Magical Metamorphosis

by Eon_the_Dragon_Mage

Summary

Concerned when Hermione sleeps late, Harry decides to check on her and climbs the Gryffindor Girls' Stairs. This begins a journey of self-exploration and transition for Harry as she blossoms into her true self. Transgender Characters. Trans Girl!Harry Potter.
Harry grinned to himself as he idly strolled through Diagon Alley, eagerly taking in the sights. Every time he came into the Alley, he saw something new and wonderful. His feet took him on the familiar path towards Quality Quidditch Supplies, to stare longingly at the beautiful Firebolt on display.

As approached the store there was a shout and a bang. Harry barely had time to dive out of the way as a giant cauldron rolling dangerously down the road, chased by a red-faced man in bright orange robes. Picking himself up and shaking his head, Harry brushed the dust from his robes. As he looked up, his breath caught in his throat.

He stood before a window display, containing a beautiful collection of jewellery. They reflected the light in a way that was almost hypnotising. Without conscious thought, he found himself approaching the door and entering the store.

Instead of the expected sound of a bell or chimes, soft flute music played as he stepped inside. He looked around, feeling dazed as he took in the rainbow of metal and jewels surrounding him. He was startled from his reverie by a friendly voice.

“What can I help you with, dearie?”

His gaze snapped around to see an older woman smiling at her. Her face was creased with lines that hinted at a lifetime of laughter. A beautiful set of opal earrings dangled from her ears with a matching necklace sitting atop her simple robes. She beckoned Harry closer, and his eyes caught on the simple gold band adorning her wrist. Licking his strangely dry lips, he approached her.

“How are we looking for anything in particular today, sweetheart?” the witch – who he supposed was the shopkeeper – asked warmly. Swallowing, Harry shook his head mutely. ‘Well, why don’t you have a look around. If you see anything you like, feel free to try it on. I’ll be around if you need me.” With that she turned and floated away through the displays.

Blinking, Harry shook himself. With a small smile after the strangely cheerful lady, he looked around, slowly making his way through the rows of jewellery. There was ring with stones that continuously shifting colour in a hypnotising rainbow. There was a silver necklace fashioned after a snake biting its own tail, whose eyes followed Harry. He hurried past. He admired a set of earrings depicting the sun. Looking closer, he saw they each had several small planets orbiting them.

Turning, his eyes locked onto a glint of gold, and he knew he needed it. There sat a beautiful necklace of gold chain, upon which sat a golden Snitch. It was smaller than the real thing, with wings that looked terribly fragile. He reached out gently with a finger to stroke one, marvelling at the feathery metal.
“Would you like to try it on, dear?”

Harry jumped, whirling to face the shopkeeper. Her smile seemed even wider, and her eyes danced with a hint of mischief. Swallowing again, he stammered, “N-no, that’s okay. I’m just looking.”

The lady gave a considering hum. “Are you sure? It seems rather appropriate for you. You are the youngest Seeker in a century, after all.” She laughed at the surprised expression on Harry’s face. “Yes, I know who you are, dearie. Now come, try it on at least once.” Stepping forward, she lifted the necklace from the display and looked at him expectantly.

Feeling rather off balance, Harry nodded slowly. “Okay.” As she held the necklace out to him, he blushed. “I can’t- I don’t know how to…”

With an understanding smile, the lady stepped behind him, placing the chain gently around his neck. The Snitch settled against his throat as he felt the clasp close behind him.

“It looks lovely on you,” the witch said warmly. “Here.” She turned him to face a nearby mirror. He stared at his reflection, at the delicate golden ball resting against his throat. At the way the thin chain made his neck look different in a way he couldn’t describe, but made his face feel warm.

“Now you just need…” The shopkeeper bustled away for a moment, swiftly returning with a golden bracelet. “This will match perfectly,” she said confidently, taking his hand and slipping the band on his wrist. “Enchanted to fit any wrist, and only come off when you want,” she added proudly.

Harry raised his hand, feeling the strange weight on his wrist. The gold glinted in the mirror. ‘It does match,’ he thought dazedly. Shaking himself once more, he looked at the beaming witch. “Um, how much do these cost?” he asked nervously.

“Seven galleons,” she replied. Harry paused, looking down in thought. That seemed very expensive, as much as a wand. Glancing back to the mirror, his found his fingers tracing the delicate wings on the Snitch. Finally, he decided he could splurge just a little. ‘Especially after my restraint with the Firebolt.’

He fished through his pockets for the money, counting the coins out before handing them over. She took them with a smile, before pulling out her wand. “I need to remove the Anti-Theft Alarm charm,” she said, taking his hand and tapping the bracelet. “You don’t need everyone in the Alley staring at you now, dear,” she added as she touched the necklace carefully. “You’re all good now. Do you need anything else?”

Harry shook his head, giving her a small smile and wave as he made his way from the store. As he made returned to the Alley, he felt a warm sensation that he couldn’t put a name to. Shaking himself, he made his way along the Alley.

Looking around, he noticed an older wizard staring at him, with a strange expression. Then his eye caught a pair of girls whispering to each other, as one pointed at him. Suddenly, the shopkeeper’s words repeated in his mind – “Everyone in the Alley staring at you…”

He felt his heart suddenly beating fast, and his face felt uncomfortably hot. He sped up, beginning to jog, and then run. His world narrowed and his breathing sounded incredibly loud in his ears. He darted through the Alley into the Leaky Cauldron, barely dodging the other patrons, and slammed the door to his room.

He sank to the floor, gasping for breath. Once his pulse stopped hammering in his ears, he pulled
the bracelet off, and threw it into his trunk. After several minutes of fumbling, he freed the necklace’s clasp, and it joined the bracelet. He shoved them under his robes, before collapsing on his bed, wondering at the fear and shame churning inside him.

Harry deliberately put the jewellery from his mind, and avoided the store for the remainder of his holiday. On the last day before they were to return to Hogwarts, he was relieved to see his friends, Ron and Hermione. They looked good after their respective holidays abroad.

He happily chatted with them about their holidays, and his time spent in the Alley. He didn’t mention the jewellery store, telling himself it just wasn’t important. Once they had caught up, he accompanied them as they finished their shopping. At the Magical Menagerie, Ron got a tonic for Scabbers, his old and sick looking rat, and Hermione got what could arguably be described as a cat.

When they returned to the Leaky Cauldron, they joined the rest of the Weasley family, talking about the upcoming year at Hogwarts and Sirius Black. Later that night, Harry overheard the Weasley parents arguing whether to tell him that Black was after him in particular.

The next morning was a mad rush, as the Weasleys, plus Harry and Hermione piled into the Ministry loaned cars and made their way to King’s Cross Station. Once they entered platform nine and three-quarters, Mr Weasley pulled Harry aside to warn him about Black – he was rather surprised that Harry already knew.

On the train, Harry and his friends found a compartment with a sleeping Professor Lupin, most likely their new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Quietly, he told Ron and Hermione about the threat of Black to him specifically, to their horror.

Hours later, the train slowed to a stop early, before all the lights went out. As they scrambled for their bearings, they were joined by Neville and Ginny. Finally, Professor Lupin awoke, lighting the cabin up with a literal handful of flames. When he moved towards the door, it opened, revealing a cloaked figure.

As the figure breathed in a harsh, rattling breath, Harry felt all warmth leave his body. An itching sense of wrongness crawled across and under his skin. His eyes rolled up in his head, and he distantly heard screaming.

When he awoke, the train was once more lit and moving. After checking he was alright, Professor Lupin handed him chocolate and left. Harry’s friends filled him in on how Professor Lupin had driven away the Dementor.

Upon arriving at Hogwarts, Harry was pulled aside by Professor McGonagall for a check-up by Madam Pomfrey due to fainting, to his annoyance. Hermione was also pulled aside for a talk about her subjects. Once free, they joined the feast, where Dumbledore warned about the dangers of the Dementors. Afterwards, the Gryffindors made their way to the common room, and Harry fell quickly to sleep.

The first class was Divination, which quickly turned out to be terrible. Professor Trelawney was full of dramatic portents and ominous pronouncements. Harry felt ridiculous as they drank tea, and attempted to read signs in the dregs.

“Well,” Ron said as he looked into Harry’s teacup. “I think this thing is a face? It looks sort of broken though, so that means…” Looking through his textbook, he continued, “Uh, your falsehoods will unravel. Whatever that means?”
He turned the cup. “This way it sort of looks like a butterfly, of all things. Which is... a period of many changes. Blimey. And there’s a thing here –” he turned the cup again, “- it looks like an animal. Yeah, if that was its head… it looks like a hippo… no, a sheep…”

Harry snorted with laughter, drawing Professor Trelawney’s attention. The Professor gave several dark omens, culminating with the Grim, an omen of death. Hermione seemed incredibly unimpressed, offering scathing commentary, to the Professor’s displeasure.

A dark cloud followed Harry until their next class, Transfiguration, where Professor McGonagall informed them that Professor Trelawney regularly predicted the death of a student, and all were perfectly healthy.

After lunch, they had Care of Magical Creatures, where a newly minted Professor Hagrid showed them hippogriffs. After Harry approached and rode Buckbeak, Malfoy insulted the proud creature and received a slash across his arm in return.

He didn’t return to class for several days, until Potions, where he was greeted by the Slytherins as a champion. Snape forced Harry and Ron to help Malfoy with his potion, due to his injured arm. Throughout the class, Malfoy needled Harry, implying he should want revenge against Black. Snape singled out Neville for his abysmal potion, threatening to test it on his pet toad, Trevor, with likely fatal results. He was only saved by Hermione's whispered instructions, though it cost Gryffindor points from the vindictive Potions Master.

During their next class, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Professor Lupin led them to the staff room, where Snape belittled Neville. Professor Lupin defended the boy, to which Snape sneered before leaving. The Defence Professor then informed them they would be learning and facing about a Boggart. Once Hermione had explained the creature’s ability to shapeshift into the fear of those it faced, Professor Lupin revealed its weakness – laughter.

After teaching them the spell *riddikulus* to force the Boggart into a humorous form, he ushered Neville forward. The timid boy revealed his greatest fear was Professor Snape, to the class’ amusement. Professor Lupin then spent several minutes guiding Neville through the mental image of forcing the Snape-Boggart into a copy of his grandmother’s clothes.

As they put their plan into motion, the class laughed uproariously. Harry grinned along, but felt a strange tightness in his chest as the Snape-Boggart looked around, confused. Before he could identify the feeling, Parvati was called forward, the Boggart changed, and the class continued.

Thinking about his worst fear, Harry considered Voldemort, before settling on the Dementor. The memory of horrible feeling of cold and wrongness it evoked caused him to shudder. As his turn approached he failed to think of a way to make a Dementor funny. Ultimately, it did not matter, as Professor Lupin stepped between them. The Boggart became a glowing sphere, before Neville was called forward to banish it permanently. Harry left the class feeling pensive.

Weeks passed and classes fell into a familiar rhythm. Defence was among the most popular subjects, filled with lessons on fascinating Dark creatures. Potions continued to be a chore under Snape’s gimlet eye and Harry came to dread Divination with Professor Trelawney.

Quidditch practice resumed, Wood now more obsessed than ever with winning the Quidditch Cup for his final year. Harry greatly enjoyed the chance to fly again. He felt alive on a broom, the wind blowing through his hair. When he practiced with the Snitch, however, his mind kept wandering to the necklace he had bought. It took Oliver threatening him with one of the Weasley twin’s Beater bats to restore his focus.
Soon, announcements were posted for the first Hogsmeade weekend. Harry was less than enthused, as his lack of signature from the Dursleys prevented him joining his friends. At Ron’s urging, he approached Professor McGonagall after their Transfiguration class, to ask her permission. His Head of House seemed slightly regretful, but denied the request. He returned to the Common Room defeated and collapsed into his bed early.

With a stretch and a yawn, Harry kicked off his blankets and lazily reached for his glasses. Rolling out of bed he plodded to the bathroom. After splashing water on his face he paused at the mirror, taking in his appearance. He looked much the same as always. The only real difference he noticed was how long his hair had grown, now reaching passed his ears. He couldn’t help but grin at that. ‘Aunt Petunia would throw a fit,’ he thought with glee. He had never been allowed to grow his hair out at all, and now his minor act of rebellion felt rewarded.

Returning to his trunk, he pulled out a clean set of robes. A flash of light glinted from beneath his clothes as something shifted into view. His eyes instinctively snapped to the reflection, resting on the gold bracelet. He’d almost forgotten it. Hesitantly, he reached down and pulled it out. A thin chain was tangled around it, and as he lifted the band, the small Snitch necklace came too.

His vision blurred at the edges, and he realised he was holding his breath. Forcing air into his lungs, he shook his head and put the jewellery on his bed, and quickly changing into his robes. He paused, looking at his recent purchases and biting at his lip in a moment of indecision. After a long moment, he drew in a deep breath, steeled his Gryffindor courage and picked them up. ‘I bought them; I might as well wear them.’ He slipped a band of gold around his wrist, enjoying the way the morning light reflected off it as he turned it. Then he slipped a necklace around his neck, taking a second to settle the Snitch shaped charm over his robes.

Harry felt a strange thrill run through him as he looked down at them, then felt incredibly silly. ‘It’s just some simple jewellery, why am I nervous? People wear stuff like this all the time, it’s fine.’ Shaking his head at how ridiculous he was being, he wandered over to poke Ron awake.

“Five mo’ minutes,” came the slurred reply. When further prodding simply made Ron hide under his pillow, Harry rolled his eyes and headed for the door.

“If you’re not up in ten, I’m sending Hermione up after you.” He grinned at Ron’s muffled moan of horror – the last time he’d done that, it had ended with a cursing, dripping wet Weasley chasing a laughing Hermione around the Common Room.

Harry glanced around as he reached the Common Room, frowning at the absence of his bushy haired friend. ‘That’s weird,’ he thought. ‘Usually she’d be awake by this time.’ He settled on the arm of one of the red couches to wait. He was glad that it was the weekend now, and he could spend the day with his friends. It would help to distract from the disappointment of Professor McGonagall refusing to sign his Hogsmeade form.

Looking up from his thoughts, he spotted Neville passing by. He called out to him, “Hey Neville, how’re you doing?”

Jerking around to look at him, the round faced boy said, “Oh hi, Harry. I’m alright. How have you been?”

Harry gave a shrug. “I’m fine.”

Neville nodded agreeably, and then hesitated. “So, umm… that’s a nice necklace you’re wearing. Does it mean anything special?”
Harry glanced down at the small golden ball, nervously touching it. His face grew hot for some reason. “Ah, no. No, it doesn’t mean anything. I just felt like it, is all.”

“Oh, okay,” Neville said cautiously. “Well it looks good on you, anyway.”

Harry smiled at him, wondering at the sudden burst of warmth he felt. “Thanks, Neville.”

With a final nod and small smile, Neville continued out of the Common Room. Harry looked back over to the girls’ stairs, just as Parvati and Lavender descending them. Hopping up, he gave them a wave and hurried over. “Uh, hey Parvati, Lavender, is Hermione still up there?”

The girls gave him a smile, Lavender nodding helpfully. “Yeah, she was still in bed when we were getting ready,” she said brightly.

Harry frowned at that. Even on weekends, Hermione rarely slept in. After a moment of hesitation, Harry nodded to himself. “Alright, thank you. I’m going to check on her.”

He started up the stairs briskly, oblivious to the sudden shocked expressions on the girls’ faces. Keeping his eye out for the door labelled for Third Years, he reached the top of the tower. Knocking on it firmly, he called, “Hermione, are you okay in there?”

He waited, and after several seconds was rewarded by the faint sounds of sheets. He turned away from the door, just in case. A moment later the door opened.

“Harry!?” He jerked at the incredulity – and volume – of Hermione’s voice. “What are you doing here!?”

He turned back towards her without thinking, catching a glimpse of her dressing gown, before hurriedly turning away again. “I just wanted to check you were alright. You’re usually up way earlier than this, is all.”

There was a long silence, before Hermione finally said, “Harry. You can’t be up here.”

Harry winced and started quickly down the stairs. “Sorry, sorry! I didn’t know that was a rule.”

“Wait, that’s not-” Hermione cut off, and Harry heard the sound of the door closing behind him. He hurried back into the Common Room, where he spotted Ron sitting on the same couch Harry had used earlier. Ron looked at him curiously as he approached. “What’s the matter?”

Harry shook his head and sighed, slumping down next to him. “I didn’t know there was a rule about us going up there.” He nodded towards the stairs to the Girls’ Dormitory, where a ruffled looking Hermione had appeared, wearing a determined expression. “Hope she’s not too upset about it.”

The two of them stood as Hermione approached, looking in rather a state. Her hair was bushier than normal and her robes looked slightly crushed. Harry winced, realising she had rushed through getting ready because of him. Before he could say anything she asked, “How did you do that?”

Harry shared a confused glance with Ron. “Um, how did I do what?”

Hermione huffed as if he was being particularly thick, putting her hands on her hips. “How did you get up the stairs, Harry? They should have activated by the third step at least.”

Harry was feeling more and more confused by the second. “I don’t know what you’re on about Hermione. I just walked up them.”
She huffed again. “That’s impossible, Harry. They’re charmed to prevent any boys going up them.”

Harry shared another confused look with Ron. “Then how did I get up there?”

“That’s what I just asked you!” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands in irritation.

“Maybe the enchantment wore off,” Ron offered tentatively, before cringing at the glare Hermione gave him.

“It’s been there since the Founders, Ronald! It wouldn’t just wear off!”

Ron stood with a stubborn expression. “Well why don’t we just see,” he said, and marched over to the Girls’ stairs. Pausing to make sure Hermione was watching, he began climbing the stairs. He reached the sixth step before the stairs melted together into a smooth ramp and a loud, wailing alarm filled the air. Harry winced as Ron went ass over teakettle to the bottom of the stairs. He and Hermione hurried over to help him up, even as others in the room chuckled.

As they dusted Ron off, Harry glanced at Hermione. “So if the enchantment’s still working, why didn’t it affect me?”

Hermione stared into the distance with a thoughtful look on her face. "He shouldn't... but what if... maybe..." She shook her head and turned to them. “Harry, try the stairs again.”

Harry looked at the current slide, then at Ron, before shrugging and placing his foot against the slope. After a moment, the klaxon fell silent and the slide morphed back into a step before them. Looking back to Hermione in confusion, Harry withdrew his foot. “So what does this mean?”

Hermione chewed at her lip, looking torn. “Let’s sit down,” she said eventually, leading them over to the couches. When Harry and Ron were seated, looking confused and slightly impatient, she sighed. “Alright Harry, please just listen and let me finish. I just remembered something I learned about once before coming to Hogwarts. There was a newspaper article, about someone who was born a man, but was living as a woman. The story intrigued me, since I’d never heard of such a thing before, so I went to the library to learn more. I discovered that it was not simply a once of thing, there are lots of people like that. The actual term for it is transgender. People who are transgender typically experience a sense of their body being wrong, known as dysphoria. It is frequently described as feeling like ‘being born in the wrong body’, or feeling like parts of themselves are missing."

Harry suddenly found it oddly hard to breathe, as something long buried in his mind had just clicked. Distantly, he heard his friends talking. “Wait, are you saying you think Harry’s a tran-whatever-the-hell?”

“Transgender, Ron. I don’t know. I think it’s more likely than the Founders’ magic making a mistake and identifying Harry as girl.”

“But then why has Harry never said anything about those sorts of feelings, huh?”

“Because I wasn’t allowed to,” said a voice, sounding incredibly loud to Harry’s ears. It took him a moment to realise it had been his own.

Ron and Hermione turned to Harry, who stared resolutely down at his clenched fists. He found the words pouring out of him, as if a dam had broken. “I never knew there was a word for it. I always thought I was just a freak. The Dursleys hated me talking about it, or doing anything that seemed like it, so I just stopped.”
“Oh, Harry!” Hermione threw her arms around him, as Ron’s face took on a mixture of horror and confusion.

“So you’re saying you think you’re one of these transgenders?” Ron asked incredulously, before hurriedly adding, “Not that I think that makes you a freak or anything!”

Harry let out a sigh as Hermione released him and pulled back, though she took his hands into hers. “I don’t know. It sounds kind of like what I’ve felt, but I don’t know if that’s actually what I am.”

“The books I read said that people who think they are transgender should try experimenting with expressing their gender,” Hermione said, running her thumb over the back of Harry’s hand. “Trying things associated with the gender you feel like. And if they feel right, if they make the dysphoria feel less, then it’s probably right and you’re probably transgender.”

“So he should try on a bunch of makeup and dresses and stuff and see if he likes it?” Ron asked slightly incredulously, looking between his two friends.

“If Harry wants to,” Hermione replied simply. “Harry can try dresses and makeup and even jewellery, if that’s what Harry feels like.” She moved her hand to touch the bracelet Harry was wearing, and looked up at Snitch necklace. Harry pulled his hands back, covering the accessories self-consciously.

“Even if we say I am transgender,” Harry said carefully, “what does it matter? I don’t want to just throw on a dress and makeup. I’d look stupid and wrong.”

“The Muggle world has ways of helping transgender people look like the gender they feel they are,” Hermione answered gently. “There’s medication they can take and surgeries they can have. And surely there’s something we can do with magic that would be even better than what they can offer. Healing magic works miracles by Muggle standards.”

Despite her reassuring tone, Harry was even more nervous. “That sounds like a lot of things to do for something we’re still not sure about, Hermione.”

She nodded and said, “Let’s start by trying easy, temporary stuff first. For example, how does this feel? Harry Potter is a girl. She is my friend and I want her to be happy.”

Harry’s breathing hitched and tears appeared in his eyes. That had felt so incredibly right. He turned away quickly, swiping at them irritably.

“Blimey,” breathed Ron, watching wide-eyed. “You really are a transgender aren’t you?”

Harry took several steadying breaths, nodding slowly. “I think so. I- I’m a girl,” she said, with a shaky smile at her friends. “Oh Merlin, I’m a girl.” Hermione squeezed her hand, and she laughed softly. “It feels nice to be able to finally say it.”

“Alright,” said Ron, his shocked look fading into determination, “what should we do about it?”

Without thinking, Holly looked at Hermione, who squeezed her hand. “I think we should go see Professor McGonagall.”

The trio arrived at the Great Hall in record time, having barely refrained from running through the halls. A glance at the Staff table revealed Professor McGonagall mid-conversation with Flitwick. Harry was torn between immediately marching up to speak with her, and fleeing the Hall entirely. At Hermione’s prompting, they instead sat down to quickly eat breakfast. Harry found her gaze
drifting, constantly checking to make sure Professor McGonagall was still there.

“Do you really think she can help?” she asked, practically vibrating with nervous energy.

Wiping her mouth on a napkin, Hermione replied, “She’s the best place to start. She’s our Head of House, and Transfiguration could have some spell that does what we need. And even if she can’t do anything directly, she can help find someone who can.”

“‘Sides,” Ron added, through half a mouthful, ‘someone’ll probably tell her about the stairs this morning, and she’ll want to know about it.”

“Assuming she doesn’t already,” Hermione said, while pointedly looking away from Ron.

When Professor McGonagall began moving from the Hall, Harry shot to her feet and quickly moved to intercept her, with Ron and Hermione following close behind. The Head of Gryffindor House raised an eyebrow as she turned to meet them.

“Could I talk to you a moment, please Professor?”

She gave a small sigh. "I already told you I can't sign your form Mr Potter."

Harry swallowed and shook her head. "Actually, we'd like to talk about something else... privately, please.” She glanced around at the nearby tables, causing several people to look away quickly. She shuddered at the thought of having this conversation in public.

Professor McGonagall gave her a searching look, glancing over Hermione and Ron as well, before nodding. “Very well. Come along then.” The trio followed her to her office, Harry becoming more nervous with each step. She jerked in surprise when Ron placed a steadying hand on her shoulder.

“Easy, Harry. It’ll be alright.” She took a deep breath and nodded, even as Hermione took her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze.

When they arrived at Professor McGonagall’s office, she ushered them in, following behind. The door automatically closed behind her. She moved behind her desk, swishing her wand to produce additional chairs for the trio.

“Now, what did you wish to speak to me about?”

Harry opened her mouth, but no words came out. She threw a helpless glance at Hermione, who nodded understandingly and turned to the Professor.

“This morning, I was woken up by Harry knocking on my dormitory door.”

Professor McGonagall stared at her blankly for a moment, before frowning. “I see. If the enchantment on the stairwell has failed, that is indeed concerning. We can have a look to see if we can restore-”

“I’m sorry, Professor,” Hermione said. Professor McGonagall looked thoroughly shocked at being interrupted by Hermione Granger of all people. “But we already tested with Ron, and the enchantment did work when he tried them.”

“And it hurt like buggery when I hit the ground too,” Ron complained quietly to Harry, making her hide a smile.

Professor McGonagall’s lips pressed thin as she listened to Hermione, before looking at Ron and
then Harry. She rested her arms on the table, folded her hands and raised an expectant eyebrow. “I assume you know something I do not?”

Hermione flushed slightly at the subtle rebuke. “I remembered something I read about from before I came to Hogwarts. There are people who are called transgender. They are born with the body of the opposite gender to what they truly are. It was described as being an intensely uncomfortable feeling towards one’s own body.”

After a moment, Professor McGonagall’s other eyebrow joined the first. “And what, besides the staircase, makes you believe Potter is… transgender?” Professor McGonagall asked.

Harry took a deep breath, wrapping her arms around herself protectively. “Everything feels wrong.” She winced at the quaver in her voice. “It hurts every time someone calls me ‘Sir’ or ‘Mister’ or ‘Boy’. I look at girls and I’m so jealous. I want to be able to look like them and act like them and dress like them without being laughed at or yelled at or-” She cut herself off and looked away, taking several deep breaths. “I just want to feel comfortable being me.”

She waited, shrinking back in her seat at the Transfiguration Professor’s scrutiny. It grew tenser as the silence drew on, and Professor McGonagall continued to stare at her. Finally, the Professor asked, “Were there any suggestions in the Muggle literature for helping such people?” Harry let out a near-sobbing sigh of relief. Professor McGonagall smiled gently at her. “We will do everything we can to help you, Harry.”

“The literature advises that transgender people be allowed to express their correct gender in what they wear and how they are treated. It also had information on Muggle medical treatments to change hormones, giving them the correct puberty. There are also surgeries available, to change the things hormones can’t. We were hoping that you would know of a Transfiguration that could have the same effects, or better, for Harry.”

Professor McGonagall looked away in thought. “I can’t think of any magics that can do something quite like that. Not truly. Human Transfigurations such as that are only performed by qualified Mediwizards to repair significant damage. You must understand, permanent Transfigurations are immensely rare. All things seek to return to their original state.”

“So there’s nothing you can do,” Harry said heavily, fighting back a sudden wave of tears.

“None of that now,” Professor McGonagall said, conjuring a handkerchief and passing it to her. “I do not currently know any spell that will help, but I can certainly investigate to see if such a spell exists. And even if one does not, there is no reason it cannot be created.”

Harry wiped her eyes, nodding, even as the feeling of disappointment continued to pool in her stomach. Professor McGonagall stood then, gesturing for the trio to do so as well. “Now, I believe, it would be good to consult with Madam Pomfrey. As a fully qualified Mediwitch, she may know more about such matters.”

Harry blinked at her uncomprehendingly for a few seconds, before jumping to her feet, a dizzying rush of excitement and nervousness rushing through her.

Professor McGonagall led them briskly to the Hospital Wing. Harry tried to use the walk to calm herself down. ‘Just relax. You don’t know that she’ll be able to do anything. Stop getting your hopes up.’ She suddenly realised that Hermione was still holding her hand, occasionally giving it a reassuringly squeeze. She gave a tentative smile to her bushy haired friend, and steadied her breathing. ‘I have the best friends in the world,’ she mused, turning her smile towards Ron. He was
Professor McGonagall clearing her throat brought her out of her thoughts, and she realised they had arrived. She reclaimed her hand from Hermione’s grasp and pushed open the doors, squashing down the sudden urge to turn and run and pretend this never happened.

As the trio plus teacher entered the Wing, Madam Pomfrey bustled over. “What have you done to yourself this time, Mr Potter?”

Harry flinched. “I’m not hurt, Madam Pomfrey,” she murmured. The matron paused in confusion then looked to Professor McGonagall, who nodded.

“We are here for a consultation, Poppy, if you aren’t busy right now,” she said. Madam Pomfrey nodded, swiping her wand to send some potion vials on the nearby counter sailing into the cupboard.

“No, I’m not busy at all. Please come into my office.” She led them into her office, which was surprisingly large. As well as a desk and bookshelves, there were several beds, some closets and even an armchair by the fire. She created chairs for them with a quick swipe of her wand. Once they were all settled, she looked to Professor McGonagall expectantly.

The Transfiguration Professor seemed to consider her words before speaking. “Miss Granger here was just telling me about something most fascinating, which she learnt about in the Muggle world. It seems certain people can be born as – what was the term? Transgender? Ah, yes, that was it. People born transgender, who while their bodies are one gender, have the minds of the other. And despite lacking magic, they’ve found ways to treat them, using their medicines to give them bodies that match their mental gender.”

Madam Pomfrey looked both confused and curious. “That does sound rather interesting Minerva, but I must ask what this is about?”

Professor McGonagall smiled. “Well, as it just so happens, this morning, Potter here was able to walk to the top of the Gryffindor girls’ dormitory stairs without the anti-male enchantment activating.”

Madam Pomfrey looked between Professor McGonagall and Harry blankly before it dawned on her. “Oh!” she gasped. “You are transgender then, Mist- Miss Potter?”

Harry felt a blush on her cheeks as she nodded. “Yes, Madam Pomfrey. I’m a girl,” she replied quietly, unable to keep a small smile from her face.

Hermione leaned forward. “We were hoping you knew some spell or potion that would allow Harry to have the correct body for her gender.”

Harry held her breath as Madam Pomfrey looked thoughtful. She felt her heart plummet as the matron shook her head. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know of any magic that can do that. The closest possibilities would be Human Transfiguration, or perhaps some variation of the Polyjuice Potion, but neither of those would be a permanent solution.”

Harry slumped in her seat and looked away, resisting the urge to cry. She gave a wan smile as Ron put his arm around her.

“Don’t give up hope yet, Miss Potter,” Professor McGonagall said firmly. “Miss Granger, you mentioned Muggle methods of helping transgender people.”
Hermione nodded. “Yes, it involves the use of medications to suppress certain hormones, and replace them with others. This allows the body to undergo the correct puberty for that person’s gender. And then there are surgeries to alter the parts that hormones can’t change.”

A look of deep thought was on Madam Pomfrey’s face. “It is possible we could replicate those medications with potions. I will need more detailed information on the process, but I believe it is possible.”

Hermione beamed, looking between Madam Pomfrey and Harry. “I’ll write to my parents and get them to find books detailing the process. They’re dentists so they should be able to find it more easily than most Muggles.”

“Excellent,” proclaimed Professor McGonagall, standing with a satisfied expression. “I will also investigate potential means of allowing permanent human Transfiguration for this. Between myself and the Headmaster, I’m sure we will be able to find some way to achieve it.” She turned to the trio of students. “Now, these will take some time, Miss Potter, but we will make sure we find something to help you. Even if we find nothing, we can help you acquire the Muggle methods.”

Harry looked between Professor McGonagall to Madam Pomfrey, and was unable to stop her tears of gratitude. “Thank you,” she whispered.

Professor McGonagall conjured another handkerchief for her, while Hermione grasped her hand again. “Don’t forget,” her bushy haired friend added. “You can experiment with your gender expression, while we wait for these things. It is okay for Harry to try wearing more feminine things isn’t it Professor?” she asked.

Professor McGonagall nodded. “I will make sure the other Professors are informed about all this. If you would like, Miss Potter, we can provide you some spare sets of female uniforms.”

Harry looked at her with wide eyes. “Uh, I don’t know. People might think I’m weird, wearing girl’s robes while I look like this,” she said with a gesture to herself.

“You will find,” Professor McGonagall said, “that rules about the gender of clothes matter somewhat less in the magical world than the Muggle. I will have them ready for you and you can wear them or not as you choose.” Before Harry could respond, she continued. “I will see that the rest of the faculty are informed before classes resume, and that they will address you properly. I must ask you to promise me, Miss Potter, that you will not attempt to perform human Transfiguration upon yourself. It is NEWT level spellwork and can cause permanent damage if done incorrectly.”

Harry nodded regretfully. “I promise Professor.” Hermione and Ron echoed her, as the Transfiguration Professor turned her eye to them.

“If you can achieve at least an E on your Transfiguration OWL, you will be able to study human Transfiguration. I hope I will see you in those classes. Have a good day, Miss Potter, Miss Granger, Mr Weasley.” She turned to Madam Pomfrey. “Thank you for your time Poppy,” she said, before turning and leaving the office.

“Well,” Madam Pomfrey said briskly, “Miss Granger, I would appreciate you providing me those books when they arrive. Miss Potter, let me know if this transgender business affects your health. Until then, do try to stay out of here, hmm?”

Harry nodded sheepishly, as Hermione laughed and a grinning Ron ruffled her hair.
“Well, go on. Enjoy your day,” she said as she ushered them out of her Hospital Wing. As they walked away, Harry found that she couldn’t stop smiling.

Author’s Note:

First of all, thank you for reading my fic. This one is very important to me. I’m drawing on aspects of my personal experiences for this. This is just my personal experience, and should not be taken as applying to all trans people.

I’d like to note that since this is set in 1993, Hermione’s information and terminology may be considered outdated. Anything I have her say will be generally correct, but please do further research because transgender terminology has progressed in the last 24 years.

Due to how unknown the idea of being transgender is in the magical world there are going to be characters that say things or act in ways that are offensive and harmful to trans people, even without intending to be. Obviously, this is not reflective of my views and should not be seen as behaviour to emulate.

For example, Professor McGonagall is going to out Harry to the faculty, and they will out her to the other students. Never do this to a trans person in real life. Always privately check if it’s okay to disclose someone’s trans status before doing so, or you could legitimately put their life in danger.

Edit: Updated some of the writing for this chapter, to make it flow a bit better

Edit 2: This chapter honestly felt rather quick, so I’ve added some stuff to flesh it out a bit.
Ron and Harry found themselves being dragged to the Library by Hermione almost immediately. “Alright, we need to split up. Harry you look for books on Human Transfiguration. I’ll see if I can find anything on Potions with transformative effects. Ron, go check the Healing section, you might be able find something about altering other parts of the body.”

Harry found herself far less reluctant than she normally would at the idea of spending her weekend on research. Ron, however, dug in his heels. “Hermione, you just heard Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey say there wasn’t a way to do it. And why am I the one checking the Healing books?”

Hermione levelled a glare at him. “Just because they haven’t heard of something doesn’t mean it can’t possibly exist! We should check to make sure there isn’t something obscure enough that they haven’t encountered it. And you can help read through advanced Potions textbooks if you’d like instead. Does that sound good?” Ron glared back with a mulish expression. As he opened his mouth to argue, Hermione spoke over him. “What if the way to help Harry is in one of these books and it takes months before they think of it? How bad would it feel to know that we could have found it right away, but we didn’t even bother?”

Ron deflated as he looked at Harry. Throwing up his hands, he tromped over to the History section, drawing a nasty look from Madam Pince as he went.

Harry gave Hermione a grateful smile, before moving to look through the shelves of Transfiguration texts. Grabbing a stack of books that looked like they would have Human Transfiguration – such as ‘A Guide to Advanced Transfiguration’, ‘Alterations and Additions: The Ultimate in Self Transformation’, and ‘Change Yourself to For The Approval of Others!’ – she returned to the table and began flipping through them. Most of the technical information on the spells went over her head, but from the names and descriptions, she was able to get at least a general sense of what each one would do.

Unfortunately, it seemed like Professor McGonagall was right. There didn’t seem to be any spells that would change her body the way she needed. She found a plethora of other Human Transfigurations – changing the size, shape or colour of nearly every part of the body. Adding limbs and removing limbs. There were ways to give someone gills and tails and even cat ears.

One of the closest she could find was a disturbingly suggestive passage about couples who would use Switching Spells to ‘exchange roles’. Harry felt her face turn bright red when she realised what that meant. She had found another possibility when loud sound slamming startled her. Looking up, she realised Ron and Hermione had been back and researching for several minutes without her realising, and Ron had closed his most recent book in disgust. Hermione took a moment to look up from her own to glare at him for that.

“All the Healing stuff was just about putting stuff back the way it was, nothing really about changing parts from what you started with,” he said, shoving the book aside and dropping his head to the desk. Hermione sighed and closed her last book as well.

“I wasn’t able to find anything in the Potions section, either. They’re all cures or mind-altering effects,” she told them. She gestured with frustration. “I don’t understand how there aren’t any
potions that can transform someone! We already know Polyjuice Potion exists!”

Ron tilted his head to look at Hermione from the table. “Wouldn’t they be in the Restricted Section then, like the Polyjuice Potion was?”

Hermione stared at him before dropping her own head to the table. “Of course they would be,” she muttered. She lifted herself up. “Did you find anything, Harry?”

Harry looked back at her books. “Maybe. There’s a passage here about switching spells,” she fought off a blush once again. “I don’t know if it’s what I need, though.” She turned the book for her friends to read then pretended to be reading through the other books to avoid looking at them.

Hermione finished first with a small, “Oh!” A few seconds later, Ron made a rather strangled choking sound and pushed the book away.

Harry glanced up to see both her friends blushing brightly. “So… yeah.”

Hermione cleared her throat. “It could work. You’d need to find someone willing to, umm, swap parts with you. I suppose we can ask Professor McGonagall if Switching would be a viable solution. I don’t know how well they can last long term.”

“Let’s do that after lunch then,” Ron said, already gathering his pile books to put away. Harry blinked in surprise and checked her watch. She was shocked to realise how much time had passed.

‘Is this what it feels like to be Hermione?’ She shook her head and got up to help her friends return the books.

During lunch, Hermione presented Harry with a scroll of parchment. She looked over the list:

Pronouns
Accessories
Clothes
Cosmetics
Body
Name?

At her confused look, Hermione quietly told her, “It’s sort of a checklist for you to explore being a girl. I tried to think of feminine things that you would have missed out on experiencing, if you want to try them. You don’t have to do any that you don’t want to and there’s no set order to them. I just want you to know what you can try.”

As Hermione approached a babble, Harry cut her off with a hug. “Thank you,” she whispered. Hermione just hugged her back. Then Harry pulled back, turned and hugged Ron as well.

“What’s this for?” Ron sounded incredibly bewildered.

Harry shrugged. “Just because.”

Ron rolled his eyes at her and turned back to his food, but Harry could still see the smile on his face.

When lunch ended, Hermione went to Professor McGonagall’s office for the second time that day. She sent Harry and Ron on to the library ahead of her, with instructions to keep searching for anything they might have missed.

They were halfway through their first books when Hermione joined them, looking incredibly
disappointed. “No luck. I told her we were doing research independently to see if we could find anything to help Harry, and that we remembered Snape telling describing Polyjuice Potion. I asked if we could we have a pass to the Restricted Section to see if we could find similar potions that might work.”

“And that clearly didn’t’ work,” Ron noted bluntly.

Hermione pursed her lips. “Clearly. She said ‘while your diligence is commendable, that will not be necessary.’ She and Madam Pomfrey will check the Restricted Section for anything useful.”

As she dropped into her seat, Ron asked, “So do we need to keep reading?”

“I think we should,” Hermione said stubbornly then hesitated. “What do you think, Harry? This is really for you, so you can decide if we need to keep going.”

Harry opened her mouth to answer, then paused and actually considered the question. “I think,” she said carefully, “I trust Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall to find the answer for me.” As Ron sighed in relief, she smiled, but continued, “But… I would like to try to find at least one thing. I can’t be the only transgender person in the entire magical world, can I? Somewhere, at some point, surely there were others.”

Hermione’s eyes lit up at the challenge while Ron groaned. Harry hurried to add, “We don’t have to constantly look until we find something. I just want to look now, while we’re here.”

“Well, let’s get started,” said Hermione, already moving into the stacks.

They went through the History section, searching for signs or references to any transgender people. They looked for several hours and managed to find a few promising entries.

“What about this?” Ron asked, pointing to a passage as he read, “‘The Dark Lord Rinascita was most famous for his obsession with the feminine. He accepted only female followers and insisted on being referred to as a Dark Lady. Refusal to call him such was the fastest method of drawing his wrath. There are multiple accounts of entire villages being slaughtered for refusing to use the desired form of address.’ I mean this guy sounds like a real piece of work, but it is right there.”

Harry grimaced as she looked over the passage. “I hope we can find more than just a Dark Lady for me to look up to.”

Hermione snorted, then said, “I might have found a better one here. ‘The Ancient Greek goddess Cybele was a hermaphroditic god of the earth and nature. Her priestesses – called galli – were born as men but referred to themselves as women. They would’ – oh my… ‘They would castrate themselves and adopt lavish feminine attire.’ It goes on to describe some of the magic created by galli witches. So there have been magical transgender people before!” She grinned at Harry.

As Harry returned her smile, Ron spoke in a strangled voice, “I hope we can find a better option than that for Harry, though.” Harry glanced over to see him awkwardly crossing his legs with a look of horror. She exchanged a look with Hermione and burst into laughter.

Sunday was spent in a flurry to finish the assignments they had ignored in favour of helping Harry. Despite the stress of rushing to finish, Harry found herself feeling oddly light and relaxed. As they walked back to the Gryffindor Common Room after dinner that night, Ron poked Harry with a grin. “You haven’t stopped smiling all day.”

Harry beamed at her friend, playfully poking him back. “I feel so giddy! I finally have a name for
what I am, and I have something I can do about it. And," she grabbed Ron around the shoulders then reached over to pull Hermione closer, “I have the most amazing friends in the world. I don’t tell you that enough.” Her grin stretched wider as both Hermione and Ron flushed brightly. “Fortuna Major,” she said as they approached the Fat Lady.

As they climbed through the portrait hole, Hermione asked, “Are you sure you want to tell them tonight?”

Harry felt a jolt of nervousness, but she steeled herself and nodded. “People are going to find out anyway, once classes start again. I’d rather tell the people I care about myself.”

“Alright then,” Ron said, “should we do it all at once?”

Harry shuddered at the thought of talking to that many people at once, especially with such an awkward topic. “No. I’ll do the Quidditch team first. And I’ll talk to the guys when we all go up to the dormitory.”

“You… you don’t want to try moving to the girls’ dormitory?” Hermione asked tentatively.

Harry shook her head immediately. “It’s way too soon for anything like that. I’m not ready for that. And I don’t want to make the girls uncomfortable.”

“Do you want us to help you talk to them?” Ron asked, eyeing his brothers across the room.

“No, I think I’ll be okay. Thanks though, Ron.” With a last smile for her friends, she walked over to where the Weasley Twins were sitting with Lee Jordan. By the way they were huddled together, they were obviously plotting some mischief. They sat up as she approached, easy grins welcoming her.

“How can we help you, Ickle Harrikins.”

She rolled her eyes at that ridiculous old nickname. Shaking her head, she said, “Could I talk to the two of you, over with the rest of the team, please?” She shot Lee an apologetic smile, which he waved off with a grin. She turned and moved towards the set of couches housing the Gryffindor Chasers, relieved to see they didn’t have other company. They also saw her coming, and greeted her with polite smiles.

“Um, hi Angeline, Alicia, Katie,” she said. “Would I be able to talk with you and the rest of the team for a minute? There’s something I need to tell you all.”

The Chasers exchanged a mix of curious and concerned glances, before Angelina nodded. “Sure thing, Harry. Have a seat, the other will be here in a second.” Harry glanced behind her to see an annoyed Wood being dragged away from his diagrams of Quidditch plays, a Twin holding each of his arms.

Harry winced as she took the offered seat beside Katie. “Sorry Wood,” she said when the Twins had dragged him close enough. “I didn’t know they would drag you over like that.” She gave them an annoyed look, which they pointedly ignored as they lounged on the arm rests of the couch.

“Alright, what’s so important that you need to talk to us all?” asked the Quidditch Captain, folding his arms and tapping his foot impatiently.

Harry took a deep breath and felt a little steadier. “I wanted to tell you first, before the rest of the school hears about it. I- I’m not actually a boy. I’m a girl.”
There was a beat of silence before Fred and George began to laugh. “Good one Harry,” said George, as Fred wiped away a non-existent tear.

“I’m so proud to see you’re finally coming into your own as a prankster.”

Harry frowned and snapped, “I’m not joking.” She wrapped her arms around herself and looked down at her knees.

“I… It’s called being transgender. My body looks like a boy’s but I’m a girl. On the inside I mean. Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey are trying to find ways to help me fix my body, and all of the Professors are going to refer to me as a girl now.”

She glanced up tentatively to see the surprised expressions on the Twins’ faces, before arms suddenly embraced her. She looked to her right, where Katie, who was now holding her, gave her an encouraging smile. Then she felt Alicia stroking her hair.

“Hey,” Angelina said gently, “it’s okay Harry. We’re your team, and we’ve got your back. We’ll help you with whatever you need.”

Harry felt grateful tears in her eyes as she nodded her thanks.

“Yeah,” added Fred, once a kick from Katie shook him out of his stupor.

George nodded rapidly. “Of course.”

The team looked to Wood, who still hadn’t said anything. Once he had their attention, the Captain uncrossed his arms and met Harry’s eyes. “Is any of this transgender business going to stop you from being able to catch the Snitch for me?” Harry shook her head, feeling rather confused. “Then why would I have a problem with it?”

She stared at him blankly. Then she gave a snort and was suddenly overcome by a fit of giggles, which only got worse as Angelina punched a smirking Wood in the shoulder.

Once she finally managed to calm down, she was given a hug by each of the Chasers, a hair ruffle from Wood and noogies from the Twins (“If they’re good enough for Gin-Gin, they’re good enough for you”). Then she returned to Ron and Hermione, giving them happy grin.

“Well,” Ron said as Harry flopped down beside them with a sigh of relief. “What should we do now?”

Hermione was already reaching into her book bag. “We can always work on our Transfiguration essays on Animagi.” With a fond smile at Ron’s theatrical groan of resignation, Harry reached for hers too.

‘I’m going to work extra hard on this from now on. I will get into the NEWTs class.’

As the occupants of the Gryffindor Third Year Boys’ Dormitory prepared for bed, Harry steeled her nerves. ‘I’ve already done this three times,’ she thought with exasperation, ‘why is it so hard?’ She sat on her bed gripping the sheets, while Ron watched her with concern from his own bed.

Finally, when Seamus emerged from the bathroom, Harry cleared her throat. The boys turned to look at her curiously.
“Er… sorry to keep all of you up, but I need to tell you something.”

“This about your chat with the Quidditch team?” Dean asked, as he threw his old robe into the hamper.

Harry felt a bolt of fear race through her. ‘Did he hear what I said? Did other people? Does everyone know already?’

Seeing the look on her face, Seamus quickly spoke. “We didn’t hear nothing Harry. Saw you having a bit of a moment together, but we don’t know what it was all about.”

As Harry calmed her breathing, Neville sat on own his bed, across from her. “It’s about something important?” he said quietly. Seamus and Dean wandered closer as Harry nodded.

“I want to tell you before everyone else finds out. I’m… I’m not actually a boy. I’m a girl.” At her roommates’ bewildered expressions, she hurriedly added. “I mean yeah my body is like a boy’s but it’s wrong and we’re trying to find ways to fix it and everyone’s going to know when classes start again so I-”

“Harry,” Ron interrupted her babbling with a hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay.”

“So, uhh,” Seamus spoke hesitantly. “Are you gonna grow tits?”

“What the hell, Seamus!” Harry exclaimed in shock.

“What? I was just wondering.”

“Oh my god,” she said, hiding behind her hands as she felt the blood rushing to her face.

“You know, I think I’ve heard of something like this before. It was on the news that some bloke was going around wearing dresses and saying he was a woman. Think they called him a transvestite, or something like that.”

“Transgender,” Harry corrected, managing to peek out from behind her hands.

“Harry,” Neville said tentatively. “You’ve never said anything about this before. Why now?”

Harry swallowed the lump in her throat. “I can’t stay like this. It’s killing me. Everything about looking like a boy and being treated by a boy hurts and I just can’t do it anymore.” She looked away from the looks of pity on their faces. “Anyway, I just wanted to let you know before the rest of the school finds out. Good night.” With that, she reached out and quickly pulled her curtains closed and curled up on her bed. It took her several minutes to calm her breathing enough to even think about sleep. ‘God that was way too awkward…’

Finally, with a sigh, she managed to relax. Despite the awkwardness of those conversations, it was a relief that her friends now knew the truth about her. As she lay on her bed, her brain continued to whirl with thoughts. ‘I don’t really know many people do I? Outside of the people I’ve already told, I don’t think I could call anyone else here my friend.’ ‘The thought left her feeling rather sad. And oddly motivated. ‘I don’t want to be so isolated anymore,’ she realised. ‘I can’t remember the last time I got to know someone that didn’t approach me first.’ The Dursleys had always made sure she had no friends at school, and she was still letting the lessons from them prevent her from talking to people. ‘Bollocks to that. I’m going to make sure I can at least talk to the people in my classes. That’s a good start.’

Satisfied with her new resolution, Harry rolled over and let herself rest.
Harry spent the remainder of the weekend in a happy daze. She felt so incredibly free, it was almost unreal. Finally, on Monday, as she gathered her books for her classes, a knot of anxiety formed in her stomach. Professor McGonagall had told all of the teachers and they were going to treat her as a girl now. ‘Everyone’s going to see. Everyone’s going to know!’

Pushing down the echoes of her relatives from her thoughts, she defiantly reached for her jewellery. As she put on her necklace and bracelet, she felt calmer. ‘Let them know,’ she thought defiantly. ‘They can finally see me for who I really am.’

After a breakfast full of concerned and encouraging looks from those in the know, the trio went to class. Harry was grateful that Transfiguration was the first lesson of the day. Professor McGonagall wouldn’t tolerate her students being distracted, so Harry didn’t expect to be questioned by too many people.

The majority of the Transfiguration class passed without incident. Professor McGonagall collected their Animagi essays and lectured them on the principles of object to animate Transfigurations. Once they had copied it all down, she handed out mothballs for them to turn into moths. Harry practiced the spell over and over, determined to succeed before the lesson finished. She was pleased when she managed to cast the Transfiguration before more than half the class. Professor McGonagall inspected her moth, noting the patterns on its wings and even checking to see if it still smelt of mothballs.

“Well done, Miss Potter,” she said with a smile, before moving on to help Neville. Harry felt a happy blush at the praise and title, which became embarrassed as she heard her classmates.

“Wait, what?”

“Did McGonagall just say Miss?”

“Why did she call Potter that?”

McGonagall cleared her throat loudly with a raised eyebrow. The mutterings class her Gryffindor and Ravenclaw classmates fell silent, but she could still feel many of their eyes on her. Bracing herself, she turned to help Hermione coach Ron through the spell.

Once the class ended, Harry gathered her things and hurried from the classroom, flanked by Ron and Hermione. She managed to get half a corridor away before she heard, “Hey Potter, wait up!” With a wince she turned to see a boy she believed was called Michael Corner leading a veritable pack of Ravenclaws, all of who were staring at her with incredible interest. She shrank back from the intense scrutiny, with a surge of gratitude for her friends who stepped forward to partially shield her.

“Yes?” she said to Corner, feeling resigned to an avalanche of questions.

“What happened in there?” Corner asked with a gesture behind himself. “Why did McGonagall call you that?”

“Call me what?” she asked, hoping they would all take the hint and leave her alone.

“Why’d she call you Miss?” he asked incredulously. Harry winced again. Even knowing that she would likely need to explain to her classmates, the thought still frightened her.
As she opened her mouth, unsure what she was going to say, a voice rang out. “Kindly stop harassing Miss Potter, Mister Corner.” The crowd of Ravenclaws parted to reveal Professor McGonagall with a severe expression. “If you have any questions about this matter you may refer them to your head of house. Now kindly move to your next class.” With a final curious look at Harry, Corner turned and led the other Ravenclaws away.

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said, not knowing how to properly express her gratitude.

With a small smile, Professor McGonagall made shooing motions to them, “Off to class with you as well.”

The three of them hurried to their Herbology class, where the kindly Professor Sprout greeted them with warm smiles. During the lesson, she also called Harry, Miss Potter, drawing looks from her Hufflepuff classmates. Every time one of them tried to approach her with questions, the Head of Hufflepuff would bustle over with a refrain of “Less talking, more working, please dears.” Thanks to Professor Sprout’s efforts, Harry was able to leave the greenhouse relatively unbothered. She did pause to mouth a quick “Thank you,” to the Professor, who then called for her Hufflepuffs to remain behind.

They returned to the castle to quickly wash up and have lunch, followed by double History of Magic. Between Binns’ droning lecture and Professor McGonagall’s recent warning, the other students left her in peace. ‘Thank Merlin for that.’ she thought, starting to relax for the first time since classes began. ‘They could probably start burning me at the stake in here and Binns wouldn’t even notice.’

When they returned to the Common Room, the trio suddenly found themselves surrounded by the remainder of the Gryffindor Third Year girls. Harry sighed at the expectant looks on Lavender and Parvati’s faces. She gestured for the two of them, as well as Fay Dunbar and Sally-Anne Perks, to follow her to some nearby couches. Once they were seated, she – with Hermione’s assistance – explained how she had climbed the girls’ stairs, and that she was transgender. There were a few questions about her dysphoria from Fay and several offers for fashion, makeup and hair advice from Parvati and Lavender. Sally-Anne was oddly silent, but Harry didn’t know her enough to tell what she was thinking. The girls thanked her for indulging their curiosity and left them in peace.

After the day she had just had, Harry decided to just go to bed early. Ron and Hermione were very understanding.

The next day, the first class was Defence Against the Dark Arts, where Professor Lupin continued their lesson on identifying and defending themselves from Red Caps. He continued his habit of asking many students to answer questions, calling on Harry as Miss Potter. Harry felt incredibly free, as she realised that everyone in the room knew about her trans-ness, and a felt a smile pulling at her lips.

During lunch, she looked at her timetable and her good mood immediately vanished. They had potions next. It was with a sense of dread far greater than usual that she descended into the dungeons. As the Gryffindors approached the Potions classroom, they saw the Slytherins already waiting. At the sight of her, the Slytherins began snickering. As Harry shifted awkwardly, Hermione brushed at her arm. “Just ignore them. They don’t matter.”

Even as she spoke, Malfoy moved to the front of the Slytherins. “I heard that Potter suddenly wants to be treated a girl. What’s wrong Potter, getting coddled for fainting not enough for you? Need to
“Shove off, Malfoy,” Ron snapped.

“Aw, does Weasley want to help pamper Princess Potter? Too bad you’re too poor for it to be worth anything.”

“Shut the hell up, Malfoy!” Everyone turned in surprise to look at the source of the shout. Sally-Anne Perks stood with her hands over her mouth and a look of shock.

Malfoy’s face contorted with anger. “How dare you speak to me in that tone, you filthy Mudblood!” he yelled, reaching for his wand. Impeded by the cast he was wearing from Buckbeak’s attack, by the time he had it in his hand, half the Gryffindors were already pointing their own at him. He glared at them for a moment, before looking past them and smirking.

“What is the meaning of this?”

The Gryffindors flinched and turned to see Professor Snape striding menacingly towards them. Malfoy immediately spoke up. “Perks insulted me, sir! When I objected, they all threatened to hex me!”

Snape looked over them, before turning a gimlet eye on Sally-Anne. “Ten points from Gryffindor, Miss Perks. Be more respectful towards your classmates in future. And five points from Gryffindor for each person with a wand out. Now get in.”

Harry barely stopped herself from gaping. ‘He can’t honestly believe that’s what happened.’

Then she groaned. ‘The way he worded that, we lost extra points because of Malfoy too!’

The students filed into the Potions classroom, the Gryffindors much subdued.

“You will be brewing the Confusing Concoction,” Snape said tersely. A wave of his wand placed text upon the blackboard. “Instructions are on the board. Begin.”

The class scrambled to gather ingredients and get to work. As they set to brewing, Snape swept around the classroom. She wasn’t sure, but Harry thought he might be hovering around Sally-Anne more than usual. Harry tried to focus on her work, and ignore the looks from Malfoy across the room. It didn’t help that each time she happened to be looking in that direction Malfoy and the other Slytherins would make exaggerate kissy faces and fluttering eyelashes. Partway through the lesson, she felt Snape looming behind her and tense. She dropped in the next ingredient and started stirring, feeling her shoulders hunch more the longer she felt Snape’s glare on the back of her neck.

“Did you both to read the instructions, Potter?”

Despite knowing it was coming, Harry still flinched. “Yes, sir,” she answered, trying to keep count of the number of stirs.

“Really?” asked Snape coolly. “Then you would think you would manage to follow them.”

Harry paused and looked to the blackboard again, trying to see what she was doing wrong. Snape stalked around until he was in sight, pointing at one of the lines. “Did you decide that you would simply ignore the instruction to stir anti-clockwise, not clockwise.”

Harry groaned. ‘How did I manage to mess that one up?’

“Do you simply consider yourself too good for the proper method, Mister – oh,” Snape paused with a cruel smirk. “Pardon me, ‘Miss’ Potter.” He said it with obvious scorn, clearly finding the
concept ridiculous. The Slytherins laughed, Malfoy loudest of them all. Harry felt almost as if she’d been punched in the stomach, and found it hard to breathe.

“Well, Potter?” Snape prompted smugly as the silence stretched. Harry gritted her teeth.

“No, sir.”

Snape sneered and swished his wand over Harry’s cauldron, Vanishing her potion. “Then you can complete your Potion again, while following the instructions this time.” He paused a final moment, glaring into Harry’s eyes, before sweeping over to Seamus’ cauldron.

Harry took a trembling breath, and started working on her second potion, though she knew there wasn’t enough time left in the class to complete it. If she didn’t bother, Snape would yell at her anyway. A thought struck her. ‘Snape almost looked disappointed at the end there. He was trying to get me to argue with him, probably so he could take even more points.’ She felt glad that she had managed to control herself, mostly because she’s been trying to focus on breathing too much to truly get angry at the Potions Master.

Finally, the agonising lesson ended and after bottling a sample of her half done potion, Harry swiftly packed and fled the classroom, her friend hot on her heels. She didn’t stop until she was outside the castle, sinking down to sit in the grass where she finally stopped feeling so trapped and caught her breath.

“Are you okay, Harry?” Hermione asked, slowly lowering down beside her.

“I’m fine,” she replied. At her friends’ sceptical looks she gave a small smile. “Snape and Malfoy just got to me bit.”

“Don’t listen to them,” Ron said, flopping down on her other side. “You know they’re always talking rubbish. Just think about the look on Malfoy’s face when he realised he had half-dozen wands on him.”

“Honestly Ron,” Hermione huffed. “But he is right Harry. Don’t listen to anything Malfoy or Snape say. They’re just trying to hurt you.”

‘Yeah,’ Harry reflected as she nodded outwardly. ‘That’s why it hurt.’

Despite the friends’ reassurances, Snape & Malfoy’s words kept ringing in her ear, distracting her. After she managed to cut herself for the third time in Herbology while pruning her plant, Professor Sprout quietly excused her from the remainder of the class. She returned to Gryffindor Tower and went to bed early, hoping tomorrow would be better.

AN:

In case anyone is curious, the priestesses of Cybele were a real group and that is really what they were like. Transgender people have always existed.
Harry sighed as Professor Trelawney swished and jangled her way around the incense choked classroom. She didn’t know why she had expected today to be better, with Divination first thing. The class had started with Professor Trelawney declaring that she had been unsurprised that Harry was a girl due to her effeminate aura, and gone downhill from there. As the Divination Professor examined Lavender’s teacup on the opposite side of the classroom, Harry idly murmured, “Do you think I would be able to drown myself in my tea?”

Ron snorted. “Maybe, but then Trelawney would be right about the Grim then wouldn’t she?” he muttered.

Harry exchanged a look of disgust at the idea of the death omen with Hermione, before draining the last of her tea. She passed her cup to Ron and took his in turn, looking into it immediately.

“Right then,” she squinted at the mass of tea leaves. “Here you have… I don’t know, a fish maybe? What’s that mean,” she muttered, flipping through the textbook. “Wait, why would it be learning?”

Hermione snickered quietly before offering, “A school of fish.”

Harry shot her a playful glare, then rotated the cup. “Well this just looks like a heart now, so three guesses what that means.” Checking the textbook, she paused. “Luck at gambling… I hate this class I swear.” She put aside Ron’s cup, and looked to him. “Alright then, do me now.”

Ron paused to raise his eyebrows at her phrasing then picked up her cup. He tilted his head as he peered into it, turning it a few times. “I can’t rightly make out much of anything here. It’s just a confusing mess.”

Harry sighed. “Honestly, that’s the most accurate reading ever.” She smiled as Ron patted her shoulder and Hermione rubbed her arm. Ron glanced back to the cup. “Oh hey, that could be something. I think it’s a butterfly. Don’t you think, Hermione?”

She took it reluctantly, glancing at the leaves. “Yes, I suppose that could be. Which means,” she flipped across to the correct page, “great change or transition.”

Harry stared at her for a moment before she was overcome by a fit of giggles.

After their Transfiguration class Professor McGonagall took a moment to check how Harry was managing. With a reminder that her Head of House’s door was always open to her, she was sent on to lunch. After the meal, the trio made their way down to Hagrid’s Hut for Care of Magical Creatures. While they were ‘caring’ for the Flobberworms, Hagrid spoke quietly with Harry.

“Wont’ say I wasn’ surprised when Professor McGonagall was tellin’ us ‘bout yeh really being a girl. Bu’ ‘slong as yeh don’ hurt no one, yeh should always do wha’ makes yeh happy.”

“Thanks Hagrid,” Harry said, checking that no-one else was watching before hugging the large man.

“Wha’ s tha’ for?”

“I’ve never really told you how much I appreciate you, Hagrid,” she said with a smile. “You were my first friend in the magical world and you’ve done so much for me. So I just want to make sure
you know how much you mean to me.”

Hagrid’s beetle-like eyes misted over and he reached down to pat her on the shoulder, nearly knocking her onto her Flobberworm.

As the trio sat eating breakfast the next morning, Harry felt a ball of anxiousness building inside her. ‘I don’t want to do this,’ she realised, wrapping her arms around her stomach to stop herself from trembling. ‘I can’t go down there today.’

Her friends quickly noticed her distress. “Are you alright, Harry?” Hermione asked quietly, as Ron turned to give her a concerned look. Harry tried to answer but nothing came out, so she simply shook her head. “Do… do you want to go to the Hospital Wing?”

Harry chewed at her lip for a moment before nodding. She slowly got to her feet and grabbed her bag, still holding her stomach with one arm. Waving off Hermione and Ron as they made to join her, she trudged off to the Hospital Wing.

When she arrived, she quietly slipped inside, dropped onto one of the beds, curled into a ball and started to cry. She didn’t know how long it was before Madam Pomfrey left her office to find her there. “Are you injured, Miss Potter?” she asked, already beginning motions to cast diagnostics. Harry sniffed and shook her head. Madam Pomfrey raised an eyebrow and swished her wand a few times anyway. After finding Harry was telling the truth, she sighed and summoned a chair, settling down beside the bed. Harry took several deep breaths, managing to mostly stop her tears, then wiped her eyes and pushed herself up face the matron.

“Why are you here, Miss Potter?” Madam Pomfrey asked, though not unkindly. Harry just shrugged and sniffed again. The Mediwitch remained silent, simply sitting and watching her. Shifting, Harry looked at her clasped hand to avoid having to see Madam Pomfrey’s judgment.

“I just couldn’t go back to that classroom.”

“Which classroom?”

Harry glanced up at her, then quickly away again. “Potions.”

“Ah.” Harry peeked back up to see the matron wearing an understanding expression. “I suppose Severus has been unkind to you.” Seeing Harry’s slightly surprised look, she smiled. “Professor Snape’s animosity towards you is quite well know, Miss Potter.”

“Yeah,” Harry muttered, pulling her knees up and nearly hiding behind them. And Malfoy… all the Slytherins.”

Madam Pomfrey sighed. “Miss Potter, students are not permitted to stay in the Hospital Wing unless they are undergoing healing or a consultation.” Harry winced and fought back a new wave of tears at the thought of having to return, especially now she was absolutely late. ‘Snape’s going to kill me.’

As she reached for her discarded book bag Madam Pomfrey stood. “Which is why I must insist you join me in my office.” Harry stopped and stared at her. With a mischievous smile, the Mediwitch added, “Anything you say or do during a consultation will of course be completely confidential. No other faculty member needs to know anything.”

As Harry stuttered her thanks, Madam Pomfrey shooed her into the office and over to a comfortable armchair near the fireplace. The matron levitated over a small desk for her to put her
bag. As she got settled, Madam Pomfrey approached her again. “You can stay as long as you want. If you want to stay for lunch, even, you’re most welcome to. If you would like to read or work on some homework you may but I would ask you to consider something else instead.”

“What else?” Harry asked as she paused.

“I would ask that, only if you feel comfortable, we can speak about the things that are troubling you.”

“Why?” Harry asked before she could stop herself.

“Because if you don’t talk about them with someone, they will just sit in your head and never leave. I have always said ‘thoughts can leave scars deeper than anything else’. Even if you don’t share with me, you should with someone you trust.” As Harry looked away uncomfortably, the matron added, “And the more I know what is troubling you in regards to your gender, the more I can try to help.”

That got Harry’s attention. As much as the idea of sharing her most intimate thought and feelings scared her, the offer of any help in achieving her true gender was far too tempting. Finally, after much hand wringing and lip chewing, she nodded.

With a smile, Madam Pomfrey conjured herself another comfortable chair and sat facing Harry. A final flick of her wand summoned a board with parchment, a quill, and an inkwell. She then tucked away her wand and looked to Harry, still with a reassuring smile. “Alright, Miss Potter. Tell me anything you want. Take your time.”

Harry found herself unable to speak as she looked at the Mediwitch. She turned away to look at the fireplace. The flickering flames helped her to feel calmer and more focused, like when she did the same in the Gryffindor Common Room. Eventually she managed to find the words. “I noticed it just when the holidays were ending. I hoped I was imagining it but it kept happening so I knew it was real.”

“What was real?” Pomfrey asked.

Harry closed her eyes. “My voice is starting to break. I can hear it all the time and I hate it so much.” She trembled as she fought back tears again. “And that’s not even the worst part.”

“What is the worst part?” Madam Pomfrey prompted gently.

Harry looked over at her. “The worst part is that I know it’s just the beginning. I know my voice will get even deeper and I’ll start growing hair in places it shouldn’t grow and my shoulders will get huge and, and-”

“Miss Potter,” the Mediwitch spoke firmly, but not loudly. “Harry,” she said even softer. When Harry had managed to compose herself, she continued. “I promise, I will do everything in my power to find a solution as soon as possible. Miss Granger will be providing me with the information on Muggle treatments for transgender people very soon. If need be, we will use the Muggle methods themselves. We will make sure that you do not undergo the wrong puberty for you. Does knowing that help?”

Harry sniffed and nodded, swiping at the corner of her eyes. Madam Pomfrey leaned back and added. “I will also note that your voice is not what I would call masculine sounding. But,” she raised a hand as Harry tried to argue, “if you find it distressing, we can look for ways to fix it. Tell me, when do you next see Professor Flitwick?”
“Uh, I have Charms right after lunch actually.”

“Perfect. After your class, ask him about Voice Alteration Charms. Those will help you be more satisfied with your voice.”

That idea cheered Harry up immensely. Feeling more comfortable talking to Madam Pomfrey, she tentatively mentioned her last Potions class and summarised the things that had been said to her. “I don’t know why it hurt me so much,” she complained. “They’ve both said worse things before, so I don’t understand how this is suddenly so bad.”

Madam Pomfrey hummed contemplatively. “Perhaps,” she ventured, “it is because you have spent so long keeping this bottled up, hidden away and never spoken or thought about. And now that you’ve let it out, and people have been treating you properly, someone mocking you for it feels jarring, and reminds you of when you were trying to hide. It has, essentially, made you more sensitive to such ill treatment.” Harry pulled a face at that thought. “It also,” she said, even more carefully, “could be because it reminds you of exactly what caused you to try repressing your gender in the first place.”

Harry stiffened in her seat as she realised what – or who – Madam Pomfrey was talking about. “I don’t want to talk about this anymore,” she said, turning away from the matron. She could feel Madam Pomfrey’s eyes on her still.

“Alright.”

Harry turned to stare at her.

“As I said before,” the Mediwitch said, calmly meeting her gaze, “whenever you are ready, with someone you trust.” Harry could only stare at her, unsure how to respond. “So, on to other matters. I have noticed that you are rather underweight for someone your age. I would like to provide you with potions to provide you nutritional supplements. Unfortunately, I cannot give them to you at the school’s expense as I normally do.” Her expression became a mix of apology and anger. “I can only do that for what I use to treat injuries or illnesses that occur at Hogwarts itself.” She paused then. “My apologies, Miss Potter. That was unprofessional of me. My point is, I recommend you go on these potions, but you must request them from me, and pay for them yourself.”

“Oh,” Harry said, feeling rather dazed to learn so much about how the Hospital Wing worked. “Um, how much would it cost?” she asked.

“They should not cost any more than two galleons a month.” Harry nodded, trying to figure out the exchange in her head. She still wasn’t used to how much money she had, and it was hard to remember the value of magical money.

“Yeah, ok, that sounds good. I’m not sure how much money I still have on me…”

Madam Pomfrey waved a hand. “For something like this, I will contact Gringotts to request the payment be set up for each month. They will write you to confirm you wish to pay and then it can go ahead.”

‘That’s certainly easier than going in to Gringotts constantly.’

Madam Pomfrey glanced at the clock and gave her a regretful look. “I need to check on some things now. Please feel free to stay here as long as you need. I hope you will consider coming back to talk to me again in the future, Miss Potter.”

Harry looked at the time and was shocked to see that half the class period had passed. After giving
her a note to excuse her absence from class, Madam Pomfrey left her to work on her essays. She felt somehow lighter after talking to the matron, and when lunch approached she decided she would go see her friends.

With a final thank you for the mediwitch, Harry slipped down to the Great Hall and joined her friends at the Gryffindor table. She gave them smiles and assurances that she was fine now, Madam Pomfrey had helped, and she would be joining them for the rest of the day. Despite her reassuring them, her friend continued to watch her carefully all the way to Charms.

Professor Flitwick was his normal cheerful self, darting around the classroom to help students with the Freezing Charm. The trio managed to master the spell soon into the class – Hermione the first to freeze her glass of water, closely followed by Harry and Ron – drawing a delighted Professor Flitwick’s attention.

“Well done there, Miss Granger, Mister Weasley, Miss Potter! 15 points to Gryffindor! For the rest of the lesson, see if you can control it well enough to freeze the surface, but leave the remainder as water.” He swished his wand over their cups, returning the ice to water before moving on to help Neville, who had somehow managed to boil away all his water.

After the class finished, Harry approached Professor Flitwick, while Ron and Hermione waited near the door.

“How can I help you Miss Potter?” he asked as he straightened his stack of books.

She shifted in place, holding her bag and feeling awkward. “Madam Pomfrey said to ask you about voice altering spells. I was hoping you could teach me one to help with my voice being wrong.”

“Ah yes,” the Charms Professor said, turning to look at her. “Poppy mentioned this earlier. Of course I will be happy to help. We don’t have time right now, but I will show you after your class tomorrow.”

After giving him thanks, which he waved off easily, Harry hurried to join Ron and Hermione and they rushed to be on time for Defence Against the Dark Arts. Professor Lupin raised an eyebrow as they arrived with the bell, but waved them to their seats without comment before continuing the lesson on Red Caps.

Once the class finished and Lupin dismissed them, the students moved to the door. When Neville opened it to reveal Snape he jumped back with a terrified squeak. Professor Lupin approached the cluster of students. “Please come in, Severus. What can I do for you?”

Snape sneered as he strode into the room. The students quickly started to file out once the door was clear. “I am here for Potter,” Snape said, causing Harry to stop in her tracks with a grimace, Ron and Hermione behind her. ‘He was here as soon as the lesson ended. Did… did he end his class early just to get me?’ The thought that Snape might be that angry filled her with dread.

“Well here she is,” Professor Lupin replied mildly, though he had a watchful expression as his eyes moved between the terrified Harry and sneering Snape.

“Come, Potter,” snapped Snape, already turning to the door.

Harry finally managed to unstick her voice. “Professor, if this is about missing your class this morning, I have a note from Madam Pomfrey.”

Snape whirled back to her, face a cold mask. Hesitantly, she pulled the letter from her bag and offered it to him. He stared at it for a long moment, before glancing at Professor Lupin. There was
a tense silence as he unfolded and read the note.

With a spasm Snape’s hand clenched, crumpling the note as he glared at Harry again. When he didn’t say anything, Professor Lupin cleared his throat. “Is there anything else we can help you with, Severus?” Snape shot him a furious look before sweeping out of the room. The Defence Professor watched Harry carefully as she gathered herself and waved off her friends’ hovering.

“Thanks Professor,” she said, giving him a small smile.

“You’re welcome, Harry,” he replied before gesturing to the door. “Run along then, you three.”

The next day, Harry was so excited for the end of Charms class that she barely took in the lesson of the day. While the other students filed out to lunch, she stood waiting for Professor Flitwick, nearly vibrating with anticipation. He chuckled when he turned to see her waiting, a happy glint in his eye.

