

Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle Picking up the pieces

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The conversation at breakfast in Gabrielle's kitchenette picked up where their conversation in the Thai restaurant had left off, dwindling to silence as they finished their coffee. Harry looked up from his cup.

"You tricked me last night," he said quietly.

"You mean, 'Sleep with me? Just until I fall asleep?'" Gabrielle asked, opening her eyes wide and batting them in a ridiculous fashion.

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, that."

Gabrielle laughed. "Well, if you fell for that line, then I think, Monsieur Potter, that you wanted to be tricked."

"Maybe so. So, how did you sleep?" he asked.

"Very well, thank you – I hadn't slept in thirty-six hours. The fact that I was in the one place I wanted to be more than anything else in the world may have contributed to it as well," she said, flashing a smile that still made his stomach flip. "More coffee?"

"No thanks, I'm good."

They each started to say the other's name, and then laughed.

"You first, you are my guest," Gabrielle said.

"You were glowing last night," he said.

"Like this?" Gabrielle asked, pushing out a burst of Veela magic.

"Yeah, like that," he said.

"Well, actually, that nicely dovetails into what I wanted to bring up. We have some serious things to discuss," she said.

"About what?"

"About us."

"Is this the part where I'm supposed to break out into a cold sweat because my girlfriend wants to talk about the relationship?"

"You're not sixteen any more, Harry," Gabrielle said.

"Okay, we'll skip the sweaty part," he said lightly.

"I'm not human," Gabrielle said.

"And I should care about that because?" he replied.

Gabrielle summoned a book from her bedroom, which she pushed across the table to Harry. It was leather bound with gilt letters on the cover spelling out the title *Daughters of the Dawn*.

"Because biology is destiny, or so Nana used to try to drill into me from the time I could speak," Gabrielle said with a wink. "What do you know about Veela?"

"Birds, fireballs, beautiful women, silvery auras, addled men," Harry listed. "Your grandmother was a Veela, which makes you, what, a quarter-Veela?"

"Good guess, but wrong. I'm as much a Veela as my mother. When human males mate with Veela females, they always have female offspring. Those offspring, for all intents and purposes, can do everything that the transfigured Veela can do, except turn back into birds. Thereafter if the female offspring mate, they can have either little male wizards, or little Veela girls. The offspring are known as the Daughters of the Dawn, hence the title of the book," Gabrielle explained.

"Okay, connect the dots for me," Harry said.

"I'm deeply in love with you," Gabrielle said plainly and firmly. "This is the point where we need to make some decisions, but for you to be able to make an informed decision, you need to know everything."

"Everything?"

Gabrielle smiled. "Everything important; everything about what will or won't happen, to me, to you, to us, either way. The easiest thing would be for you to read this book and then we could have an intelligent, informed discussion."

"Sounds thrilling," Harry said dryly.

"I know, Harry. I want more than anything to take you back to bed right now and do all the things we didn't do last night, but if the shoe were on the other foot, I know that you would not do that."

"Okay," Harry said.

"Okay what?" Gabrielle asked.

"Okay, I'll read the book. I'll probably have to go back to the Barclay, especially after what you said about your bedroom; I don't think this would be very conducive to productive reading," he said, reaching across the table. "At least it's in English."

"Hermione found it for me," Gabrielle said. "All the copies I know of are either in French or Euskara."

"Can you summarize what I'm looking for?" Harry asked.

"You want to look at the life and reproductive cycle of the Veela, and then look at what it says about matched Veela," she replied.

"Matched?"

"You are my match, I'm certain of it," she said, her eyes beginning to glisten. She began to sing softly, something in an odd, guttural language with lots of clicks that still managed to be hauntingly beautiful. By the time she finished the tears were streaming down her cheeks. "What it means," she began.

Harry placed his hand on hers. "I know what it means. 'Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Creator do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.'"

"When did you learn Euskara?" Gabrielle asked, her face puzzled.

"The day after I learned French," he replied with a smile. "Biggest headache I've ever had, learning two unrelated languages in two days. Hermione thought that the likelihood of repeating the restaurant fiasco would diminish if I could speak the language of your heart."

"How was that possible?" Gabrielle asked.

"Magic; it's a goblin trick, actually, but we used neural patterns from Fleur's brain," Harry explained.

"Does that mean that you're going to start writing sappy poetry?" Gabrielle asked with a smile.

"For your sake, let's hope not," Harry replied. "So, I'll be a good boy and go read my assignment, trying to figure out the connection between something I recognize as old Hebrew poetry and the biological destiny of the woman I love."

"Come see me at dinnertime? I can cook something for the two of us," she said.

"Let's stay out of proximity of your bedroom until we work this stuff out, okay?" Harry asked, grinning. "I was doing fine until you just brought it up. I'll pick you up at seven?"

"It's a date," Gabrielle replied, brushing her tears away with the sleeve of her dressing gown.

"I'll look forward to it," Harry said.

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A shower was in order once he returned to the Barclay. Dressed in fresh clothes, he settled into the overstuffed chair next to the window, reading in natural daylight. The book was old, written in the stuffy, florid language in vogue when Victoria was Queen, but once he managed to think of Gabrielle when the author began to provide examples, the pace began to pick up. He stopped from time to time, jotting down notes on a pad of paper provided by the hotel, pausing to smile, thinking Hermione would be proud. Well, he couldn't very well copy from her notes on this assignment, could he? If Gabrielle obtained the book from Hermione, she'd probably read it and probably taken notes in her usual fashion, but it was too late now, he was into the assignment as a problem to solve. The terminology was awkward as well, but once he figured out when the author was referring to full-blooded Veela (Bird Veela) and human-Veela hybrids (Human Veela) it made a bit more sense. He finished the book by 3:00, realizing that he'd skipped lunch, a habit he'd acquired while living as a hermit.

He looked down at the list.

· Bird Veela normally live 40 years & mate for life.

· Every 3-4 generations, imbalance in number of females born in Veela flock, ratio is approximately 60:40. Surplus females seek out human mates.

- Offspring known as Daughters of the Dawn (DotD) = Human Veela.
- DotD have normal Wizarding life-span, but only if they mate with humans, otherwise have normal Bird Veela 40 year life expectancy.
- Most DotD seek mates who are unaffected by their allure.
- Some DotD appear to have a very compatible mate known as their “match.”
- DotD “match” relationships are permanent with odd magical side effects (unspecified).
- In “match” relationships, DotD lifespan does not exceed that of their mate.

It was the last point that was most disturbing. The explanations of how the allure worked, and how tricky it was to control for the Human Veela (which explained a lot of things about Fleur) were interesting, but compared to this last point, it was all so much nonsense. He needed to talk to Gabrielle; he needed to talk to her now. Closing his eyes he put the book and the list down and Disapparated.

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He didn't arrive in her flat. He'd been aiming for the kitchenette, but ended up sprawled on his back in some crowded Muggle area of Marseilles.

“Harry!” Gabrielle squealed. She extended a hand, helping him to his feet. She kissed him on the cheek, pausing to whisper in his ear. “Act as if you just slipped. We'll finish shopping together and then leave.” Lingered for a moment, she caught his earlobe in her teeth, nipping him lightly. The effect it had on him was altogether different than when his dearly departed Owl, Hedwig, would do the same thing.

He'd Apparated into an open-air vegetable market; Gabrielle had a string bag dangling from her arm into which she stuffed an amazing number of fruits and vegetables. She moved from stall to stall, clucking at produce items that didn't meet her standards and rolling her eyes at some of the prices. Between the stalls she'd loop her arm into his, and from time to time would give him an impulsive peck on the lips.

“You're not making this any easier, you know,” he hissed in English.

“But Monsieur, I am merely acting as any Muggle girl would, going shopping with her beau,” she replied, making sure that she spoke in a low, soft voice that could not be overheard.

“Well, in that case,” he replied, “I'll certainly try to act the part.” He gave her a knowing wink and when they walked to the next stall, his hand was on her backside, cupping her shapely derriere.

“I warn you,” she hissed, “you are playing with a loaded weapon.”

He merely smiled in reply.

By the time they finished shopping, twenty stalls and two streets later, the number of string bags had (magically) multiplied, and Harry was carrying all but one of them. When he took last bag from her she leaned forward, whispering “I might as well put those hands to good use.”

They walked down one narrow avenue to another, changing directions seemingly at random. “Are we trying to lose someone?” he whispered.

“No, this is how I always come home on market day,” she replied. They walked together another few blocks until he recognized the neighbourhood surrounding her building. They ascended the stairs to her flat in silence.

“Put them on the counter please,” she commanded pleasantly, wrapping herself in his arms when they were finally empty.

“I finished the book,” he said, his nose tickled by a wisp of platinum coloured hair.

“And?” she replied.

“And finally figured out that Fleur wasn't a tease, she just didn't have very good control of her Veela magic,” he answered.

“We *all* knew that,” Gabrielle replied, rolling her eyes. “But you are disturbed, are you not? I can feel it in you.”

“Yeah, I am,” Harry replied. “I'm not sure that I like it. Correction – there's parts of it that I'm *sure* I don't like.”

“And what would those parts be?” Gabrielle asked, pushing back from him until she could focus on his eyes.

“The lifespan bit.”

Gabrielle blinked. “If I do not mate, I will have another twenty years or so, which is normal for a Veela,” she said.

“That's a fraction of what you could have,” he said vehemently.

“Well, you'll just have to do something about that, won't you?” she asked, tracing her finger down his sternum.

“Why me?”

“Because you are my match, silly,” she said, laughing musically.

“How do you know?”

"Because I do," she replied emphatically.

"I'm going to need more than that," he said.

"Do you remember the night we first kissed?" she asked, leaning forward to peck him on the lips.

"Of course," he answered.

"Did it not seem like we'd always known each other and we were just coming home to where we belonged?"

"I don't know, it's not like I had a wealth of experiences to compare it to," he said evasively.

"All right, today, when you found me in the market – were you intending to come to the market or here to the flat?"

"Here to the flat – I've never Apparated to a person before," he said hesitantly.

"But you were thinking that you wanted to be with me?" she asked patiently.

"Yes, of course," he answered.

"You were exercising a bit of Tracker magic," she said.

"So?"

"Our magic is beginning to become intertwined," she explained.

"But we haven't, uh, mated yet," Harry quibbled.

"The magic doesn't care, it knows that you are my match," Gabrielle said seriously.

"But you'll die when I die!" Harry protested.

"I've got to die someday, Harry," she countered. "Were you miserable when we were apart?"

"Of course – it was excruciating," he replied.

"Would you want to live with that for eighty, ninety years? It would never fade away, in fact, it would grow in intensity," Gabrielle said softly.

"I would go mad," he whispered.

"I don't want to live without you," she said plaintively.

"You could find another bloke and live a long, normal life," he croaked.

"No, I couldn't – that window has closed, we're too close now for me to mesh with another," she said.

"So if I leave you now?"

"It would not protect me; any more than leaving Ginny protected her. I would not die, not immediately, but in the twenty or so years left to me, I would slowly go mad from the grief of being apart from you."

"But if we complete the – uh – whatever the match is," Harry began.

"If we mate," Gabrielle suggested.

"Then you die when I do," Harry finished. "I won't have it."

"Then go – you know where the door is. I won't stop you," she said firmly.

"You know I can't do that," he protested.

"Then stop talking nonsense," she replied.

"Sorry, this is just taking a while to wrap my brain around," he said. "What do we have to do to seal the deal?"

"Well," she said, beginning to smile broadly, "it's like this. Witches and Wizards are different, you see, and when a Witch and a Wizard love each other, very much, they come together. . . ."

"Thank you very much, Molly," he said, trying to suppress his laughter.

"Molly tried to give me *the talk* when I was thirteen," Gabrielle said.

"Just after your parents died?"

"Yeah, when I stopped laughing, I gave her a hug and told her that I'd already thwarted my first boyfriend from plundering my virginity. We had a pot

of tea and talked until dawn. That's when I knew that I was really a Weasley. Of course, it didn't stop her from interrogating me about the other boyfriends who came after that, but most of those relationships were very short-lived, which was your fault, of course."

"My fault?"

"I suspected that you were my match, but you were with Ginny then, so I kept trying boy after boy, until I finally gave up – it was like trying to put two magnets together backwards – the closer I got, the worse it felt," she explained. "I finally decided to give it a rest and went on with my life, which of course, meant that I was pursued relentlessly, but I am skilled at saying 'no' in ways that were clear and unambiguous. I never lacked a date, though, when we had balls and such."

"So, when we, uh," he began.

"Make love," she prompted.

"Yeah," he said.

"It will 'seal the deal.' After that there is no going back. I will be yours for the rest of your life," she said. "My life too."

"What if Ginny had never died?"

"I suspect you'd be happily married and raising little red-haired babies by now," she replied cheerfully.

"And you?"

"I would have found *someone* I could settle with – it would not have been a perfect mesh, but not everything in life is perfect."

"So, why did you come after me – in Alaska?"

"Because I wanted to know for sure," she replied.

"When did you know?"

"When you kissed me," she said softly.

"Seriously," he objected.

"Seriously – it was like being home – there was no force pushing me *away* from you, quite the opposite in fact. The little voice of Molly in the back of my head kept accusing me of being a Scarlet Woman, given what I was thinking."

"You don't have the hair for it," he jibed.

She pulled her hair, bound with elastic, over her shoulder and then shrugged. "I am a witch; it can be any colour I want it to be," she said, looking up into his eyes again. "Don't worry; I'm don't intend to change it to red."

"Thank you," he said.

"Harry, do not be embarrassed. I know you still have feelings for Ginny; you would not be the man I love if you did not," Gabrielle said soothingly.

"It's just a lot to process," he said.

"Would you process these things better if I were sitting on your lap?" she asked impishly.

"Maybe," he said with a smile.

"Well, let's find out," Gabrielle replied. She never made it around the table, however. Her kitchenette's miniature fireplace erupted with a blast of green flames.

Michele's voice boomed from the Floo connection, no bigger than a breadbox. "Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but the District Superintendent has need of you in her office, immediately. Do you know where Monsieur Potter may be? He is needed as well," Michele asked apologetically.

"I'll be there in a few minutes, I'll bring Monsieur Potter as well," Gabrielle said, rolling her eyes in frustration.

"Merci, Mademoiselle," Michele said as the flamed extinguished.

Gabrielle crossed her arms and stamped her foot.

"There are times that I hate my life, I'll have you know," she said.

"All of it?" Harry asked.

"No, not all of it," she said, giving him a wink. "Come on, let's go; it's never good to keep the District Superintendent waiting."

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Gaining access to the District Superintendent's office was much easier this time; perhaps it was the credentials that hung from ribbons draped around their necks, perhaps the gatekeepers were now accustomed to seeing them enter the building, or perhaps something else. The District Superintendent sat at her conference table, surrounded by debris on the table indicating that she'd just dismissed a meeting.

"Come, sit down," she commanded. Looking up at Gabrielle, her visage softened briefly. "I know I gave you until Wednesday to sort things out with Monsieur Potter, but when you read this you will agree that I had no choice." She pushed a document across the table.

Gabrielle read through the letter quickly, translating for Harry as she read. "It's a letter from Unai, one of the last of the gangsters that we've been tracking. He threatens dire consequences if I do not stop looking for him. He wants to resume his business in peace," Gabrielle hissed. She pushed the letter back across the table. "We've received letters like these before, Madame."

The District Superintendent's nostrils flared. "Indeed. Unai also sent us a package, along with the letter," the District Superintendent said, pushing a thin rectangular box towards them. Gabrielle opened the box. Inside was a long shock of platinum coloured hair, shimmering in the light; it was unmistakably taken from a Veela. "We are still trying to confirm the details, but it appears that Unai kidnapped three Veela girls this morning, a teenager and her twin sisters."

Harry felt his anger flare. The doors to the bookcases began to rattle. He calmed himself before he did any accidental damage.

"Monsieur Potter, it seems that you will be baptized in fire this week. My Tracker must return to work," the District Superintendent said.

"How soon can we assemble the strike team?" Gabrielle asked.

"They'll be in the mission room at 5:00 – I've taken the liberty of ordering dinner for the team and sending notices to their families."

Gabrielle looked at Harry, who nodded. "Madame, we will do everything we can," she said firmly.

"Let us hope to God that that is good enough," the District Superintendent said, rising from the table. They were dismissed.

It was time to go back to work.

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Well, it seems that Gabrielle won out and there are more stories to tell here. Who knows, we may even get to the chocolate sauce. ;-)

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Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle

Lost Lambs - Part I

The mission room resembled a large classroom with a raked, auditorium-style seating area. A large table to the side of the door held information packets while the table next to it was piled high with wrapped sandwiches and bottled drinks. Looking to Gabrielle, Harry followed after her, picking up packets for the two of them which he tucked under his arm as he snagged an oddly shaped bottle to accompany his sandwich. Gabrielle nodded and smiled as she made her way to the back of the room, more than a few of the Aurors giving her angry glares in return. A female Auror waved frantically as Gabrielle sat down, mouthing something to her, which Gabrielle replied by tapping her arm where her wristwatch would be.

“Good to see that you still have a few friends,” Harry murmured.

“I am Veela, it comes with the territory,” she said with a wan smile.

No sooner had they sat down when the District Superintendent arrived. A voice to Harry’s left called the room to attention. Being a quick study, Harry stood with the rest of the Aurors.

“At ease, you may be seated,” the District Superintendent murmured. There was a cacophony of clattering as the seats in the briefing room were all filled at once. “Thanks to you all for coming on such short notice; a few administrative matters before we proceed with the briefing. Our colleagues in Paris have been gracious enough to detail a specialist to the strike force. Monsieur Potter is a credentialed Hit-Wizard and will be providing security for our Tracker. Monsieur Potter, would you please stand up? Very good – as some of you may know, Monsieur Potter competed against Mademoiselle Delacour’s sister in the prior Tri-Wizard tournament a number of years ago. Monsieur Potter and Mademoiselle Delacour are,” the District Superintendent paused for a moment.

“Engaged,” Gabrielle piped up.

The District Superintendent cocked her head to one side, looking at the pair intently. “Indeed, congratulations are in order then. Now, on to the matter of overtime,” she said, talking for a number of minutes.

Harry had sat down, not daring to look at Gabrielle, who was shaking with silent laughter. Picking up a Muggle pen, he wrote “Engaged?” on a notepad and passed it to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle scrawled a quick frowny face on the note, writing “Sorry – I’ll explain afterwards.”

“Nothing to be sorry about,” he wrote back, pulling the pad back to add “I rather like the idea.” Gabrielle scrawled a smiley face in reply, pushing the pad back at Harry. Harry hunched over the pad, seemingly concentrating on the District Superintendent’s instructions on the proper methods of memorializing overtime. He then tore off the first sheet of paper from the pad and wrote “Marry me?” on it, passing it to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle stared at the paper, not daring to touch it for a moment. She then carefully wrote below his question “Is this a joke?” and passed it back to Harry.

Harry smiled and then tore off the sheet of paper, writing “No.” on the next sheet.

Gabrielle tore that sheet of paper off, stuffing it into her pocket before writing “YES!” on the pad, sliding it back at Harry. Harry gave her a covert wink and then turned the paper over, directing his attention to the District Superintendent.

“As you well know, this strike force has been concentrating on rounding up one of the gangs that has been plaguing the waterfront in Marseilles. Thanks to your outstanding teamwork, we’ve managed to capture or kill nine of the eleven known leaders in the gang,” the District Superintendent began. “The Muggle members of the gang are currently incarcerated in Fleury-Mérogis. The Wizard members of the gang did not choose to surrender. Although we have been unable to locate the remaining two leaders, we had reason to believe that it was only a matter of time before the remainder was apprehended. First slide please.”

