

*Kokopelli*  
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# Lost and Found Trilogy

## Lost & Found - Part I

Lost and Found – part I

It took three years to find the hidden Horcruxes, and then another to get into position to fulfil his destiny. By that time, Wizarding England resembled a house gutted by fire.

Casualties in the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix were high, as was the toll on Harry's immediate circle. Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood left reverse shadows on a nearby wall when a fireball consumed their bodies, triggered by the destruction of the last Horcrux. Ron Weasley lost an arm, but otherwise survived intact. Hermione Granger, her sanity shattered by an over-long application of the Cruciatus curse, was confined to the long-term spell damage ward at St. Mungo's. Fred and George Weasley survived, predictably unchanged. Their irrepressible good humour, however, flagged each year at Halloween, when they commemorated the passing of Charlie and Percy Weasley.

Harry never spoke of the last battle, which didn't surprise Ron much; he didn't care to dwell on it either. After Harry was discharged from St. Mungo's, he visited Ron in the rehabilitation ward every day.

"You know I'm getting out tomorrow?" Ron asked, sifting through the stack of letters that Harry had brought.

"Yeah. Your mum's rather chuffed about having you back at The Burrow," Harry said.

"You're going to leave, aren't you?" Ron asked.

Harry nodded.

"It wasn't supposed to turn out this way, you know," Ron said after a long pause.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, it was supposed to be you and Ginny," Ron said.

"And you and Hermione, I suppose," Harry said with a wan smile. While Harry and Ginny had reunited one year into the Horcrux hunt, Ron and Hermione's brief romance had fizzled out and they'd returned to being friends.

"Yeah, sumpin' like that," Ron said, wiping his nose on the back of his magical hand.

"Happy endings are for fairy tales," Harry said quietly, arranging the letters into careful piles on the side table.

"What're you gonna do?" Ron asked.

"Get away," Harry replied.

"Fair enough," Ron said laconically. "Coming back?"

"Maybe – send me an invite when you and Padma christen your first sprog," Harry replied.

"We're not like that, Harry," Ron protested.

Harry raised an eyebrow. Padma had rearranged a number of shifts at the hospital to work Ron's physiotherapy, notwithstanding the fact that her primary Healer speciality was in trauma. Maybe Ron couldn't see the determination in her eyes, but Harry could.

It made him smile; maybe someone else could have a life; his had certainly turned to worms.

It was time for Harry to leave.

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He'd been gone five years. Every year, more or less around Ron's birthday, Ron would receive a package which he reckoned was his birthday present from Harry. The presents gave no clue to Harry's location, but somehow Harry seemed to know what was going on in Ron's life. When he started work as an announcer on the WWW, providing colour commentary on the Canons, the gift had been a small bronze bottle of larynx lozenges, guaranteed to reinforce the overworked voice. When he'd finally proposed to Padma, a month later he received a large quilt with a sardonic note that said "not that you're going to have any trouble keeping warm." The latest gift was a bottle of aged Irish Firewhisky, accompanied by a note that said he should hide it from the Twins when Halloween approached.

His birthday this year had come and gone without a present. He'd wanted to worry about it, but Padma had chided him in her oh-so-sensible way, saying that Harry would return when he was ready. Ron nodded and said nothing, but resolved to bring the issue up at the next Weasley family meeting.

It was time for Harry to return.

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The tourists came to Denali in May – probably because it was the biggest mountain to be climbed. He'd climbed it himself, three years ago before discovering his favourite spot not far from the incongruously named McGonagall pass. It provided a beautiful view of Denali, of course, but it provided an even better view of Mt. McGonagall, which he'd been watching for most of the afternoon. A solitary climber was attempting to scale the eastern face, which he knew from personal experience was not for the fainthearted. The climber was either a very small man or a young woman.

An older woman would have the sense to not attempt this peak alone.

He smiled, looked up at the now swiftly moving clouds and then frowned. If she didn't make it to the ledge in the next half hour, she'd be caught in the oncoming weather. Although not as deadly as Denali, the cold and the wind on Mt. McGonagall was more than enough to kill anyone not properly sheltered.

Cheering on the climber was absorbing. Although not a betting man, he reckoned that without a mishap, she'd make it to the ledge, set up camp and then finish the ascent after daybreak tomorrow. Although he was too far away to hear the piton fail, when he saw the coloured figure drop some fifty metres in an instant, he knew that it must have given way. He prayed silently that the lower pitons would hold. They did, which meant that if she wasn't injured and had her wits about her, she could finish the climb. The figure hung limply on the rope, swaying in an unseen wind.

"Ah, crap," he said, "why couldn't she climb somewhere where the Park rangers could keep an eye on her?" He went back to his tent; folding back the flap to reach for the object he knew was leaning against the wall. If he left right now, he could get back before the storm blew in. He'd sort out the rest later.

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He formulated a plan while he flew, snugging the strap on his goggles after getting blown sideways by a particularly savage burst of wind. He never broke visual contact with the figure dangling from the rope, willing her to remain in place. As he'd feared, the storm blew up at the worst possible time. He'd been forced to loop downwind from her location so as to have a modicum of stability while flying into the savage, cold wind. He began to hum an old forgotten tune as he reached the final approach, thinking that the King would approve, as the final manoeuvre bore a passing resemblance to the Starfish and Stick that Ron was so proud of, another lifetime ago. A total body bind would keep her spine from further damage once he grabbed her, and then he'd sever the rope that had kept her from plummeting down the mountain. After that it was flying hell for leather back to the tent. According to the plan, he planned to patch her up as best he could, Obliviating her if he had to and then leaving her for the Park Rangers after the storm blew down.

He noted with some satisfaction that the piton holding her in place was twisted, but still firmly in place. The clean-climbing purists would scorn this bit of debris left in the mountain, but then again, if she'd been using a nut, she'd be dead by now.

Back at the tent, his landing was less than elegant, but given his ungainly payload, he didn't mind. Floating her into his tent, he snugged the flap down to keep the howling wind out of his temporary home. His tent, of course, was not the colourful Muggle dome that it appeared to be, but instead was a spacious, if small, residence with a few comforts.

After removing his gloves and warming his fingers, he began loosening the straps holding the rucksack to her back, letting it fall to the ground. He cast a series of diagnostic charms, looking for major trauma, which, thankfully, he did not find. He peeled away the protective mask and goggles, revealing a delicately featured face, albeit marred by bruises around the temples and some dried blood. Peeling back the eyelids, he was pleased to note that the pupils were both the same size and responded normally to light, notwithstanding the fact that she was still unconscious, whoever she was. Her limpid blue eyes reminded him of Luna's, although she lacked the bug-eyed look of surprise. He covered her with a couple of blankets and began to cooking a substantial dinner, hoping that he'd have someone to share the meal with, something he hadn't done in a long, long time.

As he cooked, she began to murmur softly. He didn't catch the words. It didn't sound like English, but a number of foreigners came to climb, so that wasn't surprising either. He ate his meal in silence, cleaning up the dishes before he began his vigil by the fire. He stared into the dancing flames with a book open on his lap.

A moan broke his reverie, followed by soft cursing in what sounded like French. It reminded him of what Fleur Weasley would say when she spilled blood on her clothes when slaughtering chickens.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Like I fell off zee mountain and theen was beaten wiz breeks," the woman replied.

Harry chuckled. "Well, you did manage the falling off the mountain part, but I didn't see any bricks when I came to fetch you."

"You climbed up to rescue me?" she asked.

"I rescued you," Harry answered truthfully.

"I weel zank you properly in the morning. Right now, I am weary. Hopefully my head weel stop throbbing if I zleep," the woman said, closing her eyes again.

Harry pulled his wand from its sleeve holster and administered a sleeping charm followed by a strong analgesic charm, which exhausted his repertoire of medical charms. He then set a motion alarm around the couch and went to bed, hoping that she'd sleep through the night.

He'd figure out who she was and what to do with her in the morning.

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The dream began pleasantly; he was sitting on the rim of a large fountain in the middle of a formal, walled garden. A mild breeze hissed through the branches that covered the walls. Looking into the fountain, he wasn't sure if he could see to the bottom or not, when he noticed a reflection of periwinkle blue on the surface of the water, startling him into looking up.

"Hello, Harry," Luna Lovegood said in a sing-song tone, her eyes bearing the ever-startled look which was at odds with her otherwise placid demeanour. "I've been trying to reach you for years, but you've been closed off to me."

"Uh, Luna, you're dead," Harry stammered.

"Of course I am," Luna said with a serene smile. "What difference does that make?" She sat down next to Harry, placing her hand gently on his knee. "Our truest friends never leave us completely, Harry."

"You were always a good friend to me, Luna," Harry said.

"And you to me, Harry. You were one of the few people at school who put up with my quirks, even if you didn't believe everything I told you. But enough of that – I don't have much time. Do you remember what Hermione once told you about the theory of forks in the streams of time?"

Harry wrinkled his brow. "Something about how certain events could happen differently, leading to a split. One day you take the bus instead of the train on a day that the train derails, so there's a future where you lived because you took the bus and another where you didn't because you took the train," he said.