“Alright Miss Potter, the Sound Altering Charms are a variant of the Sound Amplification Charm. The Amplifier incantation is *Sonorus*, and you cast it while pointing your wand towards that which you wish to make louder. In this case, the voice, so we point to our throat.” He touched his wand to his throat before pausing. “You may wish to cover your ears once I finish incanting, Miss Potter” With clear annunciation, he cast, “*Sonorus*,” then gestured for Harry to block her ears. “AS YOU CAN HEAR, IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE THE TARGET VERY LOUD.” His voice, squeaky and high pitched as always, was loud enough that it was almost painful to hear, even with her ears covered. “QUIETUS,” she heard him, clearly talking deliberately softer, and thus sounding only slightly louder than a normal yell. Harry uncovered her ears and shook her head, feeling slightly disoriented. “Now, Amplifying your voice for long periods of time can strain it, so I would like you to practice casting it, and the counter, *Quietus*, on this harp.” With a flick of his wand, he floated a small harp over, and a gesture almost like a conductor set it to playing itself.

Harry nodded, turning to the harp and paused. ‘I think that’s the same one Quirrel used to get past Fluffy,’ she thought, before shaking her head and pointing her wand. “*Sonorus!*” The next note played by the harp sounded incredibly loud, echoing through the room, before the following notes trailed back down in volume.

“Very good, Miss Potter,” Flitwick said, watching carefully. “Remember to focus, envision exactly how loud you want the harp to play.”

She nodded and carefully imagined the harp being louder, but not deafeningly so. “*Sonorus!*” This time, the harp sounded louder than naturally possible, but no longer made her teeth rattle or ears ache. She grinned as Professor Flitwick cheered and clapped. “*Quietus*.”

He had her practice about a half dozen more times, until she had consistent control over the volume. Then, the Charms Master had her cast it on her own voice, to get a feel for using the magic on herself. He temporarily deafened himself as she whispered at a screaming volume. She winced at hearing her own voice. ‘God I hate hearing myself.’

Finally, he nodded and taught her a variant of *Sonorus* that made sounds higher in pitch. After Professor Flitwick demonstrated on the harp, and gave her a goal to aim for, she practiced, casting it repeatedly on the harp until he declared it perfect.

As she turned her wand to her throat he stopped her. “Allow me to cast it on you the first time, Miss Potter. Again, it will give you a reference for you to focus on.”
Harry nodded, feeling slightly impatient. He smiled at her enthusiasm and cast it on her. She took several breaths and spoke. “Hello.” She gasped at the obviously feminine voice. “My name is Harry Potter, and I am a girl.” A huge grin stretched across her face and she burst into delighted laughter. She spun to face the beaming Charms Professor. “It’s perfect! Thank you!”

“You are most welcome, Miss Potter,” he squeaked back to her. “But now you should try it on yourself.” She regrettfully allowed him to counter the spell, before placing her wand to her throat once more. “Altusonorus!” she cast, focusing on the memory of the voice she had heard only moments ago, the one burnt into her mind, her true voice.

“Hello,” she said again. Tears sprung into her eyes as she heard her voice, once more beautifully feminine in her ears. “I am a witch and I love this spell! I am in Gryffindor House and I play seeker on the Quidditch team and my best friends are Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger.” Professor Flitwick chuckled as she rambled on, basking in her voice.

Eventually, she wiped her eyes and looked back to him. “How long will it last?”

“I would say that currently, your spell will expire naturally in two, perhaps three hours. As you practice casting it more, your magical endurance will improve and it will last longer for you.”

“I’ll practice it every day!” she said enthusiastically, almost bouncing with excitement. “Thank you so much! Thank you, thank you, thank you!” She spontaneously grabbed the Charms Master in a hug. A moment later, she released him, shocked at her actions. “Oh Merlin, I’m so sorry!”

Professor Flitwick gathered himself and shook his head. “It’s quite alright, Miss Potter. Now, you won’t have enough time to reach the Great Hall before lunch finishes, so I will have some food brought here. Sunny,” he spoke as if calling someone from outside the room.

With a loud crack that made Harry jump, a figure appeared before the two of them. She stared at the house elf, who wore a toga made from a tea-towel bearing the Hogwarts crest.

“How is Sunny be helping Master Charm Master sir?” she squeaked.

“Miss Potter and I are unable to go to the Great Hall for lunch today,” Professor Flitwick replied. “We will take our lunch here.”

“Yes Master Charm Master sir.” Sunny clicked her fingers and a large platter of sandwiches appeared, along with two plates, goblets and a pitcher of pumpkin juice. “Can Sunny be helping Master Charm Master sir with anything else?”

“No, that will be all,” Professor Flitwick said, already sitting and turning to the sandwiches.

As the Elf bowed and raised her hand to Apparate away, Harry quickly spoke. “Thank you, Sunny.”

Sunny paused and stared at her, before bowing again. “You is being most welcome, miss.” With a final click of her fingers, she vanished.

Harry sat and turned back to see Professor Flitwick giving her an odd look. Shrugging it off, she took a sandwich and said, “I didn’t know Hogwarts had house elves.”

Professor Flitwick watched her a moment longer, then nodded slowly. “Yes, Hogwarts has had a contingent of House Elves since the time of the Founders. They clean the castle and cook all meals. The castle would not be able to run without them.”
“Why have I never seen one, though?”

Flitwick smiled, “Ah, but House Elves pride themselves on remaining unseen while they work.”

Harry nodded, and began eating her sandwich as she thought about how much the House Elves must do at Hogwarts.

“If you wouldn’t mind indulging my curiosity,” Professor Flitwick said, drawing her attention back to him, “I have some questions for you.”

Quickly swallowing her mouthful and taking a sip of juice to wash it down, she nodded. “Of course, Professor.”

“I am curious about this transgender business. How long have you known you were a girl?”

Harry sat back and thought of how to answer. Carefully, she replied, “I always knew really, on some level. Being called a boy and treated like one never felt right.”

“Then why didn’t you say something earlier? From what Minerva told me, you only approached her at Miss Granger’s behest.”

Harry looked away. “My relatives, they… well they didn’t understand or approve of it. I tried talking about it, but eventually it just became easier to pretend it wasn’t real. I just, sort of, tried to forget about it.” She glanced back to see Professor Flitwick with a troubled expression, and busied herself with another sandwich.

“Could you explain to me, what it is that makes you feel that you are a girl?”

Harry closed her eyes, struggling to find the words. “It’s like I said, all the stuff about how boys are treated just felt so wrong. It really hurts when someone calls me boy or sir or Mister. Hearing my voice – before this spell, I mean – was awful. The thought of having hair on my face or my chest terrifies me.” She paused to catch her breath. “But it’s not all like that. It feels so good, so right, to have people calling me Miss Potter. It feels like I can breathe so much more easily being allowed to say I’m a girl. I can think and focus on things and not be constantly trying to ignore that part of myself. And knowing Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall are looking for ways to help me fix my body is such a relief.”

Realising how much she’d been talking, Harry swallowed nervously. “Sorry.”

“Oh, no need to apologise at all, Miss Potter. I found it all quite fascinating.”

They ate quietly for a few more minutes, before the bell to end lunch rang. As Harry gathered her things, Professor Flitwick offered her a final sandwich and reminded her to immediately go to the Hospital Wing if her throat hurt after using the Altering spell on her voice. With the warning that it could damage her vocal chords and make her voice even deeper without proper treatment, she wholeheartedly agreed.

Harry was wearing a mischievous grin that would do the Twins proud when she arrived at the Transfiguration classroom. She waved and nodded to her friends as they greeted her, but only shook her head to their questions.

Soon Professor McGonagall ushered them into the classroom and began her lecture. Harry paid more attention than usual. When the Transfiguration Professor asked a question that she felt reasonably confident for, she raised her hand. After a slight pause from both Hermione and the
“Magic can fill in the gaps in visualisation, but a clearer and more complete image of the goal allows the spell to best cast more easily and the Transfiguration to be completed faster.”

There was a long moment of silence, in which Harry basked in the surprised looks on her classmates’ faces as they heard her true voice for the first time. Professor McGonagall had better control her of her own reaction, but Harry noticed the corners of her mouth twitching with amusement.

“Correct, Miss Potter. You will find that even a basic study of the anatomy of any creature you intend to create through Transfiguration will serve improve your inanimate-to-animate casting.”

Harry settled back with a satisfied grin.

After that, the following weeks fell into much the same pattern – supportive friends, confused classmates, respectful teachers and jeering Slytherins. Every morning, Harry cast her Altering Charm on her voice and revelled in hearing herself speak. She found herself raising her hand in class to answer more questions just to hear it even more.

Not all the teachers were on her side. Snape, of course, continued to sneer every time he called her Miss Potter. When he heard her voice he took points from her and dispelled it for the lesson. She had responded by refusing to speak for the entire lesson, losing more points, but feeling satisfied at not letting Snape force her to have the wrong voice.

On the Friday of the next week a trio of owls swooped in, carrying a large package between them. Harry watched it curiously and felt a jolt of excitement as it landed in front of Hermione.

“Is that-?” she stuttered breathlessly.

“I think so,” said Hermione, carefully unwrapping it to reveal a stack of books. Harry looked on as Hermione flipped through some of them. They were almost all large medical texts, with anatomical diagrams and nearly incomprehensible paragraphs. With a satisfied nod, Hermione placed three of the books in her back, before gathering and rewrapping the remainder.

“Most of these are medical reference for Madam Pomfrey so she can help you, but I got a few for myself as well. I want to be able to help you as much as possible, Harry,” Hermione said with a smile which Harry returned. She honestly wasn’t surprised that Hermione was keeping some books for herself.

“And you can’t stand not knowing all about something,” Harry said teasingly. She hopped to her feet. “Let’s take these up to Madam Pomfrey before class, please.”

As the girls stood, Ron looked down at his mostly finished plate, then at the remaining breakfast platters with a regretful expression. He sighed and joined them, quickly grabbing several slices of toast before running after his friends.

Harry was nearly bouncing with happiness as they approached the Hospital Wing. “Please thank you parents for me Hermione,” she said for the third time.

Ron and Hermione exchanged a fond look.

“What?” Harry asked.
“It’s nothing,” Ron said quickly. When she glared at him, he looked desperately to Hermione.

“We were just talking earlier,” her bushy haired friend said carefully, “and we noticed that this is the happiest we’ve ever seen you.”

Harry shrugged self-consciously. “It’s the happiest I’ve ever been. Better than finding out I had magic, even.”

They looked at her rather incredulously. “Better than magic?!” Ron asked, seeming to have trouble understanding the thought.

Harry shrugged again. “Yeah. I mean magic is great, but if I could trade it to have my body right – or my parents back – I would in a heartbeat.”

Her friends didn’t seem to know how to respond to that. Eventually Hermione slipped an arm around her waist and Ron placed his hand on her shoulder. She smiled at them as they continued, to arm Madam Pomfrey with the knowledge to help her.

Despite all the ups and downs, things were good.
That weekend, Halloween came. As she listened to the other students chatter she was struck by a realisation and giggled. At Ron and Hermione’s curious looks, she told them, “I completely forgot about the Hogsmeade weekend.” It had seemed like the end of the world that she would miss out earlier, but compared to the last few weeks it didn’t seem such a huge deal.

“We’ll bring you lots of sweets back from Honeydukes,” Hermione assured her as they ate breakfast.

Ron nodded quickly. “Yeah, loads.”

“Don’t worry about me, I’m sure I’ll find something to do. I’ll see you at the feast. Have a good time.”

She escorted them to the Entrance Hall, where Filch was peering suspiciously at the students as he checked them off the list.

“Staying here, Potter?” shouted Malfoy from the line. “Is Princess Potter too scared of passing the Demontors?”

Harry ignored him and continued up to the Gryffindor Common Room, which was near solely full of first and second year students with a smattering of the upper years. As she moved towards the dormitory stairs a voice called out to her. “Harry! Harry! Hi, Harry!”

It was Colin Creevey, the second year with who constantly looked at her with hero worship. She had managed to mostly avoid him so far this year.

“Aren’t you going to Hogsmead, Harry? Why not? Hey also, why are the teachers are telling us to call you a girl? And why is your voice different?”

Harry glanced around as the sound level in the Common Room dropped suddenly. Most of the nearby conversations lapsed into silence, as the younger students tried to subtly listen in. She noticed many of the older students simply watching openly.

She sighed and ran a hand through her hair. She felt a knot in her stomach at the idea of talking to so many people about it, but she pushed passed it. “No, I can’t go to Hogsmeade, I—” she hesitated at the idea of telling people her relatives wouldn’t sign her form. Then she had a flash of inspiration. “It’s because of Sirius Black.”

Colin nodded seriously at that, before staring at her expectantly. She took a deep breath.

“My voice is like this and the Professors are telling you to call me a girl because I am one.”

Colin and his friends exchanged confused looks. “So you were secretly a girl and they pretended you were a boy?”

“No, I…” she paused to consider that. “Kind of. My body looks like a boy’s so people thought I was one. But I’m a girl in here.” She tapped the side of her head. “It’s called being transgender.”

Harry was surprised by the insightful question. She suddenly felt a bit warmer towards the boy. “Yeah, it does. Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall are looking for ways to help me with it.”

Colin looked incredibly sad at the thought. “Hey, you can come sit with us, if you like, Harry!”

Harry smiled but shook her head. “No thanks, Colin. I’ve got an essay to work on.” She ducked up to her dormitory and collected her Transfiguration books. On her way out she gave Colin and his friends a quick wave, before leaving the Common Room.

As she headed towards the library, she felt her good mood diminishing. Even though it wasn’t the most important thing, missing out on going to Hogsmeade with her friends was still depressing. As the feeling of loneliness started to intensify, she stopped and changed direction. ‘Homework can wait. I’m going to go spend some time with Hedwig.’

As she wandered along the corridor towards the stairs, she heard a voice from a nearby room. “Harry?”

She turned back to see who was calling her and was met by Professor Lupin at his office door. “What are you doing?” asked the Defence Professor in a concerned voice. “Where are Ron and Hermione?”

“Hogsmeade,” she shrugged, trying not to sound too forlorn.

“Ah,” said Lupin, staring at Harry for a long moment. “Why don’t you come in? I’ve just taken delivery of a Grindylow for our next lesson.”

“A what?” she asked, following the Professor into his office. It was much barer than when Lockhart had owned it. Gone were the many portraits of the prancing fraud. Instead there was a simple bookshelf with many texts along one wall, and a large water tank in the back corner. She looked curiously into the tank to see a small green creature with sharp horns and spindly fingers.

“Water demon. We shouldn’t have too much difficulty with him, not after the Kappas. The trick is to break his grip. You notice the abnormally long fingers? Strong, but very brittle.

She accepted his offer for tea, and sat as he waved her into a chair, with, “Sit down. I’ve only got teabags, I’m afraid – but I daresay you’ve had enough of tea leaves?”

Harry looked up to see his eyes sparkling with mirth.

“Who told you about that?” she asked, annoyed at how fast gossip would spread through the school.

“Professor McGonagall,” Lupin confessed as he passed her a chipped mug of tea. “You’re not worried are you?”

“No…” She considered telling him about the large black dog she’d seen in Magnolia Crescent before nearly being hit by the Knight Bus, but in the end decided not to. She didn’t want Lupin worrying that she couldn’t cope, since he already hadn’t let her face the Boggart.

“Anything worrying you, Harry?” Lupin asked, giving her a concerned look.
“No,” she replied automatically, before taking a sip of her tea. She sighed and put down her cup. “Yes. Why didn’t you let me fight the Boggart the other day?”

“I would have thought that was obvious, Harry,” he said with raised eyebrows.

Harry stared at him. “Why?”

“Well I assumed that if the Boggart faced you it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort.” When Harry continued to stare at him, he added, “Clearly, I was wrong. But I didn’t think it a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialise in the staff room. I imagine that people would panic.”

“I did think of Voldemort at first. But then I remembered the Dementors.” As Lupin looked thoughtful, she idly added, “Though I suppose being stuck with this body would also be up there.”

Lupin looked slightly startled when she said that. A sad look crossed his face. “Is it really so terrible, being mismatched like you are?”

Harry took a sip of her tea as she weighed up her response. “I didn’t really notice how miserable it was making me – constantly pretending it didn’t exist – until I acknowledged it. But not I’ve admitted it to myself, this sense that my body is wrong and I need to fix it is there all the time. I can’t really imagine living with this for the rest of my life.”

Professor Lupin opened his mouth, but didn’t seem to know what to say in response to that. Before he could think of anything, there was a knock at the door. “Come in,” he called, shaking himself slightly.

They had been interrupted by Snape, who was delivering a potion to Professor Lupin, who had apparently been feeling unwell. Snape left after repeatedly reminding Lupin to take it quickly, before leaving with a final glare at Harry. After the strange look Snape had been giving Lupin, she felt compelled to warn him that Snape had long wanted the Defence job, and that the potion could be dangerous. In the end, Lupin ignored her and sent her on her way back to the Gryffindor Common Room.

When Ron and Hermione returned that evening, they came with a load of candy and interesting stories about Hogsmeade. In return she told them about her tea with Professor Lupin and the suspicious potion he had taken. They were both as horrified with the idea as Harry, though Hermione pointed out the stupidity of poisoning someone in front of a witness. Eventually they put the issue aside and spent the night enjoying the Halloween feast.

The day had a final surprise for the students, as a large crowd formed when the Gryffindors approached their Common Room and from ahead Percy called for Professor Dumbledore to be summoned. There were gasps of shock and horror as they saw the Fat Lady’s portrait, slashed and shredded to pieces. Professor Dumbledore arrived and interrogated the gleeful poltergeist Peeves, who took delight in revealing the identity of the culprit – Sirius Black.

Thus, all the students spent the night camped out in sleeping bags on the floor of the Great Hall, while the entire castle was searched for Black, though no trace of him was found. Harry didn’t sleep well that night.

After the break in, the school’s gossip turned away from Harry being transgender to speculation about how Sirius Black managed to get in, to her morbid relief. Harry also found her personal security increased, as older students and teachers seemed set on guarding her. Professor McGonagall even warned her that Sirius Black was likely targeting her – which she already knew –
and that the Professor was considering preventing her from attending the Gryffindor Quidditch practices for safety. She argued that with their first match happening so soon – against their rivals, Slytherin no less – she needed to continue training. The Head of Gryffindor House agreed so long as Madam Hooch was present to ensure her safety.

It soon transpired that they would not be playing Slytherin, as Malfoy claimed his arm to still be injured from Buckbeak, the hippogriff, attacking him earlier in the semester. It was an obvious ploy to avoid playing in the terrible weather. The news sent Wood into a flurry to alter their strategy to work for Hufflepuff’s style. His fervour was so great that he made Harry late for Defence by stopping her to give Quidditch tips the day before the match.

She arrived to find Snape teaching the class instead of Lupin. The Potions Master was incredibly smug as he docked her several points for tardiness, and backchat when she asked after Professor Lupin. He then leapt into a lesson on Werewolves, far ahead of Lupin’s schedule, taking the time to insult the class and demean Hermione for trying to answer his questions and give Ron a detention for pointing out his hypocrisy. To add a final insult to injury, he assigned them a huge essay on werewolves.

Finally, the day of the match arrived, as dark and dreary as the previous weeks’ weather had promised. The rain was so heavy Harry could barely see in front of her, the cold making it hard to fly straight. Hermione helped during a quick time out, placing an Impervius onto her glasses to repel water from them. It wasn’t much but she could see slightly better.

As the match wore on, she was momentarily distracted by the sight of an enormous black dog staring at her from an empty stand, illuminated by a flash of lightning. She nearly lost control of her broom and once she regained control, the hound was gone. She searched the stands for it in vain, until an anguished cry from Oliver warned her that Cedric Diggory, the Hufflepuff Seeker and Captain, had spotted the snitch.

She raced towards the glint of gold, desperately trying to go faster, to beat Cedric, to get the win. Suddenly, sounds seemed muted, and she felt a sudden chill course through her. She was nearly overcome with an intense discomfort, a terrible wrongness that plagued her entire being, this feeling of her body being wrong and wanting to tear her skin off to make it stop.

With a gasp she wrenched her gaze down to the flickering movements at the corner of her vision. At least a hundred Dementors covered the pitch, staring up at her. As darkness crept across her vision, she heard a woman screaming.

“Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!”

“Stand aside, you silly girl… stand aside, now…”

“Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead- Not Harry! Please… have mercy… have mercy…”

She felt herself falling as a cold high voice laughed and the woman screamed and darkness claimed Harry.

Harry awoke in the Hospital Wing to be greeted by her entire body aching terribly, as well as her friends and team – sans Wood. They delivered the first bit of bad news. Cedric Diggory had caught the Snitch as she fell, winning the game for Hufflepuff. ‘I lost my first Quidditch match. I lost it for us, because I can’t deal with Dementors…’

After trying to assure Harry that it wasn’t her fault and calculating their chances of winning the
season, the team left her alone with Ron and Hermione. Her friends told her how Dumbledore had saved her from the fall and driven the Dementors away. They sounded rather awed as they described his fury at the Dementors.

Feeling desperate for a conversation not involving foul creatures, she asked after her broom. Reluctantly, they revealed that her faithful Nimbus 2000, which had carried her for two years, had been blown into the violent Whomping Willow tree and been reduced to kindling. She stared at the remains as Hermione poured them onto her bed. She swallowed and worked hard to control her breathing.

“I’d like to be alone now, please,” she managed to get out in a small voice.

Ron and Hermione exchanged uncertain glances. Hermione looked like she was tempted to argue, but Ron dragged her away with a, “Feel better soon, mate.”

Once she was finally alone she curled into a ball, desperately fighting off tears. The echoing chill of the Dementors still clung to her, and grew with each hammer of bad news delivered to her. All she could feel was the wrongness of her body, itching under her skin. Her face was wrong, her body was wrong, her voice was wrong – a tiny part of her realised her Altering charm must have worn off. She rocked back and forth, unable to prevent the tears spilling out. Desperately, she dug her nails into the skin of her chest, scratching painfully. Anything to distract from the wrongness, to be able to feel something else.

She gave a gasp as a pair of hands gently but firmly enclosed her own, slowly drawing them away from her body. Harry looked up to see Madam Pomfrey, who wore such a compassionate expression that she had to look away. She felt the bed sink slightly beside her, and then arms were enfolding her, and then she was suddenly crying onto the witch’s shoulder.

She didn’t know how long she spent there but when she finally pulled away, wiping her eyes and nose with her sleeve, the painful wrongness had faded. Still not able to look at the Matron, Harry muttered, “Why is it that any time something good happens to me, something bad has to happen and ruin it?”

“What do you mean, Miss Potter?” Madam Pomfrey asked gently, as she pressed a handkerchief into her hands.

“I mean… I learn I have magic and can get away from the Dursleys – but then there’s a mad dark wizard who wants me dead. I finally make friends at Hogwarts – and then half the school turns on me because of stupid rumours. And now I finally have a hope of fixing everything that’s wrong with my body – then Dementors come and give me a lovely reminder of how much it’s wrong. And my broom gets destroyed.”

“I’m afraid those responsible for protecting you have failed rather badly, haven’t they?” When Harry looked up at her, startled, the matron quirked an eyebrow. “In just over two years, I have already seen you in here more times than half of the Seventh Years, Miss Potter. Clearly the people who should be protecting you haven’t been doing it properly.” Her voice took on a dangerous edge. “They will do better in the future. I will see to it.”

Harry didn’t really know what to say to that. Madam Pomfrey shook herself slightly, looked back to her and sighed. “You are right, your life is more difficult than most. You face many things your peers will never have to face. So, the question is, what are you going to do?”

Harry blinked at her. “I don’t understand…’
“You have two options, really. You can look at the problems you a faced with and give up. Don’t play Quidditch anymore because of the Dementors, don’t try in class because of the gossip. Just lie down and give up on doing anything. Or,” she continued, as Harry went to speak with a mulish look, “you can keep going, find ways to deal with each problem and enjoy the good parts when you have them.”

Harry sat in thought, studiously not looking at Madam Pomfrey. After a minute, Harry realised she was chewing on her lip and stopped herself. Finally she nodded. “I guess you’re right,” she said reluctantly. “It’s just hard sometimes, trying to deal with it all.”

“Who says you have to deal with all of it yourself? You have some of the most dedicated friends I have ever seen. I’m sure they wouldn’t be willing to sit and let you suffer. And your Professors will be willing to help you find solutions to problems that are beyond you.” Madam Pomfrey took her hands again. “You aren’t alone, Miss Potter. Try to understand that.”

Harry swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded. She didn’t think she could speak right now if she tried. Madam Pomfrey gave her a satisfied smile. “Good. Now, if you’re comfortable talking about it: what did you mean by the Dementors reminding you of how much your body is wrong?”

Harry froze, feeling incredibly torn. ‘I don’t really want to tell her about it,’ she thought, ‘but it might affect how well she can help me fix my body…’ She mulled it over, before she finally spoke haltingly. “When the Dementors came, I… it felt like-” She shook her head with frustration as she tried to find the words. “It was like my mind was screaming at parts of my body because they shouldn’t be there, they’re not what I’m meant to be.”

Madam Pomfrey frowned thoughtfully. “I believe there was something like this described in the medical texts Miss Granger provided. The term for it is Gender Dysphoria. ‘A sense of one’s psychological gender identity to be different from one’s biological sex.’” She looked back to Harry. “Perhaps you should do your best to stay away from the Dementors, to avoid feeling this sense of dysphoria.”

Harry gave a laugh that sounded hollow even to her own ears. “That’s the problem. The feeling’s always there. The Dementors just make it impossible to ignore.”

Madam Pomfrey looked at her with a sympathetic expression, before standing and smoothing her sheets gently. “Well we will just have to find a way to fix that. I have the medical texts from Miss Granger to research and Professor McGonagall is already reaching out to other Transfiguration Masters. We will fix this for you, Harry.”

The matron smiled down at her encouragingly, before turning to the remains of her Nimbus 2000. “Now, we should get rid of this,” she said, already brandishing her wand.

“No!” Harry exclaimed, curling protectively over the shards. “Please, let me keep it. Just for a little while.” She looked up pleadingly.

Madam Pomfrey’s gaze softened. “Very well. But I will put it in a container. I won’t have splinters all over my ward.” The former broomstick was gathered into a summoned bucket, and then the matron insisted Harry lie back and rest. With a final smile, she left Harry to sleep.

After spending the weekend in the Hospital Wing, Harry was relieved to return to the distraction of classes. Sitting in bed with nothing to do besides overthink had gotten old fast. Even having Potions class was worth it.

Snape continued to sneer at her every time he addressed her and Malfoy was even more obnoxious
after the Quidditch Match, imitating a Dementor whenever she looked at him. Eventually Ron snapped and threw a crocodile heart at Malfoy, losing himself 50 points in the process. Still, the shriek from Malfoy had been well worth the points.

When they went to Defence they found Professor Lupin had returned to class. He listened with concern to their complaints about Snape and dismissed the assigned werewolf essay, to solely Hermione’s disappointment. After an enjoyable lesson on Hinkypunks Lupin called for Harry to remain behind.

He asked her about her broom, and told her how the Whomping Willow had been planted the year he arrived at Hogwarts. Harry asked him about the Dementors and why they had affected her so badly. After he reassured her that her reaction to the Dementors was not due to weakness, but instead from the horrors of her past, she admitted to hearing her mother’s final moments.

She then remembered that Lupin had driven off the Dementor on the Hogwarts Express. She pleaded for him to teach her how to protect herself and he eventually agreed to teach her after the holidays.

Buoyed with the promise of Anti-Dementor lessons, and relieved at Ravenclaw demolishing Hufflepuff in their Quidditch match, Harry was starting to feel more positive as December arrived.

Two weeks before the end of term, Hogwarts started to buzz with the approach of Christmas. Professor Flitwick’s classroom was decorated with literal fairy lights, and he had taken to having his harp play Christmas tunes softly in the background as he taught.

When the notice for a final Hogsmeade weekend on the last day of term was put up, Harry had a sudden idea. After nervously dithering over it for a few days she gathered up her courage and went to speak with Parvati and Lavender.

“Hi Parvati, Lavender,” she said as she approached where the pair were sitting. “Could I ask a favour?”

“Oh, hi Harry! Sure!” said Lavender brightly, waving her into a seat next to them. “What do you need help with?”

Harry bit her lip anxiously. “I was hoping you could give me advice on some stuff…”

The girls exchanged a glance. “What kind of stuff?” Parvati asked carefully.

With a deep breath, Harry plunged forward. “Girl stuff. I don’t really know much about things like fashion or uh… or makeup.”

The girls stared at her in surprise for a moment before their faces lit up with excitement. Lavender squealed, “Oh my gosh! Of course!” Parvati seized her hand and began dragging her to the Girls’ Dormitory stairs.

“I didn’t mean- you don’t have to now-” Harry stuttered.

“No reason not to now,” Lavender said brightly, grabbing her other hand. “This is going to be so much fun!”

Harry was pulled up to the Third Year Girls’ Dorm Room, where Lavender and Parvati pushed her onto one of the beds. Then they were off, flitted around the room, collecting various small containers and bottles, while Harry sat watching and already starting to feel slightly overwhelmed.
Eventually, the girls joined her on the bed. Harry looked back and forth between them. “So,” said Parvati, “I’ll go through some makeup looks with you. We have nearly the same skin tone, so my makeup will work best. And, if you’re okay with it, Lavender can do an amazing Hair Thickening Charm, and she’ll be able to style it into something nice. Does that sound okay?”

Harry blinked at her before nodding hesitantly. Immediately she was set upon by the pair of witches. Lavender moved to sit behind her and brandished her wand at Harry’s hair. She shivered as she felt the sensation of her hair growing rapidly. Parvati reached out and gently turned her face more towards her.

“All right, so we’ll start with a nice foundation to smooth out your face and give us a good base to work with.” As she spoke, Parvati began using a small sponge to apply a cream to Harry’s features. “Then we do some powder to make it look more natural,” she said as she used a brush to apply the makeup. “We use just a touch of bronzer to give yourself a bit of glow and some blush to give you some colour in your cheeks.”

As Parvati worked, Harry felt her head growing heavier as hair tickled the back of her neck. With a satisfied noise, Lavender tapped her head and the growing feeling stopped. “Your hair is super nice and soft Harry!” Lavender exclaimed as she ran her fingers through it, catching on several knots and making Harry wince. “But it’s so unruly. Would you mind if I put some Sleekeazy in it?”

“Umm, no I don’t mind,” Harry said, glancing back over her shoulder to see Lavender wearing a gleeful expression. Parvati reached out and turned her face back with a small huff. As Lavender ducked away to grab whatever Sleekeazy was, Parvati flipped open a small box to reveal a rainbow of colours. She hummed in thought then covered a brush with one colour. “Alright Harry, keep your eyes closed until I tell you to open them.”

Harry closed her eyes, flinching slightly as she felt the brush touch her eyelid. As she held herself still, Lavender began running her fingers through her hair again, this time without catching on any knots or tangles. After the brush had gone across both her eyelids several times, something new touched the edge of her eye. She flinched back and Parvati huffed again. “Stay still Harry! Eyeliner is hard enough to put on already.” Harry tried to avoid moving as the… whatever it was touched her eye again, running along her eyelid. She tried to focus on her hair instead, where Lavender was gently pulling and moving it. Harry wasn’t sure what exactly was being done there.

“Okay, open your eyes and look up.” Harry obeyed cautiously. Parvati held up a strange feathery looking brush. “Don’t move, and try really hard not to blink.” With that, she began to run the brush along Harry’s eyelashes. Immediately her eyes began watering, but she clenched her jaw and managed to avoid blinking until Parvati moved the brush away. As she wiped away a stray tear, Parvati smiled. “Almost done!”

“Thank Merlin,” Harry muttered, to giggles from Parvati and Lavender. She grinned ruefully. “Do you two do this every day?”

“Not quite this much,” Parvati replied, as she looked through the pile of makeup beside her. “Usually we just do lighter makeup for a more natural look.”

“We thought you’d like a slightly brighter look for your first time, though,” Lavender added.

“Just the lips left to do,” Parvati said, holding up a tube of bright red lipstick. “Open your lips a touch please.” Harry did so, and Parvati gently applied it. “All done!” she said cheerfully.

“Same here,” Lavender said, moving around see Harry’s face. “Oh you look so cute!” Harry felt herself blushing and looked away shyly.
“We can show you what you look like now,” Parvati offered, “or we can dress you up as well, and you can see the whole look together. Which would you like?”

Harry hesitated, torn between wanting to see how she looked with makeup and trying clothes. Finally she decided, “Clothes, please.”

The girls grinned at her and darted around the room once more, now collecting clothes. They had her stand this time, and held various items of clothing against her, comparing sizes and commenting on how they would match.

After nearly two dozen different items of clothing being pressed against her, she was given a small pile and ushered into the bathroom to change. Thankfully the girls had picked out a simple enough outfit. Harry could recognize the clothes at least, and could figure out how to put them on. She did have a moment of pause when she went to button the blouse and found the buttons on the opposite side than she was used to, before shrugging at the strangeness of fashion.

Once she was dressed, she bashfully returned to the dorm room. She placed her old clothes on the end of the bed, while Parvati and Lavender gave her a final look over. Harry felt incredibly embarrassed as they cooed over her, but also strangely pleased.

Parvati nodded with a satisfied expression but Lavender frowned. “It’s still missing something. Maybe that scarf you got last year? He’d look good in that.” Harry felt tight clenching pain in her heart, as Parvati nodded and turned back to the wardrobe. Lavender, who was still looking at Harry, took in her expression. “Are you okay?”

Harry bit her lip and looked away. “It’s nothing.”


“It’s just…” Harry sighed. “You just called me ‘he’.”

“Oh,” Lavender frowned. “Did I?”

Harry nodded and looked away as she fought back a sudden wave of tears. ‘Why am I crying over this? I dealt with it for thirteen years already.’ She flinched as she felt arms circle her.

“I’m sorry,” Lavender said quietly as she held her. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“We’ve spent so many years thinking of you as The Boy Who Lived, it’s hard to remember the change sometimes,” Parvati pointed out.

Lavender drew back and grabbed Harry’s hands. “We’ll do better, I promise.” Harry gave her a weak smile and nodded in thanks. Parvati brought over a scarf in Gryffindor colours and wrapped it around her neck.

“How’s that?” she asked.

“She looks perfect!” Lavender declared. Still holding Harry’s hands, she pulled her to where a large mirror stood, currently covered by a sheet. Placing her in front of it, the girls pulled aside the covering and Harry gasped as she saw the girl in the mirror.

Her face looked so smooth and flawless, it almost seemed like she was glowing in the afternoon sunlight streaming into the room. Her hair was not a short, shaggy birds’ nest, but instead was styled into a long, thick braid reaching down to her neck. Her eyes were lined with black and
seemed so much larger than before. Her eyelids were coloured with a shimmery maroon and gold. Her lips were a vivid red that kept drawing her eye.

She reached up a hand to touch her face in disbelief, then froze, echoes of Aunt Petunia complaining about smudged makeup echoing in the back of her mind. Lavender seemed to guess what she was thinking.

“Don’t worry about messing it up. It’s magical, it won’t come off until you use the remover,” she reassured.

Harry nodded, slightly dazed, as she took in the rest of her appearance. She couldn’t help but smile as she saw how well her scar was hidden, despite her hair no longer covering it. Draped around her neck was the Gryffindor coloured scarf. She was wearing a simple red blouse and a short black coat. There was a long white skirt with black leggings hugging her legs. Her feet were in a pair of red shoes with a small strap and about an inch of heel. Harry couldn’t stop staring. ‘I- I look pretty.’

“Yes, you do!” Lavender squealed. Harry felt her face flush as she realise she had spoken aloud. She opened her mouth, though she didn’t know what she wanted to say, when the dormitory door opened. She spun towards it in surprise to see Sally-Anne Perks stopped in the doorway, giving her a confused look.

They stared at each other for several seconds before comprehension dawned on Perks’ face. “Potter?” she asked in amazement, moving into the room and looking closer. Harry drew back from the scrutiny and nodded shyly. Perks shook her head. “Wow, I didn’t recognise you. You look really cute.” She blushed and stuttered, “Not that you don’t normally look cute- I mean-”

Harry was unable to repress a giggle and smiled at Sally-Anne, even as she felt herself blushing even more at the compliment. “Thank you,” she said. Seeing Sally-Anne suddenly reminded her of something. “Oh! I wanted to thank you for standing up to Malfoy earlier. That meant a lot to me. I meant to say it earlier but it got so busy I didn’t get the chance.”

Sally-Anne looked surprised but please. “You’re welcome. I, um… I have a cousin, you see. He’s transgender, like you. I mean he was born a girl but he’s actually a boy so… He’s told me how much it hurts when people insult him about it, so I knew how much it must have been hurting you.” She hesitated. “I didn’t mention him because I wanted to ask him if it was okay for me to tell people at school first.”

Harry grinned. It was always nice to be reminded that other transgender people existed. “Well, thanks again. It meant a lot to me.”

Sally-Anne moved to sit on her bed. “If you’d like,” she said slowly, “I can give you his contact information, if you would like another trans person to talk to. But he’s still a muggle, so you can’t tell him about anything magic.”

Harry considered the offer. Not being able to talk about magic would make things difficult, but the idea of being able to talk to another transgender person, who would understand what she felt, was far too tempting. “Yes, please. I’d like that a lot.”

Sally-Anne gave a bright smile and then moved to her trunk. “I’ll write it down for you.”

Suddenly, Harry found herself being dragged away from the mirror. Parvati and Lavender dumped her on the bed, which she realised they had cleared of makeup and clothes while she had been talking. The girls settled themselves next to her as Sally-Anne walked over and handed her a piece
of parchment. “That’s his name and address,” she told Harry. “If you take a letter to the Post Office in Hogsmeade, they have a service to put it into the muggle post. That’s how I contact my muggle relatives who don’t know about magic.”

“Thank you,” Harry smiled, folding the parchment and going to place it in a pocket. She frowned as she realised neither her skirt nor blouse had any. The other girls shared amused looks.

“Welcome to girls clothes, Harry,” Parvati said teasingly. “No pockets except fake pockets.”

Harry looked at her with confusion. “Where are you meant to carry things?”

“In a bag,” Lavender replied. “We mostly just use our book bags at school, since anything nicer is considered ‘inappropriate attire for an academic environment’.” Her voice became slightly bitter and mocking. Parvati giggled as she darted to the closet and returned with a small red handbag.

“Here use this for now.”

“So you just keep your wands in your bags all day?” Harry asked as she took the bag gingerly and put the parchment safely inside. “What if you need them quickly?”

They giggled at her. “No, our uniforms have pockets, thank Merlin,” Parvati reassured her. “Madam Malkin is great about including them in most of her clothes.”

“Speaking of clothes,” Lavender broke in, “you wanted advice on them?”

“Huh? Oh yeah,” Harry nodded. “I want to ask Hermione to get me some things during the next Hogsmeade trip, but I don’t know what I should ask for.”

As Parvati and Lavender began her education in the daunting world of fashion, Sally-Anne gave her a final smile and wave before retreating to her own bed.

Harry quickly lost track of how much time she spent sitting there, learning about colour coordination and fashion trends. She had quickly resorted to writing down most of what the girls were telling her. Finally, as Harry’s brain felt far too full, the door opened once again and Hermione entered. Her brow was furrowed as she stalked over to her bed, giving Parvati, Lavender and Harry a distracted nod as she passed them.

Harry stared at Hermione, shocked. Sally-Anne not recognising her was one thing, but Hermione had been her friend for over two years. She exchanged a look with Parvati and Lavender, who were grinning smugly.

“Umm, Hermione,” Harry called out. Hermione turned with a frown, looking at the girls on the bed for several seconds before her eyes widened and her jaw dropped.

“Harry?” she asked incredulously, moving carefully closer. “Is this where you’ve been? We couldn’t find you and Ron didn’t know where you went.”

Harry winced guiltily. She hadn’t told her friends her plan, since she wanted to make sure Parvati and Lavender were willing to give her advice before asking Ron and Hermione to take time out of their Hogsmeade visit for her. The whirlwind makeover had been rather unexpected.

“I, uh, asked Parvati and Lavender to give me some tips about makeup and fashion, and they got rather excited.” Hermione shot them a suspicious glance, before looking Harry up and down with a smile.
“Well, you look very nice Harry. Although I would have been willing to help you,” she added with almost a pout. Harry blinked at her.

Parvati interjected, “No offence, Hermione, but you haven’t exactly shown an interest in any of this stuff before.”

Hermione blushed. “Well no, but I could have researched it for Harry.”

“Relax, Hermione,” Lavender said. “We get to have fun talking about fashion and makeup and you don’t have to learn about something you don’t care about.”

Hermione shook her head and sighed. “Okay, I suppose this does work out for the best.”

Harry relaxed, grateful she wasn’t in trouble. “Well, now you know, I suppose I can ask. Would you be able to pick out some clothes for me during the next Hogsmead weekend?”

Hermione looked surprised before nodding firmly. “Yes of course! I said I’d help you any way I can.”

“Thank you, Hermione,” Harry said with a relieved smile.

“Now that I know where you’ve been, though, it is dinner time. Would you like to come down like that?” Hermione asked.

A mixed thrill of terror and excitement shot through Harry. ‘Oh Merlin… Having the whole school see me like this?’

Seeing the hesitation on Harry’s face, Parvati pointed out, “You were just saying how pretty you are. You should show off a little.”

“Oh yes!” Lavender squealed. “You look so cute, the boys will be all over you!”

Harry felt a strange quiver in her stomach and shot Hermione a pleading look. Hermione smirked slightly and helped her to her feet.

“Don’t worry, we’ll keep the boys off you,” she teased her lightly as she gathered up her old clothes.

Harry nodded gratefully, before turning back to Lavender and Parvati. “Thank you for everything. This means so much to me.” They waved off her thanks and made shooing motions.

“Oh, if you’d like, I can lend you some of my makeup,” Parvati offered. “You can practice with it until you get your own.”

“Thank you,” Harry said, feeling like a broken record. “And thank you again,” she added, turning to Sally-Anne, who gave her a small smile and wave before Hermione ushered her out and down the stairs.

Harry slowed as they approached the Common Room, feeling more anxious with each step. Hermione stopped with her, giving her a concerned look. “You don’t have to do this now Harry,” she said reassuringly. “You can change back if you would like.”

“No,” Harry said, taking a deep breath and bracing herself. “I have to do this eventually. Beside,” she said with a smile, “right now I’m pretty.” Hermione beamed at her and entered the Common Room together.
Harry tensed, waiting for people to start laughing, but it didn’t happen. No-one even seemed to be looking at them. They crossed the room towards where their redhead friend slouched against the side of a couch. As they approached, Ron looked up. He stared at Harry in confusion for a few seconds before looking shocked. “Harry? What are you wearing?!?”

Harry shifted self-consciously, holding her bundle of clothes tightly against her. “It’s called a skirt, Ron,” she said, unable to keep a trace of irritation from her voice.

“Besides,” Hermione added, with a glimmer in her eyes, “doesn’t she look pretty!”

Ron opened his mouth to say something, before looking back to Harry. He paused and looked her up and down. His mouth suddenly snapped shut and he blushed to his ears. “Hermione,” Harry whispered in mortification, which only started her bushy haired friend giggling.

As Ron looked away, muttering under his breath, Harry buried her face in her hands. ‘Merlin, these two will be the death of me one day.’ She looked up just in time to see Ron be trapped in a double armed headlock by his Twin brothers. She winced in sympathy.

“Well, well, well,” drawled George casually.

“What do we have here?” Fred continued.

“Whatever could have our littlest brother so flustered?”

“Could it be this charming specimen of femininity before us?”

The Twins turned playful leers on her as Ron turned even redder. She ducked behind Hermione for protection, even as her heart gave a strange flutter. ‘Why does that feel so nice?’ She shoved the thought away. “Help,” she pleaded to Hermione, while the Twins wiggled their eyebrows suggestively.

Hermione managed to stop giggling and put on a mock stern expression, with her hands on her hips. “Alright, that’s enough. Harry’s not used to being this cute. You can tease her more later.”

Harry stared at Hermione with a betrayed look while the Twins laughed uproariously. Hermione just smiled back at her guilelessly. Harry and Ron shared a longsuffering look, though they were unable to contain their smiles.

“Hey, Harry!” came a voice from behind her suddenly. She turned to see Colin Creevey standing there, camera in hand. “You look really nice Harry!” he said. “Do you think I could take a picture?”

Harry opened her mouth to say reject the idea instinctively, then hesitated as she remembered the image of herself in the mirror. “Okay,” she found herself saying. Her friends froze mid-banter to stare at her. She fought down the impulse to run away as Colin raised the camera. She shifted, suddenly incredibly conscious of how awkwardly she was standing and how her arms were full of her old clothes. Quickly she dropped them and raised her hands, unsure where to hold them. She was distantly aware of her friends ducking out from the background of the photo. At the last second she remembered to smile.

She blinked away the remnant of the flash dazzling her vision. She shook her head and leant over to pick up her old clothes. “Was that okay?” she asked Colin, who nodded with a huge grin.

“Perfect,” he replied. “Thank, Harry! Would you like a copy when it’s done?” Harry nodded and gave him a small wave.
She turned back to her friends, who were watching her with varying levels of surprise. Harry shuffled in place awkwardly. “I… I’m going to put these away, and then we should go have dinner.” She quickly turned and fled up the stairs to the Boys’ Dormitory. Relieved to find the room empty, she dropped the bundle of clothes on her bed then took a moment to close her eye and steady herself. With a deep breath, she looked in the mirror. The same pretty girl from before appeared, and she couldn’t keep the smile from her face. ‘Okay, I can do this,’ she though firmly. She remembered Parvati’s words from earlier. ‘Let’s go show off.’

As they approached the Great Hall Harry was already regretting taking so long to get ready. The halls had been mercifully empty on the way down, but as they neared the doors, she realised that was because almost everyone was already at dinner. She stopped outside the doors, trying to steady her breathing as she heard the muted chatter of the entire school on the other side. Hermione gave her a worried look. “We can bring you out some food and sit somewhere else,” she offered tentatively. Harry seriously considered it for a moment, before Ron shook his head and placed his hand on her shoulder.

“You’re fine, mate,” he said bracingly. He flushed slightly but continued. “You look really nice. Let’s show them the real Harry Potter, yeah?”

Harry swallowed the lump that formed in her throat as she thought of how amazing her friends were, and smiled at them. She gave a nod, took a final breath and pushed open the doors. As she forced herself to walk to the Gryffindor table, instead of sprinting – towards it or away she wasn’t sure – a few people glanced over, curious to see who had entered so late. She knew that they recognised her, with Ron and Hermione by her side, when nearby conversations suddenly stopped. The silence rippled over the room as people turned to look. And then the whispering started.

She clenched her jaw and continued walking as steadily as she could manage. The heels on the shoes Lavender and Parvati had picked for her kept her strides even. Finally, she reached her House table. She went to sit and paused, taking a moment to consider how to go about sitting. Gingerly, she slipped onto the bench, one leg at a time. Her friends quickly flanked her, giving her a relieving buffer against the whispers and the looks. She gathered up a plate of food and began eating, keeping her head down to avoid those around her peering at her new appearance.

She ate mechanically, already regretting coming down like this so publically. ‘Why in Morgana’s name did I think that this was a good idea.’ She could barely taste her food or hear Ron and Hermione talking quietly across her. It took several repetitions before she realised someone was calling her name.

“-in there Harry?” She looked up to see Angelina, Alicia and Katie sitting across and slightly down the table from her, giving her concerned looks.

Quickly swallowing her mouthful, she asked, “Sorry, what?”

The Chasers exchanged a quick glance. “We just wanted to say, you look very nice right now,” Alicia said with a smile. She nodded at her outfit. “All that suits you.”

Harry felt herself blushing again. She ducked her head and muttered, “Thanks, Alicia.” Then belatedly, “And you too Katie, Angelina.”

That seemed to open the floodgates, and Harry found herself receiving many compliments and questions from what seemed like half the girls in Gryffindor. Feeling her face heat up even more, she directed their praise of her makeup and clothes to Parvati and Lavender. “I just sat there and let
them do the work,” she insisted, as several girls pried for advice.

Despite the large amount of attention she had been put under and how embarrassed she felt receiving so many compliments, by the end of the dinner, Harry couldn’t keep a smile from her face.

AN: A huge thank you to everyone who has left a review, they mean a lot to me. You all have great thoughts and ideas! Hope you keep enjoying.

10 points if you noticed the reference to inwardtranscience’s To Reach Without.
Clothing, Cats and Christmas

On the Saturday of the Hogsmeade trip Harry quietly handed Hermione a handful of coins. She had been assured that even a thorough shopping trip would not require more than a dozen galleons. Hermione had already made sure that she knew Harry’s dimensions – having spent an embarrassing half hour measuring her – to ensure she could find the right sizes. Armed with the sheet of figures, and the advice from Parvati and Lavender, Hermione promised she would bring Harry clothes she would enjoy.

After she saw her friends off Harry began to head towards Gryffindor Tower, ready to spend the day deciding what to replace her Nimbus 2000 with. She only made it up a few floors before she found herself waylaid by the Weasley Twins. After calling her into an empty classroom, they presented her with an early Christmas present in the form of a blank old piece of parchment. When Harry expressed her lack of excitement at the gift, they described their daring theft of during their first year and then revealed the secret of the parchment to her. The Marauder’s Map, able to track the movements of everyone in the school and reveal secret passages around and out of Hogwarts.

With final winks and nods from the Twins, she made her way to the secret passage to Honeydukes. It felt like over an hour before she found herself sneaking out from the basement of Honeydukes into the store proper. She wandered between the throngs of students gathered in the store, marvelling at the huge varieties of magical candies. Harry delightedly collected some of the most interesting looking ones, sending Fred and George her utmost gratitude.

As she looked around for even more interesting things to buy, a group of students shifted and she saw Ron and Hermione looking at a candy display. She quietly snuck up behind them.

“I’m pretty sure Harry will kiss us if we bring her some sort of treacle,” Hermione was saying, as she shifted the large bags she was holding to her other hand.

“So… do you want to find some or not?” Ron asked as he looked over the various lolly jars.

Remembering Hermione’s betrayal during the Twins’ teasing earlier in the week, Harry grinned at the opportunity before her. Placing her hands on her hips, she cleared her throat.

“Well, Hermione?” she asked with a raised eyebrow, as her friend jumped and spun to face her.

“Do you want to find some treacle?”

“Harry!” Hermione squealed. “What are you doing here? How – how did you –?”

“Wow! You’ve learned to Apparate!” Ron said, with an impressed look.

“I haven’t,” Harry replied, before giving Hermione a stern look. “You still haven’t answered me.” As her bushy haired friend sputtered at her, Harry was unable to avoid breaking into laughter. Ron chuckled with her while Hermione huffed.

“Well, that’s a nice way to treat the person who spent their morning shopping for you,” Hermione snapped, though Harry could see her trying not to smile. She thrust her handful of bags at Harry. “Here you can carry these now. And tell us how you got here!”

Harry grinned, taking the half dozen bags and quietly telling them about the Map. Ron expressed his outrage that his brothers hadn’t shown it to him, while Hermione insisted they turn it in to Professor McGonagall to help catch Sirius Black. Harry and Ron argued that Black couldn’t be using the passages – of the three not known to Filch one was caved-in, another was blocked by the
Whomping Willow, and the final would require breaking in to Honeydukes past patrolling Dementors. Hermione wasn’t pleased but she let it go.

The group purchased their chosen sweets and then Harry was given a small tour of Hogsmeade, though the blizzard outside quickly forced them to take refuge in the Three Broomsticks. They had just started to enjoy some hot Butterbeer together, when Professor McGonagall, Flitwick, Hagrid and Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge walked in. Only ducking under the table, and a quick spell from Hermione to move a nearby Christmas tree to hide her, prevented her being caught.

Harry tried to stay silent, barely breathing, as they talked with Madam Rosmerta about Sirius Black. She leaned forward, curious to learn more about the mad wizard who was after her.

She was sent reeling as she learned that Sirius Black been her father’s best friend at Hogwarts. And he was her godfather! She could barely breathe as she sat listening. Then the worst truth was revealed. Flitwick explained the Fidelius Charm and the role of the Secret-Keeper – who hid the secret in their soul where none could reach it – and McGonagall revealed that Black had been Keeper for the Potters’ hiding place from Voldemort.

“Black betrayed them?” gasped Madam Rosmerta. The words echoed in Harry’s ears as it was confirmed. She barely heard them continue to talk, describing how Black had arrived at Godric’s Hollow looking for his fallen master. How he had killed poor Peter Pettigrew when confronted as he fled. How despite twelve years surrounded by Dementors, he had been disturbingly sane before his escape. As the teachers and Minister finished their conversation and left, Harry found herself shaking with shock.

Her journey back to Hogwarts was a blur. All she could focus on was the words repeating in her head. ‘Black betrayed them. Black betrayed them. Black betrayed them.’ At dinner Ron and Hermione watched her nervously as she ate mechanically, feeling her shock giving way to anger and betrayal. She stood abruptly.

“I’m going to go talk to McGonagall,” she said as her friends gave her concerned looks. She stalked over to the Staff Table, stopping in front of Professor McGonagall.

“Was there something, Miss Potter?” the Transfiguration Professor asked her with a raised eyebrow. It took Harry a moment to unclench her jaw and she barely resisted the urge to scream at the Professor.

“Can I please speak to you, privately?” she asked tersely. Professor McGonagall’s other eyebrow joined the first, but she stood without comment. As the Professor lead her out of the Hall towards her office, Harry clenched her fist tightly, trying to stop the shaking plaguing her whole body.

When they were finally in the privacy of the office, she couldn’t contain herself any longer. “Why did no one tell me that Sirius Black was my bloody godfather?!”

Professor McGonagall’s face pinched momentarily at her language, before the question sank in, and her expression became horrified. “Who told you that?” she asked, tightly gripping the back of chair she was standing behind. Harry felt her anger burn even hotter, but she held it back.

“Ron and Hermione were sitting at the table next to you, when you were all gossiping about how terrible it was that Black was my dad’s best friend and my godfather and how he my parents were betrayed by their best friend!” Her voice had started at a snarl and risen to a near scream.

“Control yourself, Potter!” McGonagall snapped. “You will not speak to a member of the faculty in
“That will be quite enough of that,” McGonagall said, gently but firmly breaking Harry’s grip. Struck by dizziness, her knees gave way and she collapsed into the Professor’s arms. As she continued crying uncontrollably she distantly heard Professor McGonagall murmuring, felt her hand stroking her hair.

She didn’t know how long it was before she finally regained control. Harry pulled back from the embrace as she caught her breath and wiped at her eyes. “Sorry,” she muttered.

“There’s no need to apologise for feeling emotions, Harry,” Professor McGonagall said kindly, handing her a conjured handkerchief. “Come, sit down.” She stood with a surprisingly spry motion and helped Harry to her feet. After guiding Harry to the seat at the desk, she sat on the other visitor
chair, rather than behind the desk. With a flick of her wand, she Summoned a tartan tin, and offered it to Harry.

“Have a biscuit, Miss Potter,” she said. Harry blinked at her for several seconds before hesitantly taking a Ginger Newt. She couldn’t meet the Professor’s gaze, so she simply looked at the floor as she nibbled the biscuit.

“I am sorry that you learned of this in such a way, Miss Potter,” Professor McGonagall began gently. “I simply wished to spare you this unnecessary pain. I know you want to do something but you are still a child and it is the responsibility of the adults in your life to protect you. Black will be caught by people with far more experience than you. Until then, however, you must try to stay safe. Keeping yourself out of Black’s hands is the best thing you could possibly do. Don’t dwell on this anger, Harry. It will eat at you until there is nothing left. There is an old saying, ‘The best revenge is to live well’.”

Harry struggled to swallow her biscuit, mouth suddenly dry. She thought of Snape and how his anger consumed him. ‘I don’t want to be like that. Ever.’ She looked up to see Professor McGonagall giving her a sad smile. She looked away, unable to bear the look. As the silence stretched, she shifted on her seat, and reluctantly nodded. “Okay,” she said in a small voice.

In the corner of her eye Professor McGonagall relaxed almost imperceptibly. She sat in thought while she quietly at the biscuit. ‘I still hate Black,’ she mused, ‘more than anyone. Except maybe Voldemort. I won’t try to go find him, but if he comes to me, I won’t just run away.’ With that resolution burning in her chest, she felt calmer and more focused. She looked up to Professor McGonagall, who was watching her with incredible patience.

“I’m sorry I yelled at you, Professor,” she said. “I can understand your reasons, even if I don’t agree with them.”

Professor McGonagall gave her a nod and a small smile. “Thank you, Potter. Just try not to let it happen again. I will walk you back to the Common Room.”

Harry hurriedly shoved the last of her Ginger Newt into her mouth and allowed herself to be ushered from the room and escorted back to the Tower.

As she entered the Common Room, Ron and Hermione gave her concerned looks. She walked over to them and flopped onto the couch. She smiled as they exchanged cautious looks.

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked carefully.

With a slow nod she replied, “Yeah, I’m okay. Talking to Professor McGonagall helped.”

Her friends shared a confused look.

“We… we thought you’d still be upset about what we heard…” Hermione trailed off, looking worried that Harry might yell or cry.

“I still hate Black,” she replied with a frown. “But if I try to find him, I’ll just be giving him what he wants.” Her friends let out relieved sighs. She failed to suppress a snort of laughter.

“It’s not funny, Harry!” Hermione said, slapping her shoulder. “You looked so angry before, we didn’t know if you were going to do something stupid.”

Harry shrugged. “I was considering it. But Professor McGonagall convinced me that I shouldn’t. ‘The best revenge is living well’,” she quoted, trying to mimic the Transfiguration Professor’s
brogue. Ron snickered and Hermione scolded her, though she couldn’t keep a small smile from her face. “Still,” Harry continued, “if he manages to get close to me, I can’t just let it go.”

“Dammit,” Ron muttered, as Hermione’s face twisted.

“Harry, please—”

“Do you know what I hear when Dementors get near me?” Harry interrupted her. Before they could reply she ploughed on. “I hear my mum screaming and begging for Voldemort to kill her instead of me. And I just learned that the man responsible for that, the man who betrayed her, was supposed to be a friend of hers. So no, I can’t just forget about it.” She paused, breathing deeply as she tried to keep control of her emotions. She really didn’t want to start crying again. “I won’t go looking for him, but I damn well won’t run away if he’s right there in front of me.”

Hermione and Ron exchanged helpless glances. Harry hopped to her feet. “I’m going to bed.” She hesitated a moment. “Thanks for looking out for me,” she said softly, before slipping up the stairs to her dorm.

Harry spent most of the next morning in bed. She didn’t relish the idea of watching her dorm mates scrambling to finish packing in time for the train. Eventually, she was driven out by a combination of boredom and hunger. After a moment of hesitation, she picked out an outfit from her newly purchased clothes.

After they had eaten a late breakfast, Harry, Ron and Hermione relaxed in the Common Room for several hours. Despite her resolution yesterday, Harry still found her thoughts being drawn back to Black and his betrayal. As she stared moodily into the fire, Ron jumped to his feet.

“Alright, that’s it,” he said, grabbing her arm and dragging her out of the chair. “It’s the holidays. Let’s go down and see Hagrid. We haven’t visited him in ages.”

“Yeah,” Harry said after a moment. “Let’s go see him.”

Hermione frowned. “Harry isn’t supposed to leave the castle,” she pointed out. Harry turned to her and, on a whim, pouted slightly. “Please, Hermione. Just a quick visit to Hagrid, one of our oldest and dearest friends?”

Hermione looked torn. “Oh come on, Hermione,” Ron said. “It’s almost Christmas.” With a sigh, Hermione nodded, and the three of them fetched their cloaks and made their way through the snow to Hagrid’s hut.

Ron’s hopes of finding improved Christmas cheer proved in vain, however. They found Hagrid in tears over a letter from the Ministry declaring that Buckbeak the hippogriff would face a hearing over his attack on Malfoy earlier in the year. The trio assured Hagrid that they would help him research the case and get Buckbeak acquitted.

While not an upbeat experience, the visit broke Harry out of her funk. She couldn’t brood constantly and still be able to help Hagrid win the case. They spent the days leading up to Christmas sprawled across the Common Room, reading up on historical creature trials for some precedent or loophole to save Buckbeak. Despite very few students remaining for the holidays, the castle was resplendent with the usual Christmas decorations.

Christmas morning, Harry awoke to the pile of gifts she was slowly becoming accustomed to. She careful unwrapped them, as Ron tore apart the wrapping on his own. A hand knitted sweater and delicious home cooked pastries were from Mrs Weasley. The movement of a small package caught
her eye as it fell when moved some wrapping aside. Opening it, she found a simple silver chain necklace. Confused, she searched the paper to find a note.

_Miss Potter_
While presents from faculty to students are prohibited, there is nothing to prevent me providing medical apparatus to patients during the holidays. This necklace will maintain the Altusonorus Charm for you as long as you are wearing it. Professor Flitwick – who assisted in creating it – promises the enchantment will last at least five years.
Merry Christmas.
Madam Pomfrey.

With a grin of her face and tears in her eyes, Harry quickly put on the necklace. As wonderful as the Sound Altering Charm was, having to cast it two, three, sometimes four times a day had been getting exhausting. As she wiped the stray tears away, she noticed a strangely shaped parcel, long and thin. Grabbing it and unwrapping it she gasped, drawing Ron’s attention.

“Is that a…?” Ron trailed off as Harry lifted the broom almost reverently.

“It’s a Firebolt,” she whispered, staring from it to Ron in shock. They spent a moment admiring it before they thought to ask who sent it. A search of the wrappings revealed no sign of the sender. They tried to figure out who could have sent it, debating back and forth, until Hermione arrived carrying Crookshanks, her large ginger cat. Eagerly showing her the broom, Harry was surprised to find she didn’t share their excitement. She pointed out that it was rather suspicious to receive a gift this expensive anonymously and warned them not to ride the broom.

Before she could explain, however, Crookshanks made a fresh attempt at Scabbers, Ron’s pet rat. After the tussle, in which Ron had been thoroughly scratched and Crookshanks nearly kicked, Hermione dragged her cat from the room.

Ron and Hermione were giving each other the silent treatment as they all met in the Common Room – Ron for her cat’s latest attempted raticide; Hermione for Ron attempting to kick her cat. When she saw the Firebolt as Harry brought it down, she glared at it too. Despite having already given up on even attempting to get those two talk to each other, Harry wanted to check why she disliked the broom.

Gently touching her friend’s shoulder, she asked, “Hermione, what were you trying to say about the Firebolt?”

Hermione huffed and folded her arms. “I was trying to say – that broom was probably sent by Sirius Black!”

Ron snorted loudly. “Why the hell would Black send Harry a top of the line racing broom?”

“Maybe because he’s hoping she’ll be so excited that she’ll try to ride it without having it checked for jinxes or curses?” Hermione snapped back.

With an incredulous look, Ron snarled, “Oh, come off it. How exactly is a wanted criminal meant to buy a top of the line racing broom? He can’t exactly walk into Quality Quidditch Supplies and buy one, now can he.”

“I’d rather let the Professor’s check the broom than see Harry killed because we couldn’t be bothered!” Hermione yelled back at him.

As they argued, Harry chewed her lip. The Firebolt was the most amazing broom she had ever seen
and she desperately wanted to keep it. But her promise to stay safe from Black echoed in her mind and she sighed.

“Okay,” she said, causing Ron and Hermione to break off their argument. “Hermione’s right, I can’t take the chance. The Professor’s will be able to see if it’s jinxed. If it’s not, I can use it. If it is…”

Ron’s face twisted and his ears turned red, before he turned and stormed from the Common Room. Harry and Hermione exchanged a frustrated look. They collected the Firebolt and carried it to Professor McGonagall’s office. A few minutes after knocking, their Head of House greeted them in her tartan dressing gown and hair net.

She raised an eyebrow at them. “What has you here this early on Christmas morning?” she asked rather drily. As Harry held out the Firebolt to her, Hermione explained her suspicions. The Professor’s expression became very grim. “You were right to bring this to me,” she told them, taking the broom carefully. “I will have Madam Hooch and Professor Flitwick strip it down to ensure that it is safe. It shouldn’t take more than a few weeks.”

Harry grimaced at the thought but nodded. “Thank you Professor,” she said.

They didn’t see Ron again until they went down for lunch. When they arrived at the Great Hall, they found the house tables moved aside and a single far smaller table set for the remaining residents of the castle. Aside from Harry, Hermione and Ron, the only other students were two first years and a Slytherin fifth year. The remaining seats were taken by the Heads of Houses, Filch and Professor Dumbledore.

Ron had made sure to sit away from the remaining free chairs, leaving Harry and Hermione to sit at the end of the table. Lunch was enjoyable if surprisingly loud for the small number of people. Dumbledore seemed to delight in booming out Christmas cheer. Harry blushed when he turned his twinkling gaze to her and offered his compliments on her new fashion style.

Halfway through the meal, Professor Trelawney joined them, though of course she couldn’t resist making her usual fuss about omens of death and ill fortune. Harry and Hermione shared pleased looks at Professor McGonagall’s dry commentary on the matter.

When Harry and Hermione rose together, she declared that whoever rose first would be the first to die. Hermione scoffed and Harry shrugged, while Professor McGonagall coldly dismissed the notion. “Coming,” Harry asked Ron cautiously.

Ron gave Hermione a venomous look. “No, I think I’ll stay here a while.”

After moment of hesitation, the girls left him and returned to the tower. They hoped Ron would calm down soon.

Ron remained angry at them for the remainder of the holidays. He camped out in the Common Room, glaring at them when they were too loud or came too near. They took to staying in the library to avoid him, spending their time researching for Hagrid or working ahead on their assignments. She also began composing a letter to Sally-Anne’s cousin. She introduced herself and how she knew Sally-Anne (sans magic) and explained that she was writing to him at Sally-Anne’s advice. She continued with a request for information about being transgender, from someone who understood.
It was a relief when the rest of the school returned and gave the girls a buffer from Ron’s anger. Wood cornered her the first night to check on her broom selection. He had been ecstatic at the idea of the Firebolt, and horrified at the idea of it being stripped down. He finally left her alone after extracting a promise to purchase a decent broom if she didn’t have the Firebolt in time.

When lessons resumed, Harry finally brought out the girls’ uniforms Professor McGonagall had provided her earlier in the year. She had quickly become used to wearing feminine outfits, and honestly, she couldn’t bear to go back to boy clothes. She endured gentle ribbing from Dean and Seamus, with a slightly forced smile. There were renewed stares from her classmates, and Malfoy lit up with malicious glee. (“Is Princess Potter feeling pretty today? Maybe if you look pathetic enough the Dementors will leave you alone.”) Despite all that, the new uniform felt like freedom.

Each class quickly fell back into their familiar patterns. Care of Magical Creatures became more interesting as Hagrid recovered his confidence, while Divination continued to try Harry and Hermione’s patience. She quickly descended to quietly mocking Trelawney behind her back, causing Hermione to laugh guiltily.

Harry was surprised to find many of her classes seemed easier than normal. Hermione was amused when she mentioned it. “Oh really?” she asked teasingly. “Are you saying all that extra study outside class does have good effects? That it makes it easier to understand the course material and do well?” She only laughed harder when Harry pouted.

After their first Defence class, Harry reminded Lupin of the promised anti-Dementor lessons. He gave told her to go to the History classroom on Thursday evening. She left him musing how to simulate the effects of a Dementor using without a true one.

“He still looks pretty unwell,” Harry mentioned to Hermione as they walked from the class. “What do you think’s wrong with him.”

A torn expression crossed Hermione’s face and she chewed her lip for a minute. “Come in here,” she said finally, dragging Harry into an empty classroom. As Harry sat on a desk and looked at her with raised brows, Hermione whispered, “I figured it out after Professor Snape assigned that essay, when he was substituting for Professor Lupin. He keeps getting sick at the full moon.” When Harry continued to stare at her blankly, she huffed in irritation. “He’s a werewolf, Harry!”

“Oh,” Harry said, blinking in surprise. “Why didn’t you say anything earlier?”

Hermione wrung her hands. “Because he’s the best Defence teacher we’ve ever had, and if people found out, it would ruin his life. No one wants to hire a werewolf, and they certainly wouldn’t want one near their children.”

Harry’s brow slammed together. “That’s rubbish,” she snarled. “If he were dangerous something would have happened by now!”

“I know,” Hermione said tiredly. “So we have to keep it secret, for his sake.” Harry nodded, still stewing over the unfairness of Professor Lupin’s lot in life.

During lunch on Thursday, Harry was passed a note. Opening it, she found a letter from Madam Pomfrey asking her to come to the Hospital Wing. She felt a bolt of excitement run through her. ‘Could they have found something to help me already?’ Unable to bear the thought of waiting, she showed Hermione the note before hurrying up to the Hospital Wing.

Madam Pomfrey greeted her with a smile. “Ah, Potter, good. You received my note. I have
something for you.” She paused, smile growing wider as Harry almost vibrated with impatience. “I have been in contact with several Potions Masters and researchers. With the information Miss Granger provided me earlier in the year, we have developed a new potion to do part of what you need.”

She picked up a small vial of sky blue liquid. “This is the Masculinity Muffling Mixture. It will prevent you from experience any further effects of male puberty, and potentially reverse some of what you have experienced.

Fighting down the part of her that was disappointed to not have an instant fix, she smiled brightly at Madam Pomfrey. “That’s wonderful. Thank you,” she said.

Madam Pomfrey smiled. “There are potential side effects I want to inform you about before I give it to you.” Harry gave her an impatient look. “Without any male hormones, you may find your mood dropping or shifting sporadically. You may find that your muscle mass decreases, although the nutrient potions you are being provided with will help combat that.”

After a moment of hesitation, Madam Pomfrey asked, “Have you started experiencing any sexual urges or desires?” Despite her clinical tone, Harry felt herself blushing incredibly hard immediately, and shook her head, unable to make herself speak. With a nod, Madam Pomfrey continued, “This potion may delay you experiencing them. I suspect you will find the final side effect you may experience a benefit. You may experience an increase in breast size and sensitivity.”

Harry’s eyes widened and her breath caught. Madam Pomfrey quickly added, “This will not be as effective as the second Potion we are still developing. You are unlikely to see any significant changes before it is ready. I simply need to ensure you know all the possible effects before you decide to take it. This is, technically, an experimental potion.”

Nodding, Harry took a deep breath. “Okay. I want to take it.” Madam Pomfrey gave her a mildly chiding look, but couldn’t keep the smile from her face as she handed the vial to Harry who quickly drank with a small grimace.

“I will have a dose sent to you each morning to take during breakfast with your nutrient potion.”

“Thank you!” Harry said, beaming at the Matron. “Thank you so, so much!”

Just knowing that she wouldn’t need to worry about her body continuing to grow incorrectly was a huge weight off her shoulders. As she left, she caught herself practically skipping and quickly forced herself to walk normally, but she felt a large smile stay on her face.

That night, Harry met Professor Lupin in the History classroom for her first anti-Dementor lesson. Lupin brought along a packing case containing a Boggart, in the hopes that it would turn into a Dementor for her to face. He then taught her the theory of the highly advanced Patronus Charm. Her first practice, sans Dementor, produced a small cloud of silver mist.

Then, after steeling herself, she attempted to use it against the Boggart-Dementor. Despite her best efforts, the memory of her first flight didn’t seem to be happy enough. She passed out before she was able to conjure even a wisp of mist. Her second attempt, using her memory of winning the House Cup last year, proved just as unsuccessful. This time as her vision faded she heard a new voice.

“Lilly, take Harry and go! It’s Him! Go! Run! I’ll hold him off-”
She awoke to Professor Lupin calling her name and tapping her hard on the face. Shaking off the disorientation, she sat up slowly. “I heard my dad,” she whispered. “That’s the first time I’ve ever heard him – he tried to take on Voldemort himself, to give my mum time to run for it…” She hurriedly wiped away the tears she felt on her face.

“You heard James?” Lupin asked, sounding slightly strangled.

“Yeah…” she said with a sniff. “Why – you didn’t know my dad, did you?”

“I – I did as a matter of fact. We were friends at Hogwarts. Listen, Harry – perhaps we should leave it here for tonight. This charm is ridiculously advanced… I shouldn’t have suggested putting you through this…”

Harry pushed herself up with a wince. “No! I’ll have one more go! I’m not thinking of happy enough things, that’s what it is… hang on…”

She took a deep breath, searching her memory for a truly, deeply happy memory. Suddenly she remembered something from recently, she was amazed she didn’t think of earlier. The moment she had realised that she was a girl, that she was transgender and accepted it. When she had told her friends and they hadn’t recoiled or sneered or denied, but accepted and offered their help.

Concentrating as hard as she could on that memory and the feeling of freedom and acceptance and joy, she raised her wand. “Now.”

Lupin hesitated a moment, before opening the case once more. As the Boggart-Dementor surged out, and the room chilled, Harry cast. “EXPECTO PATRONUM! EXPECTO PATRONUM! EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

She heard the usual screaming rise in her mind, then suddenly stutter. It rose and fell and the Dementor had stopped and suddenly a silver shape burst from her wand to hover before it. Harry felt the effect of the Dementor fading, but she felt light headed and her knees trembled and her wand shook and Lupin finally leapt forward.