On a screen behind the District Superintendent was a blow-up of the handwritten letter from Unai along with a picture of the shock of Veela hair.

“We received this note this morning, which we first thought was a hoax or a joke in rather poor taste. We then received notice from our Muggle liaison that one of our citizens, Balendin Artzai, from the Quartier du Panier was hospitalized in critical condition. This was followed by news that the following magical citizens had been kidnapped. Next slide please,” the District Superintendent droned.

The screen showed a head and shoulders portrait of a Veela girl in a formal gown. There were a number of appreciative noises from the male Aurors.

“This is Matzalen Artzai; the picture dates from last year when she participated in the harvest festival. Matzalen is a fifth year student at Beauxbatons; she was home this weekend to attend her sisters’ First Communion. Next slide please. The sisters – Garazi and Eskarne Artzai. They’ll turn eight at the end of this month. The sisters were abducted after bringing a lunch basket to their father. Initial reports indicate that Balendin attempted to stop the abduction. He received multiple stab wounds and nearly bled out before receiving aid from the local Police Nationals. We have not received any ransom notes or demands, apart from Unai’s demand that we stop searching for him. We believe the shock of hair to be from Matzalen, although this has not been forensically confirmed,” the District Superintendent said, looking up from her notes. “Auror Fuso?” she called, looking into the crowd.

“Yes, Madame?” Jacques Fuso replied, standing at attention.

"You will be leading the regular Auror forces in this investigation. Your highest priority is recovering the girls; if you happen to apprehend Unai in the process, so be it," the District Superintendent.

"Will the specialists be available to me, Madame?" he asked with a slight sneer.

"The forensic technicians will be available as needed," the District Superintendent replied.

"And the Tracker?"

"The Tracker will remain under my direction," the District Superintendent replied.

"I do not want her to interfere in my operations," Jacques said haughtily. "I do not need to run interference for amateurs. I think it best if she were removed from the city."

"Auror Fuso, your opinions are well known on the subject, however the Catalan ambassador has received assurances from the Minister of Magic that our Tracker will remain in the field, which is why the Ministry so graciously detailed Monsieur Potter," the District Superintendent said icily. "Are there any further questions? Good luck and good hunting. The regular Aurors should remain for a briefing with Auror Fuso, the rest of you are dismissed," the District Superintendent said, glancing at Harry and Gabrielle.

Harry stood up, gathering his papers under his arm, stuffing the sandwich and bottle into his pocket.

"Monsieur Potter, words please; before you depart," Jacques Fuso called.

Gabrielle began to leave the room, but Harry pinched the hem of her jacket, giving it a slight tug.

"I do not mean any disrespect to you, Monsieur Potter, but I believe that the Aurors can solve these crimes without a Tracker," Jacques said, tilting his head slightly in Gabrielle's direction. "You understand your brief here?"

"Oh, it's quite clear Auror Fuso," Harry replied. "I am to accompany the Tracker in her investigations and provide security."

"I'm glad we understand each other," Jacques said. "By the way, congratulations on the engagement; I hope you know what you are doing."

Harry smiled and nodded, grabbing Gabrielle's elbow as they left the briefing room. "What a pluperfect puckerhead," Harry mumbled in English after they were safely in the hallway.

Gabrielle smiled weakly and then pulled him down the hallway and into a small conference room, turning on the lights as she silenced and sealed the room. With a slight growl, she grasped the back of his head, pulling him down for a kiss. It was quite a kiss.

"Did you mean it?" she asked after coming up for air.

"Mean what?"

"Marry me?"

"Of course," he replied, planting a small kiss on her forehead.

"Why? I'm an utter bitch at times, my bottom's too big and my top's too small, I'm a pauper compared to you, I have no family to speak of, a terrible track record when it comes to romance and I don't deserve you," Gabrielle said without pausing for breath.

"Too late I suppose," Harry replied, grinning at her. "I figured out a few things when I was living as a hermit, you know."

"Like what?" Gabrielle asked.

"Life doesn't owe me any second chances; and when an angel comes into my life saying that she loves me, I shouldn't let her go," he answered.

"I'm no angel," she said softly.

"Yeah, well, your judgement on other topics is suspect too. It's true, you're not beautiful, you're gorgeous; you're not a bitch, I don't care how much money you have or don't have, and as to your attributes, well, I have no complaints," he said, grinning warmly before wrapping her again in his arms.

"You are insane," she murmured.

"Probably, but I'm *your* insane fiancé."

"You're going to regret this," she said without conviction.

"I doubt it."

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Half an hour later they were walking arm in arm in the Quartier du Panier.

"So, why did you announce that we were engaged?" Harry asked, his eyes sweeping over the street before him.

I thought it would stop some of the wagging tongues – I'd also hoped that the more ardent Aurors would stop hitting on me if I were seen as 'off the market' so to speak," Gabrielle replied. "I *certainly* didn't think that you'd propose to me on a note-pad."

"Yeah, well, your announcement did take me a bit by surprise. But as I thought about it, it just made sense, I mean, I knew, right then, that I was ready, so it seemed like the most expeditious way to move forward. Not very romantic, I guess; next time you should choose someone different if you want the storybook proposal," Harry said.

"I don't believe in fairy tales," Gabrielle said, her face lit up with a smile.

"So, do you know the Artzai family?" Harry asked, changing the subject.

"Yes and no; it might surprise you to know that all the Veela in France do *not* know each other, but I do know Madame Artzai. She was a friend of my Mother. Maman suggested that I get to know her when I first suspected that I was matched," Gabrielle said.

"Because?"

"Because there are things that *another* matched Veela can tell you that you cannot find in textbooks, Monsieur," Gabrielle replied. "This is the house, but the door is locked."

Harry frowned, twiddling with the handle of his wand. "There's someone in the house; should I knock?"

Gabrielle nodded.

Harry gave the door five good thumps.

"Madame Artzai, it's me, Gabrielle. Please let us in," Gabrielle called out.

Just as Harry was about to thump the door again, he heard a rustling in the house. The curtain on the front window swayed a bit and then there was the sound of locks moving within the door. The door opened to reveal a willowy woman dressed in black, a black shawl draped about her shoulders. Peering into the shadows, Harry saw that Madame Artzai resembled a slightly plumper version of Matzalen, with her hair cut in a bob and wrinkles about her eyes. Madame Artzai stepped back, looking carefully at Gabrielle, and then at Harry.

"This is *him*, I take it?" Madame Artzai said to Gabrielle.

"Yes, he *is* the one," Gabrielle replied.

"Stand together, please," Madame Artzai asked, holding her hands out in front of her as if warming herself before a fire. Gabrielle gave a shy smile to Harry and then twined her fingers through his. "Yes, yes," she murmured as she opened her eyes.

She gave Gabrielle a penetrating look and then turned to Harry. "The mesh is not complete. Why is that?"

"Madame, it was just today that I informed Harry about the match," Gabrielle explained.

"So he is hesitant?" Madame Artzai asked.

"I, uh, did ask her to marry me today," Harry volunteered.

"Perhaps there is hope for you after all," Madame Artzai said. "Am I to assume that this is not a social call, Mademoiselle?"

"That is correct, Madame. I am very sorry that we have to meet under these circumstances," Gabrielle said.

"Please, come this way," Madame Artzai said, leading them into a sitting room. "May I offer you food or drink?"

"Thank you, but no, Madame," Harry replied.

"I've given my statement twice," Madame Artzai said, settling into a chair by the window. The light shone behind her, placing the features of her face in darkness. "Once to the Police Nationales, and again to an Auror."

Madame Artzai's head slumped until her chin was on her chest. She took a deep breath. "Balendin has been working so hard. Two years ago, he bought out his partner; they were operating a small printing business, wedding announcements and the like. Most of the clientele was Muggle, but he also did a respectable business for the Magical community as well. He left before dawn to finish producing an order that was promised for noon delivery. Matzalen knew that he would work without eating or drinking, so she prepared a lunch basket for him, taking the twins with her. They never came back; I may never see them again. Oh, Gabrielle, what shall I do?" Madame Artzai said before letting loose with a keening sound. "My heart is dying and my children are gone; all is lost, dear sister, all is lost!"

Gabrielle moved quickly from her chair, kneeling beside Madame Artzai. "No Madame, we *will* find your daughters," Gabrielle said.

Madame Artzai shuddered and then sat up straight. "What can I do to help?"

"I need to go to the girls' rooms, to try to pick up their signatures, then I'll take your signature as well as Monsieur Artzai's," Gabrielle replied. Madame Artzai nodded, waving her hand in the hallway. Gabrielle placed a soft kiss on the older woman's cheek and then left the room.

"You are a lucky man, Monsieur," Madame Artzai said.

"I know," Harry replied.

"What is your role in this affair?" she asked.

"I'm working for the Ministry, actually," Harry said, "I'm providing her security."

A moment of uneasy silence passed.

"How is Monsieur Artzai?" he asked.

"He is struggling to live – they will not let me in his room for more than a moment," she replied.

"If he were to die?"

"Then I would pass shortly thereafter," Madame Artzai said coolly.

"That would leave your daughters as orphans," Harry said.

"A fact that has been weighing heavily on my mind today, I assure you," Madame Artzai said, her eyes flaring into life. "I did not choose my status – it chose me."

"I understand – much of my life has been the same - driven by fate," Harry said sympathetically. "Promise me something."

"What is that?"

"That you will live until your daughters are recovered," he said.

"Do you think that there is hope?"

"Gabrielle does not give up," he said proudly.

"We will talk of this when *your* heart returns from the girls' rooms," Madame Artzai said.

"Thank you, Madame," Harry said, nodding his head.

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The trip to the hospital didn't take long. With a tap of a wand their Ministry credentials showed themselves as a Lieutenant and a Captain in the Police Nationale, opening up even a ward in the Intensive Care Unit.

"You'll need to secure the room," Gabrielle said, taking off her cloak. Harry began layering the room with various charms, making the room impervious from eavesdroppers and curious onlookers, laying a mild Aversion charm over everything else, insuring that they would not be disturbed. He then took up a position against the window, giving Gabrielle as much room as possible.

Gabrielle paced along side the bed, looking for all the world like she was deep in thought or praying. She then stood next to Balendin's bed, holding her hands over his head and chest, wincing as she did so. Harry noticed a shimmering flicker of light around her, culminating in a brief flash. Gabrielle turned away from the bed, sagging as she staggered towards Harry.

"That one hurt," she said, pressing her cheek against his shoulder. Harry wrapped his arms around her. She was cold to the touch.

"The Tracking is an odd variety of empathy that is all mixed up with my Veela powers," Gabrielle said, not pulling away from him.

"And the Aurors only saw that you were flirting with them," he said softly.

"I did not want their attention – I have worked so hard to control my powers, but I cannot do the Tracking without letting go of my Veela allure at the same time," she whispered.

"Which is why you need security," Harry said.

"I am always safe with you," she said, shuddering softly. "There is nothing more we can do here."

"Do you want to go back to your flat?"

"No, not yet – there is one more stop I need to make, and then I will be well and truly *knackered*," she said, pronouncing the last word distinctly, in English. Reaching for her cloak, she jotted a series of numbers onto a card. "Can you Apparate the two of us to this location?"

"Sure, where is it?"

"Beauxbatons – the public Apparation point. I need to go to Matzalen's room. I wasn't able to get enough of a read in her old room. It was all mixed up with her sisters' signature," Gabrielle explained.

They walked out of the hospital in silence.

~+~

"Thank you for meeting with us at this hour, Madame Maxime," Gabrielle said.

"But of course," the enormous Headmistress said. "As I said earlier, any resources of the school, all you have to do is ask."

"Thank you Madame," Harry said.

"Matzalen has a private room in the west tower, room 331 – I believe you still know the way there, Gabrielle."

"Yes, Madame," Gabrielle said, nodding to the Headmistress as she left the office.

As they walked down the now-silent halls, Gabrielle picked at the visitor badge pinned to her cloak. "Why do I still feel so small in her presence?"

"Because you *are* small," Harry said with a smile, "but only in stature."

"I am told that certain things work much better when the woman is taller," Gabrielle said suggestively.

"Shall I call upon Fleur and ask her to demonstrate?" Harry replied quickly.

"Only if you wish to die a violent death at my hands, Monsieur; you are *mine*."

Harry didn't respond to this verbally, but instead pulled her to him for a searing kiss. It was not all that surprising that several minutes later they were discovered by a Prefect doing evening rounds. They broke apart the second time the Prefect cleared her throat.

"It is after curfew, students are not allowed in the halls," the Prefect said, trying to draw up her full height of almost five feet.

Harry didn't let go of Gabrielle, but instead allowed his coat to fall open, displaying his Ministry credentials. "But we are not students, Mademoiselle."

"Oh, Monsieur, I am so sorry," the Prefect said, covering her mouth with both hands.

"It is we who should be apologizing, we have just this day become engaged, and should not inflict our joy upon others," Harry said smoothly.

"Engaged just today? You are allowed then, but *just* for today," the Prefect said with a relieved smile. "Carry on." She turned the corner and retreated. Harry began to pull Gabrielle to him again.

Gabrielle nudged Harry in the ribs. "Harry, I don't think that's what she meant when she said 'Carry on.'"

"Yes, love, anything you say," Harry said, smiling as they walked down the corridor.

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Matzalen's room looked as if she'd just stepped out and would return in an instant to arrange the letters on the dresser in a neat pile, rather than leaving them scattered as if she'd just dropped them there when entering the room. Her week-at-a-glance calendar was still open on her desk, showing the assignments that she'd had to turn in before leaving for the weekend to attend her sisters' first communion. Books were neatly stacked by subject, the drawers were all neatly closed, the closet had everything you would expect in a student's closet, minus the cloak and clothes she'd been wearing while abducted.

Gabrielle's breath hitched as she scanned the room.

"What's wrong, love?" Harry asked softly.

"Old memories," Gabrielle replied as if this were a complete explanation.

Harry watched her carefully.

Gabrielle wandered to the window, looking out on the now-dark grounds. Without facing him, she began to speak. "My room was much like this the night the Head Girl summoned me to the Headmistress' office, the night she told me that my parents were dead. The Head Girl waited for me outside of Madame Maxime's office, and then walked me to a girlfriend's room where I spent the night; it was a terrible night and being here I can almost taste it again. The worst thing was that there was no 'home' to go to anymore – they burned our house after they killed Papa and Maman. All I had left of my childhood was what was in my dormitory room," Gabrielle explained. When she turned around the tear-tracks glistened on her cheeks. "This would be a really good time for my fiancé to hold me."

Harry was across the room in an instant, pulling her close as he murmured comfort into her ear. "I'm sorry," he said.

"You of all people understand," she said when she finally pushed away. "Thanks."

Harry smiled.

"I need to pick up the residue of Matzalen's magic," Gabrielle explained. "Unfortunately, there's this big erotic lump of magic that's overpowering my senses right now."

"I've never been described that way before," Harry said wryly.

“First time for everything,” Gabrielle replied. “Besides, I already know how to find you – most of the time, anyway.”

“Give me a whistle when you want me back, okay?” Harry asked.

“Yeah, I know how to whistle, I watched that movie too,” Gabrielle said, her mood visibly lighter. “It won’t take long.”

~+~

After Gabrielle finished with her readings in Matzalen’s room, they walked out of the Beauxbatons castle, surrendering their visitor passes to the Porter on the way out. Gabrielle snuggled into him when they reached the Apparation point, not having to voice her request that he perform a side-along Apparation to get them back to Marseilles. A casual observer would have thought that he was a sober boyfriend, walking a slightly tipsy girlfriend home, but the truth of the matter was that Gabrielle was exhausted. Harry walked her up the stairs, keeping a protective hand on the small of her back as she navigated the steps. He stepped into her flat when she unlocked the door.

“Where are you sleeping tonight?” she asked uncertainly.

“I’d planned on sleeping at the Barclay,” he replied, his eyebrows lifted in amusement.

“I want your shirt then,” she said, beginning to unbutton his buttons.

“My shirt?” he asked.

“Yes, your shirt; if you’re not going to stay with me tonight, I want to sleep in something that smells like you,” she explained, unbuttoning the last button before she pulled the shirt-tails free from his waistband. Hanging the shirt on one finger she looked him in the eye. “Don’t go away,” she commanded, throwing her cloak on the floor before turning towards her bedroom.

“Yes, Ma’am, I hear and obey,” Harry said with some mirth. He hung up her cloak and stowed their papers in a nook by a small desk next to the Floo connection.

When Gabrielle returned she’d brushed and braided her hair, and was now wearing his shirt as a nightgown. She had to roll up the sleeves, of course, and a generous amount of leg showed below the hem of his shirttail. “This is goodnight, I guess,” she said, pushing her hands up his chest before pulling his head down for a kiss. He suddenly had a new appreciation for how good his shirt felt when it had his girlfriend, now fiancée, inside it.

Harry locked the flat up after she’d fallen asleep, which hadn’t taken long at all, leaving her with a faint smile upon her lips. He had a number of tasks to accomplish before *he* could go to sleep, and he’d promised Gabrielle that he’d meet her for breakfast the next morning.

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Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle

Lost Lambs - Part II

Lost Lambs – Part II

It hurt his head to think about some things, so he reverted to what he'd learned from Hermione – he charted it all out on paper. When he was satisfied that he'd not bollixed it up, he charmed the journal shut and put it back on his hotel room desk. He then opened up his now empty travel bag and activated the hiding place, securing the glittering device away from the curious, the larcenous and the just plain stupid. Looking at the wall clock, he decided that he had time for a shower before making breakfast for his fiancée. He smiled at that thought. For years he'd lived with a very short horizon, expecting that he'd never live to see the next year. Now he had something, or more accurately, someone to look forward to.

"I want to grow old with her," he said aloud, surprised at how good that sounded.

~+~

Strolling through the nearby open-air market made gathering breakfast supplies ridiculously easy. Fresh bread, of course, as he *was* in France; and some fruit from a vendor; he'd considered squeezing oranges, but reckoned that his time was better spent on other tasks, so he picked up a litre of orange juice at the small grocery a block from Gabrielle's flat. He was whistling quietly as he made his way up the stairs, noting with satisfaction that the wards and alarms he'd put in place last night were all as they should be. Although the door was open to her room, it was still dark, so he moved quietly, applying a one-way sound-deadening charm similar to *Muffliato* to the kitchen.

He'd set the table first, locating a small vase for the cut flowers he'd purchased on impulse. He was bustling in the kitchen when he heard the door to her room open. Gabrielle looked at him, the table and the kitchen, blinking as if she wasn't quite awake. She smiled, shuffling into the kitchen for a hug and a kiss before disappearing into the loo; he still liked his shirt when she was in it, he'd probably like it even more if it were on the floor beside the bed, but he wasn't going there this morning.

When she came out of the loo, she was again wrapped in the terrycloth bathrobe.

"Breakfast is served," he said, putting on his best English butler voice.

Gabrielle looked at the table and then moved one of the place settings so she was sitting next to, rather than opposite from him.

Pouring coffee for both of them, she took a generous swig from her cup. "You know, I could get used to this," she said, smiling broadly.

"Let's hope so," he replied.

They polished off croissants, eggs, fruit and juice. Gabrielle declined when he pushed the fruit plate her way again.

"You tricked me last night," she said.

"Is there an echo in here or something?" Harry said, raising one eyebrow.

"I thought you'd be here this morning," she said, her lips moving into a hint of a pout.

"I *am* here," he said, spreading his hands, pointing to the mess he'd made in the kitchen.

"I thought you'd be in my *bed* this morning," she said, clarifying her complaint.

"Did I say that?" he asked. "I seem to recall, when answering your question, that I'd be at the Barclay."

"Yes, you did, but then you came to bed with me," she said.