"Quite right – I *knew* you were listening that day. Ginny didn't think you'd remember," Luna said, looking into the ripples on the surface of the pool. "Once I crossed over, I began studying the forks of time. It took quite a while to sort through them – some of them were right nasty indeed to follow. There wasn't a single fork where you were able to destroy that last Horcrux. It was only in the forks where Ginny and I worked together that you were able to dispatch Tom Riddle."

"Why are you telling me this?" Harry asked.

"Because you still blame yourself that I'm dead, that Ginny's dead," Luna said, looking up into his eyes.

"What happened in the other forks?" Harry asked.

"In a few of them you died, trying to destroy the Horcrux. It wasn't very pretty when Tom Riddle had no opponent. In the others, you lived, but the war was a stalemate. The destruction was far worse than what you experienced. You need to know that," Luna said. "We played our part, Harry. We knew the risks, but we knew the rewards as well."

Luna stood, hesitating as she turned away. She bent over to kiss his cheek. "Good-bye, Harry. I don't believe we'll see each other again until you're on this side, which is a pity, because I always enjoyed talking to you. No hurry to come over, eh?"

With that Luna disappeared, as if passing behind an unseen curtain. The wind blew some more.

"Hello, Harry," said the voice that he thought he'd never hear again. With a flash of scarlet, Ginny knocked into him, nearly tipping him into the fountain as she settled in his lap. She pulled his head down for a hungry kiss.

"Merlin, Harry, you have no idea how I've missed that."

Harry brushed his cheek against hers. "Oh, I think I do, love, I think I do," he said earnestly.

"I haven't much time, Harry," Ginny said.

"That's what Luna said too," he replied.

"You gooseberry – if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have figured out how to get here. Luna used to meet here with her mum when they were separated," Ginny explained.

"So, you're going to try to tell me that your dying wasn't my fault?" Harry asked.

"Not really," Ginny replied. "You either believe Luna or you don't, and even if you do, sometimes it takes a while before things you believe up here," she said, kissing his forehead, "make sense down here," she said, placing her hand over his heart.

"So what are you going to tell me?" Harry asked.

"That I love you," Ginny said.

"You told me that the day of Fleur's wedding," Harry said wistfully.

"Yeah, it was the only way I could break into your fit of noble stupidity," Ginny said, knuckling her fist into the ticklish spot above his last rib. "I loved you – you loved me back. We had time together. That's more than a lot of people get, you know."

"Yeah, I guess," Harry said quietly.

"I don't want you here anytime soon," Ginny said.

"Picked up another boyfriend already, have you?" Harry said with a burst of unexpected humour.

"Never," she replied solemnly. "I do regret dying a virgin though. Now that I'm here and you're there I can't do much about that," she said with a crooked smile.

"I still love you," Harry said, a tear leaking from one eye.

"Don't start," Ginny said with a sniff. "Oh, Merlin – now you've got me started too," she said, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. "I don't want you to pine for me, Harry – I want you to live. I want you to love again and let some girl give you lots of babies and then when you're all old and used up you can come see me again and I'll sort it out with the other woman as to who gets to be with you on this side."

"Right," Harry said with some exasperation. "Did you have anyone in mind?"

"I do, actually, but I can't tell you – that's one of the rules, you know. Even if I were to tell you, you'd be self-conscious and screw it up. You never were very good at chatting up girls, Harry," Ginny said, brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"That hasn't improved any, you know," Harry said.

"Well, it hasn't helped that you've spent the last five years either living with a bunch of monks, or wandering the world as a hermit," Ginny said reproachfully.

"I get along just fine with wolves and bears and elk," Harry said, "lots better than I ever got along with people."

"Yeah, well, that was one of the things I wanted to talk to you about," Ginny said.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, oh. It's time for you to go back to England. I'm going to have a little niece soon," Ginny said, pantomiming rocking a baby.

"Ron finally managed to knock Padma up. There are a couple of other surprises waiting for you too." Ginny said impishly.

"I thought you couldn't tell me what was going to happen," Harry said.

"I didn't – I just told you what has *already* happened. If you didn't live in Unplottable places, your mail would catch up to you and I could spend my time doing other things," Ginny said.

"Oh? Like what?" Harry asked.

"Like this," Ginny whispered, closing her eyes and turning so she could kiss him again.

Harry closed his eyes to savour the moment. He began to hear the sound of rain, which was unusual, because he couldn't feel any raindrops.

"Oh, damn," Ginny hissed. "My time is up."

"Will I see you again?" Harry asked.

Ginny looked into his face and then smiled. "Yes, you will. Sweet Merlin, I do love you, Harry," she said, pulling away. As she retreated, the fountain, the garden and the walls disappeared into gray nothingness, leaving only the sound of rain.

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It was the absence of the sound of the rain that woke him. He reached for his wand and his glasses in one smooth move, focusing on the sounds of someone rattling around in the loo adjoining his room. The door opened, releasing a cloud of steam as he saw pale limbs and towels in motion. He stared, transfixed as he tried to make sense of this unexpected awakening. His guest had, evidently, bypassed or nullified the alarm he'd placed on her. Or, possibly, he'd slept through it, but he rather doubted that.

The door opened fully and a towel clad woman tiptoed into his bedroom, letting out a little squeal of surprise when she saw him sitting up in bed. Her hair, what he could see of it, was pale blonde, verging on white. Her skin was pale porcelain, smooth and lustrous. She seemed to be a rather petite, rather fit young woman.

"I'm sorry, I must have woken you," she said in rather less accented English than last night. "I'm afraid that I've been presuming upon your hospitality, raiding your medicine cabinet and your shower in one fell swoop." She tilted her head to one side and released a dazzling smile. "Good morning, Harry, it's very good to see you again."

Harry screwed up his face in disbelief. "You look familiar, but I don't remember who you are, Miss –"

She smiled again. "Normally I would be crushed, but I'm willing to make allowances under the circumstances. You last saw me nine years ago – I was eleven at the time. Your Ginny and I were dressed alike in bridesmaid dresses, but you only had eyes for her."

"Gabrielle?" Harry asked incredulously.

She nodded.

"What were you doing out here?" he asked.

"Well, yesterday, I was climbing the mountain," she said as if she were explaining something obvious to a particularly slow child.

"Why?"

"My intuition told me that if I climbed the mountain, I would be able to find you. I didn't anticipate that it would be as part of a daring rescue," she said, shifting uncomfortably. "If you will excuse me, while you may well be comfortable talking to barely dressed women, I would be far more comfortable if I could finish this conversation wearing more than a damp towel."

"But of course," Harry said, laughing at the oddity of the scene. "Do you have clothes to change into, or shall I transfigure some of mine?"

"I think I have some in my rucksack. Give me a minute before you come into the next room," she said, darting out of the room on the balls of her feet.

Harry ducked into the loo, emerging minutes later relieved, refreshed and ready to ask some serious questions. Breakfast was underway when he entered the kitchen nook, a pot of coffee already brewed and a skillet heating for scrambled eggs.

"What do I smell?" Harry asked, looking around his now commandeered kitchen.

"You know, that's one of those philosophically difficult questions to answer," Gabrielle replied playfully. "I haven't a clue what *you* smell, but I smell scones cooking in the oven."

Harry laughed. "So you were able to find everything?"

"Yes; things you use every day are in the cupboard to the left of the sink, with the usual staples in the cold cupboard and the dry cupboard. If they were larger, I'd call them pantries, but everything is compact here – it's like being in a ship's galley," Gabrielle replied. "Let's get you fed and then we can talk."

Harry poured two mugs of coffee, leaving one plain mug on the counter beside Gabrielle as he sat back to watch her. She'd dressed in an oversized tee shirt and short denim shorts that displayed a pair of truly marvellous legs, marred only by a spectacular bruise on her left thigh.

"How are you feeling?" he asked after taking his first swig of coffee.

She smiled. "A shower and two tabs of ibuprofen helped," she said. "You put an alarm on me."

"Yeah, I did. I didn't want you to hurt yourself stumbling about in this little cottage," he said, feeling somewhat sheepish.

"Where do you keep your hot pads?" she asked.

"I use dishtowels – they're in the second drawer," he replied.

"Got it, thanks," she said, bending over to open the oven. From Harry's perspective, the view was excellent; although he turned away once she stood up, carrying the tray of scones to the table.

Harry set the table while Gabrielle served up breakfast. They ate together in silence for a while, until Harry finished his second scone.

"Very nice, thanks. Breakfast for me is often something left over from the night before – cooking for one is the one part of living alone that I don't care for," Harry said.

"Is that the only part you object to?" Gabrielle asked.

"It's simpler – I'll leave it at that," he said. "So, is there anyone I need to notify that you're here?"

"Not really; Mum and Dad died in the last year of the war; no boss or boyfriend waiting for me back in England. Fleur and the Weasleys are the family I have now," she said slowly. "Besides, Fleur knows I'm here."

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"I was looking for you," she said.

"Well, good; you've found me. After this storm breaks, we'll ship you back to England," Harry said firmly, hooking a thumb at the window. The wind outside was blowing snow sideways.

"I'm supposed to bring you back," Gabrielle said.

"Why?"

"Ron called a Weasley family meeting. They decided that enough was enough, and it was time for you to come back," Gabrielle explained.