Once the Boggart was contained, Harry sank to her knees, gasping but grinning. The silvery form of her Patronus vanished. Lupin congratulated her greatly on achieving that much, but forbade her to try again. He handed her a large bar of Honeyduke’s chocolate. She ate it in silence for a minute, before she couldn’t contain a question any longer.

“Professor Lupin,” she said quietly, causing him to give her a curious look. “Would… would my parents have been okay with me? I mean…” She made a vague gesture at herself. “With how I’m different?”

Lupin paused in extinguishing the candles with a strange, almost pained look on his face. Then he turned and approached her, crouching down in front of her. “James and Lily loved you very much Harry,” he said, eyes going slightly distant. “They didn’t care whether you were a boy or a girl, because you were going to be their child, and they loved you.”

“But that doesn’t mean they’d find this all okay,” she said in a small voice. “I’m not exactly a normal girl…”

Professor Lupin blinked and looked at her. He smiled gently. “No you’re not. But they loved you, so they would have tried to understand, and done whatever it took to help you. Making sure you were safe and healthy and happy were more important than anything to them.” Harry smiled back at him, feeling herself tearing up again, but suddenly not minding.
A thought suddenly struck her, and after a moment of hesitation she blurted out, “What would I have been called if I was born a girl?”

Lupin cocked his head and closed his eyes in thought. “I… can’t remember exactly. I’m sorry Harry. Although,” he added before Harry could do more than sigh, “Lily was adamant that if you were a girl she could continue her family’s flower name tradition.”

He sat in silence, staring into the distance for a few seconds, before he shook his head and rose to his feet. “Come on now,” he said as he reached down to help Harry up, “it’s getting late. Don’t forget to eat all of that chocolate.” He ushered her out with a wave.

Harry walked back to the Common Room, slowly eating the block of chocolate. Her success with the Patronus and Lupin’s assurances that her parents would have supported her left a warm feeling bubbling inside her. ‘And I would have had a flower name,’ she thought with a smile. Despite her aunt, she had always found flower names incredibly pretty. As she savoured the sweet taste, an idea came to her. ‘Maybe… maybe I can change my name…’

The next day during lunch, Harry quietly mentioned her idea to Hermione and asked for help researching names. Her friend immediately agreed and wrote her parents for books on name meanings. Harry started regretting asking her shortly afterwards however, when she noticed how stressed Hermione was becoming with her massive workload. Every night the studious witch claimed a corner of the Common Room and covered several tables with her books, charts and parchment.

After Slytherin’s win over Ravenclaw in the latest Quidditch game, Wood stepped up their training. Between that and her Patronus lessons, Harry only had one night each week to complete her homework. She took to sitting near Hermione and finishing her essays as quickly as she could, before doing what she could to help her bushy haired friend. This mostly involved passing her books or sheets when she asked for them but occasionally she could act as a sounding board and even occasionally offered thoughts that had Hermione frantically writing down ideas.

One night, Wood pulled her aside to tell her he had tried to speak to Professor McGonagall about the Firebolt. She had been incredibly short with him. Apparently she had been rather displeased with him saying, “I don’t care if throws her off, as long as she catches the Snitch on it first.” Harry raised an eyebrow at that, before breaking into a fit of giggles. When she recovered, she told her irate Quidditch Captain that she had spoken to Professor Flitwick earlier. He had assured her that they would be finished checking the broom before the next match. And Professor McGonagall had promised that if it was not returned by the Friday before the match, she would escort Harry to Diagon Alley to purchase a new broom after classes. It was, she said, a reward for her responsibility in bringing it to their attention. Wood had been disgruntled that McGonagall hadn’t simply said so, but pleased with the news anyway.

January passed in a haze of classes, study and Quidditch training. As they entered February, Harry sat drinking Butterbeer with Professor Lupin after another partially successful Patronus session. Despite her best efforts, she still couldn’t produce more than the indistinct shape. She worried that, as morbid as it was, her desire to hear and know her parents was holding her back from truly wanting to stop the Dementor’s effects. Lupin reassured her that for a thirteen year old, managing as much as she could was already an incredible feat. After a while, Harry asked about what was under a Dementor’s hood. Lupin told her no one truly knew, as the only people who saw it suffered the Dementors’ Kiss. Harry was horrified to learn that it irrevocably removed people’s soul, while leaving them alive as empty shells. After a moment, Lupin told her the Daily Prophet had announced the Dementors now had permission to perform the kiss on Black if they found him.
“He deserves it,” she said after a moment of thought.

“You think so? Do you really think anyone deserves that?”

“Yes,” she replied stubbornly. “For…” She paused, considering whether to tell him about the conversation she had heard in the Three Broomsticks. She had already told McGonagall she knew about it – with Ron and Hermione hearing as her cover story. And he had been a friend of her parents, so he had to know about it.

She took a deep breath and continued. “He deserves it because he was my parent’s Secret-Keeper and he betrayed them to Voldemort.”

Lupin’s head snapped around. He stared at her, then breathed, “How do you know that?” She summarised ‘what she had been told by Ron and Hermione’. He continued to stare at her for a long time, enough for her to shift uncomfortably in her chair. Finally he looked. “Yes, I suppose if anything would deserve the Kiss, that would be it,” he said softly. He stared into the distance with a sad face and terrible, hollow eyes.

Harry immediately felt awful for bringing it up. She reached a hand towards him, but stopped short of touching him. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly. “I shouldn’t have mentioned it.”

Lupin shook his head and turned with a small gentle smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “You, of all people, have the right to ask about that, Harry. But please not right now. I- I just can’t.”

Harry nodded cautiously. She desperately searched for anything to distract him. “Thank you,” she said quickly. “For going out of your way to help me, I mean. With all of this.”

Lupin gave her a real smile then. “James and Lily would be so proud of you. I promise you that,” he told her. “You are such a brave, talented, compassionate young witch. You really do have the best of them both.”

Harry felt her cheeks heat up and a few tears spring to her eyes. Before she could say anything, the door opened. Lupin rose to his feet as Professor McGonagall entered the room. Harry sat up straight as she saw the Firebolt in her hands.

“There you are, Potter,” she said, sounding a touch irritated before looking at Lupin. “If I may have Miss Potter, Remus?”

He took a moment to clear his throat. “Yes, of course,” he said, sounding slightly hoarse. “We… we were just finishing up anyway.” She gave him a strange stare for a long few seconds before nodding and gesturing for Harry to follow her. With a final wave to Lupin, Harry quickly obeyed.

“I’ve just come from looking for you in the Gryffindor Common Room,” McGonagall said as they walked. “We have checked it as thoroughly as we can and it is clean.” She held it out to her.

“You’ve got a good friend somewhere, Potter.” Harry beamed as she accepted the broom almost reverently. “I daresay you’ll need to get the feel of it before the match won’t you?” McGonagall asked with a smile back at her. “And do try and win, won’t you? Or we’ll be out of the running for the eighth year in a row, as Professor Snape was kind enough to remind me only last night…”

“I’ll do my best, Professor!” Harry said brightly, before darting forward and hugging her Head of House. “Thank you!”

Professor McGonagall gently pat her on the back before sending her off to the Common Room. She was almost there when Ron intercepted her. “I told you so,” he said with a smug expression.
Harry gave him an exasperated look. “I still needed to get it checked Ron. I have it now, which is what matters.”

“Yeah, alright,” he replied, still rather pleased before a worried look crossed his face. “Listen, can I still have a go on it? Tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure,” Harry said, simply relieved that Ron was no longer giving them the cold shoulder. They returned to the Common Room together, letting Neville in past Sir Cadogan – the Fat Lady’s replacement – to be greeted by a crowd of people eager to glimpse the Firebolt. After the crowd drifted away, Harry and Ron approached Hermione who gave them a tired smile.

“So it’s all clean then?” she asked distractedly. “That’s good. I’m glad.”

Harry frowned at how tired she looked. “Let me help, Hermione,” she said. “I’ll just put this away-”

“I’ll take it!” Ron volunteered. Once he left, carrying the Firebolt like a holy relic, Hermione moved a stack of parchment so Harry could sit.

“Hermione, all this is killing you. You need to drop some subjects.”

“I couldn’t do that!” she cried, scandalised as she searched through her many books for one reference or another.

Harry looked at her doubtfully. “You hate Divination, it is a complete joke. And Muggle Studies is useless to you! Please be reasonable Hermione. This isn’t worth running yourself into the ground over.”

Hermione, with a torn look, opened to her mouth, but Harry never heard what she intended to say. A yell echoed down the boys’ staircase, followed shortly by a furious Ron who was dragging a bedsheet behind him. With a great deal of yelling, he forced them to look at the sheets which were stained with what looked like blood. Then he threw down the most damning piece of evidence – a handful of long, ginger cat hairs.

It had been barely minutes in which Ron and Hermione had been talking again, before it all fell apart. Harry found it incredibly frustrating. Ron was furious that Hermione’s lackadaisical attitude towards Crookshanks had caused the death of his rat, while Hermione argued that Ron was prejudiced and blaming her cat without proper evidence.

Unable to take more of this, Harry steeled her nerves and stepped in. After Ron had stormed off from the latest argument the next day, she pulled Hermione aside. “Hermione, I know you care about Crookshanks, but you’re also very tired and not thinking about this. Crookshanks is a cat. They eat rats. That is part of their natural instincts. You’ve seen Crookshanks go after Scabbers multiple times. Please don’t deny reality just because you don’t like it.” Hermione’s expression became more stricken the longer Harry spoke, until finally she burst into tears. Harry gently hugged her with a muttered apology.

“No, I’m sorry,” Hermione said eventually. “I’ve just been so stressed with all my classes and Hagrid’s case on top of it.” She saw the look Harry was giving her and sighed. “I know you think I should drop some, but I just can’t bear to. And I… I know Crookshanks probably… ate Scabbers. I just couldn’t admit it to myself.” She gave Harry a small smile. “Thank you for making me see reason. I should probably apologise to Ron, shouldn’t I?”

“Probably,” Harry smiled back. “Let’s do that now.”
They approached where Ron was being comforted by his brothers. He glared as Hermione approached, but she kept coming. “What?” he snapped.

“I just wanted to say… you were right. And I’m sorry. I should have listened to you and kept a better eye on Crookshanks. It’s my fault Scabbers is dead.”

Ron’s face went blank with surprise for a moment, before the anger came back. “It’s a bit late for that isn’t it? That doesn’t bring Scabbers back, now does it?” He fell silent as George put a hand on his shoulder.

“No, it doesn’t,” Hermione said guiltily. “But I’ll make it up to you. I’ll help you find a new pet, since it’s my fault you lost Scabbers. And I’ll keep Crookshanks under controls so this never happens again.”

Harry held her breath as Ron considered her words. “Fine,” he said at last, and Harry released a sigh of relief. “Just keep that menace away from me.”

While it didn’t fix everything, Harry was simply glad her friends were on speaking terms again. Ron’s mood improved more when Harry offered to let him use the Firebolt after her Quidditch training that evening. The broom was amazing, the team was inspired and Ron had a blast, so she considered it a success.

Now she just needed the match to go as well.

The match went very well indeed.

Not only had she caught the Snitch, winning Gryffindor the game and keeping them in the running for the Quidditch Cup, but she had also managed to cast a Patronus. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle and Marcus Flint had attempted to sabotage her by pretending to be Dementors, but had instead lost points and secured themselves detentions with a furious Professor McGonagall.

Harry enjoyed the victory party, only slightly distracted by the memory of Ravenclaw’s incredibly pretty Seeker, Cho Chang. Her stomach squirmed as she remembered the cocky grin Chang had shot her after cutting her off, and she felt her cheeks burning. Looking for a distraction, she saw Hermione trying to read a huge Muggle Studies book, despite the noise.

“Come join in, Hermione,” she said as she approached the studious girl’s corner.

“I can’t, I need to read all of this by Monday.”

Harry sighed with frustration. “Hermione, you’re Muggleborn. You could pass Muggle Studies without taking a single class. Hell, I could probably pass it! Please just give yourself one night to relax.” Hermione looked torn, glancing between Harry and her book. “At least come have something to eat.” They looked towards the food table, where Ron was enthusiastically talking about the game. He saw them looking, and grinned, waving them over. Hermione’s shoulders slumped and she closed her book.

“Alright, you win Harry,” she said. “But I will hold you responsible if I don’t do well on my exam!”

Harry smirked as she shepherded her friend towards the party. “I think I’ll be safe.”

The party lasted well into the night, only ending when Professor McGonagall stormed in to insist they sleep. After the exciting, fulfilling day, Harry fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.
What felt like a moment later, she was woken by someone screaming. As she and her roommates scrabbled awake, Ron told them Sirius Black had been standing over his bed with a knife. They saw the torn curtains and hurried to the Common Room, where the rest of the House started to regather, disturbed from their sleep by the yelling and running. Ron tried to convince first the Head Boy, his older brother Percy, and then Professor McGonagall, who arrived shortly after. Finally, the portrait guardian was asked, and revealed he had allowed Black in, as he had possessed the whole weeks’ worth of passwords on parchment, which Neville had lost.

No one slept that night, the entire House staying up in the Common Room as the castle was searched. Professor McGonagall returned at dawn to inform them that Black had not been found.

The next day, Hogwarts improved security immensely. Professor Flitwick was teaching the front doors to recognise Black; Filch boarded up windows and cracks and mouse holes. Sir Cadogan was summarily removed and a nervous Fat Lady returned, with a group of security trolls as guards. The sight of them sent shivers down Harry’s spine as she remembered her first year. By the looks on Ron and Hermione’s faces, they didn’t like the memory any more than she did. Hermione almost stopped breathing the first time she saw them, before Harry and Ron hurried her away.

Harry also found herself being called in to Professor McGonagall’s office. Her Head of House, looking visibly tired, got straight to business. “I am incredibly concerned that Black managed to reach the Dormitory you were in, Miss Potter. If he had started with the correct bed, or Mister Weasley had not woken up, we would likely not be having this conversation.” Harry shivered at the realisation of how close she had come to being murdered in her sleep.

“What can we do? What if he gets passed all the defences again? Isn’t there anything that can stop him?”

“There is something we can do, Miss Potter,” Professor McGonagall said reassuringly. “I think even Black will find it impossible to overcome the magic of the Founders.” Harry stared at her blankly. “We will move you into the Girls’ Dormitory. You can climb the stair, while Black certainly can’t. This will give you an extra layer of protection.”

Harry grinned at her. “And he probably won’t even think to look for me in there,” she giggled. “This makes me feel much safer. Thank you.” Professor McGonagall sent her on to her next class with a smile.

AN: A huge shout out to foobeezoobee for a great piece of fanart! You can find it at twitter.com/foobeezoobee/status/877351117700681729 or on the fanart page of my tumblr: draconicjanus.tumblr.com/fanart
When Harry returned to the Common Room that evening, she discovered that her bed and all her belongings had already been moved from into the Girls’ Dormitory. The other girls had generally warm reactions to her joining them. Hermione was delighted to have a friend room with her, and glad Harry had an extra layer of protection. Parvati and Lavender were thrilled, eager to offer more advice on feminine topics. Sally-Anne welcomed her with a shy smile, while Fay Dunbar merely nodded in greeting.

Harry had mixed feelings about her new dormitory. On the one hand, it made her far safer from Black, and she had a pool of warmth inside her at feeling accepted by the girls. On the other hand, she couldn’t shift the small voice in the back of her head shouting that she shouldn’t be here, only girls were allowed, she was disgusting for being here. It sounded awfully like Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, so she did her best to ignore it.

As days passed after the increase in security, Harry noticed, with a small amount of guilt, that the secret passageway to Honeydukes had not been sealed or guarded. Hermione worried they should tell someone, but Ron pointed out that they would have heard if Honeydukes had been broken in to. Harry was leery of losing her last path to freedom, and in the end decided to only say something if it became obvious Black was using the passageway.

Ron became an instant celebrity, to his delight, with people constantly asking him about Black. By contrast, Neville had never been more outcast – not only was he banned from Hogsmeade and suffering detention, the other Gryffindors had been forbidden to give him the new password to the tower, forcing him to wait to be let in each night. And on top of that, two days after the break-in, he received a Howler from his grandmother. Even with him fleeing, the whole school still heard her chewing him out for bringing shame on the family. Harry stared after him, feeling a strange, unsettling feeling in her stomach. She was only distracted by Hedwig nipping her to deliver a letter from Hagrid. Her large friend invited her, Ron and Hermione for tea, with strict instructions to wait for him to escort them.

When they arrived at Hagrid’s cabin, Harry noticed a gigantic hairy brown suit, with a terrible yellow and orange tie, hanging from the wardrobe. It was, he told them, for Buckbeak’s hearing that Friday. Ron grimaced, shifting guiltily and Harry could guess why. In his recent feuds with Hermione, he had completely forgotten to help with the case. Harry and Ron both apologised for not helping more, which Hagrid waved off.

Harry had been helping research the case of course – between classes, homework, Quidditch practice and Patronus lessons – but most of the credit went to Hermione, who had kept driving at it, frequently stopping to explain complicated legal terms. And that had been on top of what was likely an even heavier workload than Harry had faced. Honestly she was rather amazing. ‘Brilliant, but scary,’ Harry thought with a nostalgic smile. The bushy haired witch blushed as they gave her quick round of applause for her dedicated efforts.

They spent a while talking, about the Quidditch Cup, and Hermione also asked Hagrid for advice on controlling Crookshanks, to Ron’s gratification. He advised her to avoid letting her cat wander freely without her watching. There wasn’t much she could do to change the cat’s natural instincts, but she could at least stay vigilant and prevent anything from happening again.

After Hagrid escorted them back to the castle, they found a crowd gathered around the Common Room notice board. A Hogsmeade visit had been announced for the next weekend.
“What d’you reckon?” Ron asked Harry quietly.

“Well, Filch hasn’t done anything about the passage into Honeydukes…” Harry mused.

Hermione looked horrified. “Harry, you can’t sneak into Hogsmeade again. You promised to stay safe!”

Harry turned an entreaty gaze on her. “Please Hermione, it feels like I’ve been cooped up in here for ages!”

As Hermione gave her a dubious look, Ron jumped in. “Black hasn’t been seen in Hogsmeade at all. And he’d have to pick Harry out of all the students there.”

Hermione seemed to be wavering, so Harry threw out, “I’ll take my invisibility cloak. That will keep me safe if anything goes wrong.”

Hermione groaned and threw a longsuffering glance at the ceiling. “All right, fine. And I suppose I have to come too, to keep you both out of trouble.” She glared at them, but Harry could tell it was mostly teasing.

Shortly after she moved into the girls’ dorm, she was cornered by Parvati and Lavender. “Hi?” she said nervously, as her gaze darted nervously between the grinning girls.

“Hey Harry,” Parvati said in a light tone. “We wanted to tell you, we’ve been super proud of how well you’ve gone, switching uniforms and all.”

“We know it must be a super big change for you,” Lavender added.

Harry blinked at them, feeling rather confused. “Uh, thank you?” she said hesitantly. “Honestly, it’s sort of nice to be able to wear stuff like this,” she admitted, her hand running down the side of her skirt.

“Oh?” Parvati asked with a tilt of her head. “So it feels good?”

Harry shook her head. “Not good, really. It’s more like…” She spun her hand in the air as she tried to figure out how to explain it. “It’s like having something tight around your chest finally come off and being able to just breathe.”

“Huh,” Lavender said, looking thoughtful. After a moment, she shook her head and smiled at Harry. “Well, we’re glad for you.”

Harry smiled and nodded, feeling rather awkward. When the girls didn’t move on, she shuffled her feet. “Was there something else?”

“Well…” Parvati said with feigned casualness, “we also noticed that you haven’t done anything with makeup since we did you up a while ago.”

Harry opened her mouth, not sure what she was going to say. Lavender jumped in before she could speak. “We’re not saying you have to wear makeup if you don’t want to,” she said reassuringly. “Fay and Sally-Anne don’t wear much, and Morgana knows Hermione won’t ever touch it. We just wanted to see if you wanted to try some again.”

Taking a steadying breath, Harry tried to blink back the sudden wetness in her eyes. “I’d like that,” she said, sounding a little choked up. She quickly cleared her throat. “I don’t really know what I’m
doing, so I’d appreciate the help.” As Parvati and Lavender squealed with excitement, she added shyly, “I haven’t bought any of my own yet, sorry.”

Parvati waved away the apology easily. “Don’t worry about it. We’ll use mine to teach you the basics, and we can pick you up a set over the weekend.”

She squeaked in surprise as Harry suddenly hugged her, muttering “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she laughed gently and hugged her back.

Over the next few days, every time she saw a despondent Neville waiting outside the Fat Lady, the unsettling feeling returned. Finally, on the day before the Hogsmeade weekend, she was finally able to put words to it. She promptly marched down to Professor McGonagall’s office.

“How can I help you today, Miss Potter?” Professor McGonagall asked. Harry paused, realising she had been in here more in the past few months than she had in her previous two years. She shook off the thought.

“I need to talk to you about Neville.” Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow, but waited for her to continue. “I- you- He’s been punished enough, Professor!”

McGonagall’s second eyebrow joined the first as she looked at Harry sternly. “I did not realise you were an expert on discipline, Potter,” she said drily.

Fighting back memories of her relative’s ‘discipline’, she made a frustrated gesture. “You’re being unfair,” she snapped. “He’s already lost Hogsmeade trips and had detention. And been publically shamed by his grandmother! You could at least give him back the password.”

Professor McGonagall’s lips had gone very thin. “Miss Potter, it is not your place to tell me how to punish my students. I have decided that Longbottom cannot be trusted with the Password to the Tower.”

“Cadogan changed the password almost three times a day. And you know he has trouble remembering things! Of course he had to write them down. He didn’t mean for Black to get in, it’s not like he handed them to over personally! Does Black have to break in again and kill Neville while he’s trapped outside?! Will you be satisfied then?!”

Professor McGonagall looked as if Harry had slapped her in the face – a mix of utter shock and dawning anger. Harry flinched back, immediately regretting opening her mouth. She closed her eyes and braced herself for whatever punishment her Head of House would lay on her.

As the silence dragged on, Harry cautiously opened an eye, to see Professor McGonagall giving her a strange look. “Why is this so important to you, Harry?”

Harry blinked at the sudden change in tone and address. Then she processed the actual question. “Because…” she said carefully, “you’re not being fair. And you’re always fair to us.” Then she muttered under her breath, “At least after First Year.”

Somehow, Professor McGonagall heard that. “And how was I not fair in your First Year?” she asked primly.

Harry stared at her. “150 points from Gryffindor, for three students being out of bed.”
The Professor gave her a harsh look. “It was for more than breaking curfew, Miss Potter. It was for spreading that cock-and-bull story of a dragon at Mister Malfoy and Longbottom’s expense.”

“We weren’t lying about-” Harry cut herself off. In her research for Hagrid, she had discovered exactly how illegal their actions with Norbert in First Year had been. She certainly wasn’t going to give a confession now. “We were in the safest place in the magical world,” she said instead, “with no Basilisks or mass murderers on the loose. You never punished anyone else that harshly for being out, or for lying to your face. Not even Fred and George. So why did you come down so hard on us?”

Suddenly looking very tired, Professor McGonagall let out a sigh. “I… I didn’t want to tell you this, Miss Potter. Your father was a good, brave, clever man. But in his youth, he was also an incredible troublemaker and, to be frank, could be rather a bully at times.” Harry stared at her, trying to process this new revelation. “I saw you four in my office and all I could think of was him and his little band of troublemakers.”

Harry pushed down the hurt that Professor McGonagall had thought her capable of becoming a bully. After living with Dudley, she was certain she could never become like that. Then she realised, “My dad, Sirius Black, Professor Lupin and Peter Pettigrew.”

She gave Harry a sharp look, but nodded. “I suppose I wanted to make sure you wouldn’t follow in your father’s footsteps. You look so much like him it is sometimes hard to separate the two of you.” Harry flinched at the familiar statement, and of course McGonagall noticed. “Miss Potter?”

“I just… really don’t like being told I look like him,” she said in a small voice. She felt horribly guilty, as if she was being ungrateful to her dad and his sacrifice. But every time someone said it to her, it felt like a punch to the gut.

Professor McGonagall gave her a look filled with sympathy. “Because of the dysphoria?” she asked gently, and Harry nodded. Nodding in reply, the Professor then asked, “Why is it so important that I’m fair?”

Thrown for a moment by the sudden shift in topic, Harry opened her mouth, though she didn’t know what she intended to say. All she had was a wordless sense of how things should be, and how jarring it was when it went wrong. Finally, she managed to give it words. “Because other people aren’t.” She thought of her relatives and their punishments for the most random things. She thought of Snape and his immediate hatred of her simply because of her dad. She thought of all the Slytherins and their jeers and Malfoy’s sneer. With a shake of her head, she brought herself back to find Professor McGonagall giving her another strange, assessing look.

“Very well,” she said at last. “I will take your… opinion into consideration. Run along, now.”

Harry blinked, amazed to be leaving without a detention, or at least loss of points after her outburst. As she reached the door, her Head of House called, “Oh and Miss Potter.” Harry winced, turning back to her. “If you see Mister Longbottom, you may tell him the password. And 10 points to Gryffindor, for being willing to stand up to injustice.” Harry gaped at her a moment before grinning brightly.

“Now get out.” Harry got.

On Saturday, Harry carefully packed her Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder’s Map. After she sent her friends off to Hogsmeade, she had some trouble getting in to the secret passageway – first with Snape watching her suspiciously, then needing to shake of Neville, who couldn’t stop thanking her for giving him the password. Finally, she managed to get through to Hogsmeade, where she found...
Ron and Hermione waiting outside Honeydukes for her. She grinned and, safely under her Cloak, tapped them both on the shoulder. The resulting spat lasted about a minute before they heard her giggling and realised they had been tricked. After some good natured grumbling, they showed Harry what she had missed last time.

They visited the Post Office, where Harry slipped Hermione some money to post her letter to Sally-Anne’s cousin. It had taken her almost a month for her to be happy with it, and to gather up the courage to send it. Hermione was helpful enough to make sure the envelope included a return address that would allow Harry to receive a reply. She was glad she was invisible, so no one could see how badly she was blushing.

After that they visited Zonko’s to Hermione’s disapproval. Then they headed to the Shrieking Shack, pockets bulging with pranking items. Ron and Hermione told Harry about the Shack for a short while, before they were interrupted by Malfoy and his pair of cronies. He had been mocking Hagrid and Buckbeak as they approached and upon seeing Ron and Hermione, immediately began insulting them.

Harry took the opportunity provided by her Cloak to get back at the git. Invisibly, she proceeded to launch mud and gunk at them, while Ron and Hermione laughed at their plight. She had fun for several minutes, before her attempt to trip Crabbe pulled the cloak from her face. On seeing her disembodied head, Malfoy screamed and fled, Crabbe and Goyle scrambling behind.

“Harry!” Hermione exclaimed. “Get back to the castle, quickly!”

She rushed back through the passage as fast as she could. Reaching the statue, she considered trying to make her way invisibly back to the Common Room, but discounted it quickly. There was too much chance of being caught, and that could lose her the cloak. She left it within the statue and climbed out.

She barely managed to close it and step away before she was found by Snape. He took in her red face and muddy hands, and escorted her down to his office. There he interrogated her about what Malfoy had seen, and quickly established that she had no alibi.

“So. Everyone from the Minster for Magic downwards has been trying to keep famous Harry Potter safe from Sirius Black. But famous Harry Potter is a law unto himself. Let the ordinary people worry about his safety! Famous Harry Potter goes where he wants to, with no thought for the consequences.”

Harry bit down a snarl. “Stop calling me ‘he’,” she said, fists clenched tight.

Snape sneered at her. “Making demands now? How extraordinarily like your father you are, Potter. He, too, was exceedingly arrogant. A small amount of talent on the Quidditch pitch made him think he was a cut about the rest of us, too. Strutting around the place with his friends and admirers… the resemblance between you is uncanny.”

Harry flinched again at being reminded of that resemblance. She nearly snapped that her dad didn’t strut, but the memory of Professor McGonagall’s words stopped her. She really didn’t know much about her dad at all. And if he’d been a bully, Snape could have seen the worst of him. She took a deep breath.

“I didn’t know my father,” she said as steadily as she could. “He died when I very young, you see. All I know is what other people tell me. So I don’t know if he strutted, I just know that everyone says he was a good man.”
Snape scoffed at her. “Your father couldn’t have been further from being a good man! He was nothing but selfish, arrogant, petty and cruel!”

“Oh, really!” Harry snarled. “That’s not what Dumbledore told me! He saved your life! You wouldn’t even be here if it weren’t for my dad!”

Snape went even paler. “And did the headmaster tell you the circumstance in which your father saved my life? Or did he consider the details too unpleasant for precious Potter’s delicate ears.”

When she didn’t answer, he revealed the horrible truth – her dad had been responsible for him being in danger in the first place, and only acting out of self-interest. He then demanded she turn out her pockets, revealing her bag of Zonko’s tricks and the blank Marauder’s Map. Snape quickly focused on the Map, trying to unravel its secret. Harry was trapped between delight and horror when, instead of showing Hogwarts, the Map instead began insulting Snape.

Nearly vibrating with fury, Snape had called Lupin in to have a look at the Map which was “plainly full of Dark Magic”. The Defence Professor was very dubious of Snape’s claim or that Harry could have been received it directly from the manufacturers. He declared the matter solved when Ron burst in, panting and declaring that he had bought the items for Harry at the previous Hogsmeade visit.

Lupin escorted Harry and Ron to the Entrance Hall, where he proceeded to quietly chew them out for sneaking Harry into Hogsmeade, despite the danger from Black, and for not handing in the Marauder’s Map, which he somehow recognised. Harry felt terrible when he told her she was gambling her parents’ sacrifice for jokes and trinkets.

The subdued pair made their way back to the Common Room. As they neared, Hermione rushed out to meet them, looking devastated. She had just received a letter from Hagrid, telling them he had lost the case, and that Buckbeak was to be executed. Ron promised to help her research for the appeal, to make up for his previous absence.

The improved security meant the only time they could see Hagrid was at Care of Magical Creatures, later in the week. He varied between numbness and sobbing. When they returned to the castle, they heard Malfoy crowing and laughing at Hagrid’s tears. Before Harry or Ron could do anything, Hermione surged forward and slapped him, hard across the face. After Malfoy and his guards fled, the trio hurried to Charms only for Harry and Ron to realise Hermione had vanished. They found her after lunch, asleep in her study corner of the Common Room. She brushed them off when they tried to convince her she was taking too many classes, and rushed off to apologise to Professor Flitwick.

She rejoined them in time for Divination, where Professor Trelawney had them beginning with crystal ball gazing. Harry, Ron and Hermione made snide comments and laughed through much of the lesson. When Professor Trelawney prophesised the Grim to Harry again, Hermione finally exploded at the ridiculousness of the class. The Professor turned and declared her to be talentless in the art of Divination. Hermione responded by packing her bag and storming out, shouting that she was dropping the subject. After a moment of hesitation, Harry joined her, followed shortly by Ron. They caught up to her at the bottom of the stairs, where she was muttering furiously to herself.

“Howdy, Ron said cautiously as they approached.

Her bushy haired friend whipped around, looking startled. “What are you two doing?” she asked incredulously. Harry and Ron exchanged a glance.
“We’re dropping Divination too,” Harry replied. Hermione looked torn between being flattered and concerned.

“You can’t just drop a subject,” she told them firmly. “You need to take at least two electives to meet the syllabus! I can only leave because I’m taking extra classes!”

Harry grimaced. “Well, I really don’t want to go back to Divination, especially not after that. Why don’t we talk to Professor McGonagall and see what our options are?”

The trio waited outside the Transfiguration classroom for the lesson to finish. Professor McGonagall raised her eyebrow when she saw them, but ushered them inside without a word. After settling behind her desk, she eyed them. “Well?”

The trio exchanged a glance before Hermione spoke. “We would like to drop Divination, please Professor. All of us.”

The Transfiguration Professor stared at them before sighing. “You are free to drop the subject if you wish, Miss Granger. You are already taking classes far beyond the requirements. Miss Potter and Mister Weasley, however…”

Harry grimaced. “Please Professor, isn’t there anything we can do? She keep predicting my death and I- it’s starting to get to me.” Ron and Hermione looked surprised at that. To be fair, she hadn’t been telling them her fears about the Grim that seemed to keep appearing to her, so she supposed she couldn’t blame them.

Professor McGonagall shook her head. “You must take an exam for a minimum of two electives, and I cannot allow you to sit one you have no chance of passing.” Ron looked disappointed and Hermione had a look of resigned acceptance. Harry, however, was struck by an idea.

“What if…” she said distantly, “what if I take the Muggle Studies exam? I’m basically muggleborn so I’ll be able to pass it at the very least. And then I could study extra hard over the holidays and join a different class.”

Professor McGonagall and Hermione both gave her surprised and impressed looks, while Ron was utterly horrified.

“That would be an awful lot of work, Harry,” Hermione said worriedly.

“I agree,” Professor McGonagall said sternly, looking over her glasses at Harry. “You would have three months to learn a year of materials, through self-study only.”

Harry refused to give up. “I can start doing some study now, that will give me a four extra months. And Hermione’s studied all of it, so she can help me during the holidays. Please?” she added, with a hopeful look to her studious friend. Hermione actually looked excited at the idea of studying with Harry in one of her other electives. Professor McGonagall continued to give her a dubious look. Harry steeled herself. “At least let me try?” she pleaded.

After staring at her a moment longer, the Professor nodded. “Very well. I will trust you to put in the effort required for this. Don’t disappoint me.” She gave Harry a very scary glare, before turning to write on a piece of parchment. “Now, which subject would you like to take? I cannot condone you taking Muggle Studies next year. I know you don’t have the same academic interest as Miss Granger. That leaves you with either Ancient Runes or Arithmancy.”

Harry paused and considered the options. She had watched Hermione work on homework for both those classes, and even worked as a sounding board for her ideas, so she had a fairly solid grasp of
what each subject entailed. Ancient Runes was the study of multiple runic languages. From what Harry could tell, there was no magic that could be performed with or on runes. It simply taught multiple written languages. Not her cup of tea personally.

On the other hand, it did look far easier than taking Arithmancy. Her glimpse of that subject made it look like “Divination using maths”, as well as the magical properties of numbers themselves. Honestly, despite being a more cognitive subject, Arithmancy was appealing to Harry more. The fact she could do something more than translate and read with it tipped the scales. “I’d like to take Arithmancy.”

Professor McGonagall raised her eyebrows again, but noted it down without comment. She then turned to Ron. “And you Mister Weasley?”

Ron looked glum. “I don’t know… I don’t like Divination, but I’m not sure I’m up to doing all the extra study. And I don’t think I can pass any of the other exams, anyway.”

As Professor McGonagall went to write, Hermione interrupted. “What if Ron took the Divination exam this year, and changed to Muggle Studies next year?”

“I just said I don’t want to do all that study, Hermione!” Ron snapped. “And why would I do Muggle Studies?”

Hermione faced him with hands on hips. “Would you rather study or be stuck in Divination alone for the next two years? I was thinking,” she continued over him, “I could invite both of you over for part of the holidays. Then I can tutor Harry, and you, Ron, can experience the Muggle world first hand for a few weeks. That kind of immersion in a new culture can teach far more than studying.” She finished with a huff, then turned pink as she realised everyone was staring at her.

“Did you just say real world experience is better than learning from books?” Harry asked incredulously. Hermione blushed even harder.

“We went for a holiday in France over the summer holidays,” she explained. “I knew some French, and I tried to study for it before we left, but actually going out and experience France was what really helped me get the language.”

Harry nodded in understanding. Ron however was stuck. “You speak French?” Hermione rolled her eyes at him. Before they could start a row, Professor McGonagall cleared her throat.

“Muggle Studies, then?” she asked, once they were all looking at her.

Ron hesitated a moment before nodding. “I suppose it’ll be nice to know what Dad’s nattering on about all the time, anyway.”

Professor McGonagall signed the parchment and rolled it up. “Very well,” she said as she stood. “I will see that this goes through. Make sure you work hard. I won’t accept anything less than your best.” She smiled down at them. “Though I think you all made the right choice.”

As the Easter holidays approached, Harry received a surprising letter. A harried looking owl dropped it into her lap, before immediately winging away. Harry looked at it curiously. The envelope was made from paper, instead of the usual parchment. That meant a muggle had probably sent it. But the only muggles who even knew about her were the Dursleys and…

Suddenly her mouth felt dry. With trembling hands she tore open the envelope and pulled out the letter, written on more muggle made paper. She took a deep breath and began reading.
Dear Miss Harry Potter,

I am glad Sally-Anne advised you to write me. It is always good to hear from another trans-sibling. I would of course be happy to help you. I know how terrifying it is to come to terms with being trans, and how much of a relief it is to know there are other people who understand. I also want to reassure you that even if your experience doesn’t perfectly match mine, that doesn’t make you any less trans. You know who you are better than anyone else. There is no wrong way to be trans.

Alright, my story. I only truly realised I was trans when I was a teenager, and began puberty. Before that, I had been content as a tomboy – my parents were never strict on gender roles or expectations. It was only when my body began to develop in ways that my brain told me were simply wrong that I knew something was different about me. I told my parents about these feelings, and they took me to a counsellor, who helped me find the words to express what I was experiencing. I was transgender. I was experiencing dysphoria. It was such a relief. I had a name for what I was and what was happening. More than that, I had a path I could take so that I could feel right. I began Hormone Replacement Therapy almost a year ago. It helped relieve many of the causes of my dysphoria.

It hasn’t all been sunshine and daisies. I faced a lot of backlash. I have changed school repeatedly due to bullying and harassment by students and teachers. Many doctors have expressed their disapproval of my transition or very existence as a trans person. Despite that, I know I am luckier than others. I have a loving, supportive family and a group of understanding doctors who are helping me transition. I know there are people who have neither luxury. Which is why we must always help our trans brother and sisters.

On that note, would you be interested in coming to a meeting with other trans people? I attend a queer group that meets semi-frequently and has a few other trans members. It’s rather refreshing to be able to talk freely, share advice and experiences. It is completely free. You are under no obligation to come of course, but having this community helped me greatly. I hope we can help you too.

Whatever you decide, good luck with your transition.

Tyler Perks

Harry found herself rereading the letter with a teary smile. Hermione and Ron gave her concerned looks. “Are you alright, Harry?” Hermione asked carefully.

Harry chuckled wetly. “I’m fine,” she said. “Really,” she added, as they gave her doubtful looks. “It just never really hit home that I’m not the only one until now.” She tilted the letter to let them read, though she didn’t let it go. By the end, Hermione was beaming and Ron had a slightly bemused expression.

“I’m so glad for you,” Hermione said, flinging her arms around Harry. “Do you think you’ll go to the meetings?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said. “I’d have to hide a lot about myself and how I’m doing my transition. I can’t exactly tell them about magic, can I?”

“I think it would be good for you, don’t you Ron?” she waited a beat for him to agree, but received only silence. “Ron?” she snapped, shaking his arm.

He snapped out of his thoughts. “Sorry, I just didn’t realise there were people who went the other way with the whole transgender thing.”
The girls rolled their eyes at him and turned back to the letter. “Still, it will definitely be good for you to talk to more transgender people your own age.” Harry realised then that she didn’t actually know how old Sally-Anne’s cousin was. She hadn’t mentioned it, and neither had he in the letter. She shook her head at her thoughtlessness. She put the letter away for class, but frequently found herself taking it out to read over in her spare time.

She imagined what the group would be like, being able to see and talk to other transgender people. The thought of talking to so many people made her nervous, but the chance to finding a connection, a bond with them was incredibly exciting.

That night before bed, she asked Sally-Anne about her cousin’s age. Her new roommate had looked surprised and then slightly embarrassed. “He turned 17 this year,” she told Harry. “I’m sorry. I can’t believe I didn’t mention it before.” Harry waved off the apology, and thanked her again for putting them in contact.

She started collecting her nightclothes, when she suddenly remembered the promise made to herself months ago. She wasn’t going to let the Dursleys prevent her from making friends here. Chagrined, she realised she hadn’t made much effort to do so. She steeled herself, turning back to Sally-Anne before floundering. ‘I don’t know how to make friends.’ And wasn’t that a depressing thought. She shook her head. ‘I have to at least try.’

“So, umm… how are classes going?” she asked, then winced. Sally-Anne glanced at her with a confused look.

“Oh, they’re fine,” she said slowly.

Harry bit her lip, this was so awkward, but she refused to give up. “You… you mentioned you were muggleborn. What’s your family like?”

Sally-Anne turned to face her, brows slightly furrowed. “They’re great,” she said. “They were so very excited for me to learn magic, even though they don’t really understand it all. Dad’s a mechanic, and mum writes thrillers, so all this was interesting to them. Umm, what about you? How’s your family.”

Harry couldn’t hold back a wince. “They’re, ah, not as good. They don’t really like, well… anything to do with magic really.” She looked away from the pitying look that crossed Sally-Anne’s face. “So do you?- I mean, have you-?” She slumped. “Forget it.” She turned away, feeling her cheeks burning after messing up so badly. As she collected her nightclothes again, she felt a hand on her shoulder. Glancing back, she found Sally-Anne looking very concerned.

“Are you alright, Harry? Did… did I do something wrong?”

“No, you-” Harry sighed. “I don’t know how to talk or make friends with people. I… it all just jumbles up and I don’t know what to say and I end up babbling like an idiot like I am now so I’m going to shut up now sorry.”

Sally-Anne stared at her before bursting into a fit giggles. “I’m sorry,” she said quickly, as Harry shot her a hurt look. “I just never really imagined Harry Potter being too shy to talk to me of all people”

“Why?” Harry asked, feeling very confused.

Sally-Anne shrugged. “I mean, I’m nothing special.”

Harry blinked at her. “Are you kidding. You’re amazing. You’re so kind and supportive to people
you barely know. And you do well in class, you get it before most everyone. And you have the most amazing hair…” Harry trailed off, as she realised Sally-Anne had turned beet red. She blushed herself, when it struck her how much she had been gushing compliments.

They stood for a few moments, both trying to overcome their respective embarrassment. “Thank you,” Sally-Anne squeaked out. She opened and closed her mouth a few more times, before adding “You’re really great and pretty too.” Her blush came surging back, and she covered her face before ducking back to her bed. Harry grabbed her nightclothes and likewise made a retreat as she ducked into the bathroom to change.

She rested her forehead against the mirror, enjoying the cool feel. Despite her embarrassment, a smile tugged at her lips. ‘That went well.’

The Easter holidays were far less relaxing than previous years. The Third Years were given an avalanche of homework, with Hermione suffering the worst. She worked such long hours and looked so exhausted, Harry was sure she was going to break soon. Ron, between his own homework and researching Buckbeak’s appeal, took over Harry’s role of providing support Hermione while studying. Harry wanted to help more but, with the final game versus Slytherin fast approaching, she had daily practices and barely any time for her own work, let alone her friend’s.

It was the most intensely charged lead up to a Quidditch match Harry had ever experienced. The whole school was buzzing. This was the first time Slytherin had been this close to being unseated as the Quidditch champions. More than that, this match was becoming deeply personal to Harry. She so wanted to beat Malfoy, make him pay – for trying to sabotage her, for his non-stop mockery and most especially for Buckbeak.

On top of that, their chances at winning the Cup rested solely on her. If she caught the Snitch when they weren’t up by 50 points, they would win the match but lose the Cup overall. So Harry was understandably tense.

Finally, the day of the match dawned. The tension was so thick it was hard to breathe. It felt like Harry had barely blinked and she found herself walking onto the pitch. Then the whistle was blown and she was thrown into the dirtiest game of Quidditch she had ever experienced. The Slytherin constantly fouled them, and the Gryffindor, frustrated, responded in kind.

Every time Gryffindor was ahead by enough, the Slytherins focused on keeping her from catching the Snitch. Malfoy even grabbed her broom to stop her, which she nearly kicked him for. In turn, Harry made sure Malfoy couldn’t get anywhere near the Snitch without her blocking him.

After Harry disrupted the latest Slytherin defence, she turned and with horror Malfoy diving for the Snitch. She desperately dove, urging her broom faster and faster, slowly drawing level. With a surge forward that almost unseated her, she batted Malfoy aside and claimed the Snitch.

Three quarters of the stands exploded into cheers, as Slytherin was defeated for the first time in years. Harry was embraced by her delighted team, and then hoisted above the crowd. They were carried to the stands, where a sobbing Wood accepted the Quidditch Cup and after basking in it for a long moment, passed it to Harry. She thought she could cast a Patronus that could clear the Dementors Azkaban now.

Harry basked in the euphoria of her victory for the next week, but she didn’t allow it to distract her from studying for the rapidly approaching exams. She also made sure she studied to catch up on Arithmancy. While she wasn’t doing that exam until next year, she didn’t want to let Professor
McGonagall down. She had been pleasantly surprised that it was not as hard as she had thought. The maths involved, at least to start with, weren’t any more complicated than what she had learned in primary school. Sure she’d avoided doing well so she wouldn’t be punished for showing up Dudley, but she had still paid attention and learnt how to do it. Which was good, because she really didn’t want to put any more on Hermione’s plate right now.

A few weeks after the match, she received a surprise when Hermione dragged her to the library for something that wasn’t revision.

“I know I should be studying but I can’t even focus on it right now and it helped earlier in the year when you made me take breaks so I want to do that now and I also promised to do this for you months ago but I completely forgot with how busy I’ve been and I’m so sorry,” Hermione babbled as she pulled her along.

“Hermione!” Harry finally managed to cut her off. “What are we going to do?”

Hermione blinked at her. “We’re going to research names for you. I should have done this when my parents sent the books, but I just didn’t have time. I’m sorry,” she added quietly.

“Don’t worry about it,” Harry said gently “I’ve seen how hard you’ve been working yourself.”

Hermione smiled gratefully at her then led her to one of the library tables, where she spread out half a dozen books on name meanings and origins. Harry noticed that more than half of them were about baby names. Hermione smiled sheepishly when she pointed it out.

“I did ask for name etymology books too, but… well, most people looking for names are looking for what to call their child.” Harry just shook her head and moved on.

The number of names that existed was rather daunting. They quiet looked through the books, considering feminine names. Hermione tended to focus on the origins and history of each name, while Harry was more attentive to how they sounded, and if they meant anything interesting.

After Harry immediately rejected almost a dozen suggested names in a row, Hermione huffed. “Alright, is there something in particular you have in mind?” Harry blushed, and quietly told her about her conversation with Lupin about her parents.

“I know it’s rather silly, but I like the idea of having flower names. In honour of mum, since that’s how she would have named me.”

“It’s not silly at all,” Hermione reassured her. “In fact it’s rather sweet.” With that criteria they were able to search through the list of names far more quickly.

“How about Heather? From the common name of the purple flower from the Calluna plant. Native to Scotland; used for cleaning, as well as to draw attention.”

Harry, who had cocked her head in consideration, winced at the last part. She knew it was silly to give so much weight to the meaning of a name, but she couldn’t help it. She shook her head before looking back to the book. A familiar word caught her eye.

“I thought Holly was a type of wood, not a flower,” she said, pointing out the entry.

Hermione dutifully read, “From the flower of the Holly tree. Thought to have powers of protection, especially from thunder, lightning and curses. Also a symbol of domestic happiness. How does that sound?”
Harry stared into the distance for a few moments, rolling the name around in her mind. She idly
found herself touching her wand which, to her surprise, grew slightly warm. After a second of
hesitation, she drew her wand, examining the white wood.

“I- I think I like it.”

Hermione smiled. “If you want to try it, I can use it for you.” When Harry nodded cautiously,
Hermione said, “Holly Potter is my friend. She is so brave and generous, I admire her very much.
How was that?”

Harry felt her face flush brightly. At the same time, warmth bloomed in her chest. She hid her face
in her hands. “It was nice. I liked it. But I don’t know if it’s because of the compliments or not.”

“Well,” said Hermione, “shall I continue calling you Holly?”

Harry nodded then paused. “Maybe just when we’re alone? I don’t really want everyone to hear me
trying out names until I decide which one I’ll use.”

With an acquiescing nod, Hermione turned back to the books. “I suppose we’re done then… unless
you want to look for a middle name too?”

Harry considered it. “Yeah. Holly James Potter sounds a little bit funny to me.”

They continued searching through flower names for almost an hour. No others leapt out at Harry,
but she left with a list of a half dozen that she considered the best. After they packed up and were
walking to the Common Room, Harry gave Hermione a tight hug.

“Thank you,” she murmured into her friend’s ear. “You spent so much time helping me with this
and I know how important your studying is.”

Hermione hugged her back just as hard. “You’re welcome, Holly,” she whispered back. “And don’t
be silly. You’re more important to me than any books.”

As they parted, Harry grinned. “Hermione Granger says I am more important than books. The
highest compliment I could ever receive.” She ran laughing, as Hermione swatted at her with mock
indignation, barely suppressing her own laughter as well.

As June arrived, everyone’s workload dramatically increased, with even the Weasley Twins
actually studying for the OWLs. Hermione became more stressed than even the NEWTS students
as she received her exam timetable. Harry and Ron were distracted from asking about her
conflicting schedule on it by a letter from Hagrid. Buckbeak’s appeal was scheduled for their last
day of exams. It would happen at Hogwarts, with an executioner already present, to their horror.
With the increased security measures, they couldn’t go see their friend, and Harry was too scared to
retrieve her Invisibility Cloak.

Exams started, bringing a peak to their stress. Many of the third years complained of the difficulty
in Transfiguration, while Hermione nit-picked the details of her work. Harry had been surprised to
find herself able to achieve the desired results, with very few errors. Her tortoise hadn’t resembled
the teapot it began as, at the very least. In their Charms exam, Professor Flitwick offered her the
opportunity to demonstrate the Sound Altering charm for extra points.

Care of Magical Creatures the next day was likely one of the easiest exams. A preoccupied Hagrid
provided them a tub of Flobberworms to keep alive for an hour. The trio used the chance to check
how Hagrid was holding up. He was incredibly anxious about the appeal, but could do nothing but

wait.

Potions was nothing but Snape hovering menacing as Harry tried to create a Confusing Concoction. She managed to stir the correct way this time, but had clearly missed another step, as her solution would not thicken. She left knowing Snape had failed her.

They had their Astronomy exam that night at midnight, which left the Third Years with several hours of trying to stay awake. Hermione was leading a group of students in revising until the last possible second. After a while of this, however, Harry was getting a terrible headache. As she closed her books and moved to sit near the fire, she was intercepted by Lavender.

“Hey Harry,” the bubbly girl said. “If you’re not studying anymore, I have a fun idea for something we can do to keep awake.”

Harry gave her a cautious look. She didn’t always agree with Lavender on what constituted fun.

“What were you thinking?”

“Your hair is super nice, and you’ve gotten really good at styling it, so I was thinking it would be fun to try giving you a new colour.”

Harry paused. She hadn’t thought of it before, but the idea of being able to try different colours was actually rather appealing. Still she should at least check… “How long will it take? Our exam’s in two hours and I should do at least a bit more study.”

Lavender waved her hand flippantly. “It won’t take more than an hour, tops. And we can quiz each other while we do it. Parvati and I do it all the time.”

After a final moment of hesitation Harry agreed and was promptly dragged up to the dorm room. As Lavender collected some potions from what Harry now knew to be her beauty kit, she said, “I can do pretty much any colour you’d like, and it will last almost a year without fading. I give you something to wash it out earlier if you don’t like it later. Now, did you have an idea of what colour you want?”

Perhaps it was because she had been thinking of honouring her mother recently that caused an idea to come to her immediately. She opened her trunk and fished out her photo album. She flipped to a page with a clear shot of her parents, holding each other and laughing. Returning to Lavender, she held out the album.

“Can you give me the same colour as her?”

Lavender took the album carefully, smiling at the couple. “Are these your parents?” she asked softly. “They look so happy.” She nodded firmly and passed it back. “When I’m done, everyone will think you inherited her hair, not your dad’s.”

With that, Harry was placed firmly onto Lavender’s bed, where she had her hair carefully brushed out then coated through with a potion right to the scalp. “To make the colour change easier,” Lavender told her. Once her hair was thoroughly wet, Lavender ran her wand along the each lock, enchanting the colour into them. As she worked, she quizzed Harry on the constellations and stellar movements they needed to know. It was oddly relaxing.

Once Lavender declared the colouring done, she applied a second potion to Harry’s head, this time a sealant, to keep it from fading until she used the removal potion (for at least a year). Then, after a few minutes carefully drying it with her wand and a final quick brush, Lavender handed her a mirror.
Harry gasped. Her hair was a rich auburn, identical in shade to her mum’s. With all the brushing and potions, it had released its tangles, instead hanging in gentle waves and framing her face quite prettily. She looked up to Lavender who was smiling nervously.

“I love it,” she said with a grin. Lavender squealed and threw her arms around her. Harry could help but laugh as she hugged her back.

The hair salon study session seemed to have worked well for Harry, as the Astronomy exam wasn’t too difficult. She also received many compliments on her new hair colour. Surprisingly, she didn’t mind the attention she was getting for it. It was rather embarrassing the next day, when the Weasley Twins teased her about dying her hair to become more of a Weasley.

“Pity you got the wrong shade!” one laughed.

“Oh well, it’s not as if Mum doesn’t love you more than us already,” the other said, wiping away a mock tear.

Harry fled to her History exam before they could get any worse. After that one, they had Herbology in the scorching greenhouses. She thought she had done alright, though she could tell her plants weren’t quite as lively as Hermione or Neville’s.

Their second last exam was Lupin’s Defence obstacle course, which Harry completed with full marks. Ron and Hermione made a good showing, though neither managed to match Harry’s run. Harry took note of the fact that Hermione’s boggart was McGonagall telling her she had failed everything. When she had a chance, she wanted to talk to her friend about that.

Once Hermione had been calmed, they returned to the castle, where Cornelius Fudge stood at the doors. They had nearly passed him, when he did a double take. “Harry Potter?” he asked incredulously, staring at Harry.

Harry winced. This was the first time someone from outside the school had seen her since she had realised she was transgender and started trying to fix her dysphoria. She knew she must look drastically different to when the Minister saw her during the holidays. With a deep breath, she steeled herself and smiled politely.

“Good afternoon, Minister.”

He gaped at her for a long moment. “What are you wearing?” he finally asked.

Harry glanced down at herself. She didn’t really want to have to explain everything about being transgender to the Minister of all people. So she decided to just act as if everything were perfectly normal. “My uniform?” she replied.

Fudge’s brow furrowed. “But- but that’s the girls’ uniform! And your hair is completely different! I didn’t recognise you!” Harry shrugged. Fudge seemed to be casting around wildly. “Is this a disguise? Trying to throw Sirius Black off from finding you?”

“No Minister,” Harry answered, reigning in her annoyance with the man. “I just prefer this.” When he continued to gape at her, she cleared her throat. “Is there a reason you’re at Hogwarts today, sir?”

Fudge blinked and shook himself. “Oh, well yes. A dreadfully unpleasant mission. The Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures required a witness to the execution of a mad Hippogriff. As I needed to visit Hogwarts to check on the Black situation, I was asked to step in.”
Ron stepped forward, looking like he was about to say something, when two wizards joined them. One looked ancient and shrivelled; the other was tall and brawny with a sharp axe at his belt which he was stroking. When Ron went to speak again, Hermione elbowed him. The Minister and his entourage went on their way, with a final strange glance at Harry. Ron and Hermione got in a small argument, where she reminded him not to be rude to his father’s boss.

After lunch, the three split off for their final exams – Harry and Hermione to Muggle Studies; Ron for what would hopefully be the last he saw of Divination. Harry had been feeling a little nervous. She’d grown up in the muggle world, but she knew her experience at the Dursleys wasn’t exactly normal. Professor McGonagall would be very angry if she failed this.

Professor Burbage gave her a supportive smile as she handed her the exam paper. When they were told to start, she took a deep breath and flipped it over. Swallowing the lump in her throat, she read.

What is the role of electricity within a muggle home?

Name ten appliances that function using electricity?

What are some common muggle games of leisure?

Harry stared at it for several seconds before bursting into giggles. She covered her mouth, as Hermione gave her an outraged glare. Picking up her quill, Harry shook her head at her silliness. ‘Well, I know I’m not failing this one.’

AN: Even before I realised I was trans, being told that I "look just like my father" really, REALLY bothered me on a level I didn’t really understand except in hindsight.

Some important advice for people who are questioning if they are trans. Cisgender people (that is, people whose true gender matches their gender assigned at birth) do not wonder what it is like to be the other sex. They don’t spend time imagining what it is like. Wanting to be a girl is a symptom of being a girl. Wanting to be a boy is a symptom of being a boy.

It’s okay to explore your gender and who you are. If you spend years feeling one way, and then it changes, that’s okay. It doesn’t make anything you went through less real or important to who you are.
After finishing their final exam, Harry and Hermione returned to the Common Room. Hermione, more relaxed than she had been for months, went on about how interesting the Muggle Studies exam had been, and how fascinating what the questions revealed about the magical understanding of muggles.

They spent some time enjoying being able to finally relax. Suddenly, Ron scrambled into the room, a wild look in his eye. The girls exchanged a concerned glance. “Are you alright?” Harry asked cautiously.

“Something weird just happened in my Divination exam,” he told them. “Trelawney had some kind of fit. She went all rigid and staring and her voice got loud and raspy. And she said—hang on I wrote it down.” He pulled out a piece of parchment with his scrawled handwriting over it. “It will happen tonight. The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever before. Tonight before midnight the servant will set out to rejoin his master.” He shoved it into Harry’s hands, looking worried. “And then when I tried to ask her about it she didn’t remember it happening!”

Harry wasn’t sure what to think about that. Hermione, on the other hand, was giving him a very dubious look. “Really, Ron? We already know she’s a fraud. It would be incredibly easy for her to pretend not to remember what she said. She was probably trying to impress you with “the power of Divination” so you wouldn’t drop her class. Having three people change to get away from her probably doesn’t look very good for her. Although I must say it is in incredibly poor for her to make predictions like that.”

Ron was digging his feet in. “You didn’t hear her! It wasn’t at all like her normal stuff. This was different somehow.”

Before Hermione could argue, Hedwig swooped in, dropping a letter between them. They fell silent as they recognised Hagrid’s handwriting. Harry shoved Ron’s note into her pocket. The appeal had been today. Hagrid had lost. They were, he wrote, going to execute Buckbeak at sundown. And he told them not to go down.

Immediately Harry knew they had to go. She refused to let her friend suffer alone. But without the Cloak it would be impossible to get past the security… Ron and Harry were shocked as Hermione proceeded to sneak to the secret passage and retrieve the Invisibility Cloak for them.

After dinner, they proceeded to sneak away and use the Cloak to reach Hagrid’s cabin unseen. Hagrid looked completely hopeless when he let them in. They offered to stay with him for the execution, but he firmly refused. Suddenly Hermione, who had been preparing tea for them, squealed with shock as she found Scabbers hiding in the milk jug. Ron stared in shock before grabbing his squirming pet.

Then Hagrid saw the executioner’s group approaching and quickly ushered the out the back. They had barely got away, Ron trying to control his berserk rat, when they heard voices, silence and the swish of the axe. Fighting off shock and tears, they continued back towards the castle. They reached open ground when Crookshanks appeared and Scabbers leapt from Ron’s grip. Ron bursts
from the cloak to give chase.

Just as he caught it, the group were set upon by a huge black dog. In an effort to protect Harry, Ron was grabbed and dragged into the passage under the Whomping Willow, earning a broken leg as he tried to stop himself.

Harry and Hermione were blocked by the violent Willow for a minute, before Crookshanks showed them a secret knot that froze it, allowing them to give chase. They raced down the passage, which ended in a decrepit room with boarded windows – the Shrieking Shack, they realised, horrified. Carefully, they searched the house until they found Ron, lying on the floor of an upstairs bedroom.

They were in the room before they realised it was a trap and found themselves disarmed by Sirius Black. He looked terrible, gaunt and filthy and mad. He looked over Harry and Hermione, before a strange expression crossed his face. His head tilted and he stepped towards Harry.

“Harry?” he asked and she felt a sense of absurd déjà vu. Fudge had sounded exactly the same. He looked her up and down, looking incredibly confused. If the situation wasn’t so serious it would be amusing. “You look different. Your hair’s like Lily.”

Hearing her parents’ betrayer talk about her mum rekindled her anger. She made to move at Black, before Ron and Hermione grabbed her, holding her back.

“If you want to kill Harry, you’ll have to kill us, too!” Ron snarled, though his face was bone white from the effort to stand.

Black blinked at him. “Lie down. You will damage that leg even more.”

“Did you hear me? You’ll have to kill all three of us!” Ron said, though he was leaning heavily on Harry.

Black grinned at that. “There’ll only be one murder here tonight.”

“Why’s that? Didn’t care last time, did you? Didn’t mind slaughtering all those Muggles to get at Pettigrew… What’s the matter, gone soft in Azkaban?” Black’s face had returned to that strange expression as he heard her speak. She idly realised her voice, high and feminine thanks to her Sound Altering necklace, must sound odd to someone who thought she was a boy.

“Harry! Be quiet!” Hermione hissed, terrified.

“HE KILLED MY MUM AND DAD!” With a wrench, she broke free and threw herself at Black, who didn’t react. She forced aside the wands and punched him hard. There was screaming and yelling and sparks from the wands as she punched him repeatedly. Suddenly Black’s hand found her throat.

“No. I’ve waited too long-” he hissed.

Just as the fingers tightened, Hermione leapt into the fray, kicking Black, while Ron pried the wands from his grasp. She pulled away as Black’s grip faltered, and dived for her wand, kicking at Crookshanks to keep him off it. She spun back, pointing her wand as she yelled, “Get out of the way!”

They moved quickly, Hermione grabbing the other wands, Ron crawling to the bed.

“Going to kill me, Harry?” Black panted from where he was sprawled at the base of the wall. Harry
approached slowly, wand dead on his heart.

“You killed my parents,” she said, standing over him.

“I don’t deny it. But if you knew the whole story—”

“The whole story?” she snarled, her rage burning hotter. “You sold them to Voldemort, that’s all I need to know!”

“You’ve got to listen to me. You’ll regret it if you don’t… you don’t understand…” he rasped urgently.

“I understand a lot better than you think,” she said, her voice trembling. “You never heard her, did you? My mum… trying to stop Voldemort killing me… and you did that… you did it…”

Before she could react, Crookshanks blurred passed her, curling protectively over Black’s heart, refusing to move at Black’s weak protest. Harry raised her wand, ready to avenger her parents. It would take just one spell. She trembled, trying to will herself to cast. Footsteps echoed through the floor and Hermione screamed for help. A voice in Harry’s head shouted for her to do it, but she still hadn’t when the door burst open.

Professor Lupin surged into the room, taking in the scene, before he turned his wand on Harry and disarmed her. Harry stood feeling almost empty. She hadn’t been able to do it.

“Where is he, Sirius?” Lupin asked, and she stared from him to Black. Black paused then slowly pointed at Ron.

Lupin stared at Black, murmuring, “But then… why hasn’t he shown himself before now? Unless—unless he was the one… unless you switched… without telling me?”

Slowly Black nodded. Before Harry could ask what was happening, Lupin had pulled Black to his feet and embraced him. The silence was broken by Hermione screaming at Lupin for his betrayal. As Lupin tried to interrupt, asked them to let him explain, she shouted, “NO! Harry, don’t trust him, he’s been helping Black get into the castle, he wants you dead too – you know he’s a werewolf!”

“Not up to your usual standard, Hermione,” Lupin said, looking calm though pale. “Only one out of three, I’m afraid. I have not been helping Sirius get into the castle and I certainly don’t want Harry dead… But I won’t deny that I am a werewolf.”

Ron tried to stand, but fell with a whimper. As Lupin made to help him, he gasped, “Get away from me, werewolf!”

Lupin stopped, then turned back to Hermione. “How long have you known?”

“Ages. Since I did Professor Snape’s essay.” Her eyes darted to Harry. “And I told Harry just after Christmas.”

Lupin gave Harry a strange look. “And you still came to learn the Patronus from me. I’m flattered Harry, truly. But Snape will be delighted,” he continued, looking back to Hermione. “He set that essay hoping someone would realise what my symptoms meant. Did you check the lunar chart and realise that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realise that the Boggart change into the moon when it saw me?”

“Both.”
He forced a laugh. “You’re the cleverest witch of your age I’ve ever met, Hermione.”

“I’m not. If I’d been a bit cleverer, I’d have told everyone what you are!”

Lupin simply smiled and told them the staff already knew. Then, when they still refused to trust or listen to them, he returned their wands and put his own away. At their questioning he told them he had seen them on the Marauder’s Map – which he had helped make, as Moony – and witnessed an extra person join them in Hagrid’s hut, to their confusion. Then he asked to see Scabbers. At Ron’s question of why his rat was important, Lupin and Black revealed that the rat was an Animagus. Peter Pettigrew.

As they objected that Pettigrew was dead, killed by Black twelve years ago, Black launched for the rat, before Lupin stopped him, telling him to explain, that he owed them – especially Harry – the truth. Hermione pointed out that if Pettigrew was an Animagus he would be registered with the Ministry, which she knew he was not.

Lupin proceeded to tell them the story of how he had become a werewolf as a very young child. How Dumbledore had allowed him to come to Hogwarts anyway, with the Shrieking Shack as a safe location to transform. How his friend – Harry’s dad, Black and Pettigrew – had discovered his secret and instead of turning away, had worked to help him. They had become secret, illegal Animagi, to join him while transformed. He also revealed that Snape had gone to school with them, and blamed all of them for Black nearly killing him by sending him to see Lupin transformed.

Before they could say anything else, Snape appeared from beneath the Invisibility Cloak, wand pointed at Lupin. Eye glittering with triumph, Snape revealed that he had seen Lupin on the Map when he went to deliver the Wolfsbane Potion. He refused to listen to them, binding Lupin with painful ropes. When Hermione tried to ask Professor Snape to let them explain, he screamed at her, sounding deranged with his hatred for Black. He sounded horrifically delighted at the idea of presenting Black to the Dementors to suffer the Kiss. He was far beyond reason at this point.

As Snape levitated Lupin and directed them to the door, Harry moved to block it. She wanted answers. Snape glared at her furiously. “Get out of-” he cut off, staring at her as if he had never seen her before. What little colour left in his face drained away.

Harry used the silence to speak. “I don’t know how much you heard, Professor, but they told us that Ron’s rat is an Animagus. Peter Pettigrew. I know it sounds crazy, but shouldn’t we at least check? If they’re lying, we can take them to the Dementors. If they’re not…”

Snape continued to stare at her. She wasn’t sure he was even breathing. After a painfully long amount of time, he spoke in a monotone. “Peter Pettigrew is dead.”

“Please Professor,” she said. She hated begging her most hated teacher like this, but she needed him on her side. “Just test if it’s an Animagus and we’ll know the truth.”

There was a long moment of silence. It was hard to breathe through the tension. Finally, Snape lowered his wand. “Show me the rat,” he said. He turned to look at Ron, and Harry felt relief to no longer have him looking at her like that. Hesitantly, Ron handed the squirming rat to Snape, who held it in an iron grip. He brandished his wand at it, and with a flash of blue white light the rat was suspended, before falling and with another flash began expanding, transforming into a cringing, snivelling man. The man, who must be Pettigrew, glanced around at them all nervously and looking incredibly scared.

Snape stared down at him. “Hello, Pettigrew,” he breathed icily.
Pettigrew looked at him fearfully. "S-Severus… please, you have to help me. Sirius has come to try and kill me again!" he shrieked, pointing at Black with his middle finger. Harry noticed that his index finger was missing, and remembered what she overheard. 'The biggest piece of him they could find was a finger.'

“What compelled you to spend the last twelve years as a rat, Pettigrew?” Snape asked, wand not moving an inch. “Black was safely in Azkaban, you would have been hailed as a hero. What were you so scared of?”

Black, who had been glaring with pure loathing at Pettigrew, chose that moment to speak up. “He’s been hiding from Voldemort’s old supporters. I heard them in Azkaban, Peter… they all think you’re dead, or you’d have to answer to them… I’ve heard them screaming all sorts of things in their sleep. They think the double-crosser double-crossed them. Voldemort went to the Potters’ on your information… and Voldemort met his downfall there. And not all Voldemort’s supporters ended up in Azkaban, did they? There are plenty out here, biding their time, pretending they’ve seen the error of their ways… If they ever got wind that you were still alive, Peter -”

Snape turned his head to glare at Black. “Are you saying that you weren’t the Secret-Keeper?” he asked coldly. “That you didn’t betray them to the Dark Lord?”

Black looked haunted as he spoke. “I persuaded Lily and James to change to Peter at the last moment, persuaded them to use him as Secret-Keeper instead of me. I thought it was the perfect plan…” he said bitterly, “a bluff… Voldemort would be sure to come after me, would never dream they’d use a weak, talentless thing like you. Of course, we didn’t tell anyone, sure that we had a spy in our midst. And the spy turned out to be you.”

Pettigrew sputtered and stammered, “Me, a spy… must be out of your mind… never… don’t know how you can say such a thing…”. But Harry noticed how pale he looked, and how his eyes kept darting to the doors and windows.

“But,” Hermione spoke up, looking between Black and Pettigrew, “it’s just your word against his. How do we know who is telling the truth?”

Snape stared at Black for a long moment, before turning back to a quivering Pettigrew and stabbing his wand forward. "Legilimens," Pettigrew collapsed to his knees, eyes darting around at something only he could see. His arms drew protectively around his head. After almost a minute, Snape pulled back slightly. Pettigrew whimpered softly at his feet.

"Black is telling the truth, for once,” he said softly. A quick flick of his wand released Lupin from his bonds. Harry stared back and forth, trying to understand what had just happened.

"What- what did you just do to him?” Hermione asked, staring at the trembling form on the floor.

“I used Legilimency to determine the truth, Granger,” Snape said harshly, eyes never leaving Pettigrew. “And Pettigrew was lying.” Harry stared at her parents’ true betrayer.

Lupin, who was behind helped up by Black, noticed the trio’s confusion. “It is essentially mind reading,” he told them. He and Black turned back to Pettigrew with grim looks.

Putting aside the horrifying revelation that Snape had the power to read minds, Harry asked, “So what are we going to do with him?”

“I’m going to kill him,” Black said, a mad glint in his eye. Pettigrew seemed to have recovered from Snape reading his mind and scrambled backwards.
“Severus, please, don’t let him kill me!”

Snape’s wand continuing to track him. “Still just as pathetic as you were at school, aren’t you Pettigrew. Always running to hide behind the biggest bully you can find.”

“I’m sorry for everything that happened while we were at school,” Pettigrew shrilled. “Please, I was just a child! You can’t let him kill me for that!”

“Oh, it wouldn’t be for just that. You betrayed L- the Potters, and then sent someone else to Azkaban for twelve years. You spied for the Dark Lord.” He flicked his wand, tearing away the sleeve of Pettigrew’s shirt and revealing a strange scar on his forearm. The rat Animagus cowered, covering it quickly. “You even have his Mark.”

Pettigrew flinched then turned to Lupin. “Remus, my old friend, you don’t believe him do you… he tried to kill me.”

“Because you betrayed James and Lily,” Lupin replied harshly.

Pettigrew fell back before scrambling to Ron. “Ron… haven’t I been a good friend… a good pet? You won’t let them kill me, Ron, will you… you’re on my side aren’t you?”

Ron recoiled from him, looking utterly revolted. “I let you sleep in my bed!”

“Kind boy… kind master… you won’t let them do it… I was your rat… I was a good pet…” Before Pettigrew could touch Ron, Snape snapped out a jinx, knocking him back. He turned and scrabbled at the hem or Hermione’s robes. “Sweet girl… clever girl… you – you won’t let them… help me.” Hermione pulled away, horrified and Snape knocked Pettigrew away from her, onto his back.

He scrabbled wildly to his knees, eyes falling on Harry. “Harry… Harry… please don’t let them do this… I was James’ friend…”

“HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO HARRY?” Black roared. “HOW DARE YOU FACE HIM? HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT JAMES IN FRONT OF HIM?”

“Harry, Harry, James wouldn’t have wanted me killed… James would have understood, Harry… he would have shown me mercy…”

Black and Lupin strode across the room together, grabbing his shoulders and throwing him away from Harry.

“May I, Remus?” Black asked in casual tone.

“Of course,” Lupin replied, passing over his own wand.

“Anything to say for yourself, traitor?” Black asked, wand raised.

“Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord… you have no idea… he has weapons you can’t imagine… I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen… He Who Must Not Be Named force me-”

Sparks shot from Black’s wand, making Pettigrew squeal in terror. “DON’T LIE! YOU’D BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR A YEAR BEFORE LILY AND JAMES DIED! YOU WERE HIS SPY!”
“He, he was taking over everywhere! What was there to be gained by refusing him?”

“What was to be gained by fighting the most evil wizard who has ever existed? Only innocent lives, Peter!”

“You don’t understand! He would have killed me, Sirius!”

“THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED! DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!”

Lupin spoke in a quiet, dangerous voice. “You should have realised. If Voldemort didn’t kill you, we would. Goodbye, Peter.”

As Black drew back his wand, a voice called, “Wait.”

Black froze, turning to glare at Snape. “Why?” he hissed.

Snape had a terrible smile on his face as he moved forward. “Because I want to do it too.”

Black’s eyes bored into Snape. “Why?”

“You know why.”

