There are More Things in Heaven and Earth...

by Maevi

Summary

Hera; Uncertain meaning, possibly from either Greek ἥρως (heros) "hero, warrior"; ὥρα (hora) "period of time"; or ἀρέω (haireo) "to be chosen".

Hera Potter was tired of only surviving. She wanted to live. So she took the chance when it presented itself.
"STOP!"

The word seemed to echo on into eternity around the cavernous chambers. Water dripping on stone and lapping the artificial shore in harmony. Scales slowing to a stop somewhere to the right of two heavily breathing teenagers, and one hardly breathing at all.

Hera held Tom’s diary in her left hand, the sword of Gryffindor in her right, ready to pierce it. Tom glared, absolutely furious, his right hand stretched out towards Hera as if to stop her. The blinded basilisk had ceased moving as well, sensing her Master’s desperation.

Hera, breath laboured from running and dodging the ruddy serpent, stood firm, arms shaking from the strain that had already been put on them.

“I’m willing to offer a trade” Hera rasps. She is tired. All her life she has been fighting for every morsel of survival. For every ounce of peace.

She thought it would be better at Hogwarts. Here she doesn’t have to dodge whale like fists and sharp nails. Here she gets to eat as much as she wants. Here she doesn’t have to nearly stop breathing when company comes over, pretending that she doesn’t exist, wishing at the same time as she hated it that it was true. Except.

Except.

Hera is still fighting for her life, only differently. Instead of a steady trickle of resistance, she faces a veritable tsunami at the end of the school year.

She can’t quite decide which one’s worse. But no more.

“I want to make a trade.” She reiterates, clearing her throat, her breath calming. Tom Riddle’s eyebrow goes up in question, his stance relaxing somewhat as well, although no less aware.

“If you let go of Ginny and me, let us walk out of here unharmed,” her eyes flickered over to the basilisk biding her time, “and NOT send your giant snake after us, I won’t stab your diary, or in any other way try to kill you.” She continued to breathe slowly through her nose, trying to keep calm. She’d learned the hard way that showing any fear or uncertainty was the first step to defeat.

Tom gave a derisive snort. “Oh really? The Weasley girl is the reason I’m practically corporeal, and my ticket to full life. Tell me little girl,” he sneered, “how exactly am I supposed to get around that?” Hera berating herself for forgetting that, blurted out the first thing to pop into her head. “The basilisk?”

Tom’s eyes widened, then shrunk into slits as he hissed. “She is over a millenia old. She belonged to Salazar Slytherin himself! I will NOT-” “Exactly!” squeaked Hera, terrified of the complete and utter rage oozing off Tom Riddle’s not quite fully fleshed out body. She continued quickly, clenching the sword and the diary as hard as she could, arms shaking more and more, and hoping to stave off a disaster.

“She is old, now somewhat useless because of what Fawkes di-”both boy and basilisk hissed, Hera flinched, “-d. Also, surrounded in Slytherin’s magic? That would be a boon to you, right? Besides,
couldn’t you just raise a new one?” Hera’s voice had risen to nearly mouse levels, the stress pulling her vocal cords tight. She felt a bit mad even suggesting these things, things that will help him, the man that had murdered her parents. Although not yet, technically. Merlin this was confusing.

She watched him warily, his facial expression frozen, seemingly thinking about her words. Honestly, she really was mad to even have suggested this. But she was so tired. She wanted a garauntee that he wouldn’t go after her. She wanted it to stop. She waited now with baited breath.

Hera tensed again as Tom slowly relaxed, his expression going from frozen to blank. Then, as if struck by brilliance, his eyes lit up and he smiled, turning his gaze to Hera. It would’ve been a nice smile, Hera thought idly, had it not been so predatory. He started to slowly, almost like molasses, move towards Hera. Hera didn’t think she could move even if she’d wanted to.

“Did you know that there is a prophecy regarding us?” Now it was her turn to freeze. Those actually existed? Merlin next he’d say zombies existed too. Hera minutely shook her head, eyeing the ever so slowly approaching Tom.

“Mm, yes. Summarily it states that only we can kill the other, however your rather desperate plea has merit.” Finally, he stopped, an armslength away from her. She could see how his eyes glittered, the dimple that only made an appearance when he smirked.

“We promise not to kill eachother?” Would it be so easy? Surely not. She kept her emerald gaze on him. Barely even blinking.

“An unbreakable vow.” He states with relish, as if he’d just solved the greatest mystery in the world. Hera only looked at him in confusion. His expression turned annoyed.

“An unbreakable vow is enforced by your magic, so if you were to attempt to break it, your magic would kill you before you could fulfill the intention.” Hera felt a pang of loss at how similar he sounded to Hermione in that moment. Apparently teaching mode was similar in all hyperintelligent people.

“So what you’re saying is that we would vow not to kill eachother, and if we tried to anyways, magic would kill us before we would succeed.” Hera wanted to be sure about what she was getting into. It almost sounded too good to be true. Then a thought struck her, and she swiftly moved half a step back. Narrowing her eyes, she asks, “Does that only mean you can’t kill me, or does that also stop you from asking someone else to do it?”.

Tom’s expression turned almost amused, if she read him right. She could hope.

“We would word it in such a way that we would not be able to ask others to do the deed for us.” Raising his hands in a placating gesture, he kept is body language loose, eager to see this through. Hera felt that this may either be the best decision of her life, or the greatest mistake she’d ever make. But having one less person making your life hell felt rather like a good deal.

“Alright.” Hera put the diary with the sword on top of it, on the ground before stepping once more within arms distance. Tom’s grin returned, and he lowered his left arm, but kept the left stretched out towards her. She eyed the hand as if it would bite her, then slowly stretched out her left hand as well, understanding what he wanted. Just before contact though she hesitated. Tom gave an irritated huff.

She looked up at him, face determined. “You’ll let Ginny go too, right? Alive?”
The skin around his eyes tightened, but he gave a short nod, and so Hera grabbed on to his forearm as he did the same to her. Tom yanked her closer, until they were almost bumping foreheads. Well, bumping her forehead to his chin more like. With his right hand, Tom reached into Hera’s right robe pocket and plucked out her wand.

“Ah ah,” Tom started just as Hera began to struggle and object, “I need to borrow it to complete the vow, so if you wish to leave this place alive I suggest you go with it.” Reluctantly Hera stilled and swallowed her words, nodding towards him to begin, and nervous over what was about to happen. She could feel the magic beginning to stir, almost in anticipation. Hera couldn’t decide if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

“You shall repeat after me, using your own name of course, with no last minute additions, else I call off the vow and kill both you and the girl.” Knowing her currently very precarious situation, Hera simply nodded.

“Excellent, let’s begin.” Hera felt the sudden increase in Tom’s magic surrounding them, goose pimples breaking out, ears popping, a roiling in her spine as her magic roared to great it.

“I, Thomas Marvolo Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort, pledge on my magic not to kill, nor ask any other being to kill, Hera Lily Potter. So mote it be.” A golden band slithered out from Hera’s wand and bound itself around their joined arms, constricting them somewhat. Hera gulped, took a deep breath, then repeated.

“I, Hera Lily Potter, pledge on my magic not to kill, nor ask any other being to kill, Thomas Marvolo Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort. S-so mote it be.” A second band appeared from her wand, crisscrossing the other band, and binding them even tighter together. For a second the bands glowed brightly, then disappeared, the magical backlash causing Hera to stumble away from Tom. In a daze, she lifted the arm of her robe and saw the faintest white marks on her skin where the bands of golden magic had been.

“I swear on my magic that I will release Ginevra Weasley from these chambers alive.” Tom’s words jolted Hera out of her daze and she spun around to stare at Tom who had grabbed the diary and already made his way over to Ginny. He was kneeling, bending over her, now mumbling words and waving Hera’s wand over the red heads prone form.

“All of a sudden, after even more mumbling and wand waving, a beam of seemingly black light shot from Ginny to the basilisk, who Hera had somehow managed to forget about during their dealings. Now she stooped to grab the sword, and held it in her hands, just in case. Not that she would actually be able to do anything, but seeing as Tom still had her wand, it was a measure of comfort that calmed her heart a bit. Hera couldn’t be bothered with holding it correctly though, as her limbs were now shaking even worse than before, the slight magical drain affecting her already exhausted body.

As Ginny’s shaking settled, fear lessening and hope gaining ground at hearing of their freedom to leave, Hera cautiously walked over to the still kneeling, and vaguely amused, Tom and silently asked for her wand back. Tom’s eyebrow raised itself achingly slowly, the silence extending and tension
thickening. Just as Hera was sure he was never going to give it back he swiftly stood, placed it gently into her outstretched hand, before turning and walking over to the still keening basilisk, placing a soothing hand on her hide.

Hera quickly returned to Ginny, helping her stand up and started shuffling back towards where Ron and the Professor were. Fawkes trilled overhead, causing the girls to jump, as Hera had forgotten about him and Ginny hadn’t known. A warmth suffused them however, and new energy with it. A thought occurred to Hera, which resulted in her stopping.

“Thank you,” Hera said quietly, turning slightly back towards Tom, “for keeping your word.” At hearing the girls stop, Tom turned and looked at Hera with an indecipherable expression.

“For future reference, I always keep my word.” With that final remark he seemingly dismissed the girls from his mind and turned back towards the now silent basilisk. Hera, taking that as an excellent sign to leave, shouldered most of Ginny’s weight and shuffled the both of them in the direction of the doors, with Fawkes ahead of them. Turning one last time towards Tom and the almost dead basilisk, she thought she saw a vaguely familiar dark grey mist slowly make it’s way towards Tom. Shivering as a chill creeped up her spine, Hera turned back around, and focused resolutely on getting them back to Ron and the obliviated Professor Lockhart so that they could finally, finally, leave.

A wave of dusty feeling magic rolled past her, the static making her hair stand on end. Hera shivered again, and kept on walking.

Chapter End Notes

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The Summer

Chapter Summary

The summer after her second year, despite it's auspicious end, is depressingly similar to previous summers.

Until it isn't.

(And the new stray dog is a nice distraction.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dodging fists, bruises, grease splatter, dry weeds, dust, too cold, too hot, too tired, too bored, too scared, running, kicking, hiding, wishing. This is the blur that Hera’s summer had turned into. Still trapped in the cupboard under the stairs. Still tasked with more chores than her tiny body should be able to accomplish. Still beaten for every perceived hint of freakishness.

Kicking a can laying by the side of the road, the urge to clean up overcame her and she picked it up, walking along and tossing it into a nearby garbage can. Quietly disgusted with herself by how ingrained her aunt’s rules had become, Hera continued on her way towards the playground with the good swings, determined to enjoy her day off.

Turning the corner towards the park, Hera breathed a sigh of relief as she saw that the swings were Dudley free. Heading over, she plunked herself down, kicked herself off, and closed her eyes.

When Hera was younger she used to do this because she could pretend that she was a bird, free and flying wherever she pleased. Now she does this because it’s the closest to flying on her broom as she can get. Merlin she misses her broom.

The sun beating down. The wind in her hair. Hera hadn’t felt this peaceful since right after the incident in the chamber of secrets.

She hadn’t spoken to anyone on what had transpired that day. Not even Ginny knew the full story. And certainly not Dumbledore. No, any faith she had had in the old man had died when he forced her back to this hell hole the first time. Hera wonders if all orphans are treated as dismally.

Leaves rustle behind her and she whips her head around, paranoid in case Dudley’s gang had decided to sneak up on her. A black, shaggy shadow sneaks by. Relaxing her tensed shoulders, Hera smiles fondly towards the local homeless dog snuffling for scraps along the ground near the bushes.

According to her Aunt Petunia it had appeared during the spring and it terrified her. Feeling immediate kinship towards the ragged skeletal excuse of a dog, Hera made sure to hand it scraps whenever she could. She knew what it was like to go hungry. Going back to her swinging Hera continues to daydream of better places and bigger skies.

“Oi freak!” The words came from her right and startled Hera so badly she fell off the swing and gained a face full of sand. Roaring laughter accompanied her attempts to dislodge sand from her person, scrubbing anxiously at her eyes to get rid of it as fast as possible.
More sand sprays into her face and she quickly discards that tactic in favor of scrambling in the opposite direction of the laughter. She really didn’t want to deal with this right now.

More sand crashes into Hera’s face as she’s tackled to the ground, Piers Polkiss being the sprinter of the group catching her before she could flee. Her magic builds as she’s kicking and scratching her way out of his grasp. He screeches away from Hera as she manages a lucky hit down south. Her magic still humming through her, and finally getting enough sand out of her eyes to see, Hera stands up, leaning against one of the swing poles.

“Y-you twit!” Piers squeaked out, being supported by Dudley and the third one she could never remember the name of. Shaking sand out of her hair, wincing when she stretches a new cut on her forehead, she answers.

“Really Polkiss, my teachers throw better insults. Did I somehow manage to kick your brain at the same time?” Polkiss started pulling towards Hera, but the other two held him back, wary of what she’d kick next.

“Mummy will hear about this!” Dudley huffed, red faced from the strain of holding up then holding back Piers. “Oh what is she going to do Dudders, lock me in a cupboard? Newsflash, she already does that.” Hera answers, after which she spits out some sand from her mouth, wiping her hand across her face. Magic swirls along with her emotions.

“She’ll tell Father.” Dudley sneers, knowing full well the fear Hera has for him.

“I’m trembling in my boots” her magic turns defensive, and despite paling at the threat, Hera refuses to cower. She’s a Gryffindor for Merlin’s sake. “With his size, the worst he could do is sit on me.” Hera is well aware that he could do much worse, but pushing Dudley’s buttons was more important at the moment though. He riles her up almost as effectively as Malfoy. The pointy faced git only wins by an air of snobbery Aunt Petunia could only dream of.

“I mean really, I don’t know how your mother doesn’t snap under the weight.” Hera may have just signed her death sentence, but Merlin the look on Dudley’s glowing puce face was worth it. Dudley drops Piers and rushes her. Just as Hera’s magic raises to defend her, another aura pushes it down, at the same time as a voice stops Dudley in his tracks.

“Excuse me” The voice is arctic, and unfortunately, Hera thinks, one she recognizes. Although what in the blazes he’s doing here is beyond her. She closes her eyes and gulps.

“Three against one seems a little unfair, don’t you think?” Dudley remains frozen, wether from the heavy pressure of magic in the air or the sudden appearance of an unknown grownup is yet to be decided.

“Well?” The cold voice snaps, clearly expecting an answer more than cowering. Really Hera thinks, he should be used to that.

“Y-yes sir. S-sorry sir.” Dudley sends a swift glance towards Hera, then unsticks from his position, reaches his two companions via a sort of rushing waddle, then departs, all while Hera looks back in mild amazement over the swift departure. Turning her gaze to the owner of the cold voice, her brain stutters to a stop in confusion for a second. Standing in front of her is Tom, but certainly not the sixteen year old who she had left behind in the chambers. This Tom is atleast a decade or so older, the bone structure more defined, broader
shoulders, taller even, probably. He was also…

“Do I pass muster?” Tom asks, a hint of amusement entering his glacial expression. Hera startles, her face flushing, standing up straighter and trying not to shiver as a cascade of sand fell down the back of her shirt. Her brows knitted.

“You-you’re…tan?” The phrase came out more as a question, Hera not quite being able to get over that little detail. Since when do Dark Lords get a tan?

“I’ve recently gained a new lease on life.” Tom smirks, “Am I not allowed a vacation as well?” Looking like a drowning fish, Hera was at a loss for words that wouldn’t be insulting. Not that she was entirely sure why she was concerned with being insulting. As the amusement on Tom’s face increased with her failed attempt at words she resolutely snapped her jaw shut and glared, folding her arms in front of her defensively.

A growl from the bushes startles them both, Hera twirling around to see the stray dog snarling with its hair standing on end. Tom eyes the dog, snorts, then waves his wand, making the dog disappear.

“Oi!” Whirling back Hera cries in outrage, “He’s harmless! What’d you do to him?” Hera’s magic once again flared up in agitation. Tom looked mildly impressed. Then he quashed it with his own aura.

“The mutt is fine, child. I simply sent him someplace where he wouldn’t disturb us.” Tom’s expression grew more intense. Hera felt uncomfortable, squirming against the pressure of his magic. “And simply because something seems harmless, does not make it so. Not everything is at it seems.” As Tom says the hand not holding his wand raises towards hi throat, bringing Hera’s attention to a rather gaudy looking locket with a snake on it.

Dismissing the locket Hera snaps snaps her eyes back towards Tom’s, ”Do former Dark Lords also become guru’s while going on vacation?” Irritation bleeds back into his expression, “Take it or leave it Miss Potter it matters not…” Twirling his wand his aura becomes even stronger, and Hera has to struggle to keep standing. He takes a step closer towards her and leans into her personal space. “…and there is nothing former about me.” Hera shifted and Tom saw a shadow of purple along her collarbone. Looking down he spots previously hidden bruises down her arms and what he can see of her chest. His expression freezes, and Hera barely dares to breath.

Achingly slowly he takes one of her arms and raises it, turning it this way and that, considering the discolorations. Suddenly the pressure of Tom’s magic disappears, and instead she feels a tingling going through her body from where his hands touch her arm. Staring at the source she sees the bruises she usually keeps hidden behind a layer of her magic actually disappear, along with the ever constant ache they cause. She’d almost forgotten what it was like without it.

“Are your, guardians, aware of these,” he questions nonchalantly, his hands still moving her arm about, eyeing his handywork. This breaks Hera out of the rush of being pain free for the first time in, well, awhile. “Very,” her clipped answer is punctuated by snatching her arm back, a cautious glare in her eyes.

Tom steps back and mumbles something to himself, still eyeing Hera. All she hears is ‘Severus’ and ‘hoodwinked’. Hera continues to eye him, unsure of how to proceed after what just happened.

“So distrusting,” he muses, “it may do you good in general child, but need I remind you that we made a deal?” His voice is back to being almost congenial, and honestly Hera didn’t think Slytherins had as many emotions as what he’s shown today.
“Besides,” he continues flippantly, “there’s a new serial killer on the loose.” Hera tenses, a sliver of fear trickling down her spine. “Yes,” Tom continues his gaze wandering around,

“an Azkaban escapee, rather impressive actually, as that’s never happened before.” His eyes zero back on Hera. “They say that he was one of my most loyal Death Eaters. That he’s escaped to kill you in revenge”. Hera’s eyes drop to the sand at her feet, despair creeping up on her. It felt like going from the frying pan into the fire.

But, something Tom said grabbed her attention. Her eyes snap back to his.

“Was he? One of yours?” It was the way he’d phrased it that had her mind chewing at it. Tom’s expression seemed vaguely like pride. As if it had been a test and she’d passed.

“No,” he states simply. Then, to Hera’s confusion, turns and starts walking away, back towards the park entrance. She feels, funnily enough, insulted by the sudden dismissal, but then gets the urge to follow so strongly that she starts running after him, quickly catching up. As Hera matches his stride, his gaze flickers down to her tiny form, then back to the road ahead.

“Wouldn’t your guardians worry over you walking with a stranger? After all I could be dangerous.” Hera snorts and looks up at him dubiously at the question, having thought he’d fully understood what she’d implied previously. However she answered anyways.

“Actually they’d be ecstatic if you were a pedophile here to kidnap me, rape me, than kill me.” She says this so matter of fact that Tom almost stumbles at the words. Almost. Instead he merely raises an eyebrow and hmms as he walks, not looking at her.

Hera, having looked at Tom as she answered, looking forward to his expression, is disappointed. A thought suddenly strikes her.

“Have you come to take me away?” Something almost like hope flutters in Hera’s chest. This time Tom does look down on her, but his expression is back to the emotionless cold of when he arrived, and she feels like they’ve come full circle. Of what she doesn’t know.

“As good looking as I am, I am not the Goblin King. I merely came to confirm or disprove a rumour.” Hera’s eyes were the size of dinner plates as they stared up at Tom.

_Did he just make a David Bowie joke?_

The brief hint of humour the Dark Lord showed faded away as they stopped at a crossroad.

“Now, as I’ve succeeded in my endeavour, I have more important things to do.” He glances down at the still amazed tween. “I must now depart. Good day.” With those final words the tall man spun out of existence. Hera was still processing the joke made. She didn’t know Dark Lords _had_ humour.

The sun beating down on her brought Hera out of her stupor, and she looked around at her surroundings, realizing she had no idea where they’d walked. Fortunately, she recognizes the street sign, and figures she’s about a 30 minute walk from her Aunt’s house.

Thinking over his last words, Hera stares at the spot where he’d disappeared. What rumour was it he’d been following? Clearly it had had something to do with her, otherwise he never would have shown himself. She couldn’t for the life of her figure out what about her it had been.

As Hera lets out a deep sigh, she starts the now long trek back to Privet Drive, the heat which had previously been bearable now causing droplets of sweat to appear on her forehead. Exasperation
over her situation suffuses her.

Bloody enigmatic Dark Lords.

Chapter End Notes

Tom is sane, Hera is confused. What else is new?

SO here's chapter two! I'm not gonna bore you with reasons behind it's delay, cause honestly no one cares.

Again, still without a beta, so any comments, thoughts, critiques are welcome!
The Beginning of Third Year

Chapter Summary

Third year is off to an inauspicious start.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hera didn’t see the stray dog again that summer.

Sitting on the train watching the raindrops race across the window, her thoughts turned towards the ragged looking lump of robes sleeping across from her. Hermione and Ron were engaged in their own activities, both surprisingly reading, but on very different subjects. Hermione holding a typical dusty old leather tome, while Ron’s bright orange book disturbed her eyes despite being in the periphery.

When entering the last semi-empty compartment on the train they’d snuck a peak at the stranger’s equally ragged trunk and seen the initials R. J. Lupin, which really hadn’t given any clues other than the man having a decidedly wolfish last name. She wondered if he liked wolves like Professor Sprout liked plants. Maybe he was a werewolf hunter. She snorted, then again she knew absolutely nothing about pottery, and had no desire to fix that.

Shaking her head to disperse her thoughts, she returned her gaze to the window. Watching the landscape pass by in greys and deep greens and browns. A shadow streaked through the sky, disturbing the tableau. Hera was just about to comment on it, still staring out the window to try and catch another glimpse. Seeing her breath form in front of face however, made her pause.

Suddenly the train screeched to a stop, the lights flickering off, and Hera was flung forward, towards the strange man, landing on him with a huff. Scrambling back from him she noticed amber eyes widening at the sight of her, but she was quickly distracted from the screams coming from further down the train. Getting up and moving towards the door, a large hand grabbed her upper arm. Turning around she saw that Mr Lupin was holding a finger in front of his lips and shaking his head to indicate that they should keep quiet. He pulled her back towards her seat and went to the door in her stead, peaking out into the hall.

Swearing under his breath he slid the door shut and made a complicated wand movement at the lock. Moving Hermione and Ron, who’d been frozen during this whole ordeal, he put the behind him and infront of Hera, then faced the door once more, wand at the ready. Feeling the temperature continue to drop, Hera palmed her wand as well, not sure what she’d be able to do, but ready none the less.

A shadow moved by the frosted window in the door. It halted behind it, and what seemed to be the head turned slightly to the side, as if it was thinking. Hera’s heart was pounding, fear and adrenaline and cold trickling down her spine.

The click of the lock going up made the three teenagers flinch, and the older man stiffen.

Slowly the door opened, a skeletal hand surrounded by black floating robes the first thing they see. The door slid open the whole way, showing a creature looking exactly like what Hera thought a grim
reaper would look like. It seemed to first be looking towards Mr Lupin, although Hera couldn’t be entirely sure as its face was obscured by a black hood. It seemed to dismiss the older man though and turned its head towards the children, primarily Hera.

Feeling the focus of the creature on her, her whole body felt like it had been submerged in ice. But, as the creature continued to stare, something in the back of her head started to rage, and Hera’s magic began to respond in kind, swirling in unrest with a desire to destroy the threat.

“Expecto Patronum!” The older man spoke calmly, startling Hera out of the staring match with the creature, and causing her magic to stutter to a stop. A ghost like wolf emerged from the man’s wand and a terrible shriek came from the creature standing at the doorway. It fled, taking the dismal atmosphere with it, leaving only warmth and a strange joy emanating from the wispy wolf apparition. The spell faded, and the man turned towards them.

“Right, that was a fair bit more exciting than I remembered these rides being.” He gave the trio a small smile, his eyes kind.

“Are you three alright? Any lingering sadness? Depressions?” As he asked this he was digging into one of his pockets, pulling out a chocolate bar. Breaking off three pieces he gave one to each teenager, throwing an extra worried glance towards Hera.

“Take a seat and eat this. It’ll help, I promise, with an added bonus of tasting good.” He threw a small wink towards the younger group as he took a piece and sat down himself.

“Sir?” Hermione began, as they sat down obediently while the lights flickered back on and they started nibbling on the confection. “Why were there dementors on the train?”

So that’s what they were Hera thought. Looking briefly towards Hermione then back at the man as she wondered the same thing, whilst nibbling on the chocolate. It really was rather good. The sandy haired man ran a hand over his face, and looked momentarily very sad.

“Dementors are normally guards at Azkaban. Most likely they’re here because they're searching for the escaped convict.” He gave another small smile towards Hermione, but still looked a lot more tired than before.

“Is it because of me?” Hera piped up, causing everyone to look at her. Ron’s father had pulled her aside at Kings Cross and warned her of Sirius Black, and that he was probably after her head. After her talk with Tom during the summer though, she didn’t feel an overly large amount of concern in regards to the convict. Mr Weasley had made her promise twice that she’d be extra careful. To ease his worries she tried to be as earnest as she could in her promises, though Hera wasn’t entirely sure she’d succeeded as Mr Weasley had still looked fairly worried when they rejoined the rest of his family and the Grangers.

“That’s the running theory yes,” said Mr. Lupin, pulling Hera back to the present. "But don’t worry, you’ll be perfectly safe at Hogwarts.” Another reassuring smile was thrown her way.

Hera simply nodded, decidedly not thinking about the falseness of the second part of the answer. He probably thought it was perfectly safe, and she wasn’t in the mood to disabuse him of the notion. Either way she’d been expecting that answer, and turned back towards the window as the train jumped it’s way back into movement. Other things occupied her mind now, like the emotion that had appeared in the back of her mind, and the way her magic had reacted to it. With it. She gnawed on her lip as her brows furrowed, finishing off her chocolate. No, Sirius Black was no cause for concern. The rage was though.
The rage hadn’t been her own.

The welcoming feast was as grand as ever, and a relief to come to after the events on the train. More food than could possibly be consumed by even the multitude of teenagers in the room. Moving paintings. Cheerful ghosts, and not so cheerful ghosts. Ridiculously gaudy robes on ridiculously twinkling headmasters. A dull roar of conversation. Hermione practically buzzing in her seat from the excitement of a new school year and new classes.

Smiling indulgently towards her bushy haired friend, Hera returned to her roast chicken and mashed potatoes, marveling again at the feeling of a full stomach. The overabundance reminded her of the starving stray, which in turn reminded her of the very strange appearance of Tom.

He hadn’t been there for very long, nor had she seen, or heard, of him during the rest of the summer, much like the dog. His surprise visit and been confuzzling, and she’d been rather in a daze the rest of the day, which had been rather a good thing as Vernon’s equally large sister Marge had made an unscheduled visit with her demon of a bull dog. She’d been so distracted that even Marge’s usual insults about her parents barely registered, and Hera had merely nodded and continued clearing the dining table. Looking back Hera realized that that had probably been for the best, as the insults had been particularly vitriolic that evening, and Hera would’ve probably ended up turning Marge into a frog, or blowing her up, or something equally freakishly magical.

As it were, the rest of the summer remained rather the same after the mysterious visit as before it. Sans dog of course.

The first few months of school went smoothly, despite the train ride, and threat of Sirius Black, and the nightmare creatures, also known as Dementors, stalking the grounds. Hera was beginning to suspect that being in mortal peril would be the norm at school. Although honestly now that she didn’t have Voldemort breathing down her neck no one else really made her fear for her life. So despite Dementors and Sirius Black, she was feeling surprisingly good. Everything was surprisingly good. Normal. Magical.

Except Hermione was acting weird. Which in a school where children are daily performing acts against the laws of nature, is exceedingly strange indeed.

Hera first noticed during their first Divinations class, where Hermione hadn’t entered with them, but had still somehow ended up at the same table as her and Ron.

At the time Hera chalked it up to her being rather unobservant, which wasn’t all that unusual. Hermione’s rather fantastic put down and subsequent storming out of the classroom also helped in making her completely forget about the strange experience. But then it happened again. And again. And then Hera started noticing when Hermione would slip away when no one was looking, or when there’d be something slightly off about her appearance. And the fact that she was always tired. Like right now.

Sitting in the Gryffindor common room, on the sofas infront of the fire, the light illuminated the bags under Hermione’s eyes as she was bent over their transfiguration homework. Or at least Hera thought it was transfiguration. One never really knew with Hermione.

“Are you ok?” Hera cringed a bit at the blatant question, and mentally wondered again why the sorting hat ever thought that Slytherin would be a good fit for her.

Hermione hmm’d distractedly, but otherwise continued writing on her parchment, quill scratching away frenetically. Hera frowned.
"Hermione"

"Hmm"

"Hermiiiiione"

"Hmmm"

"Heeeeeermiiiiioone"

"Hmmmmmm"

Hera’s frown deepened. Leaning forward, she waved her hand in front of Hermione’s face.

“What!” Hermione snapped, finally looking towards Hera.

“Are you ok?” Hera repeated the question, leaning back into the sofa. “It’s just we haven’t talked in awhile. I only ever really see you at classes, or sleeping, or doing homework.” A flash of guilt passed Hermione’s face, her hand jerking towards her neck before settling.

“Yes well, being top of our class takes a lot of hard work. I can’t afford to be frivolous with my time.” Hermione shuffled around some of her parchment.

“You didn’t look this bad last year though, or the year before that.” Hera remembered vividly the bushy haired ball of anxiety that Hermione had been around exams, but this was a whole other level.

“I have more classes this year, so obviously, I’ll be busier. Either way I’m fine, so you don’t have to worry.” Hermione’s tone indicated that she wished the topic to end now.

“It can’t be healthy though.” Hera tried one last time, worry and irritation gnawing at her.

“I’m fine Hera.” snapped Hermione.

Hera stared hard at Hermione, barely even blinking. Hermione fidgeted, guilt flashing across her face again before looking away. Hera’s face softened, even if her resolve didn’t.

“You’d tell me if there was something else going on, right?” Hera watched as Hermione’s hand twitched again, noticing this time a golden chain hanging around her neck that hadn’t been there before. It brought to mind the locket Tom had been wearing, and Hera idly wondered if there was a new wizarding trend she was missing.

“Ah- Of course Hera. But I’m fine. Everything’s fine. There’s nothing to worry about.” Hermione said all of this still staring at her homework. She then flickered a smile in Hera’s direction and started gathering her school things.

“But you’re right, I am tired and should get some rest. Good night.” And with that Hermione disappeared up the stairs to the girls dormitory as if Fluffy were after her.

“What’s wrong with her?” Ron asked as he plopped down in the seat next to Hera, biting off a licorice wand.

“I don’t know, but she’s stressed about something.” Hera kept her eyes towards the stairs where Hermione had disappeared, brows furrowed.

“Eh, probably just school.” Ron’s eyes widened comically, “Maybe it’s Scabbers! Maybe her bloody beast ate him and she knows!”
“Ron I don’t care about your mangy rat!” Hera snapped, turning towards him in frustration. “Something’s wrong with Hermione and all you can talk about is your rat! Besides, isn’t he ancient to begin with?”

“Well yeah,” grumbled Ron, having shrunk back a bit at her tone “but he’s been in the family for years! Bill had him when he was in school you know.” Hera paused at that piece of information. Her brow now furrowing in confusion.

“I didn’t know magic rats existed.” Now it was Rons turn to be confused.

“Well no, rats are rats you know? No magic.” Hera was even more confused.

“But Ron, rats only live for two years at the most. Are you sure it's even the same rat?”

"Of course it's the same one! Missing finger on his front paw and everything!” Well that seemed like specific enough identification to Hera, but still didn't explain how it was still alive. Deciding to think about it another day, she focused back on her homework and started scratching out writing with the quill.

"Have you finished tomorrow's potion's assignment?" Hera asked after a few minutes. She'd finished it herself a couple of days before, but knowing Ron, and the lack of contact with Hermione he probably hadn't even started yet.

Ron swore, then shrugged, and took another bite from his licorice wand confirming her theory. So they continued like that, her writing, him chewing, the flames crackling, quiet conversations from the other groups of people in the room floating around them. Eventually Ron finished his candy, then stood up.

“Well, I’m gonna go look after Scabbers one last time before curfew, then do the bloody essay. You don't think Hermione would let me look at what she's written, do you?”

"Nope” Honestly he could be so lazy sometimes.

"Ah well, worth a shot. See you."

“Yeah yeah Ron, good luck.” Hera continued staring into the fire as Ron left. An idea forming in her head. She needed to find out what was going on with Hermione. She also needed to read up on magic rats. She’d never liked Scabbers. He’d always stared at her when she was around, acting twitchier than usual.

In regards to Hermione though, clearly asking wouldn’t do the trick. Maybe following her after one of their classes? She always disappeared so quickly though, it’d be difficult to track her down. As she pondered these thoughts a small explosion echoed through the room, followed by the maniacal laughter of the Weasley twins. Turning towards the corner they were huddled in and seeing them covered in blue slime, Hera’s face lit up into a radiant smile. Fre and George were her answer. Surely they knew everything there was to know about the castle, and probably magic rats too.

Yes, she decided huddling down behind the couch as the twins began flinging balls of blue goop in everywhich direction, she’d ask the twins tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes
Hello! It's been awhile but I promise I'm still alive (despite my brain telling me otherwise) and now that I've got summer vacation can focus more on the story! Aka already typing up the next chapter. Thank you so much for all the kudos, comments, and advice so far!

Hope you've enjoyed!

(Also, keep on forgetting to mention that I have a tumblr, so you can also write me there @ maevifey.tumblr.com)
The Map

Chapter Summary

Hera finally gets the Marauders Map, but what she discovers only confuses her more.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So-“

“-how may we be-“

“-of service to you?”

The unusual trio stood the next day in a corner of the Gryffindor commonroom. The twins looming over the younger girl, and to Hera they looked like identical cheshire cats. Given the way their smiles stretched almost impossibly wide, Hera wasn’t all too sure they hadn’t used magic to make their natural grins wider just to unnerve people.

“Right.” Hera took a deep breath. “I need your help.” The twins’ smiles somehow grew even wider. It didn’t help Hera’s apprehension, but she was a bloody Gryffindor so she ploughed on.