"So, how did you find me?"

"It wasn't easy, believe me," Gabrielle said, refilling her mug of coffee. "By the time I found your place in Cyprus, you'd already left."

"Not a nice neighbourhood," Harry said with a wry grin.

"You're telling me. Turks on one side of the mountain, Greeks on the other – lobbing mortar rounds at each other every now and then just to keep in practice," Gabrielle said with a shudder.

"If it's any comfort to you, they don't do that when I'm living there," Harry said.

"How did you end up in Cyprus?" Gabrielle asked.

"After I killed Voldemort, I was really screwed up. I needed to get away so Ron could have something like a normal life. So I travelled to places where no one knew the boy-who-lived, or if they did, they didn't give a hoot. I had problems with dreams. There're some monks that live on the Greek side of the island of Cyprus. I was told that they might be able to help me," he explained.

"Did it work?"

"More or less – they taught me something like Occlumency that stops the brain from dreaming," he said.

"I thought you needed dreams to keep healthy," Gabrielle said.

"Normal people do, or so the Healers tell me," he said. "I haven't been normal for years."

"You were dreaming this morning," Gabrielle said with a smile.

"Oh?"

"You were talking to someone. It didn't seem unpleasant," Gabrielle said.

"I forgot to do the exercises last night. Having a guest threw me off my normal patterns," Harry said.

"I'm sorry," Gabrielle said.

"Stop apologizing - you sound like me when I'm depressed. It's hardly a hardship to spend time with a beautiful woman," he said with a grin.

"Flatterer," she said.

"It's not flattery if it's true," he replied. "So, how did you get stuck with the job of finding me?"

Gabrielle twirled her wand in her fingers for a moment, stopping long enough to banish the dishes to the sink, leaving only the coffee mugs. "Would you like a refill?"

"No thanks, I'm good," Harry said.

"I was present at the Weasley family meeting as an honorary Weasley. Molly has a habit of picking up stray witches and wizards, you know. They decided it was time and then they spent half the evening arguing with each other as to how they would do it. I told them that they were being silly, and that I was the only one who could find you."

"And why is that?"

"It's what I do for a living. I'm a tracker," Gabrielle said.

"A what?" Harry asked.

"A tracker. In France, most of the Aurors are generalists, as the English Aurors are, but they also have some specialists; trackers are one of the specialties. My specialty is finding things and people, including people who don't want to be found," Gabrielle said proudly.

"We could have used you during the war," Harry said.

"I was too young, and I wasn't trained yet, but I did see some action after you left England. I tracked down Mr. Dolohov on the Continent and I was the one who finally found Mrs. Lestrange," Gabrielle said coolly.

"Good on you," he said.

"I wasn't completely disinterested. Dolohov killed my mum and dad and Lestrange was the one who broke Hermione's mind."

Harry was silent for a long while, staring into the bottom of his nearly empty coffee mug. "What happened to them?"

"Dolohov was tried; another prisoner killed him while he was awaiting transport to Azkaban."

"And Lestrange?"

"She tried to kill my partner – it wasn't good for her health," Gabrielle said sardonically. "I left the service after that and emigrated from France."

"Which sidesteps the question of why I should go back to England," Harry said, changing the subject.

"Padma's big as a barn – she's going to deliver your goddaughter sometime in July," Gabrielle said.

"That's nice – I'll send a present," Harry said with a bored expression.

"Hermione's out of St. Mungo's – she's in her right mind again," Gabrielle said with the sly expression of a card player tossing an unexpected pair of aces onto the table.

"Damn," Harry said, looking away. When he turned back his eyes were glistening. "I'd given up hope."

"Can we Disapparate from here?" Gabrielle asked.

"Nope. Portkeys don't work either. It's been one of the things I've been studying up here for the last three years. The Shamans locked this area sometime in the eighteenth century; it had to do with their rituals near Denali. The modern-day Shamans either don't know how it was done, or aren't talking. My money is on don't know," Harry said.

"So we're stuck here until the storm lets up?" Gabrielle asked.

"I reckon so; I'm sure we can figure out something to do," Harry said with a boyish smile.

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Dorothy came up with a sleeping beauty scenario for putting Harry on ice for a few years and then pairing him up with Gabrielle. Tim Joy (Jeconais) was bit by that bunny and started working on a story. I caught wind of this and started plotting out a story one night when I couldn't sleep. This is what I came up with as a break from writing a chapter in Stories from Sixth Year. This is the first of three parts in my projected story arc. We'll see more of Ginny, Hermione will come on stage, and we may see if Gabrielle was bruised any place other than her thigh.

For those of you smutty minded readers who wondered how they passed the time waiting for the storm to break, it involved a bottle of wine, a guitar, and the Song of Roland, translated on the fly by Gabrielle. She's quite a storyteller when she puts her mind to it.

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# Lost and Found Trilogy

## Back home - another life - Part II

"Welcome home," Fleur said in English with barely a hint of an accent. The rest of the conversation took place in French at a break-neck pace. "Where have you been?" she asked before placing a kiss on each cheek.

"Where *havent* I been?" her sister asked rhetorically.

"Professor Marçall always said it's the sign of a weak mind to answer one question with another," Fleur said haughtily.

Gabrielle sighed. "Alexandria, Cyprus, Alaska, Harrods," she listed.

"Harrods?" Fleur inquired.

"Harry felt that he needed to supplement his wardrobe before showing up at the Burrow," Gabrielle explained.

"You *found* him?" Fleur shrieked, tossing the Daily Prophet into the air.

"Were you ever in doubt?" Gabrielle countered.

"So, what of the other mission?" Fleur asked.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news?"

"The good news," Fleur answered.

"He is kind and brave and funny and warm and he definitely knows that I'm a girl," Gabrielle said.

"And the bad news?"

"He is a perfect gentleman," Gabrielle said, moving into the kitchen to pour a glass of water.

"You expected bodice-ripping?"

"I was in a tent with him for three days – a tent not much larger than my first flat. We ate and drank and told stories and sang songs, but not once did he treat me any differently than *Bill* treats me," Gabrielle said, her lips forming a ridiculous pout.

"Oh, the horror," Fleur said, pressing the back of her hand to her forehead. "Might I remind you that a lasting relationship-

-does not begin in bed," Gabrielle interrupted. "Yes, I know, but a kiss might have been nice."

"Is he worth waiting for?" Fleur asked.

"I've waited eleven years, sister mine, I think I'm entitled to a little sympathy. Yes, *bloody hell*, yes; he's worth waiting for. Are you happy now?"

"What did you observe?" Fleur asked.

"He's still in very fine shape; he's an excellent flier; he was surveying a magical field in the wilds of Alaska, trying to determine the nature of the charms that anchored the field for no other reason than he wanted to know how it worked. He's an adequate cook, he lives a fairly disciplined life, he's taking a daily dose of a Muggle medicine, Bupropion, he's teaching himself how to play the guitar, and he still gets misty eyed when he talks about his old girlfriend," Gabrielle said, ticking off the items on her fingers.

"And from that you conclude?" Fleur asked.

"That he's disciplined enough to keep fit, he has a curious mind and has the initiative to start projects and see them through, he's not afraid to seek help when he needs it, and at one time, at least, he fell deeply in love," Gabrielle said with a sigh.

"And the fact that he's well to do and has the loveliest eyes never made it to your list?" Fleur asked teasingly.

"I make enough money that I don't care how much he has, and as for his eyes, well, certain things I will not share with my sister," she said with a wicked smile.

"So, where is he now?" Fleur asked.

"Setting up his flat at number 12 Grimmauld Place."

"Lupin's house – the old Order Headquarters?" Fleur asked.

"Yes, it's actually still Harry's house – he lets the house to Remus and Dora for a Galleon a year – there's a nice flat in the basement he fitted out before he left England. He asked me to accompany him tonight when he goes to the Burrow," Gabrielle said.

"Asked you?"

"I'm trying to not read too much into that right now. I suspect he thinks that Molly won't flay him on the spot if he's got a comparative stranger with him," Gabrielle said.

"But you are *family*," Fleur protested.

"Perhaps," Gabrielle responded cryptically. "Wish me well."

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What do you say to someone you gave up for dead years ago?

Harry pondered this question as he stood on the threshold, hesitating before knocking. He gave up pondering the question as he felt magic swirl around him.

"Tell me something that only you know," a voice from his past asked.

Harry smiled. "When you sleep on your stomach, you drool," he said.

"I do not, you big lug! Get in here before the neighbours call the Daily Prophet!" she exclaimed.

Harry felt another swirl of magic and a click as he pushed against the door. The cottage was similar in layout to many of those on Wyvern Lane; he'd looked at enough of them before deciding against living in Hogsmeade. This one was furnished to reflect the occupants; floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and window boxes filled with exotic plants in bloom. He supposed that the mirror next to the door doubled as some sort of foe-glass, but that detail could wait.

"Come here," she commanded, as she pushed up from a nicely appointed Muggle wheelchair, standing precariously. "Oh, Harry," she said as he swept into her arms. He could feel her shake in his arms.

"Why are you crying?" he whispered.