Harry stared, feeling very confused by the conversation. Ron and Hermione looked just as lost, while Lupin looked rather shocked. Black stared at Snape for a long moment, before nodding shortly. Snape and Black raised their wands as one.

“NO!” Harry yelled, darting between them and Pettigrew. “You can’t kill him. You can’t.” Her breathing felt ragged as she stared down the two grown wizards.

Black staggered, while Snape’s eyes glittered with malice at her. “Move, Potter,” he hissed venomously.

“Harry,” Black snarled, “this piece of vermin is the reason you have no parents. This cringing bit of filth would have seen you die, too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than your whole family.”

“I know,” Harry gasped. “We’ll take him up to the castle. We’ll hand him over to the Dementors. He can go to Azkaban… just don’t kill him.”

Pettigrew flung his arms around her knees. “Harry! You – thank you – it’s more than I deserve – thank you –”

“Get off me,” she spat, kicking him away from her. “I’m not doing this for you. I’m doing it because I don’t want them to become killers because of you.”

Black exchanged a look with Lupin, before lowering his wand. Snape’s eye burned into her, his wand not wavering. She met his gaze, defiantly. “He’s not worth it.” After a pause, his wand slowly dropped.

“You’re the only person who has the right to decide, Harry. But think…” Black urged, “think what he did…”

“He can go to Azkaban,” she said stubbornly “If anyone deserves that place, he does…”

“Very well,” Lupin said, reclaiming his wand from Black. “Stand aside, Harry.” When she
hesitated, he added, “I’m going to tie him up. That’s all I swear.”

With a flick of his wand, he had Pettigrew firmly bound and gagged.

“But if you transform, Peter,” Black growled as he crouched over him, “we will kill you. You agree, Harry?” Harry looked down at him and nodded her agreement.

Then Snape turned to Ron, conjuring bandages and splint to strap his leg. Sirius suggested two people be chained to Pettigrew to make sure he couldn’t escape. Lupin and Ron volunteered, and were quickly manacled to each of his arms.

Once that was taken care of, the strange group proceeded down to the tunnel back to Hogwarts. Lupin, Pettigrew and Ron went first, with Snape directly behind, wand half raised in case Pettigrew tried anything. Sirius followed behind, with Harry and Hermione trailing.

As they attempted to manoeuvre the manacled trio into the passage, Hermione spoke up tentatively. “Er – Mr Black – Sirius?”

Black turned to her, looking startled at being address in that way. “If you don’t mind me asking, how did you know Pettigrew was here? And how did you get out of Azkaban?”

Reaching into his robes, he drew out a crumpled piece of paper. He smoothed it out to reveal a photograph, torn from the Daily Prophet. Harry blinked at the waving figure of the Weasley family from their trip to Egypt over the previous summer. Black told them how he recognised Peter sitting on Ron’s shoulder in the photo. Hermione noted that it could have been any rat but Black shook his head, indicating the missing toe, which Pettigrew had cut off. Then, he told them how between his Animagus form and knowledge of his innocence, he had kept enough of his sanity and magic to slip out, once he knew Pettigrew was at Hogwarts with Harry.

They walked in silence for a short while, before Sirius glanced back to Harry. He tentatively checked if she knew he was her godfather, and offered, when his name was cleared, to take her in. She agreed, immediately and enthusiastically, asking when she could move in.

After a few beats of silence, Sirius looked back at Harry again, with a curious expression. “If it’s alright for me to ask… what’s happening with… All this? Did you lose a bet?”

Harry took a deep breath, as her stomach flopped with worry. ‘I hope he doesn’t change his mind…’ Pushing away that depressing thought, she explained, “No, I didn’t lose a bet. I- I’m transgender. I’m actually a girl.” As Sirius blinked at her in confusion, she hurriedly added, “I mean, I have a boy’s body right now, but Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall are helping me find ways to fix it.” She stopped herself, realising she was babbling. When the silence stretched, she added in a small voice, “I hope that’s okay…”

Sirius stopped and turned fully, to see Harry withdrawing, shoulders hunched, arms protectively around her stomach. “Hey,” he said, kneeling down in front of her. He reached out and gently grasped her hands. “Of course it’s okay. All I care about is making sure you’re happy. You’re my godso— my goddaughter. It’s my job.”

Her breath caught and she gave him a trembling smile. As he smiled gently back at her, she felt tears form in the corner of her eyes. Her hands were still trapped in his and she couldn’t wipe her eyes. She ducked her head, trying to hide her face as she steadied her breathing. Sirius released one of her hands and gently raised her chin. Feeling incredibly vulnerable, she met his gaze, before he pulled her into a firm hug, with a murmured, “C’mere.” He patted her hair gently and she clung to
Once her breathing had steadied, she pulled back, wiping her eyes. Sirius ushered her ahead, to where Hermione stood waiting a short distance away. She had clearly slipped passed them at some point, and then been torn between following the rest of the group and remaining with them. They hurried to catch up to the others, where Snape cast a disparaging look over his shoulder.

“Do try to keep up, Black,” Snape drawled. “We are doing this for your benefit after all.”

Sirius narrowed his eyes at Snape. “We can’t all slip down the tunnel so fast, Snape. We don’t have enough grease in our hair.”

Snape stiffened. “I would expect such poor gratitude from you, Black. You always were a boorish fool.”

Harry heard a longsuffering sigh echo back from where Lupin was walking. She watched as the two of them sniped at each as they continued down the tunnel.

After carefully exiting the tunnel, the strange group travelled across the darkened grounds. The castle was drawing nearer, when a cloud suddenly shifted, and the party was illuminated by the moon. Lupin went rigid, his limbs beginning to tremble. Sirius and Snape froze, horrified. Then they surged forward, Sirius pushing Harry and Hermione back. Lupin’s body was warping, stretching horribly, as hair sprouted all over his face and body.

Snape’s wand flashed out, severing the chain that bound Lupin to Pettigrew and Ron. As the transformation finished, Sirius blurred into his Animagus form and dove at the werewolf, biting its arm and dragging it away from them. As the canines fought, a clash of teeth and claws, Snape stopped, staring transfixed.

Then Hermione yelled as Pettigrew dove for Lupin’s fallen wand. There were two bangs; Ron, already unsteady was knocked unconscious and Crookshanks was sent flying. Finally, Snape came brought his wand around, disarming the rat Animagus, but before he could cast anything else, Pettigrew transformed, vanishing into the grass. As Snape turned back to the werewolf, it gave a howl and fled into the forest.

Harry called to Sirius, that Pettigrew had escaped, and the huge dog immediately pounded away in search of the rat. Harry and Hermione rushed to check on Ron, who was thankfully alive. Striding over to them, Snape flicked his wand over Ron’s form.

“He will live,” he told them, returning to scanning the forest.

“We’d still better get him up to the castle,” Harry said.

Snape nodded, “Yes, let-” He was interrupted by the loud yelping sounds of a dog in pain.

“Sirius,” Harry whispered, before bolting towards the lake, where the sounds were echoing from. Hermione was a moment behind her.

“Potter, you idiot child, get back here! Granger!”

They arrived to see Sirius transform back to a man, curling up and moaning. And then, they saw the swarm of Dementors gliding towards them over the lake. Desperately, they attempted the Patronus, to protect Sirius and themselves, but all they could do was silvery mist. As the Dementors overcame their failing Patroni, the nearest ones lowered their hoods, revealing
disgusting, horrific faces. A pair of strong, clammy hands grabbed hold of her neck, turned her face
up.

Suddenly, a burst of silver light knocked the Dementor away from her. She fell gasping to the
ground and then looked up. A silver doe was circling them, and Snape was there, determinedly
directing the Patronus to hold foul hoard away.

But even with his protection, the Dementors were only held at bay. Already, she could see him
faltering under the strain, feel the chill returning. As a hundred soul sucking beasts pressed in
against them, the doe began to flicker.

As she felt herself fading, her mother’s screams growing louder once more, another blindingly
bright silver form charged across the lake. The Dementors, unable to withstand the assault,
scattered, abandoning the feast. Harry used the last of her strength to raise her head, peering
desperately to where the new Patronus was returning. For a moment, she glimpsed a figure
reaching out to greet it. ‘They looked like… but that was impossible…’ Unable to keep her eyes
open any longer, she fell in to blackness.

Harry awoke, feeling rather groggy. She heard noise and listened. It was the sound of raised voices,
from very nearby. ‘-dare you question my integrity!’

“Your tale is beyond preposterous! I saw Black laughing over the destroyed street! I heard him
confess! You can’t just waltz in with a story about a man supposedly back from the dead to undo
that!”

“I was not the sole witness, Minister. Lupin, Potter, Granger and Weasley were all present and can
confirm what I am telling you!”

“So I’m supposed to believe the word of a werewolf and three children?”

“I would be trivial to prove truthfulness with Veritaserum!”

“Unless they’ve been bewitched! Black could easily have warped all of your minds with his Dark
Magic!”

“Dark Magic does not work like that, you incompetent buffoon!”

“How do I know you weren’t helping Black the entire time? You served You-Know-Who as well!”

“Be careful with such accusations, Minister. I was cleared of charges after the war. You wouldn’t
want the public to think the Ministry could have failed to find justice in those trials. And with the
Dementors running wild, attacking students and a staff member of Hogwarts… it wouldn’t look
good for the Ministry.”

As Fudge began sputtering, Harry opened her eyes and glanced around the dark Hospital Wing.
She saw Ron asleep nearby and Hermione watching her from the next bed with a worried
expression. Madam Pomfrey approached them with an incredibly large block of chocolate which
she began breaking up.

Harry sat up, grabbing her wand and glasses. “I need to see the Headmaster.”

The matron paused, taking in Harry’s defiant stance. “Is this about Professor Snape’s version of
events? He insists Black is innocent, but the Minister intends to have Black Kissed immediately.”
“WHAT?”

Harry and Hermione leapt out of bed. Before they could move more than a few steps, the door opened as Cornelius Fudge and Snape entered.

Fudge was giving her a concerned look. “Harry, Harry, what’s this. You should be in bed – has he had any chocolate?”

She pushed aside her annoyance at being called he. “Minister, listen! Sirius Black’s innocent! Peter Pettigrew faked his own death! WE saw him tonight! You can’t let the Dementors do that thing to Sirius, he’s-”

“Harry, Hary, you’re very confused, you’ve been through a dreadful ordeal, lie back down, now, we’ve got everything under control…” Fudge said, shaking his head patronisingly.

“YOU HAVEN’T! YOU’VE GOT THE WRONG MAN!”

“Minister, listen, please,” Hermione said beseechingly. “I saw him, too. It was Ron’s rat, he’s an Animagus, Pettigrew, I mean…” She trailed off as Fudge just looked at her condescendingly.

“Quite clearly bewitched. They will have to be monitored carefully yes…”

Snape gave him a look filled with disgust. “Why would Black bother to bewitch them? He had them at his mercy. He could have killed them at any time!”

Fudge waved the question off, as if it were a trivial concern. “The man is insane. I can’t comprehend the way his deranged mind works!”

“SIRIUS ISN’T INSANE! WE’RE NOT BEWitched!”

Madam Pomfrey, quite fed up with them all, ordered the Minister and Potions Professor out. Before anyone could move, Professor Dumbledore entered. With a quick apology, he asked to speak to Harry and Hermione, alone. After a short debate she shot him a look promising dire retribution if her patients’ care suffered and stormed into her office. Fudge checked his watch, then left to meet the Dementors.

Once he was gone, Dumbledore looked to Snape. “Dear me, Severus. Wouldn’t it be a shame if some of the teachers hadn’t heard about the Minister’s decision, and attempted to impede the Dementors from entering the school? That was the last decision they had been informed off, after all.” Snape narrowed his eyes at the Headmaster before nodding and striding away with a swirl of his robes.

As Dumbledore turned to them, Harry and Hermione tried to explain what they had seen. The Headmaster stopped them, telling them their testimony would do no good. Even with Snape’s testimony, they had no evidence. Fudge was refusing to budge.

“I fear he feels it would not reflect well of the Ministry. Thus, he is doing what is easy, rather than what is right.”

“He’d rather an innocent man lose his soul than look bad!” Harry exclaimed, beyond outraged. Hermione was gaping in horror beside her. Dumbledore looked incredibly tired as he nodded sadly.

“I do not have the power to overrule the Minister for Magic. What we need is more time,” he told them, looking to Hermione.
Hermione’s brow furrowed. “But- OH!” Whatever realisation Hermione had received was clearly what Dumbledore was waiting for. His voice turned low and urgent as he told them the exact room Sirius was in and then gave cryptic advice. They were told not to be seen, that they could have two lives and that three turns would do it. Harry was incredibly confused.

Her confusion only became greater as Hermione leapt into action, pulling her close, looping the chain of a small hourglass around their necks and turning it three times. Suddenly, with a feeling like being pulled backwards, she found herself standing in the Entrance Hall with Hermione, who immediately dragged her into a nearby cupboard. Once in there, her studious friend quickly and quietly explained to her the function of a Time Turner, and how she had been granted one for her expanded class timetable. After a short discussion, they realised what Dumbledore wanted them to do – save Buckbeak and ride him to save Sirius.

With that tentative plan in mind, they snuck after their past selves, desperate to remain unseen. They reached the safety forest and crept around to Hagrid’s where they heard themselves talking. Harry couldn’t keep a small smile from her face as she heard voice, sounding wonderfully feminine. ‘I need to thank Professor Flitwick for my necklace again.’

Harry resisted the urge to simply grab Pettigrew now, heeding Hermione’s words of caution about time travel. Once their past selves left and the execution party had arrived and seen Buckbeak, Harry slipped out from hiding. She bowed to the hippogriff and then quickly urged him into the safety of the forest, Hermione desperately joining her. They barely made it in time.

Once the party returned inside, Harry and Hermione carefully moved around the edge of the forest to watch the Whomping Willow. They watched as their past selves chased Sirius and Ron, as Lupin followed a few minutes later, then Snape. The two settled in to wait until they could act to save Sirius.

After a short while, Hermione looked at Harry hesitantly. “Harry, there’s something I don’t understand… why didn’t the Dementors get Sirius? I remember them coming, and Snape came to protect us, but I could feel it… it wasn’t enough. I think I passed out… there were so many of them…”

Harry explained how, as Snape’s Patronus had begun to fail, another Patronus had saved them, from the other side of the lake.

“But who conjured it?” Hermione asked. “Did you see what they looked like? Was it one of the teachers?”

Harry shook her head. “No. She wasn’t a teacher.”

“But it must have been a really powerful witch, to drive all those Dementors away… If the Patronus was shining so brightly, didn’t it light her up? Couldn’t you see–?”

“I saw her. But… maybe I imagined it… I wasn’t thinking straight… I passed out right afterwards…”

“Who did you think it was?”

“I think… I think it was my mum.” She knew without even looking that Hermione was giving her a concerned look.

“Harry, you mum’s – well – dead.”

“I know,” she answered quietly.
They fell back into silence, watching and waiting.

Finally, over an hour later, they saw their past selves emerge and begin moving towards the castle. Harry burned to intervene, to stop Pettigrew somehow, but there was nothing they could do. Then, realising the danger they would be in when Lupin rushed to the forest, they dashed back to Hagrid’s now empty hut.

Once she felt Lupin had passed, Harry stepped outside. She wanted, needed to see who cast the Patronus. If there was even a chance it was her mum… She dashed to hide in the bushes by the lake, staying low so she wouldn’t be seen. Across the lake her past self failed to repel the Dementors, Snape’s own Patronus faltered under the onslaught. She watched, waiting to see who cast the Patronus, they had to act soon.

Then, she was struck with a bolt of understanding. ‘I didn’t see my mum… I saw myself!’ She burst from hiding. “EXPECTO PATRONUM!” A huge, silver creature erupted from her wand, so bright she could barely look at it. It seemed almost dog-like, as it charged across the waters, biting and tearing at the hoard of Dementors as they fled from the sudden onslaught.

Finally, the Dementors were gone, and the Patronus stalked back to her. It wasn’t a dog. It was a tiger. Even through its silvery glow she could make out the pattern of stripes across its ethereal fur. Even as it approached with the dangerous grace of a predator, she didn’t feel threatened in the slightest. It slowly blinked at her, before rubbing its cheek against her hand. She felt a surge of warmth and… and love.

Then it suddenly vanished. She blinked, slightly disoriented, before a sweeping beam of light from the other shore startled her, and she dove back into the bushes. Moments later, a furious Hermione dashed to him, dragging Buckbeak along. Snape’s wandlight searched the bushes and for seconds longer, before turning away. Harry quickly and quietly explained what happened, as Hermione listened with mouth open.

“Did anyone see you?”

“Yes, I saw myself, but I thought it was my mum! It’s OK! Although…” she bit her lip worriedly. “Snape may have as well. But at least he’s on our side this time.”

Hermione looked worried by that revelation. “Oh, I hope he doesn’t tell anyone. We could get in so much trouble for misusing my Time Turner.”

Harry couldn’t keep the smirk off her face. “We just saved a hippogriff from execution and are about to do the same for Sirius, I think those are what we’d be in real trouble for.”

Hermione shot her a glare, though it lacked any real heat. Then her expression became thoughtful. “That Patronus you cast – it drove away all those Dementors! That’s very advanced magic…”

“I knew I could do it this time because I’d already done it.” And, she looked away, feeling bashful, “it also felt really good that I mistook myself for my mum, y’know?” Hermione gave her a warm smile.

They watched as Snape gathered their past selves, as well as Sirius onto floating stretches, before taking them and Ron, back to the castle. Once they saw the Ministry’s executioner hurry passed to fetch the Dementors, they sprang into action. They mounted Buckbeak and flew swiftly through the air, finding the right window and opening it. Sirius looked at them with shock and wonder, before joining them. Buckbeak carried them to the nearby tower, where Harry and Hermione
quickly dismounted. After a quick offering of heartfelt thanks, Sirius turned Buckbeak away and vanished into the sky.

Harry and Hermione then rushed back to the Hospital Wing, hiding from first Fudge and then Peeves. They barely made it in time. Once Dumbledore locked them back inside the Hospital Wing, they returned to their beds, just as Madam Pomfrey came out of her office, insisting on them eating their fill of chocolate.

The Matron raised an eyebrow at the expression on Harry’s face, which was torn between pride and nervousness. “I don’t want to know,” she told them, with a stern look. “But you are not to leave this Wing without my permission, do you understand?” Harry and Hermione exchanged startled glances before nodding hurriedly.

Harry had honestly lost track of how much chocolate she had eaten before she heard raised voices once more. They grew louder as the speakers approached. Madam Pomfrey shot the door a glare with a mix of frustration and resignation.

“He had no wand he couldn’t have simply vanished! You must have done something to let him out, Snape!”

“I don’t appreciate such unfounded accusations, Minister,” Snape snarled back. “I was with you or Professor Dumbledore for the entire time Black was in custody.”

“That is true, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said mildly. “Severus left the Hospital Wing with me.”

“We’ll see about that!” blustered Fudge, as the doors to the Hospital Wing rattled, before the lock clicked and they opened. Fudge strode in, red with anger, followed by an annoyed looking Snape and a mildly amused Dumbledore.

“What is the meaning of this?” Madam Pomfrey demanded. Fudge waved her off dismissively.

“Harry,” Fudge said, looking to where Harry sat on the bed, mouth covered in chocolate. “Tell me, my boy, did you see if Snape left the Hospital Wing before Professor Dumbledore was finished talking to you.”

Harry scowled at him. She was tempted to tell him she was a girl right now, just so he would stop calling her ‘my boy’, but pushed aside the thought. She looked to where Snape was watching her, a strange look glimmering in his eyes.

Turning back to Fudge, she felt the lie slip out easily, ‘He stayed the whole time, Minister.”

“Are you sure? He couldn’t have slipped out and come back?”

Harry stared at him incredulously. ‘How stupid does he actually think I am?’ she wondered. “We didn’t talk for much longer than two minutes, Minister,” she said, unable to keep an undertone of scorn from her voice.

Fudge went even redder, while Dumbledore smiled happily. “There, you see Cornelius, Severus had nothing to do with Black’s escape.”

“Well… he must have used some sort of Dark Magic. Probably the same type he used to escape Azkaban in the first place.” A sudden look of horror crossed his face. “What if he can Apparate through wards without a wand!”

“Now, now, there’s no need to jump to conclusions, Cornelius. I certainly doubt Black can
Apprate through the wards of Hogwarts. Even Voldemort—"Fudge flinched violently "—couldn’t manage that, after all. We will find out how he did it, I’m sure. Now, I trust the Dementors will be removed from the school now?"

Fudge deflated slightly. “Yes, they’ll have to go. Never dreamed they’d attempt to administer the Kiss on an innocent boy… completely out of control… No, I’ll have them packed off back to Azkaban tonight. Perhaps we should have dragons at the school entrance…”

“Hagrid would like that,” Dumbledore said mildly, as he escorted the Minister, who was muttering under his breath about the press, out of the Wing.

Madam Pomfrey stared pointedly at Snape, who stared right back. Finally, she threw up her arms and strode back to her office, saying only, “Lock the door on your way out!”

Harry exchanged a nervous glance with Hermione as Snape turned to her, eyes glittering menacingly. After a long, tense silence, he spoke. “I, of course, have no idea how Black escaped. I certainly don’t remember seeing the person on the other side of the lake, who cast the Patronus. A person who’s Patronus is identical to Lily Evans.”

“Well is Lily Evans?” Harry asked. A quick glanced showed Hermione was as confused as she was.

A small sneer appeared as Snape said, “Evans was your mother’s maiden name, Potter.” As she gaped slightly, he gazed down at her impassively. “I will keep your secret. Ensure you keep mine.” With that, he spun and left the Hospital Wing. The lock clicked loudly once the door closed.

Sighing with relief, Harry and Hermione relaxed in their bed. So of course that was when Ron awoke, confused and asking for explanations.

The trio were released by noon the next day. They spent their afternoon enjoying the leisure of exams being completed and no longer worrying about a supposed mass murderer. Their relaxation was only ruined when Hagrid informed them that Professor Lupin had resigned and was packing to leave. Harry immediately left to see him.

She found his office almost completely packed, the office stripped bare. Lupin reassured her that he was not being blamed for Sirius’ escape, as Dumbledore had protected him, so he was not leaving because of that.

“Then why?!” Harry asked desperately.

Lupin gave her a sad, tired look. “Harry, look what happened. In a moment of utter foolishness, I forgot to take my potion and I put all of you in grave danger. I could have killed you, or bitten you. If that happened, I would never be able to forgive myself. That must never happen again.”

“You’re the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we’ve ever had! Don’t go!”

Lupin simply shook his head and continued packing. “From what the Headmaster told me this morning, you saved a lots of lives last night, Harry. If I’m proud of anything, it’s how much you’ve learned. Tell me about your Patronus.”

Harry told him about how she had cast and he laughed warmly. “Yes, Lily’s Patronus was originally a tiger. She was always immensely talented in Charms and learnt to cast it in our Fifth Year.”
Realising that she had managed to learn the Patronus Charm two years before her mum, Harry felt incredibly proud. Then something in Lupin’s wording stuck her. “Was originally?”

Lupin nodded. “Your Patronus can change throughout your life. It can happen as you naturally grow and develop, you find that it changes. Or significant events can suddenly cause the shift. Lily’s changed… I believe it may have been their wedding day. That is most likely what changed hers.”

“What did it become?” Harry asked, incredibly curious.

“When you love someone, it can cause your Patronus to match theirs,” Lupin told Harry. “James was a stag – which incidentally matched his Animagus form, Prongs – so your Lily’s became a doe.”

Harry paused at that. ‘So why does Snape have the same Patronus as my mum?’ She hesitated, unsure if it was a good idea to ask Lupin about that. Before she decided, he finished his packing and passed over her Invisibility Cloak and the Marauder’s Map.

They were interrupted by the arrival of Professor Dumbledore, who informed Lupin that his carriage was waiting. With a goodbye and a final smile, Lupin left. Harry dropped into the seat at the desk, feeling wretched.

Dumbledore spoke to her gently, reminding her that if not for her actions, Sirius would have suffered a terrible fate. Something in his wording reminded her of something. She looked away in thought then remembered Ron frantically telling her something yesterday. Slipping her hand into her pocket, she drew out the note he had given her. Madam Pomfrey had been kind enough to cast a Cleaning Charm on them before they left.

“Umm, Professor? Yesterday Ron told us that Professor Trelawney had a… a sort of fit during his exam.”

“Oh my,” Dumbledore said, looking rather unworried by the news. “Perhaps I should send Poppy to see her.”

“Er, well… apparently her voice went all raspy when she said this,” she said, passing him the note with Trelawney’s words on it. Dumbledore read it, eyebrows slowly rising. When he finished he looked into the distance, seemingly deep in thought.

“How interesting,” he said at last. “That brings Sybill’s total of real predictions up to two. I should offer her a pay rise…”

Harry stared at him, aghast. “But- But – I stopped Sirius and Professor Lupin killing Pettigrew! That makes it my fault, if Voldemort comes back!”

Dumbledore assured her that it was not her fault, that the consequences of actions could be unpredictably vast and varied. He also told her that her saving Pettigrew had formed a bond between them, one Voldemort would likely be unhappy with.

“I knew both your parents very well, both at Hogwarts and later, Harry. They would have saved Pettigrew too, I am sure of it.”

Harry bit her lip, gathering her courage to admit to Dumbledore, “Last night… I thought it was my mum who’d conjured my Patronus. I mean, when I saw myself across the lake… I thought I was seeing her.”
“An easy mistake to make,” Dumbledore replied quietly. “Your hair, coloured so, is almost a perfect match for hers.” He gave her a gentle smile. “You are shaping up to be a fine young woman.”

Harry blushed, but shook her head. “It was stupid, thinking it was her. I mean, I knew she was dead.”

“You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? You mother is alive in you, Harry, and shows herself most plainly when you have need of her. Your mother’s love lives in your skin and your Patronus was that which was truest of her – a fierce, powerful mother, dedicated to protecting her child.”

The day before they received their exam results, Harry pulled Hermione into an abandoned classroom. As her studious friend gave her a curious look, Harry took a steadying breath. “I wanted to talk to you about your Boggart.”

Hermione groaned and looked away. “Do we really need to talk about this?” Harry noticed her cheeks were tinged with red.

“Yeah, we do.” She leaned against the nearest desk. “It honestly worried me.”

Hermione flopped down onto a seat next to her. “Alright, yes, I know it’s really silly for that to be my greatest fear. Ron’s made it quite clear how amusing it is, when I care about my grades so much.”

“But it’s not just about grades, is it?” Harry asked, with a shrewd look. “It’s not just how well you do in class. You know you’re amazingly smart.”

“Harry…” Hermione began, voice tinged with embarrassment and exasperation.

“No, really. Aside from you consistently staying at the top of our grade, we have First Year,” she ticked off on her finger, “where you solved Snape’s riddle to get me through the fire. Second Year,” she ticked of another finger, “you brewed Polyjuice Potion in secret, in a bathroom, successfully, and you figured out Slytherin’s monster was a basilisk, which definitely saved my life. And this year,” she ticked a third finger, talking over Hermione’s protests, “not only did you figure out Professor Lupin’s lycanthropy almost immediately, you also took every single subject you possibly could, and probably still did amazingly.”

Hermione was blushing so brightly she rivalled Ron’s hair. She made a small squeaking noise as she tried to speak, and buried her face in her hands. Harry smirked slightly. ‘This is kind of fun,’ she thought idly, before focusing. “So, why are you so afraid of failing your classes?”

It took a few minutes Hermione could compose herself enough to speak. “I suppose it’s not really failing my classes that I’m afraid of. I… before I came to Hogwarts, I never really had any friends. I was the awkward, nerdy, teachers’ pet. So, I was honestly rather lonely growing up. And then Professor McGonagall showed up with my Hogwarts letter and told me I was magic and there was a whole new world full of people like me. I was so excited! This was why it was so hard to make friends, I thought, I was too different from them because of my magic. It would be so much easier to find friends at Hogwarts!”

Harry winced. She remembered how alone Hermione had been the first few months, and how she and Ron had contributed to it.

“It hurt,” Hermione continued, “to realise that I still didn’t have friends here. That there were
people who thought I didn’t even belong in the magical world.”

Sliding off the desk, Harry moved the sit beside Hermione. She slipped an arm around her shoulder, and received a small smile in response.

“I guess what I’m really afraid of is them being right about me. Deep down, I’m scared that I don’t deserve to be here.”

After a moment of hesitation, Harry slipped her other arm around her friend. As Hermione hugged her back, she wracked her brain for some way to respond. A memory came to her and she quietly said, “When we were waiting for the Sorting Hat, I was so worried. I kept imagining the Hat just not Sorting me, and McGonagall yanking it off and telling me I had to go home. It was terrifying.”

Squeezing her tighter for a second, Hermione then sat back. They exchanged small smiles. “I’m really sorry for how Ron and I treated you during First Year,” Harry said softly. “We were real jerks. You deserved better.”

Hermione shook her head. “It’s okay. Honestly, it was mostly Ron who said anything to me. And I know I can be a bit abrasive sometimes. Besides,” she added with a teasing smile, “you both certainly made up for it.”

Harry burst into a fit of giggles. A few seconds later Hermione joined her. When she finally managed to get herself under control, Harry said, “You really are an amazing witch Hermione. You belong here. Never doubt that.”

Hermione responded by hugging her tightly once more.

They received their exam results the next morning. Harry was surprised at how well she had managed in several of them, although the O in Muggle Studies earned an eye roll. Hermione, of course, received top marks in everything – including a 320% correct Muggle Studies exam. Ron was pleased to have passed every subject.

Before heading down to the Leaving Feast, Harry sorted through her clothes carefully. She was immensely grateful Hermione had bought her a few different styles. Tomorrow would require some very careful planning. Picking out one that she thought would work, put it aside. She would leave it on top once she was finished packing.

Reaching into her trunk, she smiled as her fingers brushed against the box Madam Pomfrey had given her. It contained enough doses of her Masculinity Muffling Mixture to last through the summer, until she saw the matron again. She hoped the woman hadn’t minded Harry hugging her, too much.

She smiled as she glanced around the dormitory, where her peers were doing their own final sweeps. That was one difference from the boys’ dorm – no one was leaving their packing to the last minute. She could easily picture Ron, Dean, Seamus and Neville relaxing before the feast, blissfully forgetting their frantic rush the previous years. The other girls had found her recounting of their desperate struggles incredibly amusing.

The trio enjoyed the Leaving Feast, where the Quidditch team’s performance earned enough points for Gryffindor to take the House Cup as well. Then, after a restful night’s sleep, they found themselves riding the horseless carriages to the station and shoving their trunks onto the luggage racks of their compartment. As the train pulled away from the station, Hermione told Harry and Ron that she had dropped Muggle Studies to have a normal schedule. She poked her tongue at
Harry’s “I told you so!”

As Harry looked forlornly towards the receding castle, Ron invited both of them to the Quidditch World Cup. Harry immediately agreed, and Hermione nodded amiably. “Don’t forget, I’m having you both over to study for your electives!” she warned. “You don’t want to disappoint Professor McGonagall, after all.” Ron gave a theatrical shudder.

They talked and laughed through the trip, interrupted only by the arrival of a positively tiny owl, bearing a message from Sirius. He wrote that he was now in hiding, and let her know that he had sent the Firebolt. Hermione gave a triumphant “I told you so!” in return. There was also a note, giving Harry permission to attend Hogsmeade weekends. Sirius closed by giving the owl to Ron, to make up for the loss of Scabbers.

As the train approached the station, they changed into muggle clothes. Harry’s outfit was a carefully decided balancing act. She really, truly didn’t want to return to wearing boy clothes over the holidays. So much so, she had actually thrown away the majority of her old clothes. On the other hand, she knew her relatives were going to hate the fact that she was transgender. In an effort to prevent a fight at the station, she had picked out the most androgynous set she could manage.

She wore a simple lilac shirt and light denim shorts. The shirt sat differently on her than Ron’s shirt did on him, and the shorts were cut slightly higher than she had seen on boys before. She kept her trainers, just in case she needed to bolt. Overall, she felt rather cute. “Could you watch to make sure I’m alright?” she asked her friends, as they waited to pass through the barrier. They nodded, as she had already told them her worries about her relatives’ reactions.

Uncle Vernon turned almost purple as he took in Harry’s hair and clothes. “What the hell are you wearing, Boy?” he snarled, glancing around to see if anyone was looking.

“Well, Uncle Vernon,” Harry replied mildly. It was rather amusing to see him jump at the sound of her altered voice. He puffed up, clearly wanting to yell at her, but being in such a public place stopped him.

“Well, you will not wear rubbish like a queer ever again! And stop doing – whatever it is with your voice! And get a haircut! You hear me?” As he straightened, he noticed the envelope from Sirius’ letter still in her hand. “And what’s that?” Harry couldn’t keep the grin off her face. If this wasn’t most beautiful segue ever…

“If it’s another form for me to sign, you’ve got another -”

“It’s not. It’s a letter from my godfather,” she told him brightly. The grimace on his face with every word delighted her. Then her words sunk in.

Uncle Vernon sputtered, “Godfather? You haven’t got a godfather!”

“Yes, I have. He was my mum and dad’s best friend. He’s a convicted murderer, but he’s broken out of wizard prison and he’s on the run. He likes to keep in touch with me, though… keep up with my news… check I’m happy…” With a wide grin she moved passed her horrified Uncle, to what looked like her best summer yet.
AN: I have always loathed the idea that Lily's patronus was a doe right from the start, even when she hated James utterly. I can't see their patroni being anything close to a match until they actually grew to love each other.
Upon returning to Privet Drive, Harry was greeted first by a shocked look, and then a furious glare from Aunt Petunia. “What do you think you’re wearing?” she snapped at her as she dragged her trunk inside. “Change out of that immediately! And then get back down here, I’m cutting your hair again.”

Aunt Petunia turned away, obviously fetching some scissors. Harry gave Uncle Vernon a pointed look, and cleared her throat. He glared at her and she gently waved the envelope from Sirius at him. He purpled, before saying in a strangled voice, “Wait, one second, Pet.”

“And you!” Petunia shrialed, rounding on him. “How could you let him walk around like that? What if the neighbours saw him? What would they think of us?”

Leaving Uncle Vernon to the unenviable task of explaining the existence of her godfather, Harry hauled her trunk up to her room. When she was halfway up the stairs, Dudley peeked out of his room to see what all the commotion was about. At the sight of her, he stared dumbly for a few seconds before bursting into laughter. She shrugged it off, suppressing the small part of her that felt hurt by it.

Once in the safety of her room, she let Hedwig out of her cage and started unpacking. She had sorted through most of her clothes – putting the less obviously female ones into the wardrobe – before Dudley banged on her door, telling her his parents wanted her downstairs. With a sigh, she trotted down to see them, keeping her hand near her wand just in case. She didn’t trust Aunt Petunia with those scissors.

Entering the kitchen, she saw her Aunt and Uncle seated at the table, both with incredibly displeased expressions. They grimaced further at the sight of her. “Sit down, Boy,” Uncle Vernon snapped. She paused, glancing around quickly, but didn’t see scissors anywhere, so she sank into the seat facing both of them. Folding her hands, she pasted an overly cheerful smile on her face and waited.

Uncle Vernon glared at her, nostril flaring with each breath. “You Aunt and I have decided to tolerate… this rubbish,” he nodded his head sharply at her, “but we’re going to set some ground rules.” Harry raised an eyebrow and waited. Her Uncle’s face became redder as he continued. “Firstly, you are not to go around wearing… skirts and dresses, that type of nonsense. We won’t have you prancing around the neighbourhood dressed up like some sort of sissy faggot, you hear me?”

Harry’s other eyebrow joined the first. When her Aunt gave her a pointed, angry look, she nodded. Uncle Vernon settled slightly. “Good. Now, the nurse at Dudley’s school has insisted Dudley be started on a diet. Apparently,” he picked up what looked like her cousin’s end year report and read bitterly, “‘excessive weight gain in teenage years may have drastic medical repercussions in the future.’” He had a disgruntled expression, as though he couldn’t understand how the nurse reached that conclusion.

“That will start tomorrow,” Aunt Petunia continued with a sniff. It seemed like Harry’s Aunt was
struggling to even look at her. “And we will all be following the diet with him, to keep his morale up.” Uncle Vernon looked as displeased with the idea as Harry was, but didn’t say anything.

After a few beats of silence, Harry asked, “Anything else?”

With a pinched expression, Aunt Petunia snapped, “No. Go—”

“Good,” Harry interrupted her. Her Aunt and Uncle sported identical expressions of impotent rage. “My turn. You will not stop me from studying or completing my summer homework. You will not try to stop me from leaving to run my own errands – don’t worry,” she added with a roll of her eyes as Uncle Vernon began to swell up, “I won’t be hanging around here, the neighbours won’t see me. Also, I’ve been invited to stay at a friend’s house for a few weeks. You won’t stop me from going. Or I’ll have to let my godfather, Sirius know you’re being downright unhospitable.”

Uncle Vernon, who had been turning purpler with each word, and Aunt Petunia, who looked like she had swallowed a dozen lemons, both paled and exchanged terrified looks. Finally, Uncle Vernon ground out, “Fine. Is that all, Boy?”

Harry’s patience finally snapped. “One more thing,” she said, keeping her voice deceptively level. “Every time you call me Boy, I am going to start dressing and acting more and more femininely, until the entire neighbourhood is buzzing about it. I imagine they’ll be scandalised.” She stood, savouring their utterly horrified expressions. “Now I’m done.” With that, she strode back up the stairs to her room.

Leaning against her door, she heaved out a sigh of relief. *That went well,* she thought happily. Then she frowned in thought. ‘*I was already half starving last summer, and now this diet is happening. There’s no way I’m putting up with this.’*

Pulling parchment and quill from her trunk, she settled at her desk to write some letters. She penned three notes explaining her situation and begging for help, addressed to Ron, Hermione and Hagrid. She would send them as soon as Hedwig returned from her hunt.

Setting aside the completed missives, she started a note to Sirius. Even if he couldn’t take her in while still on the run, she still wanted to get to know her godfather. She wrote about the remainder of term and how well she and her friends did on their exams. She told him about the Dursleys’ reactions, and her use of him as a threat. She also asked him several questions, about himself and her parents. Biting her lip, she read it over and then put it aside. ‘*That can be a first draft.*’

After a moment of hesitation, she reached for another piece of parchment. She decided write to Tyler Perks, Sally-Anne’s transgender cousin, to tell him she wanted to go to the group he had mentioned. ‘*I really should have done this earlier,*’ she chastised herself. With everything that had happened, she’d forgotten to reply. ‘*I hope it’s not too late now…*’ She apologised for the delay between letters, and let Tyler know she was definitely interested in going to the group, if the offer was still open. She blushed as she realised that she almost forgot to include the address to Privet Drive, so he could send her an answer. Finally, after reading over it several times she was happy with it and sealed it in an envelope with Tyler’s address. ‘*I’ll walk down and post it tomorrow,*’ she decided firmly, before a wide yawn overcame her. Shaking her head, she straightened up her desk and collapsed into bed.

Harry was delighted to receive a reply from Tyler only a few days after posting her letter. He waved off her apologies (“*Sally-Anne’s told me how busy your school can get*”), and enthusiastically agreed to introduce her to the group. The next meeting was this Sunday afternoon, he wrote – if she would like to go with such short notice – and offered to meet her at 3, at
Piccadilly Circus station to escort her. She wrote a delighted confirmation, posting it immediately. ‘Lucky I bought so many stamps,’ she smiled to herself.

The days couldn’t seem to pass any slower, until Sunday finally arrived. She packed a small backpack with a change of clothes, some makeup and accessories. Once satisfied she had everything she needed, she strode out to the street and hailed the Knight Bus.

“Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out-”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Harry interrupted him, pressing her fare into his hands. “Piccadilly Circus station,” she said as she climbed on board, with a belated, “Please.” The beds had been replaced with a variety of chairs, none of which looked secured. Harry saw almost half a dozen people, scattered on the seats on the lower level.

“Don’t I know you from someplace?” Stan asked Harry, squinting at her as she grabbed the nearest seat and braced herself. Before she could answer, the bus gave a loud bang and lurched, throwing her back against the chair painfully.

As she sat up, a look of comprehension dawned in Stan’s eyes. “’Ere – it’s ‘Arry Potter!” he exclaimed. “Guess ‘oo jus’ got on Ern! ‘Arry Potter came back!”

Harry sighed. ‘Well, that was nice while it lasted.’

“’Ow’ve you been, ‘Arry?” Stan asked cheerfully, rocking with the turns.

Harry shrugged. Not wanting to be too rude, so she murmured, “Fine.”

Stan nodded happily. “That’s good. We’ve ‘ad more folk riding wi’ us, now things’ve calmed down a bit. You ‘ear about that Sirius Black business up at ‘Ogwarts? They ‘ad Black caught and ‘e just vanished!”

Harry nodded, still torn between happiness at Sirius escaping and sorrow that he hadn’t been exonerated. ‘It’s so frustrating that I can’t do anything to help him…’

Stan shook his head, “Course, you were there, weren’t you? Musta been scary, ‘aving Black in an’ out of the castle like that.”

Harry scowled with annoyance. She was about to ignore Stan and turn away, when an idea struck her. ‘Maybe I can do something.’

She looked up at Stan. “Actually,” she said, louder and clearer than she would usually, “I spoke to him and he was quite nice.”

Stan stared at her, dumbfounded. “You talked to Sirius Black? Are you off your rocker? ‘Ow’re you not dead?”

“Sirius never wanted to kill me, or anyone. He’s actually innocent,” she told him gleefully. “He never killed Peter Pettigrew. He revealed that Pettigrew was still alive, hiding as an Animagus and he killed all those people! Me, my friends, and two Hogwarts Professors all saw it.”

Stan gaped at her and Ernie even turned to give her a disbelieving look over his shoulder – two trash cans and a bus stop leapt out of the way before he looked back. She heard shuffling from the other people on the bus, and was glad for their curiosity for once.

“Wha- how- why wasn’ that in the paper?” Stan asked blankly.
Harry’s face twisted with bitterness. “Because, the Minister,” she snarled with the title derision, “decided it would be better to just have Sirius Kissed to keep the whole thing quiet, rather than have the Ministry look back in the press. If he hadn’t escaped, an innocent man would be a soulless husk right now.”

Continuing to look horrified, Stan asked, “Why didn’t he jus’ show ‘em Pettigrew?”

“There was an accident,” Harry told him. She really didn’t want to out Lupin as a werewolf, so she left it broad. “Pettigrew got away.”

Stan fell silent, clearly thinking about what he’d just learned. Harry sat back, feeling pleased with herself. ‘Let’s see how the Minister likes this bad press.’

After a quieter, though still very bumpy ride, Harry was let off at her stop. Slipping down into the station, she ducked into the bathroom. Feeling guilty, she locked the door to the accessible stall, promising to finish as quickly as possible. She knew it was wrong to use this stall, but she knew the other bathrooms just weren’t usable. If she tried to use the women’s room, she would be screamed at, maybe even arrested. And if she used the men’s, someone would probably punch her, at the very least. Thus, she used the only unisex place available, the accessibility stall.

As fast as she could manage she stripped out of her androgynous shorts and top. From her backpack, she drew out a light green summer dress. Hermione, she had been told, grabbed it on sight, as it was the exact colour of her eyes. She slipped it on, thankful for Hermione’s diligence in finding the correct size for her. After swapping her trainers for some simple slip-ons, she faced the mirror.

Flipping open her makeup kit – which Lavender and Parvati had acquired for her on the second to last Hogsmeade visit – she decided to only do a basic look. She really didn’t want to take too long, and she wasn’t confident in her ability to do a full face of makeup yet, anyway. Deciding on just a simple eyeliner look, with some red lipstick and a touch of blush, she quickly got to work. As the eyeliner straightened itself along her eyelid, Harry thanked magic for existing.

Taking a moment to smooth out her dress, she left the bathroom and moved to wait at the top of the station stairs. She hugged her backpack to her stomach, feeling incredibly nervous, as swarms of muggles passed by. Uncle Vernon’s voice seemed to echo in her head – ‘Decent people would give those queers a good beating, that’ll set them straight’. Her hand slipped into the bag, gripping her wand tightly. She glanced around nervously, waiting for someone to do something, say something. But, aside from the occasional glance, the people around her didn’t seem to be paying her much mind.

She had just begun to relax, slightly, when a throat cleared behind her. Jumping in place, she spun to find a young man looking at her curiously. Before she could react, he asked, “Harry Potter?” After a short pause, she gave a nervous nod and a grin bloomed on his face. “I’m Tyler Perks,” he told her, and she let out a relieved breath. “I thought it was you, from how you described yourself in your letter, but it’s always good to make sure.”

He opened his arms, clearly offering her a hug. Harry hesitated a moment, before stepping into the embrace. Tyler gave her a small squeeze around the shoulders, and then released her. Looking her up and down, he smiled. “You look very pretty, Harry.” She felt herself blush, and awkwardly waved off the compliment.

Then, she took a moment to look at Tyler properly. He had bright blue hair, cut so short it stood up in small spikes. His eyes were a deep brown, sparkling mischievously at her as he smirked. Her
eyes were drawn to a glint of metal on his lower lip. She blinked at the sight of thin metal rings curled around the lip. They looked rather like a type of earring (sleepers she thought they were called). The lower half of his face was covered in light stubble, which she thought was trimmed at the edges.

Despite the heat of summer, he was wearing an open leather jacket, under which he wore a shirt bearing a British Flag and text reading “Sex Pistols”. He had long, ripped jeans and scuffed black combat boots. It had to be one of the strangest outfits she’d ever seen – and considering the wizarding world, that was saying something.

There was an awkward pause, before Tyler seemed to notice how nervous she was. His grin became gentler. “You don’t have to do this now, if you don’t want to. We have them every fortnight, you can go later.”

Harry shook her head quickly, drawing herself up. “No. I’m already here. I want to try this.”

“Alrighty then,” Tyler nodded firmly. “Let’s go.” He led her through the streets of Soho for a few minutes, until they reached what looked to be a function hall. As they paused at the door, they could hear the muted sound of music echoing from inside.

“Oh, right,” Tyler said, snapping his fingers. He shook his head to himself. “I forgot all about that.” As Harry stared in confusion, he gave her a sheepish smile. “It’s Pride right now, so today might be a bit more… festive than usual.” With that, he pushed open the door.

Harry’s first impression was of colour. The entire hall seemed as if a rainbow had exploded inside it. Every wall seemed covered in banners or flags bearing all the colours imaginable. There were rainbows of streamers and balloons filling the corners of the room. She stared, feeling as if she was looking at Dumbledore’s more flamboyant robes. With a chuckle, Tyler ushered her inside, into a whirlwind of introductions.

Over half a dozen people sat on a loose circle of chairs, surrounding a small table. Tyler guided her closer to them. “Hey everyone, this is Harry, the young lady I was telling you about.” Harry gave a nervous wave as the group turned to her, a cacophony of voices offering greetings. She looked around at the most interesting collection of people she had encountered. Tyler went around the circle, introducing each one.

An older man with a beard nearly as thick as Hagrid’s, whose arms were bulging with muscles, stood as Tyler said, “This is Robert. He’s the organiser of this queer little group. He’s practically the father of the group,” Tyler added in a stage whisper, with a teasing grin at Robert.

Rolling his eyes, he said, “Call me Bobby.” Harry noticed he was wearing what looked like a rainbow flag as a cape. Stepping forward, he offered Harry an embrace, which she tentatively accepted. When he released her, Bobby rested his hands on her shoulders and smiled down at her. “It’s always nice to find other trans people, isn’t it?”

“Wait, you’re transgender?” she asked, looking between him and Tyler in surprise. They chuckled and nodded, before Bobby ushered her on.

“This is my fiancé, Michael,” he said, gesturing to a slightly younger man, whose dark skin contrasted vividly with the bright colours of his clothes – just simple shorts and t-shirt.

“A pleasure to meet you,” Michael said as he shook her hand. Straight-faced, he added, “I’m sure Tyler will be pleased to no longer be considered the baby of the group.”
Harry didn’t really know what to say to that, while Tyler laughed, “While Bobby’s the group Father, Michael makes all the Dad jokes.”

“Be nice!” Bobby hissed, slapped Michael gently on the shoulder.

Still chortling, Tyler waved her on to greet a woman, who Harry thought was look in about her mid-30s. “This is Jamie, the group mum. She’ll be able to share stories from her own transition with you.”

She wore a circlet of flowers, a rainbow tie-dyed shirt and baggy floral print pants. As she raised her fingers in a peace sign, Harry remembered Uncle Vernon yelling about ‘those lazy damn hippies’. “Welcome to the family, sweetie,” Jamie spoke with a husky voice.

The next person was the least colourful in the room, but she was still drew Harry’s attention. The woman had long, violet curls and thick, almost porcelain white makeup. Her lips were black and her eyeshadow in shades of purple. She wore an ankle length pencil dress with black velvet opera gloves. “Jessica,” she said, elegantly extending her hand and drawing Harry into a gentle embrace. “You look quite beautiful dear,” she said, releasing her and giving her a flattering smile that set Harry’s cheeks burning.

“Careful dear,” the person next to her said lightly. “You don’t want me to think you’re leaving me for a younger woman, do you?” Jessica burst into a fit of giggles as an wrapped around her waist and pulled her close. The lady holding her had close cropped hair and seemed positively bristling with tattoos. Her arms, which bulged with more muscles than even Bobby, were covered in designs of mythological creatures. At least, on the parts visible from the rolled back sleeves of her flannel shirt. She wore long pants, so Harry couldn’t tell if she had more on her legs.

As the new person teasingly nuzzled at Jessica’s cheek, drawing a small squeal, Tyler rolled his eyes. “This over affectionate goofball is Rebecca. As you can see, she’s a giant softie.” Rebecca poked her tongue at Tyler, and then smiled welcomingly at Harry. “Anyway,” Tyler continued, “that’s all of the oldies sorted, let’s move on to the cool kids.” There was some good natured grumbling from those already introduced.

“Now, this particular eyesore is called Sam,” Tyler told her, prompting a two fingered salute from the… boy? Girl? Harry couldn’t tell. Looking around Tyler’s age, Sam had long green hair, almost completely shaved on the left side. The ear on that side was bristling with piercings, through the ear itself as well as the lobe. Their upper lip also bore piercings – two small studs equally spaced apart. The crop top they wore, bearing a brightly coloured unicorn, revealed their navel which also bore a piercing. Over their shoulders were rainbow striped suspenders, holding up an equally rainbow patterned skirt.

Noticing Harry’s obvious confusion about their gender, Sam said, “I’m bigender. Use they/them pronouns for me please.”

“I’m sorry, what does that mean?” Harry asked tentatively.

Sam gave her an easy grin. “My gender’s a combination of male and female. It varies which is more some days. Being called he or she doesn’t feel right, so I prefer being called they.”

“Yes…” Harry uttered as she processed that. “Okay, I’ll try to remember.”

“Next we have Amanda,” Tyler said, gesturing to a young woman with strawberry blonde hair and bright pink lips. She had sparkling amber eyes and rainbow rectangles painted on her cheeks. As she hopped to her feet, surprisingly graceful despite the height of her heels, her long pink dress
“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Amanda said, dropping into an exaggerated curtsy. Harry found herself blushing as she returned the greeting.

“This is Sarah,” Tyler continued, as another young woman with a broad cowboy hat perched on top of a head of tightly curled white ringlets stood to greet her. She wore a shirt, which she had only half buttoned with a tied knot tying the remainder, and a pair of incredibly short shorts.

“Howdy,” she said with a cockney accent as she tipped her hat. Harry blinked at the juxtaposition then waved hello.

The final person in the circle stood as Tyler said, “And finally we have Naomi.” She reminded Harry of Angelina Johnson, with similar dark braided hair and dark skin. She wore a brightly coloured soccer jersey, with text reading “I play for both teams.”

“Welcome to our little Queer Group,” Naomi said cheerfully. Then with a small smirk, added, “Having more cute trans girls here is always welcome.” Harry blushed and hid her face in her hands as every else laughed quietly.

Once Harry had recovered, Naomi grinned teasingly once more. “Here, let’s have a quick little game with our newest girl.” She reached out, grabbing Amanda and Sarah and pulling them to stand next to her. “Two of us three are trans gals. Can you pick who’s cis?”

“Uhh.” Harry looked between the girls. She honestly couldn’t tell. Partially to stall, she asked, “What’s cis mean?”

“Cis is short for cisgender,” Tyler explained. “People who aren’t transgender – whose gender matches what they were assigned at birth.”

“Oh, okay.” Harry looked back to the trio of girls, who teasingly fluttered their eyelashes and blew kisses at her. She blushed again, then after a final hesitation, pointed to Sarah. “You’re cisgender?” she asked tentatively.

Amanda and Naomi burst into giggles as Sarah grinned at her, but shook her head. “Nope, sorry hun.” She pointed to Amanda, who waved cheerfully.

Harry blinked, looking between Sarah and Naomi in amazement. “I’d never be able to guess,” she told them. As the girls dramatically blushed and thanked her, she felt a surge of jealousy, but she pushed it aside. ‘I don’t need to be envious. Madam Pomfrey will find something, and that will be me soon.’

Eventually, she was waved into a seat. “So, why are their rainbows everywhere?” she asked, looking around as the others resettled.

“It’s Pride,” Sam told her. At Harry’s blank look, they continued, “It’s where we celebrate the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, which kicked off the LGBT rights movements. And thank past queer activists who fought for all of us.”

“And remember those who are no longer with us,” Jamie added softly.

There was a moment of silence, before Tyler continued explaining. “The rainbow is one of our symbols of our community. It’s even our flag.”

As Harry nodded in thought, Bobbie smiled at her. “Alright Harry, now that we’ve all been
Harry shifted under the many curious gazes. “I thought Tyler told you all about me.” she pointed out.

Tyler shook his head. “I just told them your name and that you were a trans girl, just starting out and looking for support. Anything else if yours to share, or not, as you choose.”

Taking a deep breath, Harry considered how to explain everything, without mentioning magic. “Well… I suppose I didn’t realise I was transgender until very recently. Last October, I went… something happened that showed me that I’m a girl, and my friend Hermione explained the idea of being transgender. Then we went to our Head of House and the Matron about it. They’ve been helping since then.”

“What have they done to help your transition?” Jessica asked with a smile.

“Madam Pomfrey gave me some stuff to stop me having any more male puberty. Professor McGonagall told all the other teachers that I’m a girl, got me a girls’ uniform and helped me move to the girls’ dorm.”

The group looked pleased by that. “It sounds like you’ve got some good support there,” Bobby said brightly. “And what about everyone else? The other staff? The students?”

“Well, most of the other teachers have been okay – except Snape, but he hated me before this anyway. The other students haven’t really said much so far. My friend Hermione helped me lots of new clothes. Oh, and my new roommates have been helping me with learning makeup and hair and all that.”

“And how are things at home?” Michael asked her. “Are your parents being supportive?”

“Oh, um… my parents died when I was very young. I live with my Aunt and Uncle. They… they’re sort of obsessed with being normal, so they really don’t like that I’m transgender.” As the group made sympathetic noises, Harry looked down with a frown. “Honestly, they’re the reason I never realised I was trans. If I talked about feeling like a girl they would punish me, so I just sort of… stopped talking about it, or thinking about it.” Shaking her head, she added, “And I mean, they didn’t like me before I realised I was trans anyway, because… uh, of my parents.”

“Because one of them was Indian?” Rebecca asked with raised eyebrows. Harry nodded hesitantly. “So, racist as well as transphobic? Sound bleeding delightful.”

“If you would like, we can give you our addresses,” Naomi suggested. “That way, if you need a place to get away, you’ll have some options.”

Harry blinked, surprised by the offer. “You don’t have to do that. I mean I got to a boarding school, so I only really see them during summer, and I spend a month or two at my friends’ houses.” Then she grinned, only slightly evilly. “And my godfather just got out of prison, so they’re not trying to stop me anymore, so that I won’t write to him about them being awful.”

Tyler chuckled appreciatively, as Sarah said, “We’d feel better if you had it anyway, sugar. Better to have it and not need it, after all.”

“Thank you,” Harry said, not really knowing what more to say.

“Don’t worry about it, Harry,” Sarah told her, reaching out to take her hand. “We’ve got to look out for our trans sisters.”
“Yeah,” Sam said, grinning, “you’re part of the family now. No getting rid of us.”

With a blossoming feeling of warmth, Harry grinned back.

The weeks seemed to fly by until suddenly it was August and Harry was packing her trunk. It had been the best summer she had ever had with the Dursleys. Her relatives, scared of the revenge Sirius might wreak on them for upsetting her, had almost completely left her alone. With letters to her friends and godfather keeping her in touch with the magical world, and the fortnightly sessions with the Queer Group opening her eyes to a whole new world, she found herself thriving.

Despite enjoying herself more than usual, she still was looking forward to leaving to stay with Hermione. A week ago, the Dursleys had received a letter from the Grangers, inviting Harry to stay with them for several weeks and offering to pick her up on the evening of the first of August. While Uncle Vernon had been reluctant to allow Harry to have anything she could enjoy, the threat of Sirius had forced him to grant permission.

Yesterday had been her birthday, on which she had received several birthday cakes from her friends, as well as a few gifts. The one she loved most (though she wouldn’t tell anyone) was from Hermione, who had sent her a simple black handbag that Harry had fallen in love with immediately.

Even Sirius had sent a cake, along with a letter full of advice on her makeup. Apparently Sirius had been quite fascinated with the muggle world during his teenage years, frequently running off for excursions. During that time, he had fallen in love with punk rock musicians and their rebellious spirit, such as David Bowie and Adam Ant. His interest in them had bordered on obsessive and had introduced the boys of his dorm to the wonderful world of cosmetics. The boys, according to Sirius, had worn more makeup than the girls for several years. And now he was passing his wisdom on to her. She smiled as she glanced it over once more, especially enjoying where Sirius wrote and remember to go easy on the eyeliner, Moony and I learned that the hard way. James was calling us raccoons for a month.

Looking at the letter reminded her of the decision she had made on her birthday. After spending weeks looking through the list of possibilities she made with Hermione, she had finally decided on what her new name was going to be. She had considered several of the names before discarding them.

Marigold had been one of the first options she really considered. The bright red and gold flower was just so incredibly Gryffindor, symbolising the sun, passion, riches and even lions. It also could be shortened to Mary, Hermione noted, which wasn’t too far from her birth name. She had giggled at the suggestion of Protea, the pink and red flower symbolising courage and energy. The name Hazel had truly tempted her, the small yellow flower of peace, reconciliation and even some magic.

In the end, she went with none of those. They didn’t feel quite right for her. Not like the ones she had picked. She looked down at where she had carefully written out her new name. Holly Jasmine Potter.

Something about Holly had stuck with her since it was mentioned many months ago. And the times she and Hermione had been alone, and her friend had called her it had just felt right, in a way she still didn’t understand fully. She had decided on Jasmine, in the end, for a few reasons. As Hermione had researched for her, it represented beauty and luck. Hermione had noted teasingly that it also meant both purity and sensuality, which had set her blushing. Despite her slight embarrassment, she liked the name. She also liked that it was similar to James – she didn’t want to
completely erase her father when she changed names. The final deciding factor had been when Sirius told her that Jasmine had also been her mum’s middle name.

Holly shook herself. She had gotten rather distracted from her packing there. She collected her completed assignments and unfinished letters, placing them on the top of her clothes. After a final look around the room, she closed the fully packed trunk. A glance at the clock by her bed showed she still had a few hours before the Grangers were due to arrive. With a shrug, she picked up her new handbag, which only contained her wand at the moment, and went for a walk.

She wandered the streets of the neighbourhood, enjoying the balmy weather of the late afternoon. After almost an hour, as she sat in the park, breathing in the fresh summer air, she found her peace interrupted. Dudley and his gang sauntered over to her.

“What do we have here?” Piers Polkiss sneered. “Looks like Potter isn’t even pretending that he’s not a little sissy anymore.”

“Yeah, nice bag, Potter,” Gordon drawled sarcastically. “What the hell are you, a girl?”

Resisting the urge to just pull out her wand and hex them, Holly looked back at them judgingly, before raising an eyebrow. “Yeah, I am,” she said simply.

That seemed to throw them off completely. They exchanged confused glances. Before they could gather themselves, Holly stood, looking at Dudley. “I’m sure you can explain the situation with my godfather well enough.” As Dudley paled, Holly sauntered back to Privet Drive.

“The blood hell does that mean, you faggot?!” She glanced back as Malcolm stepped towards her threateningly. Looking trapped between anger and terror, Dudley stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

“Leave it, Mal,” he ordered.

As Dudley’s gang turned to stare at him incredulously, Holly grinned and strolled away.

After dinner, during which Dudley couldn’t even look at Holly, the residents of four Privet Drive sat waiting for the Grangers. The Dursleys had put on their best clothes, as an intimidation tactic.

“I hope you told them to dress properly, these people,” Uncle Vernon snarled at her as she brought her trunk down. “I’ve seen the sort of stuff you lot wear. They’d better have the decency to put on normal clothes, that’s all.”

Holly stared at him for a moment. ‘Oh Merlin, I never mentioned that Hermione’s Muggleborn.’ She considered just telling her Uncle that the Grangers were muggles, but honestly, letting him make an ass of himself sounded like too much fun.

“Yes, the Grangers will wear normal clothes,” she said evenly, managing to keep the grin off her face.

“They’ll be driving, of course?” he asked. Holly nodded. Hermione’s letter had mentioned that at least.

Finally, almost an hour after dinner, there was the sound of a car stopping on the street, and then a knock on the door a minute later. Holly hurried to open the door, Uncle Vernon lumbering after. She beamed at the sight of Hermione and her mother, a fairly average woman with long curly hair. She looked to be in her mid-forties, and Holly noticed she was wearing a fairly nice dress.
“It’s good to see you, Harry,” Hermione said, pulling her into a hug.

“Holly now,” Holly whispered to Hermione. “It’s great to see you too,” she said, as her bushy haired friend pulled back to give her a surprised but pleased smile. “Thank you for having me,” she added, looking to Dr Granger.

“You’re quite welc-” Dr Granger began, before Uncle Vernon interrupted her.

“Hurry up and take him. I don’t want the neighbours to see you people hanging around here.” Dr Granger stared at him, utterly shocked by the depth of his rudeness. Hermione raised an eyebrow at Holly, who gave her a sheepish grin.

“I beg your pardon?” Dr Granger said, narrowing her eyes dangerously.

Uncle Vernon made a disgusted sound. “I said get out of here already. I don’t want any decent people seeing the likes of you around here.”

Before her mother could say anything, Hermione spoke quickly. “Didn’t you tell your relatives that my parents are Muggles?” she asked, voice thick with feigned disapproval.

“Must’ve slipped my mind,” Holly replied lightly, slipping out of the doorway. “Hermione’s parents aren’t magical,” she said, smirking back at her Uncle, who was already turning purple at her use of ‘the M word’. “They’re dentists, actually.” With a final wink, she left Uncle Vernon standing thunderstruck in the doorway and led the Grangers back to the car.

As Dr Granger pulled away and her amusement faded, Holly felt embarrassment begin to wash over her. “Sorry about that,” she said quietly. “My relatives… they really don’t like magic, and he thought you were a witch.”

“No need to apologise for him, Harry,” Dr Granger said, glancing back to her in the rear view mirror.

“Actually Mum,” Hermione interjected, “I think she’s chosen a new name now.”

Holly flushed as they gave her expectant looks. “Um… I’d like to be called Holly Jasmine, please.” Then she gave a start. “Oh, and thank you for sending those medical books about transgender people, Dr Granger. They’ve already helped Madam Pomfrey find some potions for me.”

“You’re most welcome, Ha- Holly,” Dr Granger told her warmly. “And please, call me Helen.”

“Alright Holly, tell us how has your summer has been? Did you go to the support group Sally-Anne’s cousin recommended?”

She shared the details of her summer so far – how Sirius’ existence had kept the Dursleys from being too terrible and the incredible experience of the Queer Group. Hermione expressed her pleased surprise to learn that Holly had actually completed a large part of her homework already. Hermione then told her about her family’s holiday in Spain. Holly grinned and relaxed as she let her friend’s excited babble wash over her. ‘Even with the Dursleys behaving themselves, it’s good to get away,’ she thought happily.

When Hermione trailed off, Dr Gra- Helen looked back to them again. “If you don’t mind me asking, where has your godfather been before now, Holly?”

Holly glanced at Hermione, who looked very nervous, and realised that perhaps her friend hadn’t been completely upfront with her parents about everything that had happened to her at Hogwarts.
She kept an eye on her as she spoke. “He was wrongly imprisoned for 12 years, and only recently escaped.”

“Escaped? He wasn’t released? Wait,” Helen asked in a tone of dawning horror, “you godfather isn’t Sirius Black?”

“Uh, yeah he sort of is.” As Helen gave her a horrified look in the mirror, she hurried to add, “He was framed. He’s actually innocent of pretty much everything he was accused of.”

“And how do you know that?” Helen asked, sounding incredibly worried. Holly exchanged a cautious glance with Hermione, who mouthed *nothing too dangerous* with a pleading look.

“Umm, well Sirius showed us that the person he supposedly killed, Peter Pettigrew, was alive and had responsible for everything he was accused of.”

They drove along in silence for several minutes. Hermione looked incredibly nervous as her mother processed that. Eventually Helen spoke again. “Who was ‘us’?”

With another glance at Hermione’s worried expression, Holly said, “Um, he showed Professor Lupin, Snape and I.”

“So your friends weren’t there with you? That boy, Ron, and Hermione?”

As Holly opened her mouth, Hermione gave a sigh and slumped. “Forget it, Holly. She’s already figured it out.”

Holly bit her lip as, looking back and forth between mother and daughter. Helen gave a frustrated sigh. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell us this, Hermione. We trusted you when you told us everything at Hogwarts has been fine, since the incident on Halloween your First Year.”

Hermione looked down with a guilty expression. “I’m sorry, mum. I didn’t want to worry you.”

“I’m your mother, it’s my job to worry about you. I must say, I’m very disappointed in you young lady and we will certainly be continuing this conversation when we get home.”

As Hermione slumped in her seat, Holly gave Hermione an apologetic look. Her friend smiled wanly and shook her head at her. “Don’t worry Holly. None of this is your fault.”

“Of course, I don’t blame you at all, Holly,” Helen added gently. As Holly smiled tentatively, she added, “I am curious, however. If you had evidence of your godfather’s innocence, why are we still receiving news of the hunt for him?”

With another glance between the two Grangers, Holly said, “Pettigrew managed to get away, and the Minister refused to listen to us. He kept saying it would look bad for the Ministry politically if it got out. Sirius would’ve been Ki-” she cut off at Hermione’s quick head shake, “uh, killed if we hadn’t- I mean he hadn’t escaped.”

Making a noise of mixed disgust and horror, Helen said, “Every new thing I learn about this Wizarding World makes me like it even less.”

Holly didn’t really know what to say to that. The remainder of the journey was spent in terribly awkward silence.

When they arrived at the Granger household – a moderately sized family home in Hampstead – the
sombre group of women entered quietly. As Holly looked around the hallway curiously, smiling at the many photos of a young Hermione on the wall, Helen turned to her daughter. “You should show Holly where she will be sleeping, Hermione” she said firmly. “I will speak with your father, and then we will be having a Family Discussion.” From the weight of intonation in those words, and Hermione’s wince, Holly guessed her friend wasn’t in for a fun night.

“Yes mum,” the bushy haired witch said quietly, moving to carry Hedwig’s cage up the stairs.

As Holly moved to follow with her trunk, Helen added, “I will see you down here in ten minutes.”

Hermione winced again as her mother strode away. “It’s always bad when she drops her contractions,” she muttered. Shaking her head, she turned back. “You can have your pick of either guest room,” she told Holly with a smile. She led her up the stairs, pointing out the two available rooms, as well as where to find the bathroom. After a quick look showed no real difference between the rooms, Holly shrugged and picked one at random.

The girls dragged her luggage into the room, setting the trunk at the end of the bed and Hedwig’s cage on top of the desk in the corner. Holly looked around, taking in the large wardrobe, wide desk and spacious bed. While she observed the room, Hermione slumped into the desk chair, burying her face in her hands.

Taking a concerned step forward, Holly reached out then stopped, unsure what to say. After a minute of silence, she cautiously asked, “Hermione?”

“I’m okay,” came the muffled reply. With a sigh, her friend looked up, face twisted with resignation. “Just not looking forward to the conversation I’m about to have.”

Holly winced. “I’m sor-” she began, only for Hermione to talk over her.

“It’s not your fault, Holly. I wanted to tell them, but I didn’t know how to, without getting into all the details and scaring them.”

As Hermione rubbed her face again, Holly tentatively rested a comforting hand on her shoulder.

Hermione smiled at her gratefully, patting her hand in thanks. “Will you be okay? Is there anything I can do to help?”

Hermione rose, shaking her head. “No, this is a conversation I need to have with them. I probably shouldn’t have kept it all hidden this long. I was just so worried they might want to pull me out of Hogwarts.” At Holly’s horrified look, she added, “I don’t think they will now. They would consider changing schools three years in to be a very drastic measure. You should unpack your things and get some sleep. I’ll be putting you and Ron through the wringer tomorrow.”

Holly rolled her eyes at her friend’s teasing smirk. “How is Ron getting here, anyway?” she asked.

“Mr Weasley will Apparate him here. They should be arriving in about half an hour. I’d better go down and talk with my parents, or we might still be going when they arrive.”

With a quick hug, Hermione left Holly to begin unpacking for her stay. After a few minutes she heard muffled voices. She paused, half hoping to make out what was being said, but the conversation continued at a quiet volume. ‘It’s weird that people can get in trouble and not get yelled at by their family.’ Shaking her head, she returned to hanging her clothes in the wardrobe.

Almost half an hour passed before Hermione returned, looking incredibly grim. Holly felt her stomach plummet. “Did they-?” she began, not even sure what she was asking.
“No,” Hermione answered tiredly, dropping to sit on the bed. “They certainly weren’t happy, once I told them about everything with the Philosopher’s Stone and the Chamber of Secrets. But they agreed to let me return to Hogwarts. They know changing schools halfway through my education would impact my academic performance. And,” she added with a small smile, “this is the first place I’ve had friends.”

Holly sat down beside her, then hugged her friend, relief running through her. “Thank Merlin.”

“Though if I am put in harm’s way again, they’re pulling me out, regardless.”

“Well,” Holly said, trying to cover her anxiousness, “let’s make sure you have a quiet time this year.”

Hermione’s smile became more genuine. “Here’s hoping,” she said, hugging Holly back. “Oh! I should introduce you to my father too.” She took Holly’s hand, leading her back down the stairs and into a spacious living room. A man with receding brown hair sat in a recliner, frowning as he read a newspaper. As the girls approached he looked up and folded the paper, face taking a neutral expression.

“Dad, this is my friend, Holly Potter. Holly, this is my father, Dr Richard Granger.”

Dr Granger nodded reservedly. Holly didn’t know how to respond, and gave an awkward half bow, half curtsey. He stared at her for several long moments, while she shifted in place nervously. Hermione placed her hands on her hips and huffed, just as Dr Granger broke into a wide grin and chuckled softly.

“A pleasure to meet you, Miss Potter,” he said warmly, leaning forward and offering his hand. Feeling very confused, Holly shook his hand, looking between the grinning father and his pouting daughter.

“Dad likes to pretend he’s scary when he meets new people, for some silly reason,” Hermione told her with irritation.

“Umm, it’s a pleasure to meet you too, Dr Granger,” Holly said tentatively. “Thank you for having me.”

He waved off her thanks easily as he stood. “Please call me Richard. There’s no need for stuffiness here. I get more than enough of that at work.” Continuing to chuckle, he wrapped an arm around Hermione, who rolled her eyes and smiled exasperatedly. Holly watched them, pushing down a sudden surge of jealousy, and smiled at the pair.

Before anyone could speak, a chime echoed through the house. Hermione straightened with an excited expression. “That must be Ron!” she exclaimed, slipping from her father’s grip and dragging Holly to the door. She threw it open to reveal Ron, holding his trunk, and Mr Weasley.

“Alright, Harry, Hermione?” Ron said with a grin. Beside him, Mr Weasley peered eagerly into the house, obviously thrilled to be visiting a muggle home. Helen and Richard joined them in the hallway and offered their second guest welcome. Holly and Hermione took Ron up to free guest room, while the Doctors Granger talked with Mr Weasley downstairs, no doubt receiving dozens of questions about how every muggle object worked.

Once they settled Ron’s luggage at the end of his bed, the trio sat and relaxed. “It’s good to see you both,” Ron told them.

“It’s really good to see you too, Ron,” Holly said, hugging him quickly while Hermione nodded.
“Oh also,” Hermione said brightly, “don’t you want to tell Ron something?”

Holly sat up, taking a breath as Ron gave her a curious look. “I’ve thought about this a bit, and I’ve decided I’m going to change my name.”

Ron looked astonished, blinking at her for several moments. “What are you going to be called?” he finally asked.

Looking down shyly, Holly spoke quietly. “Holly Jasmine Potter.”

He continued to blink at her for several seconds, before Hermione huffed and poked him. Jumping, he shook his head, and smiled at Holly. “That’s a nice name. It suits you.”

Holly blushed and smiled bashfully. “Thank you.” Then, feeling awkward at being the focus of attention, she looked at Hermione. “What’s our study plan?”