“It’s Hermione. She’s been acting weird, disappearing and not sleeping. I’m worried.” Hera’s worry shone through her eyes.

“Ah yes, she of the two tonne bags under her pretty caramel eyes-“ The one on the right said dreamily, fluttering his eyelashes,

“-you sure she isn’t just studying herself to an early grave?” asked the twin to the left, elbowing his brother in the stomach.

“That’s what Ron said” Hera grimaced. The red-heads in front of her snickered.

“Well if ickle Ronnikins said that then it can’t be true! But-“

“-how exactly do you think we can help you here?” Their smiles had dimmed somewhat as Hera’s demeanour grew serious.

“Well, seeing as you’re master pranksters, the sneakiest of sneaks, and far more intelligent than anyone gives you credit for,” Hera felt that laying on the praise could only help her cause here,

"I felt that maybe you could provide me with some pointers on how to get around the castle unseen? Or how to follow someone without them knowing?” The twins were grinning wildly once more, so Hera felt that her chances were good. Then the twins bowed and Hera had to jump back to not get hit in the stomach by their heads.

“You suffuse us with praise!” said lefty,
“You’re making us blush!” After that they straightened and stared at each other for a few seconds, probably doing the weird twin communication thing, they nodded in unison. The right one then – she really needed to figure out how to tell them apart – disappeared up the stairs to the boys’ dormitory. At Hera’s consternation, the remaining twin could only chuckle.

“We’d intended to give it to you around Christmas, to help with the Hogsmeade situation, but with this new development it seems now is the better time to give it to you.” This declaration did not help Hera’s confusion. He continued,

“It’s a little something to help you keep track of where everyone is, so you don’t run into any unsavory types, or in your case, so that you can follow the mysterious types.” He winked at her, turning back to his twin who was coming down the stairs.

“Really Fred, you told her without me?” Apparently-George tsked at his brother after eyeing him for a moment, holding a yellowing parchment in his hand.

“I couldn’t help myself! She’s just so cute when she looks confused.” Apparently-Fred said, now on the right, schmoozing at his brother, then sending a wink in Hera’s direction, causing her cheeks to pink. Rolling his eyes at his brother George then turned towards her.

“Well-“ began George,

“-here it is-“ Fred continued, snatching the parchment from George and waving it in the air,

“-the secret to our success-“ George snatched it back,

“-our rise to glory-“

“-the cream in our crop-“

“-the bread to our sandwich-“

“-the crown jewel.” finished George, handing it over to Hera with a flourish and extravagant bow.

“That’s great gentlemen,” Hera said as she stared hard at and twisted the parchment around, opening the flaps, flipping it over, yet not seeing anything. “But what does it do?” It flapped morosely in her hand as she looked back up at them.

“Ah, here’s the brilliance of it-“

“-you say the magic words, and voila!” Then together they touched their wands to the top of the parchment and whispered, “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good”

Hera practically felt the magic activating in the parchment, inky tendrils snaking out from where their wands had touched the parchment. Slowly she could make out a miniature drawing of Hogwarts, as well as words appearing. At the top, in an elaborate banner, were the words Itinerarium Maraudentium. She’d have to ask Hermione what they meant later. Underneath, last to appear on the whole parchment, were the words:

Messrs
Moony, Wormtail
Padfoot & Prongs
are proud to present
“Marauder’s map” mumbled Hera, tracing the words. “Who are they?” Her gaze snapped back up to the twins.

“No idea-“ began Fred, taking the map from her and opening it up. “-but we found it in Filch’s office and it’s been our precious ever since!” finished George. Unfolding it completely, physically moving both the hands of George and Hera to hold the now massive parchment, Fred started pointing out names and places.

“You see these footsteps with names underneath? They correspond with the actual person here in the castle, which means you can avoid-”

“-or stalk!” George added,

“- anyone you want, as long as they’re in the castle,” George then moved some flaps around until a room named Headmaster’s Office appeared, containing footprints pacing back and forth with a banner following them containing the name Albus Dumbledore.

“See, here we have our esteemed headmaster, improving upon the groove behind his desk.”

“He does this everyday.”

“Believe us, we’ve checked” They both snickered again.

“Huh.” While interesting, Hera was more keen on seeing if Hermione was were she said she would be, “Could you show me the library?”

Fred and George, clearly amused, knowing precisely why she asked, flipped through the map again until they found a large rectangular area filled with the word books in rows - to symbolise the real thing - as well as showing a few students milling around, and Madam Pince holding court by her desk.

Hera, searching for a specific spot, found that there in the righthand corner, the area that corresponds with where Hermione’s favorite study spot is, sat a pair of unmoving footprints with a banner containing the name Hermione Granger underneath. Something within Hera eased at seeing the name and her shoulders relaxed, a fond smile appearing on her face. The twins tapped their wands again against the parchment whispering, “Mischief Managed”. Startled Hera looked up as the boys fold the map together again, then hand it to her.

“Don’t forget those phrases-” said Fred, patting her hand that was over the map.

“-as otherwise the map will refuse to work-“

“-and become rather rude.”

“Why?” Hera smirked at the twins, slipping her hands from Fred’s, “Speaking from experience?” Fred and George guffawed at her remark.

“Kittens got claws!” Fred said wiping a fake tear from his eye.

“Seriously though kitten”

“Oi!” Hera really hoped this wouldn’t be a nickname that stuck.
“Take good care of that map for us. It’s served us well, but you need it more than we do. And keep it secret-”

“Keep it safe!” Fred interjected.

“Don’t need any Professors after us!” George finished, clapping a hand on her shoulder. The younger girl smiled up at the twins, murmuring her thanks. Then the twins clapped their hands together once and made shooing motions at her.

“Well scat kitten, we’re busy men!” said George in an adopted posh accent. It only made Hera giggle.

“Much to do, many to prank!” Fred continued with another bloody wink, still shooing her away.

“Yeah yeah” Hera gave a dismissing motion with her arm, still giggling, and began heading towards the common room door. A thought occurred to her.

“By the way,” Hera said, stopping and turning back around towards Fred and George who still stood deliberating in the corner, “how did you figure out what to say to open it?”

The twins only grinned impishly, tapping the sides of their noses in unison, then nodded and strolled off in the direction of the sofas in front of the fire, where other upperclassmen sat. Hera only snorted, shaking her head, then continued to the library to go study with Hermione.

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It was a week before Hera could implement her plan to follow Hermione. It seems that the conversation they’d had had upped Hermione’s caution in appearing normal. She went with them to all the meals, quidditch practices, to and from classes, even to and from the bathrooms, to Hera’s exasperation.

But like most things her run of normal behaviour had to end.

It was a cold day, a couple of days before Halloween, when Hermione began her dodging technique again. It was after the last lesson, DADA - Hera's current favourite - that Hera decided to follow Hermione, who had given the excuse that she was going to the library and needed to be undisturbed. At worst Hera thought, following Hermione's figure as she disappeared around a corner, she’d just follow Hermione to the library and that would be that. However, if there was something up, Hera could make sure that Hermione wasn’t in trouble, or doing something stupid. Although as this was Hermione, so it probably wasn’t stupid, but if it was important she didn’t want Hermione to feel that she had to go about it alone.

Throwing an excuse at Ron about having to go to the bathroom and that she’d meet up with him later, she ducked into a side corridor and slipped on her invisibility cloak and pulled out the map. Touching her wand to the parchment and whispering the magic words she spotted Hermione up on the fourth floor, nowhere near the library, and headed in that direction.

Sprinting through hidden corridors and secret passageways that the map had revealed, she made it up there in record time, thankful for her excellent shape because of quidditch. Spotting Hermione down the corridor she followed her quietly, observing as Hermione looked around the area to make sure no one else was there, then sneaking into one of the unused classrooms here. Tip-toeing her way to the mostly closed door, Hera observed through the crack as Hermione, with her back to the door to Hera’s frustration, fiddled with something around her neck, then did something with her arms. Hera could also hear her whispering something under her breath, something like – numbers?
And then Hermione flickered out of existence.

Muffling a cry Hera burst into the classroom, standing right where Hermione had just been, looking everywhere for any hint of what could have happened. Remembering she has the map, with shaking hands she fumbles and unfolds it completely on the closest desk. Scouring the castle for any sign, she finally spots the Hermione Grangers banner in the least likely place – right in the Library, just where she originally said she would be.

Complete and utter bewilderment filled Hera at this information. Had Hermione somehow gotten her hands on a transportation device? But then why not just walk to the Library if that was where she was going to be anyways? Why walk up to an old dusty classroom four floors away from her final destination, only to pop up there anyways?

**How? Why?**

Grabbing the map and sitting down on the floor, Hera contemplated on what to do next. She felt like there was more to this than simple teleportation, it’s just that she had no idea *what else* it could be. She couldn’t ask Hermione, obviously, for if it had been something simple she just would’ve told Hera, instead of winding her way around an explanation.

Hera pondered that she could maybe ask Professor Lupin, as they’d gotten rather close since they’d started private lessons in learning how to produce a Patronus. The distracting thought caused a small smile to appear on her face, thinking about all the chocolate she’d consumed so far. She was only producing silver whisps, but she felt confident, and Professor Lupin had expressed the same, that she’d soon manage to produce a corporeal Patronus. She suspected that the reason why she wasn’t doing better was the lack of good memories in her life, because magic wise she felt fine. Simply put she needed a better memory. Maybe she could borrow one from someone, or daydream up something better?

Either way, she decided, deactivating and stuffing the map and her invisibility cloak back into her bag, there was nothing more she could do about Hermione now. And so Hera began the long - although significantly shorter with the help of the map - trek back to the Great Hall to join Ron for dinner.

The upside she thought, whilst whistling on her way down, passing Professor Snape who gave her a curious side-eye before striding on in the opposite direction, she’d also discovered a hidden passageway to Hogsmeade during her studies of the map. An upside to Hermione taking so long before sneaking away again. Now she didn't have to stay behind during the next Hogsmeade weekend.

Entering the Great Hall, Hera smiled towards the gaggle of red heads sitting at the Gryffindor table, taking a seat next to Ron and Ginny. In her life, despite adversity, it was well worth being grateful for the small things.

**Chapter End Notes**

So in celebration of being at 100 kudos (HOLY CRAP GUYS THANK YOU), I thought I’d get this chapter up pretty dang fast (for me)! I'm super happy that people like this fic, it really makes my day! Hope you all are doing all right, wether you've had your exams already or not, and the next chapter should be up soonish!
(You can also find me and/or ask questions at my tumblr: maevifey.tumblr.com)
Hogsmeade was utterly intriguing, as Hermione would say. Kind of like a victorian village, only stretched.

Hera had seen Hermione disappear three more times before deciding to give up on that endeavour for the moment. With having private Patronus lessons with Professor Lupin and Quidditch – not to mention the Fat Lady’s portrait being slashed and the increase in people watching her – she really didn’t have the time, and whatever it was Hermione was up to hadn’t killed her yet, so a few more months wouldn’t hurt. Hera hoped.

But she was in Hogsmeade now, a few weeks before Christmas, and it was magical. Trailing behind Hermione and Ron, she stared up at the stretched out victorian buildings around them. Christmas ornaments were floating between the buildings, over the streets - a few even stalking the shoppers, to Hera’s great amusement.

So far, they’d already been inside Scrivenshaft’s and the Quidditch shop – one for Hermione and one for Ron – and the two in front of her were now discussing whether to go to Zonko’s or The Three Broomsticks, the debate inevitably getting more and more heated since Hera couldn’t actively mediate.

Ron desperately wanted to go to Zonko’s and was arguing his point with the fact that it was farther away and therefore it would be better to go there first, that way they could just relax at the pub on the way back without any unnecessary detours. And while sound logic normally, the invisible third had to disagree with him.

Personally, Hera agreed with Hermione in that they should go to The Three Broomsticks first, as then she could disappear back to Hogwarts via the passageway in Zonko’s cellar afterwards. Hermione had at one point subtly tried to remind Ron of Hera’s presence and needs, but either he’d completely missed the point or had just forgotten.

Out of sight out of mind indeed, Hera thought with a quirk of her lips, trudging along behind the arguing pair, making sure to walk in footprints already made.

As the arguing started devolving into insults and manic hand waving on both parts Hera flinched behind them and sent a mental prayer to Merlin, narrowing her eyes in annoyance at the two. Honestly if they didn’t quit soon one of them was bound to blurt out her presence, or maybe accidentally hit her with one of their flailing limbs, although Hera’s increasing anxiety may just cause her to blow her own cover to get them to stop.

Just as Hera was about to ‘accidentally’ shove both of them to maybe break them out of the spiral of word spewing they’d gotten into, they came to an abrupt stop in front of The Three Broomsticks, Hera nearly bowling into Ron as Hermione whirled on them, and the insults devolved into yelling. The poor invisible girl felt like everyone was staring at the two, and in turn would discover the mess her footprints had made in the snow trying not to fall over.

Releasing a near silent sigh of exasperation, she idly wondered if they were always like this when she wasn’t around. She knew that Ron hadn’t liked Hermione at all in first year, but thought they were over it. Maybe this was just the way they communicated she mused as she continued looking
around to make sure no one had discovered her yet, and avoiding people rushing by.

But enough was enough, and she was cold, not to mention she really didn’t like the yelling, and having to dodge the holiday shoppers (and their robes).

So, trying to be as discreet as possible, she kicked Ron on the back of his leg, hissing at the both of them to quit it and just get inside. She hoped she wasn’t literally hissing she thought as she slowly inched her way towards the door, as that would only confuse them more. Before she could think more about that though, she nearly ran into the Minister of Magic who was surprisingly speedily entering the pub.

At least she thought it was Cornelius Fudge. It was rather hard to decide as he’d been moving fast, and she’d only seen him in the Daily Prophet before. That bowler hat was rather distinct though, as was the general shape of him.

Her curiosity was piqued either way, and she quickly ditched her two friends by the entrance, planning on entering with the next person going in or out. When it was Professor McGonagall who nearly bulldozed Hera (she really needed to pay better attention to her surroundings)– only her quick Quidditch reflexes allowing Hera to keep her cover – her curiosity turned into suspicion. Following the Transfiguration Professor through the packed ground floor, up the rickety stairs in the back, and down an equally rickety hallway and into the room furthest down said hallway, the curiosity and suspicion swirling in her stomach grew.

After entering Hera swiftly dove towards an uninhabited corner to safely observe the proceedings withought risk of being caught, thankful that none of the floorboards made any creaking noises.

Settling her beating heart and pulling her cloak closer around her, she looked around.

Professor McGonagall had already perched herself onto one of four armchairs facing the fireplace, hers closest to the door. The MoM sat in the one furthest in the room, dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief and accepting a cup of tea from – Hera furrowed her brow – Professor Lupin? He looked more haggard than usual Hera thought, which she honestly hadn’t thought possible before.

She didn’t recognize the fourth person in the room though, seated in the chair next to the Minister, and decided that they were probably a ministry goon, going by the bored look on their face. Although with his dark skin and colorful robes he didn’t exactly fit the normal image of a ministry worker. Then again Hera thought, she’d never met a ministry worker before, so who was she to judge.

“Right,” McGonagall’s crisp voice shot through the tense air, startling Hera in her corner. “You called us here to talk about Black – start talking”.

“Aha-hm-heurgh” Fudge spluttered, having just taken a sip of tea and half of it coming back out again. Coughing, he put the cup and saucer down carefully, and used the same handkerchief he’d used earlier to wipe around his mouth. Everyone in the room grimaced lightly.

“It is a well-known rumour that Black may be after Miss Potter.” The Minister began, avoiding all eye contact.

“There have been concerns voiced as to exactly how secure Miss Potter is from the escaped prisoner.” Fudge stopped there, looking uncertain on how to continue. McGonagall’s face morphed into displeasure, about to respond when the unknown man cut in.

“The exact complaint is that since Black has managed to avoid the Dementors once, he should be perfectly able to do it again.” The man stated this as if it was a bit ridiculous, which Hera found
confusing, seeing as she thought this was a perfectly valid thought.

“Precisely!” the Minister continued.

“A suggestion has been made that to avoid collateral damage, she should be removed to a safe house until the convict has been apprehended.” Hera seized up at the words, eyes wide and unblinking. The temperature in the room dropped a few degrees.

Take her away from Hogwarts?

“Are you insinuating that we cannot protect our own students against one madman?” Professor McGonagall responded in a cold quiet way the Snape would have been proud of, the older witch’s magic crackling. The minister quailed.

“No! No. It is simply that, well, seeing as we all know that the prisoner is after The-Girl-Who-Lived, as I’ve said, and your Defence Professor is well known to have been friends with the Prison-“

“If I may interrupt Minister” Lupin cut in coolly, “I severed all ties with that man after what he did. We all trusted him.” He grew more agitated, standing up, a growl in his voice.

“He was their Secret Keeper after all, supposedly to *keep them safe*” He threw a humourless smile towards the Minister and his lackey. A flicker of eyes in her direction, which Hera sincerely hoped she imagined, and he turned, moving to look out the window, and added quietly,

“He was her Godfather.”

Hera’s world froze completely. A ringing filled her ears, and she desperately tried to rein in her anxious magic and keep her position hidden. Interestingly enough the often-opinionated feeling at the back of her mind was quiet.

*Her Godfather.*

The Minister talking brought her slightly out of her daze.

“Yes well, we can’t have what happened to Pettigrew happen to her in any case. Bad for morale you know.” He took a quick sip of his tea, cup clattering in the saucer.
“You mean bad for your image?” McGonagall quipped, glaring over her own sip of tea.

Why did she recognize that name?

“Yes well we hardly want her blown up with only a finger to show for it!” He flustered, his face turning a mottled purple.

“Minister may I remind you that Hera Potter is currently behind thick stone walls filled with teachers and students and extremely gossipy portraits and ghosts—” McGonagall held up a finger as the Minister opened his mouth to interrupt. To Hera’s frazzled amusement he looked like a scolded child.

“-and they’re surrounded by your Dementors, who are in turn surrounded by wards controlled by our Headmaster, who I may remind you is the only wizard Voldemort ever feared.” McGonagall finished with relish, enjoying the spluttering of the Minister. Even the mystery ministry goon twitched a smile at the Minister’s actions.

“Well, well, yes, well. If that is the stance of Hogwarts than on your head be it!” He finally managed to force out, looking nearly constipated. Honestly Hera had no idea why he was so upset at this. Didn’t politicians want to avoid responsibility to begin with?

“I’m sure we’ll be fine Cornelius” said Professor McGonagall, nearly placating.

“Now if that was all Professor Lupin and I have students to herd back towards the castle.”

Finishing her tea, Professor McGonagall stood up, and Hera moved back towards the door in preparation of sneaking out while they threw around customary good bye’s. She was out like a shot and sprinting quietly down as soon as Lupin opened the door, dodging patrons and looking around to see if her friends were in seated somewhere inside the pub. Spotting Ron with Dean and Seamus, she snuck her way over, told him that she was heading back to the castle, then left without waiting for his response.
Sitting in the common room on one of the ridiculously plush chairs in front of the fire, Hera thought about everything she’d learned today.

In the grand scheme of things it wasn’t actually all that much, but together with the information she already had she still felt like creating one of those mind maps Hermione is so fond of.

First and most important point – Sirius Black was (is?) her Godfather. Apparently he’d also killed a man so hard only his finger remained, but he was her Godfather. She had a Godfather.

And he wasn’t actually a Death Eater. Well, if she was to believe Tom that is, although she was inclined to as he hadn’t lied to her yet. But that made her wonder about the murder, because that did sound very Death Eatery. Speaking of which, the supposed dead, Pettigrew, she knew that name. She’d seen that name recently. Only she couldn’t for the life of her remember where. Sipping on some mulled apple cider she’d picked up from the newly discovered kitchens she stared into the flames, hoping her thoughts would start making sense soon.

In conclusion, Hera thought, she needed to do some research. She snorted at the thought that Hermione would be proud of her, if she were around more to see this. Draining the rest of her drink, Hera went up the stairs to the girls dormitories to get her bag, and the map, before heading down to the Library.

Despite Professor McGonagall’s earlier claim of needing to go gathering students, it was still actually an hour or two before people would begin returning to the castle. And even though first and second years weren’t allowed to visit the village, and were somewhere in the school, it was deserted on the way down to the main level. The atmosphere in the castle was quiet, as if the castle itself were taking a breather before everyone returned.

Strange how she’d never noticed it before during previous years. Maybe it was because she always had her fellow year-mates to keep her company. But she was alone now, and it was surprisingly peaceful.

Taking out the map after checking to make sure no one was near, Hera activated it and checked to see who was in the library. Seeing only the librarian and names she didn’t recognize – probably Ravenclaws – she continued on her way whilst lazily browsing through the parchment. Folding and unfolding various sections, keeping an eye on the corridors in front of her, she read all the different names she came across. It had become one of her favorite pastimes when she didn’t want to think about life. A sort of meditation.

She’d come up with stories for the different names, imagining who they could be, what house they were in and what their favorite animal could be. She made it all the way down to the dungeons on the map when a name made her pause.

There it was. Pettigrew. Peter Pettigrew. Her breathing started to speed up.

She recognized the name because she’d seen it on the bloody map.
Hera’s first instinct was to run after the name moving down an unused hallway. Then she forced herself to think. Maybe it was a common wizarding name? Maybe it was the child, or niece or nephew of the one murdered? It didn’t feel right though, and the urge to investigate overtook any feelings of caution. So, throwing on her cloak for the second time today, Hera began the mad dash down to the dungeons and the elusive name.

Down stairs and slides and one strangely placed fireman's pole, Hera made it down to the corridor perpendicular to the one Pettigrew was in. Taking a moment to calm her breathing, she peaked around the corner, heart in her ears.

But nobody was there.

Quickly double checking the map to see where the person had disappeared to, her eyebrows flew up in surprise to still see the name in the corridor she was looking at. Pinching the bridge of her nose as a flash of annoyance at the wizarding world in general Hera took a deep breath. ‘Nothing is what it seems’ should just be her new life motto.

The name moved steadily towards the opposite end of the hallway from where she was. She stared hard down the hallway. Maybe whoever they were had an invisibility cloak as well. Whoever it was was moving really slowly too. Inching her way forward down the hallway after the name, she suddenly noticed Severus Snape popping up behind her.

Jumping up to stand against the wall Hera tried to make herself as small and flat against said wall as possible, breathing slowly and silently like she does to stay undetected when back at the Dursleys. Snape came stalking around the corner from where she’d been before, robes billowing behind him. She mentally cursed when he took out his wand in a flourish and slowed down as he continued down the corridor, hoping to Merlin he wasn’t psychic like the Headmaster seemed to be and discover her plastered against the wall.

But, to her immense relief, he walked right by, not even pausing by her hiding spot, and disappeared around the opposite corner. Finally able to breathe properly again, Hera rolled her shoulders to loosen them up, then peered down at the map to see if Snape had better luck at finding Pettigrew. Except she couldn’t find his name now. Kneeling on the floor to properly unfold the map, checking all crevices, the name was nowhere. It was gone. She noted during her search that Hermione was now in the library, Dumbledore was once again pacing in front of his desk and the Weasley twins were up to something close to the Hufflepuff common room entrance – but no Peter Pettigrew.

Groaning in frustration Hera ripped off her cloak and stuffed it back into her bag. Adjusting her glasses and running her hands through her hair, she stood back up and headed back towards the main level. Seems like she was back to heading to the library for information. At least now that she knew Hermione was there she could maybe cajole her into helping. OR resting. Whichever Hera managed
to convince Hermione of first.

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooono hi!

It's been awhile, and I'm really sorry for that. A multitude of factors contribute to my lack of posting, but I won't bore you with the details (suffice to say I'm almost done with medical school).

I've got a solid plan now though, and new motivation, so hopefully it won't be another six months before the next chapter.

If you've stuck with this story, thank you so much for reading! <3
Christmas came and went, the novelty of actually receiving presents yet to ware off despite being alone this year. Hermione had gone to France with her parents, and Ron hadn’t issued an invitation (most likely because Hera had sided with Hermione in the great Crookshanks vs Scabbers debate). Either way, as long as she didn’t have to go back to the Dursley’s Hera was content.

And it gave Hera the chance to hunt for Pettigrew undisturbed.

However, despite practically burying her nose in the map the majority of the break, she’d only managed to spot the name a couple of times, and none of the opportunities had been any more illuminating. The closest she’d been to Pettigrew had been outside the kitchens. She’d seen a shadow sneak inside, but just as she’d been about to follow Professor Trelawny had staggered down the hallway, looking three sheets to the wind and like a stiff breeze would fell her. Fortunately, Hera had taken to always wearing her invisibility cloak during these escapades and remained undetected. As the Professor neared Hera’s position Hera was almost tempted to trip her up in retaliation for all the fatalistic and grim predictions the supposed seer had thrust upon her. She decided against it, but in the end still couldn’t help yanking a bit at the eccentric’s colorful shawls, causing the woman to shriek and drunkenly sprint away, yelling that Sirius Black was after her.

Hera ended up cackling after the display against the wall opposite the portrait to the kitchens, utterly pleased with her small prank. Straigtening suddenly as she remembered why she was there in the first place, Hera groaned as she saw that Pettigrew’s name had disappeared again, and quietly cursed under her breath at the lost opportunity.

Cursing again when she saw Professor McGonagall’s name heading her way, Hera ended up scampering in the opposite direction, her prey lost and not wishing to test if the Professor had any cat like senses in human form as well.

Now it was the day before the rest of the students would return to Hogwarts, and the last day where Hera could sneak around nearly without hinderance. She was lurking down by the dungeons this time, perilously close to the Slytherin common rooms. She’d made sure the Snape was far away before venturing down. Seeing as he was currently in the Headmaster’s office with Dumbledore and Lupin, Hera felt sufficiently safe at the moment.

Silently making her way down the various stone corridors, Hera took the time to admire the paintings, tapestries, and statues down here. For obvious reasons she wasn’t usually able to explore these areas, being in Slytherin territory and all, so she enjoyed it while she could.

As opposed to the many portraits that dominated the upper levels, the paintings down here mainly consisted of landscapes and beautiful renditions of ancient buildings and architecture. Hera had no idea from what era they were from, Hermione would surely know, but the cathedral like quality to them appealed to the green-eyed witch.

There were many more statues down here as well, and these she recognized to be greek - or maybe roman? – and she took a moment to wonder why they were here, before moving on. Glancing down she scanned the area she was in, mainly looking for Pettigrew, but also anyone to avoid really. Seeing only emptiness in her immediate nearness, Hera continued to silently stroll down the corridors. The she noticed a flicker out of the corner of her eye. Looking down she spotted the name she’d been after all break three corridors down! Stroll turning into a sprint, she nearly crashed into a strangely placed suit of armor when making a turn causing a light ‘clang’ to sound down the
hallways. Hoping this hadn’t scared him away she reached the corridor where she’d seen his name, only to see nothing.

Thoroughly disheartened, and quite frankly tired of this now, Hera let out a deep sigh and made to turn back from where she’d came, when she heard a squeak.

Looking back she saw the tail of a rat disappear into a hole in the wall, and Hera’s face scrunches in distaste. Despite Ron’s love for his rat, Hera had never liked the icky creatures (too many lectures from Aunt Petunia on how unhygienic they were, not to mention the diseases they could carry), and all of a sudden, the allure of the dungeons disappeared in a puff of imaginary smoke. If they had rats down here she wanted no part of it, dubbly grateful that she’d managed to convince the hat to put her in Gryffindor and made to trudge back up to the currently rat free common room.

The thought that the rat could’ve been Scabbers crossed her mind as she passed by the ginormous doors to the Great Hall, but honestly, she’d rather hope the pest stayed lost. The unusually ancient thing always gave her the creeps, a vague sense of distaste and wariness lingering in the back of her mind.

She then briefly wondered if familiars popped up on the map while on the moving staircases, then equally quickly concluded that no they didn’t, as she’d seen Crookshanks plenty of times live but not on the map.

Fascinating bit of magic her map, yet still somewhat lacking. Hermione would probably find it an interesting challenge to fix, if Hera ever told her about it. Although what she would do with the information she didn’t know.

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Hera lay panting on the floor of the DADA classroom - observing the vaulted ceiling with it’s swirling colors - after another unsuccessful attempt at conjuring a patronus against the mock dementor. They’d already been at it for 30 minutes and she was utterly wrung out, and unnaturally chilled from the faux dementor’s presence.

It was their first lesson of the new semester, the end of January, and Hera was having an incredibly hard time concentrating at the task at hand. Hermione had come back even more stressed and popping in and out from the map with more frequency. Ron was staunchly ignoring both of them because of Scabber’s still missing status, despite Hermione’s attempts at reconciliation.

And now, being faced with one on one time with Professor Lupin just reminded her of the eye-opening meeting she’d eavesdropped on at the Three Broomsticks. It was all terribly distracting, and Hera had never been very good at holding several things in her mind at once, while simultaneously acting normal.

And so, she was laying there on the old wooden floors, utterly wrung out and frustrated with herself because of it. And also wondering exactly how well Professor Lupin had known her parents, and why he’d never said anything about it to her. And maybe if she should just ask him about them.

And her ‘Godfather’.

But she didn’t want to think about that now.
Tilting her head a bit to the side, Hera observed Lupin stuffing the boggart back into the wardrobe out of the corner of her eye. She took in his appearance of well worn and battered clothes, scarred face, and greying hair. He looked tired, utterly underwhelming in his knitted cardigan, and she wondered. She wondered how he’d gone from best friends to her parents (andn one convict), to looking one step away from homeless. And also all the scars.

He didn’t look like the type of person to be involved in activities that led to those kind of scars, with his grandfatherly style of dressing and mild manners. But those scars were undeniably battle scars, that Hera was certain. Hera knew scars, having a fair share of her own.

Would it be more awkward to ask about his scars, or her parents, she wondered, running a hand through her disheveled hair and mentally preparing her tired muscles to get up.

Floor boards creaking as Hera moved, she rearranged herself into sitting indian style and took a deep breath, starting the meditation techniques Professor Lupin had taught her. So she sat there trying not to think of anything, absorbing the peace as Professor Lupin shuffled around fixing a cup of tea and a piece of chocolate.

“Is school going alright? It’s just you seem distracted.” Hera startled at the question, then shrugged, standing up to move to the armchairs, Professor Lupin following and handing her the refreshments. Taking a sip of her tea and nibbling off a corner of the chocolate, Hera continued.

“Yeah no, it’s fine. Nothing too major since it’s still fairly early in the term. Although looking at Hermione you’d think the exams were next week.” Hera muttered into her tea, curling up, worry working its way onto her brow.

Lupin only chuckled though as he sipped his own tea. “Yes, she does seem rather intensely focused lately.”

“That’s one way to put it” Hera this time snorted into her tea, curling up even more and letting the warmth and sugar seep into her system. Lupin only hmmd, eyeing her in amusement.

They sat in silence for awhile, and as the cold slowly left her system, Hera realized that this was probably as good as any a time to ask him about her parents. And maybe Black. But small steps first. Lupin had even given her the excellent opening of school, and gathering her Gryffindor courage around her, she went for it.

“Soo, eehm” Hera began, “about school-” There Hera hesitated, and Lupin raised an eyebrow inquiringly.

Hera stared hard into her tea cup. “Did you happen to know my parents at school?”

The quiet lingered, stretching out indeterminably. After what felt like forever, Hera finally peeked through her eyelashes at her Professor. His lips were pursed in a straight line, knuckles white where he was clutching the tea cup he was also staring hard at. Hera was mildly impressed that the china was holding up at the pressure.

Seeming to sense her gaze, his eyes flickered up to meet hers for a brief second before flickering to the side. Then he seemed to deflate, letting out a deep sigh and rubbing the hand not clutching the tea cup over his face. His exhaustion seemed even more pronounced now, and Hera nearly felt bad for bringing up the subject. But only nearly.

“Yes. Uh, yes I knew them. Fairly well actually.” Lupin sent a wane smile at her. “You have your mothers eyes you know.”
No she didn’t, Hera thought. No one had ever bothered to tell her anything before, and her aunt only had derogatory words to say.

But she didn’t say anything, instead giving him a small smile in return and waiting for him to continue.

“I was friends with both your parents during school, although in the beginning they couldn’t stand each other.” Hera’s eyebrows went up in surprise. “They did?”

“Oh yes,” He chuckled, his eyes far away. “Lily hated James because of his pranks, and James hated that she didn’t like him.”

“That seems rather conceited of him.” Hera couldn’t help but comment, not sure how to feel about it.

“And that would be one of the other reasons why she disliked him.” Remus smirked. Hera hummed in understanding. She couldn’t stand conceited people either. Malfoy coming primarily to mind.

“So, was pranking her another one of the reasons?” Hera asked, taking a last sip of tea.

“Oh no,” Remus began to look a bit contrite. “James had a tendency to target Sni-, eh, her then best friend. Jealousy mainly, I think.” His hand scratched the back of his neck. “BUT we pranked a lot of people back in the day. Your mother wasn’t the only disapproving one in the castle. In fact, Professor McGonagall even gave us a name!”

“Us?” Hera interjected before he could continue, eager to hear more about the others in their group, hoping it’s Black and Pettigrew.

Lupins smile dimmed a bit “Ah yes, well.” Hera almost felt bad. “There were four of us you see. James, Peter, eh Sirius and I –“

“Sirius Black?” Hera clarified, and Lupin flinched. “And Peter Pettigrew?” At the second word Professor Lupin’s gaze turned sharp. “Yes. They called us The Marauders.”

Hera’s eyes grew to twice their size. “Like the map!” Hera blurted out, immediately slapping a hand to her mouth. Lupin’s eyes had turned equally wide. Then to Hera’s surprise and consternation he burst out laughing.

“Somehow it doesn’t surprise me that the old relic managed to find it’s way to you.” Remus proclaimed, wiping tears of amusement from his eyes. “You’ve been using it well I hope.” He said with a wink and a smirk. Hera flushed, smirking back awkwardly but not saying anything.

To tell him that she was using it to stalk the maybe relation maybe ghost maybe alive old friend of his didn’t really seem like a good idea. When all he did was chuckle again and move to get more tea, Hera let out a silent sigh of relief.

“So if you’re the ones who made the map, what do the names mean?” Hera decided that distraction was the best way to avoid the question, and she really was curious. At her question Professor Lupin gained a mischievous look on his face, then turned to her, handing Hera a new cup of tea as well.

“Don’t tell anyone, but the names came from our animagus forms.” Lupin’s eyes twinkled nearly as much as Dumbledore’s

“No way” Hera’s eyes glittered in excitement. “What animals did you turn into?”
“Well, your father James, who was Prongs, could turn into great bloody big stag. His antlers had a tendency to catch on everything if he wasn’t careful. Wormtail – Peter – was a rat. Really convenient for sneaking around and gathering intel.” Lupin snickered at the end of the sentence, most likely an inside joke, but Hera had stopped listening after the word rat.