"Because I thought I'd never see you again," she replied, pushing away long enough to kiss his cheek before sitting down again in the wheelchair. "Don't mind the chair – my legs work well enough, but five years of bed rest tends to play hob with one's muscle tone. Oh, Harry, it's so good to see you again."

"Indeed," he replied. "I'd given up on you. I'm sorry."

"Well, some things don't change, Harry Potter, you're still apologizing for everything," she exclaimed.

"And you're still right," he replied. He pulled a chair away from the table, twirling it around so he could sit in it backwards, and propped his elbows on the back.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush," Hermione began.

"You only beat around the bush when you want me to do something you think I don't want to do," Harry quipped.

Hermione nodded. "So, why did you leave?"

"Do you want the long version or the short version?" he asked.

"The short version will do," she said.

"Ginny was dead, you were as good as dead, Ron needed something to live for and I was severely messed up. If I stayed in England, Ron would make taking-care-of-Harry his life. He deserved better than that, so I left him in Padma's clutches. That part seems to have worked out well," he said.

"I can honestly admit that I never saw that one coming," Hermione said. "He's grown up a lot; they make a nice couple."

"Yeah, it seems that saving her sister kinda evened out the gigantic prat he was on the evening of the Yule Ball," Harry said with a sideways smile.

"So, what did you do, where did you go?" Hermione asked, settling back in her chair as she pulled a strand of hair around one finger.

"I went to Marseilles and discovered that I don't make a very good drunk. Then I dried out and a brighter than average Muggle doctor concluded that my depression might need some chemical help, so he prescribed an anti-depressant that brought me back into the land of the living, for which I'm quite grateful. I went to Alexandria for a while and then Cyprus. There's a monastery there where I hung out for a year or two. I would have stayed except that the Abbot said that I had 'issues' I had to work out before he'd consider taking me as a novice. I learned how to play the guitar and learned how to turn off my dreams, which meant that I could sleep again, which was a good thing. I got tired of Cyprus one summer as it began heat up, so I looked at a map and went to North America on a whim. I did the tourist thing in Alaska, ending up in Denali. There are some fascinating things up there, so I spent my summers in Alaska and winters in Cyprus," Harry said, pausing to take a breath.

"No one could get mail to you – the Post Owls returned with a look of disgust on their faces," Hermione complained.

"Yeah, well, that was necessary. I was tired of getting death threats, pleas for money and marriage proposals. I also received a number of indecent proposals, including enough knickers to start my own unmentionable shop," he said, looking up at an incredulous Hermione.

"Women sent you their *knickers*?" she asked.

"Knickers, pictures, long rambling perfumed letters, and it wasn't just women," he replied.

"Eeww," she said, making a face.

"I suppose I should set up a mail drop, but I haven't been home long enough yet to contact my solicitor," he said.

"When did you get in?"

"This morning – I went shopping with Gabrielle because I had a suspicion that my wardrobe of jeans and t-shirts wouldn't cut it back in England, so I pumped some money into the local economy and came home with several bags of clothing for all occasions."

"How do you and Gabrielle get along?" Hermione asked.

"She's great – when she's awake she doesn't have the cloying thick accent her sister used to have, she's smart, and she's incredibly easy to get along with, and she's not hard to look at," Harry replied.

"Hasn't tried to work the Veela charm on you?" Hermione asked.

"It doesn't work with me, and no, she hasn't tried. If anything, she's been a bit reserved. It's kind of nice to meet someone, hit it off, and know that they're not trying to get something from me," he said.

"You know that she does fancy you a bit," Hermione warned.

"If that's true, she hides it well," Harry replied. "Speaking of hearts on sleeves, is Neville still hanging around?"

Hermione smiled. "Neville's very sweet," she said guardedly.

"Might I remind you that I was the one who originally set you two up and covered for you when Ron was trying to figure out where you were? Poor bloke was as devastated as I was when you landed in St. Mungo's after the war," Harry said.

"We survived, Harry," Hermione said sombrely.

"Not all of us, Hermione, not all of us," he said wistfully. "Well, on that happy note, I assume that you've been invited to dinner at the Burrow?"

Hermione nodded.

"See you there then," he said, leaning forward to kiss her cheek.

She never heard the crack of his Disapparation from the threshold of her doorway.

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Dinner at the Burrow was a smashing success. Harry noted that the table arranged itself neatly into pairs: Fleur and Bill, Molly and Arthur, Padma and Ron, Hermione and Neville, and two spares, Gabrielle and himself. He didn't receive the expected grilling from Molly. Apart from a very thorough hug when he walked in the door, she hadn't said more than ten words to him that evening. As the dinner plates were cleared away, Neville sidled up him, twisting his head to indicate that he wanted them to pull away from the milling crowd.

"Might I have a word with you, Harry?" Neville asked politely.

"Certainly, let's step out into the garden," Harry replied.

They walked across the lawn, pausing to stop and examine some of the herb beds, which Neville pronounced as looking fit and healthy.

"I, uh, wanted to ask you something," Neville began, narrowly avoiding his schoolboy stammer.

"We were roommates for six years, Neville, so stop treating me like Snape," Harry said lightly.

"Right then," Neville said. "It's about Hermione."

"Lovely girl, that Hermione," Harry said, trying to stifle a grin.

"That she is," Neville said. "I've been waiting until you got back, you know."

"Neville, I *don't* know, so stop circling around it," Harry said softly but firmly.

"I'd like to get married," Neville began.

"I think that would be good," Harry replied, "but I've always favoured women myself."

Neville looked at him in confusion until he cuffed Harry lightly on the back of his head. "Me too, you pillock. What I mean to say is that I want to ask Hermione to marry me, and I wanted to ask your permission first."

Harry gave him a bemused expression. "And why would I be in any position to grant you permission?" Harry asked.

"Well, seeing that her parents are dead and all, and you're practically her brother, I thought that you could, you know, do the *in loco parentis* thing," Neville said.

"Are you really sure you want to marry Hermione? You know, the first night you take her to bed she'll say that whatever you're doing, is wrong based upon some book that she read?" Harry asked with a straight face.

Neville's face went pale.

"Buck up, Neville, I was just taking the Mickey out of you. Hermione's crazy about you. For what it's worth, you've got my blessing," Harry said.

"Really?" Neville asked.

Harry nodded. "Really," he replied.

"She's, uh, going to want you to give her away, you know," Neville said.

"Is she now?" Harry asked.

"We talked about it once when she was talking about losing her parents," Neville said.

"Neville?"

"Yeah, Harry?"

"If she says 'yes' take good care of her, okay?" Harry asked.

"Right," Neville replied.

"Uh, Neville, the Burrow is that way – I suggest you ask her right away," Harry said.

"Thanks, I'll do that," Neville said, heading back to the Burrow at a good clip.

Harry walked alone out to the Orchard, trying to remember the good times he'd had there without getting too maudlin about a certain redhead that was missing. He was, for the most part, successful, until he heard a mild explosion of voices from the Burrow. Evidently Neville had taken his advice literally.

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Harry looked up when he heard the sound of twig snap. He waved at Gabrielle, marvelling at how the moonlight played with her hair.

"What're you doing?" she asked, leaning up against a tree trunk.

"Feeling particularly alone, actually," he answered.

"It was rather couple-ish in there," Gabrielle observed.

"So you thought my company was better than feeling like a singleton?" Harry asked rhetorically.

Gabrielle nodded.

"Well, no accounting for taste, I suppose," Harry said sardonically.

They walked together in silence for a while.

"Hermione says that you fancied me at one time," Harry said.

"Her statement is incorrect," Gabrielle shot back. "That presumes that I stopped fancying you."

"So, being rescued by a fourteen year old boy when you were eight scarred you for life?" Harry asked.

"No, not hardly," Gabrielle said with a chuckle. "I can honestly say that I've not met any men like you, Harry."

"I don't know what to say to that," Harry said.

"I think this is where I'm supposed to say that if you want to kiss me that I promise I won't slap you," Gabrielle said.

"You know, direct works for me," Harry said, reaching out to push a strand of hair out of her face, "I'm lost with a lot of the subtle human interactions."

Up close, her hair really was as soft as it looked in the moonlight.

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The remainder of the summer passed in a blur. Neville and Hermione married in a small ceremony at the end of June, attended by Neville's parents and the extended Weasley clan, with a reception held on the grounds of Hogwarts. Padma gave birth to a strapping blue-eyed, black-haired girl on Harry's birthday.

Although no announcements were made, it seemed that all of Wizarding England knew that Harry was back. For every invitation he accepted to a wedding, bar mitzvah, christening, dinner or ministry social event, he'd turn down twenty or more. At each occasion, he was accompanied by a well-dressed, poised platinum blonde who didn't have to make any overt moves to notify the other women on the scene that Harry Potter was *unavailable*. Whether by good fortune or design, the most that was said about him in the society articles was "Harry Potter, accompanied by Gabrielle Delacour, was in attendance at the event."

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In a rare spell of down-time, Harry was sitting in his flat, going over his monthly statement from Gringotts. He never caught any errors, but felt that it had to be done for some reason. His restricted fireplace burped into life.

"Harry, are you in?" Ron called from the green flames.

"Yeah, come on over," Harry replied. Minutes later they were both sitting at his small breakfast table, chilled bottles of butterbeer in hand.