After giving her a chiding look, Hermione acquiesced. “For you, we’ll keep running you through the Arithmancy curriculum. You were decently far along by the end of the year, and you said you’d kept up your study during this summer?” She paused for Holly to nod in agreement. “Good, so you can spend the majority of each day studying for that. And you, Ron,” she said, turning to face the ginger, who was looking to be regretting his change of electives, “will spend the first few days becoming familiar with muggle technology in an average household. After that, we’ll expand to other forms of technology and then some social and historical study.”

“Blimey that’s a lot to study!” Ron exclaimed. Hermione huffed, hands on hips.

“You agreed to this months ago, Ronald! Would you rather go back to Divination? By yourself?” Face twisting with distaste, he shook his head. “Good. Also…” she hesitated a moment. “I have another thing I think we should study.”

Even Holly gave her a disbelieving look. “We have a lot on our plates already Hermione. What else do you want us to do?”

Biting her lip, Hermione said, “I did some research at the end of the year, based on something I heard in the Shrieking Shack. Professor Lupin said that Snape used something called Legilimency on Pettigrew to know he was lying. And he described it as a form of mind reading.” Ron and Holly bolted upright, exchanging glances of horror.

“I forgot about that,” Holly said faintly, as the implications hit her. ‘Oh Merlin, he could find out every rule that we broke. We broke into his private ingredients cupboard!’

“How have we not been expelled by now?” Ron asked faintly.

“That’s what I was researching,” Hermione said. “Legilimency can be performed wandlessly and silently, but is easier with a wand and incantation. The subtler version also requires eye contact.”

“So we just need to not look him in the eyes?” Holly asked hopefully.

Shaking her head, Hermione said, “If someone used their wand to cast the spell, that wouldn’t protect you.”

Slumping back onto the bed, Ron moaned, “So what can we do if that’s not enough?”

“I found a way to block it.”
“Of course you did,” Ron muttered, shaking his head fondly.

Holly grinned at her. “You really are brilliant Hermione.”

The bushy haired witch blushed and waved aside the compliments. “It wasn’t that hard. Several of the books I found information about Legilimency in referred to Occlumency – that’s the magic you use to counter it. Occlumency is a sort of mental discipline or meditation, where you control your thoughts and emotions, to limit what the Legilimens sees in your mind.”

“Wait, it’s not a counterspell we can just cast?” Ron asked, sitting up to look at Hermione.

“No, because Legilimency is so subtle, it can be hard to tell when it’s even happening. Occlumency lets you hide all your thoughts from a Legilimens at first, though more advanced techniques allow you to show what you choose, so the Legilimens can think they saw the truth without giving it away. I found instructions for the beginner’s techniques, which involves meditation and clearing your mind. I thought we could put aside some time each day to work on them.”

“That sounds like a lot of extra work,” Holly pointed out. “But if it will keep Snape out of our heads I definitely think it’s worth it.”

“Not to mention anyone else who can use Legilimency, right,” Ron added, before paling. “Y’know, there were a bunch of rumours that You-Know-Who could read minds…”

The trio sat in horrified silence. Hermione shook herself. “Well, that’s even more reason for us to work on this. Now, you two should go to sleep, I want you both up and ready in the morning.”

Holly chuckled as Ron gave a theatrical groan. “Good night, both of you,” she said, returning to her room.

The days quickly fell into a pattern of studying. Surprisingly, despite the intensity of their learning, neither Holly nor Ron balked. Starting the first morning, Ron was introduced to the wonders of the muggle world. He watched with increasing fascination as Hermione showed him the refrigerator, the toaster and the television. She also made sure he was able to correctly pronounce “electricity”. Holly giggled as Ron grew more enthusiastic with each new piece of technology he was shown.

Holly couldn’t spend too much time watching Ron be educated however. She was spending nearly all her time studying, working through the Arithmancy curriculum and reading Hermione’s extensive notes. Between those and the occasional assistance from Hermione, Holly found that the subject wasn’t too hard. She regretted how intimidated she had been by its reputation as an incredibly difficult class. It wasn’t easy, by any means, but it certainly didn’t seem to be as horrendously challenging as people had told her.

Hermione looked thoughtful when she pointed it out one day. “Honestly, I didn’t think about it much at the time,” the bushy haired witch mused, “but it might be because the magical world doesn’t have primary schools. Most people just get home-schooled, before coming to Hogwarts, so there’s no set standard for mathematical literacy. So a lot of students would come in and not know anything about multiplication or long division or factors. And since the subject is focused on applying the maths to magic more than teaching how to actually do the maths itself…”

“Yeah, I can see why they would say it’s one of the hardest subjects. I mean, I know how to do all this maths, and I’m still finding it challenging sometimes. Going in without it…” Holly trailed off. Honestly she was feeling rather amused. ‘She hadn’t thought about it before, and figured it out instantly. Only Hermione.’
The studying was broken up by healthy meals – morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea – so Ron and Holly weren’t feeling completely overwhelmed. Honestly, Ron confided to Holly, he had discovered that the muggle world was almost as fascinating as his dad had told him, so it didn’t really feel like study. Hermione used the time between afternoon tea and dinner to make sure they were also completing their holiday assignments.

Then, after dinner, they retired to either of the guest rooms, where Hermione led them through the mental exercises that supposedly made up Occlumency. She instructed them to clear their minds, calm their thoughts, embrace the void. “Ron won’t have much trouble with that,” Holly quipped, earning a light punch. Unfortunately, they wouldn’t have any way to truly gauge their progress, as that required a Legilmens to test their mental defences. And Hermione flatly refused to let any of them try their hand at what her books said was “a most subtle and dangerous mental art”

Surprising, all three of them found the exercises difficult. Ron expressed his confusion at how he was meant to become empty of emotion – “It’s not like I can make myself not feel thing, is it?” – and the suggestions from Hermione’s research didn’t seem to help him much. He often spent half the time huffing quietly in irritation.

Hermione was also struggling, for once. Despite all the advice and techniques her research had turned up, she found herself unable to stop herself from thinking. “It’s hard to clear my mind,” she explained one evening. “It feels like I have almost got it, and then I’ll have half a thought and it will spawn a dozen others and my brain is just buzzing!”

Holly was having another problem altogether. She found that, when there wasn’t anything distracting happening, she was able to clear her mind of thought and emotions relatively easily. It was a strange, peaceful feeling – ‘almost like flying’ she reflected later. Before she truly immersed herself in that mental state, she felt something pressing for her attention. Instinctively she focused on it and immediately cringed as her mind was assaulted with signals from her body, reminding her that it existed and was her and was still completely wrong. She managed to pull herself out from that well of dysphoria, but her emotions were left in such turmoil she knew she had no chance of calming them that night. And so Occlumency eluded her.

Two weeks into her stay, Holly once again caught the Knight Bus to the Queer Group. She had visited the group a few more times over the previous weeks. After the first time the decorations and outfits worn had become slightly less outrageous, though each person’s unique style still showed. She also learned that most sessions weren’t quite as busy as her first one – it was rare that more than half a dozen of them were free on the same day at the meeting.

The group was incredibly fun to go to, and it was oddly relaxing to simply sit and talk with other people who simply understood. It also was very educational. Holly was taught many new terms, as various Queer concepts were explained every time she expressed confusion. She felt rather embarrassed at how uninformed she was, but everyone in the group was incredibly kind and patient with her.

When she arrived, she was greeted with many hugs and kisses to the cheek that set her blushing. She shyly told the group her newly chosen name, smiling and thanking them as they congratulated her. They all immediately began using her name, giving her a strange warm feeling. Her blush worsened as the younger members teasingly called her the group’s official “Flower Girl”, but Tyler’s grin, and the easy non-judgemental humour drew giggles from her.

Their immediate acceptance of her new name made her slightly wistful. Ron still hadn’t gotten used to Holly’s name. When he had not been reminded he called her Harry on instinct. Each time, Hermione firmly corrected him, causing his ears to redden. Holly knew it wasn’t deliberate, so she
didn’t hold it against him, but it still stung a little.

Partway into the meeting, Bobby turned to her. “Is there anything you would like to share or ask today, Holly?”

Holly opened her mouth then hesitated. She wanted advice to help her achieve her Occlumency, but she couldn’t mention magic at all. Throwing caution to the wind, she crafted an edited version of events. “One of my friends has got us to start doing a type of meditation, to help us clear our minds and focus more easily.” That wasn’t even a lie – Occlumency would improve their focus and recall, Hermione had told them. “I can reach the mental state it talks about easily enough but… well, every time I do, I feel how wrong my body is more intensely, and I just feel so awful and disgusting.” Feeling her throat grow tight and tears fill her eyes, Holly cut off and looked away, trying to steady her breathing.

Sarah, who was sitting beside her today, gently took her hand. “We know how it feels sweetie. You have to remember, your dysphoria is lying to you. You aren’t disgusting. You are a very pretty young girl, and you’re going to flourish into a beautiful woman.” She sighed as Holly shook her head stubbornly, as she did almost every time someone offered her a compliment on her appearance. “As for the meditation: I study Aikido for self-defence. It’s a martial art,” she added at Holly’s blank look. “As part of it, we have meditation sessions. I’ve had a similar experience of becoming more aware of my body. Mine are less dysphoric than yours, I suppose because I have been transitioning for a few years now. So, once you can start your hormones it will be less intense.”

“But that could be ages before I get them,” Holly pointed out glumly. “And then I’d need to wait for them to work enough that I could meditate. Isn’t there anything I can do to get it now?”

“Well, when I asked sensei, he gave me an alternate technique. I use a focus, which makes it easier to stay in the meditation. Instead of just trying to empty my mind, I picture something, to the exclusion of everything else. Focus on the details of it, envision it perfectly in my head as if it’s before me.”

Holly stared at her. “Do you think that would work for me?”

Sarah shrugged apologetically. “I honestly don’t know. Everyone’s different. But it doesn’t hurt to try.” Holly nodded, thinking of what she could use as her focus. The group waited a moment to see if she wanted to talk about anything else, before moving on.

As the meeting was wrapping up, people offering each other hugs and farewells, Holly noticed something. Amanda pulled Sarah and Naomi closer to her and given each of them a rather intense looking kiss. It was much more than the chaste cheek kisses she usually offered the other group members.

Holly had spotted similar things a few times during other meetings – the three holding hands, almost always coming in together – but had been too shy to ask. Amanda was smiling as Sarah and Naomi giggled and kissed each other as well.

Taking a steadying breath, Holly slowly drifted nearer, waiting until the girls parted. She hesitated a final moment, then tentatively cleared her throat. As the three women looked at her, she shrank back slightly. “Sorry for interrupting…” she said quietly, “I was just… I was wondering… what is going on with you three?”

The girls exchange glances and then smiled at Holly. “Well Holly,” Naomi said, eyes sparkling mischievously, “when three girls love each other very much-” She cut off as Amanda swatted her
over the back of her head.

“Ignore this idiot,” she said with exasperation, while Sarah rolled her eyes fondly. “We’re in a polyamorous relationship, Holly.” Before Holly could open her mouth to ask, she continued, “Polyamory is when more than two people are in a relationship together, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved.”

Holly looked between the three of them, blushing as she remembered some of the things she had overheard from upper year boys. “So, you’re all in love with each other?” The girls nodded, grinning cheerfully and linking hands. “But don’t you get jealous?”

Sarah wiggled her hand in the air, as Naomi explained, “Sometimes one of us can feel a bit left out, but our relationship is based on clear communication and understanding. If anyone has a problem with anything in our relationship, we bring it up and work out a solution together.”

Amanda added, “We also experience something called compersion – essentially the opposite of jealousy. When we see our loved ones happy, even that happiness is not caused by us directly, we still have positive feelings. We’re happy when they’re happy. It doesn’t get rid of jealousy completely, but it certainly helps.”

“Beside we’re all three together at once, more often than not,” Sarah pointed out.

Holly nodded, thanking the girls for telling her about it, before wandering out with a final wave to the group. ‘Well... that was interesting,’ she mused, as she caught the Knight Bus back to the Grangers’.

AN: Yeah, public bathrooms super aren’t fun for trans people.

In my personal experience, every time I’ve gone to meditate, I become hyper aware of my body and gotten super dysphoric. So, fun.
August continued in a blur of study. As the weeks continued, Holly and Ron found their curriculum growing more challenging. The final semester of Arithmancy work finally outpaced Holly’s previous mathematical education, and she began learning new equations and numerical logic. She was pleased that it wasn’t so difficult, thanks to the foundation she had worked on.

As Ron gradually grew more accustomed, Hermione began challenging him. She had him pick out which outfits would be appropriate for different muggle settings. Once she was sure he could at least blend in reasonably well, she took him – and Holly if she had completed her work for the day – on excursions in the muggle world.

Hermione had not been exaggerating when saying she planned to immerse Ron in the culture. Once he had been given the basic rundown of muggle transportation, she handed him a map and some money and made him responsible for finding their way. The first time, he put them on a train to the opposite side of London from their intended destination.

Despite the rocky start, Ron figured out the Tube within a few days, and Hermione began showing him important pieces of muggle culture. First were important muggle landmarks and historical locations around London and images of other famous ones from around the world. Later, Ron was fascinated with muggle entertainment, as he watched his first movie in a theatre. He had seen shows on the television already, of course, but the sheer scale of the theatre almost overwhelmed him. Afterwards, they explored a games arcade, which was even more dazzling, with its bright lights and loud music and fun games. It took Hermione over an hour to drag Ron and Holly away in the evening.

Every second night, the Grangers treated them to the cuisine of cultures from around the world. Ron’s opinion of muggles dramatically improved when he learned about take out. As wonderful as the food was at Hogwarts, it was all very traditionally British, Hermione pointed out. “The muggle side of Britain has become far more multicultural since the Statute of Secrecy,” Hermione lectured. “As a result, many wizards make cultural assumptions that make them stand out even more in the muggle world.” She also made sure Ron understood the histories and traditions of each culture, as well as enjoying their food.

Holly found herself enjoying this summer more than any before. Even the previous summer, with the freedom to explore Diagon Alley for several weeks, paled in comparison. It was just so good to see her friends and stay in a house with people who liked her, and used her real name and pronouns. So of course, something had to ruin it.

Holly dreamed a strange, vivid scene, where Voldemort and Wormtail were talking, speaking of someone they had killed and conspiring to kill her as well. Then, an old man who was eavesdropping on their plotting was discovered and killed. She woke gasping for breath, pressing a hand to her scar as a painful burning feeling gradually faded. That was worrying. The last time her scar hurt like that, she had been in the presence of Voldemort. It took a few moments to reassure herself that Voldemort wasn’t actually nearby, ready to attack her.

As her heart finally slowed, Holly knew she wouldn’t be able to get back to sleep. Reaching for her glasses, she considered asking her friends for advice but didn’t want to bother waking them up. ‘I can already guess what they’ll say, anyway,’ she mused. ‘Ron will remind me of the reasons Voldemort can’t be here now and Hermione will suggest telling Dumbledore, while she does research.’ She sat up in her bed, rubbing her face tiredly. ‘Alright, Hermione is right. Will be right. Whatever. I should let Dumbledore know, just in case.’ After several months of “better safe than
“sorry” she had fallen into certain habits.

Slipping over to the desk, she pulled out a fresh sheet of parchment and inked a quill. She paused, considering her words, before writing.

*Dear Professor Dumbledore,*

I hope you are having a pleasant summer. I wanted to let you know, I had a dream about Voldemort last night. He and Wormtail, that’s, Peter Pettigrew by the way, were talking about having killed someone and planning to kill me too. Then they killed an old man who overheard them. I woke up with my scar hurting, like it did when Voldemort was near in my First Year. Sorry if this doesn’t matter, but I would prefer to keep you informed.

Sincerely,

After a moment of hesitation, she steeled herself and signed:

*Holly Jasmine Potter*

As she set it aside to let dry, she considered what else she could do. While telling the Headmaster felt responsible, she also wanted reassurance. She almost smacked herself as it came to her. ‘Of course! Sirius!’ She searched her desk for the latest letter she had drafted for her godfather. Smiling as she read over her recap of how enjoyable summer at the Grangers’ was, she reached for the quill again.

*A weird thing happened this morning. I woke up from a dream about Wormtail and Voldemort with my scar hurting. Last time that happened it was because Voldemort was at Hogwarts. I don’t think he could be near me now. Do you know anything about curse scars, that could explain it hurting now? I’ve also written to Dumbledore about this, in case it is important.*

She paused, considering what else to write. Quickly glancing over her letter, her eye widened as she realised something very important that she had forgotten to add. She chewed her lip a moment, hoping Sirius wouldn’t be angry as she wrote.

*I also wanted to let you know, I want to change my name, to Holly Jasmine Potter. I know mum and dad called me Harry, but it just doesn’t feel right for me.*

Swallowing the impulse to scratch out her words, she forced herself to finish the letter.

*I’ll send this with Hedwig, once she gets back from hunting. Say hello to Buckbeak for me. Holly*

Glad to have done something about the dream, but now with a new worry to plague her, she grabbed her Arithmancy text. Slipping back into bed, she attempted to read to keep herself distracted. It was intense, learning so much so quickly, but she was determined not to disappoint Professor McGonagall.

Since she was awake so early, Holly decided to give the Grangers a surprise. After dressing quickly, she slipped quietly into the kitchen and checked the fridge for what she needed. With the Doctors Granger’s busy schedule, the usual breakfast was simple cereal (sugar free, of course). For this morning, Holly was going to give them a proper English breakfast. Once she was sure she had all the ingredients she needed, she got to work.

After years of cooking for the Dursleys’ appetites, preparing the large meal was almost second nature. Soon, the smell of frying sausage, eggs and bacon was wafting through the house. Holly felt a rather satisfied smirk pull at her lips as the Grangers plus guest stumbled into the kitchen,
their expressions torn between eagerness and incredulity.

“Blimey Holly, I didn’t know you could cook!” Ron exclaimed as he dropped into a seat at the table.

Holly divided the food onto plates, idly replying, “I always cooked for the Dursleys.” Occupied as she was, she missed the glance the Doctors Granger shared at that.

“You didn’t need to go to all this, Holly,” Helen said gently, reaching out to help as she carried the plates to the table in one go.

Holly shrugged and smiled bashfully. “I wanted to, as thanks to the pair of you for your generous hospitality.” Then with a grin she added, “And to Hermione for being such an amazing teacher and helping us be able to pass our new electives.”

Hermione huffed, cheeks pinking. “I would hope you do more than pass, Potter!” she chided teasingly.

With a chuckle they all dug in to the food and soon Holly was blushing under the barrage of praise of her cooking skills. It was a drastic change from the Dursleys’ entitled demands and a refreshing one. Once plates were cleared, a banging at the kitchen window drew their attention. Looking over, they saw a tiny grey sphere of an owl, banging against the kitchen window. Ron, who had ducked in to collect seconds, swore under his breath and hurried to let it in.

“Dammit, why’d they have to use Pig?” he muttered, snatching the excitedly hooting owl from the air. Holly and Hermione exchanged a confused look.

“Why did you call your owl Pig, Ron?” Hermione asked cautiously.

“I didn’t,” he sneered. “Ginny named him Pidwidgeon and he won’t answer to anything else now.” Shaking his head in disgust, he opened the letter Pig was carrying. It was from Mrs Weasley to the Grangers and ‘Harry’, informing them of the Quidditch World Cup in just two days and asking permission to bring Hermione and ‘Harry’ to the Burrow for the remainder of summer to attend it.

Holly sighed at sound sight of her former name, immediately resolving to tell the Weasleys her new one as soon as she saw them. After a short discussion, the Grangers agreed to let Hermione go. Holly was definitely going, since her guardians weren’t there to object. Soon Pig was winging away with their letter confirming the arrangements for the next day.

Once breakfast was cleaned up – surprising Holly how quickly it could be done with people helping – the Doctors Granger left for work and the trio turned to their final day of study. When Holly ducked into her room to collect her books, she saw Hedwig had returned. After jotting a quick postscript to let Sirius know where she would be staying for the remainder of the summer, she attached both letters to the owl’s legs. With a reminder to deliver Dumbledore’s letter first (earning a derisive look) she sent Hedwig off.

Sending the letters reminded Holly of her disturbing dream. Returning to the living room, she told her friends as much as she could remember about it and the pain in her scar when she woke. They reacted almost exactly as she predicted – Hermione gasped and began listing off suggestions, including several reference books and many people including Dumbledore, McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey. Ron looked scared and confused, pointed out that Voldemort couldn’t have been there now. They both looked surprised when she informed them that she had already written to Dumbledore and Sirius. After a short silence, Hermione had said, “That was very responsible, Holly,” Ron nodding his agreement. Honestly, Holly wasn’t sure what was so amazing about it, so
she simply shrugged and unrolled her latest essay, trying not to think about that awful dream.

It was with a surprising amount of regret that Holly packed the last of her things the next day. The Weasleys would be collecting the trio that afternoon, and she was excited to be able to see a professional Quidditch match. At the same time, she had enjoyed her time with the Grangers an incredible amount, and a large part of her didn’t want to leave.

Shaking her head at how silly she was being, she folded her final shirt and placed it in her trunk. ‘I don’t know what I’m worrying about. The Burrow has to be the most amazing magical house I’ve stayed in.’ With a final fond glance around the guest room, she dragged her trunk and Hedwig’s cage downstairs to wait in the living room with the Grangers. She passed some time chatting with Hermione, and later Ron when he joined them (packing everything last minute of course).

Five o’clock, the arranged pick up time, came and went. The Doctors Granger exchanged resigned glances as the minutes passed. Finally, almost half an hour later, the fireplace suddenly lit up with bright green flames, causing everyone to jump in their seat. In a while of motion, Mr Weasley stepped out of the fire, brushing some soot from his sleeve.

“Sorry we’re late,” he said, as Fred and George stepped out of the fire behind him. “Had a bit of trouble getting your fireplace hooked up to the Floo Network. Don’t worry though, it’s just for an afternoon, since muggle houses technically aren’t supposed to be connected, strictly speaking. I have a useful contact at the Floo Regulation Panel and he fixed it for me.”

The Doctors Granger exchanged a glance. “So,” Richard said slowly, “you’re saying some wizard can just create a way into our house without our permission, any time?”

The Twins paused as Mr Weasley stammered, “Uh, well, not really. It’s all controlled by the Ministry you see. They would need to get approval from the Floo Regulation Panel, and they don’t like to connect muggle houses. Too much risk to the Statute of Secrecy.”

“Didn’t you just say that you bypassed those regulations because you had a friend working there?” Helen pointed out.

“Well, yes, but that’s just because I work at the Ministry. He knows me.”

“So you can guarantee that every person working in the Ministry is completely and totally trustworthy? None have secret motives or could be bribed or blackmailed?”

“I…” Mr Weasley trailed off, now looking very concerned. “Oh Merlin,” he muttered quietly.

The Grangers did not look happy at that. As they exchanged another long glance, Mr Weasley glanced around. “How about we Floo the kids over to the Burrow now and then I can seal your fireplace. That will stop anyone using it in the future, unless you choose to have it opened up.”

“That’s a start, at least,” Richard said firmly. “And then you can tell us about any other ways wizards can just pop into our house uninvited.”

Mr Weasley winced, but nodded. Looking to the trio, he almost plaintively asked, “Got your trunks ready?” When the trio nodded, he looked to the Twins. “Give them a hand with those, would you boys?”

As Fred and George heaved Hermione’s trunk to the fireplace, Holly turned to the Doctors Granger. “Thank you for letting us stay,” she said, smiling gratefully. “These last few weeks have been amazing.”
“Yeah,” Ron added quickly. “It’s been brilliant.”

“Oh it was no trouble at all,” Richard told them with a smile, shaking both their hands. Helen folded each of them in a quick embrace, patting them on the shoulders.

“Yes, it was very interesting to see the other side of the culture shock,” she said, grinning teasingly at Ron, who chuckled and blushed sheepishly.

As Hermione said her goodbyes to her parents, Holly and Ron moved their trunks to the fireplace. After Mr Weasley threw a pinch of Floo Powder onto the flames, Fred and George stepped through, each taking one of the girls’ trunks with cheerful shouts of “The Burrow”.

“Typical,” Ron muttered under his breath, shaking his head “Just leave my stuff behind. Thanks.” With Holly’s help, he heaved his own up, and followed them into the fire. Holly had a final fond look around, before giving the Grangers a small wave.

“See you later, then,” she said, and stepped into the fire. There was a dizzying whirl of green fire and half glimpsed fireplaces before she was spat out, barely catching herself as she hit the floor of The Burrow’s kitchen. She pushed herself up, looking around at the familiar, welcoming home. Ron was sarcastically thanking the Twins for “all the help”, to which they responded with exaggerated modesty.

“Please enough with this flattery!” Fred said, fanning himself.

“Our egos can stand only so much!” George continued, pretending to swoon.

A new voice spoke. “Yes, be careful Ron. Any more and their heads will be too swollen to fit through the door.” Chuckles echoed around the kitchen.

Holly looked over, to see two new faces sitting at the table, on either side of Ginny, who gave her a smile. Even without being introduced, their red hair told her who they must be – Bill and Charlie, the oldest of the Weasley siblings. The furthest of the two was the one who had spoken. He was incredibly cool looking, with long hair tied back in a ponytail – actually looking very similar to Holly’s currently – a fang earring and clothes that would have looked perfectly at home at a rock concert, dragon hide boots and all.

“How’re you doing, Harry?” the nearer one asked with a grin, extending a burnt and calloused hand for her to shake. She did so, realising that this would be Charlie, who worked with dragons in Romania. He was shorter and stockier than most of his brothers, with a broad, good-natured face that seemed almost tanned with freckles.

Before she could answer, the fire flared bright green. Holly barely managed to jump aside before Hermione was launched through the space she had been standing in. The bushy haired witch stumbled and nearly fell, only saved by Charlie’s reflexes as he caught her. The Twins wolf whistled suggestively as he tipped her back to her feet, causing Hermione to blush and Charlie to roll his eyes.

“It may be a while before Mr Weasley gets back,” Hermione said, sounding slightly flustered. “My parents weren’t really happy to find out how easily wizards could break into our home.” With a wince, she quietly added, “Especially after everything I told them this summer.”

“Is everyone here now?” Mrs Weasley came bustling into the kitchen. “Hello Harry, dear, Hermione. Had a nice summer?”

“It’s been delightful, Mrs Weasley,” Hermione said brightly. “We’re all here but Mr Weasley-”
“He’s probably bothering your parents about plugs again, isn’t he? I specifically told him not to do that before he left. I can’t believe him!”

“Actually,” Hermione interrupted quickly, “my parents had some concerns about keeping wizards from breaking in.”

“Oh,” Mrs Weasley said, looking stunned. “Well that’s alright then. I suppose I’ll start dinner for you all now.”

Holly cleared her throat. “Actually,” she said, feeling her cheeks heating as all eyes turned to her. “I wanted to say something, while I have you all here. Well, almost all of you.” She paused nervously, taking a deep breath. Hermione shot her a warm smile, and Ron gave a thumbs-up. “I’ve decided to change my name. I’d like to be called Holly Jasmine Potter, from now on.”

There was a beat of silence, before the Twins lit up with teasing grins. “Aww, what a perfect name for our little Holly-kitten,” Fred said lightly.

“Such a delicate flower she is,” George continued, reaching out to pinch her cheek.

Holly felt her cheeks burning, but couldn’t help smiling. “Get off,” she said with feigned offense, as she pushed him away playfully.

“Um, not to interrupt, but what’s going on here?” Bill asked, with an incredibly confused expression. Charlie looked just as lost. Holly realised that no-one must have told them about her being transgender. She sat down at the table across from them and took a steadying breath.

“Okay,” she began, suddenly glad that she had explained it to people before. It was almost routine by now. “I’m transgender. My gender is different from what they decided I was when I was born. I’m actually a girl. Madam Pomfrey’s helping me fix all this.”

Charlie peered at her. “So, she’s finding a way to stop it and make you a normal boy?”

Holly stared at him in horror. “No, absolutely not. She’s helping me fix my body, so I’m like cisgender girls.” Seeing their lack of comprehension, she clarified, “Like non-transgender girls.”

Bill tilted his head curiously. “Are you going to use Transfiguration to change your body to how you want it?”

“Professor McGonagall mentioned it, but it would be hard to make such a drastic human Transfiguration permanent. I’m currently taking a potion that is suppressing any male development, and Madam Pomfrey is finding something that will allow me female changes.”

Nodding thoughtfully, Bill mused, “That makes sense. But would potions mimicking puberty be able to change everything? I thought larger changes needed some element of Transfiguration, even in potions.”

Holly wavered and shot Hermione a pleading look. The academically inclined witch stepped forward. “The potions would be a magical version of the muggle treatment, which involves suppressing the unwanted hormones, and replacing them with those correct for her gender. It won’t cause any changes through Transfiguration. Holly will simply experience female puberty.”

“But that wouldn’t change reproductive organs would it?” Bill pointed out. Holly shifted awkwardly in her seat, glancing around the kitchen. She was glad to see that Ron looked as uncomfortable as she felt, and Charlie wasn’t too far behind. Ginny’s face had grown redder as the conversation continued. The Twins still looked faintly amused by the whole situation. Mrs
Weasley stood with her hands on her hips.

“If the potions are replicating the muggle treatment, they wouldn’t no. Transgender muggles usually need surgery to alter their genitals to those correct for their gender.”

Just as Holly felt she was about to die of mortification, Mrs Weasley interrupted. “That’s quite enough of that, you two,” she snapped, giving Hermione and Bill a gimlet eye. “That is not even close to appropriate.” Once Bill looked cowed and Hermione blushed with chagrin, she pulled out her wand and waved it at the trunks stacked in the corner. “Why don’t you put those up in your rooms now that I’ve lightened them for you? Hermione you’ll share with Ginny and you’ll be up in Ron’s room again, Harry, dear.” There was a pause, as everyone stared at her. She looked around in confusion for a moment, before she realised. “Oh. I’m sorry, I meant Holly.”

Holly nodded, giving a tight smile as she moved to collect her trunk. Just as she picked hers up, now considerably lighter, Hermione cleared her throat. “Mrs Weasley, you do know Holly has been sleeping in the Girls’ Dormitory at Hogwarts for several months.”

Mrs Weasley, who had turned towards the stove, stiffened at Hermione’s words. “Wasn’t that meant as protection from Sirius Black?” she asked, looking back. “Har- Holly will be safe in the Boys’ Dormitory again, now.”

Hermione shook her head. “Professor McGonagall said Holly would remain with us.”

“Also, Sirius is completely innocent,” Holly quickly added. Everyone in the kitchen stopped and stared at her incredulously. “Well he is,” she said, sounding slightly defensively even to her own ears. “We have five witnesses that saw Peter Pettigrew alive and confess to framing Sirius, two of whom were Hogwarts Professors.”

“Wait,” George asked with a confused expression, as the other Weasleys continued staring at her, “why are the Aurors still after him then?”

“Because the Minister decided revealing that an innocent man had spent twelve years in Azkaban would make the Ministry look bad in the press,” Ron said darkly.

The kitchen fell into a horrified silence. Finally, Mrs Weasley shook herself and asked, “Who knows about this?”

“Professor Lupin and Snape witnessed it with us,” Hermione said, “and Sirius told Professor Dumbledore, and he believes us.”

“And no one else knows about this?” Bill asked, frowning deeply.

“I, uh… may have told the Knight Bus conductor, Stan Shunpike. Rather loudly. With other passengers eavesdropping.” Holly said quietly. There was a beat of silence before the Twins broke out into raucous laughter.

“Oh that’s just brilliant!” George crowed, leaning against the wall for support.

“Our sweet Holly-kitten, pranking the Minister for Magic himself.” Fred said as he pretended to wipe a tear from his eye.

Mrs Weasley shook herself once more. “Well, hopefully Professor Dumbledore can help Black clear his name,” she said faintly, before rallying. “But for now, you get those trunks out of the kitchen. Har- Holly shared with Ron last time, so I’m sure he will be fine there.”
Holly, who had been nodding her agreement, flinched at the incorrect pronoun. Ron, Hermione and even the younger Weasleys froze. They had all seen how much misgendering hurt Holly, during the past year. Taking a shaky breath, Holly said, “Please don’t call me ‘he’.”

Mrs Weasley looked around, confused by the sudden tension in the room. “Why not, Ha- Holly, dear?”

“I told you, because I’m a girl.”

“But…” Mrs Weasley gave her a strange look. It seemed almost like pity. “I mean, you’re not really a girl, yet. Madam Pomfrey hasn’t made any changes for you. You still look like a boy.”

Holly’s breath caught in her throat as she suddenly found herself fighting back tears. “I am a girl. Just because my body is wrong, doesn’t mean I’m not. I know who I am, this is part of me.”

As it became harder to hold back the tears, she grabbed her trunk and quickly walked out of the room. She was dimly aware of Ron and Hermione at her heels. Behind her, she heard Mrs Weasley saying something, sounding torn between worry and offense. Then, Ginny’s voice echoed out. “She already is a girl, Mum. Even the Girls’ stairs can tell.”

She rushed up the stairs, barely acknowledging Percy as he stuck his head out of his room. Finally, she reached Ron’s room, walls glaring orange from Chudley Cannons posters. Carefully placing her trunk down, she collapsed onto the only free bed, hiding her face against the pillow as she struggled to control herself.

‘Is that really what it seems like to others?’ she wondered miserably. ‘How many of them are just pandering because I’m the fucking Boy Who Lived?’ She jumped as she felt a weight on the bed beside her, a hand gently rubbing her back. Peering blearily over her shoulder, she saw Hermione giving her a sad smile, Ron standing beside the bed with a worried expression.

“I’m really sorry about what Mum said,” Ron said remorsefully. “Percy sent her a letter when all this transgender stuff started happening, but I don’t think he really understood it enough. The Twins and I tried to explain it a bit better, but… well clearly she still doesn’t get it.”

Holly held back a small sob. “And how many others don’t understand?” she sniffed. “How many of them think I’m not really a girl?”

Ron and Hermione exchanged helpless looks, before the door opened and Ginny strode in. “Honestly,” she said without pause, “I’d say perhaps a bit more than half.” As the trio stared at her, aghast, she shrugged apologetically. “Well, you’ve got the Slytherins following Malfoy’s lead and treating it like a joke,” she said, moving to sit on the next bed over. “The Ravenclaws are split between those who think it’s real and want to know more and those who think it’s a disguise and want to know why. Hufflepuffs seems to either believe you or are willing to go along if it makes you happy, since it doesn’t hurt anyone. And in Gryffindor, there are three groups: those who get it, those who think it was just because of Black and those who don’t care.”

Holly slowly sat up, turning to place her back against the headboard. She hugged her legs to her chest as she looked at her friends. “Is it really that bad? They all think I’m lying?” she asked in a quiet voice.

“They don’t think you’re lying,” Ginny replied carefully. “Some just can’t really wrap their head around the idea of wanting to be a different gender.”

“How do you know what everyone thinks, Ginny?” Hermione asked with a frown.
Ron nodded folding his arms. “Yeah, I never heard any of that.”

“That’s because the three of you never talk to anyone else,” Ginny said, sounding rather smug. Grinning at their offended expressions, she continued, “I think more people will come around when we are back at Hogwarts. Once they see that you’re continuing with it, they’ll realise how serious you are.”

Holly sniffed, trying to wipe her eyes surreptitiously while the others looked away politely. “I hope so,” she said quietly. She gave Ginny a small smile as she carefully stood. “Thank you for telling me all that. It’s better for me to know where I stand with everyone.” With that, she stepped over and pulled her into a quick embrace. When she pulled back, Ginny’s face had gone scarlet.

“Just telling you what I’d heard,” she muttered bashfully. “Anyway,” she continued in a louder voice, “we should probably go down and help, since Mum says dinner will be ready soon.”

The four left the room, and headed downstairs, dropping off Hermione’s trunk in Ginny’s room on the way. When they reached the kitchen, Mrs Weasley turned to them with a remorseful look. A flick of her wand set the saucepan of sauce stirring itself. “I’m very sorry Holly,” she said, stepping forward to pull her into a warm embrace. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. It’s just hard to adapt to this all so suddenly.”

“It’s okay Mrs Weasley,” Holly answered instinctively as she returned the hug. She hadn’t been expecting to receive an apology at all. The Dursleys certainly wouldn’t have. It still seemed strange that people liked her, sometimes.

“We’re eating out in the garden,” Mrs Weasley said, as she pulled back. “There’s just not room for eleven people in here. Could you take the plates outside, girls? Bill and Charlie are setting up the tables. Knives and forks, please, you two,” she added to Ron and Holly as she turned back to the cooking. The Ron, Hermione and Ginny exchanged worried glances, as Holly took a deep breath, trying to move past that comment. She moved forward, grabbing a handful of cutlery from the drawer and retreating outside. In the garden, she saw Bill and Charlie fighting with flying tables, to the cheers of their siblings, until Percy yelled at them from his window.

When the table was almost fully loaded with delicious smelling food, Mr Weasley arrived in a crack of Apparition. He was grinning ear to ear as he greeted his children and planted a large kiss on his wife’s cheek. “Arthur!” she exclaimed. “What’s gotten into you?”

“I have had the most wonderful afternoon,” he said cheerfully. “Hermione, your parents are most lovely people.”

“They, umm, didn’t yell at you?” Hermione asked tentatively. Mr Weasley chuckled and shook his head.

“Oh no, not at all. They were quite upset about how easy it was to hook their fireplace into the floo, of course, but once we sat down and I explained the ways to protect against unwanted entry they were much happier.”

“You were gone for ages, Arthur,” Mrs Weasley said, hands on hips. “It couldn’t have taken that long.”

“Oh, well, they wanted to make sure we covered everything,” he said, not quite meeting Mrs Weasley’s gaze. As her eye narrowed, and she continued to stare at him, he wilted. “We may have started discussing the differences muggle and magical transportation and security.”
Mrs Weasley gave a long suffering sigh, shaking her head at her eccentric husband. “At least you’re here for dinner.”

Holly quickly learned that, while meals with the Weasleys had been noisy the past few years, that didn’t hold a candle to the racket made by the entire Weasley brood at once. Mr Weasley and Percy were talking about their work at the Ministry, with Percy alluding to some top secret project for after the World Cup. Mrs Weasley was trying to convince Bill to cut his hair and remove his earring, to his and Ginny’s protests. Fred, George and Charlie were eagerly discussing who they thought would win World Cup. Holly spent half the meal just basking in the happy atmosphere. ‘I love the Burrow,’ she thought idly.

Partway through the meal, Mr Weasley smacked himself lightly on the head before turning to their end of the table. “Goodness me, I managed to completely forget. Hello, Harry, Hermione, how has your summer been?”

“It’s been quite nice, Mr Weasley,” Hermione answered politely, Holly nodding in agreement. She took a sip of her drink as she tried to decide how to broach the name topic again.

“And how about you Ron,” Mr Weasley continued in a teasing tone. “How was all that studying? Did you learn a lot?”

Quickly swallowing his mouthful of food, Ron grinned. “It was great actually! There’s so much about muggles I never knew. Did you know they’ve actually been on the moon?!”

“Really?” Mr Weasley asked, sounding captivated. “Did they use aeroplanes to get there?”

“No,” Hermione quickly jumped in, “they used much larger vehicles called rockets, which are powerful enough to escape Earth’s gravity and reach space.”

“Fascinating,” Mr Weasley replied. Then he shook himself and turned back to Holly. “And your study went well, Harry? Arithmancy is a tricky subject, from what I hear.”

“It went well,” Holly replied. “I can see how it gets difficult later, but I learned most of the maths for it in Muggle school before Hogwarts so it wasn’t too hard.”

“That’s good, that’s good,” Mr Weasley said warmly returning to his food. Holly steeled herself. Why was it so hard to do this every time?

“Also, Mr Weasley,” she said. “I need to tell you something.” In a moment of realisation, she added, “And you also, Percy.” Once she had both their attention, she said, “I want to tell you, I’m going to change my name. I’d like to be called Holly Jasmine Potter, from now on.”

The two of them looked as surprised as the other Weasleys had at the revelation. Mr Weasley recovered first. “That’s a delightful name, Holly,” he said with a warm smile. Meanwhile, Percy was frowning.

“I don’t believe the Registry of Magical Names allows changes without a valid reason,” he told her. “Usually due to marriage, or divorce. I can check the associated regulations of course, there may be a form to allow changes of name outside those contexts. Likely with a substantial fee applied.”

Holly winced. She hadn’t even considered changing her name legally. She’d just wanted a name that felt right. “I’ll worry about changing it with the Ministry later,” she said firmly. “I’ll settle for people just using my new name for me now.”
“Well said,” Bill said with a grin, raising his mug. “To our newly named, Holly Jasmine Potter.”

“Holly Potter!” the Weasleys and Hermione chorused, as Holly protested, blushing.

Holly was woken before dawn by Mrs Weasley, to get ready for the journey to the World Cup. After a quick breakfast, she sent them off with well wishes. Thinking dark thoughts at Bill, Charlie and Percy, who could sleep in and Apparate themselves later, Holly hiked along in the pre-dawn twilight. On the way, Mr Weasley explained Portkeys to her – enchanted objects that could teleport people across vast distances, usually disguised as rubbish. She idly wondered what wizards would do if any helpful Muggle tried to clean up for them, but pushed the thought aside.

After a long, steep climb to the top of a hill, they spread out to look for their scheduled Portkey to the Cup. A few minutes into their search, they were called over by a ruddy-faced wizard, who turned out to be Amos Diggory. He was there with his son Cedric, who was the Hufflepuff Quidditch Captain and the only person to beat Holly to the Snitch (although both of them insisted it didn’t count, with Dementors interfering).

While Mr Diggory was easily chatting with Mr Weasley, Holly found herself slightly distracted. A light morning breeze was blowing, and caught Cedric’s hair in a way that drew her eye. She paused as her eyes travelled over him, taking in his handsome face, his broad shoulders, his arms with wiry muscles. Suddenly the breeze felt incredibly cold on her face and she realised her face was flushed. She looked away, returning her attention to the adults’ conversation.

“All these yours, Arthur?” Mr Diggory was asking as he peered at them.

“Oh no, only the redheads… uh except this one,” he added pointing to Holly. “This is Ha- Holly, friend of Ron’s – and Hermione, another friend.”

Cedric gave Holly a curious look, tilting his head slightly as his eyes narrowed in concentration. She shifted awkwardly under the scrutiny, and his eyes widened. “Potter?” he asked, sounding rather surprised. “I didn’t recognise you!” Mr Diggory’s head snapped around from where he was saying hello to Hermione.

“Merlin’s beard,” he breathed. “Potter? Harry Potter?”

Holly cringed, wishing Cedric hadn’t recognised her. “Uh… yeah,” she said quietly. “I prefer to be called Holly now though, please,” she added. Diggory’s eyes paused in their search for her scar (thankfully hidden behind her fringe) to give her a strange look. It made her almost as uncomfortable as her scar being stared at. As he looked her up and down, taking in her long hair, light makeup with a red lipstick and the long dress (which she was now regretting wearing because it was bloody cold, even with tights), his expression grew more confused.

“Why?” he finally asked, sounding utterly baffled.

Holly couldn’t hold back a slightly frustrated sigh. Explaining this all the time was really getting old. “When I was born they thought I was a boy. I’m actually a girl, and I’m fixing things now.”

After a few moments of silence, Mr Weasley coughed and said, “Must be nearly time, right Amos?” The ruddy-faced wizard shook himself out of his confusion and agreed. Soon they were gathered around, touching the mangy boot that was their Portkey. As Mr Weasley eyed his watch, quietly counting down the remaining time for their departure, Holly looked across the circle, to see Cedric watching her. As their eyes met, she felt her cheeks flushing again. After a moment, Cedric smiled at her then mouthed the word “sorry” with a glance at his father. Holly couldn’t help
smiling back, and gave him a nod of acceptance.

She was so distracted, she barely heard Mr Weasley counting down, “Three… two… one…” and suddenly a hook caught her behind the navel, yanking her forward and into a disorienting whirl of wind and colour, before her feet slammed back into the ground and she collapsed. At least she wasn’t the only one, she was thankful for, as only the adults and Cedric had kept their feet. Holly’s face heated once more as Cedric helped her to her feet. ‘What the hell is wrong with me today?’ she wondered.

Once they had recovered, they split off from the Diggorys, finding the Muggle owner of the campsite, Mr Roberts, who watched curiously as Mr Weasley consulted with Holly over the Muggle money. When he started musing on the strangeness of the people coming through, a Ministry appeared and Obliviated him. Holly was rather shocked by the casual memory modification, after her experience with Lockhart.

“Is… is that sort of thing normal?” she asked Mr Weasley, as they walked through the campsite, past rows of tents, many not even remotely Muggle friendly.

“What’s that?” he asked idly.

“Is it normal to just casually wipe Muggle’s memories like that?”

Mr Weasley looked slightly startled. “Well if they learn about magic, yes, we have to. Though I do suppose at an event like this, it would happen more often.”

“But…” Holly trailed off, trying to figure out how to word her thoughts. “But aren’t memory charms incredibly complicated? And can have long lasting effects if done even slightly wrong?” Mr Weasley nodded, looking at her with a furrowed brow. “So, what if all those memory charms hurt Mr Roberts?”

“I wouldn’t worry, Holly,” Mr Weasley said reassuringly. “The people casting the memory charms are experts.”

“Yeah, but they look run off their feet. It’s easy to make mistakes when you’re tired like that. I just-” she gestured in frustration, “I don’t understand why they couldn’t just let the Muggles in on the secret for this. Then they wouldn’t have to try to hide all the magic, and keep memory charming him. And if they really want to keep it secret, they could just Obliviate him one time, once it was all over.”

Mr Weasley stared at her with a considering expression. “I’d never thought of that,” he said quietly. “Some people wouldn’t like it, because of the risk of him telling someone else in the time he knew the secret. It might be too much of a risk to the Statute. But I can still suggest it to the people involved. It might help, next time we have to host something like this.” Holly nodded with a sense of muted relief.

Finally, they arrived at their designated spot, and began pitching their two tents, without magic, “for anti-Muggle security”, though they all knew Mr Weasley excited to try it the Muggle way. Once they were set up, Holly was dubious of them all being able to fit, until she crawled inside and saw the expanded space, with amenities of a small flat. Mr Weasley handed over a kettle and saucepans to Holly, Ron and Hermione, assigning them the task of collecting water. Holly stopped quickly to grab her handbag from the backpacks, checking to make sure her wand was safely inside.

The trio wandered towards the water tap, through the field of tents, as the inhabitants gradually
rose with the sun. They saw why the Ministry workers were so run off their feet, as many witches and wizards barely attempted to hide their magic use. In the vividly green area of the Irish supporters, they encountered Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnigan who greeted them cheerfully. They also met Mrs Finnigan, who paused at Holly being introduced as Harry Potter. She held back a wince as Seamus explained by saying, “Yeah, Harry’s decided to be a girl now.”

“Um, also,” she said quietly, “I’ve decided to change my name. Please call me Holly, now.” Dean nodded agreeably, while the Finnigans looked confused.

“What’s the matter with your real name?” Mrs Finnigan asked.

“It’s just wrong, for me,” Holly replied, shrugging self-consciously. After a few minutes of awkward conversation about the Cup, the trio excused themselves and continued on. Out of curiosity, they checked the Bulgarian area, which was covered in moving posters of their star Seeker, Victor Krum.

Finally, they reached the tap and joined the queue, behind an old man wearing a dress arguing with a Ministry worker who was insisting he put on pants. As they argued, Holly couldn’t help remembering the Queer Group, talking about how ridiculously strict gender roles and expression could be, and how harmful they were to queer people. An idea came to her. ‘Maybe this person is transgender,’ she wondered. ‘If dresses feel more comfortable…’

“I like a healthy breeze round my privates, thanks,” the man, Archie, said indignantly. While Hermione ducked away in a fit of giggle, Holly smiled ruefully. ‘Or not.’ Once they collected their water, they carefully moved back to their tents. On the way, they were repeatedly stopped by people who recognised them from Hogwarts including Oliver Wood, Ernie Macmillan and Cho Chang, who set Holly blushing with a smile and wave. As they continued, Holly pointed out other teenagers she didn’t recognise, who Ron noted were likely from foreign magical schools. Realising the true scope of the magical world was rather staggering.

When they reached the tent, Hermione helped Mr Weasley light matches to start the fire, Ron watching with interest. As they waited for the fire to grow hot enough to cook with, Mr Weasley entertained them with a running commentary on the Ministry workers hurrying past their spot. Eventually, the fire was ready, and they began cooking sausages and eggs on a skillet. Just then, Bill, Charlie and Percy strolled out from the neighbouring woods to join them, having just Apparated in.

As they settled down for lunch, Holly maneuvered to sit next to Percy causing him to raise an eyebrow at her. “I wanted to apologise,” she told him quietly. Percy’s other eyebrow joined the first. “For the other day,” she clarified, “when I had just arrived at the Burrow and you tried to talk to me, but I ran past you. That was rude and I wanted to apologise for it.”

Percy’s expression had grown increasingly bewildered as she spoke. “Don’t be ridiculous, Holly,” he said at last, sounding exasperated and slightly flattered. “You were obviously in quite a state at the time. I’m not going to be upset at you for that.”

Holly smiled brightly at him. “Still, I owe you a conversation. So, how have you been, Percy?” The two chatted as they ate their lunches, Holly learning a bit more than she wanted about international cauldron thickness standardisation. With Percy’s passion for his work, Holly was quickly convinced of the importance of preventing people from trying to save money by providing inferior goods, which honestly risked peoples’ safety. After seeing some of the nastier side effects of mishaps in Potions class, Holly didn’t want to imagine how much damage a leaking cauldron could do.
Halfway through lunch, Arthur spotted Ludo Bagman, the Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, and called him over. Percy eagerly hurried forward to shake his hand, wanting to make a good impression. Mr Weasley grinned as he began introductions. “Ah – yes, this is my son, Percy, he’s just started at the Ministry – and this is Fred – no, George, sorry – that’s Fred – Bill, Charlie, Ron – my daughter, Ginny – and Ron’s friends, Hermione Granger and Ha- pardon, Holly Potter.”

Bagman did a small double take at Holly’s name, before his brow furrowed in confusion. “Holly Potter?” he asked, peering at her, eyes flickering to her forehead. Holly silently thanked Lavender for leaving her a fringe. “Don’t you mean Harry Potter?”

Resisting the urge to snap at him, Holly forced a polite smile to her face. “I’m Holly, now,” she told him firmly.

When Bagman continued staring at her, Mr Weasley cleared his throat, continuing the introductions by revealing him as the source of their Top Box tickets. Shaking himself, Bagman smiled and basked in the praise, before asking around for anyone to wager on the Cup. The Twins took him up on it, betting their entire savings on Ireland winning, but Krum catching the Snitch, to Mr Weasley’s, and Percy’s, disapproval. Holly couldn’t believe they were risking all their money on such long odds.

Bagman joined them for a cup of tea, gossiping about his work at the World Cup, and casually dismissing the continued absence of Bertha Jorkins who had been missing for several weeks now, which seemed worryingly negligent. A moment later, another wizard Apparated to their fireside. Barty Crouch was stiff, upright, looking for all the world like a muggle banker. He impatiently informed Bagman of the Bulgarian delegations requests for more seats in the Top Box, before a near breathless Percy offered him a cup of tea. Looking mildly surprised, Crouch accepted, calling Percy ‘Weatherby’ in the process, to Fred and George’s delight.

The Ministry wizards spoke for a short while longer, before Bagman began hinting at some big thing that would be happening at Hogwarts that year, and Crouch insisted they leave to deal with World Cup matters, pushing his undrunk tea back at Percy. Once the two Apparated away, the Twins began pestering Mr Weasley and Percy to know what was happening, but received nothing.

As they cleaned up after lunch, Holly touched Percy’s elbow to get his attention. “I’m sorry Mr Crouch was like that to you,” she told him gently. “He shouldn’t treat you like that.”

Percy tried to wave it off. “Oh it doesn’t matter. Mr Crouch is an important, busy man. As long as the work gets done, that’s what matters.”

“Still,” Holly said. She wasn’t sure why it was bothering her so much. Maybe she was just sensitive to the issue of names right now. “You’re a member of his staff,” she pointed out. “He should at least have the decency to remember your name. He knows your dad’s, and it’s not hard to tell you’re related.” As Percy stared at her, she shrugged. “I don’t know, I just… You deserve better than that, is all, Percy.”

After a long moment, Percy gave her a tight smile. “Don’t worry about me, Holly. I’ll be fine.” As she turned back to cleaning her plate, she heard him quietly murmur, “Thank you.”

A sense of excitement grew over the area as the afternoon passed. By dusk, the air was so thick with tension it seemed to quiver. The Ministry seemed to have given up trying to contain the evidence of magic and fantastic sights abounded. Holly, Ron and Hermione strolled through salesmen, hawking obviously magical wares and souvenirs. Ron bought himself a shamrock hat
and green rosette in support of Ireland, as well as an animated miniature Krum figure, while Holly bought the three of them Omnioculars to view the match, and Hermione collected some schedules.

They returned to their tent, waiting eagerly, until a loud gong rang out and the trees lit up red and green, leading them to the pitch. Holly couldn’t keep from grinning with the charge of excitement in the air, as Mr Weasley led them through the forest, amid a horde of witches and wizards. She stared in amazement as the huge stadium, shiny gold and able to hold a hundred thousand, came into sight. The Weasley group had their tickets checked, and began the long trek up to the Top Box. After what felt like half an hour of climbing stairs, they reached box, filled with opulent seats. Holly looked out at the pitch in amazement, watching a hundred thousand magical people eagerly preparing for the match, as huge magical advertisements scrawled themselves onto gigantic blackboards. Shaking her head, she looked around to see who else would be in the Top Box. The only other occupant currently was a small creature that was unmistakably a house-elf, sitting with its face hidden behind its hands. Those ears looked like…

“Dobby?” she asked.

The elf peered out at her through her fingers. “Did miss just call me Dobby?” she squeaked in an almost painfully high voice, drawing the attention of Ron, Hermione and Mr Weasley as well.

“Sorry, I just thought you were someone I knew.”

“But I knows Dobby too, miss!” she squeaked. “My name is Winky, miss – and you, miss…” she trailed off, peering curiously at Holly through her fingers.

“I’m Holly Potter,” she replied politely. “Pleased to meet you.”

Winky stared at her, baffled. “Dobby is never talking of a Holly Potter,” she said carefully, with a note almost like suspicion.

Holly sighed. “He knew me before I decided to change my name. I used to be Harry Potter.”

Winky’s expression showed disbelief, until Holly raised her hand to lift her fringe. Eyes widening in awe at the sight of the lightning scar, Winky half bowed in her seat.

“Forgive Winky for not believing, Miss,” she asked almost frantically.

“It’s alright,” Holly reassured quickly. Casting about for a distraction, she asked, “How is Dobby? How’s freedom suiting him?”

Winky shook her head, “Ah, sir-”

“Don’t call me that.” Holly snapped, flinching slightly. As Winky cowered back, she sighed. “Sorry. Just, don’t call me sir. I’m not a boy.”

After peering at her for a long moment, Winky nodded slowly. “Yes, miss,” she said. She then told Holly about Dobby’s misadventures with freedom, and how he had been refusing to work without pay, to the other elf’s horror. When Holly suggested it was good for Dobby to enjoy himself and have fun, Winky firmly stated that elves were not supposed to have fun, only obey their masters. She was afraid of heights, she told them, but was sitting here in the highest box at her master’s order to save him a seat. Holly frowned, and turned to Mr Weasley.

“Is there anything you can do, to keep her secured to her chair for the match? That might help her feel safer.”

After a moment of thought, Mr Weasley nodded, “I suppose a Sticking Charm would keep her
Turning back, Holly gently called, “Winky.” Once the elf was peeking out at her again, she asked, “Would you like us to cast a Sticking Charm on you? That way you don’t have to worry about coming out of your seat until you want to.” The house-elf stared at her for several seconds, before finally nodding. Mr Weasley leaned over, branding his wand smoothly. With a small squelching sound, the back of Winky’s tea towel toga secured itself to her chair. She reached a hand back and tugged it, finding it firmly attached. Finally, she seemed to relax, the tiniest amount.

“Winky is thankings you, miss,” she said, before looking to Mr Weasley. “And thankings you as well, sir.”

Mr Weasley smiled at the elf. “No trouble at all.” With a final smile and wave to Winky, Holly turned her attention back to the pitch. Over the next half hour, the box gradually filled around them. Mr Weasley shook hands with many people who seemed very important in the Ministry. Percy eagerly leapt to his feet to meet them. When Cornelius Fudge arrived, Percy bowed so low his glasses almost fell from his face.

Fudge turned to Holly, smile faltering as he saw her outfit. He turned to the wizards beside him, half gesturing towards her as he introduced her. “Harry Potter, you know,” he told the Bulgarian Minister, who didn’t seem to understand him at all.

“Actually,” Holly interrupted quickly. “I’m going by Holly Potter now.” She raised her chin slightly, feeling defiant as Fudge stared at her. Turning to see the Bulgarian wizard giving her a confused look, she sighed, and once again lifted her fringe. At the sight of her scar, the Bulgarian began talking loudly and excitedly, pointing at it.

As she began turning away, shaking her head, she heard Fudge call out, “Ah, Lucius!” Holly, Hermione and Ron turned quickly to see the Malfoy family approaching the seats behind Mr Weasley. Lucius Malfoy introduced the Minister to his wife, a tall, thin blonde woman, named Narcissa, and his son, Draco.

Fudge failed to introduce the Bulgarian Minister, mangling his name, before drawing the Malfoy’s attention to Mr Weasley. Lucius took the chance to take a swipe at the Weasley’s money situation, while an oblivious Fudge preened about Malfoy’s generous donations to St Mungo’s Hospital. He spent a few seconds sneering at Hermione, as if she was something disgusting he had stepped in, before turning to move on. As he did so, his eyes fell onto Holly and he stopped.

“Well, well, well,” he drawled, looking Holly up and down. “Draco told me that Harry Potter had decided to become a girl, but I almost didn’t believe him, until now.”

Holly glared at him, wishing she could hex the smug look off his face. “I am a girl,” she replied, as if it were completely obvious. “Also, something Draco wouldn’t have been able to run to daddy about: my name is Holly now.”

The Malfoys stared at her, Draco looking irritated, while his parents seemed more contemptuous. “Charming,” Lucius coldly drawled at last, before leading his family to their seats.

As Holly and friends turned back to face the pitch, Bagman bounded into the box. After quickly checking the Minister was ready, he whipped out his want, pointing it at his throat with a “Sonorus!” and began speaking over the noise of the crowd. His voice boomed throughout the stadium as he welcomed them to the World Cup. He began by introducing the Bulgarian Team Mascots – Veela. A hundred women, of unearthly beauty took to the field, and began to dance. Holly’s mind became blissfully blank, desperately staring at the beautiful women dancing before
her. As the dance grew faster, wild thoughts came to her to be impressive. She had half stepped out of
the box, before Hermione’s voice called to her, and the music stopped. Holly dazedly noticed
Ron and Ginny, both half out of their seats, still staring at the Veela. Hermione pulled Holly back
into her seat with a huff.

Then, Bagman announced the Irish Mascots, as a swarm of leprechauns soared through the air,
creating impressive displays of green, gold and shimmering rainbows. The crowd was delighted
when they made gold rain from on stands. Ron cheerfully shoved a handful of gold into Holly’s
hands, repaying her for the Omnioculars.

Once the mascots were settled to each side of the pitch, Bagman announced the names of the
Quidditch players, who soared onto the field in blurs of speed. The referee entered the field and
released the balls. With a shrill whistle, the game began. It was faster than any game of Quidditch
Holly had seen before, the Quaffle barely being held for a second by each player. Ireland’s Chasers
were amazing, quickly scoring repeatedly, but Krum was beyond incredible performing feints and
manoeuvres she had never thought of. The game grew harder and dirtier, as Ireland continued to
pull ahead. When the leprechaun’s teasing and rude gestures became too much, the Veela attacked,
launching fireballs as their faces transformed into cruel looking bird heads, their backs sprouted
scaly wings. As Ministry wizards sought to contain the battling mascots, the game played on
above. Finally, the Seekers dived. Krum edge ahead, pulling from his dive with the Snitch as the
Irish Seeker crashed. Despite Krum’s amazing catch, Ireland won by points, just as the Twins
predicted. The Irish section erupted into cheers as they realised their victory.

Beside Fudge, the Bulgarian Minister spoke gloomily in English, much to Fudge’s outrage. Holly
grinned viciously at Fudge’s misery. Then Fudge was handed a golden trophy, and the Bulgarian
team arrived, standing forlornly as they shook hands with the Ministers. And then the Irish team
reached the box, to loud cheers, as they received their Cup.

Bagman shook his head, cancelling his Amplifying Charm as the Irish took another victory lap. As
Fred and George scrambled to claim their winnings from him, Holly turned to where the Ministers
were sitting. An idea struck her, and she couldn’t keep herself from acting on it.

“Minister Fudge,” she called lightly, just loud enough to be heard. As Fudge looked over, slightly
reluctantly, the Bulgarian Minister turned as well. She repressed a smirk. ‘Perfect.’

“Yes, Harry?” Fudge asked.

“It’s Holly,” she corrected shortly. As he reared back slightly, she continued, “I just wanted to ask
you, are you still trying to cover up the fact that Sirius Black is innocent, or are you willing to
listen to the witnesses now?”

Fudge’s face immediately turned red and he began sputtered angrily. The Bulgarian Minister
turned to face her more fully. “What is this?”

“Ignore him, Potter is just a little boy looking for attention,” Fudge half snarled, moving to usher
the other Minister away. After a moment of resistance, the Bulgarian followed him. As they passed
Mr Weasley, Fudge hissed to him, “Get him out of here.”

As the Ministers and entourage left, Mr Weasley waved his group over. “We should go,” he said,
expression grim. Holly grimaced, but nodded.

“That could have gone better,” she though glumly. A niggling thought of forgetting something
struck her, as the Weasleys gathered themselves up. Then it hit her. “Mr Weasley, what about
Winky?”
As Mr Weasley turned, brow furrowed in confusion, a shaky, squeaky voice piped up. “Do not be worrying for Winky, miss. Winky is being able to get free.” With a snap of her fingers, the fabric of her toga released from the seat.

“Alright then.” It was easy to underestimate what house-elves could do. “Um, sorry your master never showed up,” she said. “At least you can get down now.”

Winky shook her head. “Winky is to be waiting for master to arrive.”

“Oh…” Holly looked around, wanting to help but not knowing how. Mr Weasley gave her a look of mixed impatience and helplessness, gesturing for her to leave. “Well, take care, Winky,” she said, with a final wave, before allowing herself to be ushered out.

As they descended the stairs, Mr Weasley sighed. “I know you’re frustrated with the Minister right now, Har- Holly, but please don’t do that again,” he said, sounding worried. “Having the Minister upset with you would not be enjoyable.”

Holly’s face twisted in frustration. “So I should just sit back and let him do whatever he wants? You know what he’s doing is wrong!” Hermione, next to her, nodded in agreement.

“Calling him out and embarrassing him publically is just going to make him dig his heels in even more,” Mr Weasley told them. “There’s nothing you can do right now.”

Holly huffed angrily and continued stomping down the stairs. As they exited the stadium, they saw the two Ministers, standing to the side, clearly having a rather heated discussion. From the sound of it, the Bulgarian Minister had dropped all pretence of not speaking English, and was demanding answers from Fudge, who was trying to deflect him away. Mr Weasley placed a hand on Holly’s shoulder and firmly steered her away, before either Minister noticed her.

“Let’s just all get some sleep,” he said tiredly

AN: Sorry this one took so long to get up. Writer’s block was kicking my ass for this chapter and life got in the way.
Despite his words, Mr Weasley agreed to let them stay up, and share a last cup of cocoa before bed. He didn’t really want to ruin the good mood the game had created. They sat by the warm fire, talking about the game, and Holly managed to put aside her anger at the Minister to enjoy herself with her friends. Eventually, they went to bed, the buzz of excitement fading to a warm tiredness. Holly slipped from imagining playing Quidditch like that into dreams of flying.

Suddenly, Mr Weasley was shouting urgently for them to get up. Blearily she climbed from her bunk, noticing the distant singing had been replaced by the sounds of screams and running. Adrenaline shot through her and she reached for her clothes, only to be stopped by Mr Weasley. She quickly grabbed her bag and coat before hurrying out. Outside the tent, she saw swarms of people fleeing into the forest from a tightly packed crowd of masked wizard. They were drunkenly laughing and jeering as they floated Mr Roberts and his wife and children over their heads, treating them like puppets. She could only stare in horror as more and more wizards joined them, cheering and pointing.

Mr Weasley and his adult sons joined the Ministry in trying to stop them, while ordering Holly and the others to hide in the woods. Despite their best efforts, between the crowds and the dark, Holly, Ron and Hermione were quickly separated from Fred, George and Ginny. In the woods, they encountered Draco Malfoy, who gloated smugly about the Muggles being tortured and threatening that Hermione could be targeted too. Then his eyes fell on Holly and his smirk faltered into an expression of disgust. “You even wear women’s sleepwear now, Potter?” he asked incredulously, looking Holly up and down.

She pulled her coat closed over her nightdress, glaring back at him. “I am a woman,” she snapped before striding away, beyond sick of dealing with his bigotry. Ron and Hermione hurried to follow, as Malfoy called snide comments at their backs.

After encountering a group of French teenagers, who probably attended Beauxbatons, Holly realised her wand wasn’t in her bag. The trio looked around, but were unable find it. She hoped it was still in the tent, but being trapped without it made her feel incredibly vulnerable. At a loud rustling, they turned to see Winky fighting through the bushes to get away, moving as if being pulled back by some invisible force. As the sounds of fighting became louder, they moved deeper into the woods, passing some goblins, and even a few veela, who caused Ron’s eyes to glaze over.

Once they found a quiet clearing to wait in, Bagman stumbled across them, looking pale and strained, yet he hadn’t heard about the riot. Swearing he Apparated away. They sat, waiting and talking quietly, listening to the distant sounds fading. Suddenly, the sound of staggering footsteps approaching brought them to their feet. As they peered into the trees, calling to see who was there, a voice yelled, “MORSEMORDRE!” and a huge green shape erupted into the sky. Holly squinted up at it, taking in the sight of an ethereal skull, with a snake protruding from its mouth. Returning her gaze to the forest, she demanded the hidden person reveal themselves.

At that moment, Ron and Hermione started dragging her away, looking horrified as they told her the shape – the Dark Mark – was Voldemort’s sign. Then, with a crack, twenty wizards appeared
around them, wand ready, and Holly barely pulled her friends to the ground in time to avoid the wave of Stunning Spells from all directions. They only held their fire as Mr Weasley yelled for them to stop, recognising Ron. As he frantically checked on them, Crouch began accusing them of casting the Dark Mark. Even as they explained where the spell had come from, and the other Ministry wizards clearly dismissed them as suspects, Crouch continued to eye them suspiciously. Amos Diggory searched through the trees where they pointed, finding an unconscious Winky with a wand in her hand. Crouch checked the bushes himself, muttering denials, as Mr Diggory revealed Winky belonged to Crouch. The Ministry wizards seemed convinced that Winky had been the one to cast the Dark Mark.

Waking her, they began interrogating her, demanding answers as she gasped and stammered her innocence. When they waved the incriminating wand in her face, Holly recognised it.

“Hey – that’s mine!”

Everyone turned to stare at her, as Mr Diggory asked, “Excuse me?”

“That’s my wand! I dropped it!”

“You dropped it? Is this a confession? You threw it aside after you conjured the Mark?” Mr Diggory demanded.

“Amos, think who you’re talking to!” Mr Weasley snapped. “Is Harry— I mean, Holly Potter likely to conjure the Dark Mark?” He shot her an apologetic look at his slip.

As Mr Diggory looked chastened, Holly could hear the other Ministry wizards muttering in confusion. Scowling, she snapped, “I’m changing my name to Holly Potter. Could we please move on?!” As the Ministry wizards stared at her in shock, she continued, “Anyway, I didn’t drop my wand here. I lost it just after we got into the woods.”

As Mr Diggory turned back to interrogating Winky, Hermine pointed out that Winky couldn’t have cast the spell. The voice speaking the incantation was far deeper than hers, clearly human. Then, Mr Diggory cast a spell on Holly’s wand, to reveal that it had indeed been used to cast the Mark. As he declared her guilt, Crouch stepped in, sounding offended at the implication that his servant would be associated with Dark Arts. He looked almost manic as he ranted on his hatred of the Dark Arts.

Finally, Mr Weasley determined that Winky had picked up the wand after the culprit had fled. Despite being nearby, she had not seen the caster, to the wizards’ disappointment. Then, Mr Diggory cast a spell on Holly’s wand, to reveal that it had indeed been used to cast the Mark. As he declared her guilt, Crouch stepped in, sounding offended at the implication that his servant would be associated with Dark Arts. He looked almost manic as he ranted on his hatred of the Dark Arts.

Tiredly, they explained what had happened to the rest of the Weasleys, who were waiting for them. Percy immediately took Crouch’s side, earning him Hermione’s ire as she protested Winky’s mistreatment. Then, at Ron’s questions, Mr Weasley explained how the Dark Mark, not seen for thirteen years, had been used to mark where Voldemort and his followers had killed someone.

Bill told them that the sight of the Mark had scared away the group of Death Eaters who had been torturing the Muggles. At Holly’s confusion, he explained that Death Eater was the name of Voldemort’s followers. They had been frightened of the Mark, because they had denied the Dark Lord to avoid Azkaban, and feared his wrath for their betrayal. After some more discussion on the
events of the night, Mr Weasley sent them to bed, to get some sleep before they returned to the Burrow as early as possible.

Early in the morning, they quickly packed with magic, returning to the Portkey area. Mr Roberts waved them off with a dazed, “Merry Christmas!” Holly gave Mr Weasley a pointed look, but he assured her that Mr Roberts would recover. They joined the queue and took a Portkey, then walked back to the Burrow. Mrs Weasley rushed out to greet them, calling out in relief. The early newspaper she was holding detailed attack on the World Cup, painting the Ministry in the worst light possible and practically inciting panic.

Mr Weasley and Percy insisted on going in to help, despite being on holiday, to Mrs Weasley’s displeasure. As she tried to convince them not to go, Holly pulled her friends up to Ron’s room. “What’s up, Holly?” Ron asked, once the door was closed behind them.

“Remember the dream I told you about, a few days ago? Where Wormtail and Voldemort were plotting to kill me?” She hated putting it so bluntly, but it was better to face the truth.

“Don’t – say – his – name!” Ron hissed through clenched teeth, as Hermione nodded looking troubled.

“It’d be a weird coincidence, for me to have that dream and my scar hurts, and three days later the Death Eaters are on the march, and Voldemort’s sign’s up I the sky again.”

Ron flinched violently again, before a look of horror crossed his face. “Wait. Remember at the end of last year? When Professor Trelawney had that fit, and talked about the Dark Lord returning ‘greater and more terrible than ever before’…”

Hermione gave a derisive snort, looking sceptical as she said, “Oh, Ron, you aren’t got to pay any attention to anything that old fraud says? We all left her class, she’s that useless.”

“You didn’t see her,” Ron replied, jaw set stubbornly.

“I told Dumbledore about that at the end of last year,” Holly interrupted quickly, before they could start arguing. “He thought it was a real prediction.”

Hermione’s mouth hung open in astonishment, while Ron looked smug. “Surely Dumbledore can’t believe Trelawney’s nonsense?” she asked, aghast.

“I don’t think he believes everything she says,” Holly said carefully. “When I asked him about it, he said something about it being her second real prediction. He even said he should give her a pay rise,” she said with a small smile. There was a moment of silence, Hermione shaking her head in disbelief.

“I just hope I get a response to my letters soon,” said Holly at last. “I know Sirius might take a while to reply, since he’s who-knows-where, but I’d thought Dumbledore would have sent me something by now…”

“Maybe he’s just busy,” Ron offered with a shrug. When she still looked worried he said, “Come and have a game of Quidditch in the orchard, Holly. Come on – three on three, Bill and Charlie and Fred and George will play… you can try out the Wronski Feint…”

Hermione gave him a disapproving look. “Ron, Holly doesn’t want to play Quidditch right now… she’s worried and, she’s tired… we all need to go to bed…”
“Yeah, I want to play Quidditch,” Holly said. “Hang on, let me get my Firebolt.”

Hermione left the room, shaking her head and muttering about Quidditch fanatics under her breath.

The following week, leading up to their return to Hogwarts, Holly and Ron spent a large amount of their time, studying for their exams, to place into their desired electives. Hermione looked on proudly as they revised, offering advice and clarifications when they needed it. They barely saw Mr Weasley or Percy during that time, as they were almost always at the Ministry, taking care of the chaos spawned by the World Cup attack.

The night before they were to catch the train, the residents of the Burrow relaxed in the living room, each engaged in some quiet activity or conversation. When Mr Weasley arrived home, looking thoroughly exhausted, he told them that Rita Skeeter had uncovered the disappearance of Bertha Jorkins, and was having a field day as she continued to smear the Ministry. When a comment from Percy brought up Mr Crouch and Winky, Hermione snapped at him that Crouch treated house-elves poorly, and that they were basically slaves. Before they could begin arguing in earnest, Mrs Weasley sent them all up to check they were packed for tomorrow.