"I wanted to make sure that you fell asleep quickly; that's one of my assignments, making sure that the Tracker is well rested and fit for duty," he replied. "If I had stayed the night, where do you think we'd be this morning?"

Gabrielle looked at him, her tongue flickering across her upper lip. "We'd still be in bed."

"And how long do you think we'd be there?" he asked, waiting for an answer.

Gabrielle was silent, the ghost of a smile playing on her lips. "A long, long time?" she finally replied.

"I think that's a safe bet," Harry said, reaching out to stroke her fingers. "When Ron finally married Padma, I paid for a honeymoon at a rather swank bed-and-breakfast as one of my wedding presents to them. It seems that they never managed to make it to breakfast, which is a pity, because the place had a killer reputation for putting on a good spread."

"*Ron* missed breakfast?" Gabrielle asked incredulously.

"Not entirely," Harry replied. "According to Padma they had a large tin of cream crackers and cheese, without which, according to Ron, they probably would have starved. They did manage to make it out of bed for lunch and dinner every day, so I have my doubts whether or not they were approaching starvation."

"I've got crackers," Gabrielle purred, stroking between his fingers with her index finger.

"Yeah, you do. I found them when I was searching for your bread knife, but we also have a job to do which involves saving three girls from a very nasty fate," Harry said, twining his fingers with hers.

Gabrielle made a sour face. "You know, there are times when that noble streak of yours is a real pain in the arse," she said, her eyes twinkling.

"I've been told that a time or two in the past," Harry said. "Let's clean up and then we can get started."

They could have used magic to clean the kitchen, but the kitchenette included a very small dishwasher, so Gabrielle dried the hand-washed items and put them away while Harry loaded the dishwasher.

"Where are we getting married?" Gabrielle asked.

"Well, I suppose that depends a lot on *when* and *how*," Harry parried, surprised to be actually discussing the logistics for something that, until yesterday, had been distant and theoretical.

"Church wedding or civil?" Gabrielle asked.

"I could go either way," Harry said.

"What are we?" Gabrielle asked.

"Well, last I checked you were a very desirable witch, and I'm told that I'm an erotic lump of magic," Harry quipped.

"I'm not going to live that one down, am I?"

"Nope."

"What I meant is what type of church are we talking about? When you're home in London you attend All Souls at Langham Place. When you're in Cyprus, you pray with a bunch of Orthodox monks, and when you're in Alaska, you attend a little Lutheran church. So what are the Potters going to be, denominationally: Anglicans, Orthodox or Lutherans?" Gabrielle asked.

"Uh, eclectic mongrels?" Harry suggested.

"Well, I've got the mongrel part down already," Gabrielle said.

"You might notice the common thread in all those churches is that it's usually the closest church to where I'm staying at the moment," Harry said.

"Right," Gabrielle replied, an uncertain look on her face. "I go where you go, it's part of the match thing. There's an English speaking church in town; All Saints is by the Estrangin Metro, it's an Anglican church."

"I'll ring them up later today," Harry said.

Gabrielle nodded. The details were getting settled. "So, how big of a service?" Gabrielle asked.

"Take this the right way, love, I *really* don't care. I want to be *married*, to *you* – the wedding is just a blip facilitating that. I want to make you breakfast every morning and go to bed with you every night. I want to grow old with you and see whether or not your hair turns white by the time you get wrinkles," he explained.

Gabrielle beamed at him. "So, basically, you don't care about the details of the wedding?"

"As long as it doesn't involve pastel tuxedos, no."

"Well, that makes it rather simple then," Gabrielle said decisively. "We'll finish this case and then have a small wedding, inviting our friends and immediate family. If we keep it a short notice thing, it will be less likely to get out of hand and turn into a circus."

"Are you letting Molly in on the planning?" Harry asked.

"No – she had her wedding, this one's mine, besides, it would remind her too much of the wedding she *didn't* get to plan," Gabrielle said sensibly.

"You've got a point there."

"Honeymoon?" she asked hopefully.

"Some place with a bed," Harry said, giving her a wink.

"And maybe even breakfast?" she replied.

"Don't count on it."

~+~

The city of Marseille is comprised of sixteen *arrondissements*, each of which is further subdivided into *quartiers* for total of one hundred eleven

quartiers . By lunchtime, they'd drawn out a schedule for making their way through the city, *quartier* by *quartier* , making sure to coordinate their schedule with the strike force. Like most systematic searches, this one was mostly tedium, relieved by frustration, capped with exhaustion.

"Am I screwing up your ability to Track?" Harry asked as they closed out another *quartier* .

"No," Gabrielle said, sipping delicately from a bottle of Orangina. "Your signature is pretty loud, but I can still track other signatures. I can Track Madame and Monsieur Artzai, for instance, although that's fairly simple as Monsieur Artzai is stuck in the hospital, and Madame Artzai is either at the hospital, at home, or at St. Stephen's church, down the road from the hospital. What I can't get a whiff of, however, is Matzalen's signature, which should be strongest, or the twins."

"Any possibility that they're dead?" Harry asked.

Gabrielle shook her head. "Madame Artzai would know; it's a Veela thing, chapter seventeen in *Daughters of the Dawn* ."

"I kinda skipped over that one," Harry said. "So we keep looking?"

"Yeah, we keep looking, but that doesn't mean that we can't stop for dinner. I'm taking you to *Chez Fonfon* , so you can finally get some decent bouillabaisse," Gabrielle said. "It's in the next *quartier* on the list, so we can still list it as work."

"I don't *like* bouillabaisse," Harry said.

"Says the man who eats raw fish," Gabrielle said dismissively. "*My husband* will learn to eat the foods of my childhood, whether he likes them is another question entirely; besides, the swill they served at Hogwarts was not true bouillabaisse."

"Yes, dear," Harry replied. He didn't mind; this display of spirit was heartening after a day of dead-ends and fruitless searches.

~+~

The first day's tracking pretty much set the pattern for the days that followed. Harry would make breakfast for Gabrielle at her flat, they'd return to their methodical *quartier* by *quartier* search, stopping only for a stand-up lunch during the day, and a longer, more leisurely dinner after stopping for the day. Harry would then take Gabrielle back to her flat, donate the shirt of the day towards her sleepwear collection and after a little necking, hold a very exhausted Veela Tracker until she fell asleep. He would then return to his room at the Barclay for the work that he liked to think of as "the second shift." It wasn't all drudgery, however, as it allowed them to walk from *quartier* by *quartier* , looking for all the world like a young couple, deeply in love, going for a stroll.

It also afforded an opportunity to discuss a number of things, primarily about their life together, including pets ("dogs are okay, but no cats, for obvious reasons, Harry"), children ("of course I want to bear children, the question is how many and when") and money ("the fact that you are wealthy is irrelevant; a Veela wife manages the household, which includes increasing its wealth"). Needless to say, some of the conversations lasted longer than others.

"Where do you go at night after you leave me?" Gabrielle asked, kicking idly at a bit of debris on the sidewalk. "I mean, aside from going back to the Barclay."

"What makes you think that I'm going somewhere?" Harry parried.

"When you leave, you fortify my flat with layers of charms suitable for a Gringotts branch office, including a screamer charm that I assume is linked to something on your person," Gabrielle said, looking sideways at him.

"I'm not sure you want to know," Harry said.

"There should be no secrets between us," Gabrielle admonished.

"You may come to regret that," he said.

"I doubt it," Gabrielle said simply.

"Last night I went to Fleury-Mérogis, with Auror Fuso," Harry said, hoping that he wasn't opening a can of worms.

"Continue," Gabrielle commanded.

"He sends his warmest greetings, by the way, marvelling that I've not throttled you yet. He assumes that your charms in bed outweigh your other shortcomings," Harry said in a mocking tone.

"But of course, everyone knows that," Gabrielle replied quickly.

"We were interrogating some of the prisoners. Jacques thought it was going to be a waste of time because someone went to the trouble of Obliviating them after they were arrested," Harry said.

"And?"

"I suspect that Jacques thought I was going to torture them," Harry said with disdain.

"Jacques would have enjoyed that, no doubt," Gabrielle said.

"Actually, we're pretty much alike on that topic," Harry replied. "Neither of us has any qualms about it, but we both feel that it doesn't produce useful information. If you torture me, I'll try to tell you what I think you want to know, just to get you to stop."

"So you didn't rough them up?" Gabrielle asked.

"Not that anyone could see," Harry replied with a wry smile. "One of the prisoners thought he was drowning and another thought his hand had been burned off, but that was merely an illusion, a distraction to allow me better access to their memories."

"Legilimency?" Gabrielle asked. "How useful."

"Yes, apparently the French Auror Academy doesn't provide much coverage on that art – they think it can't be taught. They are mistaken, of course, but that should come as no surprise to you."

"But of course; so, what did you find out?" Gabrielle asked.

"Most of their memories of Unai have been wiped, but not the surrounding memories, a sloppy technique that is the hallmark of the amateur Obliviator. One of the thugs appeared to have been Unai's driver – we've got an idea of where he'd go to pick Unai up at the beginning of the day and where he'd drop him off at the end of the day," Harry said with a grin.

"Which means?"

"That we have a fair notion where Unai lives, or at least where he lived at one time," Harry said.

"And that would be?" Gabrielle asked.

"A houseboat, one with a good view of the 'Château d'If,' whatever that is," Harry replied.

"Did you ever read *The Count of Monte Cristo* when you were a boy?"

"Yeah, I read it when I was home with the Dursleys one summer. For some reason I was able to identify with the protagonist quite well. The notion of getting free from prison and wreaking vengeance on all my enemies was quite appealing at that age," Harry said.

"While the Count was actually a commoner, he really *was* held prisoner at the Château d'If. It's not much to look at, and only tourists go there and then only because of *The Count of Monte Cristo* tie-in. It's like all the foreign visitors who go to Prince Edward Island because of *Anne of Green Gables*." Gabrielle expounded. "I'll take you to the harbour after dinner tonight – I know a spot that affords a great view of the Isle d'If -"

Gabrielle, however, wasn't allowed to finish that sentence as her mobile went off at that moment. The French Ministry of Magic, unlike its English counterpart, was not averse to co-opting Muggle technology, including mobile phones that were hardened to work in magical environments. Gabrielle reached into her purse and gently swore under her breath when she looked at the offending object.

"What is it?" Harry asked.

"The District Superintendent, she wants us back at the office immediately."

~+~

The District Superintendent was pacing by her window when they were admitted to her office. "Please sit down," she said, gripping the back of her chair. She chewed on her bottom lip, looking at the floor for a minute. She appeared to be composing her thoughts. When she looked up at Harry and Gabrielle sitting together on the leather sofa her expression changed.

"So it's true? You two really are engaged?" she asked.

Gabrielle giggled. "Yes, Madame," she answered.

"Have you set a date?" the District Superintendent asked.

"After we find the Artzai girls," Harry answered.

"That's one way to put some incentive into work," the District Superintendent said with amusement. Her visage changed again. "No progress since the last report?"

"No, Madame," Gabrielle replied meekly.

"Well, I'm afraid that I have news, none of it good," the District Superintendent said, releasing a small hiss of frustration. "Through our friends in Bulgaria, we've intercepted some rather unpleasant communications. Unai intends to auction the twins off. He's received indications of interest from more than a dozen countries."

"And Matzalen?" Gabrielle asked.

"Apparently Unai intends to keep Matzalen for his own purposes. If he can break her will, she would be a remarkable asset to a prostitution operation, every Veela's nightmare, I might add," the District Superintendent added for Harry's benefit. "I am receiving calls daily from the Catalan Ambassador."

“What is their interest in this case?” Harry asked. “That’s the second time you’ve mentioned him or her.”

“The Catalan Ambassador is a him, which is an irrelevant fact. The Veela flock in Western Europe is represented among the Muggle and Magical governments by Catalonia, an arrangement that goes back more than a thousand years. I might add that the Ambassador reports that the Flock is very pleased to hear of your engagement,” the District Superintendent said, her face difficult to read.

“Why would they care?” Harry asked.

“The Veela place their daughters with the rulers of Muggle and Magical society; they always have – they consider it a form of diplomacy. Your union is regarded as most beneficial to the interests of the Flock,” the District Superintendent said, smiling sadly. “Do not worry, Monsieur Potter. Mademoiselle Delacour is well and truly in love with you without ulterior motive; I can attest to her sincerity. The Flock, however, still thinks of things from an earlier mindset when daughters were not much more than chattels and strategic marriages stopped wars and promoted trade. But that is another subject for another day. The fact that we have not received any ransom demand from Unai and the fact that we are hearing rumblings about auctioning off the twins to major players in the sex trade does not bode well for the Artzai family, which leads me to the next bit of bad news. Balandin Artzai died this morning; the news reached my desk at noon.”

“I am so sorry,” Gabrielle said, looking down. “And Madame Artzai?”

“Madame Artzai is still with us, surprisingly,” the District Superintendent said.

“Yes!” Harry cried, making a fist.

“You have news for us, Monsieur Potter?” the District Superintendent asked.

“Harry asked Madame Artzai to make a solemn vow that she would live until we recovered her daughters,” Gabrielle said proudly.

“Your insight into our nature is to be commended, Monsieur, I did not think that it would be possible to overcome the fatal side of her match with Balandin,” the District Superintendent said.

“What is more powerful than a mother’s love?” Harry asked rhetorically.

“Ah yes, of course,” the District Superintendent said, nodding sagely. “Well done; at least a little bit of good news in an otherwise wretched day. So, no trace of Matzalen or the twins?”

“No, Madame, it is most frustrating. This has never happened before! Once I acquire a signature, I can always find what I’m looking for – always!” Gabrielle exclaimed.

“I do not doubt your abilities, daughter, or your diligence in searching for our sisters,” the District Superintendent said, “but you did fail to find your intended when you went looking for him the last time.”

“He was not in any of the places I looked; there wasn’t even a cold trail to pick up in all the places I searched: Alaska *and* Crete *and* Cyprus *and* Alexandria *and* Singapore, places I’ve picked up his trail before.” Gabrielle said vehemently.

“But Mademoiselle, he was in Cyprus, just before he came here,” the District Superintendent said.

“What?” Gabrielle shrieked. “No way!”

“I was,” Harry interjected.

“Bind me and beat me!” Gabrielle spat. “What were you doing there to erase your traces?”

“Uh, actually, I’m more of a nuzzle and grope guy personally, rather than, uh, the bind and beat thing,” Harry said.

Gabrielle looked at Harry as if he had grown an extra head. “*I’m* trying to solve this problem, and *you* are trying to *arouse* me!” she accused.

“Is it working?” Harry asked.

“Yes, but that’s beside the point!” Gabrielle huffed.

The District Superintendent was seized with paroxysms of laughter. “Oh, Harry, you are so good for her!” she exclaimed when the laughter subsided. “What were you doing in Cyprus before you came? Anything out of the ordinary?”

“I installed a magical field on the top of one of the Troödos mountains,” Harry said, mulling the possibilities.

“What sort of field?” the District Superintendent asked.

“It’s a bit of a one-off thing – it nullifies Apparation, Portkeys, and has an added component that stops ballistic projectiles,” Harry said, noting the look of puzzlement on the District Superintendent’s face. “The Greeks live on one side of the mountain and the Turks live on the other and they’ve been shooting at each other for years. Some monks live near the top of the mountain and they’d get hit by stray rounds every now and then. I cobbled up the field to thank them for their hospitality over the years.”

“Mademoiselle, I think a field trip and an experiment is in order. Draw some of the satellite phones from the quartermaster and go play hide and seek with your fiancé,” the District Superintendent commanded.

“Yes, Madame,” Gabrielle said, leaping to her feet.

If the experiment worked, perhaps the lost lambs were not without hope after all.

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Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle Hide and Seek

Hide and Seek

“So, where are we eating?” Gabrielle asked, stowing their equipment in a satchel. She shrank it to the size of a walnut, dropping it into her purse.

“A tavern in Paphos – I’m fairly certain that it’s still open,” Harry replied, screwing up his face, “Cyprus is an hour ahead of Marseilles, two hours ahead of the UK – I’ve been round the world and this time-zone business still throws me,” he complained.

“What’s for dinner?” Gabrielle asked, her stomach giving a well timed rumble.

“*Meze*, the Cypriot answer to *dim sum*; little bits of everything, hot and cold – you can be done in ten minutes or two hours,” Harry said. He turned to get a good look at Gabrielle, pausing to kiss her.

“What was that for?” Gabrielle asked.

“Do I need a reason?” he replied.

Gabrielle smiled, shaking her head.

“Do you want the coordinates?” he asked.

“Not particularly,” she said, giving him the sly smile he knew so well. He put his arms around her and Disappeared them both. They both knew that she could Apparate across the ocean without working up a sweat, but preferred Sidealong Apparation; it was quirky, but frankly, he didn’t mind overmuch.

~+~

Dinner at the Dragon Tavern was hurried, which was a pity, as the *meze* was particularly intriguing that evening. Gabrielle did remember to pass along a message from his solicitor, which Harry then explained to her. “I’m trying to sell Monsieur Artzai’s business – Madame Artzai has no interest in running the business without her husband, and frankly, they need the money,” Harry said.

“Are *you* buying it?” Gabrielle asked.

“Would I do something like that?” he parried.

“If you thought you could get away with it, yes,” Gabrielle answered.

“I would if I had to, but no, my solicitor has arranged for a *bona fide* buyer. I *am* arranging a line of credit for the purchase, but the Artzai family has no need to know the details – they’re getting good value for the business as measured by an honest appraisal,” Harry said.

Gabrielle lifted Harry’s hand, placing a gentle kiss on his palm.

“Thank you,” she said simply.

“I know what it’s like to be alone in the world,” Harry said softly.

“I know,” she echoed.

After dinner, they Apparated to the Troödos mountains, seeking the base of the particular peak where the monastery was located. Harry used his wand to mark the anchors supporting the field over the mountain with a faint, glowing green light. “Ready?”

“Not particularly – I’m not eager to lose you again,” Gabrielle complained.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

“Ever since we’ve – uh – come to terms with how we feel about each other, I’ve had your signature locked in my memory. It’s like there’s a little bit of you tucked away inside of me and its getting bigger every day. I don’t want to lose that, even for an evening,” Gabrielle said.

“You make it sound like you’re pregnant,” Harry quipped.

“No such luck,” Gabrielle retorted. “Although now that you mention it, I wouldn’t mind practicing.”

All in good time," Harry replied.

"Can I Apparate safely once I'm under the field?" Gabrielle asked.

"Yeah, but anything other than line-of-sight tends to go wonky on the destination – I'm not sure why," Harry said, "I never managed to Splinch myself doing line-of-sight under one of these fields, but I wouldn't try blind Apparation to a coordinate – that's guaranteed to push you into the mountain, and repairing that damage is beyond my first-aid skills.

"Portkeys?"

"Won't work, either in or out; again, I don't know why, just what happens," Harry continued, "these fields have been fascinating to study."

"I imagine so. Okay, you've got ten minutes, and then I'm going to try to acquire your signature under the field. If I can't acquire it within an hour, I'll call you on the phone and we go *home*," Gabrielle said.

"What? You don't care for my winter home?" he asked. He leaned in to give her a kiss.

"For luck," he said with a wink. "If you find me in under half-an-hour, there's more."

"You *do* know how to motivate a girl, Monsieur," she said, smiling broadly.

"I try," he said, giving her a wave as he Disapparated, leaving a whirling cloud of dust in his absence.

~+~

Waiting sucked.

Purposeful waiting was okay; tailing a subject into a building and waiting for him or her to leave the building was dreadfully boring, but with a lively propensity towards very vivid daydreams, the time could be passed without going mad.