"You know, you're looking good," Ron said, pausing to swallow and belch.

"Says the man who's going through severe Serita-induced sleep deprivation," Harry said with a smile.

"It's not that bad – I got a stretch of four hours last night – seemed like a luxury," Ron said.

"How long before Padma goes back?" Harry asked.

"She's talking about not going back," Ron said.

"Can you afford that?" Harry inquired.

"Well enough – I just got a bump up the scale at work. I'm making more than dad now, just for writing about Quidditch! The world's a crazy place, I tell ya," Ron said, summoning another pair of bottles, offering another to Harry.

Harry pushed the bottle back towards Ron.

"No thanks, it doesn't really go well with my medicine," he said.

"So, what's that stuff do?" Ron asked.

"Ask Padma," Harry replied.

"No really, what's it do?" Ron asked with concern.

"Well, you know what a melancholy moody bastard I've been all the time you've known me?" Harry asked.

"Yeah?"

"It takes the edge off – now I'm just an unemployed, lazy bastard," Harry said, smiling. "Seriously – it doesn't make me happy; it just lets me feel normal without the fog and the fits of rage I used to swim in for months at a time."

"You seem pretty happy though," Ron observed.

"Yeah, well, that's a different sort of medicine," Harry said, smiling broadly again.

"I suppose Miss Delacour has something to do with that?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, I guess so. I still don't know what she sees in me, but I figure if lightning strikes, I might as well play along," Harry said pensively.

"Are you and she – uh," Ron stumbled.

"Playing house? Making the beast with two backs? Four bare legs in a bed?" Harry said with a smirk.

"Uh, yeah, I guess that's what I was asking," Ron said, looking down at his bottle.

"No."

"No? You two are joined at the hip – you're never out anywhere without her beside you," Ron objected.

"Outside of the Burrow, have you ever seen a public display of affection between us other than holding hands?" Harry asked.

"Uh, now that you mention it, no," Ron said, seemingly confused.

"Relax, Ron, there's plenty going on, we just have the good taste to not writhe like eels in public, and we aren't doing *that* yet." Harry confided.

"You would bring up the eel bit – might I remind you that I was an idiot that year?" Ron countered.

"Oh, yeah, you were so much better the *following* year when you and Hermione went racing out of our tent, into the rain, both starkers, both shouting at the top of your lungs at each other," Harry said glibly.

"Yeah, well, Hermione always knew how to push my buttons," Ron said. "We are much better friends than we were lovers."

"Smartest realization you ever made," Harry said.

"Nope, that would be Padma," Ron said with a proud smile.

"I'll grant you that."

"So, is this serious?" Ron asked.

"Gabrielle? I think so – it's not like I have a lot of experience in this area, you know," Harry said.

"Do you love her?"

"I think so," Harry replied quietly.

"Have you told her?"

"Not yet – I'm just enjoying everything as it unfolds," Harry said, staring off into space. "Changing the subject – how would you like to have Sunday afternoon and evening off, let me and Gabrielle watch Serita?" Harry asked.

"What, have you strap her on the back of your motorbike and go racing along the beach?" Ron countered.

"I was thinking something more like pushing her in a pram through the park, but if you think that Padma would approve the motorbike, I'll see if I can get her a wee little helmet," Harry said.

"You're serious?"

"Yeah – Gabrielle's good with kids, and I've got to start working on my godfatherly duties, don't you know."

"What about feeding Serita?" Ron asked, looking interested.

"Padma pumps sometimes, doesn't she?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Ron replied.

"Have her lay in a ten hour supply and we'll keep Serita fed and changed, allowing you two time to sleep or whatever it is that old married couples do when they're not tending sprogs," Harry offered.

"Yeah, well, we're not doing *that* either – I'm on an eight week diet until Padma's bottom heals up," Ron said.

"Remind me to schedule in some time to feel sorry for you, mate."

"Prat!"

"Sex-fiend!"

"Slacker!"

"Hey, I resemble that remark," Harry said.

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Harry was, for the first time in a long time, happy; in a return engagement of *déjà vu*, he felt like he was living someone else's life - again. The melancholy part of his personality was dreading the inevitability that *something* would occur to screw this up.

The shoe finally dropped on a Friday night, at dinner in London after an outing at the Muggle theatre.

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"Harry, we need to talk," Gabrielle said, clutching her purse with one hand, hoping that she wasn't looking as nervous as she felt.

"So talk," Harry said, stirring his coffee wandlessly. "I'm listening."

"I'm running out of money," Gabrielle said quietly.

"How much do you need?" Harry asked instantly.

"That's not the point – I am not now, nor was I ever interested in your money," she said proudly. "The French Ministry has asked me to come back."

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Harry felt like he'd been pole axed. He tried to breathe, but it was as if his lips had been sealed while his chest was simultaneously squeezed by some giant fist. When he finally managed to speak, he squeaked out "Did you accept the job?"

Gabrielle nodded.

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Harry's eyes flashed, and then he appeared to tamp down whatever he was feeling. "Well, what's done is done," he said, standing up to pull a fifty pound note from his pocket and throw it to the centre of the table. "I'll miss you – terribly," he said, just before Disapparating with the faintest of cracks.

Gabrielle stared at the space where Harry had just been, staring in disbelief. "Mon Dieu! What have I done?" she wailed.

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There was an incessant banging on the door. Hermione stirred from her reverie and began to stand.

"Hermione! I don't care if you're getting the shagging of your life; I really need to talk to you – right now!" Gabrielle called through the locked door.

Hermione blushed and then laughed at the absurdity of it all, opening the door with a flick of her wand.

"Not that it's any of your business, but I got the shagging of my life yesterday – today my husband is at his mum's house, painting the parlour," Hermione said primly. "Come on in Gabrielle, I'll make some tea."

A minute later they were seated at the kitchen table, a tray of biscuits before them, standing watch over their steaming cups of tea.

"Start at the beginning – assume I know nothing," Hermione said.

"I think we just had our first fight," Gabrielle said, "but I'm not really sure."

"What did you do tonight?" Hermione asked.

"We took in an early show in London and then went to dinner," Gabrielle reported.

"Sounds pretty good thus far," Hermione responded.

"I wanted to talk to him about my situation," Gabrielle began.

"And what situation is that, exactly?"

"I'm running out of money – I need to go back to work," Gabrielle said.

"At which point Harry offered you money," Hermione said.

"Which I refused," Gabrielle said proudly. "Then I told him that I was offered an assignment back with the French Ministry. He asked me if I'd accepted the offer and I said yes. Then he got very angry, stood up and paid for dinner and Disapparated from the restaurant."

"Tell me the exact words – verbatim if you can," Hermione said, her eyes closed, her fingertips on her temples as she tried to visualize this scene.

Gabrielle complied with the request, essentially recreating five minutes of very critical dialogue.

Hermione moaned.

"It's that bad?" Gabrielle asked.

"If you were anyone else, I'd be hexing you right now."

"What did I do?" Gabrielle pleaded. "How can I fix it?"

Hermione muttered something indistinctly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch that," Gabrielle said.

"I said, 'showing up naked, covered in dark chocolate would be a start.' Harry thinks you just broke up with him, which I'm certain was not your intention," Hermione said calmly, her voice belying the fury beneath her façade. "What were you intending to discuss?"

"I wanted to talk about how we could make a long distance relationship work, until I finish the assignment," Gabrielle said plaintively.

"So it's not a permanent position?" Hermione asked, her face brightening a bit.

"I'm sure that they'd take me on a permanent basis, but no, this was only a temporary assignment that would put me into the black for a couple of years," Gabrielle answered.

"Were you hoping that he would talk you out of it, propose, perhaps?" Hermione inquired.

"That would have been nice, but no, I wasn't hoping for that; I don't live in a fairy tale," Gabrielle said coolly.

"I must remind you that Harry only appears to be normal. He can spot a grasshopper from across the Quidditch pitch, but the nuances of human discourse often elude him; it's as if he were raised by wolves or something," Hermione said. "You need to find him, sooner would be better than later, and grovelling isn't out of the question; chocolate wouldn't hurt," she said with a slight smile.

"I'm afraid that appealing as that might sound, it's not going to happen," Gabrielle said.

"And why not?" Hermione asked coldly.

"Harry's not in England any more; he's left again."

"You're sure?"

"It's what I do, Hermione. Yes, I'm sure."

"You're screwed then; Harry took a big chance with you. He might never have told you, but he was very much in love with you and was thinking that you're the one. Don't look so shocked, surely you had an inkling of how he felt?" Hermione asked.

"It was always hard to sort out what I discerned from what I wanted to be there," Gabrielle said after a moment of painful silence. "I'm sorry to have troubled you. I've got to go pack; I've got an international Portkey to catch in the morning."

"That's it? You're just going to let him get away like that?" Hermione asked incredulously.

"Some particularly nasty criminals are on the loose back in France, Hermione. If I go back tomorrow I may be able to catch them before any more innocents are slain. Not everything is about me – as for Harry, in between fugitives, I'll start looking for him again," Gabrielle said with a note of dejection.

"Good luck; you're going to need it," Hermione said, stifling a yawn.