Up in Ron’s room, Holly wondered if the reason Sirius hadn’t responded was because he had been caught. Ron reassured her, pointing out that it would definitely be in the papers, to make up for all the current bad press the Ministry was facing.

They turned to sort through the school shopping Mrs Weasley had bought for them, until Ron made a horrified sound, lifting up a horrifying maroon and lace dress. At that point, Mrs Weasley arrived with fresh laundry. Ron asked what the dress was and she told him it was his dress robes for formal events, which were required that year. In response to Ron’s vehement protests, she had Holly pull hers out. Holly’s were much more elegant, looking mostly like her old Hogwarts robes, but bottle green, instead of black. When Ron expressed his preference for those, Mrs Weasley embarrassedly admitted Ron’s were second-hand. Ron adamantly refused to wear them.

Once Mrs Weasley left, and Ron was moping about everything he owned being second-hand, Holly looked over her dress robes again, feeling an unsettling suspicion. “I’ll be back in a minute,” she muttered to Ron, slipping out of the room and down the stairs, robes in hand. Reaching Ginny’s room, she knocked on the open door. Ginny and Hermione looked up from their packing and waved her in.

“What is it, Holly,” Ginny asked, raising an eyebrow as Holly carefully closed the door.

“Um… Hermione, could I please see your dress robe?” she asked tentatively, eyes downcast in thought.

Hermione shot her a confused look, but nodded. “Sure, give me a minute to get it out.” Holly stood awkwardly with her dress robe clutched to her chest, fingers nervously toying with her hair, hoping that her growing suspicion was wrong.

When Hermione pulled out her dress robe, a beautiful thing of floaty, periwinkle-blue material, Holly almost burst into tears. “Dammit,” she muttered. “I was right.”

“Right about what?” Hermione asked with concern, putting aside her robes, while Ginny quickly took Holly’s hand, rubbing it comfortingly. Wordlessly, Holly held out the robes, letting Hermione unfold them to see. After a moment of looking between them and Holly, Hermione gave an “Oh!” of realisation, and gave her a sympathetic look. “I’m sorry, Holly.”
“What? What’s going on?” Ginny asked, sounding slightly put out, as she glanced between them.

“Mrs Weasley bought Holly men’s dress robes,” Hermione said grimly. Holly choked back a sob, covering her face with her free hand. She gritted her teeth, stubbornly refusing to cry over this.

“Oh dammit,” Ginny said in a frustrated voice. “This is getting ridiculous. How many times do we have to tell her before she gets it? In fact,” she nodded decisively, “I think I’m going to go yell at her about this.”

Holly quickly grabbed her hand as she made to leave. “No wait. Please don’t,” she asked beseechingly. “I don’t want to start an argument over this. It’s not worth it.” She gave a small smile as Hermione put the robes over her bed and came over to take her other hand. “At least they’re better than Ron’s, they’re absolutely hideous.”

The girls shared a guilty giggle, before Holly’s trailed off. “Wait…” she breathed. “I’ve got an idea.” Reclaiming her hands and dress robe, she darted out of the room with a call of “Thanks, Hermione, Ginny!” She arrived at the attic room to find Ron muttering angrily under his breath as he threw clothes into his trunk.

Hiding the robe behind her back, she called brightly, “Hey Ron.” He shot her a dark look, which she promptly ignored. “I have something for you.” As his expression turned curious, she presented the robe to him. He blinked at it in confusion for several seconds, before his expression twisted bitterly.

“I don’t want your charity, Holly,” he snapped at her. She sighed, resisting the urge to roll her eyes. “It’s not charity, Ron,” she told him firmly, dropping the robe onto his bed. “These are men’s dress robes.”

“Yeah, unlike mine,” Ron said bitterly, glaring at them.

Holly planted her hands on her hips. “They’re men’s robes, and I’m a girl, Ron. I’m not wearing them. Never,” she said, echoing his words to his mother. As her words sank in, Ron’s mulish expression wavered. He was considering it. “If you don’t take them, I’ll just burn them or something.”

Snorting in amusement, Ron stood, shaking his head. “Well fine, no need to waste them. And it’ll be a damn sight better than those horrible ones,” he nodded to the maroon monstrosity. “Thanks, Holly,” he added with a smile.

The next morning, Holly witnessed the unnerving sight of Amos Diggory using the Floo to speak to Mr Weasley. His head sat in the flames, completely unharmed, as he told Mr Weasley about an incident with someone named Mad-Eye, asking to keep him from getting in too much trouble for some Muggles seeing magic. Once Mr Weasley left, the others told Holly how Mad-Eye was a retired Auror – a Dark Wizard catcher – who had been one of the best, but fallen into paranoia and retired.

After breakfast, the Hogwarts students, escorted by Bill, Charlie and Mrs Weasley, caught cramped Muggle taxis to King’s Cross and then easily slipped through the barrier to Platform Nine and Three Quarters. After placing their luggage on the train, they said their goodbyes to the adult Weasleys, who teasingly made cryptic references to something happening at Hogwarts that year. Finally, the students returned to their carriages, and the train pulled away.

Holly, Ron and Hermione had barely gotten comfortable before Malfoy’s drawling voice drifted
into the compartment, gloating about his parents considering sending him to Durmstrang – a foreign school with a reputation for the Dark Arts and blood purity – instead of Hogwarts. They closed the door to block him out, wishing he had gone there, so they wouldn’t have to put up with him.

Several of their friends and acquaintances looked in on them throughout the ride. Almost every person who came in used her old name. She repressed a sigh each time she asked them to call her Holly instead. ‘The one time I want people to know something, the vaunted Hogwarts rumour mill falls apart,’ she thought bitterly.

When Sean, Seamus and Neville Longbottom joined them, conversation turned to the Quidditch World Cup, much to Hermione’s displeasure. Ron excitedly told Neville about their experience, and his awe at seeing Krum. “We saw him right up close, as well. We were in the Top Box—”

He was interrupted by Malfoy appearing in the doorway, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. “For the first and last time in your life, Weasley,” Malfoy drawled.

“Don’t remember asking you to join us, Malfoy,” Holly said coldly.

Malfoy wasn’t listening to her, however, as he spotted Ron’s second-hand dress robes, which Ron had hung over Pigwidgeon’s cage to muffle the excitable bird. “Weasley… what is that?” Malfoy snatched it up with a look a cruel delight. “Look at this! Weasley, you weren’t thinking of wearing these, were you? I mean – they were very fashionable in about 1890…”

“Eat dung, Malfoy!” Ron snarled, red-faced as he snatched back the robes.

As Malfoy, Crab and Goyle laughed, Holly snorted derisively. “Ron has perfectly good new robes to wear,” she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “Those are just some old things to cover his owl’s cage”

Malfoy shot her a glare. “And why wouldn’t he just use a blanket?” he demanded. Holly shrugged. “Why waste a good blanket?” she said, rolling her eyes. Malfoy’s cheeks tinged pink as she shared a look with her friends, who laughed at her dramatics.

“What ever,” he sneered. “So… going to enter, Weasley? Going to try and bring a bit of glory to the family name? There’s money involved as well, you know… you could even cut a decade off saving to see the Top Box again if you won…”

“What are you talking about?” Ron snapped.

When Malfoy realised they didn’t know what was happening at Hogwarts, he proceeded to gloat about his father telling him ages ago. After a parting shot about Ron’s father probably not being important enough to know, he left. Ron slammed the door behind him, rattling the glass violently.

As they arrived at the station, the rain was absolutely bucketing down. After calling a quick greeting to Hagrid, the trio and Neville rushed to a horseless carriage, which carried them up to Hogwarts. They hurried into the castle, to be greeted by Peeves the Poltergeist pelting them with water bombs. He only stopped when Professor McGonagall stormed over and threatened him with the Headmaster. Once he fled, blowing raspberries all the while, McGonagall ordered the watching students into the Hall. Then her eyes fell on the trio and she said, “Except you, Potter, Weasley. I need to speak with you.”

“I’ll save you some seats,” Hermione told them, moving into the Great Hall with Neville. Holly glanced at Ron, who shrugged, and they followed Professor McGonagall into a side room, off the
Entrance Hall. As she turned to face them, the Professor waved her wand over them, leaving them warm and dry.

“Don’t look so worried, you’re not in trouble,” she said, to their relief. “I wished to discuss your electives. Are you still determined to drop Divination?”

“Well, I’m not going to let all the study I did this summer go to waste,” Ron said with a grimace, before casting a nervous look at her. “Uh, not that I mean studying is bad or anything, Professor.”

The corners of Professor McGonagall’s mouth twitched as she said, “Quite.” She looked to Holly, who quickly nodded her agreement. “Very well, you will be excused from your first classes tomorrow, so you may take your exams after breakfast. They will be graded before lunch is finished. I hope you appreciate the Professors sacrificing quite a bit of their time for this,” she said archly, looking over her glasses at them.

“Yes Professor,” they chorused. “We’ll make sure to convey our gratitude,” Holly added, earning a small smile.

“That’s all sorted then,” Professor McGonagall said, gesturing to the door. “We should get to the Feast, I need to start the Sorting.”

As Ron hurried to the door with an eager expression, Holly hesitated. “Umm, actually Professor,” Holly said quietly, “there’s something else I’d like to ask about.” She hesitated, until her Head of House gestured for her to continue, looking slightly impatient. “I’ve decided to change my name. I’d like to be called Holly Jasmine Potter, now.”

Holly’s eyes refused to stop looking at her hand, clenched in her lap. ‘Why am I so damn nervous? I’ve been telling people to call me Holly for over a week now!’

“Ah,” Professor McGonagall said, voice sounding odd. Holly looked up, to see a slightly wistful expression on her face. “Yes, I suppose you would want to. I will change your records with Hogwarts, and see to it that the rest of the staff are informed. You will need to contact the Ministry, if you wish to change any other documentation, I’m afraid.”

“That’s fine, for now,” Holly nodded happily. “Thank you Professor.”

“You’re welcome, Holly,” Professor McGonagall replied, smiling at her warmly. “It is a lovely name. I’m sure Lily would be quite proud of your choice.”

Holly beamed.

As promised, Hermione had saved them seats. Ron and Holly received many jealous looks, as those around them continued wringing out their soaked robes, which they ignored with aplomb. They had barely settled before Colin Creevey, her Third Year fanboy, called from up the table. “Hiya, Harry!”

“Hi, Colin,” she replied warily.

“Harry, guess what? Guess what, Harry? My brother’s staring! My brother Dennis!”

Holly closed her eyes for a moment and took a breath, before speaking. “That’s nice,” she replied politely, careful to keep her voice level as she avoided looking at Colin.

“He’s really excited!” Colin continued oblivious to Holly’s annoyance. “I just hope he’s in
Gryffindor! Keep your fingers crossed, eh, Harry?"

“Sure, Colin,” Holly said through gritted teeth. Then, she took a deep breath, unclenching her hands under the table. “I have something I need to say,” she said, speaking up slightly to draw attention from along the table. As heads turned, she resisted the urge to fidget under the attention. Ron shot her a questioning look, while Hermione gave her an understanding smile. She had been planning to do this in the Common Room, but honestly didn’t think she could deal with it throughout the Feast. Speaking clearly and carefully, she said, “I’ve changed my name, to Holly Jasmine Potter. Use that from now on, please.”

There were incredibly mixed reactions to her announcement from those around her. Most of her friends and acquaintances in Gryffindor already knew, having been told at the World Cup or on the Express. The Gryffindor Chasers and Holly’s roommates offered compliments on her choice, in varying volumes and pitches.

Other Gryffindors looked utterly shocked. Holly was rather disturbed as she looked around at their expressions. They were acting as if she had cursed someone. A Second Year girl, named Romilda Vane, Holly thought, looked almost in tears, as she said, “But… but you’re Harry Potter! The Boy Who Lived!”

Holly couldn’t keep a grimace from her face. Merlin she hated that title. “Well, now I’m Holly Potter, The Girl Who Lived.”

As the news rippled along the table, and across the aisle to the Hufflepuffs, some shocked faces turned to anger. “Seriously?” a Fifth Year snarled at her. “I thought this rubbish was just to throw Sirius Black off or something, but you’re actually still pretending to be a girl?!”

“Shut the hell up, McLaggen,” Katie Bell snapped angrily, as Holly curled in on herself, away from the glares and her friends moved closer protectively.

“Just ignore them, Holly,” Hermione told her firmly, shooting McLaggen a venomous look. “It doesn’t matter what they think.”

Before Holly could reply, Professor McGonagall entered with the First Years, bringing silence to the Great Hall. They gathered at the front as the Sorting Hat was brought out and sung its song. Holly was surprised to hear a different one from her own Sorting. Apparently it changed every year. Then the Sorting began, Professor McGonagall slowly working her way down the list of names as the Hat placed the new students into their Houses. Dennis Creevey was sorted into Gryffindor, to the delight of Colin, who immediately pointed Holly out to him. Finally the last student was Sorted and Dumbledore bade them to “Tuck in.”

Ron immediately fell upon the food like a starving animal, but Holly found her appetite lacking at the moment. Picking at her food, she wondered why it was so hard for people to just let her be herself. She was distracted by the sound of Hermione’s indignation upon learning that Hogwarts used house-elves to prepare the meals, after which she refused to eat. Ron tried to tempt her throughout dinner and dessert, but she refused to budge even an inch.

When the food vanished, Dumbledore gave the start of term announcements. Shockingly, he declared the inter-house Quidditch Cup for the year was cancelled, to the dismay of the House Teams. ‘He’s lucky Wood graduated last year,’ Holly thought numbly. ‘I wouldn’t put it past him to hex Dumbledore over this.’ As Dumbledore made to explain why, he was interrupted by someone dramatically entering the hall. He was the most frightening looking person Holly had ever seen – excepting Voldemort. His face was horrifically scared and twisted, and one of his eyes was obscenely large and vivid, electric blue. It rolled endlessly in its socket, spinning around
dizzingly. He stomped across the Hall to shake hands with Dumbledore, before taking a seat at
the High Table. Dumbledore introduced him as Professor Moody, the new teacher for Defence
Against the Dark Arts. The students were too shocked by his appearance to applaud.

As they stared at the new Professor, who was snifffing his food before eating and drinking only
from a hip-flask, Dumbledore continued, informing them that Hogwarts was to host the newly
revived Triwizard Tournament. It was, he explained, a sporting competition between Hogwarts,
Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, where each school entered a Champion to face magical tasks. It had
been discontinued over a century ago due to the huge death toll. Despite that morbid fact, only
Hermione seemed perturbed, with many students whispering excitedly. Delegations from
Beauxbatons and Durmstrang would be arriving in October, and the Champions would be selected
on Halloween, by an impartial judge. The winner would earn eternal glory and a thousand galleons
in prize money. However, only those aged seventeen were permitted to enter, to the outrage of
many younger students. With that, Dumbledore sent them to bed.

The Weasley Twins spent the journey to the Common Room mutinously planning to enter
regardless of the age restriction. Once they passed the Fat Lady, the girls split off to their
Dormitory, where Holly collapsed on her bed, feeling incredibly drained. Hermione stormed
around the room, muttering furiously about slave labour and only stopping when Parvati threw a
pillow at her.

Feeling grateful for the silence, Holly drew her curtains and quickly changed into her nightdress.
As she lay down, she forced her mind to run through her Occlumency exercises, putting aside her
emotions and clearing her thoughts. As the sense of meditative peace began to wash over her, she
began to feel the creeping sensation of dysphoria growing more intense. Remembering Sarah’s
advice on meditation, she considered what to use for her focus. Since the meditation felt similar to
flying, she decided to try that.

Allowing her mind to latch onto the feeling of floating freedom, she remembered the sensation of
flight. Immediately, her mind was filled with a rush of memories, of flying, of Quidditch, of
conversations, jumping from one association to the next at a dizzying pace. Desperately she ran
through another exercise, slowly regaining control of the while of thoughts, allowing her mind to
clear once more. When she no longer felt completely overwhelmed, she shook her head, and pulled
herself of the meditation. ‘Well that didn’t work,’ she thought glumly. Shaking her head, she
decided to leave it for tonight and get some sleep.

The next day, Holly and Ron saw Hermione off to Herbology, before hurrying to the room
Professor McGonagall had informed them their exams would be held in. It was an unused
classroom, with all the desks and chairs stacked in the corner, bar two in the centre of the room.

They were met by Professors Vector and Burbage. Professor Vector, the Arithmancy teacher, was
tall and severe looking, with long, dark hair and piercing eyes. In contrast, Professor Burbage, who
taught Muggle Studies, had a kindly, almost cherubic face which was framed by gorgeous white
ringlets of hair. At the sight of her, Holly immediately felt an intense surge of dislike. She was
shocked and disturbed at how intense the feeling was, and she quickly focused her attention on
Professor Vector instead.

“Good, you’re both here,” Professor Vector said in clipped dones, waving them towards the desks.
“Hurry and sit down so we may begin.”

Holly and Ron obeyed, and their respective Professor’s placed several sheets of parchment face
down before them. As they got out their quills and ink, Professor Burbage hovered nearby with a
bright smile. “Now don’t worry dears, I’m sure you’ll both do excellently.” Ron returned a nervous
smile, while Holly simply nodded, keeping her eyes fixed on the wall to avoid looking at the cheerful Professor.

Professor Vector pulled out a pocket watch and checked the time. “Do not touch your exam until I give you permission,” she said in clipped tones without looking up, as Ron made to move his parchment aside. “Once the exam begins, you will have an hour to complete it. There will be no talking during the exam. Do not look at another student’s exam paper.”

With a tinkling laugh, Professor Burbage said, “Come now Septima, they’re not even doing the same subject!”

Professor Vector shot her a dark look. “It is the principle of the matter,” she sniffed. Looking back to her watch, she paused for several seconds, before calling out, “Begin!”

Holly and Ron quickly flipped their exams. Ron immediately began scribbling an answer to the first question, while Holly flipped through the pages, reading over each question before starting. It was a challenging exam and Holly found herself mentally thanking Hermione several times for working them so hard. She quickly lost track of time, as she worked through question after question, page after page of equations. Finally, she completed the final question, and looked up. Professor Vector was alternating between looking at her watch and staring hawklike at the students. Professor Burbage wandered the room, occasionally pausing to glance at Ron’s exam and smile proudly. Noticing Holly’s gave, she smiled even more brightly. “About ten minutes left, Miss Potter.”

Ron paused his writing and quickly checked how many question remained, before resuming at slightly faster pace. Holly nodded stiffly, returning to her exam and looking over her calculations. She was glad she did, as she spotted an error where she forgot to carry a seven, and quickly fixed the mistake.

“Quills down,” Professor Vector said sharply, snapping her watch closed. Ron dropped his quill and sat back with a groan. He rubbed at his wrist, grimacing. Holly placed her quill down, and watched the Professor Vector, trying to ignore the Muggle Studies Professor in the corner of her vision.

“Well done,” Professor Burbage bubbled, clapping cheerfully. “We should have these marked before lunch is over, right Septima?”

Professor Vector inclined her head. “Barring unforeseen factors. You may go,” she told Holly and Ron, who quickly collected their things and left.

“Blimey,” Ron said, shaking his hand. “Alright here, Holly?”

She huffed in irritation. “I’m fine. Just hungry, is all. Let’s get down to lunch already.”

“Can’t argue with that!”

Over lunch, Hermione grilled them on how their exams went, only calming down after many
reassurances. Then she told them about Herbology, which had been shared with the Hufflepuffs, collecting Bubotuber pus, and then Care of Magical Creatures, where Hagrid introduced them to horrifying monstrosities called Blast-Ended Skrewts. Holly and Ron gave longsuffering groans at the news. After eating quickly, Hermione rushed off to the library to research something, to their exasperation.

As they were finishing their lunch, Professor McGonagall approached, them, handing each of them a sealed envelope with a neutral expression. Holly barely refrained from rolling her eyes at the theatrics of it all. ‘It’s just the results of one exam…” Still she felt a thrill of nervousness as she took it and broke the seal. Pulling out the parchment inside, the read it with bated breath.

**THIRD YEAR EXAM RESULTS**

**HOLLY JASMINE POTTER HAS ACHIEVED:**

*Arithmancy: E*

A relieved sigh exploded out of her, and she looked over at Ron with a grin. He was staring at his results in shock. “What’s wrong?” she asked, looking over his shoulder in alarm. Her eyes widened at what she saw.

**THIRD YEAR EXAM RESULTS**

**RONALD BILLIUS WEASLEY HAS ACHIEVED:**

*Muggle Studies: O*


“Congratulations, Ron!” Holly said, grinning and slapping him on the back. He blinked at her for several seconds, before a disbelieving smile bloomed on his face.

“Thanks,” he said, looking back at his results in awe.

“Yes, well done to both of you,” said Professor McGonagall, startling them both. They had actually forgotten she was standing there in the excitement. She was looking down at them with an eyebrow raised, though Holly noticed her lips twitching slightly. “Here are your new schedules,” their Head of House said, handing over their timetables. “It just so happens that your next classes are your new electives. Do try not to be late. Oh, and Miss Potter, Madam Pomfrey requires you in the Hospital Wing after dinner.”

Immediately Holly’s excitement returns full force. She desperately hoped Madam Pomfrey had good news for her transition. Well, she’d find out tonight. Shaking her head, she grabbed bag, before poking Ron in the shoulder to do the same. They hurried out of the Great Hall and up the staircase.

Once they were out of sight down a corridor, Holly pulled out and activated the Marauder’s Map, glancing around to make sure no one saw. She looked down at it, trying to trace place where their classrooms were, when Ron made a strange sound and pointed at something on the Map.

Following his finger, she saw two dots, labelled Ronald Weasley and…

She stared, a sense of rising joy bubbling inside her, at the sight of her dot, labelled Holly Potter. Glancing up, she saw Ron grinning at her. “I guess that makes it official then, yeah?” All she could do was grin in return, eyes drawn back to her dot, and the absolute confirmation that her new name was real, and no one could take it away from her. After almost a minute, Ron poked her. “C’mon,
we haven’t got all day. Honestly, girls,” he muttered, rolling his eyes.

Poking him sharply in the ribs, Holly returned to locating the quickest routes to their classrooms, quickly finding them thanks to the Map. “Have fun with all that math,” Ron said, poking his tongue before hurrying to a nearby secret passage that would take him halfway to his destination. Shaking her head, Holly nearly skipped away, still beaming.

Thanks to the shortcuts on the Map, Holly managed to reach the Arithmancy classroom early. She was there before anyone else. Shrugging, she leant against the wall, pulling out her Arithmancy textbook. As she read, she hummed a happy tune. After seeing Professor Vector at her exam, she definitely didn’t want to fall behind.

After a few minutes she was joined by several others, who she assumed must be her classmates. A quick glance showed the majority were Ravenclaws, unsurprisingly. Holly recognised Padma Patil simply for her resemblance with her twin, but she couldn’t remember any of the others’ names. There were several Hufflepuffs, though she only recognised Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott. Worryingly, there was also a relatively large group of Slytherins, though she couldn’t name any of them.

The Arithmancy students eyed her with looks of varied curiosity and suspicion. After a long moment of tense silence, a tall, black Slytherin boy asked, “What in Merlin’s name are you doing here, Potter?”

Holly looked up from her book with a raised eyebrow. “Waiting for Arithmancy,” she replied evenly.

One of the Ravenclaws called out, “Since when do you do Arithmancy?”

“Since now,” she told them, as if it were obvious. Honestly she didn’t get why they were having trouble with this.

One of the Slytherins, a pretty girl with cold blue eyes and blonde hair gave her a condescending look. “You can’t just join any class you want because you’re famous, Potter. You have to prove you’re competent enough.” The Slytherins and even some Ravenclaws chuckled at that.

“You’d think he’d be satisfied making everyone pretend he’s a girl, but I guess he has to make a scene here too,” the other Slytherin boy said, a small, weedy looking, who’s eyes glinted with malice.

Holly clenched her fists, resisting the urge to hex him. Looking at the blonde girl, she spoke in a carefully controlled voice, “I have already proven my competence, since I just received and Exceeds Expectations on my exam.” Feeling a surge of annoyance at how shocked everyone looked, she looked at the weedy boy, saying, “And if you are too stupid to understand the fact that I am a girl, I’m afraid there’s nothing that can be done for you.”

As the Slytherins muttered angrily amongst themselves, a few of the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuffs approached her. There was a moment of shuffling, before a nervous looking Susan Bones was pushed to the front. After a moment, she blurted, “Is it really true that you’re changing your name?”

Looking around at the curious faces, Holly gave a small sigh. At least they weren’t yelling at her. “Yes, my new name is Holly Jasmine Potter. Please use it.”

“I don’t get it though,” one of the Ravenclaw boys piped up. “Why not stay as Harry Potter?”
Holly opened her mouth and then paused, taking a moment to find the right words to explain it. “Being called Harry just feels wrong. I know it’s the name my parents chose for me, but it’s clearly a boy name. Harry Potter is a name for the Boy Who Lived, and I refuse to pretend I’m not a girl anymore.”

The boy nodded with a contemplative expression. “Fair enough,” he said at last. “Terry Boot, by the way,” he added, thrusting his hand out. As she tentatively took it, he smiled. “A pleasure to meet you, Miss Holly Potter,” he said, leaning over her hand and brushing it with his lips.

Holly snatched her hand back and clutched it to her chest, feeling her cheeks heating up. “Stop it,” she said, past the sudden lump in her throat.

“Stop what?” Boot asked, head tilted curiously.

“Stop making fun of me. This is real. It’s not a game.” She stopped, turning away slightly to control her breathing. The sound of snickering from the Slytherin group wasn’t helping matters.

Boot’s expression became horrified. “I’m not making fun of you,” he protested, holding his hands out earnestly.

“It’s true, he’s not,” a Ravenclaw girl said, stepping forward. “He’s an overdramatic prat to every girl he meets.” Ignoring Boot’s indignant squawk of protest, she extended her hand. “Lisa Turpin. Can I ask, why did you pick Holly?”

Holly carefully shook her hand, searching her eyes for any hint of lies or mockery. Finding none, she said, “I was looking through names and it felt right. And I wanted one that would honour my mum’s flower name tradition.” She felt her blush deepen as many of the girls awwed at that.

After that, the floodgates seemed to open, as all the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs who had approached her introduced themselves. Holly wasn’t sure she’d be able to remember all the names, but she did her best to keep track. It didn’t help that many of them kept complimenting her choice of name, or her hair or her lipstick, and she found quickly herself incredibly flustered.

She was rescued by the arrival of Hermione, who approached with a raised eyebrow and a smirk. With her friend there to shield her, and help answer the insatiable Ravenclaws’ questions, Holly breathed a sigh of relief. Then she jumped as the bell rang and the classroom door opened, at the exact same moment. No one else seemed fazed by it, already filing into the classroom, so she figured it was a regular occurrence.

Professor Vector didn’t bother introducing Holly or explaining her presence, instead immediately launching into a lecture. Holly scrambled to grab her quill and take notes. She quickly saw that the Arithmancy teacher’s reputation as a hard ass was well earned, tolerating no chatter or distractions. Despite her strictness, she paused at specific points to allow questions, and provided clearer and more detailed explanations. It was easy to see why Hermione enjoyed it so much, despite the contingent of Slytherins glaring at them from across the room. As the lesson drew to a close, Professor Vector checked through their work, then declared that they would not receive homework for the week, to sighs - of relief from most; of disappointment from Hermione.

After class, Holly excitedly showed Hermione her new name on the Map, receiving a delighted hug of congratulations. As they began walking down to the Great Hall, Hermione mused, “I wonder how the Map identifies who people are? It must be incredibly advanced magic to be able to locate every single person in the castle and be able to recognise them regardless of obscuration.”

“Obscuration?” Holly asked blankly.
“Oh, you know,” Hermione flapped her hands at her, “like how it can see past your invisibility cloak.”

“Or Animagus forms?” Holly said, remembering seeing Pettigrew on the Map the previous year.

“Yes, exactly. I wonder if it can bypass other magical disguises? Polyjuice Potion is meant to be nearly undetectable, but if the Map sees past it…”

“Professor Lupin said the Map never lies, so it probably can,” Holly pointed out. “We could write and ask him though.”

Hermione nodded enthusiastically at that idea. “He might even be willing to tell us how they made it!”

“Or I could ask Sirius, if he ever gets back to me,” Holly added, voice growing worried.

“I’m sure he’s alright, Holly,” Hermione reassured her. “And just think, you’ll be able to tell him your new name shows up on the Map,” she added with a smile.

Holly continued to look worried as they continued through the corridors, only cracking a smile when Ron joined them, excitedly talking about Muggle Studies and how interesting it was. In a teasing tone she asked, “Why don’t you tell Hermione about your exam results? I didn’t have time at Arithmancy.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “I completely forgot you did them today! You got your results back already? You both must have passed to get your electives, but what did you get?”

“Well I managed an Exceeds Expectations, thanks to all your help this summer,” Holly told her, drawing an excited squeal and a hug from her bushy haired friend. Then the girls looked expectantly at Ron.

He shuffled his feet, not looking at them and ears glowing red as he mumbled something. When Holly poked him in the side, he sighed. “I got an O.”

Hermione stopped in her tracks, her mouth falling open. Her eyes were wide as she stared at Ron. “O?” she asked faintly. “As in Outstanding?” Ron nodded nervously.

Holly slammed her hands over her ears as Hermione screeched painfully. Ron would have joined her, but his arms were trapped by their bushy haired friend’s tight embrace. He winced and glared at Holly, who simply poked her tongue at him.

When they reached the Entrance Hall, they joined the crowd queuing to enter the Great Hall for dinner. As they waited, Malfoy called out to get their attention, before overdramatically reading out the latest Rita Skeeter article about Ron’s father covering for Mad-Eye earlier in the week. It portrayed him in the worst way possible, and even got his name wrong, to Malfoy’s delight. The article was accompanied by a picture of the Weasley parents outside the Burrow, prompting Malfoy to insult Mrs Weasley as well. Holly insulted his mother in turn, as she and Hermione pulled Ron away. The moment her back was turned, Malfoy launched a spell at her, just barely missing. Before she could even touch her wand to retaliate, there was a roar and a bang and Moody was there, wand pointed at a ferret sitting where Malfoy had been. After checking she was unharmed, Moody began launching the ferret into the air and slamming it painfully into the ground. The spectacle continued until Professor McGonagall arrived and intervened, furiously chastising Moody for using Transfiguration as a punishment and reminding him of Hogwarts procedures. Seeming unrepentant, Moody proceeded to drag Malfoy into the dungeons to discuss
further punishment with Snape.

A rather stunned trio entered the Great Hall, sitting to eat. Hermione practically shovelled food into her mouth, planning to return to the library to research her secret project, and Holly ate almost as quickly. Ron raised his eyebrows, as he realised he was the slowest eater of their group for once. In short order, Hermione and Holly finished their plates and hurried out, separating at the top of the marble staircase.

Holly hurried through the corridors, almost jogging in her eagerness. When she reached the Hospital Wing doors, she paused, forcing herself to take several deep breaths. ‘Don’t get your hopes up so much,’ she chided herself, ‘she might need to talk to me about anything.’ It did nothing to temper her excitement as she pushed open the doors.

She barely had a chance to look around before Madam Pomfrey strode out from her office. “Ah Miss Potter, good. Sit on this bed, if you would.” When Holly did so, the matron waved her wand over her, humming in thought at her readings. Just as Holly began to fidget with impatience, Madam Pomfrey nodded. “Well, you won’t need to take nutrient potions any longer. The damage done by malnutrition is well on the way to repair. Maintaining a healthy diet will suffice for the future. Unless you feel you may need them in the future?” she asked, giving Holly a piercing look. Shifting uncomfortably, Holly avoided the matron’s gaze, shaking her head. She had the Dursleys well enough under control, she wouldn’t need to worry about that anymore.

After a long moment, Madam Pomfrey nodded, writing something down on a clipboard before walking away. Holly remained sitting on the bed, unsure if she was done. Luckily Madam Pomfrey returned quickly, now carrying a flask filled with a bubbling magenta liquid. She gave a small smile of repressed amusement as Holly straightened. “Is that…?” Holly breathed, eyes locked onto the flask.

“Yes, we managed to finish developing it just before summer ended,” Madam Pomfrey told her. “This is the Feminising Philter, which will let you develop female features.”

Holly leapt to her feet, barely managing to hold herself back from reaching for the flask. “I suppose you have to warn me about side effects first,” she said, pouting impatiently.

“As always Miss Potter,” Madam Pomfrey said, with a smile that bordered on a smirk. “This potion should give you the effects of a normal female puberty. You should experience fat redistribution into female patterns – away from the waist and stomach, more to the hips, thighs and chest. That will also make your face appear more feminine. You will develop breast tissue, and are likely to experience widening of the hips. Your skin should soften and become clearer, with less acne. You should also find any body hair you currently have becomes thinner and less dense.”

Holly continued to stare at the Feminising Philter as if it were the Holy Grail. With a small sigh, Madam Pomfrey continued in a clinical tone, “Possible side effects include: loss of muscle mass, mood swings, shrinkage of genitals, decrease of sex drive and loss of fertility.”

Cheeks burning, Holly finally looked away, meeting Madam Pomfrey’s gaze. Swallowing, she asked, “Is that all?” The matron nodded, holding the potion out to her. She took it almost reverently and immediately drank it, finding it tasted like sugar and strawberries. Handing the flask back, she couldn’t stop herself from beaming. “How long will it take to work?” she asked.

“Since we want the effects to be permanent, they will need to build up over time. You will likely begin to see physical changes within three to four months, but it will take several years before the full transformation is complete.”
“So, I’ll need to take it every day, for a few years?” Holly asked.

After a small hesitation, Madam Pomfrey shook her head. “Unfortunately, you still have male sexual organs, which are producing testosterone. If you stop taking your potions, it will reverse the effects of the potion. You will need to take the potions for the foreseeable future, until we find a way to permanently stop your body from producing the testosterone.”

Holly gave a grimace at the idea of taking potions every day for the rest of her life. Then she stopped and considered what she was getting out of them. “Worth it,” she said defiantly.

With an indulgent smile, Madam Pomfrey added, “I will see to it that you receive your dose each night at dinner, alongside your Masculinity Muffling Mixture.” Then she stumbled as Holly launched forward, almost tackling her with a hug. Patting her on the back, she laughed softly. “You’re welcome, Miss Potter.”

Holly practically bounced all the way back to the Gryffindor Common Room. She was also tempted to dance, but she drew the line at twirling in the corridors, no matter how much she was bursting with joy.

The Fat Lady raised an eyebrow at her, but swung open obligingly as Holly spoke the password. A glance around the Common Room showed Ron in the corner, demolishing Neville at chess. It seemed Hermione was still in the library. As she sat down beside the game, Neville glanced up with a welcoming smile. Ron was too absorbed to notice her.

“Did something good happen at dinner, Holly?” Neville asked her, and she realised that she was still grinning like a lunatic. She nodded, waiting for Ron to finish his move so she could tell them both. When nearly a minute passed with no change, she kicked him in the shin.

“Ow! What the bloody hell- oh, hi Holly. What’s going on?” Ron asked.

Almost vibrating with excitement, Holly told them, “Madam Pomfrey finally found a potion to help me fix my body! I’ve just starting taking it now!”

“That’s great, Holly,” Neville said, giving her a warm smile.

“Yeah, that’s brilliant,” Ron nodded in agreement. “Uh, how long before you start getting…” he trailed off, but made a gesture with his hand over his chest. Holly stared at him for a moment, wondering what exactly he was talking about before it clicked. “Ow! I’m sorry! Dammit, stop hitting me already!”

Once she was satisfied that he was properly punished, Holly stopped slapping him and sat back down. “Madam Pomfrey said I should start seeing visible changes within a few months, but it will take years for all the changes to happen.”

“Blimey,” Ron said, shaking his head. “I can’t imagine waiting that long.”

Holly stared at him for a long moment. “Ron, you do know what puberty is, don’t you?” she asked cautiously.

“Of course I bloody know!” he exclaimed, ear burning red. Neville sat deliberately not watching them, cheeks glowing with embarrassment.

“Okay, good,” Holly said with relief. “I really didn’t want to explain it to you.” She quickly continued over Ron’s sputtering protests, “But my point is, I’m basically having puberty, like any
other girl. I just need to take potions to make mine go properly.”

There was a long, uncomfortable silence, before Neville cleared his throat. “Well, congratulations Holly.”

“Thanks,” she said, then stood and retreated up to her dormitory. She called a greeting to the other girls, who returned it warmly. Before she could even think about getting ready for bed she was cornered by Parvati and Lavender. They wanted to tell her about what happened in their Divination class that day.

“Professor Trelawney started the class by pointing out another of her predictions came true!” Lavender said excitedly.

“She told us ‘It was just as I foresaw. As predicted, Harry Potter has died, to allow Holly Potter to exist.’ Isn’t it amazing? She knew!”

‘Of course, that’s why she said I’d die, rather than just that I’d change my name,’ Holly thought to herself, barely managing not to roll her eyes. Merlin, these girls were sweet but sometimes they could be a bit much. “That’s… nice,” Holly replied politely. “Have you seen Hermione, by the way?” she quickly asked, before they could keep going on.

They shook their heads. “She hasn’t been back yet,” Lavender told her.

“Alright, thanks,” she said, before retreating behind her curtains to change into nightclothes. She had dressed and completed her nightly ablutions before Hermione arrived. With a distracted greeting to Holly, she carefully put away her books and prepared those she would need the next day.

Holly waited patiently bed for her to finish with her book, before asking, “Did I tell you I had to see Madam Pomfrey today, Hermione?”

Looking around, blinking, her bushy haired friend said, “No. Why? Did something happen? Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine, Madam Pomfrey just wanted to give me a check-up, to take me off my nutrient potions.”

“Oh, that’s good then.” Hermione turned back to her trunk, collecting her nightclothes.

“She also gave me my first dose of the potion that will let me have a female puberty.” Holly repressed a grin, as Hermione nodded distractedly before freezing.

Then there was a blur of motion as Hermione leapt across the room to grab her. “Oh my God! Holly that’s wonderful! I’m so happy for you!”

Holly laughed and hugged her back. The other girls looked over curiously. “What’s going on?” Lavender asked, clearly eager for gossip. Holly quickly explained the basic effects of the potion she was now taking, receiving congratulatory squeals and hugs from Parvati and Lavender, while Fay congratulated her less exuberantly.

“I’m really glad for you,” Lily told her quietly. “Tyler will be excited to hear.” Holly smiled and nodded, mentally adding a letter to the Queer Group to her To Do list.

With final wishes goodnight, Holly retreated behind her curtains again as the other girls began to change for bed. She lay down and attempted her Occlumency exercises, but her excitement wouldn’t fade, so she gave it up for the night. Instead she simply lay, hugging herself and grinning
with delight, until she finally managed to sleep.

Classes continued without much change. Even Holly’s new name didn’t shake things up, since the Professors usually called her Potter. Snape was in a foul mood over the hiring of Moody, who he seemed afraid of. When Thursday rolled around, the Gryffindors were so eager for Defence that they all arrived early. Except Hermione, who was still researching her mysterious project.

Moody’s first lesson was on the Unforgivable curses – the Imperius, the Cruciatius and the Killing Curse. He demonstrated each to them in turn, using spiders as the victims. With Imperio he danced the spider around the room which the class found amusing until Moody pointed out the horror of utter loss of control. Then he used Crucio, causing the spider to curl up, shuddering and jerking, until Hermione stopped him. Neville was horribly shaken by the sight. Finally, he cast Avada Kedavra, snuffing out the spider’s life with a blast of green light and a loud rushing sound. Unblockable and uncounterable, the only person ever to survive it was Holly. Using any of those curses on another person carried the penalty of life in Azkaban.

After the lesson, an incredibly shaken Neville was pulled aside by Moody, while the other students spoke in awed whispers. At dinner, Hermione once more ate quickly, before vanishing to the library. Holly and Ron ate at a more reasonable pace before returning to the Common Room. They went up to the boys’ dormitory to collect Ron’s Muggle Studies homework, finding Neville reading a book on rare plants, gifted to him by Professor Moody.

They spent over an hour working on Ron’s homework, with Holly helping occasionally, before Hermione returned, looking smug. Once Ron finished, she showed them a box, containing badges labelled S.P.E.W. Hermione had created a group called the Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare, to campaign for house-elf freedom and rights. Despite their lack of enthusiasm, she conscripted them to help her collect donations and raise awareness.

Just as Holly and Ron were preparing to attempt to convince her against the whole thing, they were interrupted by Hedwig at the Common Room window, returning with an answer from Sirius. With a mix of excitement and trepidation, Holly read it out.

Holly –
I’m flying north immediately. This news about your dream and scar is the latest in a series of strange rumours that have reached me here. Dumbledore agrees with me, which is why he’s got Mad-Eye out of retirement. If you have any more dreams like that one, or your scar hurts again, tell Dumbledore at once. He would have told you this himself, but he’s been very busy with the Tournament.
I’ll be in touch. My best to Ron and Hermione. Keep your eyes open Holly.
Sirius
P.S. Lily would be delighted by your choice of name.

Holly was treated to the strange duality of feeling warm pleasure at Sirius’ acceptance of her name and horror that he was returning to danger in Britain. Her fingers tangled in her hair and pulled in nervous frustration.

“I shouldn’t have told him!” she said exclaimed.

“What are you on about?” Ron asked.

“It’s made him think he’s got to come back! Coming back because he thinks I’m in trouble! And there’s nothing wrong with me!” Hedwig clicked her beak expectantly at her. As she turned to snap at the owl, she paused, knowing it would be awful to take her fears out on Hedwig. Taking a deep
breath and closing her eyes, she tried to clear her mind, putting aside her emotions to sit in tranquillity.

Once she felt less panicked, she opened her eyes. “I don’t have any food right now Hedwig, I’m sorry. If you want to wait I can fetch you some treats soon, or you can go to the Owlerly now if you’re too hungry.” With a hoot almost like a sigh, Hedwig gave her an affectionate nip on the finger and soared out the window.

Holly looked back to her friends, who had worried expressions. “Holly,” Hermione said soothingly, “From what Sirius wrote, it’s more than just your scar bringing him back. Dumbledore wrote to him as well, he likely would have asked him to come back soon anyway, with these signs they both noticed.”

“Besides,” Ron added, “Sirius managed to avoid the Ministry for an entire year while they were doing nothing but looking for him. Right now, they don’t have Dementors here to look for him, and they’ve probably got their hand full with the Tournament going on.”

Holly nodded, conceding to their logic. “I know,” she said quietly, “but it doesn’t stop me from worrying about him.” She smiled as Hermione took her hand, and Ron braced her shoulder supportively. With a shake of her head, Holly turned to Hermione. “Could you look over Ron’s Muggle Studies essay? I think it’s all right, but I’d like to have a second set of eyes look it over.” Hermione didn’t look fooled for a second by Holly’s attempt to change topics, but she acquiesced anyway, pulling Ron’s essay closer.
Holly did her best not to worry about Sirius over the next couple of weeks. Though her friends’ reassurances of his competence (not to mention the Ministry’s incompetence) helped, she occasionally needed to practice Occlumency during the day. Many other students seemed eager to distract her from her thoughts as well.

Somehow, Holly seemed to have gained many new friends from her decision to study Arithmancy. Nearly every classmate from the subject would greet her in the halls. Sometimes a simple “Hey, Holly!” as they hurried past to their classes, other times approaching her to talk about completely mundane topics for several minutes. Holly honestly had no idea what was going on.

“Why are they using my name all of a sudden?” Holly asked Hermione one day, as they left Arithmancy. She waved cautiously back to Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott who smiled brightly at her. Terry Boot gave her a flourishing bow as she passed him, before he was dragged off by Lisa Turpin and Anthony Goldstein. “Not that I’m complaining about it, mind,” she added, “but most people still just call me Potter.”

“Haven’t you been explicitly telling people to call you Holly?” Hermione asked, arching an eyebrow at her.

“Well, yeah. But I meant that more just as ‘don’t call me Harry’. I didn’t expect everyone to suddenly start talking to me like this.” She realised at the last second that it sounded like she was whining petulantly and clapped a hand over her mouth.

Hermione just laughed at her.

It wasn’t all friendly greetings, however. She also found herself the target of glares and hissed insults. While she was used to that sort of behaviour from the Slytherins (especially near a Quidditch match) it was disconcerting to receive it from every house. One boy from Hufflepuff looked down his nose at the sight of her, lip curling as if she was something utterly disgusting on his shoe. A trio of older Ravenclaw girls hissed, “Wierdo,” as the passed her in the halls. Even some Gryffindors threw her surly looks and quiet insults. The boy who yelled at her during the Welcoming Feast, McLaggen took every chance he could to painfully shoulder check her.

Holly tried to ignore it, as she had in previous years. Her friends worked to shield her from the worst of it, glaring back at the perpetrators. Despite it all, it wasn’t nearly as bad as when she had been hated in First and Second year. ‘At least it’s not the entire school this time.’ She put it out of her mind, and simply tried to focus on the people who did like her.

It was a few weeks later, in the first days of October, that a subtle shift seemed to occur. Holly noticed more girls were whispering and glaring as she passed and several boys seemed to giving her impressed or jealous looks. Others stepped up their harassment. She occasionally found herself with Ravenclaws trailing behind her, kicking at her feet every dozen steps. Any time she tried to turn and confront them, they would flutter off, tittering and calling, “See you, Potty!”

When some Hufflepuff yelled, “Potter the Pervert,” before fleeing with mocking laughter, she began to get an idea of what was happening. When she returned to the Common Room, she cornered Lavender and Parvati.
“You two are always up-to-date on whatever the latest rumours are in Hogwarts, yeah?” she asked them. They nodded, rather proudly. “What are they saying about me?”

The girls exchanged a long look, before Lavender sighed. “We didn’t want to tell you, Holly. It’s not exactly very nice…”

“Neither is how people have been treating me recently. At least this way I’ll know why.”

After another exchange of glances, Parvati said, “Well, someone – we think it was one of the Slytherins – started a rumour that you found a way to trick the stairs to the Dormitory, and are just making up being transgender to spy on girls while they’re changing or showering.”

Holly could only gape at her, feeling her face flush with horror and rage. “They- I- How-” she sputtered. “I wouldn’t bloody do that!” she finally yelled.

“We know that, Holly,” Lavender soothed. “We’ve been telling everyone that you’ve never stared at us getting changed or barged into the bathroom.”

“And that you hide in the bathroom or behind your curtains whenever anyone needs to get undressed,” Parvati added. Holly had done that from the start, with an echo of Uncle Vernon ringing in her head, going on about faggots and perverts and peeping toms.

“Has it helped?” she asked weakly.

“I think we managed convince a fair few,” Parvati nodded. “But you know how some people are. Once they’re convinced of something, there’s nearly no changing their mind.”

With a groan, Holly buried her face in her hands. “Bloody brilliant.”

“Don’t worry Holly. Honestly, from what we’ve heard, most people are just talking about the rumour. Only a few people actually really believe it,” Lavender told her earnestly.

“Yeah,” Parvati added brightly, “most people are on your side. Besides, there’ll be something new soon, and people will forget all about this.”

“I hope so,” Holly muttered.

Holly found she didn’t have much time to worry about rumours, as the workload from her classes increased. Hermione was thriving, without trying to study for more than 24 hours a day. It was a surprise for Holly to realise she was keeping up relatively well. She’d gotten into the habit of finishing homework early and reading ahead last year, when she spent a lot of time with Hermione. Between that and her summer of study, she didn’t find the workload too challenging.

With two friends willing to focus on their work, and his own summer spent studying, even Ron found it manageable. His ears went red when, after Dean complained in Transfiguration, Professor McGonagall put his Transfiguration as an example of acceptable standard, along with Hermione and Holly’s.

Their Defence Against the Dark Arts class was incredibly serious, with Moody determined to beat Constant Vigilance into their heads, and make sure they were prepared by any means necessary. It was still a surprise when he told them that, despite being illegal, he would be placing them under the Imperius curse, so they could recognise its effects.

One by one, Holly’s classmates were put under the curse, acting in strange and ridiculous manners.
Then, it was her turn. As the curse washed over her, she sank into a wonderful sensation of warmth and floating. It reminded her of her Occlumency meditation, with an undercurrent of vague happiness. Instinctively, she braced herself for a wave of dysphoria to needle her about her body. Instead, she heard Moody’s voice echoing into her mind. “Jump onto the desk...jump onto the desk...”

She felt her knees tremble for a moment, wanting to bend. She tried to block out the words, her mind falling into the familiar pattern of Occlumency as it worked to put aside the foreign train of thought. “Jump onto the desk.” She wavered in place, mind working itself free of the voice. “Jump! Now!” Just like when trapped in a whirl of associations, she shoved aside all thoughts and feelings, wrenching her mind back under control.

With a gasp, she fell to her knees. Her head throbbed with her pulse, and she gingerly rubbed at her temples. She glanced around, noting the stunned looks on her classmates’ faces. Even Moody had paused, both eyes staring at her.

“Well that’s impressive, isn’t it,” Moody finally growled, twisted face growing pleased. “You see that, you lot... Potter fought it off! Do that again, Potter, and the rest of you, pay attention – watch her eyes, that’s where you see it – very good, Potter, very good indeed! They won’t be controlling you!”

After her second experience under the Imperius – which she managed even faster – Holly returned to her friends clutching at her temples. Her head ached painfully and she slumped into a seat with relief.

“Are you alright, Holly?” Hermione asked, hovering nervously.

With a tired nod, Holly said, “I’m fine. Just a headache. It’s getting better.” Indeed, the sharp pain was already fading to a dull ache, which was much more manageable.

Ron and Hermione exchanged a glance. “How did you do that?” Ron breathed softly. “You broke the Imperius on your first go.”

“It felt like the Occlumency meditation,” she told them. “I just kept putting aside what Moody was telling me and keeping my mind clear. It took a bit of focus when he got insistent, but it worked.”

Before they could ask anything else, Moody barked, “Over here Weasley, it’s your turn. And you’re next Granger.” As Moody cast at Ron, his nervous expression faded. For a long moment he stood, unmoving aside from the occasional twitch, before he gave a jerky half-skip and almost fell over.

“Good, Weasley, good!” Moody said, as he stumped forward and pulled Ron to his feet. “You damn near beat it! We’ll try that again, and all of you watch his eyes.” Moody insisted on putting Ron under three more times, until he was able to throw the curse off completely. Holly watched his eyes carefully, seeing the flicker of emotion as he struggled for control. Their classmates seemed even more astonished that he was able to do it.

Then it was Hermione’s turn. Ron gave her a thumbs-up and a shaky smile. She took a deep breath before stepping forward. Holly could almost see her running through the steps of Occlumency. When Moody placed her under, she dropped to all fours and barked like a dog. She began crawling around the room, still yipping, but Holly could clearly see her movements were jerky, hear her voice trembling. Finally, Moody lifted his wand and stopped, before lurching to her feet.

“Nearly, Granger,” Moody said. “You fought well but it wasn’t quite enough.”
“Do it again,” Hermione said, slightly unsteady. Moody stared at her in consideration before raising his wand once more. She managed to resist slightly longer, her motions even more irregular, the pauses longer. When he released her, she half collapsed to the floor. Holly and Ron rushed to help her to her feet.

“Again” she insisted.

Moody gave her a look that seemed almost like pity. “I think that’s as much as you’ll manage today, Granger.”

Hermione set her jaw stubbornly. “Again!”

There was a tense silence. No one had ever heard Hermione talk to a teacher like that before. Moody continued to stare at her, expression unreadable, for a long moment. Finally, his face twisted into a horrifying grin. “That’s the attitude you need, Granger. Out of the way, you two,” he told Ron and Holly.

“You can do it,” Holly whispered quickly, before retreating. Ron stayed slightly longer, muttering to her and giving a final pat on the shoulder. Once Ron stepped away, Moody raised his wand, casting the Imperius once more. This time, Hermione stood in place for nearly a minute. Her teeth were gritted so hard, Holly could hear them grinding across the room. She sank to her knees but went no further. Her fists were clenched tightly and trembling. Holly thought she might be drawing blood. At last, after another agonising minute, Moody lowered his wand and Hermione slumped. She knelt, arms and head limp, panting for breath.

“Well done, Granger,” Moody said softly as Ron and Holly hurried forward to help Hermione to her feet. Once she was standing, she raised her head to look at the Defence Professor. “Full marks,” he added in a wry voice, surprising chuckles from the gathered students. “Class dismissed! You three,” he pointed to the trio, “stay behind.”

Holly and Ron waited, supporting Hermione carefully. Once everyone else was gone, Moody waved his wand at the door, causing it to swing closed. He looked them over and took a swig from his flask. “Sit down before you pass out, Granger,” he said at last. Another flick of his wand dragged three chairs over and they sat gratefully. Moody remained standing. “Now, let’s start with why the three of you are so good at resisting the Imperius. Have you been practicing on each other?”

“What? No!” Holly exclaimed, as Ron and Hermione gaped in horror.

“It’s nothing like that, Professor,” Hermione said quickly. “We just started practicing Occlumency over the summer, and it just happened to help with this.” Ron nodded rapidly in agreement.

Moody squinted at them with his normal eye, while his larger eye spun wildly. “And why in the world would three fourteen year olds be trying to learn something that lets them resist Veritaserum?”

“What? No!” Holly exclaimed, as Ron and Hermione gaped in horror.

“It’s nothing like that, Professor,” Hermione said quickly. “We just started practicing Occlumency over the summer, and it just happened to help with this.” Ron nodded rapidly in agreement.

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“From what?” Ron asked blankly.

“Veritaserum,” Hermione answered. “It’s the most powerful truth serum in existence. It’s N.E.W.T level and highly regulated by the Ministry, though. The books I found on Occlumency didn’t say anything about being able to stop Veritaserum.”

“No, they wouldn’t,” Moody said with a snort. “If they did, everyone would want to learn Occlumency, and then Veritaserum’d useless to the Ministry, wouldn’t it. So, if you’re not learning
They exchanged nervous glances then Holly spoke up. “At the end of last year, we found out that Snape can do something to read minds, called, uh…”

“Legilimency,” Hermione supplied.

“Yeah, that. Once Hermione researched the details, she found out about Occlumency to protect from it, and we decided to try to learn it.”

“Snape’s been using Legilimency on you?” Moody asked, voice dripping with distain.

“I don’t think he’s ever used it on us,” Hermione said, shaking her head. “But once I realised Legimimens exist, it seemed foolish not to learn Occlumency.

“Constant Vigilance, after all,” said Ron cheekily. “Not to mention the rumours that You-Know-Who was able to read minds…” he added with a shudder.

“Aye,” Moody said, expression growing hooded. “You-Know-Who was a master of the mind arts. He could tear the truth from a man’s mind with a glance.” He gave them a look of dark amusement. “Your defences wouldn’t last a second against him, even if you worked on them every moment for your entire Hogwarts career.”

Ron slumped in his seat. “So it’s useless then.”

Moody burst into laughter. “Lad, if you’re going to give up on something because you can’t best You-Know-Who, you might as well jump off the Astronomy Tower.” As the trio shared an uncomfortable look, he shook his head, saying, “You’ve already made impressive progress, the three of you. Resisting the Imperius is no mean feat. And Snape and You-Know-Who aren’t the only Legilimens in the world. Even Albus uses it, when he feels the need is dire enough.”

“Wait, Dumbledore can use Legilimency?” Holly asked. She suddenly remembered every time she had been speaking with the Headmaster, and feeling like he was looking right through her. He always seemed to know just what she was thinking…

She shook herself out of her thoughts, as Moody continued, “Keep working on your Occlumency, all three of you. It’s not every day I find three underage wizards with this much potential. You’ll be worth watching.” He gave them a rather terrifying grin. “Just don’t do anything that will mean I have to arrest you, y’hear?”

Before they could protest that ominous warning, he flicked his wand to open the door. It was a clear dismissal and the trio fled.

That night, after bidding the other girls goodnight, Holly settled down to complete her Occlumency exercises. She fell into the meditation allowing her thoughts and emotions to calm and be put aside. The sense of warm floating filled her mind. It wasn’t quite the same as the Imperius, she realised. That had a sense of vague happiness, while this was simple peace.

As she felt her dysphoria rising, disturbing the peace, inspiration struck. It wasn’t the same as when under the Imperius, but she could still try. Just as when Moody’s voice had ordered her to jump, she forced the dysphoric feelings under her own control and forced them down, refusing to let them disturb the peace and take hold, even for a moment.

Eventually, it seemed like she had reached an equilibrium. Compartmentalising the dysphoria
required half her attention and she turned her thoughts to the pattern of the Occlumency exercise she had yet to fully finish. She felt a small thrill of amusement at the idea that her focus was pure bull-headed stubbornness, before that too was put aside.

Slowly, carefully, she felt for the edges of her mind, where intrusions would come from. One of the earliest Occlumency exercises, this was to help her become familiar with the shape of her mind and thus more easily recognise when Legilimency was being used on her. Once able to recognise such attacks, she could then learn to force the Legilimens out, or misdirect them from their goal.

After a few minutes of touching her own mind – which was an incredibly strange thought – Holly felt her dysphoria pressing against her focus. It grew harder to keep at bay, until finally she could deny it no longer, and the sense of wrongness of her body flooded back. With a shudder, she pulled herself from the meditation. Relaxing in her bed, she still managed a smile. ‘Even if I can’t do that forever, at least I’ve finally made progress.’ Then she giggled. ‘I wonder how Moody would react if I thanked him for Imperio-ing me?’

As October trudged on, things settled into a steady pattern. Classes continued at their new pace, and Holly grew used to being greeted in the halls or drawn into conversations with her classmates. She also quickly became numb to the insults and glares thrown at her by those who still believed the rumours about her. Honestly, it wasn’t anything like Second Year, when nearly the entire school turned against her.

Returning from a challenging Care of Magical Creatures lesson, caring for Hagrid’s fast growing Skrewts, Holly and her friends found the Entrance Hall packed. There was a sign informing the students that the delegations from the visiting schools would arrive that Friday, the day before Halloween, and classes were ending early that day. A nearby Hufflepuff, Ernie Macmillan hurried off, saying he planned to tell Cedric.

“Cedric?” Ron asked blankly as they worked their way through the crowd.

“Diggory,” Holly told him. “He must be entering the Tournament.”

“That idiot, Hogwarts champion?” Rib scoffed.

“He’s not an idiot,” Hermione snapped at him, “you just don’t like him because he beat Gryffindor at Quidditch. I’ve heard he’s a really good student – and he’s a Prefect.”

“You only like him because he’s handsome,” Ron almost sneered.

“Excuse me, I don’t like people just because they’re handsome!” Hermione retorted.

Ron coughed “Lockhart!” into his hand.

“Oh come on, Cedric’s not that bad,” Holly protested. “He seems nice enough, and I’d be absolutely shocked if he managed to be worse than Lockhart.”

Hermione gave her a pleased smile, while Ron looked betrayed.

Holly found herself incredibly grateful for the announcement, as the news of the visiting schools finally supplanted the awful rumour about her. As the gossip turned to the Triwizard Tournament, Holly found less people took the time to snipe at her in the halls. In preparation for their guests Hogwarts underwent an autumn clean, the suits of armour polished, the portraits scrubbed. Many of the staff seemed stressed, Professor McGonagall even snapping at Neville for messing up a
Switching Spell.

On the Friday, after classes, the inhabitants of Hogwarts gathered on the grounds to await the visiting schools. Beauxbatons arrived first, in flying carriage the size of a small house, pulled by enormous winged horses. Once it landed, the delegation dismounted, led by their Headmistress Madam Maxime, a huge woman the size of Hagrid. They hurried inside, their thin clothes giving little protection from the late autumn chill. Shortly after, the Durmstrang delegation arrived, with a ship rising out of the lake. Igor Karkaroff, the Durmstrang Headmaster, was a tall, thin man, with short white hair and curled goatee. After speaking with Dumbledore, he led his group of students, which Holly was surprised to see included the famous Viktor Krum, into Hogwarts.

Ron was nearly rabid with excitement at Krum’s presence as they filed into the Great Hall. To his disappointment the Durmstrang students sat at the Slytherin table, while the Beauxbatons students sat with the Ravenclaws. After a quick welcoming speech from Dumbledore, the feast began. In addition to the usual fare, the Hogwarts house-elves had created dishes from the visiting school’s nations. Shortly into the meal, their conversation was interrupted by one of the French students.

“Excuse me, are you wanting ze bouillabaisse?” she asked them. She had incredibly long, silvery blonde hair and large deep blue eyes. Ron went purple, gaping at the sight of her, unable to speak. Looking at her, Holly immediately hated everything about her. It was rather like when she saw Professor Burbage. She clenched her teeth to avoid saying anything rude, looking away quickly.

Hermione raised an eyebrow at them, before reaching out to push the dish to the girl. “Take it, please.”

“You ‘ave finished wiz it?”

Ron spoke in a strangled tone, “Yeah. Yeah, it was excellent.”

With that, the girl picked up the dish and carried it off carefully. Ron goggled after her, while Holly glared. “She didn’t even say thanks,” she muttered darkly.

At her voice, Ron startled out of his trance. “She’s a veela!” he gasped.

“Of course she isn’t!” Hermione said in exasperation. “I don’t see anyone else gaping at her like an idiot!” For once, Hermione was wrong, as many people seemed to forget themselves as the French student passed.

Leaning around to keep watching her, Ron said, “I’m telling you, that’s not a normal girl! They don’t make them like that at Hogwarts!”

“Oh please,” Holly snapped, viciously sawing at her steak. “She’s not that amazing. Maybe if you paid attention to girls at Hogwarts you’d get that.”

Ron finally turned away from the Beauxbatons girl to give her a shocked look. Hermione tentatively touched Holly’s arm. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Holly said irritably.

After sharing a concerned look with Ron, Hermione asked, “Did you see who just arrived?” She nodded towards the Head Table. Holly glanced up to see that Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch had joined the Professors, most likely to see the Tournament begin.

Throughout the remainder of the feast, Holly couldn’t help but shoot glares at the French witch. She didn’t know why she disliked her so much, but something about her set Holly’s teeth on edge.
Once the meal drew to a close, Dumbledore stood. He introduced Mr Bagman and Crouch, crediting them for their work organising the Tournament and revealing that they would join the panel of judges. He went on to describe the Tournament, how the champions would face three challenging events throughout the year. Then, he revealed how the champion for each school was to be decided – the Goblet of Fire. It was a large wooden cup, filled with blue flames. Aspiring champions could place their names in the Goblet, which would select the most capable entrant for each school the next night. To ensure only those of age entered, Dumbledore would place an Age Line around the Goblet, preventing anyone under seventeen years from crossing.

With that, he dismissed them to bed. As they filed their way to the doors, Fred and George plotted their way past the Age Line and Ron craned his head to spot Krum. Karkaroff organised his students, paying extra attention to Krum, before leading them to the door. They reached it at the same moment as Holly and her friends, who she held back politely.

“Thank you,” Karkaroff said carelessly as he continued past. Behind him, Krum paused, peering at Holly. He stepped closer and Holly resisted the urge to step back as he half loomed over her. Behind her, Ron squeaked quietly.

“Vot is your name?” he asked.

Slightly taken aback, she replied, “Holly Potter.”

“You vere in the Top Box. I heard you yelling at your Minister.”

Holly felt her cheeks grow warm, but raised her chin defiantly. “So?”

Krum considered her for a long moment, head tilting slightly. He opened his mouth to say something, but was interrupted by Karkaroff returning. “Is everything alright Viktor? Is another silly girl bothering you for an autograph?” He shot Holly a venomous look.

“I’m wouldn’t be glaring at Potter like that if I were you,” growled a voice from behind them. Karkaroff’s head snapped around to see Moody watching him with narrowed eyes. The Durmstrang Headmaster was horrified.

“You!” he exclaimed.

“Me. And unless you’ve got anything to say to Potter, Karkaroff, you might want to move. You’re blocking the doorway.”

With a furious and terrified glare at Moody, Karkaroff turned back to Krum. “Come along now, Viktor.” With a last glance at Holly, Krum led his cohort after their Headmaster.

Once they left the hall and were climbing the stairs, Ron nearly exploded. “Bloody hell, Holly! You got to talk to Krum! He asked for your name!”

“Yes Ron, I was there,” Holly said tiredly.

“What do you think he wanted?” Ron asked excitedly. “Oh, you should have asked for an autograph!”

“I’ll do that if I ever speak to him again,” Holly said, sharing a look of exasperation with Hermione. Krum was impressive, but this was a bit much. Ron didn’t stop going on about the famous Seeker until they reached the Common Room, where the girls quickly hurried to bed to escape.
The next day saw the students of Hogwarts rising far earlier than usual. They found the Goblet of Fire sitting on a stool in the middle of the Entrance Hall, with a thin gold line on the floor. When Holly and her friends arrived, they were told the Durmstrang students had already entered their names, before Fred, George and Lee Jordan, having just taken an Aging Potion to trick their way past the Age Line. Ignoring Hermione’s doubts, Fred and then George stepped past the line, cheering triumphantly. A moment later, they were thrown out of the circle and sprouted long white beards. Holly took an instinctive step away from the Goblet, shuddering. Professor Dumbledore arrived and sent the Twins, along with a laughing Lee to the Hospital Wing.

After breakfast, during which Angelina Johnson put her own name into the running, to the Gryffindors’ delight, the trio decided to visit Hagrid. In a fit of inspiration, Hermione ran off to collect her S.P.E.W. gear in an effort to recruit Hagrid, as she had attempted with many other students in the Gryffindor Common Room. While Holly and Ron waited for her, the Beauxbatons students entered and placed their names into the Goblet, one by one. As they left, Hermione returned, and the trio followed them onto the grounds. The Beauxbatons students filed into their giant carriage, which was parked near Hagrid’s hut.

Holly, Ron and Hermione continued past to visit Hagrid, who was wearing the most hideous outfit they had seen him in – the suit and tie from Buckbeak’s trial. They sat down to have tea and speculating about the Tournament, which Hagrid coyly refused to share details of.

After a while of that, Hagrid turned to look more directly at Holly. “I know it’s bin a few weeks now, but I’ve bin meaning to ask yeh, what’re yeh changin’ yeh name for?”

Holly placed her cup down carefully. “Well, I suppose it’s because the name Harry just has all these ties to thinking I was a boy and being called the Boy Who Lived. Every time I hear it, I’m just reminded of all of that, and it honestly hurts, just a bit.”

She yelped as Hagrid reached over, pulling her into a one armed hug, which was tighter than any Mrs Weasley had managed with both. “Holly’s a fine name for yeh then, I’d say.”

“Thank you,” she managed, telling herself the tears in her eyes were just from being hugged so hard.

They stayed talking long enough for Hagrid to prepare them lunch - “beef casserole”, though it had too many claws for their taste. Hermione tried to convince him to join S.P.E.W. to little avail. As dinnertime approached, the trio prepared to return to the castle with Hagrid intended to join them. He put on an awful cologne, before hurriedly washing it off at his water barrel outside. At that moment, Madam Maxime exited her cabin with her students, and spoke with Hagrid, before the two of them led the way to the castle, leaving Holly and friends behind, to their incredulity.

The three of them hurried up to join the Halloween Feast, eager to see the champions drawn from the Goblet of Fire, which had been moved into the hall. Everyone shifted impatiently in their seats, waiting for Dumbledore to finish. Finally he stood, dimming the lights with a sweep of his wand. The flames of the Goblet turned red and spat out a parchment, which Dumbledore caught. Reading it out, he declared Viktor Krum the Durmstrang champion, who stood and passed through a door behind the staff table. The Beauxbatons champion was Fleur Delacour, the beautiful girl who had entranced Ron. Holly glared as she practically glided from the hall. Finally, the Hogwarts champion was declared to be Cedric Diggory, to the utter delight of the Hufflepuffs.

Looking pleased, Dumbledore started to continue his speech, before the Goblet interrupted him, flaring red and disgorging a scrap of parchment once more. Catching it, Dumbledore stared at for a long moment, before calling, “Harry Potter.”
Holly sat frozen, sound seeming distant as a variety of emotions fought, leaving her numb. Whispers ran through the hall, in a jumble of anger and confusion. Professor McGonagall swept over to Dumbledore, whispering to him urgently, with a worried look on her face.

Almost instinctively, Holly ran through an Occlumency exercise, sorting through her emotions, until finally she was able to feel something. She was angry. In fact she was almost furious. Trying to control her breathing, she turned to Ron and Hermione, who looked stunned. “That’s not my name,” she hissed.

Dumbledore nodded to Professor McGonagall and turned back to the hall. “Holly Potter! Holly! Up here, if you please!”

Holly slid out of her seat, trying to keep her rage off her face. By the way several people recoiled as she passed, she knew she hadn’t been too successful. The muttering around the hall grew louder as she continued.

“That’s not my name, Professor,” Holly said, as soon as she reached Dumbledore. “I didn’t put it in there.”

He gave her a commiserating nod. “I know, Holly. Go through the door. We will sort this out.” Holly searched his face for any hint whether he believed or was simply humouring her. She couldn’t tell either way. Following the path of the champions, she moved along the staff table, where all the teachers were staring at her, and through the door behind into a small room. The three champions were gathered silently around the fire. In one portrait, an old witch darted in to whisper to the occupant.

Delacour looked around at the sound of her entering. “What is is? Do zey want us back in ze Hall?” she asked. Holly felt her anger spike at the French girl’s words. She grit her teeth and shook her head, stalking over to glare at the fire.

Cedric asked hesitantly, “Are you okay, Holly?”

Before she could consider answering, Bagman scurried into the room, looking delighted. “Extraordinary! Absolutely extraordinary! Gentlemen… lady. May I introduce – incredible though it may seem – the fourth Triwizard champion?”

Krum surveyed Holly darkly while Cedric looked confused. Delacour tossed her hair in a way that set Holly’s teeth on edge, saying, “Oh, vairy funny joke, Meester Bagman.”

“Joke? No, no, not at all! Harry’s name just came out of the Goblet of Fire!”

“But evidently zair ‘as been a mistake. She cannot compete. She is too young.” Then she paused, cocking her head. “And I thought ‘er name was Holly?”

“Yes, it is!” Holly snarled. “This idiot just can’t seem to understand that.”

Bagman puffed up as he turned to her, face going red. “Now see here young man, you can’t-”

“I am not a boy!” Holly screamed at him.

With a bang, the door opened and Dumbledore led the visiting Heads, Mr Crouch, Professor McGonagall and Snape into the room. The sound of talking from the Hall echoed in, before McGonagall closed the door.

Delacour strode over to her Headmistress. “Madam Maxime! Zey are saying zat zis little girl is to
compete also!"

Holly glared at her hotly. ‘Don’t you dismiss me like you simpering brat!’ she thought venomously.

“What is ze meaning of zis, Dumbly-dorr?” Madam Maxime asked, straightening imperiously.

Karkaroff added coldly, “I’d like to know that myself, Dumbledore. Two Hogwarts champions? I don’t remember anyone telling me the host school is allowed two champions – or have I not read the rules carefully enough?” He laughed coldly.

“C’est impossible. ‘Ogwarts cannot ‘ave two champions. It is most injust.”

“We were under the impression that your Age Line would keep out younger contestants, Dumbledore. Otherwise, we would, of course, have brought along a wider selection of candidates from our own schools.”

“It was intended to,” Dumbledore said carefully. “We must determine what went wrong.” Looking down at Holly, he calmly asked, “Did you put your name into the Goblet of Fire, Holly?”

“My name didn’t come out of it, so no,” she answered hotly. Professor McGonagall and Snape both shot her a warning look at her tone.

“What do you mean it’s not your name?” Karkaroff snapped. “You are Harry Potter, are you not?”

“My name is Holly Potter!” she insisted.

“Then why did Dumbledore call you, instead of Harry Potter?” Karkaroff snarled.

“Miss Potter changed her name over the summer,” Professor McGonagall said, stepping between them. “We have been using her new name since the beginning of the year.”

“Miss? She?” Karkaroff asked. “I thought Harry Potter was the Boy Who Lived.”

Resisting the urge to hex the Durmstrang Head, Holly said, “I am transgender. They thought I was a boy, but they were wrong.” She raised her chin defiantly as Karkaroff stared at her like she’d grown an extra head.

“While zis is all quite fascinating,” Madam Maxime broke in, “could we get back to ze matter of the Tournament? ‘Ow did she enter ‘erself? Did she ask an older student?”

“If I’d actually wanted to get in, I certainly wouldn’t have had them use my deadname!” Holly snapped. At the blank looks she received she sighed and clarified, “My old name.”

“Mr Crouch… Mr Bagman, you are our – er – objective judges. Surely you can agree that this is most irregular?”

Bagman looked to Crouch, who, despite looking terrible, spoke in his usual curt tone. “We must follow the rules, and the rules state clearly that those people whose names come out of the Goblet of Fire are bound to compete in the Tournament.”

“And since my name didn’t come out of the Goblet, none of this matters,” Holly said.

Bagman puffed up at her. “It doesn’t matter what nickname you’ve decided to call yourself. You are Harry Potter and your name came out of the Goblet.”

Holly almost pulled her wand on the ponce, but stopped herself, fists clenched painfully tight. “My
real name is Holly Potter. I’ve had it magically proven. So you can take your Tournament and your Goblet and stuff it! I won’t have anything to do with it!”