Waiting for the sake of waiting; just watching the time to go by was hideously boring, so Gabrielle went hiking.

Her eyes were acclimated to the wan light provided by the moon on a partly cloudy night, so she carefully picked her way around the perimeter of the field, using the faintly glowing anchors as reference points. She'd made her way almost a kilometre from her starting point before the timing charm pinged. She'd lost her grip on her fiancé's signature the instant he'd Disapparated, so she was most curious as to what, if anything, she'd be able to sense once she, and he, were both under the field.

Once under the field, checking twice to make sure that she was within the imaginary lines connecting the glowing anchor points, she sat down on a rock of comfortable height, closing her eyes.

It took a while to centre herself. Then she pushed out her senses. She could detect the field, but it was remarkably elusive, like a wisp of scent on a windy day. There were various living things on the mountain, of course, including several dozen monks near the peak. The other living things could be quickly categorized and then dismissed. She wasn't interested in the hare that was just out-of-sight to the west, or the fox that stalked it. She was looking for two-legged prey.

Sweeping her senses past the monastery, she went searching for Harry's place – an apartment, really, built into a cave near the top of the mountain. She smiled in satisfaction when she found the cave, and then began to screw up her face in concentration as she searched for traces of his signature there. There was *something* there, but it wasn't *Harry's* signature. Or was it? It had all the elements of Harry's magical signature, but they were scrambled somehow. She then cast her senses out, covering the mountain, looking for a similarly scrambled signature.

"Got you," she said, a feral glint in her eyes as they opened.

"Yes!" she hissed, pumping her fist. She looked down at her watch.

He'd been gone for twenty minutes; it had taken her ten minutes to find his scrambled signature. Now she just had to catch up to him.

"You *owe* me, Harry," she growled.

He'd been moving from place to place, which was not totally surprising, but she was a little irked by the time she got within line-of-sight to his position.

She Apparated to a spot opposite to where he was seated, studying the expression on his face; he appeared to be happy.

"I knew you could do it," he said. "I'm very proud of you. So, what was it like?"

She straddled his lap, pulling his face to her for a kiss, a long, deep kiss.

"Scrambled is what it was. Your signature was there all the time, but I didn't recognize it. I went looking for your place at the top of the mountain – there was a trace of a magical signature there, but it wasn't yours – or that's what I thought at first. Then I figured it had all of the elements of your magical signature, just scrambled around like a children's word jumble. Then I went looking for a similarly scrambled signature. Speaking of which, I've got a sample of Matzalen's hair in my satchel – I'm going to try reading it here to see how scrambled her signature is under these screwy conditions. After I figured out your signature, it was just a matter of doing line-of-sight hops without twisting my ankles on these wretched rocks," Gabrielle explained with a hint of satisfaction.

"If it was a nice place, the monks wouldn't live here," Harry replied. "Speaking of which, I want to introduce you to someone."

"Who?" Gabrielle asked.

"Abbot Anthony," Harry replied. He indicated that she should stand up, and after standing up himself, laced his fingers in hers and began walking down the mountain, picking out a narrow trail in the twilight.

"Why am I meeting him?" Gabrielle asked.

"He's someone important in my life."

Gabrielle shivered.

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The monastery of St. Athanasius was surrounded by a high wall, an artefact of days when it was literally a fortress against the world. The gates were closed, but the brother assigned to serve as the gatekeeper recognized Harry, giving him a quick hug before he noticed Gabrielle in the shadows behind him. The two men murmured something in a language that Gabrielle didn't understand. The gatekeeper then addressed Gabrielle in English. "Wait here, I will fetch the Abbot."

"What's the matter? No girls allowed?" Gabrielle asked after the gatekeeper departed.

"Something like that – the monastery hasn't had a woman within its walls for a couple of hundred years, and that woman was a nun from a cloistered convent who was trying to escape from the local warlord of the day," Harry explained. "Don't take it personally."

"Is there anything I shouldn't do here?" Gabrielle asked nervously.

Harry laughed. "Don't hit on the brothers or flash them with Veela allure, other than that, just be yourself."

The Abbot arrived silently, almost catching Gabrielle by surprise.

"Brother Harry," he said quietly, in English. "I trust you are well?"

"Very well, reverend father," Harry replied. "I see the field is holding nicely."

"Indeed," Abbot Anthony said, smiling broadly. "The Turks did not believe me when I told them about it. After the first six mortar rounds rebounded back on their positions, they concluded that while I was as crazy as the legends say I am I was to be believed. Since then it's been blissfully quiet." Turning to Gabrielle, he extended a hand to her, which she took. He had a firm grip. "I am Anthony."

"Gabrielle," she replied, wondering if she should curtsy.

"We're engaged," Harry announced.

Abbot Anthony looked intently at Gabrielle. Although she was fairly certain that he wasn't a Legilimens, she felt that he was looking deeply into her.

"I have heard much about you," Abbot Anthony said, his eyes twinkling in the moonlight. "Your companion thought at one time that he wished to take up the habit and become a monk. I encouraged him to give the matter further thought and prayer. It appears that he is not entirely incapable of discerning the will of God for his life, and that God has graciously provided a comely *helpmate*. So, are you an Anglican like Harry, or a lapsed Catholic like the remainder of your countrymen?"

"Right – uh - about the helpmate bit," Gabrielle stammered. "I'm – uh – working on that – wherever Harry goes, I go."

"A sound decision," he said with a low chuckle, looking over to Harry. "Do you have a date?"

"Soon," Harry replied. "We have some business that must be wound up first."

"Dark business, like the last?"

"Yes, reverend father," Harry said.

"It is the duty of the strong to protect the weak, which necessitates that men like you must rescue them when they need rescuing. The brothers, of course, will pray for you. If there is anything more that you require, you have but to ask, Brother Harry. May I pray for you now?" he asked.

"Of course," Harry replied.

Abbot Anthony held his hand out to them, palm up. "Give me your hands," he said.

Gabrielle placed her hand in his broad, dry palm, Harry placed his over hers. Abbot Anthony took his free hand and wrapped a knotted rope around their hands, beginning to chant softly in the language used earlier by the gatekeeper. Gabrielle thought she recognized a word here or there, but couldn't be sure. Although this was a novel experience for her, praying with Abbot Anthony, here under the stars felt right, somehow. When he finished chanting he looked up at them, a small smile upon his face. He then looked to heaven and said, in perfect Parisian French, "Heavenly Father, bind their lives together, watch over them, and grant them your grace, your peace, and your love. Amen."

Amen," Gabrielle replied, hoping that she wasn't making a fool of herself.

"See, it is not so hard," Abbot Anthony said, slipping the rope from their hands. "Perhaps Brother Harry will even be able to show you how to make the sign of the cross properly, instead of backwards."

"Behave, reverend father," Harry cautioned.

"Never; I am incorrigible. Goodnight, children," Abbot Anthony said, pulling the gate closed again. "You are welcome to return. Peace be with you."

"And with your spirit," Harry replied.

Harry gave Gabrielle's hand a squeeze. "I wanted you to meet him – he's done a lot for me."

"Did you *really* want to be a monk here?" Gabrielle asked.

"I wanted what they had," Harry answered, "but this is not what I was born for."

"Thank goodness," Gabrielle replied. "I'd hate for you to have to sneak out to see me every night."

"Every night?" Harry asked.

"Well, every night but Saturday night; we'd have to give you one good night to sleep with a clear conscience after confessing the many sins you'd be committing with me on the other nights," Gabrielle quipped. "Can we go home now?"

"Not yet, one more stop," Harry said.

"To your place at the top of the mountain?"

"No, there's not much there; we're going back to England, I need to tap into the mind of England's smartest witch," Harry said, pulling her into his arms.

If the gatekeeper noticed their disappearance, he kept it to himself. Stranger things have happened at the monastery of St. Athanasius.

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Hogsmeade was quiet and the streets were dark when they arrived outside of Hermione's cottage. Harry rapped on the door.

"Harry! What if they're asleep? What if they're - being *intimate*?" Gabrielle asked sharply.

"If they're asleep, I'm sure that they can wake up for us and then fall back asleep again after we're gone. If they're *being intimate*, I'm sure the door will be appropriately charmed and they'll never hear us," Harry said.

The door pulled open quickly. "The door's *not* charmed, and we're *not* being intimate, not yet, at least," Hermione said with a smile. "Come on in, you two. I'm sure it's something important if you're showing up at this hour. Neville? Can you put the kettle on for tea? Harry and Gabrielle are here."

Four mugs of tea, six slices of cake, and numerous hugs and kisses later, the two couples were seated in the kitchen around a small table.

"If it were anyone else, I couldn't believe that you'd propose on a note-pad, but since it's you, Harry, I truly believe it," Hermione said, wiping a tear of laughter from her eye.

"Thanks, I think," Harry said.

"So what really brings you by, Harry?" Neville asked, his voice firm. "If it were just to let us know that you two finally got engaged, you could have sent a card."

"Finally?" Harry said, his voice rising in mock umbrage. "I'd say that this courtship has been moving along fairly expeditiously, Mister-I'll-wait-seven-years-to-ask-Hermione-out-Longbottom."

"She was busy," Neville protested. Gabrielle laughed.

"What do you need, Harry?" Hermione asked, her eyes shining.

"I need a way to find and paint the perimeters of one or more unknown Anti-Apparation fields which might be located anywhere across an area the size of a goodly sized city and map the results," Harry said, filling a sketch pad with diagrams and equations representing the field. "Anything come to mind off of the top of your head?"

Hermione made a face as if she were trying to remember something. "Let me go check one of my journals," she replied, disappearing into another room in the cottage.

"She's looking much better," Harry said to Neville.

"She's working really hard in therapy. She's pretty much back to normal," he said.

"She'll never be normal," Harry said lightly.

"I *heard* that Harry," Hermione said, bringing in a small stack of leather bound notebooks.

"You'll always be singularly exceptional," he said warmly.

"That's a little bit better. Gabrielle, you need to work on polishing him some more," Hermione admonished.

"I keep *trying* to polish him, but he's playing hard to get," Gabrielle said with a grin.

"Oh, Lord, save us from unresolved sexual tension," Neville moaned.

"Amen!" Gabrielle chimed.

"Hem, hem," Hermione said, causing the Gryffindors to laugh.

"I don't get it," Gabrielle said.

"Ask Harry to explain it sometime when you're very relaxed," Hermione said. "You're going to want to break something by the time he finishes the story."

"O-kay," Gabrielle said, slightly annoyed that she'd been left out.

"So, what's in the journals?" Harry asked.

"Remember Malfoy Manor?" Hermione began.

"The first time or the second time?" Harry replied.

"The second time, when we blew it up," Hermione said. "We were on the West team; the East team brought the wards down. Anyway, the Manor had a field up like the one you sketched. The Twins cobbled together a means of painting the field so the West team could find its anchors. It was their type of job: fireworks, explosives and the chance to leave a Phoenix Mark over the burning ruins of Malfoy Manor."

"You make it sound like a favourite holiday," Gabrielle said sleepily.

"It was the only building I ever enjoyed watching burn to the ground," Hermione said, opening a journal. "Anyway, enough of that digression. For that mission the Twins asked me for some help in the theory and Spellwork for a powder that sparkles a bit when it hits this type of field. We packed it into one of their whiz-bang rockets in place of the ball of pyrotechnics. The explosive charge scatters the powder, which then floats in a cloud to the earth, with some wind drift, of course. There are probably better ways of dispersing the powder, but we were rushed for time. Is tomorrow morning soon enough? I know that Gred and Forge can cobble together as many as you need. I can drop-ship a batch to the Auror office in Marseilles. Do you care whether the powder effect is visible?"

Harry pondered the point. "I'd rather that it not be visible – maybe we can push it into a spectrum that's not visible and then use some of the Muggle devices to look for the effect."

"Hmph," Hermione said, pulling out a pencil.

"You know, mate, she's not going to go to bed now, until she figures out how to do that," Neville said.

"My apologies in advance, Neville," Harry said. "Tomorrow would be fine. I think it's time that I get sleeping beauty back to her flat in Marseilles. Ready to go, love?"

Gabrielle didn't answer. She'd leaned forward, resting her head on her crossed arms, and fallen asleep.

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Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle The Good Shepherd

Matzalen wanted to die.

Actually, she was beyond that by now, whenever now was; she was dead already. There were two remaining foci in her life – the first was getting the twins out of this hell-hole. She was resigned to the notion that to achieve either of her goals she had to let Master think that she was a good little slave, eager to advance as a whore in his stable.

The day they were all captured, a day she left home without her wand, leaving her life behind, she was brought to the man the others called Unai. He explained that she was now a slave, giving her a new name, Mary; as a slave, whether she lived or died depended upon her obedience. He then further explained just what his slaves did to earn their keep. Matzalen vowed that she would rather die first, which, unfortunately, she said aloud in Master's presence.

The beating was swift and methodical, inflicting maximum pain without leaving marks or permanent damage. After the beating, she was brought back to Master and she spat in his face. He used a terrible spell on her then, causing temporary blindness and excruciating I-wish-I-was-dead levels of pain. Thereafter she was in darkness; for how long, she couldn't reckon.

When she could next remember, she was in a small room with the twins, who, incongruously, were watching Muggle television cartoons. Her sisters piteously complained that they were hungry, not having eaten for days. Later that day, Master's goons fetched her for another audience. The choice was presented to her: if she obeyed, the twins would be fed. The alternative was starvation for the twins and further blinding pain for Matzalen. After a brief lash of pain that deprived her of sight for half an hour, she relented.

Master knew all about Veela, even to the extent of speaking Euskara, which Matzalen discovered one day when he replied to a stream of invective she'd been muttering. He knew the extent to which she could control her allure, and likewise knew the effect it had on her when she exercised it for extended periods. After several beatings, she learned how long she could burn her allure before the throbbing became unbearable. She was ashamed when Master showed her how to relieve the throbbing, laughing at the flare this caused in her covering of Veela light.

Early on, they were transferred from the first place to the second place, both of which were by the water. The second place was a large building where they were permitted to move about with relative freedom. Master's men, and women, would come and go at this place without any discernable pattern. Master dressed her in clothes befitting her new status: gaudy, skimpy things that Maman would have pitched a fit over when Matzalen was alive. Her hair had inexplicably not yet grown back, even with the aid of potions and charms, so Master provided a coarse black wig that made her look like an Egyptian, which Master found amusing, so he darkened her skin to match her hair.

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The twins seemed to adapt to the new life fairly well once they moved to the second place. They were shy and avoided the men who came and went in the strange, dark, cold building, but would play with the women. Their days were spent exploring the place, doing rudimentary lessons that Matzalen devised covering reading, writing and maths and on occasion, simple chores in the kitchen. The hardest part of the day was evening, when the twins would ask Matzalen to pray with them before bed.

Papa had always performed that role when Matzalen was growing up, and it pained her to do it now that she suspected that he was dead. The twins had an affinity to faith that was foreign to Matzalen; they believed the same way they breathed; naturally without a lot of thought about the mechanics. Matzalen had gone through all the Catholic milestones, including first communion and confirmation before leaving for Beauxbatons, but what little faith she'd imbibed from her family seemingly drained away when she was apart from them. Now that she was living in this nightmare, she considered it alternately futile and hypocritical to pray to a God she wasn't sure was there, or listening. The twins, however, maintained an oddly positive outlook.

One night when she'd not properly latched the door separating her tiny bedroom from theirs, the sound of her weeping woke them. They came, hand-in-hand to comfort her, blinking in the light of her room.

"Don't cry, Matzalen, sister is looking for us," Garazi said.

"I'm your sister," Matzalen said, trying without much effect to hide the effects of her crying.

"Of course, but *this* sister is hunting for us, she's a hunter with a mate who is helping her hunt – he has hair that's black like the night with a scar on his face," Eskarne said, wiping her fingers across her forehead.

"How do you know this?" Matzalen asked.

"Because we do," Eskarne replied.

"We see them in our dreams, but *they* can't find us yet," Garazi added.

Matzalen filed this bit of weirdness away. The twins saw things that other witches often didn't see – prompting Maman to have them evaluated for the second sight when they were seven. The elderly wizard conducting the screening was noncommittal about his diagnosis, but he did leave Maman with a stack of pre-paid Owl-post envelopes so she could send him quarterly reports, which Maman had faithfully filled out thereafter.

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In addition to caring for the twins, which she enjoyed, she would on occasion attend to Master's guests, which usually meant nothing more than serving as a slutty looking barmaid with Veela-enhanced flirting, although at the last meeting she'd had to perform her tricks like a pet crup, flirting and flashing her allure on command. Thankfully, that little performance hadn't ended as she expected in a demonstration of some of her other recently acquired skills; she was dismissed to allow the men to discuss business. Master came to her that night, after she had put the twins to bed. He reeked of alcohol.

He often came at night, sometimes just to talk, other times to continue his sordid training. That night he seemed particularly pleased with himself, and after asking about the health of the twins he was silent for a while before asking a strange question.

"Do you love me, Slave?" he asked.

"No, Master, I do not," she answered truthfully. The flicker of annoyance in his eyes made her apprehensive; perhaps he would beat her again.

"The day will come, Slave, when you will joyfully spread your legs for me and beg me for children," he said deliberately, trying to keep his words from slurring.

"Yes, Master," Matzalen said noncommittally.

The expected beating never came.

Matzalen's second goal became clear that night before she fell asleep: she was going to rescue the twins, of course, but she was also going to kill Master.

Or die trying.

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Morning began as it usually did; he was in Gabrielle's kitchen, making breakfast. Gabrielle crept out of her room, hugging him from behind while his hands were occupied, kissing the back of his neck. The feel of her breath on the back of his neck made him shiver, but he didn't mind a bit. She disappeared as quietly as she appeared. The sound of the door to the loo closing was the only hint as to where she was in the flat. He continued shaping the pastry dough into shapes, pinching them closed and then popping the sheet of pastry into the oven.

"Harry?" Gabrielle called from the loo.

"Yes, love?" he replied.

"How did I get here?"

"Is that an existential question?" he bantered.

He heard the sound of the toilet flushing along with the sound of running water; Gabrielle was very serious about the basics of hygiene. When the door was pushed open, she was wearing the usual terrycloth robe, but it wasn't tied this morning, revealing her long, lovely legs peeking out from the shirttails of the shirt he'd been wearing last night. He never looked this good in his clothes, but his opinion was obviously biased.

"How did I get here?" she repeated.

"Well, you see, when a Wizard and a Witch love each other, they get married, and after that. . ."

Gabrielle stared at him for a moment, a look of momentary confusion turning into a smile. "You're a pervert; you know that, don't you? What I meant to say, before I was so rudely interrupted, was that I don't remember coming *here* last night, nor do I remember getting dressed for bed. So, anyways, there I was in the loo when it comes to me that the last thing I remember from last night was being so tired at Hermione's cottage, then things got pretty fuzzy thereafter," Gabrielle said.

"You fell asleep. I brought you home," Harry explained.

"You brought me to *your* flat," Gabrielle said accusingly.

"Yes," he said.

"And then you brought me *here*," she said.

"Uh-huh," he said.

"And then *you* dressed me for bed?"

“Yeah.”

“Which meant that you *un* dressed me first,” Gabrielle said.

“Kind of,” Harry said. “I unbuttoned your blouse, slipped off your trousers, enlarged your camisole and then did a switching spell.”

“A switching spell?”

“My shirt for your camisole,” he said with a deadpan expression.

“And the expansion charm on the camisole?”

“Was to make sure I didn’t blow it up – I didn’t think it would fit otherwise,” he said.

“You were *wearing* my camisole?” she asked incredulously.

“Only for a moment,” he said, the faintest blush arising to his cheeks. “Once you were in my shirt, I put you to bed.”