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# Lost and Found Trilogy

## Broken Pieces - Part III

### Broken Pieces

He played the conversation over in his mind – one more time.

Denial wasn't an option. After four months that had approached bliss, she had told him unequivocally that she was leaving. He'd left the restaurant as quickly as possible because he didn't want to break down in front of her – he still had *some* pride. He'd popped back to England after spending the night walking the beaches in Cyprus to find that every trace of her was gone to - *wherever* . Her leaving was a fact, like gravity, like magic, like exhaustion, like the pain in his hands after beating a particularly unsympathetic oak tree outside of her former flat.

Withdrawal – he'd honed that into an art-form. When you have magic, a bit of money, and don't mind being a bit uncomfortable, there are a lot of places to retreat where you can guarantee that you'll be left alone. Of course, the off odd chance that you might be killed in an avalanche or be collateral damage in a low-intensity war was just part of the downside if you really, really wanted to be alone.

Anger – now that he was taking his blessed daily dose of Bupropion he wasn't subject to the rages that he'd become famous for as a teenager, but he could still launch into a pretty good rant. The problem now was that his anger didn't have a target apart from an uncaring universe that allowed him to fall in love with a woman who had just left him. That realization, that he *loved* her, had sunk in on the second day. He was *angry* that she'd left, but he wasn't angry *at her* . He missed her – the way she'd sing quietly when doing a mindless task, the way she smelled when he embraced her, the way she fit into his side when they were doing something trivial like watching a practice Quidditch match from the stands. He missed watching her eyes open after a kiss. Missing her was excruciating.

Bargaining – he wasn't very good at that, but he had put in a good hour of prayer after dawn on the third day when he returned to St Athanasius' monastery in Cyprus. He wasn't sure that he believed in God, but he didn't mind praying with the brothers, who seemed to have settled those questions of belief long, long ago. Abbot Anthony would let him join the brothers for a meal and spend a day or two at the monastery before he'd retreat to his place on the top of the mountain. In the end, he'd felt a little bit ridiculous pleading with a God he wasn't sure existed about a problem that he was fairly certain was his to solve, not God's. That didn't stop him from lighting a candle, though, or staying for prayers before the noon meal.

Depression – he knew a lot about that. He didn't fear it any more, but he did give it the same healthy respect he paid to the other things in his life that could destroy him if he wandered too close: dragons, rip tides, unstable rock faces, and certain dark creatures. He knew that he needed to sleep if he was to avoid the mania that came from days of sleep deprivation, and he likewise knew that he couldn't rely on the usual chemicals or potions, so he would exhaust himself with physical activity, eat a Spartan, albeit nourishing meal, and then collapse in a nylon mesh hammock he'd installed in a place that usually received breezes in the night. After a week, he'd settled into a rhythm. Midway into the second week he woke in the middle of the night with a burst of clarity: he now knew what anchored the magical fields that surrounded Denali, a problem he'd been trying to solve for three years. As he scratched several lines of arithmagical equations onto a notepad, he barked a rough laugh, a sound he hadn't made in quite a while. His unconscious mind had solved a vexing problem, it just happened to be the *wrong* vexing problem.

So he'd processed denial, withdrawal, anger and depression; he'd be damned if he was going to move from depression to acceptance, but *that* problem was going to have to be put off for a while he fixed another niggling problem for his neighbours.

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The strange hermit known to the monks as Brother Harry would come and go, but that wasn't without precedent; a number of hermits had, over time, semi-attached themselves to the monastery. He'd be a regular visitor on a weekly basis for a few months, and then be absent for half a year or more. The brothers took little notice of it – *they* weren't going anywhere, and whoever *he* was, he had the confidence of Abbot Anthony.

He appeared again one morning, waiting until morning prayers were finished to seek an audience with Abbot Anthony. The Abbot was no slouch in the smarts department and understood how the Denali magical field could be adapted to the problems faced in the Troödos mountain range. The next day the Abbot assigned an unusual surveying assignment to Brothers Cyril and Basil and a week later after they'd dug very particular holes in the rocks, Brother Harry came and filled the holes with cylinders he'd brought down from his hermitage. If the brothers noticed the correlation between their construction project and the fact that the Turks on the other side of the mountain stopped firing their mortars, they never said anything about it. They'd been praying for years that the random barrages would stop, and that prayer had finally been answered. Nothing mysterious about that; they'd been living with answered prayers for years.

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Throwing yourself into work when you don't want to face your emotions can be a good thing. The fact that the work happens to be finding kidnapped children and their kidnappers is just a bonus – the work is a painkiller that happens to be available in eighty hour doses.

In the first two weeks, they'd recovered the magical children along with some Muggle children the Muggle authorities didn't know were missing. In the following month, they rounded up eight of the ten core leaders in the gang responsible for the heinous crimes. The remaining scum had crawled under a rock somewhere and weren't cooperating with the strike team's efforts to apprehend them.

Gabrielle sighed, picking up a pen to fill out the remaining paperwork. Once she filled out this last batch of papers, she'd go to her pitifully empty flat and sleep, something she hadn't done for a while. She looked up before the door opened, deciding in a flash that she probably didn't need to pick up her wand. The District Superintendent pushed the door open. If she were still an Auror, she'd be expected to snap to attention, but she was a specialist, a civilian, on contract, so she could remain seated. She decided to compromise, putting down the pen and sitting erect at her desk.

“Yes, Madame?” she said in her best school-girl French.

“I am most pleased with your results, Mademoiselle, but it pains me to think that you have been working for what, the past six weeks without a break?” she said in measured, even tones. “Today is Wednesday. I want you to go home, now, and not return until Monday. Are you clear on my expectations?”

“Just what am I to do between now and Monday, Madame?” Gabrielle asked.

“Anything other than working on this case – go back to England and see your nephew and nieces, visit the beach, go shopping – anything other than this case. Is that clear? The Ministry has deposited several pounds of gold into your account, it wouldn’t hurt if you spent a little of it in France,” the Superintendent drawled, her lips curling with the ghost of a smile.

“Yes, Madame,” Gabrielle said, closing the folder on her desk. It would still be there on Monday, wouldn’t it?

“It’s not just for you, Gabrielle; you’ve been running my Aurors ragged. I would like to have something left to supervise when you leave us,” the Superintendent said. Her face softened, and she put on the more familiar, softer face Gabrielle had known as a little girl. “I am proud of you, daughter; you have brought honour to us once again.”

“But of course, Madame Superintendent,” Gabrielle said with a smile.

The Superintendent nodded and swished her platinum hair to one side, pulsing with a quick glow of Veela energy before she walked out of the room. Gabrielle felt honoured by the display, which was equivalent to a loving hug from a favourite aunt.

Gabrielle Apparated to a safe spot outside of her flat and walked up the flights of stairs leading to her room. She put her satchel down, kicked off her shoes, and collapsed into the bed, falling asleep before she could turn over into a more comfortable position.

When she woke, whenever that was, she’d go looking for Harry.

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It didn’t take long to wind up his affairs on Cyprus. What little food he hadn’t eaten already he left in the monastery kitchen where it was sure to be eaten by the brothers. He had a brief chat with Abbot Anthony, who again thanked him for installing the shield covering the south side of the mountain and Disapparated from the monastery courtyard. In Crete, he found the British consul who was able to post a message for him; with any luck by the time he arrived at his flat in London he’d have a reply.

He let himself into the basement flat at Grimmauld Place, smiling when he lit the lamps – there waiting on the table for him was a neatly penned reply from his oldest and best friend; he would be dining with Mr. Longbottom and Mrs. Granger-Longbottom tonight in response to his inquiry. He stripped off his clothes, which were more appropriate for the balmy Mediterranean than London in autumn, took a shower and then settled down for a brief nap.

He awoke in time to browse through a couple of stores to find appropriate gifts; a bottle of a rather clever Muggle compound that helped potted plants retain water and a book of Sufi poetry that he’d first discovered when visiting the Turkish side of the island of Cyprus. He arrived punctually, receiving hugs from both newlyweds and deposited his gifts, which were initially rebuffed and then eventually accepted. Neville had read about the Muggle compound, but hadn’t found it when he’d asked for it at the local ironmonger’s shops. Dinner was pleasant enough, although by unspoken mutual consent none of them said anything about Harry’s most recent departure or the events that led up to it. After coffee was served, Neville excused himself, explaining that he had a flat of orchids that had to be re-potted if he had any hope of them blooming before Christmas.

Seeing the glint in Hermione’s eye, he knew he was in trouble. He attempted to distract her by diagramming the Denali field, writing out his analysis of the various magical forces anchoring that field, and explaining how he’d adapted that discovery to protect the monastery on Troödos. That was good for about half an hour, as Hermione couldn’t resist the temptation, but when the last diagram was drawn, her visage changed and the glint returned to her eye. With a practiced flick of her wand, she silenced the room.

“You’ve been trying to distract me, haven’t you?” she asked.

“Yeah, because you’re going to explain to me in excruciating detail what an arse I’ve been, aren’t you?” he replied.

Hermione nodded.

“Look, if it will save any time, I’ll admit that I screwed up big time, although for the life of me, I’m not sure how,” he said.

“Adults don’t run away from their problems, Harry – especially when it’s conflict with someone they *love*,” Hermione said gently.