“You can’t risk that, lass,” growled a voice from the door, as the foreign visitors stared at her in utter shock. Moody stumped into the room, eye roving over them all. “Even if your name’s changed, the old one is still a part of you. There’s no telling if the Goblet will be able to bind you with your birth name. If it has, you don’t want to be risking violating a magical contract like that. The results ain’t pretty.” Holly swore under her breath, causing Professor McGonagall to glare at her sharply.

Karkaroff’s face twisted into an ugly expression, his hand clenched. “I insist on resubmitting the names of the rest of my students. You will set up the Goblet of Fire once more, and we will continue adding names until each school has two champions. It’s only fair, Dumbledore.”

“But Karkaroff, it doesn’t work like that,” said Bagman. “The Goblet of Fire’s just gone out – it won’t re-ignite until the start of the next Tournament –”

“– in which Durmstrang will most certainly not be competing! After all our meetings and negotiations and compromises, I little expected something of this nature to occur! I have half a mind to leave now!”

“Empty threat, Karkaroff,” Moody snorted. “You can’t leave your champion now. He’s got to compete. They’ve all got to compete. Binding magical contract. Convenient, eh?”

“Convenient?” sneered Karkaroff disdainfully, with an undercurrent of fear and anger. “I’m afraid I don’t understand you, Moody.”

“Don’t you? It’s very simple Karkaroff. Someone put Potter’s name in that Goblet knowing she’d have to compete if it came out.”

“Evidently, someone ‘oo wished to give ‘Ogwarts two bites at ze apple!” Madam Maxime exclaimed.

Karkaroff bowed to her. “I quite agree, Madam Maxime. I shall be lodging complaints with the Ministry of Magic and the International Confederation of Wizards –”

“If anyone’s got reason to complain it’s Potter. She’s the worse off here.”

“Why should she complain?” Delacour snapped, stamping her foot petulantly. Holly barely kept a sneer off her face. “She ‘as ze chance to compete, ‘asn’t she? We ‘ave all been ‘oping to be chosen for weeks and weeks! Ze honour for our schools! A thousand Galleons in prize money – zis is a chance many would die for!”

“Maybe someone’s hoping Potter is going to die for it,” Moody said ominously. A tense silence followed.

“Moody, old man…” Bagman said nervously, “what a thing to say!”

“We all know Professor Moody considers the morning wasted if he hasn’t discovered six plots to murder him before lunchtime,” Karkaroff sneered. “Apparently he is now teaching his students to fear assassination, too. An odd quality in a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Dumbledore, but no doubt you had your reasons.”

“Imagining things, am I? Seeing things, eh? It was a skilled witch or wizard who put the girl’s name in that Goblet…”
Madam Maxime threw up her hands. “Ah, what evidence is zere of zat?”

“Because they hoodwinked a very powerful magical object! It would have needed an exceptionally strong Confundus Charm to bamboozle the Goblet into forgetting that only three schools compete in the Tournament… I’m guessing they submitted Potter’s name under a fourth school, to make sure she was the only on in her category…”

“Potter is many things, but I would not call her… exceptionally skilled,” Snape drawled, speaking for the first time since entering the room. He smirked down at her gloatingly as she glared, unable to protest without making herself seem even more suspicious.

Finally, Dumbledore declared they had no choice but to accept the current state of affairs. The other Heads were not happy, but could not offer a solution. With that decided, Crouch gave them their instructions for the first task – they were to face it unaware until the last moment, to test their courage. It would take place on the twenty fourth of November. They could not seek help from their teachers and would only have their wands. To make up for the time they would need to prepare for the tasks, they were exempt from end-of-year tests. With that taken care off, Madam Maxime and Karkaroff swept their champions from the room, and Dumbledore sent Cedric and Holly off to bed.

As they passed through the eerily empty Hall, Holly felt her anger fading. Before she knew what was happening, her breathing grew short and her eyes filled with tears. Cedric looked incredibly uncomfortable as he asked, “Are you alright?” Holly looked away as hot tears began pouring down her face. She tried to hold it in, but her body betrayed her and her breaths turned to sobs.

“Whoa!” Cedric exclaimed, stopping and gently taking her shoulders. He turned her to face him and knelt down to her level. “Hey, it’s okay!”

“No it’s not,” Holly cried, shaking her head. “So many people refuse to use my name or treat me like a girl! And someone started that awful rumour that I’ve been spying on the other girls! And people keep calling me terrible things in the halls! And now I’m in this bloody Tournament and people have died in it and I don’t know what I’m going to do!”

Suddenly Cedric pulled her forward gently and Holly found herself being hugged. She tensed at the contact, before letting herself lean into the embrace as a fresh wave of tears burst out. She didn’t know how long she cried while Cedric held her. As her tears stopped and her breathing slowed, she became suddenly very aware of the feel of his arms around her and his breath on her hair and just how close they were. Her cheeks burned as she carefully pushed away from Cedric. She caught a glimpse of him smiling kindly, before looking away quickly. ‘No, I definitely can’t bear to face him after that.’

Cedric’s voice was as kind as his smile had been, as he said, “I’m sorry people haven’t been kind to you. I’ll talk to my House, see what I can do about any of them bothering you. As for the Tournament… well it’s certainly unfair of them to ask you to compete against people three years your elder. Especially when someone else forced you into this mess. I’ll do everything I can to help.”

“You believe me?” Holly asked softly, glancing up shyly. He still had that damned smile. “You’ll help me?”

“Yes,” Cedric said, as if it were obvious. “Your new name is so important to you, I can’t imagine you using your old one.” Getting to his feet and stretching, he said, “Now, let’s get back to our Common Rooms. Will you be okay to get there by yourself?” Holly nodded, feeling tongue tied as her face heated even more. Cedric gave her another warm smile as they reached the
Entrance Hall. “Well… see you, Holly.”

They parted ways there, Cedric through a nearby door, Holly ascending the stairs. As she climbed toward the Common Room, she wondered who could be responsible for her selection as fourth champion. Moody thought they were hoping she died in it, and she felt a chill as she remembered her dream of Voldemort and Wormtail plotting to kill her. Then she blinked, startled to find herself already at the portrait of the Fat Lady, who had been joined by the witch from the chamber. They watched her avidly, but opened at the password.

She was greeted by the sound of raised voices. Pausing to listen, she recognised Ron and Hermione’s voices, but couldn’t make out any of the others. Cautiously, she entered the Common Room to find it divided almost squarely down the middle. One side was fronted by a wall of her friends, her roommates – former and current – and her Quidditch teammates, with half of Gryffindor House behind. On the other side, Holly saw an angry looking group, headed by the older boy McLaggen, who had taken to shoving her recently.

Once past the portrait hole she was able to make out the words more clearly. It was surreal to hear Hermione yelling across the room. “How many times do we have to tell you, Holly isn’t like that! She hates attention!”

McLaggen scoffed, “Sure he is. Potter’s always strutting about, like being famous and on the Quidditch team means he owns the place. It doesn’t help that Dumbledore’s always giving him favours.” Behind him were the majority of the upper year Gryffindor boys, expressions varying between anger, smugness and caution.

Ron’s ears were a deep red as he snarled, “Stop calling her a boy! She’s a girl! How bloody thick can you get?”

“Oh please!” an older girl Holly didn’t recognise, who looked to be a Seventh Year, said shrilly. “As if we don’t all know Potter’s faking to spy on us! The fact he put his real name in the Goblet proves it!” A dozen girls were gathered behind her, nodded in agreement. From what Holly could see, there were a few of the Sixth and Seventh Year girls, as well as most of the younger girls in First and Second Year.

“She wouldn’t use that name!” Parvati exclaimed. “She didn’t enter herself!”

“And Holly has been nothing but respectful and decent to us!” Lavender shouted at them. “She’s gone out of her way to make us feel comfortable having her and she deserves better than baseless accusations from an ugly cow like you!”

With an angry cry, the Seventh Year went for her wand, as did several of the girls near her. Angelina, Alicia and Katie were faster, pointing their wands warningly. McLaggen’s expression twisted and he drew his own, followed by the Twins and Ron, and suddenly the room was filled with tense silence and pointed wands. The longer Holly listened, the more her tiredness was replaced by her rekindled anger.

“How fucking dare you!” she screamed, storming forward to stand between the groups. She glared at McLaggen and the Seventh Year girl, not caring about the number of wands now trained on her. “My name is Holly! I am a girl! Being transgender is a real thing! Muggles have known about it for ages! It doesn’t make me any less of a girl than any of you!”

She focused on the girls, as she yelled, “How dare you call me a pervert! I have done absolutely nothing to any of you! How would you feel if people turned against you because of some awful lie some asshole made up?”
Holly paused, breathing heavily. Some of the people on McLaggen’s side looked chastened, but others still looked angry and sceptical. “And before anyone asks, since I’m sure that’s what kicked this bullshit off, someone else entered my deadname into the Goblet. I’d rather not be in it, but apparently there’s a stupid magical contract forcing me to.”

“As if!” someone from the crowd yelled. “You’re telling me you don’t want the fame or the money?”

Her fists clenched tight, nails digging into her palms painfully as she struggled to control her anger. “I already have fame and money you idiot,” she shouted back, “and all it cost me was my parents! Take a wild fucking guess at which I’d rather have!” Looking away, Holly tried to control her breathing and use Occlumency to control her anger, but it didn’t seem to help much. “I’d much rather not have to compete in a Tournament meant for fully qualified adults that people have died in, to win things I couldn’t care less about.”

With a burning glare, Holly raised her hand and extended her middle finger at them. “All of you can go fuck yourselves. I’m going to bed.” With that, she turned and walked to the girls’ stairs, feeling idly grateful that her supporters had chosen that side to make their stand. She honestly expected someone to hex her in the back, but the warning looks on the Twins’ and the Chasers’ faces seemed to deter it.

Her friends gave her worried looks as she passed them, and she shot them a tired smile. The crowd parted to let her through. Without a backward glance, Holly trudged up the stairs to her dorm and collapsed onto her bed. She was asleep the moment her head hit the pillow.

When Holly woke on Sunday morning she was greeted by her roommates waiting in the dormitory for her. They let her complete her morning ablutions and change into fresh clothes before Hermione cornered her. “Are you okay, Holly? We didn’t get a chance to talk to you last night.”

“I’m fine,” Holly said looking around at the other girls cautiously.

“We just want to let you know, we’re here for you if you need anything,” Fay told her. “If you need help with the Tournament or support or anything else.”

“Thanks,” Holly said, shifting awkwardly under their gazes.

The other girls gave her supportive smiles and words of encouragement before heading down to breakfast, leaving Hermione and Holly alone. “How are you, really?” Hermione asked as the door closed.

Holly opened her mouth to say she was fine, but stopped at the doubtful look Hermione was already shooting her. She sighed and let her shoulders slump. “I don’t know. What do you want me to say? I’m scared of what could happen to me in this Tournament. And I’m angry that so many people still can’t get that I’m a girl. I just can’t seem to get a break.”

“I know it’s frustrating that people don’t understand,” Hermione said. “I’ll try to find some way to help educate them. Just try to avoid those people for now.”

“Well I certainly wasn’t planning to spend time with them,” Holly pointed out, feeling slightly sardonic.

Hermione huffed at her. “You know what I mean. And I know the Tournament seems daunting, but you’ve faced challenges before-”
“Yeah, and I barely scraped by through sheer dumb luck.”

“-but this time,” Hermione continued peevishly, “you have time to prepare for it. You’ll have Ron and I to help you be as ready for the tasks as you can be. Do you know what the First Task is yet?”

Holly shook her head. “They want to test our daring, so we have to go in blind, with only our wands.” She cleared her throat, annoyed at how much her voice trembled. “I, uh, also have someone else helping me…” she added cautiously. Looking up sharply, Hermione gestured eagerly for her to continue. Biting her lip for a moment, she blurted, “Cedric Diggory.”

Hermione stared at Holly for an uncomfortably long time before she shook herself. “Why would Cedric Diggory help you?” she asked. “You’re his competition in the Tournament. He’s making it less likely for himself to win.”

“Umm…” Holly looked away, before muttering, “I may have broken down crying in front of him.”

“Oh, Holly.”

“It’s not my fault,” Holly said defensively. “I was just so angry and then everyone I was angry at left and all the worries about the Tournament hit me at once and I couldn’t stop it.”

“Mood swings are a side effect of your treatment,” Hermione pointed out.

Holly nodded, before looking at her sharply. “How do you know that?”

“I read up on it,” Hermione shrugged, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Of course you did.” Holly barely refrained from rolling her eyes. “C’mon, Ron’s probably pouting that we’re keeping him from his food.” She led Hermione down the stairs, where Ron was indeed waiting impatiently. His expression brightened at the sight of them and he bounced to his feet.

“Hey! You girls took long enough!” he said teasingly, before frowning. “How’re you holding up, Holly?”

“I’m fine,” she said, then scowled as he looked to Hermione, who wiggled her hand in the air. “Thanks.” She turned and climbed out the portrait hole, feeling satisfied as Ron and Hermione scrambled to follow her.

Once they caught up, Hermione said, “I was thinking, Ron and I could grab some food from the Hall and the three of us can eat outside.”

“Yes, please,” Holly said immediately. “I just… I just can’t right now.” The thought of having to face the entire school right now was too much.

As they continued through the corridors and down the stairs, Ron whistled softly. “It’s always you, isn’t it Holly?” He shook his head in disbelief. “Do you know anything about the first task you can use to plan for it?”

“We go in blind, and can only use our wands,” she told him. At his disbelieving look, she added, “To test our courage.”

“Bloody hell.” He shook his head again. “And you’re not getting any help, even though you’re 3 years behind everyone else?”
“I’m not allowed to get help from any faculty or judge. Someone is helping me though.”

After a beat of silence, Ron shoved her shoulder gently. “Well go on. Tell us who.”

“Cedric Diggory.” Holly couldn’t keep a smirk off her face as Ron’s jaw dropped. He gaped at her for a minute before nearly tripping on a suit of armour. With a muttered curse he stumbled catch up.

“Diggory’s helping you? Are you sure you can trust him? What if he’s just trying to sabotage you so he has less competition? He could think that you’re trying to steal his thunder.”

‘Ron would be incredibly uncomfortable if I told him the truth,’ Holly realised. “I don’t think he’d do that. Hufflepuffs are too honourable for that. Beside,” she grinned as she linked her arm with his and then did the same with Hermione, “I have my two amazing friends to keep an eye on him as well.”

They laughed along with her. The good cheer stayed with them all the way to the Great Hall, where Ron and Hermione quickly grabbed several stacks of toast to share. Once loaded up, the trio made their way to stroll along the lake shore. As they walked and ate their toast, Holly told her friends everything that had happened after they were separated last night. With grim expressions, they turned to the question of who put her name into the Goblet.

“Moody’s right,” Hermione said. “I don’t any student could have done it. They’d never be able to fool the Goblet, or get over Dumbledore’s Age Line.”

“The important question is: Is Moody right about it being an assassination attempt?” Ron pointed out. “Yeah, the Tournament will be dangerous, but they wouldn’t have brought it back if they weren’t going to make it safe enough. If someone wanted Holly dead, there’s got to be an easier way than forcing her to compete and just hoping she carks it.”

Holly winced at his blunt wording but nodded. “Yeah, but I don’t think the person who entered me has my best interests at heart. Especially not since my dream over summer. You know,” she glanced at them, “the one where my scar hurt?”

The blood drained from her friends’ faces. “You think You-Know-Who is behind this?” Hermione asked. Holly nodded, staring out at the lake.

“He can’t be in Hogwarts again,” Ron said, desperately adding, “can he?”

Shaking her head, Holly said, “I don’t think he’s here personally. He seemed… too weak to manage it. My scar hasn’t hurt at least. But someone working for him could be here. With all the extra people, from the other schools and the Ministry coming in for the Tournament, a Death Eater could have infiltrated Hogwarts.”

“We have to tell someone!” Hermione said quickly.

“I think Dumbledore and Moody, at least, will have figured that out by now,” Ron pointed out. “Hell, Moody’s probably thought of dozens of things that we haven’t even considered yet.”

Hermione huffed, “Yes, but you should still write to Sirius, Holly. You’ve got to tell him what’s happened. He asked you to keep him posted on everything that’s going on at Hogwarts… it’s almost like he expected something like this to happen. I brought some parchment and a quill out with me –”

“Come off it,” Holly said. “He came back to the country just because my scar hurt and I had a
dream. He’ll probably come bursting right into the castle if I tell him someone’s entered me for the Triwizard Tournament –”

“He’s going to hear about it anyway, mate,” Ron pointed out. “It’s a famous tournament and you’re a famous person. They’ll probably do an article about it in the Daily Prophet soon.”

“Exactly!” Hermione said. “And Sirius would rather hear it from you, I know he would.”

“Okay fine,” Holly sighed. After they finished their last slices of toast, the trio returned to the castle and climbed to the Owlery. Once there, Ron and Hermione coaxed Hedwig down, while Holly quickly wrote the letter.

Dear Sirius,
You told me to keep you posted on what’s happening at Hogwarts, so here goes – I don’t know if you’ve heard, but the Triwizard Tournament’s happening this year and on Saturday night I got picked as a fourth champion. I don’t know who entered me – by putting my old name into the Goblet of Fire – because I certainly didn’t. The other Hogwarts champion is Cedric Diggory, from Hufflepuff. He’s offered to help me train for the Tournament. But Sirius, I don’t think that’s going to be enough. I don’t know how I’m going to survive this. What do I do?

Holly realised her fingers were shaking so badly, her words were growing nearly illegible. After several steadying breaths, she quickly added: Hope you’re okay, and Buckbeak – Holly before standing carefully.

“Finished,” she called softly. Hedwig fluttered over from where Ron and Hermione were stroking her to land on Holly’s shoulder and stuck out a leg expectantly. “Thanks girl,” Holly said as she tied the letter. “Make sure this gets to Sirius. And be careful, we can’t let anyone find him.”

Hedwig gave an impatient squawk and almost seemed to roll her eyes. With a gentle nip to the ear, the owl took flight, winging off into the early morning sky. They watched until she vanished among the clouds, Holly feeling strangely lighter as her message made its way to Sirius.
The following day, Holly found there had been a shift in her House. None of the Gryffindors yelled cruel names or taunts in the halls anymore. No one shoulder checked her as they passed. It seemed her rant had gotten through to her Housemates and they were acting appropriately ashamed. Not all of them, of course. Some, such as Cormac McLaggen, glared angrily at the sight of her, but they held their tongues and left her alone.

The rest of Hogwarts’ Houses were as divided as Gryffindor on the issue of whether Holly entered herself. After Cedric spoke to them, many of the Hufflepuffs gave Holly looks of sympathy or pity, which was slightly annoying. Although, that was at least better than the small portion of Hufflepuffs who didn’t seem to be willing to listen to their champion, viewing Holly as an attention seeker who had stolen Hufflepuff’s first chance at glory in years. Some of the hateful looks she received, especially from the older students, were quite alarming.

After the next Herbology lesson on repotting Bouncing Bulbs, throughout which her Hufflepuff classmates and even Professor Sprout continually smiled at her encouragingly, she was pulled aside by her acquaintances from Arithmancy. Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott looked concerned, while Ron and Hermione hovered protectively a few feet away.

“How’re you holding up, Holly?” Hannah asked immediately. “Do you need anything?”

“I’m fine, thanks,” Holly said, glancing cautiously between the girls. “What’s going on?”

They exchanged an uncomfortable look, before Susan said, “Cedric asked us to look out for you. You know, make sure you’re okay.”

Holly felt her cheeks heating up at the compassionate looks she was receiving. ‘I really hope he wasn’t too free with the details of Halloween night…’ she thought desperately.

“He also asked us to ask you,” Susan continued, regaining Holly’s attention, “if you are free on Sunday.”

“Why does he need to know that?” Holly asked carefully.

“He said it was so he can help you prepare for the Tournament,” Hannah said eagerly.

“How can we be sure he’s actually trying to help Holly,” Ron said, stepping forward with a mulish expression, despite Hermione trying to hold him back. “He could be trying to sabotage her, knock out some of the competition.”

Offended expressions fell over the girls’ faces. “How dare you!” Susan snapped, glaring venomously at Ron. “Cedric wouldn’t do that!”

“Yeah!” Hannah added, hands on hips. “That would be completely underhanded and unsportsmanlike!”

“He didn’t have a problem catching the Snitch when Holly was being attacked by Dementors last year,” Ron snapped. “He didn’t’ care about sportsmanship then, did he?”

“That’s not fair!” Susan said. “Cedric didn’t know Holly was in trouble! And he tried to call off the match! It was Madam Hooch who made the decision.”
When Ron continued glowering stubbornly, Holly sighed. “That’s enough Ron. I trust Cedric.”

Turning back to the Hufflepuffs, who looked pleased, she said, “You can let him know that Sunday works for me.”

“Alright, we’ll see you in Arithmancy, Holly, Hermione,” Hannah said cheerfully, pulling Susan away from glaring at Ron.

“I don’t trust them,” Ron said, as soon as they were out of hearing.

Holly sighed again. “Well I don’t have many other options do I?” she said. “You’ll both be with me, so Cedric won’t be able to, I don’t know, teach me the wrong things.”

Hermione nodded firmly. “Of course we will. But we need to go to Care of Magical Creatures now or we’ll be late,” she said, grabbing Ron’s sleeve and dragging him along, despite his protests.

Holly giggled and followed them to Hagrid’s hut.

As Holly waited for the lesson to start, she realised how much she wasn’t looking forward to this class. They shared it with Malfoy and it would be the first time she saw him and his posse of Slytherins since her deadname left the Goblet. True to form, Malfoy arrived with a sneer plastered across his face. He lobbed a few taunts at her about the casualty rate of the Tournament and how poor her chances were, before Hagrid arrived with the Skrewts for the lesson. The students were dismayed to learn they needed to attach leashes to the Skrewts and take them for walks.

After setting the class to work, Hagrid called Holly over to help him, taking the chance to talk to her quietly.


Holly shook her head. “Cedric’s the real Hogwarts champion. I just want to survive.”

“No idea who put yeh in fer it, Holly?” Hagrid asked anxiously.

“No idea,” she replied glumly. “Otherwise I would have hexed the daylights out of them already. We think it’s possible that, with all the focus on the Tournament, and all the visiting guests, a Death Eater could have snuck in.”

Hagrid was horrified. “Yeh think one of ‘em is hanging about?” He peered around the grounds suspiciously.

“Honestly, I don’t think they’d have stuck around. With Dumbledore and Moody and everyone on full alert, there’s not much they can do here anymore.”

“Huh,” Hagrid said, nodding in thought. “I suppose yeh’re right. Aren’ yeh a clever one.” He patted her on the back, nearly sending her sprawling. He hurried to help her up before their Skrewt could attack her. “Sorry ‘bout that.”

During lunch Holly’s friends flanked her, providing a buffer from the angry looks from several Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs, for which she was thankful. Then she was escorted off by Hermione to their Arithmancy class, where she was met with a mix of warm greetings and sullen stares. When she noticed several of her Ravenclaw classmates eyeing her spitefully, she gathered up her courage and approached her acquaintances from that House.

“Hi Lisa, Terry,” she said cautiously. She felt a burst of relief as they smiled welcomingly at her.
“Hi Holly,” Lisa greeted, while Terry sunk into an extravagant bow.

“Greetings and well met on this fine day, my fair lady Potter,” he intoned solemnly, before reaching out and taking Holly’s hand. When he drew it towards his lips, she snatched her hand back, glaring. She shot a betrayed look when Hermione laughed. Lisa sighed in exasperation, while Terry grinned unabashedly. “How may we help you, beautiful maiden?”

Ignoring the rising heat of her cheeks, and the sound of Hermione’s continued giggles, Holly asked, “I was hoping you could tell me what Ravenclaw thinks about what happened on Halloween. I live with Gryffindor, Cedric spoke to the Hufflepuffs and I didn’t expect anything good from the Slytherins.” She shrugged. “Just wondering about the last House, I suppose.”

“Oh,” Terry said, smile dropping instantly. He exchanged a glance with Lisa, who winced and stepped forward.

“Are you sure you want to know?” she asked cautiously. Holly felt her stomach sink.

“You wouldn’t ask me that if it wasn’t bad,” she pointed out. “It’s better for me to know that to be blindsided later.”

With another grimace, Lisa nodded. “A lot of them think you entered yourself into the Tournament because you’re desperate for attention,” she said rapidly, as if hoping to get it over quickly.

Holly stared at her a moment as she tried to process what she had been told.

Hermione protested, “But that doesn’t make sense. It was Holly’s deadname that came out of the Goblet. We’ve been telling everyone not to call her that. Wouldn’t that make them think she didn’t enter herself?”

“Ah,” Terry looked uncomfortable as he said, “some thought that, but others took it as proof that you’re also faking the whole ‘being a girl now’ thing for attention too.”

Burying her face in her hands, Holly groaned in frustration. “How many think that?”

There was a long pause. She looked up, glaring at the Ravenclaws who looked like they wished they were anywhere but there. Just before she became annoyed enough to snap at them, Lisa said, “Almost three quarters. Not many are angry about it or anything,” she hurried to add, as Holly hid behind her hands again, “they’re just…”

“Unimpressed,” Terry finished for her.

Holly sighed then gave a grateful smile as Hermione rubbed her shoulder comfortingly. “Well… at least I know now,” she said. The Ravenclaws smiled weakly and nodded. “So, did you finish Vector’s latest essay on how exponential factors can affect your equations?” The Ravenclaws and Hermione relaxed at the more comfortable topic, and they spent several minutes discussing their studies.

When it was almost time for class to start, Holly noticed Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott running down the corridor towards them. Just as they reached the class, the door opened and Professor Vector ushered them all into the room. As the students filed in, Susan slipped between people to place herself at Holly’s side. Before Holly could do more than give her a confused look, Susan pressed something into her hands before slipping away to the seat Hannah had saved for her.

Holly blinked down at the object in her hand, a sealed envelope. She looked up at Susan in askance, then realised the majority of her classmates were seated. She quickly made her way to her
seat, shoving the letter into her bag and pulling out her Arithmancy supplies. No matter how curious she was, she was not going to risk getting caught by Vector.

Finally, after an almost torturously long class, Holly packed away her books and pulled out the envelope. Looking it over she saw neat script addressing it to *Holly Potter*. She glanced over to Susan, but the Hufflepuffs had already packed and left. Shrugging, she opened it, Hermione looking over her shoulder curiously. The letter was written in the same neat hand.

*To Holly Potter,*

Please meet me at the third room on the West Corridor of the First Floor after breakfast on Sunday. I’m sorry to steal your weekend, but I believe it will be easier than trying to synchronise our timetables.

I’m sorry for how some of my House have been treating you. I’ve tried talking to them, but they don’t want to hear.

I know you’re scared, but please try not to stress too much. I’ll make sure you’re well protected and prepared for the Task.

Regards,

Cedric Diggory.

Holly felt mildly embarrassed that she hadn’t realised who the sender was until she saw the signature. Glancing around, she realised almost everyone had left. Hurriedly she and Hermione finished packing their bags and left the room.

Hermione hummed thoughtfully as they walked back to the Tower. “He’s organised, at least.” Nodding in agreement, Holly could only hope Cedric was equally as good at teaching.

The days rolled past, and the newly polarised Hogwarts became familiar. Everyone seemed to either love her or hate her. To Holly’s eternal gratitude, Ron and Hermione accompanied her everywhere, providing a buffer against the cruel comments and looks. With their protection, and the occasional encouragement from other students who believed her, she was able to keep her mind on her studies and only feel slightly overwhelmed.

Sunday arrived, and Holly found herself struggling with breakfast. Her stomach just wouldn’t settle, filled with nervous butterflies. It was almost as bad as the waiting before her first Quidditch match. She didn’t know why she was so anxious about it. Cedric had been decent before and she trusted him to actually help her.

After she managed to choke down a few slices of toast, she gathered herself. Poking Ron and Hermione to follow, she led the way from the hall, through the corridors to the chosen room. With a final, steadying breath, she opened the door and stepped into the room, her friends at her shoulders.

It was a simple classroom, unused for many years, the chairs and desks stacked neatly along the far wall. Large window panes kept it brightly lit with the morning sun. Cedric, who had been waiting on a chair at centre of the room, stood and smiled at the sight of them. “Holly,” he said welcomingly, before glancing at her friends curiously.

Ignoring the feeling of her cheeks heating up, Holly said, “Ron and Hermione are here to help me as well.” She glanced over her shoulder to see Hermione smiling politely and Ron glaring.

Cedric hesitated, then smiled once more and waved them into the room. “The more the merrier,” he said cheerfully. With a flick of his wand, he levitated his chair to join the rest, then turned to face the trio. “So, your Defence Professors would have been Quirrel, Lockhart and Lupin, right?
Oh and Moody this year?” Holly nodded in confirmation. “Alright, I have a general idea of what they would have each taught you, but could you go through a summary for me?”

Hermione immediately jumped in. “Well, in First Year, Professor Quirrell simple hexes and jinxes, as well as XX class Dark creatures. Second Year… I mean, we read about some more challenging XXX creatures, and moderate hexes and basic curses…” Cedric winced, nodding in sympathy before gesturing for her to continue. “Professor Lupin focused on Dark creatures, from XXX through to XXXXXX. And Professor Moody has been teaching more advanced hexes, jinxes and curses this year.”

Cedric looked thoughtful as she spoke. “So very patchwork,” he mused. “Solid in some areas but grossly lacking in others.” He gave a rueful smile as Hermione and Ron both puffed up with offence. “The usual for Defence then,” he continued, before either could start yelling. “I don’t think we’ve had more than three good teachers in the last dozen years.”

“Why do you think you can teach us anything worthwhile then?” Ron asked darkly.

Cedric turned to Ron, looking surprised. “I got an O on my Defence O.W.L. It took a lot of self studying but,” he shrugged, “hard work is what us Hufflepuffs are known for after all.

“Now,” he said, turning back to Holly as Hermione elbowed Ron sharply, “I was thinking we should start with some protective spells. We don’t know what the First Task will be, so I’d like to focus on making sure you can get through as much as possible without being hurt. So, first off, the Shield Charm.”

Standing straighter, Cedric moved towards the centre of the room. Facing them, he drew his wand and held it ready. “The incantation is Protego, and the wand motion is like so.” He brandished his wand as if batting away an invisible ball. “Put them together and you have *Protego!*” he shouted, repeating the gesture. The air in front of him shimmered as if filled with heat haze. “Try hitting me with something,” Cedric said to them.

Holly glanced at her friends, before tentatively drawing her wand. She pointed it at Cedric, and after a moments pause yelled, “*Expelliarmus!*” A jet of red light shot from her wand, screaming across the room. Before it could reach him, it struck the shimmering air. A circle of red appeared for a moment, before Holly’s spell blasted back at her, catching her by surprise and tearing her wand from her grasp. It spun through the air towards Cedric, who easily caught it.

As the shield faded, Ron snarled, “What the hell are you playing at?”

Cedric stared blankly back at him. “What do you mean?”

“What’s the big idea, launching Holly’s spell back at her like that! What if she’d used something more powerful? She could have been hurt! You’re just trying to take out your competition!”

“Ron, stop it,” Holly said, placing a hand on his shoulder. “I wouldn’t cast a spell that could hurt him like that anyway. He’s just showing us how it’s meant to work.” Ron grimaced, but subsided at her pleading look.

She turned back to find Cedric approaching. With a cool look at Ron, he offered her back her wand. “Now you try it.”

Holly reclaimed her wand and as Cedric stepped back, brandished her wand. “*Protego!*” she incanted, mimicking the gesture. She squinted at the shimmer that appeared, then looked up hopefully. “Is that right?”
Cedric stroked his chin as he considered her spell. He raised his wand and fired a simple Jelly-Legs Jinx before Holly could react. It struck her shield, which shattered with a sharp crack, and continued through to hit her. Immediately her legs were unable to hold her weight and she collapsed. Before she hit the ground, Ron leapt forward and caught her. Glaring at Cedric, he lowered her gently.

“What was that for?” Holly groused.

“Sorry,” Cedric said, reversing the jinx with a flick of his wand. “That’s the only way to really test how strong a Shield Charm is.” He extended his hand to help her up. With a sigh, Holly took it, and was hoisted to her feet. “Alright, let’s try again.” Looking to Ron and Hermione, he said, “Why don’t you two practice the Charm as well? You can test each other with some simple jinxes.” When Ron looked mulish and Hermione looked hesitant, he grinned charmingly. “Don’t worry, I promise no more Jelly-Legs Jinxes.”

Holly’s friends looked to her, only moving away once she nodded. The pair faced each other, taking turns to attempt the Shield Charm and break through the other’s defence. She turned back to face Cedric, who led her to the other side of the room.

“They’re very protective of you,” Cedric noted quietly. Holly shot him a startled glance. He smiled brightly at her, and nodded back at Ron and Hermione. “It’s good to have people like them watching your back.”

Holly glanced back at the pair fondly. “They’re the best,” she said warmly. “They’ve been with me through everything. Honestly, I don’t know what I’d do without them.” Then, as she remembered who she was talking to, felt her cheeks flush brightly once more.

Cedric somehow managed to make his chuckle sound kind. “Alright, let’s focus on teaching you this spell. Cast it again and we’ll what to work on.”

With a deep breath, Holly turned to face him and raised her wand. “Protego!” she incanted. As the shimmering shield appeared, Cedric levelled his own wand at her.

“Rictusempra!”

Holly’s shield shattered upon being struck once more, and she was assaulted by tickling sensations all over her body. Unable to contain her laughter, she clutched at her stomach as her knees buckled. The feeling stopped a moment later, and Holly gasped to catch her breath. “What – was – that – for?” she panted.

Cedric’s grin was far too reminiscent of Fred and George. “I said no more Jelly-Legs Jinxes. Everything else is fair game. C’mon,” he said, reaching down to haul her to her feet, startling a squeak out of her, “I think I know what the problem is.” Moving to stand behind her, Cedric grabbed her hand and pulled it into position before her. Holly was immediately aware of the sensation of his chest pressing against her back and felt like her face was aflame.

“I noticed when you cast just now, you added a flourish to the wand motion. You want to keep it steadier. Short, sharp and focused. Like this.” Keeping his grip of Holly’s hand, Cedric pulled her hand through the wand motion a few times. She kept her eyes firmly fixed on it, while she desperately wished her heart would stop beating so loudly. “Try it like that.”

When Cedric released her and stepped back, Holly took a shuddering breath, trying to calm down. She didn’t know why he kept affecting her like that. Raising her wand, she waved it through the motion, taking care not to add the extra flourish. “Protego!” Once the shimmering shield appeared,
Cedric fired another spell at it. Holly braced herself for another assault of tickles, but the spell struck her shield and rocketed back at Cedric, who barely managed to dodge it.

He laughed softly and grinned at Holly. “There, you got it!” Holly found herself beaming back. Before she could say anything, the sound of applause drew her attention. Ron and Hermione were watching them, cheering her success. She smiled gratefully, though silently hoped they hadn’t seen how much she had reacted to Cedric holding her. That would be mortifying.

“Alright,” Cedric said, drawing her attention back to him. “Now I want you to work on your endurance. You two,” he pointed to Ron and Hermione, “take turns trying to break her shield. We want to build you up to be able to block more and more spells. Eventually we’ll move on to blocking more powerful spells as well.” As her friends dutifully took aim, Holly heaved a sigh, but turned to face her friends, raising her wand to cast again.

After the lesson with Cedric, Holly was feeling far more optimistic. She hadn’t learned a lot yet, but being taught protective magic by someone who knew what they were doing was such a relief, she finally felt able to relax. Classes continued at a regular pace, which Holly found easier to handle without the lingering dread.

Before she knew it, the week had flown by, and the trio were descending into the dungeons for her final class after lunch on Friday. As they approached Potions classroom, Holly noticed the Slytherins clustered together, each proudly sporting large badges. In bright red letters they read:

Support CEDRIC DIGGORY –
the REAL Hogwarts Champion!

Malfoy perked up as she approached, crowing, “Like them, Potter? And this isn’t all they do – look!” Pressing the badge caused the words to vanished, replaced with green letters reading:

POTTER STINKS

“Oh, very funny,” Hermione snapped at them, “really witty.”

“Want one, Granger?” Malfoy said, holding one out. “I’ve got loads. But don’t touch my hand, now. I’ve just washed it, you see, don’t want a Mudblood sliming it up.”

With a snarl, Ron started forward, only to be held back by Holly and Hermione. “Ron, don’t,” Hermione warned. As Malfoy smirk triumphantly at Ron’s impotent rage, Holly reached over and plucked the badge from his grasp.

“What do you think…” Malfoy trailed off as Holly carefully pinned the badge to the front of her robes. The Slytherins and Gryffindors all goggled, when she shot a saccharine smile at him.

“Thanks Malfoy,” she said in and bright tone. “This is a message I can really get behind. Ron, Hermione, would you like one too? We can all show our support for Cedric.”

Hermione raised her hand to her mouth, trying to smother a rising fit of giggles, as Malfoy stared at them, face growing pink. Ron glanced between the girls and Malfoy, then smirked and shook his head. “No thanks, Holly. I’ve just washed my robes, you see, don’t want any Malfoy sliming them up.”

The Gryffindors laughed, and Malfoy’s face twisted in rage. He drew his wand, pointing it at Ron and snarling, “How dare you, you disgusting blood traitor! Densaugeo!” The trio all grabbed for their wands at the hex rocketed towards them.
Holly barely managed to get hers out, shouting, “Protego!” Malfoy’s spell struck her half-formed shield, deflecting to the side, away from her and Ron, instead hitting Hermione directly in the face. She whimpered in panic, clutching more tightly at her mouth. With an angry shout, Ron returned a jinx of his own, blasting the unprepared Malfoy back.

In response to the attack, the Slytherins drew their wands, and the Gryffindors drew their own in return. Just as hexes were about to start flying, a voice cut through the air. “And what is all this noise about?”

Snape had arrived. Before anyone could speak, Malfoy moaned pitifully, then rolled over and heaved, slugs pouring from his mouth. Immediately he stalked over to his student, brandishing his wand. Waving it over the boy with a muttered incantation, he bathed him in a dull red glow. Slowly, Malfoy’s heaving eased, and he was left gasping for air on his hand and knees.

With frighteningly slow motions, Snape rose to his full height. “Take him to the Hospital Wing, Goyle,” he said quietly. Once Malfoy had been helped to his feet and half carried away, Snape turned to glare at the Gryffindors. “What happened?” he hissed in a chill voice. The Slytherins loudly clamoured to blame the Gryffindors, only falling silent as Snape raised a finger and pointed to a boy Holly believed was called Nott. “Explain.”

In an oily tone, Nott said, “Weasley attacked Malfoy, sir-”

“He attacked us first!” Holly snapped, in outrage.

“Malfoy got Hermione!” Ron added. “Look!” At his insistence, Hermione showed them what was hidden behind her hands – her teeth had begun growing distressingly quickly, already reaching her collar. The Slytherin girls were laughing with cruel delight at the sight.

Snape stared coldly at her for a long moment, before saying, “Very well. Hospital Wing, Granger.” Without sparing a second more on her, he turned a glare on Ron. “Twenty points from Gryffindor, Weasley, and detention for attacking another student. Now get inside.”

Holly pulled a reddening Ron into the classroom, as he muttered about Snape’s unfairness. As they claimed a table, the Slytherins glared at them, several flashing their Potter Stinks badges at her. When Ron continued to growl angrily, Holly patted his arm, quietly saying, “Let the anger go. Clear your mind, remember?”

Ron grimaced, before sighing and nodding. He took several deep breaths with eyes closed. When he opened then, he looked much calmer, and smiled gratefully at Holly.

Snape began the class, continuing the topic of antidotes, which they were to be brewing. Before he got any further than explaining the lesson plan, a knock on the door interrupted him, and Colin Creevey bounced into the room. As the tiny Gryffindor reached the desk, Snape stared down at him. Colin was here, he told them, to bring Holly upstairs for photographs as part of the Tournament. Holly grimaced with disgust at the idea.

As Snape glared, opening his mouth to say something scathing, Holly spoke up. “If it’s alright, sir, I’d rather stay here.” She felt her face grow slightly pink, as everyone in the room turned to stare at her, but she forced herself not to fidget.

After a long, uncomfortable moment, a twisted smirk formed on Snape’s face. “Why, Potter, I wouldn’t dare to keep you from your responsibilities as a Triwizard Champion.” His black eyes glittered with a cruel joy as Holly’s expression fell. “Take all of your things, I don’t want to see you back here.” When Holly simply stared at him, his voice turned harsh. “Now, Potter.”
Exchanging an exasperated look Ron, she grabbed her bag and followed Colin from the room. He was giving her a confused look as they walked. Holly tried to ignore it, but her skin crawled. Finally, she asked, “What is it, Colin?”

“Why on Earth did you want to stay in Potions?” The question burst from the younger Gryffindor in a horrified tone. Holly sighed.

“I’m not happy to be in this Tournament, Colin. It’s already made half the school hate me, and I don’t even know if I’ll be able to survive the Tasks. And honestly, I’d rather put up with Snape than deal with Bagman any more than I have to.”

Colin was stunned into silence as he continued leading her out of the dungeons. When they reached the right room, he shook himself, bidding a quick, “Good luck!” Holly knocked and entered.

The small classroom had been mostly cleared, with only a short row of desks remaining, covered in a velvet sheet, at which sat Bagman and a witch in magenta robes. The other Champions had arrived before Holly. Cedric and Fleur were talking, while Krum stood moodily in the corner. A portly man, holding a clearly magical camera, stood nearby, watching Fleur.

Bagman stood as he noticed her arrival. “Ah, here he is!” Holly felt her eye start to twitch.

“Champion number four! In you come, Harry, in you come… nothing to worry about, it’s just the Wand Weighing ceremony, the rest of the judges will be here in a moment –”

“Okay,” Holly snapped, “firstly, my name is Holly, stop calling me Harry. Secondly, I am a girl, stop calling me he. Thirdly, what exactly is Wand Weighing?”

Bristling at being corrected, Bagman scowled and told her, “It’s to make sure your wand works properly for the tasks. Ollivander will be looking over them all, once Dumbledore’s finished with him. After that, we’ll do a photoshoot.” He gestured to the woman, who was staring at Holly with an expression of fascination. “This is Rita Skeeter, she’s doing a small piece on the Tournament for the Daily Prophet…”

“Maybe not that small, Ludo,” Skeeter said brightly. Holly looked her over, taking in her elaborate, rigidly curled hair, her jewelled spectacles, her crimson, two-inch nails. She was sure she knew that name from somewhere… “I wonder if I could have a little word with – Holly, wasn’t it it?”

Before Holly could do more than nod, Skeeter continued, “Just a quick word before we start. The youngest champion, you know, add a bit of colour?”

“Certainly!” Bagman exclaimed. He had a strange smirk as he looked between Holly and Skeeter. “Take all the time you need.” Before Holly realised what was happening, Skeeter had dragged her out of the room and into a broom cupboard, which the reporter lit with floating candles. Once she had set up her acid green Quick-Quotes Quill, Skeeter turned back to Holly with an expression bordering on hunger.

“So, Holly… why don’t we start with… all this?” She gestured up and down at Holly.

“All what?” Holly asked, looking down at her uniform. She couldn’t see anything wrong with it.

“I mean, could you explain why you’re wearing a girl’s uniform and makeup, and asking to be called Holly instead of Harry?”

“Oh.” Holly blushed. She had actually forgotten that not everyone knew about transgender people. “Um, well, it’s called being transgender. Even though people thought I was a boy when I was born, I’m actually a girl.”
“Really?” Skeeter said, peering at her intently. “So, was it some sort of inherited curse? Does it run in your blood? Do you know who could have cast it on your family?”

“What? No it’s not a curse or anything like that. It’s not caused by anything magical. I’m just a girl who was born with a boy’s body.”

Skeeter’s brow furrowed. “But… then what makes you so sure you’re a girl?”

“What makes you sure that you’re a girl?” Holly shot back, feeling annoyed. “It’s not something I can really explain properly. Every time I’m called Harry, or he, or boy, it feels wrong, it stings. Whenever I see my face or body, a part of my mind screams that it’s wrong and disgusting.” She paused as she realised she was near tears. Taking a breath to calm herself, she wiped her eyes. “Besides, the stairs to the girls’ dorm in Gryffindor let me up them, and won’t let any boys up them.

Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall are helping me fix it now.”

Skeeter stared at her in silence. Her quill continued to scratch for several seconds, before pausing. “Fix it? They are looking for a way to make you a normal boy again?”

Holly shook her head emphatically. “Oh, hell no,” she said firmly. “We’re changing my body to fit my gender, so I’m more comfortable.”

“But… how can you…?”

“In the Muggle world, they’ve figured out ways to help transgender people fix their bodies, using hormones treatments, and then surgeries, for things the hormones can’t or don’t change. Madam Pomfrey helped develop some potions based on those treatments, so now I can have a female puberty.”

Skeeter stared for a long moment, before shaking herself. “And have these potions worked for you? What changes have you experienced?”

Holly felt her face grow warm. “Um, well it’s like a normal puberty, so the changes all happen slowly. And I only really started the important one at the start of term, so there hasn’t been much, aside from some mood swings.” She shrugged helplessly. “I just have to keep waiting, I guess.”

“You mentioned Muggle surgeries to change things that aren’t affected by hormones. How do those work? Are you planning to go to the Muggle world to have them? How much will they cost you?”

Face now burning, Holly shifted uncomfortably on her perch. “Uh, I don’t really know a lot of details for how those types of surgeries are done. I only really know what they’re for. The main ones are usually called ‘top surgery’ and ‘bottom surgery’. Top is to fix… well to fix the chest –”

“Your potions won’t help you with that?” Skeeter interjected.

“No, they should,” Holly clarified, “but some trans women start on hormones after they go through the wrong puberty, and it can be less effective. So some choose to get augmentation… there. And trans men have the opposite top surgery of course.”

“Trans men? That would be…?”

“People assumed to be girls, but who are actually boys, yeah. Since their hormones won’t remove any growth, their top surgery is to remove it all.” Skeeter clutched at her chest protectively. Holly
took a deep breath before continuing, “Then bottom surgery is for… well basically genitals.” She spoke quickly as Skeeter opened her mouth in shock. “Since hormones can’t change that, they surgically alter it to be appropriate for the trans person’s real gender.”

In the awkwards silence, Holly nervously added, “And there are other, less major surgeries some people have, such as for the face, or reshaping other areas of the body to fit them better. Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall are researching to see if there’s a magical method we can use for me, but if we can’t, I’ll probably end up having Muggle surgery eventually.”

Holly glanced around, playing with her nails—which felt incredibly short next to Skeeter’s—while she waited for the reporter to gather herself. When she glanced at the Quick-Quotes Quill’s parchment, she saw that it had recorded a mostly accurate summary of her explanations. Although it kept writing ‘transwomen’ and ‘transmen’, she’d have to make sure Skeeter corrected that.

Finally Skeeter seemed to recover, clearing her throat and saying, “Well then, that was quite educational. And speaking of education, how is everyone here at Hogwarts dealing with your change?”

“Oh, Professor McGonagall talked to other staff right away, and made sure they understood what was happening with me,” Holly beamed. “That helped introduce the change to the school, and everyone was fine with it… to start with, at least. Some people have been less accepting, now they’ve realised this is a permanent thing. But the majority of people have been nice. And my friends have all been incredible, I’m so grateful for them I can’t really express it.”

“How sweet,” Skeeter simpered. “But how do you think your parents would feel about all this? Do you think they’d be confused by it? Hurt by you rejecting the name they gave you? Sad at losing their only son?”

Holly reeled back as if she’d been slapped. Feeling a wave of emotions rise, she quickly worked to manage them with an Occlumency exercise. As she struggled to maintain control, she heard the Quill scratching away, and snapped, “Stop writing when I haven’t said anything!” The Quill paused as she glared at Skeeter, who watched her primly, with one eyebrow raised.

Taking another steadying breath, Holly finally felt in control. “Okay, let’s talk about my parents, then. I would hope that if they were here, they would love me for who I am, and accept the things I need to do to be happy with myself, even if it seemed unusual to them.” Holly noticed that Skeeter seemed almost disappointed, as if she’d been hoping for her to explode. With a smirk, Holly added, “Besides, my godfather told me they would have supported me in this, and I trust his judgement of them.”

Skeeter’s second brow joined the first. “And who exactly might your godfather be?”

“Oh, my godfather is Sirius Black,” Holly said brightly. There was a tearing sound, as the Quill stuttered, stabbing itself through the parchment. For a moment, it looked like Skeeter’s eyes were about to pop out of her skull.

“Your g-g-godfather is S-Sirius Black?!” she finally managed to stutter. “And you talked to him about your parents?!” Holly nodded, a wide grin on her face. “When in Merlin’s name did you do that?!”

“Just before the end of term, last year,” Holly told her. “We had a nice chat.” She could hold in her giggles as the reporter sputtered in shock.

“How are you alive?!” Skeeter gasped. “He’s a wanted mass murderer! He was You-Know-Who’s
most trusted servant! He wants to kill you!”

“Wrong, on all three counts,” Holly said firmly. “Sirius never killed anyone, he never worked for Voldemort –” Skeeter flinched so hard she almost fell off her bucket – “and he certainly never wanted me dead.”


Holly spoke over the reporter’s confusion. “Sirius was framed, for everything, by Peter Pettigrew. Pettigrew is an illegal Animagus – a rat, appropriately enough. He betrayed my parents to Voldemort. He killed all those Muggles. He cut his own finger off, and escaped as a rat.”

“How do you know this?” Skeeter asked wildly.

“Sirius showed me. Last year, he tracked Pettigrew to Hogwarts, where he was hiding as my friend Ron’s pet rat, and forced him to reveal himself.” Skeeter’s Quill was flying across the page in an excited frenzy.

Skeeter seemed to stunned to emote properly, staring blankly at Holly. “But then… why is he still wanted? Surely if he had Pettigrew…?”

“Pettigrew escaped,” Holly grimaced. “There was… an accident, when we were trying to bring him back. And since we didn’t have Pettigrew on hand, Fudge refused to listen, even though there were five witnesses, two of who were Hogwarts Professors.”

“Really?” Skeeter asked, a gleam starting to form in her eye again.

“Yup,” Holly said bitterly. “He tried to have Sirius given the Dementor’s Kiss that night, because investigating Pettigrew would be, and I quote ‘too much bad press’.”

Skeeter seemed almost breathless. “You said there were five witnesses? Who else was there? Who were the Professors?”

“My friends Ron and Hermione were with me, as well as Professor Lupin, our previous Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, and Sn- Professor Snape. Fudge didn’t want to listen to any of us. In fact, he even tried to accuse Professor Snape of helping Sirius escape the Dementors.”

Before Skeeter could say anything more, the door to the cupboard opened and bright light spilled in. Dumbledore stood in the doorway, eyes twinkling as he looked down at them. Skeeter quickly hid her Quill and parchment of notes in her bag, talking with Dumbledore about one of her recent articles, in which she had greatly insulted him. He did not seem offended, and ushered them back to room for the Wand Weighing ceremony.

Holly sat near the door with the other champions, feeling slightly disappointed that she hadn’t been able to tell Skeeter more about Sirius. The judges gathered at the tables, and Mr Ollivander, the wand-maker, joined them. He called each champion in turn, examining their wands to ensure they had no defects, and casting a test spell with each. Finally, he finished with Krum, saying, “Good. Which leaves… Miss Potter.”

Ollivander gazed at Holly with a curious expression when she approached him. As she handed over her wand, he asked, “You haven’t had any trouble with your wand, since your revelation, Miss Potter?”

Holly stared back blankly, before realising what he meant. “No, my wand’s been working fine. Why wouldn’t it? I’m still the same person.”
“Indeed,” he said, finally turning his silvery eyes away to her wand, which, after spending a long time examining, he declared to be in perfect working order. Dumbledore moved to dismiss the champions to dinner, but Bagman and Skeeter insisted on photographs being taken. The photography took a while, trying to fit everyone – including Madam Maxime – into frame, and position everyone pleasingly.

Finally, the group and individual shots were finished and they were dismissed. The foreign champions left, talking quietly with their respective Heads. Cedric paused, holding the door open. “Are you coming, Holly?” he called to her, as she hovered inside, while Skeeter talked quietly with the photographer.

“No, you go on. I’d just like to talk to Ms Skeeter quickly.” Cedric raised an eyebrow, but simply shrugged. “Oh,” Holly called, as he made to leave, “we’re still meeting on Sunday, aren’t we?”

He shot her a warm smile, and Holly felt her stomach flip. “Of course. I’ll see you then.” Once Cedric had left, Holly turned to find Skeeter watching her with a very knowing look. Ignoring the flush rising on her cheeks, Holly approached the reporter.

“Um, so, would we be able to continue our interview, since we were interrupted?”

Skeeter looked surprised, before a pleased smile bloomed across her face. “Why, I would be delighted, Holly. Unfortunately I don’t have time right now, we must run if we’re to meet our deadline for tomorrow’s paper.” As Holly’s face fell, Skeeter smirked. “Now, now, chin up. I will be renting a room in the village, so I can keep tabs on this delightful Tournament. I’m sure you have a Hogsmeade weekend coming up soon?”

“We have one on Saturday week,” Holly offered brightly.

“Perfect,” Skeeter said cheerfully. “We can meet at the Three Broomsticks, for lunch, and some enlightening conversation.”

“Sounds like a plan. See you later, then.” With that, Holly left, hurrying down to the Great Hall where she found Ron waiting. After a quick dinner, the two returned to the Common Room. Thoroughly exhausted from her busy day, Holly bid Ron goodnight and climbed to her dormitory. As she reached her room, she found Hedwig waiting for her at the head of her bed.

Excitement bringing her to wakefulness, she hurried to open Sirius’ reply. He was back in the country, he wrote, staying well-hidden and advised her to be cautious. He also wanted to speak face to face, asking her to let him know if she could be alone in the Common Room at one in the morning on the 22nd.

Holly paused to try to calm the confusing spike of anxiety and elation. As wonderful as it would be to see Sirius again, him being back in the country put him in incredible danger. She almost regretted not sending a message asking him not to come, though she doubted he would have listened. After taking a deep breath and running through an Occlumency exercise, she looked back to the letter to see a post-script, asking her to keep him informed, and make sure to switch owls, as Hedwig was far too recognisable.

After putting the letter away for safe-keeping, Holly took off her glasses and collapsed onto her bed, fully dressed. She closed her eyes, only to rest them for a moment before she changed. Seconds later, she was fast asleep.

The next morning, Holly was awoken by an amused Hermione. After they confirmed the other was
alright, the pair collected Ron from the Common Room, where Holly informed her friends of Sirius’ letter. She quickly drafted a reply confirming that she could meet and led the trio up to the Owlery, where she borrowed Pig to send it. Then as they made their way to breakfast, Holly told her friends about her interesting interview with Rita Skeeter, and her plans to continue it later.

“Oh, do be careful Holly,” Hermione chided. “I know she might have seemed nice, but don’t forget about what we’ve seen of her writing. Anything you say could get twisted into something else.”

“I know,” Holly said with a sigh, “but I have to at least try. If I can get the word out about what Fudge has done to Sirius, it’ll be worth it.”

When they reached the Great Hall, the trio enjoyed their breakfast, looking forward to a relaxing Saturday after the busy week. The day of leisure was almost immediately interrupted, however, by the arrival of the post. Holly mostly ignored the flurry of owls and letters, used to the chaos by now. She glanced up, intending to ask Hermione a question, before her eyes fell on the headline of Seamus’ freshly delivered Daily Prophet, and her jaw fell open.

"Boy-Who-Lived Becomes Girl-Who-Lived!"

“Seamus,” she said in a strangled voice, “could I borrow that please?” He took one look at the expression on her face and immediately handed over the paper. She unfolded it quickly, revealing a large picture of herself that took up most of the front page. In it she was smiling shyly, occasionally brushing strands of hair from her eyes. The remainder of the page was dedicated to the article, and Holly quickly read through it.

Harry Potter – a name known by every witch and wizard. With his defeat of You-Know-Who at the age of 1, he secured his place as the Boy-Who Lived, in history and in the hearts of the Wizarding World. However the latest chapter of young Potter’s life has taken an unexpected turn.

When your humble reporter, Rita Skeeter, visited Hogwarts to report on the newly revived Triwizard Tournament, I was introduced to the champions: the French beauty, Fluer Delicore; the famed Bulgarian Seeker, Victor Krum; and Cedric Diggory, a dashing young Hufflepuff, representing our beloved Hogwarts.

Then we were joined by a charming young lady, who was, to my utter shock, introduced as the fourth champion, Harry Potter! The young champion wasted no time to inform me that he was in fact a she, and now went by the name Holly. She generously agreed to a private interview, to discuss this incredible transformation.

The article continued on page 2, and then onto 6 and 7. Skeeter’s article on the Triwizard Tournament had morphed into an exposé on Holly’s transition. Holly was grateful that Skeeter had listened to her explanations of transgender topics, though she couldn’t help but wince at some of the wording. And she was unbearably embarrassed by the section speculating on how soon she would develop “womanly assets”.

Finally, she finished the article, noting not a mention of Sirius or Fudge. She hoped Skeeter was still interested in doing a story about it. Though hopefully not as intensely personal as this one had been. Once it was clear that she was finished, Hermione snatched the paper from her hands and devoured it, with Ron reading over her shoulder.

“Well…” Hermione said, as she finished, “I suppose it could have been worse? At least she didn’t make anything up about transgender people.”

Ron shook his head. “Yeah, but blimey, did she have to go on about what you’re going to look
like? I wouldn’t be surprised if someone starts a betting pool now.” Holly and Hermione stared at him. “Y’know,” he said, holding his hands in front of his chest, “for how big you’ll get.”

Before Hermione could do more than take a breath to yell at Ron, Holly erupted into a fit of giggles. Her face flushed brightly, and she buried it in her arms, unable to stop the laughter. After several long minutes, Holly managed to get the giggles under control. Ron and Hermione were giving her concerned looks as she gasped for breath. “Okay, let’s go,” she said brightly as she stood, before leading the way from the Hall. She found herself smiling, despite the growing murmur of whispers as she passed. She was now, officially, out of the closet to everyone, and it felt good.

AN: Sorry this took such a long time y’all. Writer’s block is a bitch and IRL stuff kept getting in the way. Hopefully won’t have a gap that long again (fingers crossed).

Also, thank you to everyone who has left reviews, hearing from you means a lot to me, and helped me get motivated to get this chapter out.
Skeeter’s article immediately became the talk of the school. Over the weekend, Holly overheard people discussing it. It was surreal hearing random groups of students using terms such as dysphoria and transition. They all fell silent when they noticed her, but she found herself receiving more smiles and waves than before.

On her way down to her second training session with Cedric, Holly walked with a bounce in her step, Ron and Hermione bemusedly trailing behind. She swept into the room with a cheery, “Good morning!” Cedric leant on a desk at the centre of the room, idly spinning his wand between his fingers. He nodded in greeting as the trio entered and placed their bags to the side. When he didn’t move at their approach, Holly’s brows furrowed. “Are you alright?”

“Fine,” he said shortly, standing and levitating the desk to the back of the room with a sweep of his wand. He had a dark look as he turned back to them. “Before we start, I have to ask: how much of that article did you plan with Skeeter?”

“Huh?” Holly blinked at him, feeling incredibly confused.

“Well,” Cedric continued, “Bagman was going on about how Skeeter was going to write an article about the Tournament, but what she published was all about you.”

Holly gaped at him. “I… I just answered the questions she asked me…” she said faintly.

“What the bloody hell is your problem, Diggory?” Ron snapped, half stepping between them. “Holly didn’t ask for any of this! Stop blaming her for what Skeeter decided to write!”

“I’m just saying it’s rather coincidental, that you have one interview and suddenly the whole article is about you.”

“It’s almost as if Skeeter wanted to write the most sensational article she could and capitalised on Holly’s fame,” Hermione said tartly. “You’re just too caught up in your jealousy to notice that Holly doesn’t like being famous!”

Cedric flushed and looked away. After a long pause, he sighed. “You’re right,” he said tiredly, rubbing his hands over his face. “I’m just feeling stressed about the Tournament, and going into the First Task blind. And then the article didn’t even get my name right…” He looked back and smiled ruefully. “I’m sorry Holly, it was wrong of me to take my frustrations out on you. Please forgive me?”

Holly glanced at Ron, who looked sceptical, and Hermione, who was contemplative, before nodding slowly. She tentatively approached Cedric, and reached up to pat him gently on the shoulder. “I forgive you. I understand how stressful this whole Tournament is.” With a flash of insight, she remembered something said at a meeting of her Queer Group. “Make sure you don’t bottle up your emotions,” she said, quoting as closely as possible. “Feelings are powerful, and if you try to suppress and ignore them, they just get stronger, until you can’t handle them anymore. It’s okay to let them out, in any way that you find works. Vent to someone, cry them out, even scream from the roof if that’s what you need to express them. You’ll feel better after.”

There was a beat of silence, as Cedric stared down at her with a strange smile. Holly realised her hand was still on his shoulder, and pulled it back quickly, trying to ignore how her face burned, and
how Cedric’s smile grew slightly wider. She cleared her throat and looked away. “So, um, what are we going to be doing today?”

“You’re a very insightful young lady,” Cedric said warmly. Holly barely managed to suppress a squeak, scurrying back to the safety of her friends. “Right, I’ve wasted enough of our time. Let’s get back to Shield Charms.” As Holly, Ron and Hermione moved towards their places from the previous week, Cedric shook his head. “We’re doing it differently this time. Holly you stand in the centre of the room. Granger in that corner please and you in other corner there Weasley,” he said, gesturing to the spots. “So,” he looked back to Holly, “you need to cast a Shield that can withstand our spells. But this time, you can’t cast first. You have to wait until we’re casting before you’re allowed to Shield.” He grinned as Holly goggled at him. “And, since the three of us are in different places, you’ll also have to turn to face the attack each time, since you’ll never know where it’s coming from.” With a chuckle at Holly’s grimace, he moved to his own corner and raised his wand. “And, go!”

Classes continued, as the Hogsmeade weekend steadily approached. It was an interesting experience to mingle with the student population now everyone had read Skeeter’s article. Everyone knew before, of course, but having it published in the Prophet, and explained in detail seemed to drive the reality of it home.

Holly was grateful for her Arithmancy class, where she had the chance to speak to her friends in the other Houses. Susan and Hannah told her that between the article and Cedric speaking to them, more Hufflepuffs had come around to supporting Holly. Ravenclaws remained split on the issue, she was informed by Terry and Lisa. Some had taken on the article and continued with a clearer understanding of Holly. Others took it as further proof of her “attention seeking ways”.

All she could do was shake her head and ignore them. This proved easy enough as she busied herself by getting ready for the upcoming trip to Hogsmeade. Between completing her homework, she finished her letter to the Queer Group, informing them that she was now on hormones – after editing out all mention of magic.

Then, in preparation for meeting Skeeter, she drafted Ron and Hermione into helping her recall the events in the Shrieking Shack. She didn’t want to miss an important fact when talking with Skeeter, but she also knew there were things not to say. They huddled together, describing everything they could remember from that night. Hermione carefully recorded everything in neat, precise script, for Holly to refer to later.

As they recorded Ron being dragged under the Whomping Willow by Sirius’ grim-like Animagus form, Hermione frowned. “I really don’t think you should tell Skeeter that Sirius is an Animagus, Holly. If she publishes that fact, it will be so much harder for him to hide from the Ministry.”

Holly and Ron grimaced. “What should we say instead then?” Ron asked. “That Sirius just showed up and dragged me off?”

“You’re right, that wouldn’t make sense,” Holly said with a shake of her head. “Why wouldn’t we have just run for Dumbledore, since he was right there? I know, we can say that it was a Conjured creature! That way it was under his control and could be Vanished when he didn’t need it anymore.”

“Brilliant,” said Ron, as Hermione beamed and noted down the altered events. They continued detailing the night and Holly was feeling pleased with their progress, until they reached the reveal of the full moon. The quill paused once more and their faces fell into grim expressions.
“You can’t tell her that Professor Lupin is a werewolf,” Hermione hissed, voice dropping even lower on the final word. “It would ruin his life.”

Holly nodded seriously. “I know,” she said softly. “That’s why I didn’t mention it when I spoke to her the first time. I just don’t know what we can have happen instead…”

“Well, it has to be something that disables Professor Lupin and Ron, and distracts everyone else long enough for Pettigrew to escape.”

Ron, who had been sitting pensively, spoke up. “Blame me.” As the girls looked at him in surprise, he continued, “Say I was distracted by my leg, and Pettigrew grabbed my wand. That way he can Stun Professor Lupin and I, and use my as a shield to transform and start getting away. Everything else can stay the same from there I think.”

“Are you sure, Ron?” Holly asked. “That doesn’t paint you in a very flattering light.”

“It’s fine,” Ron said, waving her off. “Getting the story out is more important.”

Holly smiled gratefully. “Thank you, Ron,” she said, hugging him and bringing a blush to his ears, as Hermione recorded their tale.

They finished detailing the events from that night, leaving Sirius’ escape from the tower as an unexplained mystery. Hermione refused to even consider revealing the truth about that, as their use of the Time Turner there had been incredibly illegal. With the record completed, Hermione carefully rolled up the parchment and handed it to Holly with a smile. “Good Luck.”

The Hogsmeade weekend arrived, bringing Holly a sense of nervous energy that had her bouncing on the walk down to the village. She had distracted herself preparing to speak with Skeeter about Sirius, but the realisation that the First Task would be held in only three days left her almost manic with nerves. Seeing her anxiety, Ron and Hermione filled the walk to Hogsmeade with idle chatter, a distraction she was immensely grateful for.

When they arrived at the village, Holly made a beeline for the Post Office, sending her letter off to her Queer Group via Tyler. Then, task completed, she led her friends through the crowd to the Three Broomsticks. With a quick glance, she spotted Rita Skeeter, who had claimed a table near the corner and was sipping at a pink and green drink. Her expression lit up as she spotted Holly approaching, before falling into calculating lines when she noticed Ron and Hermione.

“Lovely to see you again, Holly dearest!” she said, slipping out of her seat and planting air kisses at Holly’s cheeks before she could react. “I hope you liked our article. Showing the world the real Holly Potter!” She barrelled on before Holly could even open her mouth. “My publisher has been absolutely thrilled; it’s the best-selling story of the year! You, my dear,” she said, tapping Holly on the nose with a dangerously large red nail, “are big news. Now, who are these?” She arched her drawn eyebrow at Holly’s friends.

“Uh,” Holly shook herself slightly before gesturing to her stunned friends. “These are my friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger.”

Skeeter’s eyes lit up. “Oh, the ones you mentioned last time? The other witnesses to the Sirius Black Incident?”

Holly nodded, though she privately wondered at that name. “I thought you might want to speak with them as well. We can go through what happened in detail for you.”
“Having you here certainly means less people I have to track down,” Skeeter said to them with an almost predatory smile. “Come, sit! I want to know everything.” She waved them into their seats, as she reached into her bag for parchment and quill. Holly sat, drawing out her record of the night, while Ron and Hermione joined her cautiously.

“If you don’t mind, we’d like to go through what happened on the night we found out about Pettigrew,” Holly said, gently waving her parchment. “That way we won’t miss anything out.”

Skeeter eyed the page, intrigued. “Aren’t you well prepared? You’re certainly making my job easier. Go on then.”

Holly proceeded to describe the night in question, occasionally glancing at her page to keep it all straight. Ron and Hermione added their perspectives, and helped fill any gaps she left. They were careful not to mention Sirius’ Animagus form, as planned. As they reached the moment Snape believed them, a voice interrupted.

“Sorry about the wait, is there anything I can- Holly?”

The trio and Skeeter looked around, to be greeted by a familiar face. Professor Lupin stood by their table, staring at them. His clothes looked slightly less tattered than usual, and he was carrying a tray of used glasses. He was looking between Skeeter and Holly with an expression bordering on alarm.

“Professor Lupin?” Hermione asked. “What are you doing here?”

Lupin stared at the group for a moment longer, before saying, “Madam Rosmerta was kind enough to offer me employment since…” he eyed Skeeter carefully, “I left my last position.”

Skeeter’s eyes lit up. “Ah, this is one of the Professors you told me about, isn’t it, Holly? He saw Pettigrew as well?” Lupin’s face went slack with shock, as Holly nodded in confirmation. “Excellent,” Skeeter purred, before her clawed hand lashed out and dragged Lupin into a seat. “Holly and her friends were just telling me all about the night you nearly caught Peter Pettigrew. Since you’re here now, I’m sure we can get your perspective on it too.”

After a cautious glance at Lupin’s worried expression, Holly continued, describing as they escorted the now captive Pettigrew back to Hogwarts. As she spoke, Lupin grew tenser and tenser. When she described them exiting from the Whomping Willow, he became so rigid Holly thought he might have been Petrified. He opened his mouth to say something, and Holly quickly continued over him, “Then, as we were distracted coming out, Pettigrew tripped Ron, using him as a shield and grabbing his wand. He stunned Professor Lupin here, transformed into his Animagus form, and escaped.”

Skeeter raised an eyebrow, glancing between Holly’s defiant stare and Lupin’s flabbergasted expression. “Is that right, Mr Lupin?” she asked, startling Lupin from staring at Holly. The silence stretched for a long moment as the trio waited, trying to hide their anxiety. Finally, Lupin nodded slowly.

“Yes, we didn’t expect Peter to try anything. He was always rather a coward you see. And then I hesitated in stopping him, with Ronald here in the way. Thus he escaped.”

Skeeter stared at him, and then after a glance at Holly, nodded slowly. “Alright then, what happened next, Holly?” Suppressing the urge to sigh with relief, Holly quickly described Sirius chasing Pettigrew, and being cornered by the Dementors. She explained how she, Hermione and even Snape tried to protect him, and fallen, only to be protected by a mysterious Patronus. Then she
continued with how they awoke in the Hospital Wing, to be greeted by Fudge’s denial and wild accusations. The more Holly described Fudge’s refusal to listen and increasingly outlandish theories, the more Skeeter’s eyes shone with a near manic glee.

As Holly wrapped up the tale, Skeeter said elatedly, “This will make for such an explosive article! Now, Mr Lupin, if I could…” She trailed off as a shadow fell over the group. They turned as one to see Hagrid looming over them, and Moody standing behind, staring intensely.

“Sorry ter interrupt, but I’d like ter talk wi’ Holly fer a mo’,” he said.

Holly glanced apologetically at Skeeter. “Sorry, I’ll be back shortly.”

Skeeter waved her off with one finely manicured hand. “Not to worry Holly, I think we’ve covered the important parts. I can send you an owl if I need anything clarified. Besides,” she smiled predatorily, “I can use the time to talk with Mr Lupin here.”

Lupin cleared his throat uncomfortably, moving to stand. “I beg your pardon, Ms Skeeter, but I really must be getting back to work. I’m sure we can speak about this some other time.” Before she could respond, he reclaimed his tray, slipped from his seat and vanished into the crowd of students. Moody chuckled quietly as Skeeter’s face fell into a pout.

The trio stood, bidding Skeeter goodbye then followed Hagrid and Moody to a corner of the inn. Moody held Ron and Hermione back as Hagrid leant over to whisper in Holly’s ear. “Meet me tonight at midnight at me cabin. Wear yer cloak.” He straightened up and gave her a significant look, before nodding to Ron and Hermione and leading Moody away.

‘Why couldn’t he have told me that at the table?’ Holly wondered as she told her friends the message. She made to rejoin Skeeter, but stopped as she saw the table now empty. With a shrug, she led her friends back onto the main street of Hogsmeade. “Is there anything you want to do while we’re still here?” she asked them.

“Let’s go to Honeydukes,” Ron said immediately. As both girls raised their eyebrows at him incredulously, he added defensively, “That was nerve-wracking. I figure we could all use a treat.” The girls shrugged at each other, and Holly turned to lead the way.

They didn’t get far before a voice stopped them. “A moment please, Holly!” Looking behind, they saw Lupin hurrying to catch up. Stopping, they waited for him to reach them. “Thank you,” he said, slightly breathless. “I need to talk to you, before you leave. Privately.” He gestured towards a narrow alley between two nearby buildings. After exchanging confused looks, the trio obliged.

The alley was dimly lit, seeming to be little more than a shortcut between main streets. Lupin ushered them forwards until they were halfway down. He looked up and down the alley, before he drew his wand and murmured a spell. As he replaced his wand, he noticed the curious looks he was receiving and smiled gently. “Just a small spell to make sure we won’t be overheard. We’ll be discussing some important secrets.” With that the smile slid from his face. “Holly, why are you talking to Rita Skeeter?”

Holly sighed. She’d hoped Lupin wouldn’t be too upset by this, but he looked rather cross at the moment. “I’m hoping that if she gets Sirius’ story out, it will make the Minister listen to us, and stop hunting him.”

“You can’t trust her Holly,” Lupin told her. “Surely you’ve seen the articles she writes? She delights in ruining people’s reputations. If you don’t watch yourself, she’ll try to ruin yours.”
“But… the article she wrote about me was nice…” Holly said carefully.

Lupin ran a hand over his face tiredly. “For now. But honestly Holly, that’s because to her readers, you being transgender is controversial. Once they grow used to that fact, she’ll look for something new. She could turn on you at any time. And you clearly know this, or you wouldn’t be lying to her.”

The trio winced. Hermione stepped up, saying, “We just thought it would be better not to tell her the details about Sirius being an Animagus. Or your lycanthropy.”