Because she’d seen a rat. Right after seeing Pettigrew’s name. Surely not?

“Sirius was Padfoot, a mutt.” Lupin frowned at this. “Although I don’t think I can ever trust the moniker man’s best friend anymore.” A thought struck Hera. She honestly couldn’t believe she’d forgotten about her summer friend.

“All this subterfuge was really starting to hurt her brain.

“Wasn’t that his last name?” Hera asked. Lupin looked bewildered, tensing. “How’d you know what color he was?”

Hera panicked for a second. The dog had never hurt her, and if things were shaping up to be what she was imagining, exposing him now would do no one good.

All this subterfuge was really starting to hurt her brain.

“Wasn’t that his last name?” Hera said, trying to look innocent. It wasn’t her best work, but Lupin relaxed again so she counted it a success.

“Yes of course. Makes sense though, black name black fur.” Lupin let out a sigh, then a snort. “We used to tease him mercilessly about it.” Lupin grew silent after that, getting lost in his memories again. Honestly, Hera thought, it was getting a little annoying. Understandable, but annoying.

“So you’re Moony then? Wait, does that mean you’re a wolf?!” At that thought Hera got really excited. A wolf was so much cooler than a cat! “Could you shift now?”

Lupin turned very shifty at the question. Moving to clean up the tea. “I’d rather not, Hera, if that’s alright. It’s been awhile, and the memories.” He threw a false smile at her, shrugging one shoulder in a ‘you know’ sort of manner.

Hera was disappointed but wasn’t willing to press more right now. She’d gotten the relevant information she wanted, and wasn’t really willing to go back to the tense Hermione vs Ron atmosphere in the common room quite yet.

“Tell me more about the pranks you did?” It always worked on the twins, and with the way the happy twinkle came back into the Professor’s eyes, it worked here too. Settling back into the overly fluffy cushions, Hera let Professor Lupin’s voice wash over her as he told the tales of the Marauder’s daring do’s.

Meandering back towards Gryffindor Tower, Hera contemplated all that she’d learned today, counting off the facts in her head.

Fact 1: Professor Lupin had been friends with both her parents, as well as Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew.

Fact 2: Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew could turn into animals – a dog and a rat respectively.

Fact 3: Sirius Black had during the previous summer escaped from Azkaban. The same summer
where she’d made a new friend in a shaggy looking black dog.

Fact 4: She’d recently seen the name Peter Pettigrew, a man who was supposed to be dead, and nearly at the same time seen a rat.

*An excellent rat for sneaking around.* Hera slowed her steps, coming to a stop near the Great Hall by a window looking out over the Forbidden Forest.

According to the minister, all they’d found after the explosion was a finger, meaning that no body had been found. Disintegrated in the blast, most thought, *but what if it hadn’t?*

Hera’s face scrunched up at the thought, realizing that maybe Tom’s paranoia over absolutely everything was starting to get to her. But something at the back of her head was egging the thought on, so she continued.

Hypothetically speaking, if he’d escaped, he’d be lacking a finger. If he were in his animagus form, he’d be a rat lacking a-

-a rat lacking a toe. Scabbers. Scabbers was a rat that was lacking a toe, and had lived for an unusually long time.

Hera’s magic whipped around her as she came to the realization, confusion causing it to lash out. As she was buffeted against the stone wall, she tried some breathing exercises to try and calm herself, not even entirely sure why she was so upset.

That’s when she noticed the shadow at the edge of the forest, and everything froze.

She knew that shadow. She’d played with the dog attached to it most of the previous summer. And if she wasn’t completely mad, that dog could very well be Sirius Black.

Or the dog could only be here because Tom had sent him here and she’d just been spectacularly unobservant during quidditch practices and Care of Magical Creatures.

There was only one way to find out she decided, digging her invisibility cloak out of her bag. There was still a few more hours left until curfew, and Hera was determined to wring as many answers out of the day as possible. Hopefully her stroke of luck would hold. Funny how these things always happened in clusters.

With that thought, she swiftly exited the castle, and once she hit grass sprinted towards the woods.

**Chapter End Notes**

**HOLY CRAP OVER 200 KUDOS THANK YOOOOOOOU**

Going through a serious bought of anxiety in my life right now, and writing is the only thing not exasperating it.

So thank you for reading, and liking.

In regards to certain aspects of the map, I’ve taken the liberty to have it not show animagi, my thought being that the Marauders wanted to make sure that even if someone got their hands on the map, they wouldn't be discovered in their alter egos, if you get what I mean.
Also neatly fixes the plot hole of Fred and George never seeing the name of a strange man in the same bed as their little brother (that one always annoyed me).

So cheers, and happy weekend!
The Padfoot

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hera sprinted across the grass towards the looming forest, always keeping the snuffling dog in her sight. She’d shifted her wand to her hand - just in case - and her magic was squirming around her ready for flight or fight. It was a supposed crazed murderer she was about to confront after all.

Strangely enough her mind was calm though.

Reaching the edge of the tree line, Hera slowed down, trying to stay as quiet as possible so as not to spook the dog. By the way the hound was sniffing the air in her direction, her cover might already be blown.

Instead of pouncing her, the dog simply stared hard at the area she was then, then turned tail and walked into the forest. Before disappearing into the increasing darkness – she’d really need to head back in soon before curfew – the dog stopped and looked back at her, sitting down patiently.

Strange, Hera thought. It’s almost as if he was waiti –

-oh. He probably is waiting for her. Hera hesitated though, her conscious – which sounded suspiciously like Hermione – telling her that he could just be leading her to her death.

Except she wanted answers, and his tail was wagging, and Tom hadn’t acted like he was a major threat, only annoyed at the dog’s audacity to growl at him. So, stuffing her sensible sensibilities somewhere else, and summoning up all her Gryffindor courage – and stupidity she was sure – Hera followed the dog into the woods.

Hera had honestly expected to be walking for a good fifteen to twenty minutes, but it was only a few minutes until they reached a small clearing, the black dog stopping in the middle of the open space. Hera, caution taking over once more, stopped at the edge of the clearing – still with her cloak on – waiting for the dog to do something.

She didn’t have to wait long.

After a final sniff in the air, probably to make sure she was still there, then the dog huffed. Then the dog was gone, and in his place a man.

Hera gasped, nearly stumbling backwards in surprise, but otherwise did nothing, a mix of curiousity and apprehension running through her thin frame.

The man had a very scraggly appearance, wild dark hair and a bushy beard framing his haggard and thin face. Still in his prison suit from Azkaban, he very clearly had not bothered with taking care of his human side since escaping. Although, Hera thought, she probably would’ve stayed safe in animal form as well if it kept her from getting caught.

A pang of sadness swept unexpectedly through her, watching the emaciated figure. Her mind telling her that this man should not look like this, her mind supplying her with vague images of laughing blue eyes, a huge white smile and a well trimmed goatee.

This man being part of her father’s life seemed all of a sudden much more real, and Hera had the very strange urge to hug him. She’d never had the urge to hug anyone before.
Hera slowly crept out from the edge of the clearing and towards the strange yet familiar man. His eyes followed her progress as her feet made dents in the tall grass, weariness and the smallest glimmers of hope shining in his sunken eyes.

Coming to a stop a couple of meters in front of the convict, his arms flinching towards her then back again, as if he’d wanted to bring her closer. To kill her? Highly doubtful now. He looked decidedly non-murderous (she knew the look, having gone up against Tom pre-negotiation), but as she still didn’t know his motivations, didn’t know him, she stayed put, just out of reach. He cleared his throat.

“Hera” he croaked, voice raspy from disuse. “Hera, love, please, take off the cloak.”

“Why?” Hera’s voice sounded small, unexpectedly emotional, her hands fidgeting.

He looked pained, well, more pained than before. “Please?”

He sounded so sad that Hera started taking the cloak off before her brain could stop her. The near blinding smile he gave at the sight of her made her feel better about the split second decision.

“Hello Prongslet” He rasped, tears gathering in his eyes.

“Hello” Hera racked her brain for something to say, awkward with the situation and equally aware of the fact that curfew was swiftly approaching.

“You’re looking much better.” Black began carefully. Probably thinking of how she’d been during the summer. Speaking of which -

“You were the homeless dog near Privet Drive, weren’t you?” Hera blurted out, completely ignoring the previous statement.

“Ah, yes.” Hera was thankful he didn’t try to lie. “I wanted to see you, make sure you were safe. And you were!” He looked pleased, then his expression turned frantic. “I failed to protect you! The dark wizard –“

“I’m fine! I was fine.” Black had taken a step towards her in distress, and Hera had taken a step back, startled by the sudden movement, holding up her hands in a placating manner. And also to keep him from coming closer.

“He can’t hurt me.” She began warily. “However people aren’t saying the same about you –“

“I’d never hurt you!” His tone turned pleading. “You’re my Goddaughter – I vowed – James trusted – you have to believe me, please! I wasn’t the secret keeper, it was the rat.” His voice had turned into a snarl at the mention of Pettigrew’s form, madness entering into his eyes.

“Pettigrew.” Hera stated, mostly for clarification, and watch Black closely.

“You know.” He was clearly upset. “You haven’t approached you has he? He hasn’t hurt –“

“No no, nothing like that.” Hera appreciated his concern, but she was uncomfortable and cold at this point, and only wanted the answers to her immediate questions. As he apparently wasn’t out to kill her, they’d be able to bond later when curfew wasn’t upon her.

“But I think he’s in Hogwarts, I’ve seen his name on the map and –“

“I knew it! I’m going to kill that rat bas-“ Black had started off back in the direction of Hogwarts,
but Hera clutching his arm stopped him cold.

“Sorry” Hera said quietly, quickly letting go and taking a step back. She’d never intended to touch the ex convict, but she couldn’t let him get caught again trying to storm the castle. If what he was saying was true, he was innocent, and had been serving 12 years for a crime he hadn’t committed.

“Please don’t go there. You’ll get caught. All the dementors, and I don’t think the teachers will give you a chance to explain yourself. I’m sure Dumbledore can –“

Black laughed bitterly, then hissed, “Dumbledore left me there to rot. 12 years I’ve been waiting! Any attempt at a trial, a plea, anything was worthless. Dumbledore knew, and he did nothing.”

“Ok, ok, no Dumbledore. But I really need to go back now, and I don’t want you to risk getting caught please.” She felt incredibly validated in the distrust she’d always had in the Headmaster. She also really needed to get back to the school.

“I need to go back now though. Can you please continue to keep yourself hidden until we can come up with a better plan? I promise I’ll come and visit.”

Black slowly nodded, although it was clear he didn’t like the idea. Hera sighed in relief, moving to put the cloak back on.

"Wait, don’t put it on yet. I’ll walk you back.” He looked hopeful again, and Hera didn’t feel like saying no. So they walked slowly back towards the castle, Black asking Hera questions about herself, and Hera asking in turn. When the castle was in view, and both the chill form the dementors and the snow permeated the air, Hera put the cloak back on, and Black turned back into a dog, watching Hera’s footsteps make their way towards the main entrance.

In the coming months Hera made sure to visit Sirius at least once a week. They talked mostly, about memories, and school, and wishes. She learned that the map didn’t show animagi (a self defence in case the map was ever stolen from the Marauders). She learned that her mother’s favorite candy was Ziggle Dust, something similar to the muggles Pixie Stix, and that her father had been a talented sketcher, and many small facts similar to those. He told her of all the mischevious pranks they’d pulled (particularly on Severus Snape, and hadn’t THAT been a shock to learn that her mother and Snape had at one point been best friends), and that when she’d barely been able to talk she’d called him ‘Unca Pafoo’.

Hera told him an edited version of her life, not wanting him to feel even more guilty over not being there for her. Once they managed to clear his name the Dursley’s would never be a problem again anyways.

She also snuck him extra food from the kitchens, and warmer clothes that Dobby had found for her, and she was rather pleased with how normal he was beginning to look.

Unfortunately they were no closer to figuring out a way to clear Sirius’ name, the man in question becoming too incensed to think clearly, and Hera still having no luck getting to Pettigrew, not that she knew what she’d do with him if she ever got her hands on him.
She may just accidentally kill the rat herself if she ever caught him.

The mystery surrounding Hermione also wasn’t quite solved. Her bushy haired friend was still looking more and more haggard every day, and Hera’s only clue to what was happening was the necklace Hermione continuously fiddled with when she was thinking.

Lupin hadn’t been any help in regards to the Hermione situation either, only advising Hera to talk to Hermione about it if she was so worried, then feeding her chocolate before making her face her nightmare over and over again.

On the plus side, ever since meeting Sirius Hera’s patronus had gotten stronger, almost a concrete shape now as opposed to just a vaguely lumpy mist. Given the size of the patronus, and all she’d learned about her parents, more specifically her father and his patronus, she had a strong feeling that it’d turn into Prongs when fully formed. She had no idea how to get over the final hurdle and it was frustrating, no matter how proud Professor Lupin said he was.

But today was a day to relax, and that’s exactly what Hera intended to do.

Spring was slowly taking over the land, and it was an unusually warm and sunny early April day that had graced them this Saturday. Hera had somehow managed to convince Hermione to abandon her books for the moment, and they were heading down towards their usual spot near the Black Lake, underneath an ancient weeping willow, who unlike its cousin, only moved its branches along with the wind.

Hera didn’t actually know if this tree had any type of sentience in it, but given what she’d experienced in the wizarding world so far, she felt it safer not to assume even if it hadn’t done anything yet.

They’d brought a picnic basket with them that Dobby had filled up with treats and drinks, as well as a (non school related) book for Hermione, and art supplies for Hera. Ever since she’d found out that her father had been an avid drawer, Hera had decided to try and see if she’d inherited the talent, and was pleasantly surprised to find that she wasn’t half bad.

Now she had sketches of the common room, various different inhabitants of said common room, and even one haphazard doodle of Crookshanks, who had very briefly deigned to return to the tower before Ron had not so kindly shooed him off again.

The twins had given Ron a tail, and various other animal attributes, for a week after seeing how upset Hermione had been, and Hera had silently cheered them on.

Things with Ron had been incredibly strained for a long time now. Hera hadn’t really hung out with him since before Christmas, not understanding how he could be so horrible towards Hermione for something that wasn’t even her fault. And honestly, she’d been doing a lot better with her school work, not to mention mentally, not having Ron to distract her, and having to listen to him complain about everything all the time. She hadn’t realized how taxing it was to hang out with him, until she didn’t have to anymore.

Not to say that she avoided the Weasley’s entirely. Ginny had gotten over her crush and was slowly becoming a good friend, and the twins were always a joy to hang out with, no matter what the situation.

But enough about red heads, she had pumpkin pasties to eat, and an excellent view of the Black Lake and the mountains surrounding it to draw.
Starting with the outline of the scenery, Hera idly wondered if the naming of the lake had anything to do with the Black family, or if it was just a coincidence.

Humming lightly while she drew, Hera was reaching for another pasty when she noticed Hermione fiddling with her necklace again. The only difference between now and previously, was that Hera could actually somewhat see what it looked like. In fact it looked like an hourglass.

“Hey Hermione?” Hermione hummed, to indicate she was listening.

“Why does your necklace have an hourglass on it?” Instead of answering her, Hermione stiffened, eyes wide.

“I- I don’t know what you mean.” Hermione quickly stuffed her necklace back under her shirt, staring hard at her book.

“‘Mione, you can’t lie for shit, and I know it’s got something to do with how you can transport inside the castle.”

“It’s not transportation.” Hermione couldn’t help but correct, to Hera’s amusement.

“Ok, if not transportation, then what?” Hermione kept her lips pinched in a thin line, refusing to answer. Hera could see that the exhaustion was catching up on her friend, and didn’t think it would take much more to get her to talk.

“Hermione please, you’re overly stressed, always exhausted. I worry about you.” Hera pulled out the big puppy dog eyes, looking as earnest as possible. By Merlin she’d figure out this mystery as well.

Finally Hermione sighed, relaxing her tense position. Hera did an internal victory dance.

“It’s a time-turner, and you’re not allowed to tell anyone about it Hera. Anyone.”

“Yeah yeah, cross my heart’ Hera made the corresponding hand movement. “But what does it do?”

“Unary time-turner Hera. It’s rather self explanatory.” Hera stuck her tongue out at Hermione.

“It allows me to travel back in time – the number of hours I travel are determined by how many turns I make on the hourglass.” Hermione had taken her necklace back out, showing the designs to Hera, and making sure to not twist any dials.

“Huh,” began Hera, still examining the turner, “how many hours can you travel at most?”

“I’m not actually sure, although Professor McGonagall told me never to go back further than 12 hours so…” Hermione shrugged, looking at the object in her hand.

“I’ve been using it for classes, seeing as I have more than actually physically possible-“

“So Ron was right!” Hera remembered Ron being utterly confused by Hermione’s schedule as many classes overlapped. She couldn’t believe she’d forgotten about that.

Hermione scowled. “Yes well, even a broken watch is right two times a day.” A startled laugh erupted from Hera, not used to sass from her bushy haired friend.

After she finished snickering, Hermione having joined her, Hera asked. “So if you can go back in time, why haven’t you been getting enough sleep?” Honestly Hermione should by all rights be
getting plenty of sleep, seeing as she technically had all the time in the world and more.

“Professor McGonagall didn’t want me going back more than twice, so mostly I’ve been using it for classes and homework.” Hermione looked contrite, tiredness pinching her eyes.

“Hermione.” Now Hera really was worried.

“I know.” Hermione’s exhaustion really shining through now. “But I only need to hold out until summer break. Then I’m never doing anything like this again.” A small smile entered her face as she looked up at Hera. “I’ve learned my lesson.”

Hera hmmed, really hoping Hermione told her the truth. If nothing else Hera will be forced to take the damn thing away from her if she tries this again in the coming years.

“But I’m not the only one with a secret.” Hermione’s gaze had turned sharp as she peered at Hera.

Ah. Maybe Hera had been slightly less sneaky than she should’ve been around Hermione. Ah well. An eye for an eye she supposed.

Although she really wasn’t looking forward to all the yelling Hermione would do when she told her. But it’d be nice to have Hermione’s big brain on their side. Maybe she’d have a brilliant idea on how to fix Sirius’ predicament.

So Hera told her everything.

There had been lots of yelling.

Then there had been planning.

Hera was now infinitely glad she’d spilled the beans to Hermione, as she’d come up with a concrete plan nearly immediately.

It was a convoluted mess containing the halfishly legal use of the time-turner, a very strange containment box for the rat that Hermione would research then make, and somehow getting in contact with a trustworthy auror.

The first two were slightly easier to accomplish, though Hermione had the idea to include Professor Lupin and hope he could help. Hera was slightly more cautious as he had supposedly been a friend to Sirius yet hadn’t done anything about the lack of trial either.

But Hera could concede that he was probably their best bet to not only help them, but keep their plan secret. Hopefully.

Running into Snape while stalking Pettigrew right before another patronus lesson with Professor Lupin? Not part of the plan.

“What, exactly, do you think you’re doing?” Snape eyed them dangerously. It didn’t help that they were currently rather far into the dungeons, where not even Slytherins usually frequented.

Which also begged to question why Snape was there, and how they didn’t see him coming. The idea that he too could be an animagus entered her mind, but Hera elected to put that thought on hold until a less tension filled moment.
“Exploring! Sir.” Hermione supplied after an awkward moment. It took everything she had for Hera not to turn to Hermione in disbelief.

Snape raised an eyebrow, “Indeed?” and continued to stare at them nearly unblinkingly. Hera wondered if he was born that way or had cultivated the look.

Honestly it’d probably be a good look to cultivate herself. It was very intimidating. She wondered if it’d work on the Dursley’s.

“Um, yes, sir” Hera might as well commit, trying to seem as meek as possible. “We were curious about something we found in the libraries and decided to check it out.”

“Yes!” Hermione was suddenly animated, and Hera knew they were saved once more by her love of books. “We’ve read that there’s supposedly a statue of Salazar Slytherin down here and wished to see if it was true.”

“Hmm.” Snape narrowed his eyes. It must have been true though, as he didn’t call them out. “If you’d continued your reading before charging off to prove yourselves—“ Hera tried to contain her snort, “—you’d be aware that the statue was removed during the latter 18th century by the Headmistress of the time.” Bollocks.

Snape continued. “Seeing as you now have no reason to be here, why don’t I escort you back to the surface hmm?” He then immediately turned around and began walking back towards the way Hera and Hermione had come from. With no other choice but to follow, Hera cursed under her breath, although by the startled look Hermione gave her it’d probably come out more like a hiss.

Nearly sprinting to keep up with the quick, long legged man, Hera hoped they’d have more luck in their endeavours when meeting with Professor Lupin later.

Chapter End Notes

There's a scene that I've written out that I'm working towards that I thought I was going to include last chapter (or at the very least this one).

I still haven't gotten there yet. (Which means more work for me, but more words for you!)

Thank you all for reading, hope you've enjoyed!

(Also random disclaimer, I still own nothing.)
The Disappointment

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Slowly making their way up to Professor Lupin’s classroom, Hera and Hermione weren’t in exactly the best of moods. Snape had ditched them in front of the Great Hall, and by then it was too close to lesson time to try and sneak back down while simultaneously avoiding Snape. So up they went. Hermione was muttering about what she wanted, and how she wanted, to ask Professor Lupin about helping in the Padfoot matter, but Hera couldn’t help but feel slightly disheartened. She liked Professor Lupin well enough, however despite his past as a mischievous prankster, Hera didn’t really get that ‘go against the rules vibe’ from him anymore. Then again maybe that’s why he’d been a successful prankster. All they could do was try really, and hope for the best.

Entering his classroom, Lupin threw a questioning glance at Hermione, raising his eyebrow. Hera explained that she’d ‘accidently’ told Hermione about her lessons, and that Hermione was far too interested in learning herself to let Hera go off on her own anymore.

At least that was the story the girls had agreed on to stick with.

Lupin had seemed pleased though, at having another eager mind to teach, and so the lesson progressed on as usual.

Until the end of the session of course, when Hermione decided during tea and chocolate to spill the beans. Quite literally.

“Professor, I have a question, and seeing as you’re in charge of DADA I thought it best to ask you.” He looked up inquisitively from his tea cup. Hera could only feel butterflies in her stomach.

“Hypothetically, if one were to find new evidence that may be relevant to an old case, who would be the best person to contact, and how?”

A sharp glint entered his gaze. “Usually an auror would be your best bet. But I have a feeling you’re question pertains to someone specific.” His gaze grew disappointed, and Hera knew immediately that Hermione would cave. Disappointed authoritarian figure was quite literally her greatest fear, and Hera glared at him sullenly for using it against Hermione. Then again, she’d used various expression to get her own way as well, so couldn’t quite fault him.

Before Hermione could spill absolutely everything though, Hera decided to take charge.

“We’ve seen Pettigrew’s name on the map.” Hera made sure to keep her face absolutely still, just as she usually would to stay out of trouble when at the Dursley’s.

“Um, pardon?” Lupin looked flabbergasted, and Hera took a moment to appreciate the expression, then repeated herself.

“I’m assuming there’s only one Peter Pettigrew. I could of course be wrong, although I don’t think I am, am I Professor?” The Professor’s expression remained dazed as he promptly stood up, wiping a hand over his face as he started mumbling to himself, pacing back and forth. Hera and Hermione shared a look, uncertain if this was good or bad. They started to get worried when they’d finished their tea and he was still pacing, and Hera was about to ask him if he was ok when he suddenly stopped and faced them, startling the two girls.
“It changes nothing.” What? “Hypothetically if he were alive, hypothetically” He stressed, “It proves nor disproves nothing. Pa- Black was still the secret keeper, and so still betrayed your parents Hera s.”

“Yeah but what if Sirius wasn’t the secret keeper though?” Hera interrupted, the sick disheartened feeling returning full force. “What if?”

Lupin had stilled as soon as she’d said Sirius’ name, then abruptly moved, kneeling in front of Hera and taking hold of her upper arms. He had a wild look in his eyes, and Hera had to fight to not cringe away from him, her magic agitated. In her periphery she could see Hermione had taken out her wand and loosely pointed it at them with a slightly terrified look on her face.

“Have you been in contact with Sirius, please don’t tell me you’ve been in contact with Sirius Black” His fingers had tightened with every word he’d said, and at the word ‘Black’ Hera had had enough and pushed him off her with her magic.

“So what if I have, huh? I’m obviously still alive, and he’s certainly never laid a hand on me.” Hera practically hissed, unlike you was implied. Hera was so furious she could feel the magic crackling around her, Hermione’s hair frizzing up more than usual.

Lupin had the decency to look slightly ashamed as he raised himself from the floor. “But Sirius Black is dangerou-“ “He’s. Innocent.” Hera interuppted, still hissing and eyes flashing.

“Ok, ok. He’s innocent. That still doesn’t mean he isn’t dangerous Hera. He’s been in Azkaban for 12 years. That does not leave a man unaltered. I just want you safe.” His tone had turned into a mix of placating and pleading. It annoyed Hera for some reason, but she had no interest in extending the conversation anymore. She wanted this over with, wether he promised to help or not.

“Can you help us then?” Hermione’s more timid voice broke through, causing the other two in the room to glance at her. “Find Pettigrew and help free Black?”

Again, Lupin drew a hand over his face, and Hera didn’t feel optimistic. The longer he took, the more she regretted letting Hermione convince her to talk to him to begin with.

Finally, Lupin uttered a quiet “I’ll think about it.” Not looking at either girl. Hermione looked pleased, having a peaceful resolution. Hera only narrowed her eyes, and gave up entirely on him. She’d never gotten any help from anyone who’d said they’d ‘think about it’.

Clearly, they’d need to think of a new plan. Standing up, helping Hermione up as well, Hera uttered a muted good bye before sweeping out of the room in a move that would’ve made Snape proud (or more likely sued her for trademark infringement). Not looking back, she heard Hermione make excuses for them both, then her hurried footsteps behind her.

None of them spoke a word on the way back to the Gryffindor common room.

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Hera stopped going to the Patronus lessons, instead choosing to try and figure it out herself. She continued to go visit Sirius in the forest, and even took Hermione with her at one point, introducing the now two dearest people Hera had to eachother. It was slightly awkward to begin with, Hermione being extremely wary meeting him. Sirius pulled out the full charm though, and soon had both girls
giggling over anecdotes, and Hermione asking a billion questions about pureblood society, which Sirius answered with only minimal reluctance.

Hera was happy though. Spring was officially here, Sirius no longer looked like a walking corpse, and things were only looking up.

And then bloody Malfoy had to get himself cut up by a Hippogriff during Hagrid’s Care of Magical Creatures lesson. An oh boy was Hera pissed.

Why Malfoy felt the urge to make a complete idiot of himself in front of everyone was beyond Hera, but the resulting planned execution of Buckbeak and the maybe sacking of Hagrid was absolute bollocks. The only positive thing to come out of this fiasco was Ron taking his head out of his arse long enough to rally against Malfoy in good old Gryffindor solidarity.

Seeing how tense Hermione was though, trying to study during breakfast across from Ron who was trying to eat his weight in bacon, Hera didn’t feel optimistic over the peace staying. ‘Scabbers’ still hadn’t turned up, and Crookshanks was still acting pretty dang shifty, so it was probably only a matter of time before Ron remembered that he hated Hermione.

To be honest Hera wondered if Ron had ever really felt anything more than tolerance for Hera’s female best friend.

But that was a thought for another day, as they headed down to potions, Hera hoping Snape’s mood wasn’t too abysmal, as she wasn’t sure she could keep from snapping back if he antagonised her. Arriving though, the instructions were already on the blackboard, with Professor Snape sitting at his desk clearly absorbed by another class’s essays. Everyone knew by now to immediately begin brewing, and not to ask questions unless under threat of death, which suited Hera just fine.

Not even Malfoy made a peep during the lesson – chopping, sizzling, and the occasional whisper being the only sounds that filled the classroom. It was nearly meditative, and Hera actually enjoyed herself for one of the few times in her potions career. It helped that she had Hermione as her partner, who was meticulously precise in everything she did. It made Hera strive to be better as well, just to try and keep up. It was doing wonders for her grades, and as long as the Dursley’s never found out she’d be golden.

In fact, the potions session had been so relaxing that when handing over their finished potion, Hera had given Snape a small genuine smile, before realizing exactly who it was she was smiling at and swiftly retreating before he could take points away.

As Hera and Hermione were the first ones finished, they got the pleasure of leaving the classroom first as well, Hera nearly giggly and Hermione almost snorting in her amusement over Hera’s situation. Once safely out in the corridors far from the classroom they both burst out laughing, thoroughly enjoying their good mood.

“I had no idea that brewing a soap potion caused temporary loss of sanity.” Hera giggled, walking arm in arm with Hermione towards their Transfiguration classroom. They’d be ridiculously early, but they wouldn’t really have time for anything else either way, so why not.

“Sorry to burst your bubble, but that was all you.” Hera groaned at the pun, while Hermione laughingly avoided the elbow aimed at her, which ended up with both of them stumbling against the walls.

Finally calming down, they walked quietly past the Headmasters office and turned the corner, when they heard the stone staircase leading up to the office move, and voices echoing down. Hera had
stopped, causing Hermione to look at her quiescently. Hera only put a finger to her lips before moving back to the corner to see if she could hear better. Hermione was pulling on her arm, but when it was clear that the voices belonged to Professor Lupin and Headmaster Dumbledore, even Hermione stopped to listen.

“…. and it’s tremendously concerning that this has been going on underneath our noses. Hera has been putting herself and others in unnecessary risk. It must stop immediately.” While Dumbledore’s tone of voice held a grandfatherly concern, Hera could hear the steel underneath, and it sent a shard of cold down her spine. She was also absolutely furious that Lupin had *gone and blabbed on her*. See if she ever trusts him with anything ever again.

“But Albus, surely if what she says is true than a trial could fic everything! We don’t even need Pettigrew, a few drops of veritaserum and-“

“No Remus, a trial would be unwise.” Dumbledore said with what he thought would be finality. Hera was about to prove him wrong. Her crackling magic had probably already given her away.

Rounding the corner, Hera confronted the Headmaster. “Why can’t he have a trial?” Hera was incensed. The very little good will Hera had had towards the Headmaster had very quickly evaporating.

“Yes Headmaster,” Snape said silkily coming out of nowhere, “Why shouldn’t Black receive a trial?” Hera looked at him in surprise. Their classmates must have finished more quickly than she thought. Though why he was here was a mystery.

So not only was his sudden appearance jarring, it also felt very strange to have Snape backing her side. She wondered idly if fire would start raining from the ceiling as well. It would make a lovely backdrop to the Headmaster’s glare.

“We have no proof Severus. It would be futile, and would only result in the recarceration of Mr. Black.” The twinkle was definitely gone, and Hera was feeling almost giddy watching the exchange.

“While I’m far from being the fleabag’s staunchest supporter, but even I think being thrown into that hellhole without a trial to begin with was rather harsh. As Lupin said, veritaserum would clear everything up nicely. I even have some in my personal store should it be required.” Professor Snape’s cordial smile was absolutely frigid, and Hera decided she had to save it to practice on at a later date.

Hera had always thought that Dumbledore had a soft spot for Professor Snape, given the fact that he was still teaching despite the blatant favoritism and general harshness. However, the extremely stiff expression on the older man’s face was very similar to the one aunt Petunia sent her in front of guests. Stiff politeness, but full of loathing.

Professor Snape seemed to be reveling in the expression as well. How interesting.

“Wouldn’t it be for the Greater Good to put him to trial, sir? Surely freeing an innocent man, alternatively recapturing a guilty one, is an outcome to be desired?” Dumbledore’s sour expression turned to Hera, and she bore it with an attempt at the same cold politeness that Professor Snape had shown. Professor Snape himself looked faintly amused. Lupin only looked faintly ill.

“Miss Potter, I do believe you have a Transfiguration class to attend now, wouldn’t want to be late hm?” Dumbledore tried for the grandfatherly look again after the frosty hostility from before, and failed miserably. Hera however, realized he was right and begged off, politely nodding to Professor Snape, to his continued amusement. She then spun on her heal and began speed walking back to where Hermione was still hiding.
“And Miss Potter,” the Headmaster interrupted just as she was about to turn the corner for the second time that day. Hera froze, frowning.

“Have you by any chance been in contact with a Lord Anastasi?” His words now fully contained that attempted cheerfulness he’d always had before, but that now fooled no one standing in the corridor.

Lord Anastasi? Hera had never heard of that name before. Maybe it was Italian? But that didn’t answer the question of why the Headmaster thought she’d know of him.

“No headmaster. Why, is he important?” She gazed over her shoulder back at the elderly wizard, and saw how he slightly thawed, the blasphemous twinkle returning.

“Not at all dear girl, forget I said anything. Now chop chop, Minerva does hate tardiness.” Rolling her eyes after again turning her back to the trio of men, Hera sailed around the corner and nabbed Hermione’s bag strap, dragging her silently along as quickly as they could. Walking automatically, thankfully Hermione was quiet, probably mulling over what they’d heard as well.

Clearly Lord Anastasi wasn’t just anyone, as he’d asked at such a strange moment. By the looks of it he wasn’t someone that the Headmaster approved of either if their lack of contact brought back the twinkle near full force.

But why would this mysterious Lord hypothetically speak with her? On one hand, being the last Potter had meant that several Lords and Ladies had tried to gain her favor. Being the ‘Girl-Who-Lived’ doubly so. It didn’t feel like it though. Dumbledore had never asked about any aristocratic fan mail before, so why now?

Before she could think more on that subject though, they’d arrived at the transfiguration classroom, so Hera put away those thoughts for later.

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Later turned out to be the evening of the same day, sitting in the common room infront of the fire. Hermione was doing Charms homework to her right, while Ron was playing chess against one of the fifth years. From what she’d seen they looked fairly even matched, and she was happy to let them be. Percy Weasley was also there for once, sitting on the opposite couch doing his own homework, although specifically what she couldn’t tell. She was interested in him however, because of both Ron and the Twins complaining over his anal-retentive ways, and extreme desire to make a career within the Ministry.

Surely with how obsessive he was over his dream, he’d have heard of Lord Anastasi?

It was worth a shot anyways.

“Hey Percy?” Hera tried for doe eyed, although it was a risk it wouldn’t work given he had a younger sister.

“Yes Hera?” He answered, still looking down at his homework. Well, he answered, it was a start.

“I have a very specific question, and I’m fairly certain that you’re the only one who could maybe know the answer to it.” That got his attention, as he finally looked up, seemingly intrigued. Playing
to ego was always a good way to go it seemed.

Keeping the victory out of her voice, Hera continued. “Well, it’s just that I’ve recently heard of a Lord who’s name I’ve never heard of before, and I was wondering if you’d know given your dedication to your future within the Ministry.” Having a hum of all the powerful families was only a boon when interested in the Ministry, and more specifically the Wizengamot. Even she knew that by now.