“She told me that she was leaving me – out of the blue,” Harry said in his own defence.

“Did you inquire into *why* she was leaving?” Hermione asked patiently.

“Yeah, something about running out of cash,” Harry said.

“Did Gabrielle ever strike you as being particularly concerned about money?” Hermione asked.

“No,” he answered, shaking his head. “If she could pay her bills, she was happy.”

“Did she explain what the job was?” Hermione asked, already knowing the answer.

"Tracking something, I suppose," he said.

"Children," Hermione said quietly, unconsciously rubbing her side.

"Children?"

"Yeah, a bunch of magical children have been kidnapped," Hermione explained.

"For ransom?"

"No, for the sex-trade."

"That's disgusting," Harry said indignantly. "Why didn't she tell me that?"

"Because you didn't give her a chance to, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed, twinging sympathetically with the pain spread across her friend's face.

"I didn't want to cry in front of her," Harry said after a moment of silence, reaching up to brush his eyes with the back of his hand. "Everything I love leaves me."

"Oh, Harry, that's not true," Hermione said, moving beside him on the sofa.

"Oh?" Harry said, looking up into her eyes. "Do you want the list? Well, first there's Mum, and then dad of course, then Sirius, Albus, Hagrid, Ginny, even you."

"I didn't mean to leave you, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed.

"I know that, Hermione; just try explaining it to the little boy who sleeps in the cupboard under the stairs," Harry said, wiping his eyes on his sleeves.

Hermione shifted around on the couch so she could place her arms around him. Some part of him noted that she was so much thinner than she'd been five years ago, and she'd been pretty lean then. The tears flowed freely, prompting Hermione to summon a box of tissues.

"Thanks, you're ever practical," Harry said, crumpling the used tissue.

Hermione sniffed. "You know, Gabrielle came to me that night. She knew that you two had just had a fight, but she didn't understand what she'd done wrong," she said.

"So she came to the long-suffering friend for an interpretation," Harry quipped.

"She asked what she could do to fix things. I suggested showing up at your flat, naked, with her bits covered in dark chocolate. What? Why are you looking at me like that?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know which is more disturbing; visualizing Gabrielle like that, or the fact that *you* suggested it," Harry said, raising his eyebrow.

"Oh, stuff it," Hermione said, pushing his shoulder weakly. "That was one of Ron's stock fantasies – it was the first thing that came to mind."

"So it wasn't drawn from personal experience?"

"I'm not answering that question!"

"I happen to know that *Ron* favours milk chocolate, it's *Neville* that prefers dark chocolate," Harry said with a wink.

"I am a happily married woman, Harry Potter, and I have no complaints in that area of my life," Hermione said, trying hard not to smile. "You haven't been intimate with her, have you?"

"No, not for lack of trying on her part, though," Harry said.

"Why?"

Harry leaned back on the couch, stretching out his legs. He didn't talk until he'd run his fingers through his hair, trying to frame the words. "Blame Ginny, I guess – or rather blame me. During the war, after we got back together, we'd talked about getting married, I'd even bought a ring, but I wanted to wait until after Voldemort was dead, and I wasn't sure that I was going to survive. Ginny didn't want to wait, but I didn't want her to be seen as damaged goods if she survived the war and I didn't," he explained.

"I'm not sure I understand," Hermione said.

"Ginny was a pureblood without much to offer in the way of a dowry, so if she was going to have a hope of marrying well after the war, at least to someone other than me, who didn't care about pureblood snobbery, she needed to be intact."

"That was why you waited?" Hermione asked incredulously. "That's barbaric."

"There are a lot of things in the Wizarding world that haven't changed much since the Dark Ages, Hermione," Harry said drolly.

"So what does that have to do with Gabrielle?" Hermione asked.

"I loved Ginny; I *knew* I wanted to marry her – and with her I was waiting until we could get married, so I guess to be consistent, I've applied the same standard to every girl I've met after Ginny died," Harry explained.

"There have been tonnes of them, I suppose," Hermione said sarcastically.

"Not really – but there have been a few; girls who were far more interested in me than I was interested in them – on any terms," Harry said quietly. "Until Gabrielle – I didn't figure out that it was something more than infatuation until after she'd left."

"Do you know why she brought up that conversation that night?"

"No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me, aren't you, Hermione?"

Hermione smiled. "She wanted to talk about how to make a long-distance relationship work until she came back."

"She was planning on coming back?" Harry groaned. "Just shoot me, what an arse I've been."

"If it's any comfort, Gabrielle's been heartbroken, both by the fact that she hurt you and by the fact that you two are apart," Hermione said.

"Excuse me if I fail to find the comfort in that news, Hermione."

"She wants you back, *stupid*," Hermione said, cuffing the back of his head.

"Okay, thanks, that's framing it in terms that I can understand," Harry said with a smile. "You have a plan, of course."

Hermione smiled sweetly. "Of course."

~+~

The Superintendent walked away from the Apparation point shaking her head. She hated the budget meetings in Paris, but if she sent one of her subordinates, she always felt that she'd be short-changed. She ducked into a bistro, emerging moments later with a steaming coffee, her second of the day. As she walked into her office she noted a smartly dressed young man chatting amiably with her secretary. His accent was Parisian, but his clothes reeked of England. Michele stood as the Superintendent sat down behind her desk.

"Madame, this gentleman wishes to speak with you, but he does not have an appointment," Michele said.

The Superintendent smiled once she saw the stranger's face. "Monsieur Potter does not need an appointment to see me, Michelle."

"Yes, Madame," Michele said nervously, dropping a small curtsy.

The Superintendent gave her visitor chair a backhanded wave. "Won't you come in, Monsieur Potter?"

"Why thank you," he said politely, laying his coat down beside the chair before sitting down.

"What brings you to Marseilles?" the Superintendent asked sweetly.

"I'm looking for one of your employees," he replied.

"Mademoiselle Delacour is not on station at the moment," the Superintendent said flatly.

"I've already gathered that much," Harry said wryly.

"I expect her to report for duty on Monday," the Superintendent volunteered.

"I hope to not wait that long," he replied.

"You will have to live with the disappointment, Monsieur," the Superintendent said sharply.

"Can you tell me where I might find her before Monday?"

"No – for the simple reason that I do not know where she is. She has worked very long hours for almost two months and I ordered her to take a small holiday. I have answered your questions, now you will answer mine," the Superintendent said. "Why do you wish to see Mademoiselle Delacour?"

"We have known each other for years, and recently became – good friends. I am afraid that we had a misunderstanding before she left England," he said politely.

The Superintendent said nothing, closing her eyes briefly as the air about her began to shimmer with silver light.

The dark-haired man was unfazed. "Please stop," he asked. The Superintendent remained silent, staring at him as the aura around her began to blaze. She felt his magic surround her and begin to squeeze, taking her breath away. "Please – stop," he repeated.

"Very well," the Superintendent said with a crisp smile. The tension in the air dissipated as her aura faded to nothing. "I can see why she is so taken with you; you are a most unusual man, Monsieur."

Gabrielle said much the same thing," Harry said with a smile.

"I would like to make a proposition that would be in our mutual best interests," the Superintendent began, breaking into a warm, broad smile.

"I'm all ears," Harry said.

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She didn't bother coming back to her flat on Sunday night – she was driven to hit as much territory as she could during her unexpected holiday, traversing a couple of continents and dozens of time zones over the long weekend. It was Monday morning, 4:00 am to be precise. She was exhausted after a fruitless search. Her plan was to reach the International Apparation point in Paris, where she would take a quick breakfast before Apparating to Marseilles; she could shower in the changing room at the office.

After breakfast and a rather long shower she felt somewhat human, which caused a bleak smile. *Not bad for someone classified as 'near-human' in the xenobiology references.* Her smile left when she saw a note on her desk in Michele's loopy handwriting. "The District Superintendent wishes to see you at 9:30 a.m. in her office."

*Oh shite .*

Gabrielle went back to the changing room to make sure that everything looked perfect. It wouldn't change anything, but at least if she looked good, she'd have an edge going into the District Superintendent's office. It was not lost on her that when she returned to the Justice Ministry that the first part-Veela tracker to ever be certified by the Ministry would be working for the most highly-decorated and highest ranking part-Veela in the Ministry. The fact that said Superintendent was a distant relative did not help matters at all. She knew that whatever infraction she'd committed (and she'd committed a number of them in the past seven weeks) she'd get no slack from the District Superintendent.

*9:25 a.m. , well, I might as well get it over with.*

"Good morning, Michele, I'm here to see the Superintendent," Gabrielle said.

"Go right on in, Madame is expecting you," Michele said coolly. Gabrielle made sure that the door closed behind her.

"Please sit down, Mademoiselle," the Superintendent said, not looking up from a stack of folders.

"Yes, Madame," she said meekly.

She sat in silence, suffocating quietly, trying to centre herself and project a calm demeanour.

The Superintendent cleared her throat, daintily.

"I've been catching up on my paperwork, and I've been noticing an odd correlation, Mademoiselle," the Superintendent said crisply.

"Oh?"

"There have been a number of injuries in the strike force, and a number of requests to transfer out of the strike force," she said.