“So I *didn’t* get my nuzzling?” Gabrielle asked with a pout. “No gropes?”

“You were asleep.”

“I’m not asleep now,” she purred, running her fingers up the back of his neck.

Several minutes later the timer pinged, prompting them to come up for air. “Get them from the oven,” she commanded. “We can continue on the couch while they cool.”

“Wouldn’t want to eat them when they’re too hot,” he said agreeably.

“No, we might get burned.”

The brioches were successfully removed from the oven; the display of affection moved to the couch. As Harry was laying a string of kisses along her collarbone, Gabrielle threw her head back, eyes closed; the couple was ablaze in a covering of silver light, most of which was coming from Gabrielle, but Harry didn’t particularly care at the moment.

Gabrielle jerked underneath him.

“Damnation,” she muttered.

“What? Did I do something wrong?” Harry asked; his eyes unfocused.

Gabrielle straightened up, buttoning the buttons that had somehow come unbuttoned in the last few minutes. “That’s my line,” she said with a smile. “Someday we will discuss how anxious I am that I’m not experienced enough to please you. No, this is far more important, and, by the way, what you were doing was marvellous.”

“Thank you. So, what is it?” Harry asked.

“I know where Matzalen is – I think – I felt her scrambled signature when you were kissing me. As much as I’d like things to get out of hand here and now, I think it’s time that we eat breakfast and get back to work.”

“So, where is she?” Harry asked.

“Unless I’m wildly mistaken, on L’Isle d’If.”

~+~

The District Superintendent was pacing in her office when they arrived.

“Tell me that you have some good news,” she said, pausing to look out the window.

Gabrielle looked at Harry, who nodded.

“We think we know where they *may* be,” Gabrielle said cautiously.

The District Superintendent turned towards them, gripping the back of her office chair. “You have their signatures?”

“Not exactly,” Gabrielle began, “we have reason to believe that their signatures are masked – what we’ve found in Marseilles is a masked signature. We tested the hypothesis in Cyprus and then took a reading on Matzalen’s hair for good measure.”

“And the result?” the District Superintendent asked, a hint of a smile playing on her lips.

“The masked signature on Matzalen’s hair from Cyprus matches what I found in Marseilles this morning,” Gabrielle said firmly. “The only problem is that because it’s masked, I have no idea how fresh the signature is – they could be somewhere else, but it’s the first lead we’ve had in weeks.”

Indeed," she said, turning back toward the window. "My friends in the Balkans just intercepted another message. Apparently Unai has successfully auctioned off the twins; the buyer should be arriving anytime in the next three days. This case is enough to start me smoking cigarettes again. How certain are you of the location?"

"That's a problem," Gabrielle replied. "I think they're under some sort of an Anti-Apparation barrier – once I determine the parameters of the barrier, I'll be able to get a better fix on their location. It's also entirely possible that they were there in the recent past, but now are somewhere else."

"So, where do you think they are?" the District Superintendent asked.

"L'Îsle d'If," Harry said.

"In the Chateau?" the District Superintendent asked.

"Probably," Gabrielle replied.

A chiming box on the District Superintendent's desk interrupted them. The District Superintendent opened the box, revealing a small vertical ring of fire. Michele's voice came from the small, fiery opening. "There's a messenger here for Mademoiselle Delacour, Madam."

The District Superintendent looked up at Gabrielle. "Were you expecting something?"

"Yes, Madame," Gabrielle answered.

"Send him in, Michele," the District Superintendent said.

"Yes, Madame," Michele's voice hissed as the District Superintendent shut the box.

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To Gabrielle's surprise, the messenger was one of the Weasley twins, George she guessed, as his French was much more passable than Fred's. He delivered two cases, the first contained a collection of spheres the size of oranges and a launching device. The second case he didn't open or describe, other than saying it was a "special package" that Harry was familiar with. George excused himself, claiming that he'd love to stay and chat, but while he was in Marseilles, he needed to drop in on a supplier in Provencal before returning to the shop in London.

The District Superintendent frowned after the door closed.

"There are problems if they are indeed at the Chateau d'If," she began.

"What sort of problems, Madame?" Gabrielle asked.

"The Chateau was bought several years ago by the Basque Embassy - they continue to use part of the Chateau as a tourist attraction, but for all intents and purposes, the island is theirs," she replied.

"It is still part of France, is it not?" Gabrielle asked.

"Yes, but the status of the buildings is murky. What you've told me right now wouldn't be sufficient for a warrant, given the diplomatic entanglement," the District Superintendent said.

"So we can't go in?" Gabrielle asked incredulously.

"I didn't say that, Gabrielle, I'm just saying that if we applied for a warrant, it would most likely be denied," the District Superintendent said, brushing hair away from her face with an unconscious gesture. "If, however, an Auror team were to find themselves on the premises and subsequently called for assistance, the full might of the District would respond. Do I make myself clear?"

Gabrielle smirked. "Perfectly, Madame," she said.

They spent another half-hour discussing the details of the now-unauthorized and possibly illegal operation.

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An hour later, they were on the water, sailing a small rented sailboat to conduct their reconnaissance of L'Îsle d'If. Originally, they intended to release the field-revealing powder over the entire city, which would best be accomplished using modified fireworks. Now that their attention was focused on a smaller area, they could use a more discreet launcher, which George had already provided.

Gabrielle thought that it was a fine day for sailing, riding the fine dividing line between autumn and winter in Marseilles, where the dedicated sailors are out on the water ten months out of the year. They were dressed in sailing clothes, which was unfortunate, in Gabrielle's estimation. If they were doing this in summer, they'd be dressed in swimsuits; which was almost the same thing as being naked, which led to all sorts of satisfying daydreams.

"Penny for your thoughts, love," Harry said.

Gabrielle smiled broadly. "I was being a scarlet woman again, thinking about how I'd rather that we were married already, which led to thinking about what I'd be doing if I was out for a sail on a lovely day with my *husband*."

"Ah, nooky on the high seas – would I have to wear an eye-patch and talk like a pirate?" Harry replied.

"That wasn't the fantasy that I had going, but that could work too," she said. "You must think that I'm a terrible tease, always winding you up about sex but waiting for you to make the first move."

"Not really," Harry replied. "I figured it had something to do with the performance anxiety you mentioned."

Gabrielle put her index finger on her nose. "Exactly."

"What is that all about, anyway?" Harry asked.

"Oh, please! Do I have to spell it out for you?" Gabrielle asked.

"Probably, I'm not that quick on a lot of the subtle things," Harry answered.

"You and Ginny were together for years," Gabrielle began.

"And?"

"And I fear that, after we're married, when we finally do make love that you will compare me to Ginny, and that I will not measure up," Gabrielle replied, giving him a fierce look that was betrayed by a quivering lip.

Harry said nothing; he began to shake.

"What? You are laughing at me!" Gabrielle shouted, making a fist to give Harry a backhanded thump on his ribs. When she opened her fist a small ball of fire appeared in the palm of her hand.

"I don't think it warrants a fireball, love," Harry replied, giving her a quick kiss on the side of her neck.

"And why not? I open up and reveal my deepest fears to you and – and - you mock me!" Gabrielle replied.

"I was laughing at you, not mocking you. There's a difference," Harry said, his eyes moving from laughing to serious. "There's not going to be a comparison; Ginny was a virgin when she died, which is some kind of ironic thing, because if she hadn't been a virgin, she couldn't have destroyed the last Horcrux."

"*Mon Dieu*, I've done it again," Gabrielle exclaimed.

"What?"

"Made assumptions rather than just asking you," she said. She was silent for a while. "How did Ginny die?"

Harry didn't answer for a long time, looking out at the horizon while he guided the tiller.

"We got together at the end of my sixth year at Hogwarts," Harry began.

"And then you broke up with her after Dumbledore died. That was very stupid," Gabrielle said.

"Yeah," Harry said, pinching his nose briefly. "That was stupid. She convinced me that while my intentions were noble, I wasn't really protecting her at all, and I was making both of us miserable. When Ginny turned seventeen, she joined us on the Horcrux hunt, about the same time that Luna and Neville joined us. It took a while to find them all, and then we had to figure out how to destroy them. Voldemort had a thing for perverting artefacts from Founders of Hogwarts – the last Horcrux was something from Rowena Ravenclaw."

"What was it?" Gabrielle asked.

"A breviary."

"A what?"

"A prayer book – something a noble lady of her era might own. Apparently Rowena's mind wandered when she was in church. She charmed the flysheets to hold reams of her scribbling. Everything from her shopping lists for market days to thoughts on whether or not her soul was immortal," Harry said with a laugh. "Appropriate enough, given the context. It was the Horcrux that took us the longest to figure out how to destroy."

"Why was that?"

"When Voldemort turned it into a Horcrux, he put a powerful protective curse that could only be broken by a girl, a virgin, who was in love," Harry said quietly. "Luna figured out the curse, she was always incredibly gifted at Charms work. Once she deciphered it, she discussed it with Ginny. They never mentioned it to us."

"Because you'd try to talk them out of it," Gabrielle said.

Harry nodded.

"We found Luna's diary afterwards – it mentioned that she was pretty sure that the virgin could break the curse, but it would kill her in the process."

Ginny insisted that she was the only one for the job, although Luna was helping her all the way to the end," Harry said grimly. "Of the three girls, she was the only one who was still a virgin. Luna was right – when they broke the curse it was like a small atomic explosion – they never had a chance."

"I'm so sorry – I never knew," Gabrielle said sympathetically.

"Yeah," Harry said.

"Was there anyone in your life after Ginny?" Gabrielle asked.

"Not really," Harry replied.

"That's a question that should be answered with a yes or no," Gabrielle said.

"There was a girl in Alaska – a young Army widow who ran a supply shop in a little town outside of Denali. She looked like Ginny; I never went beyond flirting with her though," Harry said.

"Why is that?"

"Because I was smart enough to figure out that I really didn't want to get to know *her*, I just wanted someone to stand in for Ginny."

"Am I a stand in?" Gabrielle asked, digesting what he'd just said.

"No – you don't have red hair," he said, smirking. "I finally worked that kink out – it took me long enough. Does this help?"

"Yeah, thanks," Gabrielle said.

"We're in position now; let's just see where that field is," Harry said.

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They were upwind of the island, striking their sail for a moment to drift slowly in the stiff breeze. They loaded one of the powder balls into the launcher, charming the ball to release at apogee. Once the launcher was armed, they donned the charmed sunglasses provided by George Weasley.

"What did George mean when he said that I needed these more than you do?" Harry asked.

Gabrielle blushed, looking away for a moment. "Well, for one thing, I can already see in the infra-red spectrum, it's a Veela thing," she said.

"How's that?"

"Veela are predators – being able to see in the infra-red spectrum made night-time hunting a bit more efficient," Gabrielle explained clinically.

"Yeah, but that's not what is making you blush," Harry said.

"Launch the ball already, Harry, you know me too well," Gabrielle said.

The launcher gave a muted bark. The ball quickly disappeared as it flew straight up. When the ball burst at apogee, the fine powder dispersed in the wind, looking like a yellow sheet of shimmering silk when viewed through their charmed glasses. To the naked eye the powder cloud was invisible.

"Veela light," Gabrielle said, scanning the sky.

"Yeah, it kicks in when you're letting your allure rip," Harry said.

"And when I'm aroused, or angry, or distressed, or when I'm trying to communicate powerful emotions to another Veela," Gabrielle said.

"And I'll need sunglasses because?" Harry asked.

"I'm told that when I climax it's like a flashbulb going off," Gabrielle said, still looking at the sky.

"You don't know?" Harry asked.

"My eyes are never open then," Gabrielle said drolly, flipping open a sketchpad, drawing a diagram of the field as it began to appear in a ghostly golden glow as the powder fell to earth.

"Okay," Harry said slowly. "Something to look forward to, I guess."

"You *better* be looking forward to it, since you're making me wait," Gabrielle said, looking up from her sketch pad. "Okay, I've got it – it's a field just like what you built on Cyprus, with five anchor points."

"Yeah, we'll need to take out at least two of the anchors to collapse the field," Harry said, pulling out the special package.

"Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?" Gabrielle said.

It depends whether or not your mind is in the gutter again," Harry said, looking over the rim of his sunglasses. "We both know that if we go back, we're not going to get a warrant issued."

"So?" Gabrielle said.

"So, we need to visit the Chateau and see what we find inside – if the children are there, maybe we can spring them," Harry said.

"Simple, direct, very hazardous – very Harry; it's no wonder why I love you," Gabrielle said.

Harry smiled. "Fancy going for a climb up the cliff?" he asked, pointing to the island.

"Why not dock at the pier?" Gabrielle asked.

"I'm sure whoever's at the Chateau is watching the pier, but they won't expect us, or see us, if we come in from the cliff."

"What about the boat?"

"Well," Harry drawled. "We can either anchor it and disillusion it, or charm it to return to Marseilles without us."

"How do we get home then?" Gabrielle asked.

"Assuming that we can bring the field down, we'll Disapparate."

"I vote for anchoring the boat and disillusioning it," Gabrielle said. "It keeps our options open. And, to answer your question, yeah, I fancy a climb. It looks like a good rock face. Who's going first?"

"I figured that I'd carry the equipment, so I'd let you go first," Harry said.

"You just want to be able to watch my bum from below," Gabrielle said lightly.

"I won't say that the thought hadn't occurred to me," Harry said.

"You *are* a pervert," Gabrielle said before she kissed him.

"Your pervert, love, never forget that."

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They changed their gear silently, transfiguring what they didn't already have on board the boat. Anchoring the now-disillusioned boat, they Apparated to the foot of the cliff face. They used charms to lighten each other and the equipment pack that Harry was carrying, figuring that they would climb up without equipment, but set pitons to support a rope for their exit, if necessary. Cinching the last strap into place, Gabrielle gave Harry a long look, and then kissed him.

"For luck," she said when she broke away from the kiss.

"You don't have to have a reason, love," he replied, watching her scale the face of the cliff. As usual, the view from below was excellent.

He waited until she was half-way up the cliff before starting his own ascent, thankful that this climb was aided by the lightening charms. When they were both on top, he Disillusioned them both, creeping quietly until they were underneath the magical field covering the Chateau.

"Uh, Harry, what do you see around the Chateau?" Gabrielle asked nervously.

"Nothing but a big ugly stone castle; why, what should I be seeing?" he asked, reaching for his charmed sunglasses.

"I don't think the glasses are going to help," Gabrielle said grimly.

"What do you see?" Harry asked.

"A ring of fire around the Chateau – ten metres high and about ten metres from the wall – I didn't see it until we were under the magical field," Gabrielle replied.

"Veela specific illusion?" Harry asked.

"I don't think so," Gabrielle replied. "If it's what I think it is, we may need to divide our labour differently than planned."

"Talk to me," Harry said, setting up a peeping charm to scan inside the Chateau.

"If it's what I think it is, it's something Nana used to tell me stories about. It's a Veela specific curse – rather much like a fence that replicates the effect of the Cruciatus curse. A few centuries ago there was a nasty blood-feud in the Basque highlands between the Flock and a clan of Basque wizards. They'd set this curse up around a Veela encampment in the shape of a hemisphere and then set fire to the encampment. The Veela would burn to death rather than cross the curse barrier. I thought the clan that specialized in that curse died out three hundred years ago," she said bitterly.

"How do we tell for sure?" Harry asked.

"The same way my ancestors did – trial and error," Gabrielle said, sighing deeply.

"Let me try it first," Harry said.

"I'm not going to fight you for that honour," Gabrielle replied.

"Walk me up to the ring of fire," he said, taking her by the hand.

"We're here," she said after they'd crossed the field separating the cliff from the Chateau.

Harry reached out. "I can feel something here, but it's just a faint trace of magic," he said, stepping back and facing Gabrielle.

"Silence me," she commanded, closing her eyes as she gathered up her resolve. "If I start to scream, pull me away from the Chateau – if the stories are accurate, once I touch the barrier, I'll be stuck to it."

"Charming," Harry replied, applying a silencing charm to his beloved.

He felt the crackle of energy before he heard anything as she stretched out her hand, presenting the back of her hand to the invisible barrier. He could see her flinch before she thrust her hand forward the last few inches. Her body went taut and her head flung back, mouth open. She was screaming, but making no noise. Harry yanked her backwards, feeling terrible.

He removed the silencing charm. "Are you okay?" he asked.

Gabrielle was gasping, cradling her hand as she caught her breath. "Now I am. I suspect that this was designed to keep Veela in, rather than keep Veela out, but unless I can Apparate into the Chateau, I don't think I'm going to be able to follow you in, love."

"Still think I should go in?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, just be careful. How are you going in, disguised or disillusioned?"

"Both – if I have to bluff my way in, I'll look like a deliveryman, picking up the Veelas," he said.

"That's not much of a plan," Gabrielle said.

"This may be just reconnaissance of an empty building," Harry said soothingly.

"And it may be full of armed men, some of whom are pretty desperate wizards," Gabrielle countered.

"I'll be careful," Harry replied.

"It's not just your life on the line any more, Harry," Gabrielle said, biting her lips.

Harry pushed a strand of platinum hair back behind her ear. "I know – that's what really scares me, love, but I've got something to live for again."

Gabrielle smiled sadly, but said nothing as she transfigured his climbing clothes into clothes that might be worn by an underworld hit-man, or high level messenger, taking care to adjust his now-transfigured hat so that it obscured his famous scar.

When it came time for Harry to pass through the ring of fire, she looked away until he was through. She then busied herself with satchel charges from the other package, reckoning that she'd destroy at least two of the anchors holding the field while her love was scouting the building.

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The Chateau d'If was built originally as a fortress, resembling a squat ugly castle with four towers, three of which survived to the present day. The westernmost tower was used as a museum, visited by tourists who wanted to see the prison made famous by the Dumas novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

In his first walk around the perimeter of the castle he'd determined that there was nothing alive in the museum tower. Walking through the middle tower he couldn't get a flicker on anything either, leaving the easternmost tower, where he suspected he'd get a different result. He alarmed each door on the outside of the castle, a lesson he'd learned the hard way during the years he'd been searching for Horcruxes.

Like the other towers, the east tower was unlocked, but it did have some simple alarms, both technical and magical, which he bypassed with ease. The life-seeking charm indicated that there *were* living beings of *some* sort in the building, so with a brief smile, he refined his search strategy. The below-ground levels didn't indicate anything living, so after alarming those, he moved on. He was still disillusioned, walking with silenced footsteps. The second and third floors were also empty, but the life-seeking charm flared brightly when he passed the door leading to the fourth floor. He quickly ran up to the upper floors, confirming that they were as empty as the first few floors, alarming the doors as he cleared the floor.

He took a deep breath as he placed his palm on the stairwell door leading to the fourth floor.

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Gabrielle was worried, which wasn't a surprise; she was always worried when she was doing operations in the field. The ring of fire had further shaken her composure; the notion that her soon-to-be mate could get in serious trouble in the Chateau and she couldn't do much beyond calling for back-up was disturbing. The ring of fire taunted her; Unai knew she was looking for the children; the barrier was just further proof that Unai was

hedging his bets against the day that she'd show up on the island.

The process for seating the explosive charge around the anchor stone was tedious, but keeping her hands busy helped with the agony of waiting, which, like all waiting, still sucked. She connected the igniter at last to explosive charge and the switching device (a Muggle mobile phone handset) and eyed the next location. She decided that the next charge could wait a moment; she was going to reach out with her tracking senses and see if she could locate Harry, who she already missed, or any of the children. To her surprise she was able to locate Harry's scrambled signature with relative ease, and shortly thereafter, Matzalen's scrambled signature also. Harry was pensive – he was pacing through the Chateau.