“Oh I’m fairly certain I can help you if you give me the name. Father keeps me abreast of all relevant news in his letters.” He puffed up in pride, and Hera had to lock her jaw to keep her expression from changing.

“Oh thank you Percy!” She admittedly laid it on a bit thick, but hey, if it wasn’t broken don’t change it. “His name is Anastasi. Didn’t get his first name unfortunately.” She held the smile a little longer, just until Percy stopped looking at her.

He hummed as he leaned back in his seat, hand to chin in what was clearly a thinking pose. Whether it helped or not Hera didn’t know.

“Ah yes, I remember now!” Hera startled, smile automatically returning in place.

“New Lord, but very influential. Apparently, he’s been beginning to stir things up in the Wizengamot, for the better according to Father. Young, but highly charismatic. Foreign too. Just come from Italy. Why do you ask?” He finished inquisitively, eyes open and friendly. It was a side she didn’t often see from Percy to be honest. It was kind of a shame.

“Oh no reason in particular. I like keeping track of the various Lords and Ladyships, given my own heritage you know.” Percy nodded in complete understanding.

“Yes it is wise to keep yourself informed. You’ll one day be sitting there yourself after all.” This time it was her turn to nod sagely, with a mumbled ‘true true’ as she gazed down. It wasn’t actually something she thought about often, but she didn’t have to tell him that.

“Well, thank you Percy, you’ve been immensely helpful.” She grinned at him, then motioned towards his homework. “I’ll let you return to your work. I should probably get some of my own done as well.”

Percy smiled back at her. Hera didn’t think she’d ever seen him smile so much. “Quite right. And Hera, if you have anymore questions, feel free to ask. I’ll help as best I can.”

Hera thanked him graciously, then took out her own Charms homework, buckling down, but not really reading what was in front of her. While Percy’s information had cleared up some questions, it explained absolutely nothing on why Dumbledore could possibly think he’d be in contact with her. Sighing in frustration, Hera actually started paying attention to the book in front of her, deciding to think about it all another day.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all of the support! Hope you guys enjoyed the new chapter!
(And five points to everyone who can guess who Lord Anastasi is ;)}
"Hey Neville."

"Hey Hera.

Hera plopped down onto the sofa next to Neville, who was pruning a very interesting purple (and sparkly?) looking spiky plant. She eyed it interestingly, but then decided she probably didn't want to know. Instead closing her eyes and enjoying the quiet of a near abandoned common room.

She'd just come back from the library, after a study session with Hermione. Exams were soon upon them, and Hermione was a whirlwind of activity. Hera tried to keep up as much as possible, giving alibies when needed, and making sure Dobby kept track of her eating habits so that Hermione didnät waste away. She finally got Sirius up to snuff, she wasn't about to let Hermione slip between her fingers. She'd been doing better though, with both Hera and Sirius on her case to take care of herself. Not as tired, nor as stressed. Hera never made the suggestion that she should stop studying though, even if Hermione could definitely pass her exams even now with flying colors. It was obvious that Hermione had some time of anxiety connected with her grades, and Hera was smart enough not to mess around with that. She understood anxiety, and had no intention whatsoever to make it worse for her bushy haired friend.

Sirius on the other hand, claimed that he hadn't felt this good in years, which was admittedly true, but made Hera rather guilty at not having figured out how to fix his situation yet. Avoiding both Lupin and Dumbledore probably wasn't helping matters at all, but she was still so pissed off and disappointed at them that she couldn't help it.

On the other hand, a tentative truce had been formed with Professor Snape - or at least, that's how Hera had chosen to interpret it. Professor Snape wasn't nearly as antagonistic during his lessons anymore, and had even awarded Hermione five points for a text-book perfect colored potion (said snarkily, but this is Snape we're talking about). Hermione had been so gobsmacked that Hera had been forced to take her by the arm and drag her out of the classroom, much to everyone's amusement. Hermione had been rather star-struck the rest of the day, and Hera had enjoyed the rare day of from studying with relish. A fair amount of teasing had also commenced after that, much to Hermione's mortification. But seeing as Hera saw the tiny pleased smile that appeared at the reminder, she didn't think that Hermione hated it as much as she let on.

Half dozing in the quiet, a thought came to Hera which caused her to frown, and opening her eyes to stare up at the enchanted ceiling (enchanted just like the Great Hall, and showing white fluffy clouds and a blue sky). Buckbeak's 'trial' was in exactly a week, and Hagrid had in inconsolable. On the one hand, Hera was absolutely pissed that Malfoy had been such a disrespecting idiot. If he had been less himself none of that would have happened. As it were, Hera could also understand that children are idiots and they shouldn't be around dangerous things without the proper precaution to begin with, which Hagrid very much failed to comprehend. She didn't think Buckbeak should have to die because of two people's (well, a person and a half-giant's) idiocy.

Acting hero really wasn't all that high on her list of things to do either, but she was starting to feel like that would be the only alternative to reach a happy ending for everyone involved (or a less death filled one at least).
"….ok, Hera?" Neville's voice broke Hera from her thoughts, and she blinked owlishly at him. He smiled at her in amusement, then turned back to his plant.

"You look really frustrated is all. Is it the exams?" Ah, he'd been asking if she was ok. Hera shrugged.

"Nah, thinking about Buckbeak s'all. Hagrid is going to be absolutely devastated and I feel bad that I can't do anything about it." Hera looked down, picking at her cuticles, brows furrowed.

Neville only snorted. "We're kids. Despite everything you've done previously, we shouldn't actually have to worry about doing anything until we're seventeen. Although" Neville eyed Hera, "since you're the last living Potter you can be emancipated when you turn fourteen."

"Emancipated?" Hera recognized the word, but couldn't immediately remember it's meaning.

"Yeah, you know, legally a grown up. You'd be Head of the House of Potter, with everything it entailed. Then you'd really be able to do things if you wished. Vote in the Wizengamot, hold parties, make business ventures, ally with houses, etc." Neville had an air of nonchalance during his explanation, more focused on his plant. Hera's eyes however, had grown larger with every word.

"Wait, seriously? I can do all that when I'm fourteen?" This would fix all her Sirius problems, and she'd only have to wait another couple of months! She felt almost giddy at this new information, happiness surging through her.

"Yeah, wouldn't get too excited though." Neville patted her knee in a consolating matter. Hera was fairly proud of herself at not flinching. "There are like, three million rules to everything. Plots and ploys everywhere. It's a Slytherin's heaven. There's a reason why most purebloods end up in Slytherin after all."

"What, you don't think I could handle it?" Hera felt nearly insulted. "Wait, how do you even know all of this anyways?"

Neville's ears turned red at the question, as if embarassed. "Well, because my magic didn't show itself until fairly recent - you know the story" Her nodded sagely. They'd had a type of sharing time during first year, on of those getting to know eachother exercises, where everyone told eachother the story of their first bout of accidental magic. It'd been, interesting, to say the least.

"My magic's never been strong, so Grandmother wanted to make sure I had every pureblooded trick of the trade up my sleeve to survive. I've been getting lessons practically since I've been able to walk." His blush had spread to his cheeks at this point, and he was staring very hard at his plant. Hera frowned however, not liking the self-deprecating tone of his voice.

"One, whoever said your magic weak, was a bloody idiot, you're one of the most magically potent wizards in our year!" Second only to Malfoy, if she could trust her spidey-senses. None of them were close to her level though, which she was fairly smug about.

"Second, that was very kind of your Grandmother, to try and give you the tools in life to survive. What's it like, those lessons? Is it like etiquette, dancing, and those types of things?"

"Um, sort of?" He scratched the back of his neck, having finally put down the plant shears. "It's more like learning about our culture, eh, social norms and stuff. Like knowing who to bow to or who you shake hands with, how to act in various situations and the customs that are connected. It's why many purebloods have such a hard time with muggleborns and some halfbloods who don't know the rules. Their behaviour seems insulting, even if they don't mean it." That….made a lot of sense actually. Hera was fascinated.
"But if it's so important, why don't they teach it in school?" Hera felt like life would be a lot easier for a lot of her fellow students, and felt nearly angry at the lack of information.

"Um, I'm not sure actually. It was a required class when Grandmother went to school. The families still had their own education as well, but muggleborns and halfbloods used to have the knowledge too. Grandmother blames Dumbledore for the increasing bullying. Apparently he got rid of the classes when he became Headmaster." Neville grimaced during the last phrase, clearly as unhappy with it as his Grandmother.

"Oh." Bloody Dumbledore. The more Hera discovered about him, the less she liked him, and she really didn't like him any more.

They both grew quiet after that, Hera to absorb what Neville had told her, and Neville back to his plant, who'd started waving around it's spikes to try and regain his attention.

No wonder relations were always so strained between the students. She'd noticed that certain student groups stuck to each other, interacting with some people and avoiding others. Very aloof but unfailingly polite seemed to be a common theme too. It would explain a lot if there was a 'hidden' culture that half the students were missing. No wonder there was so much drama all the time.

And if Hera had completely missed this, what else was she completely unaware of? Was that why Snape had been absolutely horrible towards her? Why people tended to run hot and cold around her? Frustration filled Hera, and she had to reign in her magic from reacting to her emotions.

There was only one thing she could do now, she supposed.

"Neville?" He hummed. "Would you be willing to teach me? Or help me find someone to teach me?" Neville looked nearly taken aback at the question.

"You've never had any offers before?" At his question Hera threw him a deadpan expression, seeing as she'd obviously had no idea about any of this before Neville had begun explaining. He smiled sheepishly back when his brain caught up with him.

"Ah right. Um, yeah, of course! If you help me with potions and dada?" Neville looked at her hopefully, and quite frankly Hera thought she was getting the better end of the deal.

"Yeah! Easy. Thank you so so much Neville, this really means a lot to me." Hera gave him her biggest smile, and he smiled back, blushing. While Hera had never really been close to Neville before, she had the feeling that this was the beginning of a beautiful partnership.

She'd never been more excited to start studying something.

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The week progressed, Hera incorporating Neville in her and Hermione's study sessions, much to his appreciation. It was Tuesday, and they were on their way to potions, discussing Buckbeak on the way. It was when Neville jokingly wished that they could go back in time to stop Hagrid from having the lesson to begin with that Hera had an epiphany - one that included Hermione's timeturner and plenty of ferrets (not the blond kind though.)

Utterly pleased with herself and grinning like a loon, much to Neville's confusion (the look of understanding on Hermione's face told her that they were probably on the same wavelength), Hera entered the potions classroom practically walking on clouds.

However, Professor Snape's mood couldn't have been more on the opposite side of the spectrum, and it slowly tore away at Hera's own happiness until being completely torn down when she'd tried, and
ultimately failed, to keep Neville's cauldron from exploding.

"Detention Miss Potter, with me tonight at seven. Let this be a reminder to keep your hands to yourself." Snape sneered, voice dripping with disdain.

"But Prof."

"Do not make me take away points Miss Potter, now get back to work. All of you!"

Hera felt her eyes burning as she returned to her own potion. Neville had the most apologetic look on his face, and she gave him a wane smile in return. Really, she should have known better than to expect anything from the peace. To expect the ceasefire meant something. Stirring her cauldron violently Hera was angry with herself for feeling betrayed. Muggle grown ups had never been her allies, why should the magical ones be any different.

She would stay unfailingly polite though, like Neville was teaching her. No more tempermant, no more emotional outbursts, only cool cucumberness (once she got rid of the burning in her eyes). Giving Professor Snape a stiff smile before walking out of the classroom with Hermione and Neville once the lesson was over, Hera powerwalked up to dinner, determined to work some of her pent-up energy before having to go back down again.

One strange thing though, that even Hermione commented on later during dinner, and that Hera had noticed as well, was that Snape had never actually taken any points. It was a bit strange seeing as Snape had always just taken points, never threatened, before. But honestly Hera was too pissed to care.

She had time to finish up her dada essay before having to trudge down to the dungeons again. As she swiftly made her way down the now familiar pathways and secret passages towards the potions classroom, she finally managed to cool her mind, pushing her emotions away. She was bound and determined to make it through the detention unmoved like she usually was when doing Aunt Petunia's chores.

Knocking on the door at precisely seven o'clock, feeling smug at the timing, the door swung open revealing Snape sitting behind his desk, most likely correcting homework, with two steaming cups of tea on the desk in front of him. It was not a sight Hera was used too, normally being greeted by a mountain of dirty cauldrons upon entering for detention. It through her off, but she thought that maybe it was a new form of mental torture. Make the student think they're off the hook, then 'BAM', they're stuck splicing rat spleens or something.

Well, Hera didn't see any rat spleens, but she was nonetheless wary as she stood behind chair in front of Snape's desk. When Snape noticed that Hera made no movement to sit down, he gave an impatient huff and waved towards the chair, turning it into a cushy armchair. At Hera's very confused expression, Snape glared at her.

"Sit down girl, I have no intention of forcing you to do anything. I needed s legitimate reason to speak with you without the old codger's interference, so here we are. Now drink your tea."

Hera may have wanted to comment on the contradiction of him not saying he was going to force her to do anything, then telling her to drink her tea, but Hera felt so relieved at not actually having a detention that she simply followed orders. Before drinking though she sent out a flicker of her magic to check the drink for tampering - not that she thought Professor Snape would try and pull anything, but more out of habit. (Professor Lockhart had tried to drug her several times last year, and she'd stopped taking chances since.)
Snape looked almost impressed, and a little bit approving, if Hera was reading his expression correctly. He then put the piles of homework away, and took a sip of his own tea, before leaning back in his chair and eyeing the student in front of him.

He began musingsly, "I've been reliably informed that my previous perception of you was…. Biased, and based on false information. I've since been corrected." Then he sneered. "I've also been told to apologise for my abysmal behaviour."

"Um apology…accepted?" Hera had absolutely no idea how to feel about this situation. A bit gratified over the apology, utterly confused, and slightly in awe of the person who could make Professor Snape apologise to a student.

Snape had snorted at her hesitance, but decided it was good enough and moved on. "Now, I wished to speak with you in regard to Sirius Black. Attempting such a conversation anywhere else in Hogwarts would have been unwise, as the Headmaster has ears everywhere, and very obviously desires his continued convict status. Detention gives us the opportunity to discuss undisturbed."

Snape took another sip of his drink, then put the tea cup down fully, clasping his hands together and leaning forward.

"To make a long story short, I have several acquaintances who would be willing to finance Sirius Black's trial, defence, and eventual return to society, as it were. All we need is access to the man himself, and they'll fix the rest."

Hera's eyes had widened in shock, and she had to tamp down hard on the feeling of hope and happiness threatening to overwhelm her. She needed to keep a cool head.

"What's the catch?" Hera frowned. There was always a catch, and she needed to make doubly sure it was an acceptable one. This was her Godfather's life they were apparently talking about tonight after all, and he'd suffered enough.

To Hera's indignation, Professor Snape simply smirked. "No catch. My acquaintances will house him, quite comfortably I assure you, until his trial and his assets are restored to him. In return they would expect to have you and Black as allies, of course. They will also have the utmost joy of undermining Dumbledore's authority and credibility. A worthy enough cause if any."

Hera thought it over. To her untrained ear it sounded like an incredibly fair deal. Then again, she wasn't entirely sure what being an ally entailed. It also depended on who exactly his acquaintances were, if they were people she and Sirius could handle being associated with. She knew that Sirius wouldn't be able to handle being connected to a overly Dark family, like the Parkinsons, but then again, needs must.

And that was only if he was even telling her the truth, although other than being overly caustic and extremely Slytherin-ish, Professor Snape had never actually told her a lie yet.

"Comfortable how exactly? And what would being their ally mean? And who exactly are your 'acquaintances'?" Hera's face was grim, which contrasted with Snape's rather amused facial expression. She tried very hard not to be insulted.

"He'd be treated like a prince, as any pureblooded guest. Exactly what the alliance would entail would be between you, your godfather, and them. As to who they are - the primary supporters are Lord Lucius Malfoy, young Mr. Malfoy's father, and Lord Corvinus Anastasi, an old friend of ours who has recently moved here from the continent. Both honorable men - of that you need not worry."

Hera bit her lip while contemplating his words. She didn't know how hard or how easy it would be
to convince Sirius to side with Lord Malfoy, and she had no idea who Lord Anastasi was as a person other than what Percy, and now Professor Snape, had told her about him. Then again, seeing as they got to decide themselves what the alliance would be like, maybe it would work? But then again, what would keep them from exploiting Sirius position if they didn't agree to the terms of the alliance? They could just hand Sirius over if they wanted to. Hera wasn't willing to risk that. But then again, Professor Snape claimed they were honorable men. Surely honorable men wouldn't use them like that?

"Can you promise that? That they're honorable men? And that you're telling the truth?" Hera looked at him seriously, keeping absolutely still. Snape's eyebrows went up at the questions, yet he didn't seem surprised. He then murmured about 'him being right about her fondness for vows' before unveiling his wand.

"I swear that all the words I've spoken during this meeting are true." He waved his wand, and Hera felt the rush of magic as it confirmed his words, after which he briefly lit his wand, then tucked it away once more, a small smirk on his face.

The relief Hera felt at the magical confirmation was almost overwhelming. Slumping bonelessly back into her seat, she closed her eyes as they started to burn for the second time today, only instead of betrayal, all she felt was happiness. When Hera saw the concern on Professor Snape's face though, she quickly pulled herself together.

"Thank you, Professor Snape." She said, surreptitiously wiping her eyes. "I'll contact Sirius, then get back to you once he agrees?" She tried very hard to keep the seriousness she had before, but was sure her happiness was sneaking through.

"And you're so sure he'll agree?" Snape couldn't help but quip.

Hera snorted. "I'll make him. It's the best chance he has, and I'll bloody well beat it into his head if I have to." Hera's eyes widened when she realized exactly how candid she'd been. "Please excuse my language Sir."

"Excused." He drawled, clearly amused.

It was at this point that Hera realized how utterly strange this situation was. If anyone had told her a year ago that Snape would temporarily be her favorite person, she'd have laughed, then hexed them into the next decade.

As it was, she decided to simply enjoy the moment. Another problem was fixed, and Hera fully intended to enjoy the rest of the excellent tea in front of her for the rest of her non-detention.

Chapter End Notes

Kind of a build up chapter, so to speak, but we're soon at the end of third year (aka next chapter!!) I'm realising that pacing isn't my strong suit, and trying to figure out what to go into detail and what to gloss by is still tricky. Seeing as this is my first multi chapter fic you guys are unfortunately my guinea pigs, and you get the questionable joy of watching me figure it out. woop.

So yeah, not much happens, but I hope you can enjoy it anyways, and thank you all so much for your comments and kudos (HOLY CRAP OVER 300 KUDOS WTH)!!!!!!!!!!!
Next chapter will be up fairly soon too, so keep an eye out ;)

Freeing Buckbeak ended up being strangely anticlimactic compared to Hera’s previous adventures.

For one, they knew exactly what they were getting into, and when they were getting into it, which had never happened before.

The execution had been planned to happen exactly 6pm Saturday with Dumbledore, the executioner, and the Minister of Magic in attendance. So, their plan had been simple – make sure to ‘visit’ Hagrid just before 6, and ‘happen’ to be there when they arrived. Hermione would then go into full swot mode, asking questions left and right, while Hera would try to charm the Minister. It went of without a hitch, and they managed to distract the trio for a good 30 minutes. Dumbledore even seemed to help them distract the other two, indicating that he probably knew exactly what Hera and Hermione were up to. Hera had tried to ignore the fact that she very much didn’t like him anymore, making sure the distaste stayed far away from her face. It was a challenge seeing as Fudge was smooching up to her like there was no tomorrow, but judging by the pleased look on his face when Hera and Hermione hightailed it out of there after the required 30 minutes Hera was fairly certain she’d succeeded.

Once retreating to an abandoned classroom on the fourth floor, Hermione used her time-turner, wrapping the chain around both their necks, sending them back to an hour before their past selves would arrive at Hagrid’s, giving them plenty of time to comfortably hide from everyone, then all they had to do was wait.

After several games of tic-tac-toe and eye-spy, finally Dumbledore and the ministry men came down the pathway. Hera and Hermione saw them inspecting Buckbeak first, before entering Hagrid’s hut.

That’s when they burst into action.

As Hera had previously been accepted by Buckbeak, they’d decided that she’d be the one to lure him away with ferrets while Hermione kept a look out for potential threats. Nothing happened, no one unexpected popped up out of nowhere, and they easily made it all the way into the Forbidden Forest before the allotted 30 minutes were up.

They led the easily bribed hippogriff to the clearing where Hera usually met Sirius, who was waiting there just as planned. Sirius then borrowed Hera’s wand, bleaching the hippogriff wing feathers permanently, making him look rather drastically different, before handing the wand back. Then they simply took the collar and leash off, and let Buckbeak roam free. He’d most likely return to the herd, and if the officials checked with the herd Hagrid could simply say that he’d preemptively gotten a new male to keep herd stability or some such nonsense.

Easy, simple, clean. It made Hera nearly paranoid, not to mention surprisingly disappointed, with how smooth the whole operation was. At the same time, it was rather nice that something finally went according to plan.

Getting Sirius to agree to Professor Snape’s offer, however, was a completely different matter.

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“Snape?” Sirius screeched, causing Hera to wince. It’d all been going so so well while she’d described the offer – two Lords willing to meet with them etc. But as soon as she’d mentioned that it’d been Professor Snape who’d been the messenger Sirius had practically blown a gasket.

“No. There’s no way in Merlin’s muddy mind that Snape, Snape, could ever possibly want to help me. After everything we did to him? No, no, old Snivellus had set a trap, and I refuse to comply.”

“Snivellus?” Hera asked mildly horrified at the demeaning nickname. She had a bad feeling about where this was going.

“Old nickname. Pranked the hell out of him. Nothing he didn’t deserve of course, slimy old git. Greasy hair, huge nose, know it all Slytherin. He was bad news.” Sirius said this with a flippant tone of voice, as if the words excused the actions.

Hera felt rather rather nauseous. It explained rather all too well why Professor Snape had been so horrid to her before. Being a constant reminder of his former bullies? Hera doesn’t think she’d be any better in his place. In fact, she probably would have reacted worse. She while she may not know who Snape was, she knew the essence of who he was now. And now? She trusted him to keep his word, and she was bound and determined to get Sirius to accept that offer, because it was their best, and quite frankly only, option out of this situation.

If she was lucky she’d even get Sirius to apologize (best to start small though).

“I was bullied, in primary school.” Hera began in a small voice, making sure to sound extra pitiful. “My hair was too dirty, my eyes too freakish, my clothes too ratty. I was too strange to have friends, and didn’t dare to make the effort in case those kids would be targeted as well. They pushed, yanked, pulled, and threw things at me. And do you know what they always told me?” The growing horror on Sirius face told Hera that he knew exactly where this was going, and she felt vindicated. “They said that I deserved it. I never understood why though. Why just being me would merit their hate.”

Sirius opened and closed his mouth several times, but never made a sound. Instead he simply looked pained, staring at her with sad eyes, a hint of guilt in their depth. Hera was glad he didn’t try to defend himself. She wasn’t sure we wouldn’t be able to stop herself from hitting him nor her magic from throwing him about. She felt extremely disappointed in him, but realised also that this was a long time ago, and that they were now grown ups. Clearly Snape could find it in himself to move on and act mature – she’d drag Sirius kicking and screaming into maturity as well if it meant his freedom.

“Professor Snape is only the messenger, the deal would be with Lords Malfoy and Anastasi-“ When it looked like Sirius was about to say something Hera raised her voice.

“MEN WHO Professor Snape has given his word are honorable men and will not exploit us. So you will meet with them, and you will be civil with all involved. Understand?” She practically hissed the last word, her ire finally getting the best of her, magic swirling around her. Sirius’ eyes were wide, and he looked suitably cowed when he finally gave his nod of consent, obviously understanding that he was on very thin ice with his goddaughter. Nodding, Hera decided to deal with the fact that her father and godfather and friends had been bullies another day, instead quizzing Sirius on what he could teach her about pureblood customs, third year exams, and what his primary defence for the trial would be. While the relationship now felt strained, it thankfully eased as the evening progressed, helped by the relief that freedom was almost a fact now.

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Telling Professor Snape about Sirius agreeing to the plan was thankfully easy, simply staying behind after potions. The surprise that flickered across his face when she cast a fully formed female lion patronus made the experience even better, as it bounded off to tell Sirius when to meet them prior to meeting the Lords.

She’d finally managed to cast a complete patronus a couple of weeks ago after Sirius had given her some pointers (not to mention how life was looking decidedly better for her, which gave her better happy memories), and had been practicing it since under Sirius watchful gaze, testing it’s brightness and ability to carry messages. She was rather pleased with it, even if it’s shape felt rather too cliché given her Hogwarts house. Professor Snape’s amused quirk of the lips indicated that he probably also found it rather typical. Hera was just happy that everything was finally slowly coming together.

Now all she needed to do was pass her tests, and make sure the meeting between her godfather and the Lords went smoothly. Probably easier said than done.

Ideally Hera would’ve liked to present Pettigrew to both the Lords, and as evidence at Sirius’ eventual trial. Unfortunately, and frustratingly, his name had completely disappeared off the map shortly after Hera had confronted the Headmaster in front of his office. Ron hadn’t said anything about his rat being back either, so Hera could only assume that Pettigrew had probably completely fled the premises when he’d realized he was being hunted by someone. Fortunately, they didn’t actually need him for anything, as Sirius testament under veritaserum should be enough to clear the air.

Hermione was also disappointed in Pettigrew’s disappearance, but with the rapidly approaching exam dates, she was understandably more focused on her studies than anything else. A side effect to that was that Hera had also been studying more, and had never been more relaxed prior to exams in her life. The tips Neville had been giving her on pureblood stuff was also helping her feel more prepared for the meeting with Lord Malfoy and Lord Anastasi. She didn’t know how much talking she’d actually be doing, seeing as one, she was only thirteen, and two, female. If it was anything like in muggle aristocracy she’d be summarily ignored. It might be different with magicals for all Hera knew, and at the very least she could throw around her status as the last Potter if she needed to express something, or Sirius began doing something stupid.

Although then she’d probably just blame his behaviour on his time in Azkaban. Handy excuse, but only to be used in case of emergency.

However, no amount of mental preparation and self confidence could stop the butterflies from erupting when she spotted Malfoy manor after Snape had apparated them there.

Sirius had been perfectly civil when Hera and Professor Snape had come to pick him up before apparating. Hera was rather proud, even though Snape had a look of outmost suspicion on his face during the entire encounter.

Sirius had also made an attempt at personal grooming; his hair obviously washed, his scraggly moustache and beard looking decidedly less scraggly, and wearing the best robes Dobby had managed to find for him. All in all surprisingly good looking, and Hera could see a hint of what he’d once looked like before being thrown into prison.

She herself was in her best looking school robes, as she didn’t have anything else wizardlike and all her muggle clothes were hand-me-downs from Dudley – very clearly not suitable for meeting some of the most politically powerful wizards in England at the moment (or so Neville told her when she’d idly asked). So school robes, freshly showered, and hair as tame as it was ever going to be, Hera felt that despite her best attempts, she was woefully unprepared and underwhelming.
Then again, she’d once read somewhere that to be underestimated was the greatest advantage.

Walking up the large elaborate stairway to the equally large and elaborate entrance, the doors automatically opened, and Professor Snape led them straight through the entry hall, and down several corridors before leading them into what seemed to be a study.

It was filled with books and what seemed to be random artefacts on small tables around the room. A desk sat situated in front of huge windows leading out to a balcony, the view including forests and a small lake in the distance. Hera had a moment of pure jealousy realising that this was where Draco Malfoy lives, where he got to grow up as a child, then determinedly stuffed the unpleasant feeling back into the hole from whence it came.

She then took a moment to observe the man that must’ve been Malfoy’s father, sitting behind the desk, finishing up what seemed to be paperwork. Long flowing pin straight blond hair, no expression could be gleaned from his sharp features. He also had what looked like extremely expensive and well tailored robes, looking the epitome of a Pureblooded Lord.

Hera was fairly certain Lavender Brown would kill to learn the secret to having hair like Lord Lucius Malfoy.

Thoroughly impressed and reaffirming for Hera the importance of first impressions, Hera felt woefully underdressed and definitely not in her element in this room dripping of old money. She pulled her magic around her like a security blanket, and tried her best to emulate Professor McGonagall’s dignity and self assuredness. She wasn’t sure how well she succeeded in that though.

Hera watched as the expressionless face of Lord Malfoy turned into a warm congenial smile as he put his quill and papers away, rising from his seat and rounding the table.

“Ah Severus, thank you for bringing the guests. Lord Black, Lady Potter – a pleasure to meet you.” He proceeded to bow to both Sirius and Hera, who respectively bowed and curtsied back, although Hera wasn’t exactly sure how accurate her curtsy had been. Seeing as no one said anything or reacted to it in any way, she felt reasonably sure she hadn’t made a faux pas.

Lord Malfoy continued. “Please, have a seat in front of the fire. The chairs are much more comfortable, and infinitely more suitable for this kind of business I find. I must unfortunately however inform you that Lord Anastasi won’t be able to join us today, as he was delayed rather last minute by some important business. He has however given me permission to act in his name as we have discussed our offers quite extensively.” He gave an equally apologetic yet charming smile, and Hera was simultaneously in awe, and trying to memorise it to use in the future. She also kind of wondered how Draco Malfoy was so undiplomatic with a father like this. Maybe it came with age.

Sirius narrowed his eyes, but inclined his head in agreement, sitting down on one of the armchairs, Hera swiftly sitting down in the chair next to him. Tea and various hors d’oeuvres appeared on the small tables next to the chairs, and the men swiftly began fixing themselves their own cups and plates. Professor Snape had swiftly and quietly left the room when they’d sat down, and Hera quietly observed the other two as they went through what must have been an old habit of exchanging pleasantries whilst fixing themselves refreshments.

Hera fixed herself a cup of tea, and settled to further observe.

“Given your current situation, and Lady Potter’s student curfew, I feel that perhaps this meeting
would best serve its purpose being brief. Is that agreeable?” Lord Malfoy looked at both of them, and Hera nodded in time with Sirius having been keeping an eye on him through her periphery.

Lord Malfoy smiled, looking delighted. “Excellent. I have only two questions Lord Black, if you would be so kind as to answer them in front of a truth orb?” Sirius nodded again, taking a sip of his tea as Lord Malfoy summoned a clear orb like object that looked incredibly similar to Neville’s remembrall.

“I do not believe you’ve seen a truth orb before, Lady Potter?” Lord Malfoy had turned his attention to her, and she shook her head in negative.

“It is an old family heirloom, not common in the wizarding world. While not as efficient as veritaserum, it is excellent in regard to yes or no questions, speaking of which – Lord Black, did you betray the position of James and Lily Potter to Lord Voldemort?”

Sirius looked briefly indignant, but quickly cooled his expression. “No.” he answered curtly.

The orb remained clear, and Lord Malfoy nodded. “Did you kill Peter Pettigrew?”

“No. Although occasionally I wish I had.” This time Sirius’ expression remained unmoved. Hera nearly snorted though, hiding it behind her tea cup.

Th orb remained unchanged, and a corner of Lord Malfoy’s mouth twitched up before he waved his hand at the orb and it disappeared once more.

“Excellent. The trial will not be a problem, though please refrain from sharing your homicidal tendencies towards Mister Pettigrew if you could.” Lord Malfoy took another sip of his tea, Hera following suit. “In regard to the alliance, both Lord Anastasi and I wish for a standard agreement.” Hera would have to ask Sirius later what that meant.

“The one thing we would require of you, is to publicly rescind your alliance with Dumbledore, preferably in connection with your trial, although we will allow for a certain time delay after if you so wish.”

Publicly going against Dumbledore? Hera thought that that was perhaps the easiest requirement they could’ve asked of them, and judging by the slightly mad looking grin on Sirius’ face he felt the same.

“Easy. Done. Anything else?” Hera winced at Sirius’ over-eager answer and question. She’d realized fairly early in life never to ask that question, as people would usually always take advantage. Lord Malfoy must have noticed her wince, as he sent an amused glance in her direction before responding.

“No, Lord Black. We have no intention of taking advantage of your situation as it stands. Although your friendship and support in future matters would be greatly appreciated.” Lord Malfoy smiled benignly at them, and Hera got a slight ominous feeling. That may just be her pessimistic brain though, as while she’d heard mixed opinions on the Malfoys, she’d only heard positive things about Lord Anastasi. Hopefully it wouldn’t backfire on them Hera though as she quickly agreed with Lord Malfoy.

“Very good!” Malfoy clapped his hands together, clearly pleased. “Lord Black, I have a room ready for you here for your convenience. Kobry!” A house elf popped up. “Please tell Severus that we’ve concluded our meeting, so he can escort Lady Potter back to Hogwarts.” The house elf bobbed in what looked like a better curtsy than Hera had managed, before popping away again. Professor
Snape entered the room a few minutes later as the other two men were shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries. Hera still seated as she finished her tea and a few more nibbles. Seeing him enter, she quickly finished before attempting a better curtsy at Lord Malfoy, thanking him for his hospitality, and saying a much more formal good bye to Sirius than both were used to.

Returning to Hogwarts without Sirius felt weird, but at the same time Hera felt a sense of utter relief that Sirius was finally safe and in good (and well manicured) hands – that freedom was only a matter of time. She could now completely focus on her studying, and utterly ace her exams. She had every intention of making Sirius proud.

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On the downside, Sirius trial wasn’t set to occur until a week after school had been let out, meaning she’d temporarily had to return to the Dursleys. On the upside, she did indeed ace her exams (or her version of acing, meaning she mostly knew the answer to practically everything.) She’d been assured in a letter from Sirius that someone would come pick her up prior to the trial so that she could attend it, but she had no idea who, and she was slowly becoming an anxious mess over her rather horrible muggle relatives meeting any of the wizarding aristocracy. She’d never be able to live it down, and it would not help improve the view of muggles in any aspect.

As the day of the trial dawned, Hera was practically vibrating out of her skin, having told her aunt yesterday that someone from the wizarding world was going to pick her up for the day, and that it was something she had to attend. Her aunt had definitely not been pleased, her horse like face turning decidedly mulish, before she’d simply added on more chores for Hera to complete before being able to leave. She completed all of her chores, the extra one’s and all, long before lunch time (the trial was set for 1 pm, her ride to the trial coming at 12.45), and all Hera could do was sit in her room in her best school robes (without the tie, she didn’t want it to be too obvious what they were.) Wearing all black, and with her hair in the best french braid she’d ever managed, Hera felt as ready as she could on a nearly empty stomach (she’d only been able to sneak a piece of toast for lunch) when the doorbell rang at exactly 12.45.

