you," Harry confided, "If something were to happen, I don't know what I'd do." He continued to look down on the ground. "I'd feel so lost. It scares me to think about it."

"Harry, I promise I'll be careful," Ginny replied.

Harry looked into Ginny's eyes. "Think of how much you'd hurt your parents. Think about how much you'd hurt me," Harry murmured.

"I love you. I won't hurt you. I promise I'll be careful," Ginny whispered.

Harry tried to avoid having anymore eye contact with her. He was feeling very vulnerable. A thought was running through his head. This isn't how a guy should act. You need to get the upper hand. Don't show your feelings. The voice in his head had almost won, but Ginny had the advantage.

Ginny realized at this moment that Harry didn't just love her as a friend. Harry loved her as someone with whom he wanted to spend the rest of his life. Harry Potter, the boy she loved for all these years, the boy she tried to forget, but could not, the boy who taught her about unconditional love, was just as much in love with her, as she was with him. Ginny began to smile at Harry then she had an idea.

"Harry, I'll make a deal with you. Let me kiss you, just this once. After that, if you still feel it's not right, then I won't bother you again."

Harry looked back at Ginny as a doubtful smile formed in the corner of his mouth. He raised his eyebrows and shook his head, as if to ask, 'You just don't know when to give up, do you?' He looked into her chocolate brown eyes. He started to feel himself get lost in them and immediately turned away.

"Harry, it's only one kiss," Ginny tempted convincingly. She gently rested her hands on his shoulders. She was close enough for Harry to smell her perfume. She tried to catch his eye.

Harry did all he could to avoid making eye contact with her, but her eyes eventually caught his. Harry was done.

"One little kiss, Harry?" Ginny whispered sweetly, while feigning a look as if she was pleading with him. Harry felt like his insides had turned to pudding.

"Just one," Harry conceded, "after that, if it doesn't feel right..." Harry could not finish his sentence. He was looking into those eyes. 'If it didn't feel right,' he thought to himself. Who was he kidding? He knew it was going to feel right. It was going to feel more right than it had a right to!

Ginny smiled triumphantly. The little devilish smile on her lips caused a shock wave of electricity to tingle inside Harry's stomach. His heart began to beat very rapidly. Ginny pulled him in closer then gently placed her lips on his. Harry closed his eyes and allowed himself to put his arms around her waist. Ginny held her kiss for what seemed like an eternity then she gently pulled back to review her work. Harry opened his eyes and looked helplessly into Ginny's. She won. She knew it. Harry knew it too.

"So, how good are you at keeping a secret," Ginny asked with the same little devilish smile on her lips.

Harry took a deep breath and gulped, "I'm brilliant!"