Better pensive than under attack, Gabrielle thought, smiling as she imagined him racing through the halls of the Chateau, disillusioned, walking with silenced footsteps. She couldn't find the signatures of the twins, but given the ferocious interference coming from the magical field and the ring of fire and the fact that as younger children, they were bound to have a fainter signature; she was not surprised. Matzalen's signature, on the other hand, was so strong that Gabrielle was sure that she was there, which was comforting.

It was time to place the second charge.

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Matzalen was surprised to see the man in the hallways. The number of Master's men and women would ebb and flow in the building, but everyone seemed to have disappeared that day, which was odd. She reckoned that he was a wizard because he'd managed to surprise her. The stone walls in the building made for loud echoes, which she'd become rather adept at reading, being able to identify individual members of Master's retinue by the sounds they made. This man, however, was moving silently, which meant that he'd probably used magic to deaden the sound of his footsteps.

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle, do you work here?" he asked politely as his eyes moved up and down her scantily dressed body.

It was time to be charming. "After a fashion," she said, tugging on the hem of her tunic, which then tightened across her chest.

"I'm here for the Veela," he said, assuming the posture that indicated that he was used to being obeyed.

Matzalen froze, her mind gripped in panic. She'd heard whisperings of some scheme concerning the twins, but she thought she had weeks, if not months to deal with that. "Veela?" she asked.

"Yeah, some little blonde girls," the man replied, looking mildly put out. "Do you know where they are?"

Thinking fast, Matzalen began to flirt, throwing everything she had into the attempt. "Why would you want little girls, Monsieur, when you can have a big girl?" she asked, striking a provocative pose. She strained to push her allure to heights she'd never attempted.

Understanding seemed to dawn in the man's eyes, along with something else that Matzalen couldn't quite read. "Do you know where the little girls are?" he asked again.

"Why don't you come to my room and we can talk about it?" she suggested, giving him a wink as she turned away. Watching the shadows on the walls, she could see that he was following, so she made sure that her walk was worth watching.

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Placing the second explosive charge was as tedious as placing the first, but at least now she knew what she was doing. Kneeling on stones had its limits, so before she inserted the igniter into the charge, she stood to stretch her aching back and then reached out with her senses to find Harry.

She screamed as she felt the blade slide into her back, piercing between her ribs. As her knees buckled, she felt a slash behind one leg and knew that she was bleeding, badly. Her vision went black for a moment. Gabrielle took a deep breath, noting that she could do so without a fiery pain in the right side of her chest. She reached around to the back of her left knee, feeling for blood, but finding only the dry fabric of her jeans. Her mind was racing, trying to interpret the mixed signals she was experiencing. She reached out with her senses again, panicking when she found him. His lively signature was throbbing and fading; she could feel the pain in his leg and chest and knew that he was about to black out again. Veela light poured from her as she tried to put the pieces together. In a burst of clarity, she grabbed the smaller of her two satchels and ran towards the ring of fire. She was deathly afraid of being caught in the barrier, but more afraid of what she knew would happen if she didn't take prompt action. She closed her eyes, concentrating on Harry's fading signature as she sprinted towards the Chateau. She disappeared a moment before striking the ring of fire, a scream playing on her lips as she did so.

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There was blood everywhere. She'd struck on the right, assuming that's where his heart would be, slicing his leg with her stiletto above the knee for good measure to make sure that once he was down, he'd stay down. He appeared to be breathing still, although he made an odd gurgling sound as he did so. Matzalen decided that she had to turn him over so she could properly slit his throat and put him out of his misery; even thugs deserved some measure of mercy.

He began to pulse with a faint silver light as she turned him over, which was odd, but not nearly as odd as the scar on his forehead once she got him on his back. Eskarne's voice rang in her memory. "Hair that's black like the night with a scar on his face." She then remembered the only time she'd ever seen a man produce silver light, remembering how the light would flow from Papa when he was particularly proud of Maman. The shock that she might have mortally wounded a Companion of the Dawn, combined with the horror from the blood everywhere made her shrink away from the man.

Gabrielle Apparated into the room, smacking into the wall as she still had a fair amount of forward momentum from clearing the ring of fire. Pushing

away from the wall, she circled, wand out, scanning the room, noting at some level the smell of blood, the cowering, shimmering girl in the corner, a bloody stiletto on the floor in front of her, and the supine body of her chosen mate.

"Don't move, Matzalen; if you move I will not hesitate to kill you," she said coolly as she crouched beside Harry. *Airway, Breathing, Circulation.* She ran the first diagnostic – shock was setting in, his right lung was in trouble, and he was bleeding profusely from his leg; all things that she could deal with, but the bleeding was the most urgent problem, if he bled out, there wasn't much the best Healer could do to revive him. She turned his body over, pressing down on the spurting wound.

"Get me a towel," she commanded, forgetting her prior threat to Matzalen.

Matzalen complied, bringing a fresh towel, which Gabrielle used to compress the wound, stopping the bleeding for a moment.

"Who are you?" Matzalen asked, her voice trembling and small.

"We're Aurors, we're here to rescue you," Gabrielle said curtly. "Here, press down on this; I've got other things to do."

The two Veela switched positions, Matzalen pushing down on the back of the man's leg while Gabrielle pulled some materials from her pouch before she crouched beside Harry. She waved her wand in intricate, small patterns above his body, concentrating first on the leg, then on the back, over the crimson spot below his shoulder blade.

She had to return to the leg several times; the repair would not hold. "Harry, you bastard, you can't die on me – we've come too far," she barked as she returned to the leg to try yet again to patch the severed artery.

Harry murmured something indistinct in reply. Gabrielle ignored him for the moment until she finally got the patch on the artery to hold. Bending her head low to plant a kiss on his cheek, she murmured, "What was that you said, love?"

"Not a bastard, I'm an orphan, like you," he whispered, opening his eyes briefly as he tried to smile.

"He is a Companion of the Dawn?" Matzalen asked.

Gabrielle looked up, staring at Matzalen as if seeing her for the first time. "Yes, he is to be my mate, if he lives," she said.

"I'm sorry, I thought he was one of *them*," Matzalen said, looking down at the floor.

"We'll sort that out after we get you out of here," Gabrielle said. "Where are your sisters?"

"Across the hall," Matzalen whispered, blinking her eyes as she started to weave.

"Don't you dare faint on me, Matzalen," Gabrielle commanded, casting a calming charm on the girl. Matzalen's colour improved a bit. "Harry, what's buzzing in your shirt?"

"Alarms – someone's entered the castle," he said weakly. "Can you help me sit up?"

"Are you able?" Gabrielle said.

"Able enough," he replied. "Why can't I breathe right?"

"Your right lung's collapsed," Gabrielle said.

"Well, that's a first," Harry said sardonically.

"See, I told you that you'd have new experiences hanging out with me," Gabrielle quipped.

"Yeah, well, up to the last hour, it's been great," Harry replied. "So, Matzalen, where are your sisters? It's time to get out of here."

"They're across the hall," Matzalen said, not looking up from the floor.

"Can you do a Disillusionment Charm?" Harry asked.

Matzalen shook her head.

"Let me Disillusion you, you'll be almost invisible. Get your sisters and get them back here," he said to Matzalen, flicking his wand over her head. A moment later, appearing as a wraith, she left the room. Harry turned to Gabrielle. "Did you blow the anchors to the field?"

This time Gabrielle shook her head.

"Let's blow them then. You did bring the mobile?" Harry asked.

"Uh, yeah, I've got it, but the igniter isn't hooked to the switch on the second charge," Gabrielle said.

"Something come up?" Harry asked.

"You might say that," Gabrielle said.

Well, I appreciate your priorities – let's blow the first charge. Wait a minute, if the field is still up, how did you get in here?" he asked.

"I Apparated in," she replied.

"How'd you not get Splinched?" he asked with concern.

"I Apparated to your signature."

"Smart girl – how was it passing through the ring of fire?" he asked.

"Painful, but at least I didn't get stuck in it, which was my fear," she replied.

Gabrielle pulled her mobile from her satchel, thumbing a number in. When she pressed the 'send' button, they heard a distant rumble of thunder. "Well, one anchor blown, for all the good that it will do," she said.

"Can you call in reinforcements?" Harry asked.

"Good idea," Gabrielle replied, thumbing another number into the phone, pressing the 'send' button and then placing the handset back into her satchel.

"Nobody home?" Harry asked.

"Nobody I wanted to talk to," Gabrielle replied. "I put in the code for 'officer down' which usually gets a prompt response. They'll home in on the location of the phone, although, truth be told, I'd rather be somewhere else when they get here.

The door opened, admitting a noisy, but barely visible Matzalen. "They're gone! They're usually in their room right now, but I couldn't find them anywhere on the floor," she said breathlessly.

Harry braced himself against a chair and pushed up, tentatively trying his weight on his injured leg, wincing as he did so. He conjured a cane, which made standing bearable. "Where would they be this time of day?" he asked the still transparent Matzalen.

"Sometimes they'd be in the kitchens, trying to mooch a snack from the cooks," Matzalen replied.

"Are the kitchens on the second floor?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Matzalen replied.

"Nothing there on my way up," Harry said.

"That doesn't mean that they didn't go down there while you were coming up," Gabrielle countered.

"True," Harry replied. "Are you up to being a scout, Matzalen?"

"Yes, I think so," the teen replied.

"Go down to the kitchens – if you can bring them back without being seen, do so, otherwise find them and come back to us, here. Don't try to fight with the men, you won't get the element of surprise this time," Harry cautioned. He handed her a small disk. "Break this if you spot Unai's men, break it twice if you need help."

"What's it do?" Matzalen asked.

"It sends me a silent message," Harry replied.

Matzalen nodded. "Can I have my knife back?" she asked.

Gabrielle picked it up, wiped it off and handed it to Harry, who wordlessly Disillusioned it before handing it to Matzalen. He then charmed her shoes for silence. "I plan on us sneaking out of here, not fighting our way out."

"Right," replied Matzalen, "but I feel better when I have it with me."

"Get going," Gabrielle said, reaching back into her satchel.

"What are you doing?" Harry asked.

"Finishing patching you up – you're still a litre or so short in the fluids department," she said, pushing an auto-inject ampoule against his arm. "That should burn a little."

"It does," Harry said, nodding. "What is it?"

"Blood replenishing solution, healing matrix and an energy boost – you're going to be wired for a while," Gabrielle warned. "You'll feel better than you really are, so don't overdo it."

"Yeah, right," Harry replied. "Let's hobble across the hall and see if you can get a lock on the twins' signature."

Gabrielle nodded, but instead of moving towards the door, she leaned against Harry, placing her forehead on his shoulder before gingerly placing her arms on his waist.

“All right, love?” Harry whispered.

Gabrielle shook her head. “I was so scared, Harry. I felt the knife go in,” she whispered in reply. “I could feel your life slipping away.”

“Good thing; I was ready for a lot of things, getting perforated by one of the girls I was rescuing was not one of them. Moody would have my head if he were alive,” Harry said.

“Yeah, well, after we get out of here, I’m not going to leave your side for a couple of days,” Gabrielle said.

“I’m not going to complain,” Harry said. “Think we should clean up?”

Gabrielle cast a wandless Scourgify as they left the room.

“Pretty good – no wonder your flat is always so clean,” Harry quipped.

“One of my many talents,” Gabrielle said, smirking before she closed the door.

~+~

Harry stood out in the hallway, standing watch while Gabrielle tried to get a good fix on the twins’ signature, standing stock still in the centre of the room, hands outstretched to either side. Harry closed the door, hoping that the light she was casting off wasn’t visible from the room’s small, high window. The signal from Matzalen’s disk pinged on Harry’s notepad, one ping, indicating that she’d spotted Unai’s men.

“Did you get it?” he asked her as she beckoned for him to come into the room. She nodded in reply.

“They are in the kitchen. Matzalen was with them briefly and now she’s coming our way,” Gabrielle said.

“She spotted some thugs on that floor,” Harry replied, pointing to the glowing dot on the exposed page of his notepad.

“Lovely, the day is looking up,” Gabrielle said.

Another dot began to glow. “Someone else has just entered the castle – this time from the cliff-side entrance,” Harry said.

“More of Unai’s men?” Gabrielle asked.

“Maybe, maybe some of our Auror friends,” Harry said cautiously. “For now, I’m going to assume that they’re all hostile.”

There was a very quiet knock on the door, which then opened, admitting the faint outline of a very frightened teenaged Veela.

“The place is crawling with Unai’s men,” she gasped.

“Were you spotted?” Gabrielle asked.

“I don’t think so,” Matzalen replied. “The girls are hiding in a pantry; they’re very good at being quiet for a long, long time.”

“Well, I’m feeling a bit peckish, what do you say we go down to the kitchens?” Harry asked cheerfully.

Matzalen look at Harry and then at Gabrielle. “Is he always like this?”

Gabrielle smiled and then shook her head. “Only in front of strangers, once he gets to know you he’ll start being normal,” she said.

“Thanks, love,” Harry replied, applying Disillusioning charms to Gabrielle and then himself, repeating the silencing charms for their shoes.

~+~

Evading the wandering crews of searching men was not that difficult; they made a lot of noise and weren’t particularly thorough in their searches. It still took a while to reach the kitchens. Harry placed a fresh set of alarms in the hallways leading to the kitchens, and after a bit of hesitation, applied some anti-personnel hexes in layers.

“Nasty stuff, Mr. Potter,” Gabrielle commented.

“I hate surprises,” Harry replied.

“You assume that we’ll be able to exit by way of the cliffs?” Gabrielle asked.

“Right now, once we get past the ring of fire, I’m assuming that we can do a line of sight Disapparation to the mainland,” Harry replied.

“Are you in any shape to Apparate?” Gabrielle asked with concern.

“Better than fighting my way out,” he said glibly. “During the war, I got chewed up on a regular basis, so this is just like old times.”

Gabrielle rolled her eyes, following Matzalen into the kitchen.

Matzalen pantomimed flicking a wand at the windows and doors. Gabrielle replied by silencing and sealing the room, obscuring the windows with a one-way charm. Matzalen then gave a series of clucks which were answered by the twins from their hiding place. A low cabinet door opened and a small pale hand emerged. The hand was followed by an angelic looking, albeit worried girl, and a moment later, her twin.

Gabrielle crouched down. "I'm a friend of your maman. We're here to rescue you," she said calmly.

"I told you a sister was looking for us," Eskarne said to Matzalen reproachfully.

"Yeah, well, he was dressed as a gangster, so I wasn't taking chances," Matzalen replied.

Evidently she'd told her sisters a bit about the misadventures of the day.

"Right," Harry said, looking at the door leading to the hallway.

"What was it that you said about the ring of fire?" Matzalen asked Gabrielle nervously.

"Unai has set up one of the old fire rings around the building," Gabrielle explained.

"So we're trapped?" Matzalen asked.

"Not quite, I managed to get through to get here," Gabrielle said. "Do you know how to Apparate?"

Matzalen shook her head.

"Then we're going to have to take you out one at a time," Gabrielle said.

Harry lifted his eyebrows.

"Not everyone can Apparate twice their own weight, love, some of us have limits," Gabrielle said.

"Master said that no one could Apparate or Portkey onto the island, and that *we'd* die if we stepped foot out of the building," Matzalen protested.

"We've put a crack into the anti-Apparation field covering the island," Harry explained. "We're going to slip out through the crack."

"Is that *cheating*?" Eskarne asked solemnly.

"Yes, but we're allowed to cheat when we're rescuing good little Veelas," Gabrielle said cheerfully.

"Oh, good," Garazi said, nodding her head.

~+~

Harry wished he'd done a half-a-dozen things differently; he wished that he'd left listening and peeping devices at the doors rather than just simple alarms; he wished he'd brought more tools with him for man-trapping the hallways; but most of all, he wished he'd properly identified himself to Matzalen, but in his defence, he hadn't recognized her until she started pushing out the Veela allure.

They'd made their way to the ground floor without mishap. The life-seeking charms revealed that there were at least two dozen life-forms knocking about in the castle beside them, although the charm wasn't specific enough to declare whether the life forms were Magical or Muggle. The way to the cliff, and thereafter the beach below seemed to be clear, but they were waiting a few minutes until the sun was lower in the sky, making it harder still to see Disillusioned forms.

The twins bickered among themselves as to who would be the first to leave with Gabrielle. Matzalen finally intervened, suggesting that they play the Wizarding version of rock-paper-scissors to decide the honour, with Harry serving straight-faced as the judge. After three rounds, Garazi was declared the winner. The pair slipped out of the castle, Disapparated through the ring of fire, sprinted to the edge of the cliff, and with Garazi holding on to Gabrielle's back for dear life, scrambled down the rope to the relative safety of the beach below. Harry was standing watch above, waiting for the signalling charm from Gabrielle to let him know that she'd made it to the beach. Once he felt its muted click, he could breathe again. Another click announced that she was climbing the rock face again, pausing to wait for a signal from him that the way was clear.

With a brief break for a stolen kiss, Gabrielle was out the door again, this time with Eskarne, punching through the ring of fire, sprinting to the edge of the cliff and down the ropes again. Harry leaned against the wall, listening intently to the murmuring sounds of the castle. He did something with his magic, or was it Gabrielle's magic? It was hard to separate the two magics any more. Reaching out, he found a wisp of something that smelled and tasted like Gabrielle – a ghost of a scent, a shade of flavour. Gabrielle was on the beach again, reuniting Garazi and Eskarne, who would no doubt be holding hands, hiding in some crag until their sister joined them.

His notebook pinged again. The alarm on the doorway leading their way indicated that the hallway had been breached. He gave a warning notice to Gabrielle and quickly turned to Matzalen.

"I'm going to make whoever's in the hallway wish that they'd stayed in bed today," Harry said cheerfully. "Stay here and wait for Gabrielle. It's twilight, so if you stand still you're the next best thing to invisible."

Matzalen nodded solemnly, but there was an odd glint in her eye.

Perhaps she doesn't take kindly to being bossed around by men, Harry pondered. *Not surprising actually, given everything she's been through in the last few days*.

With a feral grin, he slipped on his charmed glasses, going hunting in the dark. Whatever Gabrielle had pumped into him was beginning to fade, but he still had plenty of energy and was pleasantly on edge.

I'm getting too old for this, he thought. *Maybe if I buy the station, I can get a job announcing Quidditch with Ron.*

He'd decided on his own rules of engagement long ago; he wasn't an Auror on *this* mission, he was a hit-wizard. Anything that posed a threat would be eliminated. The only thing that put a kink in that was the fair possibility that there might be French Aurors on the island. The phone had fallen out of Gabrielle's satchel some time during their clandestine romp through the castle, so contact with their reinforcements wasn't going to happen easily. If an Auror spent hours tracking it down, he'd apologize to him later. The hallway was pitch dark; Harry'd made sure that none of the Muggle lighting was operational with a few well-placed *Reducto* r curses. Any Magical form of lighting would pose more of a hazard to the light bearer than it would to Harry right now.

A single blob of heat appeared, peeking tentatively around the corner. Harry thought it was a man. The blob was joined by two more blobs. He could hear whispering as they ducked back around the corner. He smiled. Drawing his wand he conjured a handful of metal beads, sending them flying silently down the hallway, banking around the corner where they then struck the wall, pinging and ringing in the darkness. From the muffled oath he heard, he guessed that at least one of the men had slipped and fallen. If he could run, he would have attacked at that moment, but he was still relying on the cane for walking, hardly the portrait of a hit-wizard at the moment.

He saw the cutting curse slide blindly down the hallway – it shimmered with a blue tint when viewed through the charmed glasses. Dodging it nimbly, he sent a complicated charm back in reply: a bolus of magic that would burst into radiant flames as it approached anything alive larger than a mouse, followed by a hail of stunners. Given the screams and thuds he was fairly certain that he'd taken at least two players out of the game. It was time to finish this off so he could then retreat and fight another day.