Hera rushed down the stairs, answering the door practically before the Dursleys had had time to react, and nearly choked when she saw Professor Snape on the other side.

Seeing a teacher out of the context of school was one thing, but it being Professor Snape, no matter how neutral he’d become towards her during the school year, threw her off. It was also a relief in one way, as she’d been expecting an unknown witch or wizard, and now didn’t really have to care about appearances as Professor Snape didn’t like anyone (except apparently Lords Malfoy and Anastasi?).

Quickly regaining her equilibrium, Hera yelled a goodbye before squeezing through the door and closing it behind her, motioning to Professor Snape to lead the way. He raised an eyebrow at her, before eyeing the door, then turned around leading her down the street to the park. When they’d reached a secluded spot, he offered her his arm, like when they’d apparated to Lord Malfoy’s house, and Hera grabbed it, mentally preparing herself for the coming unpleasantness.

They appeared in the atrium of the Ministry, in front of a huge and rather ostentatious statue. Professor Snape didn’t give her much time to look around though, as he quickly began making his way towards the courtroom where the trial was being held. Quite a lot of people were going in that direction as well, which Hera could understand as apparently it was to be the trial of the decade.

Entering the courtroom, Hera’s first thought was that it looked like one of those old timey lecture rooms with a steep incline of rows circling the whole room. It also brought to mind the colosseum, and Hera thought it was surprisingly accurate to equate most trials with gladiator sports. Both usually ended with bloodshed of some kind.
Hera could see that most of the seats were already filled, only the Minister and a few officials still not yet in attendance, and there was still ten minutes to go before it began. Fortunately, people made way for Professor Snape as he billowed on through the masses, leading her to the seats next to, surprisingly, Lord Malfoy and his son, both smiling and nodding politely at her when they spotted her. Keeping her expression neutral, she nodded in return to both of them, before sitting to the elder Malfoy’s right. The younger Malfoy’s face had been surprisingly lacking in his usual scorn, instead filled with curiosity which Hera felt meant that the elder had most likely told him something of what was going on. Professor Snape sat down in the seat to her right, and she felt surprisingly uncrowded sitting between the two magically powerful men. They also kept most of the gawkers at bay, as apparently the news that the Girl-Who-Lived was in attendance had gone around the room and many were craning their necks to get a good look at her. Ignoring them though, as well as the hushed conversation the two men next to her were having over her head, Hera looked around the room, wondering idly who the mysterious Lord Anastasi was, and trying to figure out who’s who from the brief run down both Percy and Neville had given her before their break had begun.

Suddenly everyone grew quiet, as the rest of the ministry workers piled in, as well as the Minister himself. Following him was a curious looking woman dressed all in pink, and Hera spontaneously disliked her on sight, as she looked like a demented version of Elle Woods.

Then Sirius entered, surrounded by aurors, and whispers erupted practically everywhere at once. Hera felt slight amusement at the thought that this is what parseltongue must sound like to non-speakers.

At the sight of the wizard who entered behind Sirius and his entourage of aurors, the one who’d be acting defendant, she and nearly gasped, then nearly started guffawing, as right there, smack dab in the middle of everyone, stood one Tom Riddle.

When she couldn’t help but snort as they named him Lord Corvinus Anastasi, defendant of Lord Sirius Orion Black, both wizards next to her sent unreadable glances in her direction. Of course he’d be the mysterious Lord Anastasi. Why she hadn’t guessed that before now was beyond her. She blamed it on everything else going on in her life at the moment, and sat back to enjoy the show. She didn’t really pay attention to what was being said, instead choosing to observe the people down below her.

Tom looked ridiculously good, which was expected. His skin a few shades darker than the tan he’d been sporting when she’d last seen him, his hair now a midnight black as opposed to chocolate brown. He also had scruff on his face, and ridiculously expensive looking robes, but not in your face expensive. In all honesty he looked very italian, reminding her faintly of Blaise Zabini, and she thought that he was embodying his role of foreign aristocracy extremely well.

She wasn’t surprised at all that he was doing as well as he was, as his soothing cadence flowed through the room, sounding all too compassionate and rational in his defence of Sirius. She once again felt immensely relieved that she dared to suggest the deal last year, as she wouldn’t have stood a chance against the man holding court below her. In fact, with the agreement made, they were even on the same side now.

It kind of boggled her mind realising how much her life had changed in three years, going from living in a cupboard underneath the stairs to sitting with the upper crust of wizarding aristocracy, and belonging.

Watching Sirius give his testimony, Hera felt elated at the sympathetic looks he was getting from the majority of everyone in the room, even seeing some tears from some of the older ladies in the room.

With the way Tom had worked the room, and with Sirius’ expertly worded monologue (she
suspected that the two had gone over it beforehand, as it felt a little too calculated to be purely Sirius), Hera knew that Sirius’ pardon was in the bag. Not only would it be a boon for Fudge during the next election, but the head of one of the Sacred Twenty-eight families would be restored, which a majority of the purebloods most likely wanted desperately.

When Dumbledore decided to crash the trial though, Hera felt nothing but rage. Her magic threatened to explode, and both of the wizzards next to her looked at her in alarm as she felt their magic trying to contain hers. Tom sent her a glance as well, telling her very sternly with his face to cool it, and she slowly tried to comply. When she felt his magic give hers a push as well she finally cleared her head and summoned it back around her, winding it tightly. The people not looking at Dumbledore were looking at her, but fortunately the glares Snape were sending out made the rest of them quickly look away.

“It is a grievous crime that has been committed against Lord Black, resulting in his twelve-year incarceration.” Dumbledore began, a sad tilt to his voice. “I am in full support of his complete release, and am fully convinced of his innocence. He has bravely served a sentence not his own, and I admire greatly his resilience.” Fantastic, Hera thought. We were getting to that, so why are you here?

Going by the pinched expression on Tom’s face, he was most likely thinking something along the same line. She was surprised he hadn’t cut the older man off though.

“It is a well-known fact that Mr. Black is the godparent to Hera Potter, and once freed will have full custody.” At this he paused, and the whole room seemed to pause with him. “I have concerns however, of his mental state. Twelve years is a long time to be exposed to the dementors, and many have gone insane in less than one. I can not in full confidence say that Lord Black in his current state is the most suited to take care of a young impressionable teenager. I would like to recommend therapy with a mind healer until, to make sure there are no unfortunate side effects. Miss Potter would continue to stay at her current abode until he has a clean bill of health, of course.”

Dumbledore said all of this utter contrite sincerity, and Hera felt cold lumps at the bottom of her stomach. She was finally given a chance to escape the Dursleys for good, and Dumbledore wanted to take that away from her? Why? What could he possibly gain from this?

If this had been before the ‘altercation’, Hera would’ve fallen for his act. Now however, she had no doubt that he had an underlying reason, she just couldn’t figure out what. Unfortunately, he sounded way too logical, and Hera had no doubt that the ministry would agree with it, if only to play nice with Dumbledore. Hera could feel her heart sinking, and she almost wanted to cry. She saw Tom lean down to speak in Sirius’ ear, and Hera desperately hoped they could come up with something to counter.

“Minister! If I may.-“ Sirius spoke up suddenly, turning everyone’s attention on him. “I happen to completely agree with Headmaster Dumbledore, and would love the therapy. However-“ And here Hera truly began to feel hope again. “Her current home is with muggles, and I would like to suggest putting her in the care of a wizarding family until I can fully take care of her. I wish for her to learn her heritage, as her muggle relatives have refused to discuss any magic with her.” At his final statement, furious whispering broke out within the court room, several looks of horror and sympathy being sent her way. Hera wasn’t entirely sure what their game plan was here, but honestly as long as she didn’t have to go back to the Dursleys she wouldn’t complain.

“Fully understandable, Lord Black, indeed. Her education of her heritage is of course of utmost
importance” Fudge blustered. “Do you have a family in mind?”

“My cousin Lady Narcissa Malfoy, and her family, sir.” Hera startled, both at the suggestion and the new information drop. She’d had no idea that Lady Malfoy was related to Sirius. By the subtle stiffening of the man to her left, she could tell he hadn’t expected the suggestion either. He didn’t utter a protest however, instead standing up and agreeing to the arrangement, to Hera’s continued surprise.

The trial finished up swiftly after that, Sirius being fully pardoned with all of his assets returned to him as expected, as well as the new stipulations put in place – meeting with a mind healer, while Hera would live with the Malfoys.

She felt rather numb, all said and done. In a state of slight disbelief. She distractedly thanked Lord Malfoy before sprinting down and into Sirius arms, giving him the biggest hug she could, now that she could do so in public. Sticking close to the newly pardoned man, Hera let all the congratulations and pleasantry wash over her, Snape and the Malfoys soon joining them as they made their way out.

During all of this, Dumbledore had tried to keep his grandfatherly look of concern, but it’d looked rather sour towards the end. She’d looked around after Tom, and had managed to send of a wave and a beaming smile at him in thanks before he’d disappeared.

“Congratulations Mr. Black, Miss Potter.” Dumbledore popped up out of nowhere, just as they were about to apparate away from the ministry. Sirius expression turned into a moue of distaste, before a dark look entered his eyes and his expression turned into the epitome of pureblooded scorn. Hera realised exactly what he was about to do, and with the huge amount of people still swarming around them, she mentally agreed with him.

“I would thank you if I thought the sentiment sincere.” Hera heard several gasps at Sirius’ words. “However your lack of action on my behalf during these last twelve years have proven otherwise. I do not trust you, particularly after your attempt to once again separate me from my goddaughter, and I do not want you contacting either of us unless it regards school or business. Good day.” At that Sirius led Hera and the others past the gobsmacked Headmaster (his expression a memory she’d laugh over many a time in the future), as well as the shocked crowd around them. His words would definitely spur huge amounts of rumours and questions, and Hera didn’t think Sirius could’ve cut ties from Dumbledore more effectively than if he’d taken scissors to him. By the pleased look on Lord Malfoy’s face, he obviously felt satisfied with the completion of their side of the bargain as well.

Hera could only smile, her future feeling immeasurably brighter. Everything was finally looking up – she had good friends, people who loved her, nobody actively trying to kill her, and she’d never have to go back to the Dursleys ever again.

Truly, Hera believed that the worst was behind her, and she didn’t think she’d ever stop smiling.

Chapter End Notes

Ok so I hope you all don’t mind the super long chapter but-

-WOOHOO TOLD YOU THE CHAPTER WOULD BE UP SOON AND WE'RE FINALLY PAST THIRD YEAR YAS
(tbh when I started writing this I thought third year would be at the most 2-3 chapters. oh how naive. )

But yeah, who's excited for fourth year?! Cause I know I am! A few new characters/players to be introduced, relationships to be built upon - new friends, new enemies - it's going to be a roller coaster.

Anywho, next chapter will include the Quidditch World Cup!

(And as always, thanks for reading!)
Living with the Malfoys was extremely surreal for Hera. She often mused, whilst wondering the ancient halls and gazing at the various priceless knick-knacks and paintings adorning the walls, that this is what Cinderella must have felt like, going from slave to royalty. Hera didn’t have to marry anyone to escape her prison, and that made everything all the better.

The first couple of weeks had been slightly awkward, with Hera trying her best to be as unobtrusive and polite as possible. Worst was when she forgot about the house-elves and began picking up after herself and the others – to show her appreciation of course, like she would at the Dursleys. Their flabbergasted expressions had reminded her, and she’d reacted on instinct, standing still as a statue with her head bowed waiting for her punishment.

It was always better to just let it happen, as opposed to trying to hide.

Lady Malfoy had, however, instead of continuing to look like a mystified ferret like Draco, or the dawning horror on Lord Malfoy’s face, been incredibly kind, acting immediately and gently taking the plates from her hands and leading her to her personal parlour. Hera had been mortified of her reactions at that point, but instead of asking uncomfortable questions, Lady Malfoy had proceeded to continue her Pure-blood lessons that Neville had begun.

Draco seemed to forget about the whole episode immediately, dragging her out to play quidditch and have seeker competitions, (the majority of which she won, to Sirius’ later delight).

The slightly sad and contemplative looks that Lord Malfoy had every time he saw her however made her slightly uncomfortable, and she’d ended up avoiding him for the better part of two weeks.

Eventually though the looks disappeared, or were better hidden, as Lord Malfoy once again acted as the consummate host, amongst other things telling stories of Malfoys past and their good (and bad) deeds to the two teens delight. Often times the stories were hilarious, but Hera also realised fairly quickly, to Lord Malfoy’s approval, that the tales often had a hidden message of some sort – either a warning or a lesson to be learned or never copied.

He also took an avid interest in the teenagers quidditch playing, occasionally even taking to the sky himself to make the stakes more interesting, or to teach them a few of his own moves from his school quidditch days. Apparently, he’d been a chaser opposite her father, (the better one, of course), and Hera had been ecstatic to hear some of those memories as well.

Lady Malfoy (now Aunt ‘Cissa), had been less pleased when all three returned windblown and utterly dishevelled. The look of disapproval always quickly turned into hidden amusement as Lord Malfoy (now Uncle Lucius) would send a wink towards the teens, before distracting his ever elegant wife so Hera and Draco could sneak off to clean themselves up before whatever meal of snack was put forth for them.

In short, Hera had never had as happy a summer in her whole life before.

The truly best parts of her summer though? When Sirius got permission to come and visit. The first couple of visits had been slightly awkward for the grown-ups, and Hera suspected it had something to do with parts of their past that they all avoided like the plague.
She knew that Sirius and Narcissa were cousins, and had apparently been rather close before Hogwarts and being sorted into opposing houses, but by watching them Hera quickly realised that their humor and personalities were actually fairly similar, although Aunt ‘Cissa was never anything less than dignified, even when holding her own against Sirius’ witty quips.

Whatever had been between Sirius and Uncle Lucius seemed to ease as time passed. Quidditch seemed to be a particularly bonding topic (what with the Quidditch World Cup being nigh), as well as Wizengamot business and Dumbledore bashing, as Hera privately called it.

One particularly memorable visit included an impromptu quidditch game between the Slytherins and the Gryffindors, which ended up lasting entirely too long according to Aunt ‘Cissa, but was absolutely amazing according to Hera. They were surprisingly evenly matched – Hera being the slightly better seeker, while Uncle Lucius was the slightly better chaser, much to Sirius chagrin. They ended up calling it a tie when Narcissa somehow caught both the quaffle and the snitch within ten seconds of each other (Hera suspected wandless magic, she was too impressed to say anything though). Matches longer than an hour had then been banned, but that hadn’t stopped the four from continuing to enjoy the now good-natured rivalry.

As the summer progressed so did also Hera’s lessons, as she was a quick study to Aunt ‘Cissa’s delight. In what felt like no time she was pulling of correct bows and greetings, proper table manners and dancing, in no time. Towards the end of the summer her new aunt would construct fake social engagements with the two other males for Hera to practice. Neville had been invited as well, on Hera’s behest. It both helped her skills, and she saw his confidence grow as he proved that he could definitely hold his own in a Malfoy approved social setting. It helped that he’d somehow managed to charm Aunt ‘Cissa, much to Draco’s consternation.

Other than a small mishap here and there during the exercises, which was completely normal according to Narcissa (it helped that Draco also messed up once or twice to Hera’s and Neville’s amusement), Hera pulled them off with aplomb. In fact, the Lady of the Manor was so pleased with her progress that she’d decided to hold a post Quidditch World Cup/End of Summer ball in which Hera could have her debut. Hera was less pleased, but certainly felt better prepared, and rather like it was a necessary step in the right direction, to complain. Not that she’d complain anyways, at least not out loud.

She did however slightly complain in her letter to Hermione, if only to entertain her. She also sent detailed reports on exactly what was in her lessons for Hermione’s use, so that she could learn as well. Hera didn’t know if it was technically allowed or not, but she didn’t really care either. Hermione deserved every chance in the world, and Hera was going to make sure she got them. It also helped that Hermione could give her advice on questions and sometimes explain certain concepts that Hera had difficulty with, giving a more muggle perspective on magic traditions that made it easier for Hera to understand.

Hera also occasionally got to explain something to Hermione, which was an interesting feeling. Hera rather liked it though.

She didn’t get any letters from Ron, which didn’t really surprise her at all. Slightly sad over the slow death of her first friendship, but at the same time she mostly felt relief. She did however get a few letters from the twins, which surprised and delighted her. They contained mostly prank ideas, and she had the brilliant idea to introduce them properly to Padfoot, and so showed Sirius all their letters. He was equally delighted by their ideas, and the subsequent letters she got back from the twins after Sirius had started writing to them were so filled with absolute joy and worship that Hera ended up giggling for days, happy to have helped fulfill dreams.
She also got one letter from Mrs. Weasley, inviting her to the Burrow. She had to respectfully decline of course, explaining that she was staying with the Malfoys all summer. She didn’t really want to see Ron either, even if the twins being there would have made it bearable. She never got a reply from her letter though, and other than feeling a momentary pang of sadness, she quickly forgot about it.

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The upside to having a serious ball to go to, Hera soon realised, was the prepping – aka shopping. She never thought she’d be an avid shopper, as anytime Aunt Petunia had taken her with it had been painful (metaphorically), but shopping with one Lady Narcissa Malfoy née Black was like a revelation.

The first time they’d gone shopping had been slightly awkward as it’d still been early days, and they’d been essentially shopping for everything as the only clothes Hera had were hand me downs from Dudley and the few articles she’d bought herself during school.

The second time though, the second time had been amazing.

They’d gone to Paris of all places, although Hera really shouldn’t be surprised at this. Narcissa had had an indulgent smile on her face at Hera’s absolute wonder at being in a different country, staring slightly wide eyed (but still socially acceptable) at the new sights around her.

They’d visited high end boutiques – the type to have champagne and nibbles on hand for their most important costumers (aka Lady Malfoy and any in her company). Hera made sure to use all her new shiny Pure-blood manners, and actually found herself enjoying the whole experience, for once being pampered. She was always kind though, remembering how Aunt Petunia had been absolutely beastly to any she felt beneath her. Hera never wanted to be anything like Aunt Petunia.

Not only had they gotten new robes (not to mention gowns and various necessary accessories), but Aunt ‘Cissa had insisted that they do a spa day with the mandatory manicures and pedicures involved. Hera also got a proper hair cut for the first time in her life, as opposed to the hack job her previous Aunt had given her. It’d been growing like crazy since she’d started nutrient potions at the beginning of the summer to counteract the malnourishment she’d previously suffered from. She’d also had some serious growing pains as she grew rapidly to nearly the same height as Draco, again, much to his consternation.

But with new robes, a new hairstyle and new life knowledge, Hera felt like a completely new person.

Yes, this must’ve definitely been what Cinderella felt like (without the marriage, thank Merlin).

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It was the day of the Quidditch World Cup, and Hera was waiting for the portkey to activate together with the Malfoys and her godfather. Sirius was decked out in merchandise from Ireland’s team, Draco had a Krum pin attached to his robes, and his parents were decked out in a tasteful amount of green to subtly show their support of Ireland over Bulgaria. Hera, like Draco, showed her support in
the bulgarian super-star seeker by wearing a match jersey with his name on it, that Sirius had gotten
her a couple of days ago. Narcissa had been slightly disapproving of her veering off of the path of
utter refinement, but seeing as Sirius looked even more ridiculous Hera felt that she could get away
with it anyways.

Feeling like something had hooked her behind her navel and like she’d been thrust into a washing
machine, Hera barely had time to gasp in surprise before they were landing again on a hill
overlooking the stadium. She stumbled a bit at the landing, Sirius stabilising her, but she quickly
forgot her mild embarrassment at the sights before her.

The stadium rose up ahead of them, dwarfing everything around it. The roar of the crowd of people
could be heard even from their hill, and the mass of ant like people heading towards the building was
incredible. Hera could feel the charge of anticipation and happiness in the air, the magic thick with
the amount of wizard and witches in one place.

She could only stare around her at the multitude of cultures and colors and people surrounding her as
they wandered towards the stadium. It was a bit of a shock to her slightly sheltered british
constitution, but she revelled in the new experiences.

Climbing all the stairs to get to their seats wasn’t nearly as fun however.

Finally reaching their box – right next to the Minister of Magic’s – Hera quickly forgot her aching
legs as she stood against the railing keeping her from falling into the pitch.

“This is amazing!” Hera couldn’t help but practically crow, her grin practically splitting her face.
Draco wasn’t doing much better, standing right next to her with an equally large grin.
Sirius was grinning at their exuberance, and the elder Malfoys had a look of fond indulgence on their
faces, as they gathered together nibbles to snack on during the game.

“It’s supposed to be the match of the century.” Draco began, going into full teenage boy quidditch
fan mode. “Ireland’s team has been unstoppable for the past three years, ever since they sacked their
alcohol drenched captain and hired Troy. Absolutely slaughtered the Peruvian team in the semi-
finals, it was brutal.” Draco’s absolute glee nearly caused Hera to giggle while listening to him,
having not quite seen him like this before.

“But Krum however, is an absolute god on a broomstick. The team’s ok, but they wouldn’t
have come nearly this far without Krum. He’s leagues beyond Lynch, although Lynch isn’t bad, but
still. As long as Ireland gains as many points as possible, they’ll be set.”

“Isn’t Krum only seventeen though?” Hera questioned, vaguely remembering Draco having
mentioned his name in connection with Durmstrang.

“Yeah, still in school and everything. He’s been given special dispensation to train with his team
during the school year, probably because of all the good press Durmstrang’s been getting because of
it.” Draco sounded extremely similar to Hermione in lecture mode, and Hera had to bite her tongue
not to tease him.

“Wicked.” Hera commented, gazing back out over the field, taking in the ridiculous amount of
people all in one place, from all over the world.

Then she felt a magical signature that she immediately recognized, and whirled around.

At the doorway stood Tom, or Lord Anastasi, staring at her with a curious expression, before he
entered the box and began chatting with Lucius and Narcissa. Sirius, once he spotted him, also went
over to the other grown ups and joined their conversation.

Hera slowly turned back towards the field and poked at the still oblivious Draco. “Why’s Lord Anastasi here?”

Draco startled, clearly having been worlds away. Casting a glance at the grown ups behind them, he just shrugged. “Father invited him. He enjoys quidditch too. They weren’t certain if he was going to make it though, which is probably why they haven’t said anything.”

“Huh.” Hera didn’t quite know how to feel about it. She’d honestly been waiting for Tom to visit the manor all summer, but he’d been a no show. She hadn’t dared to ask anyone about it either, in case she accidently seemed more knowledgable than she should be, as she was fairly certain he didn’t want anyone to know his actual identity.

Then again, she speculated, looking back over to the older group, there was a chance that the Malfoys already knew. In fact, it wouldn’t surprise her at all.

“Hera! Let me introduce you to the family friend.” Aunt ‘Cissa called her over, and Hera pulled all her newfound pureblood abilities and glided over, then performing a perfect curtsy as ‘Cissa went through the proper introductions.

“I wish to thank you for your help in my Godfather’s trial, Lord Anastasi.” Hera said as graciously as she could, although she couldn’t keep the hint of mischief out of her eyes. The whole situation was a lot more amusing than she thought it’d be, and the answering amusement in Tom’s eyes proved that he shared her opinion.

“It was my pleasure, Lady Potter, although your gratitude is highly appreciated.” Tom smirked down at her. *I bet it is,* Hera thought, smirking back at him. Narcissa was looking at them with a questioning glance, clearly aware that there was more to the conversation than just those words.

Hera decided that retreat was the best course of action, and snatched a few nibbles and a plate before going back to her spot next to Draco, nodding to everyone before going back.

Tom however decided to join her shortly after, gazing out over the masses.

“I wasn’t aware you enjoyed quidditch.” Hera couldn’t help but murmur when Draco went to get his own plate. Tom snorted next to her.

“There’s quite a lot you don’t know about me Lady Potter, my like of quidditch only one. I hear though that you are a rather skilled seeker. Gryffindor is lucky to have you.” Tom flashed a smile down at her, but generally kept his gaze forward. This time it was Hera’s turn to snort.

“Apologies Lord Anastasi. I’ll try not to make assumptions in the future.” Hera was feeling a bit giddy. “And thank you. I look forward to helping Gryffindor win the Quidditch Cup again this coming year.” Hera smirked up at him, but then narrowed her eyes at the look in his eyes. He knew something about the coming year that she didn’t, and that put her on edge.

Shaking off her suspicion, she asked a question that’d been burning on her tongue from the moment he came over.

“So did you play quidditch at Ho- school?” She remembered last minute that maybe his new story didn’t include going to Hogwarts. His smile widened though at her near miss, so she didn’t feel too bad.

“Yes, as a matter of fact. I played chaser the final three years of my education. We won all our
games.” He looked utterly smug.

“Of course you did.” Hera grumbled, although more amused than disgruntled. Their conversation was cut short when Draco came back though, and he began once again babbling about stats and information on the players sweeping Hera along for the ride with his enthusiasm. He only stopped when Ludo Bagman, the head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, finally welcomed everyone. The introduction of the mascots was the most magical thing Hera had ever seen, metaphorically speaking. The leprechauns had her laughing like mad, and the veela had both her and Draco nearly falling out of the box, Tom’s disgruntled growl and probing magic effectively broke her out of their spell, and she smiled sheepishly up at him before much more soberly watching the veela’s show, holding onto Draco’s shirt to keep him inside.

And then the game began, and she was mesmerised.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, for the delay guys! School overwhelmed me a bit, then I started talking to a cute boy, so a lot of my time’s been pretty occupied.

But it's here now! And hOLY CRAP WE'VE PASSED 400 KUDOS I'M CRYING THANK YOU.

I don't know how consistent my posting will be in the future either, as I've also got another multi-chapter fic in the making, but seeing as this one will still be my priority I'll do my best to keep it to once a week.

So yeah, thank you so much for reading, and hope you enjoyed this chapter! (Next chapter will include the fancy pureblood ball, and the students finding out about the Triwizard Tournament!)
The celebrations after Ireland were wild. Leprechaun gold was everywhere, someone had charmed an aurora borealis over the area in Ireland's colors to, and Hera heard more Irish ballads during the time it took for their group to make it back to the portkey sight than she'd ever heard in her life before.

She was exhausted, the emotional and magical high leaving her drained after spectacle. Draco was swerving around, babbling about the game, and Lucius had to grab the back of his shirt to keep him steady. He'd rolled his eyes good-naturedly though, so Hera was certain the lack of Malfoy dignity was forgiven. She herself was clinging to Tom's arm to keep her going, as Sirius was just as unsteady as Draco, having taken one drink too many during all of the action-packed excitement. Tom was a calm presence amongst all the chaos, his magic a soothing cocoon against the hyperactive celebratory magic atmosphere. For being the supposed murderer of her parents, she found him surprisingly relaxing to be around. She decided not to think further on that.

“Right.” Lucius began, pulling out a piece of cloth from his robes. “Portkey will be going in two minutes, so everyone please take a corner. Corvinus, thank you for joining us! It was an absolute pleasure.” Hera felt slight disappointment that Tom wasn’t coming with them, even as her brain admonished her for the feeling as he led her forward gently to the others.

“The pleasure was mine, Lucius, and the company riveting.” He slowly released Hera, making sure she was stable before backing away, Hera snorting at his comment. The dissipation of his magic was waking her up rather effectively, and she nodded back towards Tom, as the others said their goodbyes. The hook behind her navel signified the end of what was possibly the next best day of her life, the best being Sirius’s trial of course, and Hera was amused to realise that Tom had been a big positive factor in both of those days. If he was trying to compensate for his previous misdeeds towards her, he was doing rather well, she thought sleepily. Being dropped off by Narcissa at her room, she collapsed onto her luscious bed, snuggling into the ridiculously soft bedding, quaffles and snitches and amused dark eyes dancing around her head as she fell asleep.

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Preparations for the End of the Summer ball were in full swing, with elves running around everywhere, and decorations, furniture, and food stuffs zinging around in the air. Aunt ‘Cissa had wanted her with her to show Hera the intricacies of throwing a successful high-class bash. She’d enjoyed the unofficial lesson immensely, except for having to dodge the zooming paraphernalia. Only her seeker reflexes had saved her from getting brained a from all the flying debris. After the tenth time she had to duck uncomfortably, this time to avoid a flying silver platter, Narcissa took pity on her and let her hide outside with the male half of the household until it was time for them to get ready for the ball.
They ended up playing a three-way seeker competition, Lucius indulging the younger ones, where they just caught and released the snitch several times. Lucius won once, Draco a handful of times, and Hera the absolute majority, using many new moves she’d seen the professional seekers use. Lucius hadn’t been too pleased with some of her riskier moves, and made her promise not to use them unless under adult supervision in case something went wrong. She easily agreed, seeing as the promise didn’t keep her from trying them during Quidditch matches.

Aunt ‘Cissa finally called them in when the sun was starting to sink in the sky, and they gratefully entered into the mansion, drinking down the pepper-up potions she gave them.

Narcissa clucking at their wind-swept and disheveled appearances, sending Lucius and Draco off to their rooms with a kiss on the cheek each and gently grabbing Hera, leading her to her room.

The older woman pushed Hera into the bathroom to clean off, and when Hera came back out fifteen minutes later, she’d already put on her own dress – a darker green to Hera’s lighter spring coloured green dress. Even though Hera had already seen the dresses before when they’d gotten them in Paris, she still took a moment to gaze at them in awe, privately thanking whatever deity had helped her get to this point in her life. Brushing her fingers along the material, she picked it up and carefully put it on behind a divider with the help of one of the many house elves currently on staff, then tentatively stepped out in front of the full-length mirror.

Narcissa smiled in approval, before leading her to sit down in front of her vanity and began fixing her hair. She chatted quietly while waving her wand in increasingly intricate manners, describing the spells and the movements she was using to create the elaborate braided up-do that with Hera’s naturally loose curls looked artfully tousled. She thought it looked somewhat Edwardian, and really liked it.

“Is there a book on these types of spells?” Hera wondered both for herself, because she wasn’t sure she’d remember all of what Narcissa was sharing, and also for Hermione’s sake, in case she could sneak a copy to her.

“No, dear. These types of spells are handed down from mother to daughter, or grandmother to granddaughter, depending.” Narcissa smiled slightly, gaze far away as she was caught in memories.

“The hair and makeup spells one can find in books today are easily unravelled by a simple Finite. These spells are as old as the mansion most likely, and can only be removed by the person who cast them. Normally your grandmother would have taught you, seeing as your mother was muggleborn. However, as one of the closest living female relatives it has fallen to me to teach you.” Hera wasn’t surprised that they were related, as every pureblood witch and wizard seemed to be related somehow. She did however ask how they were related.

“Dorea, your paternal grandmother, was my great aunt – my grandfather Pollux’s youngest sister. Surprisingly kind hearted for a Slytherin, if I remember correctly. You inherited her rather riotous hair, somewhat similar to my sister’s actually.” Hera kept her face carefully neutral at the mention of Bellatrix Lestrange – not particularly pleased with the comparison, but she couldn’t dispute it either.

“There.” Narcissa said, sending one last zip of magic into Hera’s hair, kind of like how muggles spray one last spray of hairspray. “We’ll go through as many of these spells as we can before you and Draco go back to Hogwarts. It wouldn’t do to be caught unprepared.” She winked at Hera with that last statement, then began waving her wand in front of Hera’s face to set the makeup charms. Obviously Aunt ‘Cissa knew something she didn’t about the coming year, and Hera had a sinking suspicion it was connected to the second formal dress they’d bought in Paris, and that was now sitting in her closet.
Fortunately Aunt ‘Cissa finished with her makeup fairly quickly, it being much less complicated than her hair, and swiftly cast a set of charms on her own face, finishing up in a matter of moments out of sheer experience.

Looking into the mirror in front of her, Hera marvelled at the picture they painted. Narcissa was beautiful as ever, her best features enhanced by the makeup and hairstyle she’d chosen. And then there was Hera herself.

She barely recognized the young woman staring back at her with neutrally cool reserve. What with her nutrient potions having done a doozy on her growth, and then the expensive robes and beauty charms on top of that.

She looked like a proper Pureblood Heiress. Like she belonged. The exact opposite of the scruffy teen she’d been only a year ago.

“You look beautiful, Hera darling.” Narcissa beamed at her, eyes suspiciously wet. Hera’s own eyes were also tearing up, realising the significance of the moment both for her and Aunt ‘Cissa – the mother-daughter bonding that both had never thought would occur.

“When you, Aunt ‘Cissa.” Hera’s smile trembled a bit, before she regained her fortitude and mischief entered her gaze. “I hope I grow up to be nearly as beautiful as you.” She hammed, beaming towards her aunt. Narcissa chuckled, pinching Hera on the arm, before ushering out of the room and downstairs to the ballroom where half the guests had already arrived.

Sirius eyes misted over when he saw her coming down the stairs, and they nearly cause Hera’s eyes to mist over too. He complimented her tremendously, then proceeded to lightly tease her and quiz her on customs and knowledge of various other purebloods. She jokingly jabbed him in the stomach with her elbow to get him to stop right before they were announced to the room, Sirius simply laughing before putting on a neutrally polite face and dragging her in. She barely had time to rearrange her features as well, but managed to do a fairly good job of it going from Narcissa’s pleased smile.

Curtseying, dancing, and swirling fabrics is what the majority of Hera’s night consisted of. She was introduced to more people than she’d ever remember, although she’d already memorised the ones that Narcissa and Lucius had previously said were important, and had made sure to pay extra attention to those individuals.

She’d even seen Professor Snape and Tom at one point during that night, but they’d disappeared with Lucius and a few others up towards Lucius’ study. Shrugging, she went to go ask for another dance with Sirius, who was extremely fun to dance with, and to make sure he wasn’t imbibing too many drinks. He was getting better as the therapy progressed, but wasn’t entirely ok yet. Either way, he was an excellent dancer.

Draco was of course also an excellent dancer, although they mostly danced when Draco was running away from the overeager teenage girls in attendance. His long-suffering face caused her to nearly giggle every time, but she gamely allowed him to drag her around the dance floor to avoid the wily females.

Neville, who’d she been glad to see, was also a surprisingly good dancer, and mainly sought her out to escape his grandmother’s sharp gaze. Lady Augusta Longbottom was a rather fearsome woman, with a steely gaze even Professor Snape would be proud of. It’d taken all of her new knowledge not to mess up in front of her, and Hera had a newfound understanding for Neville’s timidity.

She’d danced with many others as well, purebloods and prominent halfbloods alike, but she liked
best the dances she’d had with her friends. She even got a turn with Lucius after he’d returned to the ballroom.

Nibbling on some of the hors d’oeuvres, Hera stood near a wall and watched the mass of people socialising, drinking and dancing. It was fascinating, watching high society interact with each other – the deals, the schmoozing, the sly insults – it was better than any of aunt Petunia’s beloved soap operas, including better taste in clothes.