"It's a rough job," Gabrielle said.

"That's what I thought at first, until I noticed where the injuries were occurring," the Superintendent said. She opened the first folder. "Jacques Fuso, dislocated shoulder, listed as a sparring accident. Do you know anything about that?" she asked, looking up from the folder to pierce her with her gaze.

"He was sparring with me, Madame," Gabrielle said.

"How was he injured?"

"His hand was upon my breast, Madame," Gabrielle explained, wincing a little as she remembered the incident.

"That type of contact has been known to happen during sparring," the Superintendent replied.

"His hand was inside my blouse, Madame," Gabrielle answered.

"I see," the Superintendent said, moving that file to one side of the desk. "Gerrard Monet, burn marks to the face and scalp."

"The mirror in my locker had a peeping charm upon it, Madame," Gabrielle said, nibbling on her lower lip.

"Antoine Marlowe, broken fingers."

"Monsieur Marlow seemed unable to move past me in the hallways without placing his hands upon my buttocks, Madame. I gave him a warning; he did not think that I was serious," Gabrielle said primly.

"Do we need to go over the rest of these, Mademoiselle?"

"No, Madame," Gabrielle said. "The men operating under your command appear to believe that Veela were placed upon the earth to satisfy their carnal desires. Those who have bothered to inquire into my recent history believe that the remedy for a broken heart involves a dalliance with them,

a belief that I have gone to great lengths to disabuse.”

“I see,” the Superintendent said. “The fact remains that none of the qualified Aurors wish to go out into the field with you any more, despite your phenomenal accomplishments to date. I have a large stack of transfer requests awaiting my signature.”

“I do not know what I can do beyond tendering my resignation, Madame,” Gabrielle said coolly.

“That will not be necessary. I have requested that a specialist be detailed from Paris to accompany you into the field for the duration of your assignment,” the Superintendent said.

“A specialist?” Gabrielle asked.

“A hit-wizard,” the Superintendent replied. “Do not roll your eyes at me, Mademoiselle.”

“I have worked with the Parisian hit-wizards before; I am not optimistic,” Gabrielle said, trying to control her facial expression.

“This one has come highly recommended,” the Superintendent said. “If you are unable to work with this one, however, we will have to reconsider our options.”

Gabrielle knew that she’d been dismissed. She stood and moved to leave.

“As you have no partner at the moment, you are not allowed into the field. You may catch up on your reports for the remainder of the day. The specialist is scheduled to arrive at 5:00 p.m. today. I would appreciate it if you could meet with him as soon as he arrives.

“Yes, Madame,” Gabrielle said, restraining the urge to slam the door upon her exit.

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The reports were all completed by noon. Gabrielle walked out of the building to catch a quick lunch and then went to the gymnasium to work out, beating the heavy bag until it burst a seam. That wasn’t nearly satisfying enough to slake her rage, so next she went to the range, trading her usual wand for a thicker battle wand. She heard the door open behind her several times, but no one had the courage to approach her while she was simultaneously seething and shooting. She felt a warm tingling at the base of her spine, but she ignored it, marking it up to fatigue. Changing wands, she set up a combat scenario with mannequins, repeating the scenario until there were no mannequins standing. She heard the door open once again, but it never closed.

“The range door is supposed to be closed at all times, can’t you read the signs?” she called over her shoulder, not bothering to turn around.

“No, you must forgive me, I am new to the range,” he said.

A shiver ran down her back as the tingling burst into flame. He was here! She turned around slowly, pointing her wands to the ceiling. “Where the hell have you been?”

“Since Thursday evening, I’ve been here, and in Paris,” Harry replied, eyeing the wands carefully. He let the door close behind him.

“I’ve been to *Alaska and Crete and Cyprus and Alexandria and Singapore and Saigon*,” she spat.

“Saigon?” he asked incredulously.

“Okay, *that* one wasn’t your fault; while I was in Singapore I decided to hit Saigon so I could pick up some cinnamon for Molly and while I was there I scanned for you a couple of times,” Gabrielle said.

“I’m sorry,” he said, staring at her without blinking.

“For what?”

“For being an arse,” he said quietly. “For leaving in a huff; for not giving you a chance to explain. For doubting you.”

“Do you have any idea what *utter hell* the last seven weeks have been? I’ve been busting the vilest punks in Marseilles while simultaneously kicking myself for what happened that night. I’ve been such a bitch that I’m *this* close,” she said, holding her fingers apart by a centimetre, “to getting fired.” She threw down her wand. “Get over here, now,” she commanded.

Harry sauntered over to her, standing before her with his hands behind his back.

Gabrielle stamped her foot. “Not like that,” she cried, pulling at his elbows, flipping his arms around her. “Like this,” she said with a sigh. She breathed deeply, hoping that this was real, that it wasn’t a fatigue-induced hallucination. If it was a hallucination, it was a beauty – everything was correct – sight, sound, smell, touch. It was bliss. She began to glow; a shimmering aura of silver light surrounded her and then began to envelope him. She mentally kicked herself for slipping, but then decided that she didn’t care any more.

The door opened again. It was the District Superintendent. “Ah, Monsieur Potter, I see that you have found your partner,” she said sweetly.

Gabrielle broke the embrace, feeling sheepish. “Partner? *This* is the hit-wizard from Paris?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle, his credentials were issued this morning,” the Superintendent said with a slight smile.

"Monsieur Potter, your Tracker appears to be greatly fatigued and probably could not detect a rotting corpse in a bakery, given her current lack of sleep. Your first assignment is to accompany her to her quarters and make sure that she receives adequate rest before she returns to duty on Wednesday," the Superintendent commanded.

"Yes, Madame," Harry replied.

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Two hours later they stumbled back into her flat, having gorged at a small Thai restaurant not far from the office. She dropped her satchel and stood unsteadily by the door. "Where are you staying?" she asked.

"I've got some rooms at the Barclay until I can find a flat," Harry said.

"Oooh, nice digs, but a bit above your per diem, isn't it?" she asked.

"I'm not going to worry about that for the moment," he said.

Gabrielle bit her lips. "Sleep with me? Just until I fall asleep? You do have your orders, after all," she said with an impish smile.

Harry nodded. "Just until you fall asleep," he replied.

She nodded and then disappeared into her bathroom, coming out a few minutes later wearing a long cotton nightgown with three-quarter length sleeves. "The bedroom is this way," she said, leading the way. "Do you prefer the right or the left side?"

"Uh, the right," he said.

"Why am I not surprised," she said, pulling back the comforter as he kicked off his shoes. As he slipped into the bed, she turned her back to him. He slid next to her, throwing one arm over her. She wriggled into him and sighed. "Just until I fall asleep," she said.

"Just until you fall asleep," he echoed, marvelling in how right it felt to spoon with her.

As she relaxed she began to glow again. Harry never noticed, as he was already asleep.

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He woke with a start. Morning light was filtering into the bedroom window. The other side of the bed was empty. He heard rustling in the kitchenette.

"Were you expecting a package from Hermione?" Gabrielle called.

"Not really," he replied. "Why don't you open it – I'm going to use your loo."

"Got it," Gabrielle called as she continued to rustle in the kitchenette.

When he came out of the loo he noticed that she had a dressing gown on over the nightgown and was wearing flip-flops for slippers.

"You were expecting bunny slippers?" she asked.

"Not exactly. What was in the package?" Harry replied.

"Large bottle of dark chocolate sauce from Ghirardelli's" Gabrielle said, struggling to keep a straight face.

"Put it in your cupboard, we might need it some day," Harry said.

"Some day?" Gabrielle replied scornfully.

"Yeah, some day," Harry said. "What's for breakfast?"

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Okay, not my usual fare, but I enjoyed writing it. The basic plot and back story could easily fill 50-100,000 words, but I wanted to see how compact I could make it, trying to come in under 15,000 words, which is about the size of my usual chapter. What this means is that you telegraph some things (the recovery of Neville's parents) and other things you just mercilessly prune (like how the last two gangsters were hiding from Gabrielle, and the fact that they'd taken three part-Veela children hostage). Did you see the partner assignment coming? If so, raise your hands. Very good, thank you. You can sit down now.

As usual, my thanks go to my wonderful Beta, Runsamok, who I'm tempted to nickname "Quickdraw," but will refrain from doing so, because mum always said you didn't do that to ladies. Thanks also to those who provided feedback on my LJ, where the first drafts of all of my writing see the light of day.

For those of you who have not kept up with current affairs, the island of Cyprus is divided between the Turks, who are relative newcomers to the island, and the Cypriots, who speak Greek, notwithstanding the fact that they are an independent nation, admitted to the EU apart from Greece. The highest mountain in the Troödos range has a radar station on it, but other mountains in the range do have monasteries. There is an uneasy truce between the Turks and the Greek Cypriots, which breaks out into shooting from time to time.

Write what you know, we're told again and again. I'm not a wizard, so the magical bits I made up, but the geography is more or less correct in this story, and I credit a great deal of my present lot in life to my daily dose of Bupropion (Wellbutrin XL) which broke my three year clinical depression in one day. I thank God for the men and women at Glaxo, but we'll talk of that another day.

No chocolate sauce was harmed in the writing of this story.