He heard a familiar voice shout out from further down the hallway. "Surrender and live, Unai! Both ends of this hallway are controlled by Aurors." Harry smiled, only one Auror he knew could sound so perfectly poised while shouting in the darkness.

Unai uttered a more creative curse in reply, inviting Auror Jacque Fuso to do something that was physiologically impossible.

Harry decided that he didn't want to invite friendly fire. "Fuso!" he called out.

"Potter?" Jacque replied. "I warned you about getting underfoot."

"Yeah, well, I was actually trying to get out of here in time for dinner, but I was delayed by some complications," Harry shouted, taking care to move forward several feet after shouting.

Predictably, Unai took advantage of the opportunity to send a flock of severing curses to the location where he'd just been standing, exploding as they hit the wall, generating shards of rock as they dissipated. Harry replied by sending his own flock of stunners back, using the trajectory of the severing curses to approximate Unai's location. There was a muffled grunt and thud. Unless Unai was a very good bluffer, he was probably down now. Harry smiled and began to walk forward, slowly.

Harry rounded the bend in the hallway carefully. The body shapes were glowing blobs on the floor. Auror Fuso approached from the opposite end, lighting up the area with his wand.

"They're still alive; I thought you were a Hit Wizard," Fuso said, half in jest.

"I suspected that there were Aurors about, I didn't want to take a chance on killing you by mistake," Harry said truthfully.

Auror Fuso shot ropes around the lesser gangsters and then placed a stick-tight gag on Unai's mouth before reviving him. "The Veela are well?" he asked Harry.

"Yes," Harry replied, feeling uncomfortable.

"We found the mobile phone upstairs and spent a good amount of time looking for them," Fuso said. "Where are they now?"

"Away from the castle – we have a boat off-shore on the eastern side of the island," Harry said misleadingly.

"I commend you on your rescue, and on your victory in this little duel. Should you ever wish to work for a living, I will gladly sponsor your application for the Auror Cadre," Auror Fuso said, dropping a knee for a most formal bow.

Harry bowed in reply, tumbling over when he discovered, too late, that Fuso had hit him with a silent *Petrificus Totalis* when his head was bowed.

"Your orders, sir?" Fuso asked Unai after removing the gag.

"Find the Veelas, I'd like the little ones back if you can, but the older ones are of little use to me now. If they resist, kill them all," Unai said coolly. "Oh, and prop the hero up before you go, I want to talk to him for a while before I kill him."

"If you could extend the field, sir, I can insure that the Veela will not escape," Fuso said.

"It's done," Unai said.

Harry calmed himself, being fully aware of the danger of accidental magic in a confined space. He then reached out, feeling for Gabrielle's signature. He felt a surge of energy, warming his centre. He was thankful for once that the petrification masked his feelings.

Fuso turned to face Harry. "It's nothing personal, Monsieur, this is just business," Fuso said.

Harry tried to make a sour face in reply, but he was still frozen.

"Your Veela is another question, however," he said maliciously. "If she had been more generous with her charms in the past, I might have let her live." With that, he disappeared into the darkness.

Unai pushed himself up, walking over to pick up and pocket Harry's wand.

"You fight well, Monsieur, but I expected you to be more imposing," Unai said. He then flicked his wand at Harry's neck.

Harry felt feeling return to his face, allowing him to wrinkle his nose. "You're not the first to say that."

"I wanted to thank you, and your soon to be dead lady friend; your actions have given me a wonderful opportunity to reassess my commitments and, as my American friends would say, reinvent myself," Unai said, pacing back and forth.

"Tired of being a gangster?" Harry asked.

"In a word, yes," Unai said. "Eliminating or incarcerating my organization has allowed me to take my investments and redeploy them without worrying about any of them coming after me. I'd been hoping to cap that investment portfolio off with the amount I'd been promised in return for the young Veelas, but your presence here allows me to mitigate that loss."

"How's that?" Harry asked.

"There are still many people in my world who would pay respectable amounts of money to the man who can produce your head on a pike," Unai said.

"Comforting to think that I can still be useful to someone," Harry replied.

"Any last requests?" Unai asked.

"Dinner with Gabrielle at the Miramar?" Harry replied.

"I'm afraid that I'll have to go in your stead, Monsieur," Unai said unctuously.

"I don't think Gabrielle will agree to that," Harry quipped.

"Alas, she won't be there either," Unai said.

"Don't count on it, Monsieur," a voice said from behind Unai. Wraithlike hands appeared in the dim light, clapping down on Unai's ears.

Harry felt a surge of familiar energy. Unai collapsed at his feet, smoke pouring from his nose, mouth and ears. Harry felt warmth and feeling return to his extremities; the paralysis was gone.

"Excellent timing, Matzalen," Harry said.

Matzalen smiled and then dropped a curtsey. She then extended a hand to Harry helping him up. "We need to get out of here. Your boat was shelled and sunk by a police boat," Matzalen said.

"Where are your sisters?" he asked, grabbing his cane.

"On the beach with Gabrielle, they're safe for now, but we really need to get out of here," Matzalen hissed as they darted down the hallway.

"My wand," Harry said, stopping short.

"I'll go back and get it," Matzalen said, the fierce look returning to her eyes.

"Go ahead, you can certainly move faster than I can right now," Harry said. It was strange watching her disappear, silently, into the darkness. He slipped his charmed glasses back on to improve his vision in the dark. She returned in a trice, carrying Harry's wand in one hand, Unai's wand in the other.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said, taking his proffered wand. "Let's go find your sisters."

~+~

The sun had set by the time they were outside the castle. After the application of Disillusioning and Lightening charms, Harry scrambled down the rope, followed closely by Matzalen. Once they were both on firm ground, Harry dissolved the rope's anchor, letting the rope fall to the beach in a jumble. He looked for footprints or other signs of where the girls might be hidden, but the rough rocks and pebbles of the beach were singularly uncooperative. He stretched out his senses, seeking Gabrielle's signature. When he found it a burst of energy flared in his centre.

Are you safe? Gabrielle whispered in his mind.

Quite. And you?

Never better.

Where are you? He asked.

Turn left, head north for fifty metres or so.

Harry motioned to Matzalen to follow him, walking north, up the beach. He didn't see any obvious hiding places, there being a sheer rock face on one side, a narrow stretch of rocky beach and then the broad expanse of ocean on the other. Every fifth step or so, he'd close his eyes and try to pick up a hint of familiar magic.

That's cheating, Monsieur Potter, Gabrielle's voice chimed in his mind.

Well, if I am to be a Tracker's mate, it is only fair that I try to understand her world, he replied.

He heard a giggle in reply. Once he'd made his way fifty metres up the beach, he stopped, slowly turning in place. He felt a flicker of magic, familiar magic. Beckoning with one hand, he walked towards the face of the cliff, firing a tickling charm into the rock.

A portion of the rock face disappeared, revealing a small opening in the rock. Matzalen ran forward, where she was mobbed by her sisters, dissolving into a heap of squealing, chattering girls.

Gabrielle walked forward slowly; pressing her cheek against his chest as she carefully wrapped her arms around him.

"So, Fuso was working for Unai all along," she said.

"It appears so," Harry replied.

"Aurors have been searching the beach. They shelled our boat," she said sadly.

"A pity, we'll have *so much* paperwork to fill out at the rental station," Harry replied in deadpan fashion.

Gabrielle squeezed him in reply. "The field has been extended out into the ocean – we can't Disapparate," she said quietly.

"I have my own notion on that," Harry said. "We can still do point-to-point under the field, and you Apparated to a person when you came to me."

"Which means?" Gabrielle said.

"Get a lock on a strong magical signature back in Marseilles, and we'll all Disapparate together," Harry said.

"Simple, direct, and in violation of about three different principles of magic – I like it," Gabrielle said.

"Well, either that or we could swim," he suggested.

"We'll try your way; any suggestions as to the target?" Gabrielle asked.

"Can you find the District Superintendent?" he asked.

"In my sleep," she said confidently. "Gather around girls, we're going home."

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The chapter title is a reference to a saying in scripture – the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. See John 10: 11-18.

For those of you who couldn't picture it, Matzalen conjured a fireball between her hands – when Unai's head was wedged between them. As deaths go, it would be relatively painless, which is a pity, but when she went back to fetch Harry's wand, she applied another fireball to Unai's crotch, sending a message of sorts.

Chocolate in the next chapter – I promise.

Lost and Found - 2nd Cycle Bind and Loose

Bind and Loose

The waiting room outside of the surgical ward at St. Luke's hospital in Marseilles was much like any other waiting room. The chairs were hard and uncomfortable, the room was cold, and waiting there was the closest thing to hell-on-earth that Gabrielle had yet experienced in her life; she should be at Harry's side, not sitting out here with out of date magazines.

Earlier that day, they'd appeared in the District Superintendent's office. The twins appeared first, followed by Matzalen, then Harry and Gabrielle appeared in tandem. Madame Artzai had been fetched to be reunited with her daughters, and after the world's most efficient debriefing, Gabrielle had been packed off to St. Luke's to accompany Harry, who needed more specialized care than could be provided by the Mediwitch on duty at the District Office.

Harry was suffering from the obvious wounds, and a nasty case of magical depletion from punching five bodies through an almost intact anti-Apparation field covering the Isle d' If. The Healer in charge of intake decided that Harry's collapsed lung wasn't going to get any better without prompt treatment, so in he went to the trauma surgical ward. The Healer in charge was a frantic Italian wizard with very tired eyes who left the ward about forty-five minutes after Harry went in, cursing proficiently in at least six languages. He returned with an older Healer in tow, a Veela her mum's age who looked somewhat familiar. They'd been in the trauma surgical ward for three hours since then with no word or progress reports. She'd considered blowing the (sealed) doors off of their charmed hinges and barging in, but the adult part of her mind told her that would be a foolish course of action at best, and possibly fatal to Harry, so she fumed and paced and waited and then repeated the cycle.

Eventually, she leaned her head back and closed her eyes, falling into a fitful sleep. She opened one eye when she heard the doors open. The Veela Healer came through the door, stripping off her mask and cap and robes.

"Gabrielle? I'm Zurine Miller," she said, extending her hand. She had a firm, albeit cold handshake. "Please pardon my hands, its cold for a reason in the surgical ward. Your companion is in excellent shape and is resting now; he'll be conscious in an hour or so and with any luck, we'll discharge him in a day or two."

"What took so long?" Gabrielle asked, smiling at the positive report.

"Your repair work on his leg was excellent, but we were concerned with the lung, trying to repair the damage with minimal scarring. Healer Verde called me in when he recognized that your companion was not responding properly," Healer Miller said.

"What was wrong?" Gabrielle asked.

Healer Miller laughed. "Nothing was *wrong*, it just wasn't what Healer Verde was expecting – he thought he was working on a wounded, but otherwise healthy human male, but found that Harry's body was saturated with Veela magic, which caused a number of things to react differently, which is why I was called in. Once we started treating him like a Veela, everything responded as it should."

"But he's *not* a Veela," Gabrielle protested.

"Try telling his magic that," Healer Miller replied. "He'll be transferred to Ward Seven after he's cleared by the Anaesthetist, so if you want to spend the night in his room, you are welcome to do so."

"Thank you," Gabrielle said, more than slightly surprised. "That's very kind."

"Think nothing of it, Mrs. Potter," Healer Miller said, standing to take her leave.

"But - but we're not married yet," Gabrielle protested.

"Don't kid yourself, Mrs. Potter," Healer Miller said emphatically as she pushed open the door leading to the staff lounge. "Ward Seven, one hour."

"Right," Gabrielle said.

~+~

He was in the walled garden again. Autumn light filtered through the now-coloured leaves on the trees. The brilliant red in the maple leaves reminded him of Ginny, who, of course, was now before him, giving him a fierce hug before planting her lips on his. When they broke apart he could see the look of anger in her eyes.

"*What* were you thinking?" she demanded.

Well, I'm glad to see you too, love," he replied.

"Don't you try to schmooze me, Harry James Potter; you almost got yourself killed there! What were you thinking?" Ginny growled.

"What was I thinking? Well, I was thinking about Parvati, if you must know," Harry said.

"Matzalen doesn't look a thing like Parvati!" Ginny snapped.

"From behind she does, especially her legs," Harry said with a smile. "That got me thinking about Parvati, which led to thinking about the Yule Ball and what a prat I'd been, and then I returned to the here and now. At first I thought she was one of Unai's women, an Algerian, maybe. I didn't figure out that she was Matzalen until she started pouring out the old Veela charm. By then I was thinking that I didn't want to be talking to her out in the hallway because I couldn't tell who all was in the building just then."

"She nearly killed you!" Ginny exclaimed.

"But she didn't, and she really feels bad about it too," Harry said calmly.

"I want to see you again, Harry, but not like that," Ginny said.

"I think I can agree with that sentiment," Harry said. Looking around at the garden, he gestured towards the fountain, indicating that they could sit on the edge of the basin. "So, where am I right now?"

"You're sleeping off the anaesthesia in the hospital. Gabrielle's with you – in fact you're holding her right now," Ginny said with a wan smile.

Harry ran his fingers through his hair. "You must know how awkward this is for me," he said hesitantly. "I'm sitting with one girl while my body is with another."

Ginny leaned forward to kiss him chastely. "Don't worry about it, Harry, she's the one I would have chosen for you," she said sweetly. "But if you can't put it to rest, talk to Gabrielle about it, I'm sure she's not going to worry either."

"You knew about her, didn't you?" he asked.

Ginny looked at him quizzically. "About the match? I suspected it – and Fleur and I discussed it after I'd left school," she said. "You were mine at the time, so it didn't seem horribly relevant, but once I realized that I wasn't going to survive the Horcrux hunt, it did give me some comfort; I didn't want you to be alone. I'm rather happy about how things worked out – the two of you make a lovely pair. Changing the subject – what did you think of my niece?"

"Serita? She's got a good set of lungs when she's not getting what she wants," Harry observed.

"But she's such a good baby otherwise," Ginny said.

"I guess – I don't have a lot to compare her to," Harry replied.

"Hermione's preggers," Ginny said knowingly.

"Does she know yet?" Harry asked.

"No."

"Well, I'll act surprised when she tells me," Harry said.

"She'll see through you in an instant," Ginny warned.

"Probably."

"It's a good thing, Harry," Ginny said.

"What is?"

"Your life is moving on – you, your friends, they're getting jobs, getting married, having kids," Ginny said.

"I guess it is good. If it wasn't for Gabrielle, I'd still be a hermit in Alaska," Harry said. "She really is an amazing girl – when I'm with her, I feel alive again."

"Good on you, Harry, it's all going to happen for you, too, some of it quicker than you'd expect. Oh, by the way," she said, bending over to whisper something in his ear.

Harry's eyes opened wide. The whispering went on for quite a while. "Really? At the same time?" he asked.

Ginny nodded.

"Thanks, I guess, I wouldn't have thought of that," he said.

"That's why Lily asked me to tell you," Ginny said.

“You’ve got to admit that this is one of the stranger conversations I’ve ever had,” he said.

“Normal is for other blokes, Harry. Give my love to Gabrielle,” she said. “I’ve gotta go.”

“Sure thing,” Harry said tenderly. “I’ll never forget you, Ginny.”

Ginny, however, didn’t answer. The garden disappeared, leaving only the sound of the fountain.

~+~

Gabrielle had been awake for an hour and out of bed for half that time. She longed for a cup of coffee, even the terrible coffee prepared in the Hospital cafeteria, but she wanted to be there when her husband woke up.

Her husband. The thought warmed her. There was still a wedding (and a long-delayed wedding night) to come, but when she felt inside herself, she knew that their magics had merged, which meant only one thing to a matched Veela; there was no going back. She sat back in her chair, concentrating on a washcloth hanging from a towel bar next to the sink, wandlessly summoning and banishing the washcloth again and again.

She felt Harry before she heard him, stirring in the bed. She smiled when she saw the first thing he did was reach out to see if she were still in the bed.

“Looking for new ways to amuse yourself, love?” he asked, looking at the flying washcloth.

“No, just making a point,” Gabrielle replied.

“Which is?”

“I’m wandlessly summoning and banishing this,” Gabrielle said.

“I can see that,” he said bemusedly.

“As a general rule, Veela can’t do wandless magic,” Gabrielle explained. “Apart from the fireballs, which are Veela magic, and Apparation, which is Human magic, it’s well accepted among Xenobiologists that we can’t do much wandlessly.”

“And yet you’re doing it now,” he said.

“It’s your magic,” she said. “You were in surgery for a long, long time because the first Healer couldn’t figure out why nothing was working normally inside your chest when he was trying to repair your lung.”

“What was wrong?” he asked.

“According to the second Healer, your body is saturated with Veela magic,” Gabrielle explained.

Harry scowled, raising an eyebrow. “Yeah, right. Next thing, I’m going to start having this awesome power over addled females,” he said with a snort.

“Sorry to break it to you, love, but you’ve had that effect on any number of females all the time I’ve known you,” Gabrielle said. “You’re just too thick to notice it most of the time. It’s rather sweet, actually. No, the point is that our magic has merged, which is why the Healer let me spend the night in your room. She also insisted on calling me Mrs. Potter, which was both odd and wonderful at the same time.”

“Well, come here then and give your husband a kiss,” he said, smiling slyly.

“With pleasure.”

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To Gabrielle’s delight, Harry was discharged later that day. To her dismay, he insisted on returning to his room in the Barclay. Gabrielle whinged and pleaded and shimmered, but Harry was adamant; he didn’t need a nursemaid, and they’d spend the night together once they were married, not before.

“You’re worth waiting for, love,” he said, giving her a wink before closing the door.

Gabrielle stood in the hallway, summoning and throwing a fireball at the door to his flat, which had no effect, as the flat was protected by many layers of defensive magic. Harry pulled the door open long enough to throw a very small, but still very potent fireball back at her before pulling the door shut again. She dodged the fireball neatly, laughing as it shattered on the wall behind her.

She wasn’t going to win this battle. It was a good thing that she was getting married at the end of the week.

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By the middle of the week, Gabrielle was reconsidering the wisdom of throwing a church wedding with less than a week’s worth of preparation, admitting that her husband-to-be had it right – she didn’t really care for these details, she just wanted to be *married*. Once the news got out that the somewhat notorious Gabrielle Delacour and the very famous Harry Potter were getting married in a small, private church wedding, all sorts of help was volunteered, and in most cases, donated to the couple. The principal organist at a Paris music conservatory volunteered to provide the music,

provided for the twins; the twins were chosen as flower girls, and to Matzalen's amazement, she was asked to be the maid of honour.

In all the rush, there was very little time to spend with Harry. He still showed up each morning to make her breakfast, and if possible, they would eat dinner together, but the days were filled with reports, outprocessing paperwork, interviews, debriefings, and innumerable fire calls from all over the Continent and Britain. Thursday was an impossible day, with more of everything that the previous days had held. She ate a hasty sandwich in lieu of dinner, promising herself that she'd have dessert with Harry before turning in for the night, alone.

By 7:45 p.m. she threw her hands up in disgust, banishing the remaining Auror paperwork on her desk into a box, and then sliding the small stack of wedding paperwork back into her satchel. She opened up the Floo connection, knowing through her tracking ability that Harry was at his flat, and thus reachable by Floo.

"Are you ready for dessert with a very tired, very cranky Veela?" she asked.

"Yeah, sure, but Matzalen's spending the evening with friends from school," Harry replied.

"Very funny. I'm leaving this madhouse! The more paperwork I fill out, the more they discover that urgently needs my attention. Maybe if I'm especially bad they'll just *fire* me," she complained.