She was content, she realised, and slightly tired after the long day. Smiling slightly, she took another sip of her drink, and listened as Lucius – who’d come back unnoticed by Hera into the ballroom sometime during the evening – bid everyone thank you for coming in an elaborate speech, and announced the last dance of the evening. Glad that she wouldn’t have to stay up for much longer, Hera tried to blend into the wallpaper, so she wouldn’t have to dance. Her feet rather ached, and seeing all her usual dance partners already taken, Hera wasn’t really in the mood to socialise anymore.

The polite cough behind her however told her her plan was foiled. Smoothly turning around, her forced smile turned into a real one when she saw that the interloper was Tom.

“Lord Anastasi” she began, curtsying appropriately while he bowed in turn to her. “A pleasure to see you this evening. I thought you’d already fled the field after your meeting with Uncle Lucius.” Tom only raised an eyebrow at her cheek before replying.

“Well, I couldn’t very well leave without dancing with the most beautiful Lady here, now could I?” Oh, he was laying it on thick, to Hera’s amusement.

“Well, I’m sorry to say that Aunt ‘Cissa seems to already have a dance partner, so you’re out of luck.”

“Brat.” Tom chuckled good-naturedly, leading her out to the dance floor. Falling quickly into their opening stances, Hera pushed aside the ache in her feet and tried to focus on the dark wizard opposite her.

“Will I be thoroughly examined every time we meet, or is this simply a temporary fad?” Breaking Hera from her thoughts, she fought hard to keep from blushing.

“You look different every time I see you, it’s simply self preservation.” She tried to look indignant, but was probably shaky on the result.

“Mm, of course.” His smile was slightly mocking, eyes twinkling. Hera huffed, rolling her eyes. A moment of silence passed during the more complicated part of the dance, then Hera felt safe enough to start talking again.

“So, do you enjoy your new vocation? I hear you are the catalyst of quite a lot of change, or at the very least a strong advocate for said change.” Hera was genuinely curious over what Tom was doing now that he literally had a second chance.

Tom hmm’d for a moment, looking out over the crowd with a thoughtful expression. “It was something I’ve wanted to do and achieve since my time in school, but I got a bit lost on the way. I find that now that I am finally here, I enjoy my work immensely – much more than anything I’ve done before.” His gaze had turned pensive, although a small smile was briefly sent in her direction.

So something in his youth had either mislead him, or made him slightly crazy, Hera translated. It made sense Hera thought, thinking back to the blood thirsty teen she’d met in the Chamber of
Secrets, and comparing him to now. He could of course be expertly faking his new goodwill to wizardkind, but Hera somehow doubted it. He felt honest, and her intuition, or perhaps it was her magic, was rarely wrong. Not to mention his magic was infinitely calmer compared to the chaos she’d felt in those chambers. She hoped her trust wouldn’t backfire though.

“I’m glad you found your way back then. I think the wizarding world will benefit greatly from your contributions.” Tom eyed her carefully at her statement, probably checking if she was lying. She kept her face and body language open, and he relaxed, giving her an honest smile. She was momentarily blind-sighted by how young he looked then, not to mention attractive.

“Thank you, Lady Potter. I believe that means quite a lot coming from you.” He nodded graciously.

“Quite right” She blurted, relying on wit until her higher brain functions kicked into gear again. Fortunately he gave a startled laugh, and Hera’s expression turned smug, feeling like she’d accomplished something.

By then however, the song was ending. Both parties once again curtsied and bowed respectively, murmuring parting words, separating in different directions. Hera lost sight of him nearly immediately, but was quickly distracted by Sirius sweeping by and twirling her around.

Smiling brightly, they made their way around the room, saying their goodbyes to the rest of the attendees, until every last one had departed.

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Returning to Hogwarts was a bittersweet occasion.

Narcissa had indeed drilled into Hera’s brain all the beauty charms she could possibly need throughout the coming year. They’d all gone shopping one last time for their Hogwarts equipment, getting ice cream afterwards. They’d had lazy days and many family meals.

Hera had experienced what it was like to be in a proper family, and she would miss them fiercely.

The worst had been at the train station, just before she and Draco had to board the train. The Lord and Lady had already said goodbye to Draco, and had then turned to Hera. She’d felt all of a sudden awkward, not sure how to act. Narcissa had gathered her into her arms however, giving her a surprisingly warm hug. When Lucius had also given her a hug, her eyes had begun to mist. When Narcissa insisted that Hera write to them during the school year, she’d had to tamp down on all of her emotions to not break down. They cared. They still wanted to be a part of her life.

Sitting in a compartment with Hermione, Neville and Luna, Hera let a tear slowly make its way down her cheek. It was the only sign she’d allow of the emotional tidal wave that’d crashed through her. Hera almost couldn’t wait to write to them, but figured that waiting perhaps a week would be less ridiculous. Surely she’d have something interesting to say by then?

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she decided to join in on the conversation about the coming school year currently being held by her friends.

Thankfully nothing exciting during the train ride, last year’s fiasco having left Hera tense during the whole trip. They made it to the carriages without a hiccup, Hera smiling slightly at the winged skeletal horses that no one else seemed to be able to see. Except for Luna apparently. Hera thought, as the younger blonde went forward to pet one of the leathery creatures, feeding it something from
her robe pocket.

The trip up to the castle was equally uneventful, and nothing really suspicious occurred until Dumbledore stood after the new students had been sorted.

Usually he would immediately welcome everyone, utter his chosen words for the year, then let everyone get on with their dinner. When he instead waited until the Great Hall had become completely quiet, Hera knew something was up, and tensed accordingly.

“This year, my dear children, is a special year.” Dumbledore began. “An old tradition is being revived to promote international cooperation, and we at Hogwarts have been honoured to host this momentous event.” *Get to the point old man*, Hera thought. The tension was running high in the Great Hall, and all she really wanted to do was eat, and she was sure many felt the same.

Eyes twinkling, Dumbledore made sure he had absolutely everyone’s attention before continuing. “The Triwizard Tournament will be held here later this fall, with our sibling schools Durmstrang and Beauxbatons joining us at the end of October. More information will be given out closer to the date, as I’m sure you have no interest in me monologuing throughout dinner.” He grew slightly more serious, and the buzz quieted down again.

“I will however now warn those who wish to compete. It is an extremely dangerous competition, with many deaths leading to it’s hiatus. To hopefully negate this negative trend, it has been decided that only students the age of seventeen or older will be allowed to participate.” Murmuring grew in the hall – some disgruntled, others intrigued. Dumbledore raised his hand though, and the murmuring quieted.

“That being said, I will leave you to your dinner now. Welcome, and welcome back everyone. I leave you with these words: taradiddle, gubbins, snollygoster, brouhaha!” After uttering his usual nonsense words, he clapped his hands together, causing the food to appear, then sat down looking quite pleased with himself.

Quickly digging into her favorite dishes, Hera sighed in relief. She had absolutely no interest in intentionally risking her life this year, and was fortunately nowhere near seventeen anyways.

Finally a year where someone else was going to do the adventuring, she mused as she tasted some garlic mashed potatoes.

Hera looked forward to being part of the audience for once.

Chapter End Notes

Jokes aside I was in a real writing mood today, hence the second chapter. Do not expect double features in the future though.

Hope you have a wonderful week!
There had been an underlying tension in the school ever since Dumbledore’s announcement during the Welcoming Feast. Nothing truly palpable, just a heightened excitement and constant gossip around the schools and consequent students that would be arriving. There was also a lot of talk around previous Triwizard Tournaments, and speculations of what the coming tasks would entail, and what previous tasks had included. Neither the library nor Hermione had ever been this popular, being the most knowledgable about said tournaments and the other schools.

When Hermione had had the time to read up about all of this Hera had no idea. Although knowing Hermione she’d probably known this for years from stumbling upon the information during one of her numerous library binges.

Hera thought it was great though, for once not being in the center of attention. Hermione was less enchanted with the whole situation, although gamely put up with it – holding mini lectures in front of the common room fire during the evenings. Hera always joined her as moral support, and it didn’t hurt that Hermione’s hair looked particularly fascinating in the fire light.

Less amusing was the surprisingly large amount of people wondering if Hera was going to try to enter the tournament. Either people had somehow forgotten about the age restrictions, or else were willfully ignoring them. Either way, Hera was always happy to emulate Professor Snape when reminding them of that rather significant fact.

At least they weren’t stupid enough to ask twice.

She kept up with her wizarding lessons as well as she could, Neville and Draco helping her out immensely. Letters from Aunt ‘Cissa filled with useful information and small quizzes also kept her on her toes. It was an interesting experience returning to Hogwarts with her new knowledge – the amount of customs and social etiquettes going on in the school was immense. She was amazed, and a little ashamed, how she’d never noticed any of it before.

Hermione too, she’d noticed, was more concious of her actions and reactions around others. The surprise on many of the pureblooded students when Hermione actually greeted and treated them correctly according to their standing was very gratifying to Hera.

She was less pleased with the new friends Hermione was making because of this though, mainly study friends in Ravenclaw, but still. She couldn’t really complain either as she’d somehow managed to acquire her own mismatched study group consisting of her, Draco, Neville, sometimes Hermione, and whoever Draco or Neville invited.

The look on people’s faces when she sometimes sat with Draco and his friends at the Slytherin table during breakfast or lunch gave her life. Particularly the sour look on Dumbledore’s face had her feeling like the cat who got the canary.

Professor Snape had even at one point given her – her – points for excellent show of interhouse camaraderie. Dumbledore had looked like he was having an aneurysm, and Hera hadn’t been able to resist high-fiving Draco once they’d exited the Great Hall.

It had been a great day.
The extreme amusement in Lucius letter after hearing of the encounter, and the baked goods she’d gotten from ‘Cissa, only motivated her to spend even more time with the Slytherins and other houses.

The only downside to that was Ron’s very loud and very public disapproval of her new lifestyle. Fortunately the twins were rather quick and efficient in shutting him up, usually by trying out one of their new prank objects on him. It was also fortunate that he managed to screw up fairly often, as Hera was fairly certain that they would otherwise start testing on the poor first years, which would’ve really pissed Hermione off.

Some of the prank ideas felt fairly familiar too, and Hera had a sneaking suspicion that her Godfather was most likely involved in their shenanigans. She was glad though, because it gave him something positive to focus on, and not just his therapy and boring Wizengamot meetings. So yes, even if the multitude of pranks were about to skyrocket, not to mention the level of complexity they were about to gain, Hera was glad, and did her best to placate and keep Hermione away from everything so she wouldn’t have a heart attack.

Being Prefect really pulled out Hermione’s protective instincts, and Hera really didn’t want another war against red heads, especially as she rather like Fred and George. Obviously she’d still side with Hermione, but still, she’s glad she doesn’t have to choose.

The other downside to this year so far, other than Ron, was their new DADA professor, Alastor Moody.

He was incredibly strange Hera thought, and not a little creepy. He hadn’t appeared until their second night at school, the day before classes began, and his entrance had been fairly dramatic, entering through the huge doors to the Great Hall half way through dinner covered in mud (and what Hera suspected was dried blood), and then simply taking his seat as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

Dumbledore introduced him of course, as well as telling a brief history of his auror background and explaining his suitability to the task. Many of Slytherin’s students had stiffened at his name, eyeing the wizzened wizard with trepidation, and Hera understood. Given his apparent extreme prejudice towards Dark Wizards and Witches, they were most likely preparing for a year of house descrimination.

Hera too felt herself tense at the man’s nearness, and mentally prepared herself. She didn’t like his aura, or the way his magic felt hostile despite being in a room filled with children. The fact that his magical eye hadn’t stopped staring straight at her since he’d sat down didn’t help either, making Hera wonder if Dumbledore had asked him to spy on her.

Why though, she had no idea. Maybe she was just being paranoid. Then again, the way her life had gone before, all bets were off. And something at the back of her mind was telling her to be wary of this man.

His somewhat redeeming quality was that he was a fairly decent teacher (although when compared against Lockhart, anyone would seem decent). He was a bit extreme in his lessons, very doomsday and worst case scenario, but given his life experience she could accept that.

Throwing unforgivables on students on the other hand was a bit much even for her.

While it’d only been the Imperious curse, it’d still been traumatising to the students, and Hera had immediately written to all of her adult guardians about the lesson. Moody had been slightly tamer for awhile after that, so Hera knew that words had been spoken at the very least, and that hopefully he was on thin enough ice to not attempt another stunt like that again.
Hera had avoided telling her guardians that she’d been the only one to throw off the curse though. Mostly because she didn’t know how to explain how a sudden rage not her own, had been what cleared her mind enough to push Moody out. She didn’t want to worry her guardians, and honestly she’d probably just imagined the whole thing.

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As the day of their guest’s arrival approached, a near palpable buzz could be felt in the air. Hera almost constantly had a mild headache from the sheer amount of overexcited magic, and hoped things would calm down when the others finally came.

It ramped up to an even higher level the day when new decorations began popping up around the castle in Durmstrang and Beauxbatons colors and mascots, making the visit even more palpable.

Certain areas of the castle grounds had been closed off from the students as well, which really didn’t help the rumour mill as wild speculations became even wilder. Everything from dragons, to sphynxs, to medusas were mentioned, and Hera just shook her head at all of them. Hera only knew that each task was typically connected to one of the four elements, and she really had no desire to find out anything else (information from Hermione aside).

One of the few outdoor areas not closed off was the quidditch pitch, for a very specific reason. Dumbledore had announced rather early on in the semester, after alerting them to the tournament, that quidditch as they typically knew it was cancelled.

Hera had been one of many who’d cried out in protest, frankly rather pissed off at the news. The students had nearly started revolting until the headmaster had finally given in and put them out of their misery, stating that the typical Hogwarts Quidditch teams would be mixed into two, as the committee had decided an interschool Quidditch tournament was an excellent idea to keep everyone involved and entertained, and not just the champions.

What that meant, of course, was that new trials were being held for all positions in the two new teams. Hera of course was ecstatic, and immediately gave it her all when training to hopefully earn a spot in one of the two teams. She needn’t have worried though, as the minute she’d entered the pitch for her try-out, Roger Davies – one of the two chosen Captains and a Ravenclaw – immediately gave her the seeker position on his team, which already consisted of Fred and George as beaters; and himself, Adrian Pucey from Slytherin, and Eurig Cadwallader from Hufflepuff as chasers. Hera still insisted on doing the try out, as she had actually trained incredibly hard. Davies laughingly let her do it, but reaffirmed that the position was hers no matter what.

Seeing as the other captain was Zacharias Smith from Hufflepuff, who wasn’t particularly fond of Hera, she was extrememly grateful to Davies.

Hera continued to train hard, and even suggested to Davies that Draco be her replacement – just in case she was hurt too bad to continue during one of the matches. With her track record it was bound to happen, and she felt it better to be safe than sorry.

It didn’t hurt that Hera got another package of baked goods from Narcissa when Davies readily agreed with her plan.

When reminded during one of their that Krum was a Durmstrang student though, Hera very briefly
regretted her position as main seeker. Then quickly realizing that he probably was more focused on entering the Tournament than playing quidditch against a bunch of kids, she relaxed, and hoped for the best.

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When October 30\textsuperscript{th} finally arrived though, even Hera couldn’t deny the excitement she felt.

Everyone was assembled in the outdoor courtyards facing the lake. Apparently the Durmstrang contingent would be arriving by boat, and the Beauxbatons via carriage – although why they weren’t watching the gates for the carriage as well Hera didn’t know.

They stood there for what felt like forever, especially as it was a particularly cold and windy day outside.

Hera stood amongst her friends in Gryffindor, Hermione keeping up a constant chatter on various tidbits about the different schools, keeping people somewhat entertained. Draco and his friends stood a little ways away, and Hera was engaged in a battle of dignified minimalistic crazy facial expressions against her blond friend to stave of the boredom.

Apparently it was an excellent way to exercise control over their facial muscles, therefor improving upon their poker faces. Hera and Draco just tried to make as ridiculous a facial expression as possible while still looking Pureblood acceptable, winning when the other either broke eye contact or started to laugh.

They didn’t have to play long before a hush fell over the student body, as someone had spotted a tiny boat on the Black Lake.

Staring hard at what looked like a rowboat, Hera wondered briefly if a muggle had somehow managed to get passed the wards during a fishing trip, when the boat began to rapidly rise from the lake into the air. Very quickly she, and probably the rest of all the students, realised that what they’d though was a rowboat, was in fact the crow’s nest to an absolutely massive ship.

Absolutely awestruck, Hera nearly gaped at the ship, watching the water drain from it as a multitude of students who very much looked like they knew what they were doing ran around fixing sails and dropping anchor and…singing sea shanty’s?

Hera could vaguely hear what sounded like old viking ballads, and was utterly entranced.

She wondered if any of the Durmstrang students would teach her any.

The Hogwarts students didn’t have much time to get over the ships arrival, as neighing sounded from above them, causing quite a bit of confusion.

When a large carriage driven by half a dozed pegasi appeared from the cloud cover, Hera could only laugh in delight over the sheer absurdity of her day. Even for magic this felt pretty fantastical.

“Did you know they’d arrive like this?” Hera asked Hermione quietly, smile still wide.

Hermione minutely shook her head. “I’d read that they had pegasi on their grounds, but nothing about them actually using them as transport.” Hermione also had a cheek splitting grin on her face,
and her eyes were practically luminous in their amazement.

Watching the Headmaster and their House Heads greeting their equivalents in the two other schools was probably boring to most, as Hera noticed students already disappearing back into the warmth of the castle. She thought it was rather fascinating, watching welcoming customs and body language play out between the three factions.

Seeing that their guests acted and reacted according to ‘proper’ wizarding standard, Hera was extra glad and grateful for all the lessons she’d received this past year. She wouldn’t make a fool of herself in front of the visiting students, and this would be an excellent learning experience for everyone involved.

She wondered idly, as the small welcoming ceremony came to an end, if the customs and social norms varied at all between the countries, or if there was a standard all purebloods followed. Hopefully she’d meet nice enough people in the other schools to ask, otherwise she’d just have to ask Narcissa in a future letter.

When she saw that Professors Snape and McGonagall were on their way back towards the castle, Hera decided that now was a good time to head back as well.

Taking one last look at the giant ship now docked in the Black Lake – the students looking more like ants onboard, as well as at the pale blue carriage and the awe-inspiring pegasi in front of it, Hera couldn’t wait until all the student would officially meet tonight.

Rumour had it that the two schools would each be putting on a small show, and Hera couldn’t wait to see if that rumour was true.

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Hera felt like she was practically vibrating out of her skin from all of the excitement currently contained in the Great Hall. Looking around she saw practically everyone in conversation over what was about to happen, causing the usual quiet roar in the Great Hall to be exponentially louder. Even Draco had been pulled into animated discussion, causing a small smile to flit across Hera’s face seeing his arms wave around.

As soon as Dumbledore stood up though, a pin hitting the floor could’ve been heard. Hera almost snorted over how quickly everyone snapped to attention. She didn’t think absolute quiet had ever been achieved this quickly before, nor probably ever would again. Going by the twitch on Professor Snape’s face, as well as the smirk on Professor McGonagall’s, they were probably thinking along the same lines.

“Good evening my dear students! As you all are most assuredly aware, our most esteemed guests arrived earlier today. They’ve been resting after their long journeys, but shall now be joining us for dinner after introducing themselves. So without further ado – Welcome Beauxbatons!” With that Dumbledore swept his arms to the side, and the doors to the great hall opened revealing the Beauxbatons students. They swept into the room incredibly gracefully, dancing and flinging magic around in graceful arcs to show off their proficiency and love of beauty. It was incredibly entrancing, how the swirls of pale blue and silver twirled around the room, leaving no area untouched. Sparks rained down on the students in a final flourish, as small fireworks filled the enchanted night sky.
Bowing to the thunderous applause, the blue dressed students then spread themselves out amongst the tables while their Hagrid sized headmistress sat down with the other teachers.

Everyone quieted down again as Dumbledore once more stood up.

“A most beautific display by our french friends! We welcome you most warmly to our humble abode, Madame Maxime and students of Beauxbatons.” Madame Maxime bowed her head in acknowledgment, after which Dumbledore continued.

“And now, to keep them from waiting for much longer – Welcome Durmstrang!”

This time the doors were flung open before Dumbledore had a chance to sit down, and the Durmstrang contingent entered in a flurry of acrobatics and fire. Their show was more brutal, more primal than Beauxbatons, but no less beautiful – creating fire animals that chased each other around the hall, causing students and teachers alike to duck. They too ended their show with fireworks, although theirs were red as opposed to Beaxbatons blue and silver.

After Dumbledore welcomed their headmaster Karkaroff, the Durmstrang students also divided themselves amongst the tables, before quieting down as Dumbledore once again prepared to speak.

“No one has settled, I’ll begin with sharing the rules of entering the tournament. Anybody wishing to submit themselves as champion must write their name and school clearly upon a slip of parchment and drop it into the goblet. Aspiring champions have twenty-four hours in which to put their names forward. Tomorrow night, Halloween, the goblet will return the names of the three it has judged most worthy to represent their schools. The goblet will be placed in the entrance hall tonight, where it will be freely accessible to all those wishing to compete. To ensure that no underage student yields to temptation, I will be drawing an Age Line around the Goblet of Fire once it has been placed in the entrance hall. Nobody under the age of seventeen will be able to cross this line... I wish to impress upon any of you wishing to compete that this tournament is not to be entered into lightly. Once a champion has been selected by the Goblet of Fire, he or she is obliged to see the tournament through to the end. The placing of your name in the goblet constitutes a binding, magical contract. There can be no change of heart once you have become a champion. Please be very sure, therefore, that you are wholeheartedly prepared to play before you drop your name into the goblet.”

Dumbledore smiled congenially during his monologue, but his eyes were sharp, making sure everyone knew exactly how serious he was.

“With that being said, I’ll leave you to your dinners. Toodle-pip!”

Hera couldn’t wait to see who’d be chosen tomorrow, surreptitiously looking around at their new guests. Seeing Draco do the same thing at the other end of the hall, she laughed to herself, before deciding to just focus on her dinner.

They’d find out who’d be competing soon enough.

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The next day was rife with rumour as people spread around who’d entered and who hadn’t, and who was betting on who. So far the most popular candidate was Viktor Krum, to no one’s surprise.

She heard from Hermione during lunch that Fred and George had tried to get around the age limit by
drinking an aging potion, which had back fired spectacularly and turned them into old men instead.

Who the favorite for Beauxbatons was, was more unclear, same with Hogwarts. Who wasn’t in the running on the other hand, was as clear as glass. Apparently, Cassius Warrington from Slytherin had entered his name. He was a big brute of a teen, only slightly more intelligent than Crabbe or Goyle, and absolutely no one was betting for him.

She heard somewhere as well that her name had been entered into the bet as well, and while she wanted to murder whoever did that, she settled for feeling vindicated that whoever they were would lose their money either way. Honestly.

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Entering the Great Hall for the reveal that night was almost worse than yesterday, seeing as even more people were in there to add excitement and nervousness to the miasma of magic filling the air.

The Goblet had already been moved into the Great Hall, and sat in front of the teachers table, waiting for Dumbledore

Thankfully, he stuck with his recent trend of getting to the point, and only welcomed everyone to this most auspicious night, before turning to the Goblet.

As if sensing that everyone was watching it, the Goblet’s usually golden orange flames burned a bluish white for a moment, after which a smoking slip of paper fell into Dumbledore’s hand.

He smiled, eyes twinkling out towards the students, before announcing, “First out, and to no one’s surprise, the Durmstrang champion is – Viktor Krum!”

Immediate cheering and feet thumping the floor filled the hall as Krum made his way to the front to stand slightly behind Dumbledore, together with his headmaster.

The Goblet flashed again, and everyone grew silent.

“And now for Beauxbatons champion – the lovely Miss Fleur Delacour!” Again cheering filled the room, and what was probably the most beautiful girl Hera had ever seen stood up and made her way to the front of the hall. It took Hera a few seconds to tear her eyes away from the gorgeous blonde, and she blushed as she tried to refocus on Dumbledore, and who would be the Hogwarts champion. For a split second she felt apprehension, but then mentally hit herself. But with her luck –

“The Hogwarts champion – our very own Cedric Diggory!” Dumbledore beamed towards the Hufflepuff table, as the former Hufflepuff seeker stood up to the thunderous applause and cheering of his house mates who’d stood up with him. Dumbledore welcomed him up, shaking his hand, and then turning towards the champions to say something, but was interrupted as the Goblet flashed a fourth time.

Complete and utter silence filled the hall, and Hera got a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

“It would seem,” Dumbledore began slowly, turning back towards the Goblet, “that the Goblet has chosen a fourth champion.” Another slip of paper shot from the cup, it looking slightly different compared to the previous parchment slips, and into Dumbledore’s hands.
When Dumbledore’s eyes unerringly looked towards her after silently reading said slip of paper, despair filled her, and Hera knew exactly whose name was in his hands.

“Hera Potter.”

And she’d been really looking forward to those quidditch matches too.

Chapter End Notes

Poor poor Hera, stuck risking her life again, and she’s no longer allowed to play quidditch to blow off some steam.

The main question now though is, who entered her name? (Cause it sure isn't the same person as in canon.)

Hope you guys enjoy this chapter!!! And thank you for all your kudos, love, and comments!!!!! (Seriously best part of my day.)

I hope you all have an awesome week!
"Did you put your name in the Goblet of Fire, Miss Potter?" Dumbledore asked calmly.

“No.” Hera answered mechanically, voice flat. She’d already answered the same question – and many variations of it – during the evening, but this time she’d been doused with Veritaserum, carefully applied by Professor Snape.

“Did you ask anyone to put your name in the Goblet of Fire?” Professor McGonagall cut in. Hera hadn’t been able to read her Head of House’ expression since her name had been uttered in the Great Hall. It was a bit disconcerting not knowing if the older woman believed her or not. Professor Snape had sent her a surprisingly sympathetic glance when administering the potion, so she was fairly certain at least he was on her side, strange as that felt.

“No.” Hera answered again. Despite the haze of the serum she was getting seriously bored with this farce, and just wanted to hide away in her bed, hiding from the world behind curtains.

“Do you, or did you, wish to participate in the Triwizard Tournament?” Dumbledore asked one final time, this being the last question.

“No.” Equally as flat as before. “I just really wanted to play quidditch.”

Those last words slipped through her lips without her permission, and were tinged with a bit more hopelessness than Hera liked. She immediately clamped her mouth shut and ducked her head down, hiding behind a curtain of her hair.

Observing the others through the strands, Hera saw that Krum at least seemed to empathise with her, sending a sad smile in her direction. The others seemed to relax as well at her declaration, finally convinced of her innocence. Dumbledore however was arguing quietly with Bagman on the opposite side of the room, and it wasn’t looking pleasant.

The other champions and their guardians looked appeased at least, except perhaps for Karkaroff. But he also seemed like the type to never look anything less than grumpy, Hera thought.

Delacour was talking to Madame Maxime quietly in french, occaionally sending glances her way. Diggory only stared at the ground, eyebrow furrowed. Professor Sprout, Hufflepuffs head of house, was sending her worried looks.

Hera doubted her innocence in the matter would actually get her out of competing, as she thought about Dumbledore’s warnings on binding contracts while Professor Snape gave her the antidote. When the black-clad man then stood next to her, placing a steadying hand on her shoulder instead of moving back to his place next to the headmaster, Hera knew her fears would be confirmed, and gulped past the sudden knot in her throat. It was a show of Slytherin solidarity, and about as obvious as Professor Snape ever got in anything.
Hera wanted to cry. She almost let the tears fall when Professor McGonagall also came to stand by her, but blinked them away as the two older men returned back from their argument.

“I’m sorry Miss Potter.” This time it was Mr Bagman who spoke. “The contract is magically binding, and the moment your name was entered into the Goblet I’m afraid you were bound to follow through with the stipulations.” While not surprised, the dread and hopelessness in the pit of Hera’s stomach continued to grow exponentially.

“Wasn’t there a spell in place to stop students from putting in anyone’s name but there own? To stop younger students asking older ones to apply for them?” Hera’s voice was low and raspy as she asked this. She wasn’t really sure why she asked, as she wasn’t that curious.

“I know there was, as I put it there myself.” Dumbledore answered calmly. “At the moment we have no idea how the perpetrator got around the wards, but I assure you Miss Potter that it will be thoroughly investigated.”

Bitterness filled Hera. “Are you saying that someone actually managed to outwit the-“ Snape’s hand tightened on her shoulder, clearly hearing the sarcastic lilt in her voice “eh, wards?” What she’d intended to say was outwit the great mugwump in a fantastically derisive tone of voice, but the pressure on her shoulder had reminded her to use her common sense, and use those types aof comments only around people she liked and trusted.

She was totally using it in her letter to Sirius though.

“Again, we do not know how as of yet, only that it has happened.” Dumbledore’s expression had turned pinched, clearly having sensed where Hera’s thoughts had originally gone.

“WELL now that that’s settled,” Mr. Bagman interrupted as an uncomfortable silence had fallen, “there are some rules we must go through before you compete. Now…” Hera zoned out at this point, head sinking further down. She didn’t care about any stupid rules. She didn’t want to be here. She had no intention of trying to win.

Once again, she’d be forced to simply survive.

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“Why didn’t you tell me you’d put in your name?”

Ron’s sudden appearance caused Hera to flinch. She’d been sitting in front of the fire in the Gryffindor common room, staring into the flames and not thinking about anything. Blinking, she focused on Ron, who’d sat down in the armchair to her left, and was staring at her with an insulted expression. Hera had no idea why he’d be insulted, but then again she wasn’t exactly running on full mental capacity at the moment.

Shock would do that to a person.

“I mean, I’m your best friend! You could’ve at least given me a hint!” Ron’s words felt like a cold shower, and Hera felt her mind snap back into place as rage filled her. He’d barely spoken three words to her that weren’t derogatory to her new friends and life choices these past few months, and he had the audacity-

“Yeah we’re quite curious as well-“
“-how you succeeded where we failed.”

“Oh enlighten us little master!” The twins had jumped down onto the couch from behind, causing Hera to flinch again. The glee in their voices were too much, and Hera couldn’t take it anymore.

She exploded.

“I DIDN’T DO IT! I DIDN’T PUT MY NAME INTO THE BLOODY GOBLET AND I DON’T WANT TO BE IN THE BLOODY TOURNAMENT! I JUST WA-WANT TO BE NORMAL!” Hera’s voice cracked as she screamed the last sentence, the hurricane like winds caused by her magic dying slowly as she noticed the destruction around her. The fire had gone out, and papers were strewn across the common room floor. Everyone was staring at her as she stood in the middle of it, panting. Seeing the shocked and wind swept looks of the people around her, Hera gathered her magic around her as much as she could.

“How just leave me alone.” She whispered the words into the eerily silent room from behind her hair, hiding behind it for the second time that evening. Then she fled to her room.

The next couple of days Hera spent in a despondent haze. Everyone who had been in the common room during Hera’s outburst were avoiding her, except for Hermione, who’d stuck to Hera like a burr. The rest of the school, and the students from the other schools had of course also heard of the incident, and were either keeping clear like the Gryffindors, or sneering and taunting her for her weakness.

The majority of the Slytherins however, were suspiciously neutral. Hera wondered if Draco had anything to do with it, but didn’t really know what to think seeing as he hadn’t spoken to her since the announcement. She still sometimes considered moving over to the Slytherin table, particularly when the silence, or the bullying, got particularly intense. But again, Draco hadn’t initiated contact, and she had no energy to bridge the distance herself.

Neither Sirius, nor Draco’s parents, had sent a note since that horrible evening either, which didn’t help improve Hera’s mood. She’d sent an account of her version of the evening to all three of them, but the longer it took for them to reply, the more her hope diminished over receiving any help.

What if, like Ron, they thought she had entered her name, and was simply lying about it? But then, wouldn’t Professor Snape have told them the truth?

Simply put, Hera was confused, and a little heartsick, and leaning heavily on the support of Hermione, as well as her other friends. The Weasley twins had promptly apologized the morning after her outburst, and Neville and Ginny had also expressed their support – both verbally, and magically when hexing particularly nasty students.

As the week went by though, to those who payed attention it was quite clear that Hera was falling apart inside. While her uniform and hair stayed as prim and proper as usual for a pureblood heiress, the growing bags under her eyes, paleness and lack of enthusiasm in class had quite a few of her Professors worried.

Hera knew that she would have to pull herself together soon enough, particularly as Hermione’s hair was frizzling up into a cloud from worrying, but she was tired. She needed time to recharge before the next attempt on her life.

On the bright side, this time the attempts were on a tight schedule, so she could hopefully relax in between. Then again, with her luck...
At one point, she also idly wondered what Tom would think of this.

It wasn’t until a week after Hera had been unwillingly chosen as champion that three owls arrived for her at the same time during breakfast. Snatching the letters out of the air before they could hit her toast, or Hermione’s porridge, she eyed them warily. From the writing she could tell that the letters were from Narcissa (and probably Lucius as well, from the way her letter bulged), Sirius and - she recognized the writing, and her brows drew together in thought as she stared at the letter, trying to remember where she’d seen it before.

When Ginny’s laughter reached her ear though, she nearly facepalmed at the realisation. The writing looked almost exactly like the writing in Tom’s diary.

But then, why would Tom be writing her? Unless… Eyebrows still furrowed, Hera ripped into the letter, completely ignoring the other two, as well as Draco’s intense gaze from across the Great Hall.

_Hera,_

_Did you directly, or indirectly, enter your name into the Goblet of Fire?_

Annoyance flared through her. Hadn’t Professor Snape already told them about Dumbledore’s interrogation? Sighing, she nudged Hermione and asked for a pen, and wrote what she’d hope to be her last no.

She wasn’t exactly surprised when the words, including her own, disappeared into the parchment. She was mildly intrigued by what felt like a slight suction on her magic, as a tiny bit flowed into the letter, but was not surprised at all when new words slowly appeared.

_Thank you, Hera. While memories are all well and good, documented evidence is the best._

_We have spent the week since receiving the news from Severus assessing your situation and planning the best course in which to proceed. You godfather has been petitioning your case in the Wizengamot, sadly to little success. It seems that the opinion of the uncouth masses matter more than the life of an underaged witch. Unfortunately, your already famous status has most likely worked against you in this aspect as well my dear._

_I would apologize, but we both know that would be a lie._

_I will, however, apologize for keeping Lord and Lady Malfoy, as well as Lord Black, from sending word. I had felt it better that we not give you false hope in case our endeavours were for naught, as they’ve initially turned out to be. It can be rather devastating, especially after such a shock as you’ve recently received._

_I know you had every intention to play for Hogwarts in the Quidditch tournament. You would have been magnificent to see._
But now we must move on, and rethink our strategy

As such we’ve instead been researching alternate avenues as to how to use this tournament to our advantage, and have found a number of points which would be more prudent to discuss in person – say, your next Hogsmeade visit, which should be on Saturday if I am not remiss? You will know where to go once there.