"No, don't do that," he warned.

"Why not?"

"This is France – if you're fired, it's even *more* paperwork," he quipped. "I'll have the pie warm and the wine cold by the time you arrive."

"You'd best be prepared to rub my feet too," she said.

"Can I kiss them first?"

"But of course," she replied, smiling for the first time in hours.

~+~

"I'm not going in tomorrow," she said, groaning appreciatively as he sat on the floor and rubbed her feet.

"You're done already?" he asked.

"I didn't say that, I've just decided that enough is enough, and that I'm not going into work the day before I get married," she replied. "Oh, that's nice – do that a little harder; forget about sex, just do this for the rest of the night."

"I don't think so," Harry replied with a smile.

"Hold that thought," Gabrielle quipped.

"Before you get *too* relaxed, Madame Artzai is coming over," Harry warned.

Gabrielle opened one eye. "What? I've waited all day to be alone with you," she whinged.

"She said it was important," Harry said, switching from the left foot to the right foot.

"Ohhh," Gabrielle moaned.

The Floo burped into life, glowing with blue-green flames. Harry reached for the pot of Floo powder on the mantle, throwing in a pinch to acknowledge the call upon his hearth. A moment later, Madame Artzai stepped gracefully into the room, her silver hair standing out in stark contrast to her black ensemble. Gabrielle stood up by the couch, receiving kisses on each cheek from Madame Artzai, who then repeated the process with Harry.

"I am so glad that you could make time for me this evening," she began.

"Is there anything I can get you in the way of food or drink?" Harry asked.

"How are you?" Gabrielle asked.

"No, as to the food or drink," she said to Harry and then turned to Gabrielle. "As to my health, I am dying, sister."

Gabrielle nodded solemnly and motioned towards a chair. "Please sit down."

"How much time do you have?" Harry asked.

"I'm trying to last until Sunday; I would really like to see the two of you get married," Madame Artzai replied in a matter-of-fact way.

"What about your girls?" Harry asked.

"That is what I wish to discuss," Madame Artzai said, rubbing a pattern in the tabletop with her fingertips. "I am embarrassed to be discussing this

with you, but I find that I have very little choice. I am so deeply in your debt, to the both of you, and yet I am about to ask yet even more.”

“What can we do for you, dear sister?” Gabrielle asked.

“I never did thank you properly, but how can you adequately thank someone who rescues your children from slavery?” Madame Artzai asked rhetorically. “I’m especially thankful for whatever it was that you said to Matzalen yesterday, Harry. She’s been in much better spirits since then.”

Gabrielle looked at Harry, who shrugged, spreading his hands in a gesture Gabrielle understood as “I’ll explain later.”

“She went back to school, and then by Tuesday, she’d withdrawn for the term. Things have been very ugly with her fellow students and to add insult to injury, the lout she called her boyfriend broke up with her,” Madame Artzai explained. “But that is not what I came here to discuss. I have no immediate family on either side and I am concerned with what will happen to my girls. I wanted to ask whether you two would be willing to serve as their guardians.”

“Is your passing inevitable?” Harry asked. “In the immediate sense I mean.”

Madame Artzai smiled. “Yes – but for your clever gambit of binding me to promise to live until my daughters returned, I should be dead already,” she said gently. “It is so painful to live without Balendin, I’m afraid that I’ve not been much good to my daughters.”

“Nonsense,” Gabrielle replied. “I know that all of them were ecstatic to be in your arms again.”

“That may be so,” Madame Artzai said wearily. “The fact remains that my magic and my life are ebbing away. As you well know, Gabrielle, there is no cure; it is part of the fate of a matched Veela.”

“No aunts or cousins?” Harry asked.

Madame Artzai shook her head sadly. “Unlike humans, the Daughters of the Dawn do not readily accept adoption as a blessing,” she said.

Harry looked at Gabrielle. There was a fierce fire in his eyes. Gabrielle nodded silently.

“We’ll take them,” Harry said with some finality.

“You are sure?” Madame Artzai said.

“We are both orphans, Madame Artzai, and I of all people know what it is like to live with relatives who’d rather not have me around. I know nothing at all about raising children, and next to nothing about Veela, but I’m sure we can figure it out,” he said, looking to Gabrielle again. Gabrielle nodded and gave a slight smile.

“My estate, such as it is, will go to Matzalen as a dowry. I regret that I am unable to provide for the little ones,” Madame Artzai said sadly.

“That will not be an issue,” Harry said. “We will raise them as ours.”

Madame Artzai looked to Gabrielle.

“We are more than capable of bearing that expense,” Gabrielle said. “Our lives have been hard, but materially, we have both been very fortunate.”

Madame Artzai exhaled loudly. “You have taken a great burden from an old woman at the end of her life,” she said.

“You’re not at all old,” Harry said.

Madame Artzai shook her head. “I’ve lived beyond my match, which makes me quite old,” she said flatly. “I have things that need my attention, and I’m sure that you have more interesting things to do than entertain an old woman.” She rose and strode to the fireplace.

“May we have lunch tomorrow?” Gabrielle asked. “There are things I’ll need to know.”

Madame Artzai nodded. “But of course,” she said before disappearing in the flames of the Floo.

“Harry?” Gabrielle asked.

“Hmm?” he replied.

“I’m very proud of you,” she said.

“What was I supposed to do?” he asked rhetorically. “Yeah, Madame Artzai, we’ll drive your children to the Orphanage, no problem. Not bloody likely.”

“I’m still proud of you. So, when did you talk to Matzalen?” Gabrielle asked.

“We had lunch yesterday,” Harry replied.

“That was your prior engagement? A bit early to be seeing other women, isn’t it?” Gabrielle asked teasingly.

“There are limits to my interest in younger women,” he replied.

Oh? Are you free to talk about what you discussed?" Gabrielle asked.

Harry pondered that question for a bit. "I guess so. Matzalen was pretty shook up by how the students at Beauxbatons treated her, and being dumped by her boyfriend kind of put her over the edge. She was thinking of herself as damaged goods – no one would want to be her friend, no boy would ever want her for anything other than what Unai wanted, you know – the whole teenage spiral of despair."

"Things look so permanent at that age," Gabrielle said.

"Which is why tattoos are ill-advised at that age," he replied.

Gabrielle smiled. "So, what did the Great Harry Potter say to put her mind at ease?"

"After lunch we dropped by my flat. I picked up my old photo album and we went for a walk. I told her the story of my life – the real story, and then I wove in the story of Ginny's life, including her first year at Hogwarts. It was something that she could identify with, being touched by evil, having conversations stop when you came into the room, being treated like you have a contagious disease. Then I told her how we fell in love. That really floored her," he explained.

"Why?" Gabrielle asked.

"The notion that I could fall in love with her, even after knowing everything about what happened, and then choose her as my mate," he said. "I think it adjusted her 'I'll never be loved again' mindset."

Gabrielle nodded. "Just so long as she understands that you are *mine*," she said.

"She knows all about that – her father was a Companion of the Dawn, remember? So, what do you think about instant family?"

"It's not what I had planned, but once we work out the details, I'm sure it will work out," Gabrielle said.

"How do you feel about adoption?"

Gabrielle looked pensive for a moment. "The Weasleys took me in after my parents died – it was nice to have a place to call home, even if my hair wasn't red and my name didn't match theirs."

"We'll bring it up with the twins after they've been with us for a while," Harry said.

"Oh, no!" Gabrielle exclaimed.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Where will they stay after the wedding? Someone will need to look after them, shall we take them with us on our honeymoon?" she asked.

"I don't think so," Harry said calmly. "I suspect that Molly would watch them for a spell – it would do Matzalen good to get out of France for a while, spend some time where the only thing she's notorious for is being a moody, heartbreakingly beautiful teenager."

"You're going to make *such* a good father," Gabrielle said, her eyes glistening.

"I thought I was going to have a few years to ramp up to the notion," Harry said.

"What of me?" Gabrielle said, striking a haughty pose. "I'm not old enough to have a teenaged daughter."

"Ah, you never can tell how old a Veela is anyway," Harry said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Gabrielle launched herself at him, going for his last rib, the only place on his body where he was ticklish.

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Friday came and went – consumed with the administrivia of closing out their tenure as employees of the French Ministry of Magic, a rather lengthy discussion between Gabrielle and Madame Artzai about the girls, and an even longer dinner at the Miramar with the Weasleys (Ron and Padma, Serita being minded by Molly for the evening) and the Granger-Longbottoms.

Saturday came at last; a bright, clear day with just enough cold to remind the denizens of Marseilles that November was only days away. Hermione popped over several hours before the wedding to have a private chat with her best friend, using the opportunity to make sure that his formal wear fit properly, his legendary hair was in some semblance of order, and his nerves composed enough that he wouldn't go blank during the service.

All Saints in Marseilles is a small but dignified church, looking rather much like a village English church from the time of Queen Elizabeth the First. A cadre of French Aurors were providing a discreet security cordon, making sure that Muggles saw nothing out of the ordinary, and ensuring that only Wizards and Witches on a very select list came within a block of the church. The service itself was short and dignified, the rector pausing from time to time to clear his head after looking at the literally radiant bride. In less than forty minutes, the vows were exchanged, the rings were placed, the bride and groom kissed, and the newly married couple was announced to the assembled witnesses. There was a banquet afterwards in a hall provided by the father of one of the first children recovered by Gabrielle after joining the Strike Force.

After dinner, the obligatory toasts, and a spin on the dance floor, Gabrielle announced their departure. "Ladies and gentlemen, Harry and I are honoured that you witnessed our vows today. I hope that you enjoy yourselves; there will be music for as long as people wish to dance, but if you will

excuse us, Harry and I have a Portkey to catch.”

This announcement was met with laughter and whistles, the latter being amplified by the Weasley twins, who’d commandeered the wet bar, dispensing drinks that changed colour, and occasionally the shape of the people drinking them. “In a hurry, Gabrielle?” Fred called.

“I hate to wait,” she replied sweetly, vowing that she’d do something memorable to him, later.

The couple disappeared in a puff of pink, sparkling smoke.

“Veela show-offs,” Ron whispered to Padma, waving his hand in front of his face.

“Hush,” she replied. “Tonight I’m not going to take any excuses for not dancing.”

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A hotel suite in Barcelona was reserved in Harry Potter’s name. This was a decoy, however, occupied by Ron and Padma after they’d closed down the dance floor. Another honeymoon suite was reserved in Nicosia, which was also a decoy, occupied by Neville and Hermione. Gabrielle and Harry spent the night in Harry’s London flat, the balance of Grimmauld Place being vacant as Remus and Dora were in Toronto, the former filling in for a professor on sabbatical. The security afforded by the generations of protective wards, combined with the disinformation as to where the couple would be spending their honeymoon assured a reasonable measure of privacy, which they both craved at the moment.

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Gabrielle Potter spent her first waking moments as a married woman luxuriating in the sights, sounds, sensations (and smells) of married life. Harry, thankfully, did not snore, but the steady sound of his breathing was comforting, as was the arm draped about her, his hand resting on her hip. Although she’d never admit it to him, at least not for a while, she was indeed glad that she’d waited to consummate their union; she’d been waiting for him for years, what were a few more days, after all?

In the week after their marriage they discovered with joy and laughter the pleasures of coming together as husband and wife, as Veela and Companion, and as they’d discussed, what seemed like a lifetime ago, once they began, they didn’t leave their marital bed for a long, long time.

But now, in the second week of November, they managed to get out of bed before noon and began to schedule outings, house hunting, daytrips, and social visits, including brunch with Ron, Padma and Serita, and dinner with Neville and Hermione. Today’s outing was looking at several properties, as they’d be out of Grimmauld Place before New Year’s, and needed a house for their newly constituted family. Although they’d looked at several properties, Harry seemed attracted to one particular estate near Swansea, a property that Gabrielle suspected they’d buy if the Artzai girls approved in the slightest. If they indeed selected this house, the girls would be on the top floor, the room that Gabrielle suspected would be Matzalen’s affording a magnificent view of the grounds.

The girls spent much of the afternoon racing through the house and the grounds, Matzalen being particularly fascinated by the creek that ran through the property beyond the meadows and the horse barn next to the carriage house.

“Could we – uh – have *horses*?” Matzalen asked Harry timidly.

“Have you ever ridden?” he asked.

Matzalen nodded. “My room mate, first year at Beauxbatons, her family had horses – I’d go home with her every chance I could.”

“Okay,” Harry said, walking back to the house where Garazi was chasing Eskarne in and out of the kitchen.

“What does he mean, ‘okay,’?” she asked Gabrielle.

“In all likelihood it means that once we live here, we’ll buy you some horses,” Gabrielle answered.

“Just like that?” Matzalen asked incredulously.

Gabrielle nodded.

“Did you marry him because he’s rich?” Matzalen asked.

Gabrielle laughed. “Don’t be silly,” she replied. “I married him because he was my match – he could have been a pauper for all I cared.”

“Oh, right, I knew that,” Matzalen replied, breaking away to chase after Eskarne, who was climbing the trellis on the carriage house.

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They decided to buy the estate that afternoon, leaving instructions with Harry’s solicitor before returning to the Burrow for dinner. The girls would be spending one final night at the Burrow before moving into Grimmauld Place. As it was raining when they finished dinner, they returned to London by Floo rather than Apparating. Gabrielle lovingly brushed the soot off of her husband, who still didn’t care for Floo very much.

“Feel in the mood for something sweet?” she asked as she hung up his cloak.

Harry looked at her incredulously. “We just had pudding at the Burrow,” he said.

"I was thinking of something chocolate," she said, the tip of her tongue tracing half of her top lip. "Maybe something saucy."

"Well," Harry said, tracing a finger down his wife's back. "We do have that bottle of chocolate sauce in the kitchen. Would you like it over ice cream?"

Gabrielle captured his hand, kissing his palm before running her tongue along the web connecting his thumb and forefinger. "I was thinking of something sweeter," she said, returning the hand to her waist.

"Right, well, I'll just fetch it from the kitchen," Harry said, giving her a wink as she began to climb the stairs.

"Don't take too long, you wouldn't want it to get cold," she purred.

"That's what warming spells are for," he replied, disappearing into the kitchen.

The bottle in question, however, was not to be found in the kitchen; it was not in the dry pantry, where it belonged, nor in the cold pantry, where it didn't, or the spice cupboard, where it might have been placed by mistake. When Harry heard the door open behind him, he thought it was his impatient bride.

"What are you looking for?" Garazi asked in her pleasant, little girl voice.

"I'm looking for the chocolate sauce. What are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"I came to find you – I couldn't sleep, so I thought you'd tell me a story," Garazi replied.

"How did you get here?" Harry asked.

"Through the Floo," Matzalen answered, pushing open the kitchen door. Eskarne was toddling along after her, dressed in fuzzy winter weight pyjamas. "They watched you leave that way, so once Arthur and Molly were off to bed, they decided to follow after you."

"Here they are!" Garazi said, emerging from the dry goods pantry, clutching a bottle in each hand.

"Can we have ice cream? Eskarne asked, striking a cute pose for Matzalen.

"No," Matzalen replied firmly.

"Not one little scoop?" Garazi begged.

Gabrielle pushed the kitchen door open. "I'm sure that one scoop wouldn't hurt," she said, adjusting the belt to her blue silk robe. She approached Harry, brushing up against him to give him a kiss. "I thought you got lost."

Matzalen sighed, opening the frozen pantry, and selected a container from the middle shelf. Harry scrambled to pull some custard cups from the dish cupboard and a scoop from the utensil drawer. Under Matzalen's watchful eye he dug small, uniform scoops of vanilla ice cream, depositing one scoop per bowl.

"Care for a scoop, love?" he asked Gabrielle.

"No thanks," she said pleasantly. "I wouldn't want to spoil my appetite," she whispered.

Matzalen gave her an odd look as she applied a warming charm to the first bottle, carefully decanting a dollop of dark brown liquid over the ice cream. Harry reached out to wipe a drip from the side of the bottle, but Matzalen gently slapped his hand.

The twins scrambled up into seats at the kitchen table, digging into the ice cream as if it were a gift bestowed by the Queen herself, rubbing their eyes sleepily as they got to the bottom of their bowls.

"Can you take us back, Matzalen?" Eskarne asked in a faint, tired voice.

Matzalen looked at Gabrielle. "I'll clean up; can you pop them into the Floo?"

"Sure," Gabrielle replied, making sure to brush up against Harry as she shepherded the girls out of the kitchen.

Matzalen gathered up the dishes, carrying them to the sink where she quickly washed and rinsed them. "Listen carefully, *Papa*, and I will divulge an Artzai family secret," she spoke in a quiet voice.

"Oh?" Harry said.

"Two bottles of chocolate sauce, one with a blue label, one with a red label," she began.

"Yes?"

"The blue labelled bottle is spiked with a sleeping draught. The twins will sleep like soldiers until well after dawn," she said.

"Which is why my hand got smacked," he said with a chuckle.

"Exactly. I think *Maman* has plans for you that don't involve you falling asleep immediately," she said, flashing a small smile.

"You don't miss much, do you?"

"No, *Papa*," Matzalen said, handing him the bottle with the red label. "If you hurry, you won't need another warming charm." She looked at him knowingly. "I'll let myself out."

"Goodnight, Matzalen," Harry said, trying not to laugh.

"Hurry, *Papa*, it is not nice to keep a Veela waiting," she said in a sing-song voice.

Harry gave into the laugh. He reckoned that it was going to be a struggle to get in the last word with this teenager, but at the moment, it didn't seem very important. He had a warm bottle of chocolate sauce in one hand, and very soon, he'd have an even warmer wife in the other. He knew his new life wouldn't always be like this, but at that instant, life was particularly good.

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Thanks to my wonderful Beta, Runsamok, and to Art, for tire kicking.

Well, this is the end of this little story – *Lost and Found* certainly took on a life of its own. Coming up with character names is a chore for me, so I either filch names from my immediate surroundings (Serita is the teenaged daughter of my Indian next-door neighbour) or I pluck up meaningful words.

In this story, I used a lot of Basque names. The Basque speak an ancient language, and live in the mountain region between France and Spain. Artzai is Basque for "shepherd." Matzalen is the Basque version of Magdalen, with obvious connotations. The District Superintendent has a name, but I don't know what it is. Madame Artzai's given name is actually Gabrielle, but that factoid never came up in the story.

Harry and Gabrielle were married on October 31st in this story, which coincidentally was Eskarne and Garazi's birthday. Gabrielle Artzai died at dawn, on the morning of November 2nd, having spent the night with her daughters; it was sad, but peaceful, as the girls knew she was terribly torn between her desire to stay with them, and her acknowledgement that she literally couldn't live without her Companion. If this seems odd to you, it's a Veela thing, and you just don't understand.

Jacque Fuso disappeared, being a man wanted both by the French Ministry of Magic, and the crime clan formerly headed by Unai. Speaking of Unai, by the time the non-criminal Aurors arrived on the Isle d' If, Unai's body had gone missing – it had been delivered to his clan as a message by an operative working for the Catalan Ambassador.

For those of you who just can't rest until every detail is known, the bottle of chocolate sauce with the red label is the one that Hermione sent to Gabrielle at the end of the original trilogy – it moved into Grimmauld Place after Gabrielle closed out her Marseilles flat. The bottle of chocolate sauce with the blue label was from the Artzai house, which was shut down when the Artzai daughters went to live with the Weasleys after the passing of Madame Artzai. As to how the bottles got misplaced, well, some things just can't be figured out. You'll have to live with that. I know that I do. If you go to Ghirardelli's web page, you won't find chocolate sauce for sale – which lets you know how special that bottle is – but that's Hermione's story to tell, not mine.

And as to what Ginny whispered into Harry's ear – well, that's private, very, very private.