I admit, it is strange to be on the side working to keep you alive, but I do rather relish in the challenge.

I also refuse to allow anyone else to succeed where I have not.

Take care Hera, there are many now who count on your well being.

Lord C. Anastasi

A curious smile graced Hera’s face while reading Tom’s letter. While she was slightly pissed that he was the reason why no one had written to her during the past week, she could also understand why he’d done it. False hope really wouldn’t have been good for her. Knowing though that she had a team of fairly powerful individuals on her side was a great consolation. She also felt amusement over the irony that Tom’s life had become, now protecting what he’d previously desperately tried to kill. It still worried her that someone else apparently wanted her dead, but having Tom on her side – especially when he could have remained neutral – was a great relief. It was probably mostly his pride urging him to do so, but still.

Carefully folding up Tom’s letter and putting it into her bag, Hera ignored Hermione’s curious gaze and quickly skimmed through the other letters, which basically said the same thing as Tom’s, although with a few more questions about her health and promises to help in all matters possible.

Sending a quick smile towards Draco, who nodded back with relief in his eyes, Hera followed Hermione out from the Great Hall, and towards Transfiguration, which was their first class of the day, just like usual. Unlike the past week however, Hera walked with a spring in her step, hope in her heart, and a hex on her lips to any who planned to disparage her today.

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Entering the quaint cottage behind a large shaggy black dog, Hera laughed delightedly as Sirius promptly transformed back to human and twirled her around in a hug. They both sobered slightly at the polite cough, and Hera quickly turned to the remaining occupants of the sitting room. Properly greeting Narcissa, Lucius and Tom, Hera then stepped into the hug Narcissa offered, then sat down next to her on the sofa facing the other armchairs in the room, which the men, with varying degrees of grace, sat down in.

After Narcissa had poured the tea, Sirius broached the topic of their meeting.

“So love, despite our best attempts you’re stuck in the damnable tournament, but we’ve managed to
secure a few advantages for you in the coming year.” Sirius grinned while talking, and it only grew as he continued. “The Goblins have been most accommodating, and are allowing your emancipation as soon as you can visit Gringotts. Me being your Guardian is no longer an issue because of how the Ministry idiots worded the contract.”

Hera began grinning as well, putting her tea cup down. “Wait, does that mean I’ll be able to perform magic outside of school? Learn apparation, all that jazz?” Tom snorted into his tea, but the other grown ups looked mildly confused at the end of her question. “Quite.” Tom interjected, before the others could question why jazz was involved.

“Huh, something useful out of my misfortune. That’s always nice.” Hera only allowed herself to feel bitter for a second, before breathing out and focusing on the fact that she wasn’t alone in this. Not that she’d ever been, but having grown ups helping was a sight better than kids her age, no matter how smart Hermione is.

Sirius pulled the attention back to him by continuing. “So first, once we get permission to take you to Gringotts we’ll fix your emancipation, then we’ll start your training as you’ll be free to come and go from Hogwarts as you please!” The complete and utter mischief in his eyes was infectious, and Hera couldn’t help but be excited and smiling impishly back at him, despite everything else.

“We’ve all agreed that using Malfoy Manor as training grounds will be best, as you’ll have plenty of space no matter what activity – running or flying, not to mention the lake and gardens as well.”

“Although, I would prefer you stay out of my personal gardens darling, as I’ve finally managed to produce rather lovely Molys’” Narcissa couldn’t help but throw in, sending an apologetic smile towards her husband and Hera.

Lucius smiled indulgently in return, before continuing after taking a sip of tea. “And of course we’ll help with any financial needs you may have, as well as anything else you might need my dear.”

“Oi, I’m not exactly poor Lucy.” Lucius expression turned to distaste at Sirius nickname.

“Ah yes, and how exactly do you think the Ministry will react at towards what will most likely be many varied, unusual, and expensive things?” Sirius immediately looked put out, but Hera was more focused on the new piece of news she’d learned that Sirius had neglected to tell her about.

“Why are the Ministry monitoring your funds Sirius?”

Now he seemed even more put out, sinking slightly in his chair. “They’re not entirely convinced that I’m not connected with the Dark Lord somehow, because of how the rest of the Black family has been. They’ll be monitoring my accounts for a year before letting me completely off the hook. Honestly though, imagine me, in cahoots with the bloody Dark Lord. HA!” Sirius continued to grumble while grabbing a biscuit from the table, and didn’t notice how both Malfoys and Hera had gone curiously still at Sirius exclamation.

Hera didn’t know what the Malfoys were thinking, but she was desperately trying not to laugh hysterically at the irony of the statement, and used every inch of her will power not to stare at Tom seated right next to Sirius.

Out of her peripherals though, Tom didn’t seem to react at all to Sirius claim. Hera wished that she’d one day have that kind of control as she hid behind her tea cup to fully regain her composure.

Tom, seemingly bored of the conversations new direction, decided to get them back on track, leaning
forward to put his cup down, as well as draw all attention to himself.

“In regards to the actual tournament, I’ve made enquires and discovered that the first task involves dragons – more specifically a Swedish Shortsnout, Common Welsh Green, Chinese Fireball, and a Hungarian Horntail.” Narcissa gasped, while both Lucius and Sirius swore more or less obviously.

“Now, I recall hearing that you are a Parselmouth Lady Potter?” Tom looked completely bland while asking, and it took Hera a second to remember that he wasn’t supposed to have seen her speak it before.

At her nod, Tom continued. “Excellent. It’s been documented that those who speak the Serpent Tongue are able to communicate with dragons as well, although it can be a bit difficult depending on the breed, and intelligence of said dragon.”

“I understand why intelligence is a factor, but why breed?”

“It’s rather like speaking English with people from different countries. The general words are the same, but depending on which country and how well versed they are in English you’ll have an easier or a harder time understanding them.” Hera hmm’d in understanding, eyes far away as she imagined the new possibilities that had just opened up for her.

Charlie Weasley was going to have a cow if he ever found out she could actually talk to dragons. Maybe.

“That’s why my recommendation is to try and get the Hungarian Horntail as your task, as they are, ah, rumoured to be the most intelligent of the four.”

“Aren’t they the most dangerous as well?” Sirius asked, eyes as wide as Hera’s at the prospect.

Tom shrugged nonchallantly “Indeed. But, that won’t matter when you can explain the situation and escape unscathed.”

Hera didn’t feel entirely convinced by this plan, and neither it seemed did Sirius, who looked a bit green around the gills.

Hera wondered if she’d get to practice with Tom before having to test her relatively unused snake speaking skills.

The unusual group fell into silence, each contemplating the future and their part in it. Sneaking another biscuit, Hera just mostly basked in the fact that they were here for her, and in a good way.

Several minutes of silence were broken by Narcissa, who’d glanced at the clock and realized the time. “Right, well, I believe we’ve shared the essentials, so if Hera wishes to purchase anything from the village, we should allow her to return to her friends.”

Hera felt a burst of disappointment, but it was quickly overshadowed when she realized what Aunt Cissa was actually saying.

Hera needed to make an appearance in Hogsmeade to keep their little get together a secret as long as possible.

She didn’t know who would try to stop or hinder them, but Hera knew Slytherins to be overly cautious at times, and usually for a good reason.
Customary pleasantries and goodbyes were made, another hug from both Aunt Cissa and Sirius were had, and then she was slowly bustled out towards the door.

Looking around one last time at the grown ups around her, Hera felt the telltale sting of tears, but fought them back. She was just so grateful.

“Thank you” hissed Hera quietly to Tom, as Lucius and Sirius were in the middle of another minor bickering.

Tom gazed curiously down at her, his eyes taking on a nearly serpentine look as he seemed to stop blinking. Hera was entranced.

“As I said before, there are now many who are invested in your continued health, Lady Potter. I am simply assuring it.”

Chapter End Notes

HI I'M NOT DEAD NOR HAVE I ABANDONED THIS.

Really sorry about the delay, but with exams (med school, don't do it kids), and getting used to my new summer job, life's been a bit hectic and I haven't really had the energy or time to properly focus on this story the way it deserves.

Now though, things are finally settling, and I should be updating more regularly again, depending a bit on my work schedule etc etc. I probably won't be posting every week, but I'll try to keep it to at least every other (key word being try here).

Hope you enjoy the chapter, and again sorry for the wait! And of course thank you for your comments and kudos and continued support!
Staring at the Goblin in front of her, Hera was fairly certain that Professor Snape had emulated his infamous sneer after these disconcerting and rather mean looking creatures.

Only they did it much better.

She was also still disappointed that they looked nothing like the Goblins in Labyrinth. Although, she thought, while trying to keep her face neutral, Uncle Lucius could probably pull off a Goblin King pretty dang well.

She wondered if she could ever trick him into the outfit to see.

Mentally shaking herself, she focused again on the Goblins in front of her, and the conversation going on between Sirius and the Head Account Manager Bogrod, consisting mostly of the current financial situation. Her mind wandered off again as she still wasn’t needed to participate yet, and she admired the opulent furnishings in the room they were in.

It reminded her of a Victorian study; the dark drapes, mahogany furniture, crackling fireplace, metal workings everywhere. And everything Goblin made, of course.

She started paying attention again when a second goblin entered the room.

“This is Griphook, the account manager for the Potter estate, and will now deal with your -” and here the goblin paused, eyeing both Hera and Sirius slowly, mostly for drama Hera thought, before continuing, “– request.”

With that the first goblin gathered his papers and left, leaving them with the second goblin who was staring unblinkingly at her while shuffling with his papers. Hera shifted in her seat.

Yeah no, Snape had nothing on those beady eyes.

Finally he switched his gaze over to Sirius, much to Hera’s relief.

“You wish to petition for Lady Potter’s emancipation.” An eyebrow raised on the leathery skin, and Sirius huffed.

“Not only petition; fullfil, execute, achieve, the whole nine bloody yards. By the end of this day, my goddaughter will have all the rights of an adult Heiress and Head of a Most Noble and Ancient House.”

“Hmm.” Griphook gazed at them again, unnerving Hera something fierce. He continued shuffling through his papers, and Hera wondered if he actually was looking for something, or if he was just doing it for show.

After what felt like forever he seemed to find the paper he was ‘looking’ for, and put it at the top of the pile. Or maybe he’d just grown bored of the mind game he was playing. Looking down at the ancient looking parchment, he summoned several things by only minutely shifting his hand. A ceremonial looking dagger, a quill and a small oblong stone bowl were amongst the things that
appeared, but Hera was more fascinated by the feel of the magic that had just been worked, as well as wondering if she could pull off that type of wandless magic with enough practice.

Maybe she’d ask Tom next time she saw him. He at least was more likely to answer honestly, unlike Dumbledore.

“The ritual hasn’t been done in over three centuries.”

“Not the first time she’ll be a trend breaker.”

“Your Ministry will not be pleased.”

“We don’t care.”

“Very well. Miss Potter, your hand and wand please.”

Hera glanced at Sirius first, then at his nod of encouragement she slowly took her wand out of her sleeve and put it in front of the Goblin, before extending her hand over the basin. Griphook moved the wand into the basin, which seemed to resize itself to better fit the piece of wood. He then placed a ring, she didn’t know where the ring had come from, down next to her wand before taking her hand and quickly slicing her palm so that the blood flowed down over the objects in the basin, while simultaneously mumbling in what must have been Gobbledegook. It all went so quickly that Hera didn’t have time to react to the pain, instead sitting there in shock as she watched her blood cover her wand and the ring. She felt the magic gathering around her; a pressure that kept on building up until she felt like her head was going to cave in. And then it built a little more.

Finally, she felt, what she could only describe as a shell around her, fracture, and the immense pressure disappeared. It left her light headed, like when you stand up too quickly and your blood pressure drops. She gripped the arms of her chair for support, and kept her eyes closed until the wooriness had disappeared.

When she opened her eyes again Sirius was looking at her with obvious concern. Griphook was looking inordinately curious, but more like she was a weird bug he’d found on the side of the road curious. Glancing curiously back at him, she almost felt like she could grasp exactly why he was curious, before he abruptly broke eye contact. She felt briefly a small loss of magic, before it quickly replenished itself. That in itself caused her to examine her own magic, realizing that it felt different now.

Instead of a pressure cooker, releasing when overflowing, she felt a bit adrift – free – and as if she could stretch her reach across the world if she wanted, instead of just the room in which they sat. Everything felt a bit sharper, a bit brighter – the magic pulsing in everyone and everything.

She was enchanted.

As Griphook handed her back her wand, as well as instructing her on how to put on the ring and the incantation that’s to be said while doing it, she marveled at the objects in her hand; the feel of them, as well as the magic within them – ancient, yet happy to meet her.

Leaving Gringotts, Hera is nearly overwhelmed by the sights and sounds outside the dim bank. Stopping just inside the entrance, Hera tried to gather herself, gather her magic around her, before wandering out. Sirius, noticing her stop, and her hesitance in continuing, only smiled fondly down at her.
"You never can do things normally, can you love?" Hera stuck her tongue out at him, before putting on an air of Pureblood aristocracy and sweeping out of the bank, leaving Sirius to follow her.

Concerned lines still graced Sirius face, despite the smile, as he followed his wayward goddaughter into the hustle and bustle of Diagon Alley.

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Fortunately she felt pretty much back to normal by the time they’d returned to Hogwarts. The only lingering side effect of that strange ritual she’d noticed was that her magic seemed easier to access, more eager to please. It practically jumped to her fingertips every time she attempted a spell, the feeling almost like being tickled, which caused an embarrassing moment in charms were she accidentally giggled and had to pretend she’d just heard a funny joke. Thankfully he didn’t ask what joke, so she kept her head down and tried to manhandle her now hyperactive magic into some semblance of order.

Her days went back to normal, which lasted a few weeks, until Tom got the brilliant idea to send her a snake. Via Professor Snape.

He didn’t even sneer when he handed the snake over, instead smirking with ill disguised humor. Hera imagined it had to do with the fact that Dumbledore couldn’t do a bloody thing about it as she was a parselmouth and therefor according to the school rules allowed to own a snake. (Hermione had researched everything about parselmouths during their second year.)

She’d apparently also researched snakes as she whispered that Hera’s new friend was a King Cobra, which Hera also already knew. She’d done some research herself that year.

Her new (temporary? She didn’t know) friend was rather fiesty though; decidedly not impressed with the children around them, nor the way he’d been transported to her.

"I was informed that I would be helping a new speaker, but I was not informed that my transport would be the most foul-smelling heap of black cloth this side of the equator." The snake was curling around Hera in agitation, coils twitching this way and that. She wondered if petting him would seem patronizing or help calm him down.

"Umm, well, that’s probably the potion ingredients you’re smelling, although I don’t know how snakesä smelling works, so maybe they’re worse for you than for us." Hera didn’t know why she was defending her potions professor in any capacity, but she decided that not risking getting bit was the way to go, and kept her hands to herself.

"Hmph, well your dialect is strange, but understandable. My job should be immeasurably simpler than expected." He’d stopped coiling and uncoiling to instead stare unblinkingingly at her, tongue occasionally peaking out. She wondered what the hmph sounded like to none snake speaking people.

Hera was very aware of the horrified looks being sent her way, and the sudden clearing of the seats around her, but decided to deal with that later, and deal with the poisonous snake in front of her first.

"And uh, what exactly is your job, if I may ask?"

"I’ve been asked by the Master to instruct you on proper speaking techniques, as well as accustom you to a more draconic dialect."
“You know how to speak like a dragon?”

“Ohviously, else I wouldn’t be here.” Hera cringed slightly at the sheer dryness of his tone, mumbling an apology. The glare he was sending her way wasn’t all that encouraging either, although she was secretly impressed with how affective it was.

“Now take me to your abode. I’ve spent enough time in this hall to establish my presence amongst the castle’s inhabitants, and wish to rest until we begin our lessons this evening.”

Hera had started walking as soon as he’d finished his first sentence, now also well aware of the stares following her. Although, that made her realize. “He told you to make your presence as obvious as possible didn’t he.”

The cobra only laughed, while shifting into a more comfortable position around her arms and shoulders.

Great. Another enigmatically sarcastic Slytherin in her life.

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The King Cobra, she found out, was named Vasuki, and continued to be a manipulative sarcastic serpent despite the strange accent he appropriated. It sounded incredibly old fashioned, rather like those old plays by that bard person she read about in Primary School. It took some getting used to, and asking Hermione about the Shakespeare bloke and asking if she knew any books that sounded like him so that she could more quickly get used to the language, but eventually she was half decent (acceptable, by Vasuki’s standards. Bloody stingy slytherins.) Hermione would bring books back with her from the library, as Hera usually spent her evenings with her new snake friend, as well as the latest stories about Viktor Krum, who’d decided that Hermione was the next best thing after Quidditch.

Hera couldn’t fault him the realisation, but didn’t necessarily like the fact the Hermione was spending more time with Krum than her, but she couldn’t begrudge her the happiness.

She had seriously been tempted to sic Vasuki on Krum though when she’d found out that he’d asked Hermione to the Yule Ball.

Ugh, the Yule Ball.

One of the few good things that had come from reminding the world that she could speak to snakes, was that very few people actually tried to ask her to the ball.

Fortunately she’d already done the smart thing and had immediately asked Draco, who was as close to a brother as she had, to go with her. At least then the evening would be somewhat tolerable, and she knew Draco was a good dancer.

But that wasn’t going to help her now.

Standing in her newly made dragonskin armor, her nerves kept her continuously readjusting the fit as she looked around inside the tent. It looked like a standard tent, billowy walls, dim light shining through from the sunshine outside.
A couple of solid wooden tables littered the inside, nothing on them however. Hera wondered idly what they were for.

The dull roar from the people arriving outside started to reach her ears, and she looked unseeingly in that direction, noting out of the corner of her eyes that the other Champions were doing the same. They looked about as good as she felt; pale, and equally fidgety.

Everyone froze though, when their Headmasters, as well as Ludo Bagman entered the tent. In his hands he had a velvet bag, with something, or somethings, squirming inside of it. Everyone eyed the bag warily, before returning their attentions back to Bagman as he began to speak.

“Welcome, Champions, to the First Task!” He paused then, as if to receive applause. Hera had to suppress a snort. As it was obvious no one was going to do anything of the sort, he continued.

“Right, well, your task will consist of attempting to retrieve a golden egg from the nest of a dragon.” This bit of news earned a gasp from the french champion, and Hera saw out of the corner of her eye that both Diggory and Krum had gone a few shades paler. Hera, despite knowing beforehand about the dragons, still felt an increase in blood pressure as her situation became all the more real. It’s one thing to theorize about meeting a dragon, an entirely different thing to actually meet one.

“We have four dragons prepared, one for each Champion; a Chinese Fireball, a Swedish Shortsnout, A Common Welsh Green, and last but certainly not least, a Hungarian Horntail. To determine who gets to meet which dragon, we have a miniature version in this bag. You will stick your hand in and pluck your adversary.” Then he grinned pleasantly, as if this were a normal Sunday tea. “Ladies first I think. Miss Delacour?”

Delacour went first, carefully inching her hand down the bags opening with an expression not unlike stepping in dog shite, she slowly retrieved her hand again, this time with a tiny green dragon attached to her fingers.

“Oooo the Welsh Green, that will certainly be an interesting challenge for you Mademoiselle. Miss Potter?” He thrust the bag in front of her nose, and Hera quickly, but carefully reached in, and grabbed the first wriggling thing she touched. Nearly yelping when spikes poked at her palm, Hera knew immediately which dragon she’d managed to pick. Showing it off to the others, she nearly grinned at the others expressions of horror.

“Ehm well, the Hungarian Horntail. Right. Mister Diggory, shall you go next?” Bagman quickly moved on, while Hera continued staring at the tiny reptile clinging to her fingers.

Despite it’s known ferocity, this was exactly the dragon that her ‘Team’ had hoped for, as it was also known to be one of the more intelligent breeds. That meant a hopefully easier time convincing the poor thing to let her take the fake egg from her clutch, maybe implying it was a threat or something.

She didn’t know exactly what she was going to say, but at least from Vasuki’s help she’d be able to communicate just fine.

She just hoped the Horntail appreciated common sense. Vasuki had been rather vague about that.

Having only listened with half an ear as Bagman had continued, instead thinking of various strategies to eventually implement, Hera only heard that she would be the second person out, Bagman apparently decided to stick with the ladies first tactic, sending Delacour out first.
Before the first task began though, the Headmasters were allowed to speak briefly with their Champions. Hera fled to the far corner of the tent, not wanting nor needing any false encouragements from Dumbledore. Fortunately he must have sensed her reticence, as after speaking with Diggory, he simply nodded in her direction, before exiting the tent with the other grown ups.

Shortly after that, the First Task began.

Waiting through Delacour’s run Hera had the dubious pleasure of experiencing time both crawling by in a snail’s pace, yet at the same time going by all too quickly, which she realized when she heard the crowd go wild, and what sounded like the removal of one dragon exchanging of the other. Fascinatingly enough she could actually hear a word or two being uttered from the enormous reptile’s jaws; words like imbeciles, and destroy, and hatchlings, as well as a bunch of other garbled words she couldn’t understand.

Hopefully she wouldn’t have to attempt to understand them either.

Standing up, she moved over to the tent flap that exited to the small arena, and waited for her name to be announced. Stretching out her muscles and shaking her extremities to hopefully get rid of excess energy (and it not really helping), she nearly jumped when her name was announced, and the polite smattering of applause that followed. She did smile at the overexuberance of the twins’ cheers coupled with her Godfather’s ridiculous, hollered encouragements, but quickly put on her game face as she carefully exited the tent.

Squinting from the bright light, she blinked rapidly to acclimate as quickly as possible, and to more importantly be able to see the dragon.

Which was right in front of her.

And hunkering down like a cat about to pounce, golden eyes focused on her, squinting in appraisal.

“Who is’t art thee?” Hera thanked her lucky stars that this Horntail seemed to be a talkative one, and began her speech, while simultaneously wishing she’d brought ear plugs as her voice seemed to echo in her head.

Gulping, Hera called upon every smidge of her Gryffindor courage. “My name is Hera, of the line of Potter, and I have only good intentions towards thee.”

“Oh doth thee, tiny speaker?” Hera could practically feel the scepticism rumbling off of the female in front of her, but prevailed.

“Yes. Liketh unto you, I have been eh, forced into this space, against mine will.”

“Forssssooth.”

“Um, yes.” Hera felt very much like a mouse trying to negotiate with a cat. Or a snake. “If we can, eh, worketh together, than we both may escapeth this place.”

“Quaint w’rds. Thee has’t been taught well. What is’t thee wisheth?” Despite the seemingly teasing words, Hera didn’t drop her guard and american inch. Vasuki had taught her better. Hell, Tom had taught her better.

“Right” She took a deep breath, “I wish only retrieve from thine eggs-“
The Horntail turned from pleasant to demonic in a split second, and practically roared at her. \textit{“Doth not toucheth mine own young!”}\textsuperscript{1} Several people screamed at the dragon’s sudden show of aggression, sure that Hera Potter was now done for. Hera however, ignored them completely and quickly rephrased her request, while simultaneously berating herself for her idiotic choice in words. Her hands were shaking.

“I’m not gonna- I am not going to touch thy young! I wish to remove an imposter who may prove a threat. Observe, there existeth an egg of gold amongst thine clutch, which differ from your, or thy, young.” Her nerves were starting to get to her, her hands shaking, but she felt that victory was within her grasp when the she-dragon indeed checked her eggs. At the sudden, and very loud, angry hissing coming from the Horntail, she’d indeed spotted the interloper. Hera’s lips twitched into a grin before she could control her facial expressions once more as the Horntail turned back towards her. Apparently according to Vasuki, dragons had excellent eyesight, as well as a surprisingly accurate ability to read facial expressions.

\textit{“Removeth it! Anon!”}

“Yes Ma’am! Right away Ma’am!” Hera didn’t care if the dragon had heard her or not, as she slowly but surely climbed up the stones towards the dragon, and towards the eggs, the Horntail keeping an unnervingly close eye on her. Making extra sure not to touch any of the actual eggs, Hera plucked the golden imposter from the middle of the clutch, and slowly backed away.

When Hera got far enough away, the Horntail again returned to her hunched posture over her eggs, only this time much calmer, hissing soothingly to the indirectly disturbed clutch.

\textit{“I thanketh thee, young speaker.”} The dragon blinked slowly at her, rather like Crookshanks right after having received a belly rub.

The relief from finally retrieving the Golden Egg left Hera rather speechless, so she simply bowed in return. Then she slowly backed towards the tent, and when she felt it was close enough, she sprinted out of there, laughing almost hysterically at the confused sounding applause as Bagman announced her successful retrieval and the consequent points.

She couldn’t care less. She was alive, not so much as a papercut on her, and the bloody prize in her arms.

She refused to acknowledge the slight disappointment she felt at not seeing Tom there.

Chapter End Notes

Well, at least this time it only took two weeks to update? ^.^' Either way I hope you enjoyed it, and while I can't promise I'll be any faster to upload the next chapter, I'll do my best!

Thank you all for your comments and kudos, as they are like fireworks in my life!!! <3

(And Happy Fourth of July!!!!!!)
“A sham! A disgrace! You were bloody robbed!”

Hera rolled her eyes. “Oh cool it Sirius, I don’t care about the points. My only goal is to survive intact, remember?”

It was the evening of the day after the First task, and Hera was sat in the Gryffindor common room together with Hermione, the Weasley twins, and her Godfather – who’d joined them via fire-call.

They would have done this yesterday, but Gryffindor had decided that despite being in a shared third place with the French Champion, the fact that she’d succeeded was enough to celebrate, and they’d thrown a party in typical Gryffindor fashion – butterbeer and ridiculousness abounding.

Hera was only mildly annoyed at their sudden change of heart, as she was rather used to it by now. She had been more annoyed over the fact that she had had to wait another day to talk to Sirius about the whole thing.

Only now she was mildly regretting calling to him as he’d been complaining about her being cheated out of the points she should have gotten for getting the egg out fairly quickly and unscathed.

Surprisingly enough, Karkaroff had given her the highest score possible, a ten, which Hera suspected had to do with her using what was perceived as a Dark gift. On that same vein however, Dumbledore had only given her five points, with no explanation for it either. Bagman had given her eight points, having to concede that she’d fulfilled the stipulations of the task, but as it was rather boring (she speculated), couldn’t give her full points.

Madame Maxime had been kind enough to give her nine points; probably also uncertain about the use of Parseltongue, but not being able to dispute the effectiveness of it.

That had left her with a grand total of 32 points. Diggory was in the lead, with 38 points; Krum in second with 34 (apparently eggs getting smashed was not good point-wise), leaving her and Delacour in last.

Again, Hera didn’t care. Apparently though, she was the only one that thought so.

Even Hermione was upset. Thankfully a disapproving face was all she’d expressed so far.

The twins had less self control.

“It was the finest show of interspecies relations done in decades!”

“Charlie was practically drooling!” “I’ve never seen such desire in his eyes!” The twins pretended to swoon, batting their eyelashes at Hera while making cooing noises, doing a rather ridiculous impression of their older brother. Hera only shook her head at their antics, while Sirius spluttered and muttered something about youth and disgraceful boys, Hermione giggling into her book.

“Unfortunately for Charlie, redheads are not my type” Hera smirked, sarcasm lacing her words.

“Ach Freddie, my heart has been broken.” George clutched his heart as he slumped into his brother, Fred quickly imitating his pose. “Ay Georgie, forget Charlie, we never had a chance.”
Sirius, despite Hera’s obvious amusement, interrupted. “Oi knock it off! She’s too smart for you lumps anyways, hair color be damned.” The twins mock gasped at the insult, but Sirius payed them no mind, turning back towards Hera.

“We should have the points contested by an objective party. He’s obviously prejudiced, not to mention miffed over your apparent defection from his side.”

Hera couldn’t help but roll her eyes again. “Sirius, I told you. I don’t bloody care. Dumbledore can think me a talentless puppet and give me one bloody point. It’s not important.”

“Dumbledore couldn’t see talent even if it dressed as garishly as he did!” Hera snorted at this. No way was she ever going to wear anything even close to something that the Headmaster would wear. Besides, Dumbledore was apparently prejudiced, not stupid.

”It’s Parselmouth-ism is what it is!”

“I couldn’t have said it better Forge!”

“Thank you Gred.”

“Alright alright, that’s enough boys.” While normally Hera could watch the twins’ act all night, she still felt exhausted from yesterday and all the anxiety and tension she’d gone through.

Standing up, she said her goodbyes and goodnights, before slowly making her way up, Vasuki slithering behind in her steps. She’d been pleasantly surprised to find him still around after the first task, as she’d expected him to return to wherever he’d lived before his stint as a teacher.

But no. Instead she’d nearly crushed him when flopping onto her bed after the Gryffindor party, and he’d hissed complaints for nearly an hour before settling down again near her head and falling back to sleep. She still wasn’t entirely sure he wouldn’t leave during the next few days, however he hadn’t said anything, nor started acting any different than before – still hounding her on pronunciation and reminding her to stand up straight.

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And so her days continued as autumn fell away to winter. Vasuki taking up the mantle as her new Manners Master, surprising her with his knowledge of Pureblood rules and norms. Cissa and Lucius continued to owl her with information from everything between fashion and cut-throat politics, including simply asking how she’s doing and what she’s been up to (her favourite bits). In fact, as her knowledge grew, they managed to fit several of those topics into fewer pages, as her need for background information diminished. It left more time for building the relationships between these newer grown ups in her life, and she appreciated it.

Amongst all of their words of wisdom, advice, inquiries and gossip, they also reminded her that she needed a date for the Yule Ball, which she appreciated a little less. Not for the fact that she’d forgotten, as she’d already asked Draco (and forgotten to update her guardians on this, although that made her wonder how often Draco was writing if he hadn’t alerted them yet either.) It had been one of the two things she’d been purposefully trying to avoid, wanting to deal with it as little as possible despite the collective student madness over the whole spectacle. So far she’d seen five boys faint while trying to ask a girl to go as their date (Ron being one of them), and heard more excited squeals than even a pig sty could stand. Her dress robes had already been ordered and sat waiting in her
closet, thank Merlin, as every time there’d been a Hogsmeade weekend the dress shops had been full to bursting, much to both Hera’s and Hermione’s amusement.

No, the reason why she didn’t like the reminder was the increased number of askers she’d acquired after the first task.

Two of the other fainters she’d seen had been trying to ask her to the ball.

It was tedious, awkward and just absolutely horrible and she hated it to the point that she’d started just carrying Vasuki everywhere as a type of scaly necklace to try and discourage them.

So far, it’d been working like a dream, Vasuki taking not so surprising sadistic pleasure in terrorising anyone who came too close to her personal space who hadn’t been pre-approved, whilst simultaneously quizzing her on various topics and getting a free space heater to boot.

Unfortunately, the idiot in front of her wasn’t taking the hint.

A fellow Gryffindor (she was really reconsidering the greatness of her house now), had cornered her between the painting of the fat lady and the balcony railing, and had proceeded to start monologuing about his family history? Or something of the sort. She’d started zoning out after he’d started on the family business and how they’d revolutionised something or other yadda yadda. Vasuki had been hissing nonstop for nearly five minutes now, going from simply hissing to actually hissing bodily threats now. When she actually felt him starting to move off of her body towards his direction she felt it necessary to intercede before her slithery companion did something she’d regret.

Hera interrupted him mid sentence. “Look, eh, McAdder? McLuggen?” “McLaggen.” He looked mildly insulted that she didn’t remember his name, she couldn’t care less.

“Is there a point to this prattle or do you frequently accost members of your house outside of the common room to jibber-jabber at them, because I have homework I need to do.” She gave him her best haughty bored expression, while subtly trying to keep Vasuki, still hissing insults and creative ways of torture, she’d need to talk to him about that later, from escaping even further from her body.

He spluttered, but recovered surprisingly smoothly. “Why I just wished to make sure you could make an informed decision when I ask you to the yu-“

“No.” Hera’s expression was flat, even as exasperation flooded her system. She hoped Vasuki was rolling his eyes for her. She cleared her throat. “I mean, no thank you, I’ve already made an agreement with Heir Malfoy, I’m sorry to have wasted your time.” She hoped dropping names would get him to back off, as he’d been so concerned over her knowing his so-called pedigree.

Going by the hand on her arm as she’d tried to walk past, she was unfortunately, if predictably, wrong. She’d gotten the feeling he wasn’t the type to give up.

“Surely you should reconsider? Him being a Slytherin after all.” Not only was his sickeningly sweet tone brassing her off, talking to her as if she had air for brains, but the implied insult to her friend, not to mention a house she was growing fonder of by the second, had her fit to burst.

Taking a deep breath, calming her magic and the angry tacky sensation in the back of her mind, she instead started hissing at Vasuki, while staring unblinkingly straight into McLaggen’s eyes.

"Darling Master Snake, would you mind too terribly slowly making your way up his arm, then perhaps faking a strike or two at his face? If he doesn’t let go you’re welcome to bite him and I’ll claim self defence."
“Gladly young one.” She could practically hear the malevolent grin in his voice, as he slowly made his way around her body towards the unwelcome appendage now slightly tightening it’s grip on her in, she hoped, fear.

Switching back to english she spoke towards the taller boy. “It’s probably best you let me go McLaggen. My poor familiar is rather hungry, as it’s close to dinner time, and he gets very, ehem, snappy at anything that keeps him from food…” Here Hera smiled politely.

“…and currently that would be you.” As soon as she’d uttered her last syllable, Vasuki struck, nearly taking a bite out of McLaggen’s nose, but also causing him to flinch back, letting go of her arm in the process. Hera didn’t waste any time in sliding through the open portrait, throwing a ‘Thank you’ and ‘Goodbye’ behind her as the Fat Lady quickly opened and shut the portrait behind her, having felt sympathy towards the young woman and her plight.

Vasuki laughing in glee was the best thing she’d heard all day.

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She only got a few more asks prior to the Ball itself, as people slowly found other dates, or were increasingly deterred by friends and snappy snakes. The few that dared had been either incredibly polite and bowed out immediately upon her rejection, or simply couldn’t handle the pressure of a brassed off snake staring them down and hissing ominously.

Hera kind of wished she could carry Vasuki with her everywhere for forever.

Sadly that was not an option tonight, as the Yule Ball was about to begin.

Aunt Cissa had sent a list of beauty spells that could be useful to them that evening, giving several options and moving sketches of the wand movements required for each spell. Hera also had some potions that Cissa had sent previously, as well, as potions Hermione had found that she thought might be interesting as well.

The Sleekeazys came in handy in regard to Hermione’s hair, and worked fantastically together with one of Cissa’s spells that locked the hair into place, similarly to hair gel, but without the gel part.

Hera ended up using series of spells that made her hair less frizzy, and the curls curlier, which Aunt Cissa had used on her before (she really didn’t feel like experimenting that night). She then, with the help of Hermione, as well as Lavender Brown (to her surprise), put her hair up in a grecian style, to complement her pale silvery green robes which had a grecian cut to them.

A subtle cat eye, chapstick, and she was good to go, just in time to head down and meet up with Draco for the Champion’s opening dance.

Walking down the stairs, Hera was increasingly grateful she’d gotten Draco as her date, going by how ridiculously some of the boys acted when seeing their dates – fainting (she recognised one of the other fainters), looking sick, sweating, giggling (he didn’t look like all his marbles were in play), to the more normal smiling or standing stoically types. Draco was of the last variety, standing attentive at the end of the stairwell, and holding his arm out to her when she reached him.

“You’re looking rather spiffy.” Hera said, glint of mischief in her eyes. Draco took it in stride,
returning her grin instead.

“You’ve come rather a long way in fashion yourself cousin. Green is a lovely color on you. Compliments to Mother.” Hera gently elbowed him in retaliation of the dig, but kept her bland smile as they made their way over to the other champions.

After the standard greetings, and the very amusing scene of watching everyone gape at Hermione as she came gliding down the stairwell in her periwinkle robes, then gap even more when it was Viktor Krum who picked her up.

The two best friends barely had time to share a pleased smile at their handiwork, before Professor McGonagall ushered everyone inside the Great Hall, leaving the Champions and their partners outside to be introduced before the opening dance began.

Hera was really glad for the dancing lessons she’d gotten during the summer, otherwise she was fairly sure she would’ve made a fool of both herself in front of everyone.

Instead the glided along the floor, arguably the best out of all the couples, if Hera could say so herself. Thankfully the other students began joining fairly quickly, the Headmasters and Mistresses spearheading the group. Before long it was a whirl of multicolor clothing surrounding her, making it feel a bit like a psychedelic rush, or at least what she imagined it to feel like.

“Thanks again for going with me Draco, I know you probably wanted to ask someone else.” They’d been dancing for awhile now, the wall of clothing giving false sense of privacy.

Draco glanced down at her. “You are family Hera, not to mention I’m the only half way decent option in this bloody school. Of course I’d say yes.” Draco winked. Hera squeezed his arm gently in thanks. Soon however they had to take a break, and as Hera was snake-less, as soon as she’d finished her drink she had boys asking her to dance, with no choice but to accept.

As the night went on, she danced with more people than she could count; Cedric, Neville, Seamus, Dean, Fred, George, a few of the Slytherins, and many more she didn’t recognise.

During the majority of the dances, which took place with people she didn’t know nor had any interest in, she usually ended up admiring the decorations around them – from the giant Christmas trees, decked out in fake snow and absurd amounts of silver shiny decorations, to the falling snow from the ceiling, to the many glittering crystals hanging around practically everywhere. It was utterly enchanting, and easily distracted her from the current dull partner.

She wasn’t completely rude during the evening, as she always answered the questions asked. She simply didn’t expand upon the answers. Sirius will probably be pleased with how disinterested she was, Aunt Cissa probably disappointed.

Ah well, she had many more years to practice before it actually mattered, thank Merlin and Morgana.

When she finally managed to get a moment to herself, quickly hiding away in a nook nearly hidden by one of the Christmas trees, she took a deep breath before settling back against the surprisingly warm stone behind her. Watching the whirling mass of dancers, she let her mind go blank, simply enjoying being in the here and now – surrounded by snow themed beauty, grateful to be alone for a little bit.

Humming slightly along with the string orchestra playing, she swayed to the rhythm, her mind a swirling mass of black, like the lake on a moonless night.

She fully returned to reality when the idle thought of wondering what Tom would’ve thought of this
popped into her head. Surprise mixed with confusion was her main reason for pushing the thought away, before she refocused on her plans for after the Yule Ball.

The train was leaving tomorrow morning, and she’d be heading back to the Malfoy’s together with Draco for the rest of the break. Sirius was probably already there, enjoying the Malfoys well stocked wine cellar and excellent food. Hopefully dancing away the night himself, as Narcissa and Lucius were holding a Yule Ball of their own for all the students parents, as a type of consolation for not having their children home on Christmas Eve night.

Hera admired their kindness, as well as the excellent opportunity they now had to gain new contacts and allies. Their party was probably much more minimalistically, yet probably more beautifully decorated, as opposed to the mass amount of fake snowflakes, glitter and crystals that were somehow still enchanting.

Tom would’ve been utterly bored here compared to there.

And with that thought Hera lightly shook her head, then decided to rejoin the masses and actually put in effort while socialising.

Seeing McLaggen on the dance floor in front of her however, she redirected her steps towards the hors d’oeuvres.

Spotting Hermione getting a drink she raced as quickly as socially acceptable to her best friend, exhaling dramatically when she got within hearing distance to announce her arrival.

Hermione turned towards her, snorted at her appearance, then poured a second drink for Hera.

“You look absolutely knackered.” Hera rolled her eyes while taking a gulp, the sparkling cider, alcohol free of course, scratching wonderfully in her throat.

Motioning her cup in Hermione’s direction, Hera answered. “You try dancing for a solid hour and a half without break and see how you feel.” Hermione winced in sympathy, leading Hera towards a table to sit down for awhile.

“So Hermione, how’s your night with Viktor so far?” Hera waggled her eyebrows, even as a tendril of jealousy shot through her.

The dazed happy look in Hermione’s eyes at the mere mention of his name told Hera enough. She listened anyways because she was a good friend. Even if she kind of didn’t want to hear how absolutely marvellous the quidditch player was.

“Oh it’s been absolutely wonderful. He’s such a gentleman, and an absolutely divine dancer. I felt like I was waltzing on a cloud! And he’s so attentive, getting me drinks when I’m thirsty, resting with me when I’m tired, listening to everything I say, coming up with follow up questions-”

“Oooooh follow up questions, sounds serious.” Hera couldn’t help but tease, Hermione stuck her tongue out in retaliation.

“Hush you. Anyways, haven’t you had fun? I think I’ve seen you dancing with practically everyone by now.”

“Not Viktor.”

“Hera.” The look Hera got was mildly amusing to her.
“It’s been fine Hermione, relax. This just isn’t my type of thing, you know that.” Hermione’s face turned sympathetic, nodding as they both took another sip of their drinks.

The conversation after that turned towards their observations of the people at the ball so far, from most interesting dress robes, to any gossip they’d heard or seen as of yet.

They somehow managed to talk for almost an hour before Krum swept by to collect his date for a final dance before the Weird Sisters were scheduled to start their performance.

Hera looked around for Draco, but didn’t feel too disappointed when she didn’t see him. Slowly standing up, she slowly made a circuit around outside the dance floor, simply observing. She’d nearly made it to the other side of the Great Hall when she nearly ran into a what looked like a black shadow, but was actually Professor Snape. Hera was mildly surprised, however managed to hide it well as she apologised to her professor and made small talk. Her surprise only increased, and probably popped up onto her face going by the amused twitch his lip made when he actually answered her small talk questions.

She was actually having a lovely time, commiserating with her Professor over the Malfoys tendency for extravagance (how they got to that topic she has no idea), when she spotted McLaggen making bee line for her from the dance floor.

That’s when a crazy idea entered her head. Well, she’s bound to have Gryffindor impulses every now and then anyways.

“Professor, I’m sorry I have to ask, but would you mind to terribly dancing with me?” The Professor merely raised an eyebrow.

“Would this random query happen to be brought on by the idiot house mate of yours making his way here?” She didn’t know about idiot, but he’d rather hit the nail on the head.

The Professor sighed, subtly rolled his eyes, then held his arm out towards her. It took her brain a second to compute that this was actually happening, but she managed to restart herself fast enough before he sighed again, and they made their way out to the dance floor amidst a sea of whispers and open stares.

Hera didn’t care, as long as she didn’t have to dance with the idiot, she was good.

“I’m only doing this to spare you from his idiocy. I can’t even count how many times I’ve nearly caught him out during curfew. Not to mention if the boy had tried anything, I would’ve heard no end of it from your multitude of Guardians.” Snape murmured out of the corner of his mouth.

“That’s when a crazy idea entered her head. Well, she’s bound to have Gryffindor impulses every now and then anyways.

“Of course, Sir. Thank you, Sir. I appreciate if greatly, Sir” Hera was completely content to just dance, no talking included. The Professor was an excellent dancer, even better than Draco, no surprise there really, as he had many years on him.

Fortunately the song ended fairly quickly, and Snape made a quick getaway, while Hera took a more sedate pace towards the drink table, before making her way back to a table as the majority of the people made their way to the dance floor as the Weird Sisters were entering the stage.

“Did I just see you dancing with Professor Snape?” Hera swung around at Hermione’s voice, as she stood behind her, arms in front of her. Hera’s smile faltered at the slight frown on the other girl’s face.

“Um, yes? He was doing me a favor. Apparently McLaggen doesn’t exactly have the most stellar reputation with the teachers either.”
“Ah.” Hermione’s expression cleared, and she sat down next to Hera.

They sat in silence awhile, Hermione’s displeasure at Hera’s choice in dancing partner eating at her. Mostly in the form of confusion, as she thought Hermione greatly admired the man. Then again, they’ve never really discussed him specifically before, so Hera couldn’t be entirely sure.

Hermione turned suddenly towards Hera, causing her to nearly flinch in surprise.

“I’m rather tired now. I’ll probably head to bed after saying good night to Viktor.” Hermione then stood up and swiftly made her way into the jumping mass of people, disappearing practically immediately.

Hera had barely had any time to say ‘Ok’ before Hermione was gone, leaving behind her slightly confused friend. Hera wondered if something had happened during the night to cause this. Maybe Ron had said something. He always managed to get under Hermione’s skin, and not in a good way.

Sighing in mild frustration, Hera perked up when she saw Draco waving her over to the dance floor, where he and several of their friends were all dancing together. Smiling slightly, she decided to give it one last go before heading up to bed herself. After all, they had to get up early tomorrow to make the train, and she couldn’t wait to get back to the Malfoy’s manor, and away from Hogwarts.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo, sorry for the wait? ^.^'

I thought that having a relatively larger amount of free time would increase my writing output. Sadly structure is apparently a rather integral part of me getting stuff done. (You'd think I'd've learned that by now in my twenty three years.) Fortunately structure's about to return to my life, as school starts in a little over a week. Hopefully I'll get back to my weekly/biweekly updating schedule.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, and thank you all for your kudos and comments, I really really appreciate them!!!

(If anyone wants to ask questions, discuss, theorize or whatever, but not here, I've also got a tumblr you can contact me on -> maevifey.tumblr.com)
The Christmas, the New Years Ball and the Second Task

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This Christmas Break was a novelty for Hera, as she had previously always stayed at the castle, enjoying the peace and quiet and ridiculous Christmas decorations everywhere, as well as the few presents she usually received from people she actually liked. In short, they'd been absolute heaven in comparison to her previous years with the Dursleys.

This year though promised to be even more spectacular as she was in the overly opulent Malfoy mansion, with its tastefully understated green and silver themed decorations. While she'd always enjoyed the eccentricity of Dumbledore’s strange taste, at least in regards to the holidays, she was really starting to appreciate how lovely the minimalistic look was. It was much more calming in a way, not as busy, which Hera really appreciated now with how hectic her life was considering the tasks. Fortunately, Narcissa had officially banned any talk of the Triwizard Tournament the moment Hera stepped into the mansion, and Hera was happy to fall into the illusion of nothing being wrong whatsoever.

Although Draco being hit by a mild stinging hex when unsubtly trying to bring up the Golden Egg during Christmas dinner will forever be a treasured memory.

The Christmas presents she received this year were insane by her standards, which admittedly weren’t that high. She still felt incredibly awkward opening such extravagant gifts – a new broom, a cleaning kit to go with it, as well as the best gripping gloves and goggles market could buy, all from Sirius. Narcissa had given her expensive robes, and the daintiest black pearl drop earrings Hera had ever seen in her life. Lucius had given her a series of history and fictional books, stating that as his sister had found them absolutely delightful he hoped Hera would as well. She had no idea that Lucius had, or had had, a sister, but knew enough now about customs and norms to thank him graciously for such a precious gift, promising she’d take good care of them.

Draco gave her candy, as well as high-end quills and notebooks for the coming year, stating while she opened her present that “It’s about time you had things befitting your status, and not that cheap tripe you’ve insisted on buying”. Hera sent a mild stinging hex at him in retaliation whilst simultaneously thanking him for his thoughtfulness. She’d managed to do it subtly enough that none of the grown ups caught it, at least until Draco very verbally exclaimed his discomfort. He got no sympathy though given his not entirely gentlemanly choice of words, and Hera was instead congratulated on her increasing control on her non-verbal magic, much to Draco’s consternation.

In return she gave Draco candy as well, but also quidditch books she’d managed to get an early release of (her fame was occasionally useful) much to his awe.

To Narcissa she gave a sapphire jewellery set from the Potter vaults that matched her eyes perfectly, to both of their delight (and Lucius’ seeming approval). To the two grown men she gave high quality brandy and cognac, also from the Potter vaults. Given the mischievous grin Sirius got on his face upon seeing them Hera got the vague feeling that he knew exactly where it came from, and had some rather interesting but good memories associated with it. Although she did regret not getting something more for Lucius, given the personal gift he got her.

Ah well, she’d simply have to do better next year then.

It was one of the best days Hera had honestly had in her life, and she was sad to see it coming to an end, which it slowly did as tiredness set in after all the presents had been opened
After Narcissa had gently but firmly forced Hera and Draco to finish their holiday homework the next day, Hera spent most of her free time enjoying the warm coziness of the library, drinking hot chocolate and reading from the ridiculously large selection of whatever types of books her little heart could ever want. It was interesting to see what the magical world construed as fact and fiction, compared to what her muggle upbringing had taught her. In fact, a lot of it was very similar – with wicked witches, cursing fae, talking animals and the like.

It was only that, seeing as this was all possible in the magical realm, the stories probably didn’t hold the same ‘magical’ feeling as they would to a muggle; or to her.

She still found the magical world enchanting, no matter how many times Draco would come in and scoff at her choice of reading the equivalent of their version of fiction. Sometimes she’d forget that what she was reading wasn’t a fantasy book, until either a house-elf popped in with snacks and drinks, or something floated by her as the books either rearranged themselves or one of the grown ups needed something from the library.

It reminded her that it wasn’t fantasy, that this was her reality, and despite having lived in this world for three and a half years now it still sent a thrill down her spine that she was a part of it.

She decidedly did not think about any of the nightmare-ish scenarios she’d been in during those three plus years.

Instead she sat in her plush window seat alternating between books and staring out at the winter wonderland, breath fogging up the window while snowflakes scurried across the glass as the wind chased them along.

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New Years arrived much quicker than Hera liked, and with it the preparations for the annual New Years Ball the Malfoys always held. Mostly it was just switching out the obvious Christmas decorations, mostly the green ones, for muted gold tinsel and shimmering glittering lights everywhere. A light sheen of glitter seemed to settle on practically everything, which in candlelight made everything take on a near hazy ethereal look.

And then there were the robes they’d ordered for the ball itself.

Deciding to portray a unified front, those of the Malfoy and Black clans stuck with the silver and gold theme, though the Malfoys wore mostly silver while Hera and Sirius went mostly gold. Hera’s dress was the color of soft candlelight, the same glittery shimmer that coated the inside of the manor also coating her dress, making her both stand out yet giving her also the ability to blend in if she wished. It also had the advantage of matching her colouring and really causing her green eyes to pop, at least according to Narcissa, who wore a pale silver dress that made her glow like a star. The men wore matching vests to their female family members and standing together greeting the guests Hera had never felt more glamorous in her life.

Sirius, having been to, and part, of many balls in his youth slipped away from the welcoming committee as soon as was socially acceptable, as he found such proceedings utterly boring. Hera lasted a fair bit longer, everything about the situation still slightly new and shiny to her, before her desire to walk around outweighed her desire to be there.

She didn’t get far however, only managing to snag a drink from a floating platter, before Draco
snuck up from behind and steered her towards a group of their peers, mostly consisting of his friends, a few faces she recognised from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, as well as Neville, thank Merlin.

Hera was at first wary that they would start talking about the tournament, but the longer it went with the most interesting topics being what presents people had gotten and who’d visited where so far Hera began to relax properly.

Leaning closer to Neville, Hera whispered. “So how did you end up with this crowd?”

Neville took another sip of his drink before answering. “Honestly they were the only ones I saw around our age here, and I just really wanted to escape Grandmother for awhile.”

“Ah right” Hera snorted, knowing full well how overbearing his grandmother could be from the amount of times Neville has complained about it.

“You look lovely by the way.”

“Thanks Neville.” Hera’s grin lit up her face. “I have Lady Malfoy to thank for being such an amazing mentor in the art of fashion. You look rather dashing yourself I might add.”

Neville blushed lightly, taking another sip from his drink. Hera took another sip of her drink as well, enjoying flustering her friend. He needed some more good-natured teasing in his life.

She noticed Parkinson eyeing them speculatively, and Hera decided that now was as good a time as any to get to know the girl better and dragged Neville with her over to use as a prop.

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Three other slytherins had joined their smaller group by the time Hera started to feel claustrophobic with all the people surrounding her. As Neville was currently engaged in a strange discussion concerning plants, potions, and astronomy, she felt it safe to leave him there in search of a place to breathe and relax for a little while, simply people watching.

Finding a corner after having taken a platter of nibbles and another drink she sat half hidden in an alcove half a level above most of the other guests, which gave her an excellent view of nearly the whole room. It was mesmerising seeing all the twirling dancers in their finery, the gold dust that’d coated the rest of the manor now coating them as well. In the light from the hundreds of candles floating, as well as the chandeliers, it looked like a dream.

For a moment she felt a sliver of fear tingle down her spine, the vision in front of her, her life right now, feeling too good to be true. The irrational fear that she’d wake up any second once more on Privet Drive with only pain and misery to look forward to.

She tried desperately hard to push those thoughts away, and half succeeded, the feeling of discontent still clouding her mind on the fringes.

A polite cough from behind her affectively cleared her mind though.

Nearly jumping a mile into the air, she turned to see who, not to mention where this person had come
from, sparks of magic flying out from surprise before she got control over it.

The amused smirk of one Lord Corvinus “Tom” Anastasi was not what she was expecting.

“How did you get here?” The seclusion had Hera completely forgetting about formalities, not that she’d ever actually felt the need to be formal with Tom to begin with.

“The normal way – walking.” Hera rolled her eyes before turning back towards the guests, focusing on them rather than the overpowering presence behind her. She was rather surprised she hadn’t sensed him before he’d spoken, as his magic aura swirled around them nearly tangible as he moved to stand next to her.

“I wasn’t aware you were going to be here tonight.” Hera continued to keep her eyes focused on the people in front of her, her tone purposefully light. She didn’t know why she suddenly felt so conflicted about his presence, but she didn’t really have the time to analyze that right now.

“I don’t see why not, as the Malfoys are good friends. And it would never do to be on the bad side of Lady Malfoy.”

Hera snorted. “Tell me about it. I once tried to disagree on a robe choice just to see what would happen, and while her face didn’t change, quite frankly her aura terrified me more than you ever did while actively trying to kill me.”

“I feel as if I should be insulted, but must concede that she is a formidable opponent.”

Hera peeked up at his face. “Well to be fair, you weren’t really at your best during any of those times.”

He simply hmmd, tilting his head in admission.

“I’m glad we’ve got the oath though. You’d grind me to dust in a matter of moments if I had to go up against you now. I wouldn’t even have time to be afraid.”

His expression turned contemplative. “I wouldn’t discredit you so quickly. Magically speaking you’re surprisingly powerful for your age.”

“So, I’d last more than a few moments is what you’re saying?” Her tone turned playful.

Fortunately, he seemed to be in an agreeable mood too. “Oh, most certainly. You’d make rather enchanting dust too, particularly in those lovely robes of yours.”

Hera felt her cheeks redden at the unexpected compliment, suddenly feeling uncommonly shy. Going by the amused smirk on his face Hera assumed that’d been his goal for some reason.

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t destroy me with this dress please, even if it’d certainly be worthy of Gryffindor, all red and gold glitter.” Tom snorted. “But Lady Malfoy would probably kill you for ruining the robes, then resurrect me just to kill me again for allowing you to.”

His chuckle sounded surprisingly raspy, causing her to look at him fully. She’d never heard it like that before.

“As you wish.” His smile was enigmatic, though tinged with something, wistful? She felt it more than she could see it, somehow, but it was there, and it made her almost worried. He wasn’t supposed to have feelings like that.
“Has something happened? You seem; off, somehow.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Off?”

Squinting her eyes at him she felt the wistfulness disappear, as if walls were being put back in place. Feeling oddly bereft she minutely shook her head to clear the cobwebs and turned back towards the oblivious crowd.

“Maybe it’s just your general weirdness I’m picking up on. Either way, how did you manage to sneak up on me? Usually you’re just so, so there. Even idiots know, which given your, eh, minions that’s probably a good thing?”

“Indeed.” His tone was rather dry. “It has been useful in the past, as you say. However it’s absolutely useless if you ever wish to go unnoticed. Perhaps you’ve noticed how people always seem to stare at you everywhere you go?”

“Well yeah, but I always assumed it was the scar?”

“That tiny thing? You hide it behind your hair more often than not I’ve noticed, so hardly. It’s your magical presence, my dear.”

“Huh.” She’d never thought of that before, but him saying it made it seem so obvious.

“As you can easily sense others I’m going to assume you have a rather good grasp of your own magic yes?”

“I thought so at least.”

“You do.”

“Yes Sir.”

He gave her a look and she dialed back her sass a few notches, smiling sheepishly. Satisfied with her compliance for now, he continued.

“It’s really a simple matter of manipulating what you already have. Cloaking it much like you do in legilimency. You have been given legilimency lessons, yes?”

Hera nodded. She’d had a few lessons with both Lucius and Narcissa during her stays at the Manor, and had the basics down.

“Excellent. Imagine your magic as contained in a snow-globe, an unshaken one. Clear and calm and a part of the décor, in a sense.”

Oh, that’s easy. She knew how to do that. She did that everytime the Dursleys had company – hiding in her bedroom, or well cupboard, making no noise and pretending not to exist. This’d be a piece of cake. Closing her eyes a moment to focus inside of herself she felt the nothingness well over her.

Judging by the stiffening of Tom’s shoulders she’d apparently succeeded rather instantly. It made her feel giddy. She was definitely going to use this to prank Draco before they had to return to Hogwarts. She didn’t have long til her giddy bubble was burst however.

“It would seem that you’ve done this before Hera.” It was his turn to narrow his eyes at her, although much more subtly than she had done towards him. Obviously he was implying that he wanted an
explanation. Hera simultaneously did and didn’t feel inclined to indulge him.

She decided to go with half the truth.

“It was a coping method for when I didn’t want to deal with the Dursleys. Like meditation. It was very soothing.” She smiled guilelessly up at him, knowing full well it probably wouldn’t work. It was good practice though, Narcissa would be proud of her progress.

He didn’t push the issue though, despite once more narrowing his eyes at her before hm’ing and looking back out towards the colourful mass.

Hera was grateful he didn’t push it. She didn’t want to sully this wonderful evening with their memory.

They ended up staying in that alcove for a while longer, chatting of this and that, practicing their small talk against each other. Or well, Hera practicing, Tom indulging her for some reason.

Eventually though he gently shoved her out from the alcove and into reality again, disappearing before she could rain her irritation down upon him. Sighing in frustration she rolled her eyes, before beginning to look for people she knew.

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The rest of the break disappeared in a blur, though she did manage to master new/old skill and scare the bejeseesus out of Draco.

That’d been a fun day.

Now however they were all back in Hogwarts, classes had commenced, and she was once more forced to think about the Triwizard Tournament. Mostly because Hermione wouldn’t shut up about it.

Hera understood that it came from a place of worry, and wanting to be as prepared as possible. But Hera just really really didn’t want to deal with issue at any moment, and every time she thought about it she felt her motivation flee, and a as if a black hole had opened up inside her chest resulting in her not wanting to do anything whatsoever.

Suffice it to say Hera’s procrastination had never been stronger.

She knew she’d reached the end of Hermione’s rope when there was only a month left until the second task and Viktor Krum of all people asked to speak with her while she was studying in the library with her newfound Slytherin acquaintances.

“So how can I help you?” Despite knowing how chummy her best friend was with the quidditch star Hera still felt rather awkward talking to him.

“Hermy-own is much stressed over your lack of progress, and she not happy. As I wish only to see her happy, I tell you how to hear clue. Dunk egg in water and listen, perhaps better luck then.” With that he inclined his head towards her in farewell, before clicking his heels together and marching off.
Probably back to wherever Hermione was holing up.

Going back to the others, all she felt at first was amusement, and relief at having to deal even less with the egg now.

Then a frown slowly grew upon her face.

Why had Hermione gone and told Krum about her lack of progress? Sure she was more stressed about it than Hera was, but there was still a month before the actual due date. Plenty of time to not stress about it, then overly stress about it like she usually did with her exams.

And while Hera had no intentions of even trying to win, Krum was still the competition. She still wanted to have a fake air of competence going on. Hermione had completely destroyed that to Krum, and the betrayal stung. Hermione was hers first, her loyalty should be to her first and foremost.

A squirming mass of dark disquiet sat heavy in the pit of her stomach for the rest of the week.

However, everytime Hera was with Hermione, she couldn’t muster up the courage to confront her about it.

Because she saw how relaxed Hermione was now compared to before, and the disquiet had been joined by guilt for causing so much extra stress in her best friend.

It still took her two weeks before she opened the egg like Krum recommended.

She’d borrowed the prefects bathroom, password obtained from Draco as she didn’t want Hermione knowing how long she’d waited, and had sat relaxing in the bath a long time before finally opening the egg once more. She made the mistake of first opening it in the air, promptly remembered why that was a bad idea, then dropped it into the water to hopefully muffle the shrieking. She then finally understood why Krum told her to dunk the egg into the water, as what had sounded like shrieking in the air had turned into beautiful singing under water.

It was still muffled though, even if she could vaguely interpret some of the words said, so she dunked her head underwater as well, and felt her heart sink at what was said.

She didn’t have a good feeling about the coming task. She didn’t exactly know what they’ll take that she’ll sorely miss, but having only an hour to find it before it seemingly disappeared forever was not her idea of fun.

Hopefully they wouldn’t take her broom.

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They didn’t take her broom.

When both Hermione and Neville had disappeared the day of the task she had the sinking feeling that it wouldn’t be things they were swimming to get.

Seeing the frantic looks on the other champions faces as they looked around seemingly searching for someone she knew without a shadow of a doubt that somehow they were at the bottom of the Black Lake.
Squishing around the gillyweed in her hand she thought back to the very strange conversation she’d heard between Neville and Professor Moody after one of their Defence lessons specifically talking about herbology uses in terrain survival, gillyweed being particularly useful underwater. She was fairly positive that Moody had had that conversation specifically for her benefit, and probably thought that Neville would tell her about it. Being on semi-good terms with Professor Snape however allowed her to easily ask him about it, which lead to him telling her to return the day before the task and he’d have the plant ready for her in a much more palatable form than its natural state. Still somewhat unused to normal human decency from the dour man she simply thanked him and half fled his presence, to lessen the chance of unintentionally irritating the Professor.

It worked, she got the gillyweed, and now she stood with the other champions facing the very cold looking water, trying not to shiver apart as the icy winds whipped around them. Not listening at all to whoever was announcing the task, focusing instead on what spells she knew and the best way to deal with the less than pleasant merpeople, she nearly jumped out of her skin when the whistle blew, signaling the task had begun.

Quickly swallowing down the slimy seaweed tasting plant, Hera really hoped Professor Snape still wasn’t secretly out to get her and dived into the water as she felt the changes to her anatomy begin to take place.

The first shock of the cold water knocked the breath out of her, but as it quickly grew warmer, thanks to the gillyweed, she began to relax and let herself sink downwards while taking a cautious breath out of her newly formed gills. Satisfied that they worked and she wasn’t going to drown, she closed her eyes and focused her magic outwards to try and get a sense of where her friends could be hidden under the water, a bit like the echolocation bats or submarines used.

Feeling a magical blip on her radar in the opposite direction from the floating raft most of the school’s population currently stood on, Hera shot through the water in that direction, her now webbed hands and feet excellent for propelling her forward.

Swimming by kelp forests and schools of fishes of far more species than she ever expected to find in this lake (she wondered how many were of magical ilk), she heard the distant wail of the squid when she started to pass by underwater buildings, presumably belonging to the merpeople. There were no merpeople in sight, however she still adjusted her course a bit closer to the surface just in case to avoid them should they randomly appear.

She spent the next ten minutes swimming just out of sight of the village beneath her, still not encountering anyone, when she finally spotted four floating shapes ahead of her, and she began pumping her arms and legs even harder to get there faster. It still took her a while, the gillyweed giving her better eyesight underwater than she’d expected. Reaching the eerily floating bodies Hera took a moment to regain her metaphorical breath before properly looking at the hostages in front of her.

When she did focus on them the sight gave her chills, everyone looking rather more dead than alive in the murky lighting of the lake, what looked like seaweed wrapped around their legs to keep them from floating up. Their lack of breathing caused a spike of anxiety to shoot through her before she took a calming breath.

While she logically knew that they obviously hadn’t been killed prior to being put here, she still didn’t know exactly what enchantments had been put on them and she didn’t like it one bit. She wondered if their guardians knew about them being underwater, or if they’d just taken them without bothering to ask. She at least hoped they’d asked for consent before enchanting them. If not, she was sure Lady Longbottom would raise hell for the sake of her grandson, and she’d gladly help
Hermione and any of the others if they wished to make a formal complaint.

But all of that was irrelevant right now. She wasn’t sure how much time had passed since the whistle had blown, but dawdling despite being there first was not in her plans.

Taking out her wand she first carefully aimed it at the seaweed holding Hermione’s body down, and was about to say the severing charm when her magic alerted her to an oncoming projectile and she shifted to the right whilst twirling around to face the oncoming threat. Whatever it was still nicked the side of her arm, and it stung badly causing her to hiss in pain and her magic to flair out dangerously at the merpeople now in front of her.

“What the bloody hell was that for?!?” She hissed through clenched teeth while trying to shake of the numbness in her left arm. “You could’ve hit one of them!” She gestured wildly behind her, but kept her eyes on the hostiles in front of her.

“She is not yours to take human.” The one to the right rasps at her, the voice very different from the one in the golden egg.

Hera frowns. “She’s my friend too, how can you exp-“

At that moment Krum comes shooting in with the face of a shark and bites off the seaweed holding Hermione, swiftly bringing her up to the surface without even a glance at Hera.

Hera’s face went flat. “Guess that answers that question.” She mumbles. She really needed to get better at constantly being aware of magicals in her environment. Ideally, she would have felt Krum coming from a mile away, and now that she was focusing on it could feel him up by the surface now moving towards the docks.

She could also feel two more magical signatures further out by the village, one moving closer but the other staying curiously somewhat still. She could also sense what she thought were merpeople, milling about by the lake floor. And also in a concentrated group by the second signature.

Oh. That probably wasn’t good.

Shifting to move towards the other signature she was quickly stopped by the two creatures in front of her, poking their weapons at her. She tried swimming around them again but they continued blocking her off, being quicker and much more agile in the water.

Growling in frustration Hera asked why they wouldn’t let her pass.

“You shall retrieve your human, then leave. That is what they promised us.”

Baring her teeth in frustration Hera decided to simply wait and hope the other signature managed to get away.

When Cedric arrived and retrieved Cho Chang, giving Hera a confused look as to why she was seemingly having a stand off with two gremlin looking seapeople, she finally decided to check the time to see how much her and Fleur had left. The sudden use of magic spooked her guards, but fortunately they didn’t throw anything at her again. Her arm still felt funny after the first scratch she got.

Seeing that they only had ten minutes left however did not raise her spirits one iota. When Fleur’s magical signal started to feel even fainter resignation filled Hera as she realized what she’d have to do.
She wasn’t leaving without either Neville or the tiny blonde-haired child next to him.

Subtly looking around her to see if she could use her environment to her advantage, she felt dismay at how open the water was around them. Nothing to cause a landslide or anything. She needed a distraction, something to camouflage her movements long enough for her to get away with the two hostages. She didn’t have long to decide though as she felt a mass of alien signatures start making their way towards their location. Gathering all her courage, and power, she decided it was now or never and rapidly cast the largest *Incendio* she could in the direction of the merpeople, then hoping her aim was true shot a *Diffindo* at the seaweed holding her fellow humans down.

The fire had caused exactly the diversion she’d hoped, a mass of bubbles as it was near immediately put out, and the two hostages began floating up with ease as Hera grabbed them and began swimming for dear life, throwing more *Incendio* spells behind her to propel them faster up.

She felt another slice as one of their weapons must have hit her foot, but quickly forgot about it and few moments later when they breached the surface and the two others began spluttering and gasping for air.

“You ok Nev?” She couldn’t help but ask once he’d gotten his color back. He only nodded while continuing to cough a bit. Asking the little blonde one the same thing she too nodded before all three of them began swimming back towards the raft that was floating out to greet them.

Smiling in relief over having made it, as well as feeling the gillyweed slowly wear off, she began to notice how tired she felt the closer they got to the others, Neville helping the tiny blonde next to them.

As she began to struggle more and more, she realised it must have something to do with the cuts she’d gotten underwater as both her arm and foot now felt completely numb. Her vision began to tunnel, the darkness inching in faster than she liked. Fortunately though she managed to pull herself onto the platform of the raft before the darkness took her, her ears ringing so loudly she did not hear the cries of alarm sounding all around her.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait again, but I hope the extra long chapter may have compensated just a teensy bit. Hopefully.

But wow you guys this fic has gotten so many more kudos than I ever imagined, and I’m so thankfully for every single one of you reading, liking and commenting one here, even if I’m absent alot.

As we’re slowly inching our way towards 1000 kudos I was think that I’d do something special then, either an extra EXTRA long chapter, maybe a chapter in following someone else's pov, or perhaps maybe even a mini ficlet or something connected? I’d be more than happy to take requests, and do whatever's most popular (and maybe even a few more on top of that!) so if you have any ideas/wishes/wants just let me know either by commenting here or sending a message on my tumblr maevifey.tumblr.com (if you want it more private).

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, and I'll do my best to not keep you guys waiting as long til next time!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!