“And I’m immensely grateful for that. She would be able to destroy my life. But you forgot that if you’re going to lie to someone, you need to make sure everyone involved is on the same page.” Lupin sighed again at their confused expressions. “I have no idea what you told Skeeter to cover for Sirius. She was trying to question me in there, and if my story didn’t match up, your lies would have been exposed.”

“Oh,” Holly said, absently waving a buzzing insect away from her hair. “Well, we said Sirius used a conjured dog to grab Ron and just don’t mention his Animagus form after. Wait, that means we have to tell Snape too doesn’t it?” Behind her Hermione groaned and Ron swore under his breath. Lupin nodded grimly.

“Yes it does. And I dearly hope you can convince him to go along with this, otherwise…” He shook his head in defeat. “Please try to think things through, the three of you. The cost will be high if you don’t. Now, I have to get back to work.” With that he waved his wand, gave them a final nod and strode away.

In the ringing silence he left, Holly muttered, “Now I could really use that treat…”

That night, as midnight approached, Holly slipped out of the Common Room, concealed by her Invisibility Cloak, and made her way down to Hagrid’s cabin. Her large friend had made an attempt to look more presentable, combing his hair and putting a flower through his buttonhole. He led the concealed girl to the Beauxbatons carriage, where he met Madam Maxime and then guided them into the forest. When the castle and lake were hidden by trees, they encountered a terrifying sight. Four enormous dragons stood inside an enclosure, roaring and snarling and spouting fire into the air. Dozens of wizards struggled to contain them with chains, finally resorting to mass Stunning Spells.

As the dragon-keepers hurried to secure their charges, Hagrid led Madam Maxime closer, with Holly following invisibly behind. One of the keepers, who Holly recognised as Charlie Weasley, came to join them, talking about the types of dragons and how the Champions would need to get past them. Madam Maxime wandered around the enclosure, gazing at the dragons. While Hagrid stared longingly at a clutch of dragon eggs, Charlie asked, “How’s Holly?”

“Fine,” Hagrid said, still enraptured by the eggs.

“Just hope she’s still fine after she’s faced this lot. I didn’t dare tell Mum what she’s got to do for the First Task, she’s already having kittens about her…” Imitating his mother’s voice, Charlie continued, “How could they make her compete in this Tournament, she’s far too young! I thought they were all safe, I thought there was going to be an age limit!” He shook his head and sighed. “Mind you, after that Daily Prophet article came out, Mum’s finally started calling Holly she, so that’ll be good for the girl. I don’t think she’d want to be around Mum if she hadn’t picked it up soon.”
Beneath her Cloak, Holly was torn between horror at the dragons and delight over what Charlie had revealed. The conversation petered off, with Hagrid far too distracted to pay attention to Charlie. Holly took it as her signal to leave, since she also didn’t want to be late in meeting Sirius.

Dashing back as fast as she could, she collided with Karkaroff, who was clearly sneaking to see the dragons. She reached the Common Room in record time, and hurried through the portrait hole, gasping for breath. Greeting her was the sight of Ron and Hermione kneeling by the fireplace. They flinched as Holly entered, drawing together to block her view of the fire as they turned. At the sight of her, they relaxed, pulling apart to reveal Sirius’ head sitting in the embers.

Holly felt her heart leap at the sight of him and hurried forward to kneel between her friends. “Sirius! You look good!” And he did, with his hair trimmed and cleaned, and his cheeks no longer as gaunt as when they first met. “How are you?”

Sirius smiled up at her, though she could see the concern in his eyes. “I’m doing just fine. Ron and Hermione here were just telling me all about what’s been happening at Hogwarts. How’re you holding up?”

“I’m… doing surprisingly okay at the moment,” she replied. “I mean half the school thinks I’m an attention seeking liar, but the article seems to have turned some of them around. And I’ve been stressed over the First Task coming up, but I’m learning the Shield Charm so I can at least protect myself. Though I don’t know how useful it’s going to be, since Hagrid’s just shown me that the First Task is getting past some absolutely huge dragons.” Hermione let out a quiet whimper, and Ron groaned, burying his face in his hands.

Sirius’s expression turned solemn. “Dragons can be a challenge for even fully trained wizards. But there is a way for you to overcome one. Don’t be tempted to try a Stunning Spell – dragons are strong and too powerfully magical to be knocked out by a single Stunner. You need about half-a-dozen wizards at a time to overcome a dragon-”

“Yeah, I know, I just saw,” Holly told him.

“But you can do it alone. There is a way, and a simple spell’s all you need. Just use the Conjunctivitis Curse on the dragon’s eyes; they are its weakest point. You’ll be able to get past while it’s blinded and distracted.”

Holly relaxed slightly, relieved to have direction. “I don’t know that spell. How do I cast it?” she asked.

“You’ll be able to find instructions somewhere in the library. I can’t remember the exact book, but Hermione here will probably be able to help you find it.” His lips twisted into a teasing smirk. “Although, I expect you’ll also have some help with learning it from one Cedric Diggory. Anything you’d like to tell me, young lady?”

Holly felt her face redden as she sputtered, “I- how- what-..”

Sirius chuckled. “I told you, your friends have been filling me in.” Her friends had the grace to look apologetic as she shot them a glare. “Now, I do have to ask, are you sure you can trust his help? You are technically competing against him, after all.”

“I…” Holly considered everything she knew about Cedric. “I trust him. Last year, when I fell off my broom because of the Dementors and he caught the Snitch, he tried to insist on a rematch.”

“Alright, it sounds like he’s got your back, at least,” Sirius said. “But you’re going to need to be
cautious and watch your back. There have been a lot of strange things going on that seem to be hints at something larger going on. I don’t think the incident with Moody earlier this year was a false alarm. Someone tried to stop him getting to Hogwarts. Between that, Death Eaters being more active, the Dark Mark itself being cast… and there’s been news of a Ministry witch, Bertha Jorkins going missing in Albania – where Voldemort was rumoured to be last… and she would definitely have known about the Tournament.”

“Do you think Voldemort could have found out about the Tournament?” asked Hermione. “You think that’s why Holly’s been entered into the Tournament?” Holly felt a chill run through her at the thought.

“Possibly,” Sirius said. “I can’t help thinking the Tournament would be a very good way to attack you, and make it look like an accident.”

“But he can’t be here himself, can he?” Ron asked nervously. “Not like last time. Dumbledore would be able to tell now, surely.”

“What do you mean, last time?” Sirius asked, voice taking a dangerous edge.

The trio exchanged glances, until Hermione hesitantly spoke. “In our First Year, You-Know-Who possessed one of our teachers, to try to get the Philosopher’s Stone.”

For a long moment, the only sound was the crackling of the fire, as Sirius gaped at them. “How did he- why was- who- what!?” Before they could say anything, Sirius shook his head. “Wait, never mind that now. I need to make sure you know some things. But we will be talking about this later,” he said sternly.

“Since there’s a decent chance Voldemort is involved in this, I want you to watch your back. There are some people in particular you should watch out for. Firstly, Karkaroff, he was a Death Eater. He was caught and in Azkaban with me, but he got released. I’d bet everything that’s why Dumbledore wanted an Auror at Hogwarts this year – to keep an eye on him. Moody was the one who caught Karkaroff and put him into Azkaban in the first place.”

“If they had him, why would they release him?” Hermione asked with furrowed brows.

“He did a deal with the Ministry, said he’d seen the error of his ways, and then he named names… he put a load of other people into Azkaban in his place… he’s not very popular in there, I can tell you. And since he got out, from what I can tell, he’s been teaching the Dark Arts to every student that passes through his school. So watch out the Durmstrang champion as well.

“Hey, you can’t just go saying stuff like that!” Ron objected. “He’s Viktor Krum, world famous Seeker!”

“It doesn’t matter what he is,” Sirius said firmly. “He’s Karkaroff’s student, and that makes him dangerous.” He continued when Ron tried to speak. “I also think, based on what these two have told me,” he nodded at Hermione and Ron, “you should be cautious of Bagman. The level of antagonism he seems to have towards you, Holly, is troubling. I don’t know if it’s because he’s sympathetic to Voldemort, but until we know otherwise, treat him as a threat.”

Holly shrugged. “I don’t like him anyway, so staying away won’t be a chore. And I can always hex him if it seems like he’s going to do anything.” Under her breath, she added, “Or just gets too near me.”

“Atta girl,” Sirius grinned, eyes dancing. “Finally, Crouch.”
“What?” Holly “He seems like the last person to work for Voldemort.”

“True,” Sirius nodded, “he has rather an obsessive hatred of the Dark Arts. But we don’t know for sure if Voldemort is involved, and Crouch is willing to play dirty if it serves his needs. He’ll try to get rid of anything that he thinks is a threat to his image. You saw that already in how he dismissed his devoted house-elf. And he did the same when his own son was caught with a group of Death Eaters. Sent him to Azkaban personally.”

“He gave his own son to the Dementors?” Holly said, aghast. “He didn’t try to get him off at all?”

Sirius nodded grimly, “Anything that threatens to tarnish his reputation has to go. His fatherly affection stretched just far enough to give his son a trial and that was more just an excuse for Crouch to show how much he hated him.

“So take care around him. He’s dangerous, and if he blames you for his elf being found with your wand…”

“Surely Crouch wouldn’t do anything without evidence,” Ron said sceptically. “I mean, he works at the Ministry.”

Sirius’ expression darkened. “Wouldn’t he? He was the one who sent me to Azkaban without a trial.”

Hermione covered her mouth, eyes going wide, and Ron swore. Holly sat, staring into the haunted eyes of her godfather, feeling the final remnants of her trust in the Ministry crumbling to dust.

After a moment, Sirius shook his head, saying, “Anyway, those are the main people to keep an eye on, but you should always watch your back.”

“Constant Vigilance,” Holly said weakly.

“Exactly,” Sirius said, grin returning. “I see you’re learning Mad-Eye’s lessons well. Oh, speaking of lessons, I hear you need to be taught how to go about breaking rules. First rule of breaking rules, make sure everyone knows the story you’re going to tell when you’re caught… Actually that’s the second rule; the first rule is don’t get caught.”

“Wha- how do you know about that?” Holly asked. “We only just talked to Professor Lupin about it today!”

“Now, now,” Sirius chided, “I can’t be giving you all the answers. You’ll just have to figure it out yourselves. But now it’s very late, and as much as I encourage you to enjoy late nights, you all need your rest. The First Task is soon. Stay safe, Holly, and take care of her, you two,” he nodded at Ron and Hermione.

“We will,” Ron said firmly, sitting up straighter.

“Of course,” Hermione added, jaw set.

With a final nod and smile, Sirius’ head made a popping sound and vanished. Holly stared at the fire for a few seconds longer, before Hermione began shepherding her towards the stairs. “You heard Sirius,” she said over Holly’s objections. “We have lots of research and training to do, so it’s time for sleep.”

Ron laughed as Holly pouted but allowed herself to be led to bed with a final “Goodnight.”
The next morning, Holly was shaken awake by a tired looking Hermione. “We need to go now or we’ll miss breakfast, and be late to Cedric,” Hermione told her. Holly hurried through her morning routine, while Hermione went to wake Ron.

In short order, the trio hurried down to the Great Hall to eat a quick breakfast before hurrying to meet Cedric. He raised an eyebrow at them as they piled into the room.

“Good morning,” he said cheerfully. “You three look… very tired actually.”

“Yeah, we didn’t get much sleep,” Ron grunted irritably.

“Never mind that,” Holly said urgently, “Cedric the First Task is dragons.”

“What?”

“Dragons. They’ve got four, one for each of us, and we’ve got to get past them.” Cedric stared at her with mounting horror. He glanced at Ron and Hermione, who simply nodded grimly. With a groan, he buried his face in his hands.

“Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Holly agreed weakly.

After the silence stretch on for almost a minute, Hermione made a noise of frustration. “Don’t just stand there! We need to go to the library and research this, quickly! Si- A friend told us that one person can beat a dragon with the Conjunctivitis Curse, since their eyes are their most vulnerable spot.”

Cedric slowly looked up. “Right,” he said, looking slightly dazed. “I don’t know that spell but I’m sure we can learn it. Let’s go.”

He ushered them into the hall, where Hermione took the lead, guiding them with hurried footsteps to the library. Once they arrived, she directed them to spread out to search for the right book.

After almost half an hour of fruitlessly flipping through randomly selected books, Ron groaned and dropped his head into his hands. “We’ll never find it in time.”

“If only this place was sorted in a way that made sense!” Holly moaned. “The closest we’ve found was a tearjerker hex.”

“It is rather counter-intuitive,” Hermione agreed reluctantly. “They seem ordered into the broadest categories possible.”

Cedric stood with a sigh. “Keep looking. I’m going to try something.” With that, he strode away through the stacks. The trio exchange confused glances, before shrugging and returning to their respective tomes. Not five minutes later, Cedric returned, bearing a pleased expression and a thick, leather bound book.

“You found it!” Hermione exclaimed with relieved disbelief. “How?”

“I asked Madam Pince.” He grinned as they stared at him. “I know, I almost didn’t believe it myself. But I just said I needed it as research for the First Task and she took me right to it.” He rejoined the table, placing the book on the table. On the centre of the cover was a stylised eye, around which read the words *Obfuscating the Ocular.*
The trio leaned in as he flipped through the pages to find the required curse. Cedric stopped, eyes roaming over the page as he took in the incantation and wand movements. He sighed, and shot them a relieved smile. “This is less complicated than I thought it would be. We can actually do this.”

As Ron and Hermione relaxed in their seats, Holly felt a surge of relief so intense, tears sprung to her eyes. She tried to hold them back, but they just kept coming, and she turned away quickly to hide them. While she tried to get herself under control, a hand came down gently on her shoulder and gently turned her back.

She looked up to find Ron gazing at her with concern. “It’s going to be alright. We’re going to help you learn this, and you’ll make it through safe.” Holly found herself being pulled into an embrace, where she could see Hermione and Cedric giving her reassuring smiles. It left her embarrassed, but the warm feeling inside kept her from objecting.

Finally, she pulled back, wiping her eyes with her sleeve. “I don’t even know why I’m crying,” she muttered. “I’m not upset or anything.”

“Wasn’t feeling more emotional a side effect of your potions?” Hermione pointed out. “Sometimes tears are just what your body needs to process all the feelings.”

“Maybe,” she replied with a hiccough. “Alright, stop staring at me, we need to learn this now.” She directed them back to the book, but she couldn’t keep the smile from her face.

Holly and Cedric spent the remainder of the day practicing the spell on lizards transfigured from tables by Cedric. He managed to cast it consistently after a dozen attempts, while Holly struggled. They had a short break for lunch, before returning to continue drilling. Finally, as dinner approached, Holly succeeded, casting again and again, to cheers from the three watching. She huffed, blowing hair out of her eyes and unable to keep the smile from her face as Ron and Hermione moved in beside her.

“Well done,” Cedric said with a broad smile, clapping as he approached. “Very, very well done! Getting it that quickly is an incredible feat Holly.”

She felt herself blush once more and looked down at her shoes. “Thank you,” she murmured. With her eyes downcast, she missed Ron and Hermione rolling their eyes at each other.

“That’s all sorted then,” Ron said cheerfully. “Conjunctivitis Curse ready to go. Guess we can pack it in for the night.”

Cedric shook his head. “Not quite yet I’m afraid. There’s one last thing to take care of.” He strode to his bag, pulled out a book, and flipped through it. Once he found a certain page, he returned and passed it to Holly. “You need to learn this spell.”

Holly bent her head to read, as her friends craned over her shoulders. “The Flame-Freezing Charm?”

“Another spell?” Ron asked, aghast. “But why, she’s already got the important one down?”

“This is just as important,” Cedric said. “Even blinded, a dragon will be incredibly dangerous. The Shield Charm will protect you from most things, but there’s one thing it won’t work against.”

“Oh, of course” Hermione gasped. “The fire breath!”
Holly’s stomach sank as she remembered seeing the dragons in the forest, and the terrifying gouts of fire they produced. She remembered their huge claws and sharp teeth, and how even their handlers feared them. Her vision greyed around the edges as her breath caught in her throat. She swayed and stumbled, only staying upright as Hermione and Ron gripped her arms. Cedric quickly dropped to his knees before her, reaching out to gently take her shoulders.

“Holly, it’s going to be alright. You can do this. The Flame-Freezing Charm will be simple for you after that Curse.”

She shook her head violently, eyes wild. “I can’t, it’s too much, I’m going to die!”

“No, you’re not!” Cedric said firmly. “We’re not going to let anything happen to you. We’ve got a plan, and it’s going to work.”

“But what if it doesn’t?”

Cedric paused, glancing at Ron and Hermione, who hovered anxiously beside Holly. “I have been thinking about,” he said carefully. “They said you’re bound to compete in the tasks, but they didn’t say anything about having to complete them. So, if you make an honest attempt, but it’s too difficult or dangerous, you can just back out. There’s no shame in giving up.”

Holly stared at him, breath coming in short, sharp gasps. He let go of her shoulders and took her hands. “Holly I promise I won’t let anything happen to you.” He glanced at Ron and Hermione, steadfast at her side. “We won’t let anything happen to you. If need be, we will be there by your side. Bugger the rules, bugger the Tournament. Nothing is more important than making sure you are safe. Okay?”

She nodded shakily, biting her lip as tears spilled from her eyes. As Ron and Hermione added quiet words of comfort and agreement, she wanted to hide her face, but her hands were trapped in Cedric’s, and she could feel her cheeks heating as that fact hit her. After several long, embarrassing minute, she managed to calm her breathing and stem the flow of tears.

“Sorry,” she muttered, trying to not look at anyone. Ron snorted incredulously, while Hermione gave a frustrated sigh. Cedric simply smiled his same kind, gentle smile, which made her stomach flop every time she saw it, and wiped away her tears.

“Nothing to apologise for,” he said firmly, before rising to his feet. “Now, let’s teach you this spell.” Holly nodded, setting her jaw and drawing her wand once more.

Holly was very tired the next day, almost dozing during the morning Herbology class, despite Hermione’s judgement. Cedric had kept them almost until curfew, drilling the Flame-Freezing Charm until it was near instinct, so much so that she had reflexively cast it on the fireplace when they returned to the Gryffindor Common Room. Sleep that night came slowly, and her dreams were filled with claws and teeth and searing flames. Professor Sprout simply patted her on the shoulder and passed her Flutterby bush over to Neville’s supervision.

Care of Magical Creatures was enough to bring her fully awake, and she was thankful for it under Professor Vector’s gimlet stare. Finally, the class finished, and she gratefully left, hoping for the opportunity to relax for a little while before dinner.

Those hopes were dashed by the figure of Moody waiting opposite the door. As soon as she appeared, he pointed to her, growling, “Come with me, Potter.” He then turned and stomped away.

Waving off her friends with a murmured, “I’ll see you at dinner,” she hurried after the former
Auror. “Is something wrong, Professor,” she asked, as she caught up to him.

“Nothing to worry about lass,” Moody said, glancing at her with his normal eye. “Just need to talk to you about your Defence Work. In here.” He ushered her into what she recognised as his office. Unlike during Professor Lupin’s tenure, the room was filled with strange looking contraptions. Seeing her curious look, Moody called them Dark detectors, describing the purpose of them.

Then, he fixed both eyes on her. “Now then, Potter. What are you planning to do for the First Task?”

Holly blinked in surprise. “Um, weren’t we meant to talk about work in Defence?” she asked tentatively.

Moody snorted, shaking his head in disappointment. “You’re in a deadly Tournament, facing challenges meant for full grown wizards. I’d most certainly call it Defence Against the Dark Arts, wouldn’t you?” When she nodded hesitantly, Moody continued, “And as I’m your Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor, it’s my job to teach you how to improve. So, your plan?”

“But- I- We’re not meant to accept help from teachers for the tasks,” Holly pointed out.

Waving her concern away with a battered and scared hand, Moody said, “It’s alright. Cheating’s a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and always has been.” As the hesitant look remained on her face, he added, “Lass, you need every advantage you can get. Dumbledore’s asked me to look out for you, and I’ll be damned if I don’t make sure you get through this in one piece.”

With most of her concerns eased, Holly told him what she knew of the task, as well as her and Cedric’s plan to face the dragons. She watched Moody’s face as she spoke, but couldn’t tell at all what he was thinking. Once she finished, he sat in thought for a minute, before nodding slowly.

“Not too shabby,” he growled, taking a sip from his flask. “You have a nice balance of protection and attacking.” He sat forward suddenly. “But when you’re facing a stronger opponent, it’s far more important to not be in the way. If you rely on a shield and it fails…” Holly shuddered at the thought.

“So… I should be trying to cast a shield and dodge at the same time?” she asked dubiously.

“You’re more likely to mess up both if you try that,” Moody said. “Think, lass. What talents do you have that will let you be fast?”

“Well, I’m fast on my Firebolt…” she said, before slumping, “but I can’t bring it with me. I’m only allowed my wand.”

Moody stared at her for a moment. “And you can cast spells with it,” he said slowly. “Can you think of any spells that can get you what you need?”

“Oh!”

Holly barely managed to eat lunch the next day, despite her friends’ urging. Before she knew it, an anxious Professor McGonagall had approached and was leading her to the task. She tried to calm herself, to be reassured by the final practice with Cedric after dinner last night. Cedric had been intrigued by Moody’s suggestion, but doubted he would be able to pull it off himself. They had spent hours making sure they could both cast the vital spells. She didn’t think she could be any more prepared now.
She was led across the ground, towards the dragon enclosure, which was obscured by a large tent. Professor McGonagall’s hand rested on her shoulder through the entire journey. Holly smiled gratefully at her words of comfort and encouragement. As they reached the entrance, she couldn’t resist turning and hugging her Head of House. “Thank you,” she whispered. “For everything.” Professor McGonagall returned a surprisingly firm embrace, before patting her on the cheek and departing.

Pushing her way into the tent, she saw the other three champions already waiting, as well as Bagman, who scowled at the sight of her. “Well, now that our fourth Champion has deigned to join us, we can start.” He described the task to them – that they were to select the creature they were to face from a bag, and their final goal was to collect a golden egg. Once the spectators had taken the stands, Bagman offered the bag to Fleur with a, “Ladies first.” Then with a small sneer at Holly, who had moved closer, he offered it to Krum and Cedric next. She sighed in frustration, though her spirits were lifted slightly by the scornful look Cedric gave Bagman.

Once all the dragons were selected, there was nothing more to do but wait for the whistle to start. Cedric looked sick at the idea of having to go first. He smiled gratefully when Holly tentatively patted his arm. “You can do this,” she said, as much for her own reassurance as for his. “We’ve practiced enough.” The whistle blew, and Cedric moved to the tent entrance. “Good luck!” she called after him.

“You too,” he said, looking over his shoulder with a warm smile that set her cheeks ablaze and filled her stomach with butterflies. “Be safe,” he added, and then he was gone.

It was nerve-wracking, waiting and listening, only able to the screams of the crowds and Bagman’s loud commentary. Holly breathed a sigh of relief as she heard cheers heralding Cedric’s success. Cedric didn’t return to the tent, as the other Champions took their turns, leaving Holly alone. Finally, the whistle blew. Her turn had arrived.

She walked out into the enclosure, taking in the many faces surrounding her for only a moment, before her eyes locked on the huge Hungarian Horntail. It crouched protectively over its eggs, snarling at her and breathing trails of smoke from its nostrils. Taking a deep breath, she raised her wand and Summoned her Firebolt. She didn’t take her eyes off the dragon, meeting its yellow gaze as she waited. After what felt like an eternity, her broom appeared, soaring to hover at her side. She mounted, readying herself to fly. Then, she carefully aimed at the dragon’s eyes and cast the curse. The dragon roared in pain, recoiling, and Holly launched herself into the air. It felt like she had been born for this. She soared through the air, harrying the Horntail with spells across its back. They didn’t hurt it, but it could still feel them. The dragon’s nostrils flared and it tilted its ear up, before its tail lashed through the air towards Holly. She rolled aside, hearing the spikes whistle through the air.

She worked furiously, harassing the dragon with spell after spell as she dove and weaved through the air. The Horntail seemed reluctant to expose its eggs, staying crouched as it lashed out against her, but none of the dragon’s attacks could touch reach. Holly dived clever, trying to lure it up. Her overconfidence nearly ended in tragedy, as a swipe of the tail blurred through the air. Knowing instinctively that she could not avoid it, she brandished her wand to cast the Shield Charm. The spiked appendage crashed against her shield, and she was sent careening to the side.

Righting herself, and flying higher, she focused her attacks on the Horntail’s head, until, finally, it raised up onto its back legs with a furious roar of challenge. Holly immediately dived, eyes locked on the golden egg. As she approached, the dragon’s head turned, and fire surged through her path. Her wand snapped forwards, and she screamed the Flame-Freezing Charm. She heard the crowd
screaming as the flames engulfed her, but she was already through, unharmed. With a roll and a swoop, she claimed her prize, and soared away, escaping the Horntail.

Dragon handlers swarmed into the enclosure, while Holly landed before Professor McGonagall, Moody and Hagrid, who were beaming at her. She was ushered into the first-aid tent for Madam Pomfrey to check over her. The matron was furiously ranting about dangers and irresponsibility threatening her students. Waving her wand over Holly, she brightened, declaring the girl healthy. With that taken care of, she bustled over to the next cubicle of the tent to check on Cedric. Concerned, Holly followed.

The Hogwarts Champion sat on a raised chair, chest bare as Madam Pomfrey ran her wand over his side, which was covered in a layer of purple liquid. It took Holly a moment to process Cedric’s shirtlessness, before all her blood rushed to her face, and she let out a strangled squeak. Cedric looked up at her and beamed. “That was amazing, Holly! The best flying I’ve ever seen!”

Holly mouthed silently for several seconds until she found her voice. “But you were at the World Cup,” she pointed out confusedly. Had Cedric forgotten Krum’s flying? Maybe he had hit his head?

Cedric gave her an astonished look. “Holly, you literally dove through dragon fire. Not even Krum can top that.” Somehow, her face managed to become even hotter. She wondered if this was how dragon fire felt. Before she could spontaneously combust, however, Ron and Hermione appeared by her sides, offering delighted congratulations. They dragged Holly back to the enclosure to receive her scores, leaving Cedric to Madam Pomfrey’s care with a wave.

The judges conjured ribbons in the shape of numbers to show their scores. Holly received nines from Madame Maxime, Crouch and Dumbledore, to the delight of the crowd and her friends. Bagman gave her a ten, to her disbelief, and growing suspicion. Finally, Karkaroff awarded her a meagre three, prompting angry shouts from much of the audience. Charlie Weasley hurried over, shooting his brother a smile, before telling Holly she was tied for first with Krum, and that Bagman wished to speak with the champions in the tent. Once all four champions arrived, Bagman told them the next task would be held on February twenty-fourth, and that the golden eggs contained a clue to help them.

Once dismissed, Holly hovered concernedly near Cedric, who smiled and waved her off. “I’m fine Holly, really. You run on ahead.” As she made to leave, he added, “And don’t forget, I’ll see you on Sunday.” She nodded firmly.

Holly rejoined her friends, who described the other champion’s efforts in the First Task as began walking back to the castle. Cedric used the strategy they had planned, first blinding the dragon, and then distracting it’s other senses by Transfiguring a rock into a dog, to run around, barking loudly. It had gone almost without a hitch, with only a small slash from the dragon’s claw when it blindly swiped at him. Fleur put hers to sleep, managing to collect her egg with ease, though the dragon’s snore set her skirt alight as she retreated. Krum also used the Conjunctivitus Curse on his dragon, but it had a severe reaction, raging and crushing several of its eggs, costing him some points.

As the trio neared the castle, a voice called from behind them. “Holly! Holly, a moment, please!” They turned to see Rita Skeeter hurrying towards them, and paused to allow her to catch up. The reporter beamed as she reached them. “Congratulations, Holly! I wonder if you could give me a quick word? How you felt facing that dragon? How you feel now about the fairness of the scoring?”

“Yeah, we can talk,” Holly said brightly. Now the first task was past, she felt light and free. “The dragon was scary, but I had a plan that I was confident in, and once I got in to the air, I was able to
just focus on getting the egg. For the scoring… I feel most were fair, although, a few worry me.”

“How so?” Skeeter prompted, as he quill quickly took notes.

“Well… first of all, Karkaroff only gave me a three, which just so happened to keep me from being ahead of his champion. I don’t think it’s against the rules, but it seems like bad sportsmanship to me. And the other one worrying me is Bagman.”

“Bagman? But he gave you a perfect score?”

“Exactly. In all our meetings, he’s made it clear he despises me, and yet suddenly he’s giving me a perfect score? Something feels wrong there. But I suppose we’ll have to wait and see how the next tasks go for that.”

“On the topic of the next task, how are you feeling for it? Confident? Scared?”

“I mean it’s a long way off now, so I’m not really concerned. We’ll have to see what the clue they’ve given me is, and that will help us plan for the task.”

Skeeter raised an eyebrow. “‘We’? I notice you and Diggory used the same spell to blind the dragon? Is there an alliance here to ensure a Hogwarts win?”

“I mean, we are working together but it’s not for any reason like that! He- I-” Holly glanced at her friends for help. Hermione quickly jumped in.

“Holly isn’t trying to win the Tournament, she only wants to make it through unharmed. Cedric promised to help her, since her age does put her at a disadvantage. We’ve been working together each week, preparing for the tasks.”

“I see. So there’s nothing else going on between the two of you?” Skeeter asked, raising an eyebrow and shooting Holly a teasing smile.

“No, we- we’re just friends,” she stuttered, feeling her face flush once more. She ignored Ron snickering quietly behind her, and the knowing look Hermione was giving. “Oh! Before I forget, I need to tell you something else. I have some more information about what happened with my Godfather.” Skeeter’s eyes lit up at that. She fished out a new piece of parchment for her quill and gestured for Holly to continue. “It’s not much, but I thought you should know, Sirius never got a trial. He was sent directly to Azkaban. And Mr Crouch was the one who did it.”

Skeeter stared at Holly for a long moment, before her eyes went distant. “Isn’t that a delicious titbit. That certainly will help, thank you Holly dear.” As clumps of students from the audience approached, she stopped her quill and smiled brightly at the trio once more. “Good luck with the rest of the Tournament. I can’t wait to see what you do next.” With that, she turned and strode towards the gate, speaking quietly to her quill.

“Come on Holly,” Ron said, pulling her towards the castle, “you deserve to celebrate.”

That evening, Holly sent Sirius a long letter, detailing the events of the First Task, before joining the party in the Gryffindor Common Room. During the festivities, the crowd cajoled her into opening the golden egg, which produced a piercing scream before she slammed it shut again. Leaving the clue aside, they continued the party late into the night. Eventually, Holly went to bed, falling asleep with a truly relaxed smile for the first time in weeks.
Holly returned to classes after the task, finding it easier to concentrate without a looming threat. Professor Flitwick congratulated her for “performing most exceptional Charms work while under significant stress” during their next class. She found herself blushing but smiling with shy pride at the academic praise and attention.

When she walked in to Potions after lunch on Friday, Holly remembered Professor Lupin’s reprimand of how to lie and grimaced. As much as she did not want to talk to Snape about this, the longer she left it, the greater the chance of disaster. And so, after a gruelling Double Potions session, she quietly told her friends “Remember what Professor Lupin told us? I need to talk to Snape about it.” With a quick discussion, they decided that Ron and Hermione would wait for her in the hall.

As the other students filed from the room, Holly carefully approached Snape’s desk, where he was scrutinising samples. She waited for a long moment as he held the one labelled with her name up to the light. As the silence dragged on, she cleared her throat.

“What do you want, Potter?” Snape asked, not even glancing her way as he swirled the flask.

“Um, I need to talk to you, Professor,” she said, gripping the strap of her bag nervously.

“Obviously.”

When it seemed that Snape had nothing to add, Holly took a steadying breath. “Well, I’ve been talking with Rita Skeeter, you know for interviews-”

“I am aware of your more recent exploitation of your fame Potter. If you are simply here to gloat, I will be happy to deduct points from Gryffindor for wasting my time.”

“No, I-” Gritting her teeth to avoid snapping, Holly spoke as levelly as she could manage. “I told her about what happened last year, with Sirius and Pettigrew.”

The swirling flask froze as Snape’s grip tightened. After a pause, his eyes turned to her. “And why should that concern me?” he asked, the words sounding terribly loud in the silent, empty room.

“Because I lied so she can’t tell anyone about Sirius’ Animagus form or the Professor Lupin’s lycanthropy and I told her you were there too,” Holly blurted.

Snape slowly and precisely returned the flask to the other samples, eyes never leaving Holly as she bit her lip nervously. They stood, staring at each other, tension building in the air.

“You want me to lie to protect them,” he said bluntly. It wasn’t a question, but Holly nodded hesitantly anyway. “Why should I?”

“If people find out about Professor Lupin’s… problem – he’ll never get a job again! And the Ministry still has a Kiss on Sight order for Sirius! If he’s caught…”

“And I should care?”

“They don’t deserve that!” Holly said incredulously.

Snape’s face twisted with bitter loathing. “Black tried to murder me!” he snarled.

“He spent twelve years in Azkaban for a crime he didn’t commit!” she shouted back. Catching herself, she huffed a breath, continuing more softly, “Isn’t that punishment enough?” When Snape remained still and silent, she pressed forward urgently. “Please, Professor,” she asked, fighting
disgust at begging Snape of all people. “I know they hurt you. I know you hate them. But please, don’t ruin their lives now.”

She stared up at his impassive face, desperately hoping he would agree. Finally, the silence was broken. “Get out.” Failure. Holly blinked, feeling her lip tremble and tears form in her eyes. She turned away quickly, absolutely refusing to let Snape see her cry. Her nails pressed into her palms trying to stem the tears. Her breath came ragged as she quickly moved to the door. Just as her fingers closed around the handle, a voice halted her.

“If I do this…” Snape said in a low hiss, “you will owe me a favour, Potter. Any one thing I ask, whenever I choose to ask it. Do you agree?”

Every horrible things Snape could ask her to do flashed through her mind, but nothing, she knew, would compare to failing to protect her godfather and Professor Lupin. “Yes,” she said, trying to keep her voice steady, “anything.”

“Fine, I will lie for you. You will tell me the cover story after your next Potions class. Now leave.”

Holly fled through the door, crying tears of relief into her friend’s arms.

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AN: Thank you everyone for your patience and support! I’m so sorry this took so long. Writer’s block & xmas business & work & life all conspired against me. Thank you to everyone who sent a review, they really help motivate me! Also, if you have a question, make sure to log in so I can reply to you.

Fingers crossed next chapter won’t be such a struggle. More up as soon as I can manage.
The meeting with Cedric on Sunday began with congratulations all around. All four of them were near giddy at how successful their preparations had been. The only flaw in their performance had been Cedric’s injury, to the older champion’s chagrin.

“You know, it’s not really that surprising that you got hit like that, Diggory,” Ron said bluntly. As the others turned to stare at him, he continued defensively, “Well it’s true! I’ve noticed it when we practice. You’re so used to being able to block everything so if your shields break, or the attack comes from an unexpected direction, you can never react in time.”

“You’ve certainly given this a lot of thought, Ron,” Cedric said earnestly. “Do you have any ideas on how I can fix it?”

Ron shrugged. “I mean, the only thing I can think of is practicing dodging until you can just do it. But we can’t really spend time on that.”

“Why not?” Holly interjected. “We have no idea what the next task will be, being able to dodge could turn out to be exactly what we need.”

“Sure, let’s try that,” Cedric said, standing. “We’ll focus on that today and add it to our other practice from now on.”

Holly felt slightly guilty, as she and her friends spent much of the training session firing minor jinxes and hexes at Cedric. With his inexperience at dodging, and a ban on casting shields for the lesson, he looked very silly by the end of it. His skin alternated patterns of neon colours, his hair looked like spaghetti and his feet refused to stop dancing an Irish jig. Despite this all, he grinned and laughed along with them.

As Hermione worked to undo the changes, Cedric rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment. “Well, it looks like I definitely need to work on that,” he said cheerfully. His eyes lit up then, and his grin suddenly reminded Holly of Fred and George. “I’ve had my turn. I think Holly should practice dodging as well. You never know if you’ll need it for the next task,” he said teasingly, as she sputtered protests.

Before she knew it, Holly found herself in the middle of the room, her friends’ wands trained on her. “This is not fair,” she pouted.

“Oh, I think it is very fair,” Hermione said with a grin. As Holly shot her a betrayed look, she heard Ron whisper a spell, and immediately jumped to the side, barely dodging the jinx. He grinned unrepentantly as she turned to glare at him.

“Focus, Holly,” he said. “And remember, no Shield Charms.” Before she could reply, Cedric fired a hex at her side.

Holly spent what felt like hours frantically avoiding the spells, ducking, sidestepping, twisting and even rolling. In the end she was riddled with hexes and laughing tiredly as she flopped to the floor. Ron and Cedric flopped down beside her as she panted for breath. Hermione joined them once she finished reversing Holly’s pink and green hair and shifting skin colour.
“You did really well, Holly,” Cedric said, smiling warmly at her. “Much better than I did at least.”

“Thanks,” she replied weakly. “Looks like it’s my turn to teach you something.”

“Don’t be silly Holly. You’ve already taught me lots.” Holly simply grinned.

The days fell into a rhythm of classes, homework and the occasional moment to relax. Holly found herself treasuring those quiet moments with her friends. At times her emotions got the better of her and she found herself clinging to Ron or Hermione, tearfully telling them how important they were to her, and thanking them for always being there for her. It left them flustered and embarrassed, but incredibly pleased.

On Saturday, Hermione, who had been absent for half the day, while Ron and Holly talked about Quidditch and played chess, tore into the Common Room and pulled them away. She looked incredibly excited as she dragged her friends along, babbling confusingly about “something amazing!” happening. The two were led all the way down to the Entrance Hall, and down a further set of stairs, into a warm cozy hall, which Holly had never seen before. Ron suddenly groaned as they stopped in from of a painting depicting a bowl of fruit.

Holly glanced at him in confusion. “What’s wrong?”

“This leads to the kitchens,” he said glumly. “Sirius told us how to get in while we were waiting for you. This is just more of Hermione’s spew stuff again.”

“It’s not spew, Ron! I came down here just now, to talk to them all, and I found – oh, come on, Holly, I want to show you!” She seized Holly’s arm again, dragging her to the portrait and tickling the pear. When it giggled and transformed into a handle, she immediately turned it, opening the now door and dragging Holly inside.

She caught a glimpse of a huge room, with pots and pans and an enormous fireplace before a shape blurred across the room into her midsection, with a cry of “Holly Potter, miss! Holly Potter!”

Looking down at the beaming elf, who had half knocked the wind out of her and was clutching her around the waist almost painfully hard. “D-Dobby?” she gasped.

“It is Dobby, miss, it is! Dobby has been hoping and hoping to see Holly Potter, miss, and Holly Potter has come to see him, miss!”

As he stepped back, Holly could see her house-elf friend, looking far better now he was free from the Malfoys, and dressed in the most hideous clash of clothes. “Dobby, what’re you doing here?” She asked incredulously. Then a thought crossed her mind. “Wait, how do you know my new name?”

Dobby bounced excitedly as he squealed, “Dobby has come to work at Hogwarts, miss! Professor Dumbledore gave Dobby and Winky jobs, miss! When we arrived, Dobby was hearing that Harry Potter, sir, was now Holly Potter, miss!”

He then showed Holly and her friends where Winky was sitting by the fire. From the unkempt and unclean state of her clothes, they could tell she was not taking care of herself. She was still pining for her work with Mr Crouch, bursting into tears as the trio greeted her. Dobby told them how the pair of elves had only begun working that week – Dobby having trouble finding other work as he wanted pay, to the horror of the other elves.

After spending some time talking with her house-elf friend, Holly excused herself and her friends.
As they said their goodbyes, Dobby shyly asked if he could visit her, beaming when she immediately told him yes. His ecstatic face was the last thing they saw as the portrait closed behind them.

Early in December, after a Transfiguration lesson on Cross-Species Switches, Professor McGonagall held the class back to give an announcement. As part of the Tournament, Hogwarts would be hosting the Yule Ball, as tradition, and to allow greater social interaction with the foreign guests. Dress robes were required, to Holly’s chagrin, and the ball would be held on Christmas night.

After warning the students not to embarrass the school, she dismissed the class. As the students clamoured to pack and leave, Professor McGonagall called for Holly to remain behind. Once the room was clear, her Head of House continued. “Miss Potter, the champions and their partners traditionally hold the role of opening the first dance of the ball.”

Holly, who had been wondering how best to ask about dress robes had her train of thought completely derailed. She stared at the Professor, wide eyed. “I don’t know how to dance.”

Professor McGonagall’s gaze softened slightly. “It will be a simple dance, nothing too complicated. If you are concerned, perhaps you can speak to Mr Diggory. I’m sure he would be willing to teach you the basics. Regardless, please ensure you find a partner for the night.”

Fighting back a blush at the idea of dancing with Cedric, Holly brought up the other pressing matter. “Professor, I also need to ask you something. I- I don’t have any dress robes.”

“And why do you not have something that was specifically on your list of supplies for this year?” Professor McGonagall asked, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Mrs Weasley did everyone’s shopping over the holidays. I- She- The dress robes she bought for me were boys’ ones,” Holly said quietly, staring down at her feet.

“Ah,” Professor McGonagall said, slowly taking a seat. “I assume you left the robes behind then?”

Holly shook her head slightly. “I gave them to Ron. He had second hand ones and they were just awful.”

“I suppose I cannot fault you for generosity, at least,” the Professor said with a sigh. “Very well, I will speak to the Headmaster about special permission to visit Hogsmeade.”

“Thank you, Professor!” Holly said brightly, with a relieved smile as she was dismissed.

During breakfast Saturday morning, an unfamiliar owl landed before Holly and offered her a note. She took it and offered the owl some toast as she unrolled it.

“What’s that, Holly?” Hermione asked.

“It’s from McGonagall,” she answered. “She’ll take me down to Hogsmeade after breakfast.” Holly had explained her predicament to her friends earlier. She shot a grateful smile to her Head of House at the staff table, before hurriedly finishing her meal.

Once Professor McGonagall rose from her seat, Holly waved goodbye to her friends and moved to wait for her in the Entrance Hall. Her Head of House raised an eyebrow at the way she bounced with nervous energy. Despite how daunting she found the prospect of finding a partner or dancing,
she was incredibly excited by the idea of buying dress robes.

Professor McGonagall led her to the grounds, where a horseless carriage waited for them. “I requested this to speed things up,” the Professor told her, upon seeing Holly’s confused look. Once they were firmly seated, the carriage began moving. Suddenly Professor McGonagall fixed her with a stern look, and Holly quailed as she realised she was trapped with her for the journey.

“I want to make sure you understand, Miss Potter, that this is a very special privilege you are being extended. I would ask you not to go flaunting it with any other students.”

Holly looked confusedly at her. “Of course, Professor. I only told Ron and Hermione so they don’t wonder where I’ve vanished to.”

The corners of Professor McGonagall’s mouth twitched. “Indeed. I would not be surprised if they assumed the worse, given your… tendency to find trouble.” The twitching grew more pronounced as Holly pouted. She couldn’t even object to that.

After a minute, the Professor’s eyes softened. “How are you feeling, Holly?” She blinked, surprised at the sudden change of address. “A lot has been happening for you, with the Tournament and your transition.”

“Uh, I’ve been worried about the Tournament, but the training I’ve been doing with Cedric has really helped me feel better. And, well, the potions Madam Pomfrey has been giving me are just amazing! I feel so much better now. I mean, it’s like I can actually feel properly.”

“You didn’t have feelings?” Professor McGonagall asked, looking concerned.

“No, I did just…” Holly sighed in frustration. This was so hard to put into words. “I had feelings, but now that I’m on my potions and I can compare what I feel now with what I used to feel. It’s like night and day. Before everyone was muted and dull, but now it’s like there’s just so much happening in my head. It can be a bit overwhelming sometimes, but I couldn’t bear to go back.”

Professor McGonagall nodded slowly. After a moment, a strange look crossed her face. She almost seemed guilty. “I’m sorry we haven’t been able to help you with the Tournament,” she said suddenly. “With the rules that have been put in place, and the Ministry oversight, our hands are rather tied.”

Holly opened her mouth to reassure her Head of House that Moody had helped her then quickly closed it. Perhaps it was best not to mention that fact. Instead she said, “I wouldn’t ask you to cheat for me Professor. Although, if I have any… hypothetical questions about spells, I could ask a teacher about that, couldn’t I?”

Professor McGonagall narrowed her eyes slightly. “I’m sure no one can object to a student wishing to study ahead. So long as the questions were relevant to the subject, of course,” she said carefully. “For example, you would speak to Hagrid if you wanted to know more about, oh perhaps the magical creatures of the Great Lake,” she added, with a significant look.

Holly’s jaw fell open in shock for a moment, before a broad grin overtook her features. “I’ll make sure to do just that, Professor,” she promised. The Professor, looking slightly uncomfortable but pleased with herself at the same time, changed the topic, quizzing Holly on their most recent Transfiguration work. They spent the remainder of the journey holding an impromptu review session, which Holly found was grateful for. Transfiguration had never been her strongest subject, but she was determined to do well in it.
Finally, they arrived at Hogsmeade, where Professor McGonagall led the way once more. The village seemed strange without the usual mass of visiting students that Holly was used to seeing fill the main street. As they walked along, the door to the Three Broomsticks swung open, and Rita Skeeter stepped out. Her eyes lit up as they fell on Holly.

“Well, well, well, what are you doing here, Holly dearest?” she asked, raising a finely drawn eyebrow at her. “I’m quite certain this isn’t a Hogsmeade weekend. Are we making a special trip?”

Professor McGonagall stepped forward, placing herself halfway between Skeeter and Holly. “We don’t have time to stop for an interview, Miss Skeeter. You’ll have to come up to the castle another time.”

“Oh, I’m not looking for an interview,” Skeeter said, waving her hand airily. “I’m simply curious. It’s not every day the Deputy Headmistress brings a single student down to Hogsmeade, after all.”

“Our business here is none of your concern, Miss Skeeter,” Professor McGonagall said stiffly.

“It’s alright, Professor,” Holly said quickly, before the older women could start arguing. “I need to buy some dress robes,” she told Skeeter.

“But why didn’t you buy before term started?” the reporter asked, looking confused.

“My- I couldn’t wear those ones,” Holly said with a grimace.

“If you’ll excuse us, we really must be getting along,” Professor McGonagall interjected, moving to step around Skeeter.

With a glint in her eye, Skeeter moved to stand beside Holly. “Oh, but you must let me help! I spent a year reporting for Witch Weekly when I was just starting out, it gave me quite an eye for fashion, if I do say so myself.” As Professor McGonagall’s brow furrowed, and Holly looked uncertain, Skeeter wheedled, “Oh, go on Holly dearest! Let’s make a girls’ day of it.”

Holly paused, considering Skeeter. She wasn’t sure how she felt about her. On the one hand, she had a history of writing cruel articles. On the other, everything Holly had done with her so far had worked out well. She also didn’t want to offend Skeeter, if it might affect her article about Sirius. She turned and met Professor McGonagall’s gaze. “Would that be alright, Professor?”

Her Head of House sighed, but nodded, before continuing to lead the way. As they walked, Skeeter chatted happily at Holly about what trends were popular at the moment. “Although, with your fame, you could get away with anything. You might even start your own set of trends,” Skeeter said teasingly. “Think of it, all the witches wanting to be just like Holly Potter.” She laughed as Holly blushed and stammered mild protests.

Professor McGonagall ushered them to a store down a side street. A glance at the sign told Holly its name, Freya’s Formal Finery. As she entered, a bright chime sounded, and a voice called out, “I’ll be with you in just a moment!” Holly looked around the room curiously, as Professor McGonagall and Skeeter followed her in. At first she thought the store was packed, before her brain caught up with her eyes, and she realised it was filled with floating clothes. Beautifully made robes in a rainbow of colours hung in the air, as if worn by invisible people, and rotated slowly, allowing her to see them from all angles. One corner of the room was a combination changing and fitting area, while the other was occupied by a counter bearing a till. Behind the counter was a door, through which bustled a young woman.

She was tall and slender, with silky, black hair framing her face and a welcoming smile. “Welcome
to Freya’s Formal Finery! My name is Laia. How can I help you today, ladies?” she asked, warm brown eyes looking between the three curiously.

Stepping forward briskly, Professor McGonagall said, “We are here for dress robes, for this young lady.” She gestured to Holly, who waved shyly.

Laia approached, looking her up and down consideringly, before meeting her eyes with a blindingly bright smile. “I’m sure we can find something to make you even more beautiful. Come along, we’ll try out some styles and colours.” She turned and led them towards the changing booth. As they moved, she flicked her wand at several dress robes, which floated to meet them. Pressing the closest one into Holly’s hands, she ushered her into the booth. “Try that one on now, sweetheart, and we’ll see how it suits you.”

Blushing at the compliments, Holly slipped out of her school robes and into the dress robes. The robes were a deep blue, and made with heavy material. It was slightly challenging, as they were tighter than normal in the middle, requiring her to wiggle through.

Once she had it on, she looked at herself in the mirror. She thought it looked, very pretty, with long flowing sleeves and the hem almost pooling at her feet. The tight section settled around her waist, drawing it in and giving the impression of curves. She stared at her reflection for a long moment, feeling warm tingles in her stomach, until Laia’s voice startled her. “Are you alright in there, love? Do you need any help?”

“No, I’m fine,” she replied, turning and drawing back the curtain. The waiting women looked her over appraisingly, leaving her blushing shyly.

“Don’t worry about the colour for now, we can fix that in a jiffy,” Laia said, stepping forward and waving her wand around Holly. “How do you like the style?”

“It’s very pretty,” Holly said, looking down at the robes, which shifted and warped under Laia’s wand. As she looked up, she saw both Skeeter and Professor McGonagall looking dubious.

“Those are quite lovely,” Professor McGonagall said at last, “but perhaps we could try some more conducive for dancing? This is for the Yule Ball after all.” At her words, Laia swept her wand at the floating robes, sending several flying back to their original positions.

“Perhaps this one next, then?” Laia said evenly, bringing a new set of dress robes over.

Holly tried on dozens of robes, feeling beautiful and feminine in each one. Every time, she stepped out to show the older women, who passed judgement. Several were immediately rejected, either by Professor McGonagall – “Miss Potter will be representing both Hogwarts and Gryffindor and I will see that she presents a respectable image,” – or by Skeeter – “That went out of fashion a decade ago, I couldn’t bear to let you go out in that one.” Often, the two opinions conflicted, and Holly had to wait awkwardly as they debated hotly.

Finally, they found one that seemed to meet everyone’s standards. It was long and flowing, flaring out from the waist into a wide, straight skirt, decorated with patterns of small gems along the hem. Her shoulders were bare, as the neckline sat low on her chest, and small sleeves covered her arms to the elbows. The robes were made from some kind of silk material, and Laia charmed them into a bright emerald green – “To match those pretty eyes.” Holly was completely in love with it.

“If this is the one you want, I can take in the bust so it sits better on you,” Laia said kindly. Holly still blushed, realising that, despite the many wonderful changes from her Feminising Philter, she was not as physically developed as most girls her age. As she nodded, unable to keep the sadness
from her face, Skeeter butted in.

“Wait a moment, I have a better idea. Try these first, Holly dearest.” She stepped over to a nearby shelf, attached to the side of the changing booth. Returning with a pair of strange flesh coloured blobs, she proffered them to Holly. “They should be the right size.” When Holly only stared at her in confusion, she pressed them into the girl’s hands. “They go in your dress, dear, to make your breasts look larger.”

With a squeak, and her face burning hotly, Holly ducked back in to the changing booth. After a few attempts, she worked out how to hold the lumps against her chest for them to magically attach themselves. She gasped at how right they felt. A moment later, a strapless bra floated in to join her, which she slipped on. Hurriedly putting on the chosen robes, she stepped out once more. Skeeter cheered and whistled, while Laia clapped appreciatively. Professor McGonagall simply gave her a small smile. “That will do quite nicely, Miss Potter. You look quite lovely.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Holly said, still blushing, but grinning broadly. She spent a few minutes moving around the store to ensure she could move freely in the robes, before changing back into her uniform. As she paid for her selections, she beamed at Laia. “Thank you so much for all your help.”

“Oh, it was my pleasure,” Laia said brightly, as she passed Holly a surprisingly small bag. “I hope you have a wonderful time at the Yule Ball. Feel free to come back for anything you need.”

As they left the store, Skeeter stared at Holly for a moment before asking, “Do you have any formal shoes to go with that dress, Holly?” Upon learning that Holly did not, in fact, have any, Skeeter immediately led the way to a shop, called Caring Cobblers (Put Your Sole In Our Hands). In there, an elderly wizard, who introduced himself as Bartholomew, helped Holly try several types of shoes. Professor McGonagall encouraged her to pick flats, and Skeeter pointed out impossibly high heels. Bartholomew, after checking the colour of her dress, insisted on fitting Holly with a pair of simple, silver two inch heels. When Holly expressed concern, as they were taller than any heels she had worn before, Bartholomew added several enchantments to help her stay balanced and comfortable.

The door of the cobblers had barely closed behind them, before Skeeter began pulling Holly along once more. “That’s dress and shoes sorted, now we just need to find you some matching jewellery,” she said, sounding thrilled by the prospect.

“This was meant to be a short visit,” Professor McGonagall objected mildly as she followed sedately behind the younger women.

“Oh come now Minerva, you can’t let Holly miss out on the joys of feeling utterly fabulous!” Skeeter said cheerfully. Professor McGonagall’s eyes narrowed at the familiar address, but she remained silent.

In the jewellers (Gail’s Gemstones and Jewellery), Holly immediately gravitated to the necklaces. With assistance from Professor McGonagall and Skeeter, she picked out an elegant silver necklace with a tastefully sized emerald, which sat between her collarbones. At Skeeter’s urging, she also selected a matching silver bracelet, and simple emerald earrings. Thanks to magic, she didn’t need pierced ears, as they sealed onto her lobes.

The three women left the store and made their way through the streets of Hogsmeade towards the castle. Holly was buzzing happily, skipping along and carrying the bags of her purchases (far smaller than should be possible).
“Thank you for doing this for me, Professor McGonagall,” she said, beaming at her Head of House, who smiled back warmly. “And thank you for all your help today too, Miss Skeeter.”

“Oh, you can call me Rita, darling! We’re such good friends now, after all,” the reporter replied. “Helping out was my pleasure. It’s always wonderful to see a young lady preparing for her first ball.”

“Well, still thank you, Rita,” Holly said, stumbling slightly on the unfamiliar name. “I’ll see you at the next task I suppose?”

“I think we’ll see each other sooner than that, Holly dearest. But you run along now. I’m sure you have plenty more preparations to get through for the Ball.”

With a final goodbye, Holly and Professor McGonagall entered the carriage, allowing it to carry them back to Hogwarts.

During their last Care of Magical Creatures lesson of the year, as they prepared food for the Skrewts, Holly asked Hagrid about the creatures of the Lake. It was filled with magical creatures, she learned, such as the Giant Squid, Grindylows and even Merpeople. There was a whole colony at the very bottom, leaving Holly with a sinking feeling.

She had told Cedric about Professor McGonagall’s hint as soon as she saw him, leaving him with a considering look as he told her, “I think I have an idea for the egg now. Let me test it first, and I’ll tell you if it works.”

“Hagrid,” she said carefully, “can Merpeople talk?”

“Course they can,” Hagrid said cheerfully. “They’ve got their own language an’ everythin’. It all sounds like a right screeching racket when they talk in air, mind yeh. Yeh’ve gotta talk ter them underwater. Or I suppose yeh could learn their language, like Dumbledore did.”

Holly pasted a smile on her face, not wanting to show Hagrid her gloom as she realised the next task almost certainly involved the merfolk. Ron and Hermione, who were working next to her, quickly masked their own looks of horror as well. After a long moment, Ron mercifully changed the subject. “You coming to this ball thing on Christmas Day, Hagrid?”

“Though’ I might look in on it, yeah. Should be a good do, I reckon. You’ll be openin’ the dancin’ won’ ye, Holly? Who’re you takin’?”

“No one, yet,” Holly said reddening.

Hagrid let it drop, casting around for a moment before saying, “Oh, that reporter friend o’ yours came knockin’ on the weekend.”

“Rita?” Holly asked in surprise.

“Yeah, tha’s her. She was askin’ lots o’ questions about the last few years.”

Holly blinked, sharing a confused look with her friends. Why would Rita be asking Hagrid about last year? He hadn’t seen anything important, as far as she knew.

“What kind of questions?” Hermione prompted.

“Well, firs’ of all, she asked abou’ the Chamber an’ everythin’ that happened that year. Then she
got onto when I went to Azkaban.” His beetle eyes darkened, and Holly could see him frown behind his moustache. I wouldn’ normally tell someone about it, but yeh’ve been speakin’ with her a lot, Holly, so I reckoned I could trust her.” Holly supressed a wince, simply nodding encouragingly. “She was very interested when I told her abou’ the night Fudge came to take me. Asked a bunch o’ questions about warrants and Aurors and such. I don’ really know wha’ it was all about, but she seemed happy when she left.”

As they continued working on their assigned task, Holly wondered what Rita was investigating, and if it had anything to do with her story. She supposed she’d have to ask.

For the rest of the week, the students grew restless as the holiday approached. Some teachers, such as Professor Flitwick, gave up trying to teach and simply allowed them to relax. He took the opportunity to talk to Holly about her excellent Charms work during the Tournament. She simply directed all credit to Cedric, for teaching her so well. After the class finished, Holly asked him if he could enchant her necklace for the Yule Ball with the Voice Altering Charm, like the Christmas gift from last year. He took it with a kind smile, promising to do his best. Professor McGonagall worked them until the last minute, and Snape informed them that the last lesson of term would be testing their antidotes.

As the trio studied for the final potions test, Fred and George asked to borrow Pigwidgeon, although they refused to tell them who they were writing to. Changing topics quickly, they asked if the trio had dates for the ball. Finding out Ron did not, they told him to hurry up. At Ron’s indignant prompting, Fred asked Angelina on the spot.

Once they left, Ron said, “We should get a move on, you know… ask someone. He’s right. We don’t want to end up with a pair of trolls.”

He quickly found himself receiving incredulous glares from Hermione and Holly. “A pair of… what, excuse me?” Hermione spluttered.

Ron glanced nervously between her and Holly. “Um, I just mean, I’d rather go alone than with someone I don’t genuinely like,” he said tentatively.

Hermione wasn’t having it. “So what, the only girl you would genuinely like is one you consider pretty, even if she’s completely horrible?” Holly stared at Ron expectantly, wondering where she fell in Ron’s opinions of girls.

“No, I-” Ron huffed in frustration before taking several deep breaths. “Look, I spoke rudely and without thought. I shouldn’t have called girls I don’t like trolls. What I meant is I don’t want to go with someone I don’t like. Finding them good looking is an important part of that, but so is them being a good person.”

After glaring at him another moment, Hermione turned back to her Potions textbook with a sniff. Ron glanced at Holly pleadingly, and she simply raised her eyebrows judgingly. He sighed and turned back to his own Potions book, and they continued studying in silence.

On Friday, Holly realised she needed to find a date urgently. For anyone else, going alone was acceptable, but she needed to open the dance. She was unsure who she wanted to ask, or how to go about asking. Every time she saw Cho Chang, her stomach filled with butterflies and she had trouble concentrating. But sometimes Cedric would say or do something that left her blushing and flustered.

Finally, she decided she would ask Cho first, since two champions going together could be
awkward. But if Cho said no, she planned to march over to Cedric and ask him. With that plan in mind, she went through her day, keeping an eye out for a chance to speak with Cho.

She didn’t get a chance to speak with Cho until after Potions, where she almost forgot to add the bezoar to her antidote. She hurried out after class, searching for Cho until she found her leaving Defence Against the Dark Arts with a group of friends.

“Er- Cho? Could I have a word with you?” Holly almost quailed at the looks she received from Cho’s friends. Half of them glared at her like she had said something foul, while the rest looked condescending.

“Okay,” Cho said, with an unnervingly blank expression, before following her away from the others. Holly took a moment to breathe deeply, centring and calming herself, before she looked at Cho with a shy smile. “Would- would you like to go to the ball with me?” She felt her cheeks grow warm but ignored them, focusing on meeting Cho’s gaze.

Cho frowned at her, looking confused. “I thought you were a girl now,” she said, after a moment. “I am.” Holly blinked, now also feeling confused. “Does that matter?”

“You should be asking a boy to the ball, then,” Cho said firmly.

Holly was rather taken aback. “I- But I want to go with you.” When Cho looked increasingly uncomfortable, she asked, “Does the magical world not have gay people?”

Cho looked away with a grimace. “You don’t do that sort of thing here, alright? Girls date boys. That’s the way it’s always been.” As Holly stared at her, trying to process what she had been told, Cho sighed. “Anyway, I should get back to my friends. Good luck finding a partner,” she offered, with an uncomfortable smile, before turning and walking away quickly.

Feeling dazed, Holly made her way down to dinner. As she surprise faded, she found a growing sense of anger and disgust rising inside her. Had Cho really just said that there were no gay people in the entire Wizarding World? That anyone like that was wrong and should just, what? Ignore it? Pretend it wasn’t real? Holly suppressed the urge to growl. ‘I’ve had enough of pretending to be something I’m not, thank you very much,’ she though bitterly. It made her even angrier, as she realised that Cho would consider all her friends in the Queer Group, and their beautiful relationships, to be wrong. Suddenly Holly felt very glad she had asked Cho first. ‘If I’d gone to Cedric first, I might’ve never known this about her… I could have been pining over her for ages.’

Then, with a sinking feeling, she wondered how many other people thought the same.

She shook her head, and set her jaw. No point in worrying about that now. She had a date to secure. She strode through the corridors, head held high and eyes blazing. Entering the Great Hall, she scanned the Hufflepuff table, finding her quarry quickly. Before she knew it, she was standing at Cedric’s shoulder.

“So, Holly,” Cedric looked back at her in surprise, before smiling warmly. Holly felt her cheeks warm slightly, but it was nothing compared to the fire already driving her.

“Sure thing, Holly.” After excusing himself from the group of Hufflepuffs, who were staring at Holly with varying degrees of curiousity and suspicion, he followed her from the Hall and into a nearby room.

Taking the time to centre herself once more, Holly put aside her anger and was able to smile
genuinely at Cedric. “Would you like to go to the ball with me?” she asked evenly. The other
champion blinked in surprise before looking regretful.

“Ah, I’m really sorry, Holly, but I’ve already asked someone,” he told her gently.


“Uh, I asked Cho. Cho Chang, do you know her?” Even with all her practice, Holly’s Occlumency
still wasn’t enough to keep a grimace from her face. “What is it? Did something happen, Holly?”

Looking at Cedric’s earnest expression, she couldn’t help but tell him what had just happened when
she asked Cho out. Cedric looked contemplative as she spoke, before nodding as she finished.

“Yeah, I can see why that would be upsetting for you. But before you judge Cho too harshly, hear
me out. I’m pretty sure she’s just repeating what she’s been told at home. She just believes it
because that’s what she’s been told her whole life.”

“But why would anyone tell her that in the first place?” Holly asked, tugging at her hair in
frustration.

“I-” A strange look crossed Cedric’s face. “Okay Holly, listen. In the wizarding world, magic is
considered the most important thing. It’s… it’s the source of our life, our power, of everything. So,
by extension, anything that risks the magic not continuing is wrong.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Holly asked impatiently.

Cedric ran a hand through his hair, looking at anything but her. “You need both a witch and a
wizard to make a baby, you know?” he said, making Holly blush bright red. “And the kid is
probably going to be magical, so the magic continues. That’s why people don’t really like it when
two guy or girls date. They can’t have kids, and that threatens the magic.”

“How on earth is magic threatened by people being with who they love?”

“Because if we don’t have enough people to keep the population going, wizards will actually die
out.” Holly gaped at him. “That’s not to say people aren’t allowed to be with who they want,” he
added quickly. “If they want to, they can, nothing stops them. It’s just… expected, I guess, that
they marry someone and try to have at least one kid.”

Holly felt even more confused. “But if they get married, how can they…”

Cedric stared at the ceiling as he said, “Extramarital affairs are considered acceptable in such
arrangements.”

Once she processed the words, Holly returned to gaping. “Does… does everyone do things like
that?” she asked faintly.

“It’s fairly common. Most people won’t do more than tut and gossip if they see something they
disagree with,” he hurried to assure her.

“But some people do more?” Holly asked, feeling her anger rising. As Cedric nodded reluctantly,
she clenched her fists. “You have got to be kidding me. So what, the Wizarding World is on the
verge of collapse because there aren’t enough people to keep it going? How many magical people
are there?”

“I… don’t really know the exact numbers. I’m not sure anyone has fully counted,” he admitted
rubbing the back of his neck.

“So people don’t actually know if that’s true or not?” Holly asked hotly “They just assume it is because, what? That’s what they were told growing up? Fuck that! I’m going to go out with whoever I like, and I will marry whoever I want, and no stupid, homophobic rumour is going to stop me!”

As she panted angrily, Cedric carefully moved towards her, and placed his hands on her shoulders. “I’m sorry,” he said mournfully.

Holly huffed. “It’s not your fault,” she said, shaking her head. “I just… I really thought the Wizarding World wouldn’t have this problem.” Cedric smiled sadly at her. She shook her head again, running through Occlumency once more to calm herself. “Anyway, I’ll deal with that later. There was something else I needed to ask you about.”

“Oh?” Cedric asked, sounding slightly worried.

“Nothing too bad,” she assured him. “Can you teach me how to dance?”

Holly returned to the Common Room smiling. Despite everything that had happened today, at least Cedric had agreed to help her not make a complete fool of herself at the ball. The revelation of homophobia in the magical world still grated at her, but she knew that was something that would take time to address. Her lessons on queer history had shown her that progress took time and dedication. Regardless, she planned to change it.

As she entered the Common Room, she saw Ron sitting ashen faced in the corner, with Ginny comforting him, and hurried to join them. It turned out, Ron had asked Fleur Delacour to the ball. She had been flirting with Cedric, and Ron, already finding her beautiful, had felt his rudimentary Occlumency shatter as a burning need to ask her took over. He had recovered almost immediately, but fled thereafter.

Holly felt a sneer pulling at her lips. “She’s part Veela. You were right – her grandmother was one,” she told him soothingly. “It wasn’t your fault, I bet you just walked past when she was turning on the old charm for Cedric and got a blast of it – but she was wasting her time, he’s going with Cho Chang.” She smirked with vicious satisfaction. At least Delacour hadn’t been able to get her claw into Cedric. Silver linings and all.

Realising Ron and Ginny were looking at her curiously, she said, “I… sort of asked both of them just now.”

“What, together?” Ginny asked incredulously.

“No! Merlin, no. I asked Cho first and then Cedric.”

“But if they’re going together, why would you ask him?” Ron asked, baffled. At least he was getting some colour back in his face.

“Well, Cho didn’t tell me they were going together. She just told me I should ask a boy, because apparently gay people aren’t allowed to exist,” Holly said with a scowl.

Before the Weasleys could do more than gape, the portrait opened and Hermione joined them.

“Why weren’t you two at dinner?” she asked. “I saw you grab Cedric, Holly, but you didn’t come back. And where were you?” She looked at Ron expectantly. Holly, Ron and Ginny filled her in on
the romantic drama so far. Hermione launched into a gratifying rant on their behalf.

‘- and since I haven’t encounter any examples of racism or sexism – outside of blood purism, of course – I assumed the Wizarding World was better than the Muggle World in this regard. I suppose that shows the error of making assumptions like that. And what Delacour did to you was completely unethical, Ron! Especially since you felt it on your Occlumency, that makes it some type of mind based magic, which she’s using to manipulate people! Absolutely unconscionable!’

Once she wound down, Ron cleared his throat. “Right, but that doesn’t really help us with finding dates.” Holly and Ginny laughed as Hermione rolled her eyes with a frustrated huff. A thoughtful look crossed Ron’s face as he asked, “Hey Hermione, I know you told Neville you already had a date, but I was wondering, do you actually?”

Hermione gave him a withering look. “Yes, I have a date. Just because it’s taken you three years to notice, Ron, doesn’t mean no one else has spotted I’m a girl!”

“I noticed you’re a girl,” Ron objected defensively. “I just hoped that if you hadn’t found someone yet, we could go together. As friends, of course,” he added quickly, ears turning red. When Hermione stared at him with raised eyebrows, he hunched in embarrassment. “Look, forget it. I’ll just go stag. Ginny, you can go with Holly, since she needs to—”

Ginny turned scarlet, looking regretful as she said, “I can’t. I’m going with – with Neville. He asked me when Hermione said no, and I thought… well… I’m not going to be able to go otherwise, I’m not in fourth year.” With a dejected look, she stood. “I think I’ll go and have dinner.” With that she hurried from the Common Room.

“What’s got into her?” Ron asked, looking after his sister in concern.

“She’s just got some disappointment to work though,” Hermione said. “Now, Ron, I think there’s another girl who you’ve forgotten about. She’s very pretty and I know you get along wonderfully.”

Ron perked up immediately. “Who?”

Hermione nodded pointedly towards Holly. Holly froze as Ron looked between her and Hermione, stammering. “I- I mean she- but we- but we’re friends. It’d be weird,” He objected weakly.

“You just asked me,” Hermione pointed out with raised eyebrows. “Are we not friends, Ronald?”

With a nervous look, Ron backpedalled. “No, no, of course we’re friends. You’re right, Holly and I should definitely go together.”

“Ron,” Hermione said in a deceptively calm tone that had Ron even more scared, “ask Holly properly.”

“Oh, uh…” He turned to face Holly, who looked back, feeling strangely vulnerable as their eyes met. Ron blushed to his ears as he asked, “Holly, would you go to the ball with me?”

“I’d like that very much,” Holly said in a small voice. She smiled at him, and then at Hermione. “Thank you.” Hermione simply looked smug.

After dinner the next day, Holly dragged Ron and Hermione to meet with Cedric, as both had expressed concern over their own dancing talents. Cedric didn’t even have the decency to pretend surprise. After showing the trio the steps of a simple dance, he paired the up. They started Ron dancing with Hermione while Cedric led Holly through the steps. Once she felt relatively confident
with the basics, they swapped partners. Cedric guided Hermione around, as Ron carefully avoided Holly’s toes. They continued for several hours, swapping partners and Cedric offering advice and gentle correction, until curfew approached. Holly felt far more confident and was sure that, if they practiced each night, she wouldn’t embarrass herself too much.

Before the trio could leave, Cedric asked them to wait. From his bag, he retrieved a sheet of parchment and offered it to Holly. She took it and, at Cedric’s prompting, read it aloud:

*Come seek us where our voices sound,*

We cannot sing above the ground,
And while you’re searching ponder this;
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,
An hour long you’ll have to look,
And to recover what we took,
But past an hour, the prospect’s black,
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back.*

After a moment of staring blankly at Cedric, she realised where the poem came from, and paled.

“Oh Merlin. We have to go underwater for an hour. How on Earth are we going to manage that?” She had suspected the merfolk were part of the task, but the magnitude was stunning. Hermione gasped, Ron swore and Cedric smiled reassuringly.

“I have a few ideas, but let’s not worry about it for now. The task isn’t for two months, and we’ve got the ball to look forward to. After Christmas, we’ll get stuck right into it, alright?”

Holly nodded, putting aside her worry and focusing on the ball. She was determined to enjoy herself. It was Christmas after all.

As the holidays began, and the staff added the final touches to Hogwarts’ Yule Decorations, Holly and her friends worked on their homework. They had a lot to get done, but they fell into a regular pattern. They would study in the morning, relax in the afternoons and practice dancing in the evenings. Holly quite enjoyed the routine, as the exercise had her asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow each night.

Hogwarts was more beautiful than ever, with ornate Christmas decoration everywhere: everlasting icicles, singing suits of armour, luminous holly berries and real golden owls. Even the house-elves were working harder, with rich and hearty winter meals. The only person who seemed able to find fault was Fleur Delacour.

“It is too ‘eavy, all zis ‘Ogwarts food,” she complained loudly as she left the Hall. “I will not fit into my dress robes!”

Hermione snapped, “Oooh, there’s a tragedy. She really thinks a lot of herself, that one, doesn’t she?”

“I know,” Holly agreed, glaring at the Beauxbatons champion as they moved into the Entrance Hall. She raised her voice at Delacour’s back. “It’s not like she volunteered to come here or anything.”

Delacour looked back over her shoulder, shooting a condescending glare at Holly, who returned it equally. Eventually, she scoffed, flipping her long blond hair as she turned away, Holly sneering at her retreating back.
As the trio made their way to their dancing lesson, they encountered Pigwidgeon, sitting on a bannister, twittering madly. Many people pointed and laughed at they passed him. Ron sighed and snatched up his owl, passing the letter to Holly. They ducked into an unused classroom to quickly read.

_Dear Holly,_

_Congratulations on getting past the Horntail, whoever put your name in that Goblet shouldn’t be feeling too happy right now! I’m glad the Conjunctivitus Curse worked and I was very impressed with how you improved on my suggestion._

_Don’t get complacent, though, Holly. You’ve only done one task, whoever put you in for the Tournament’s got plenty more opportunity if they’re trying to hurt you. Keep your eyes open – particularly when the people we discussed are around – and concentrate on keeping yourself out of trouble._

_Please send the date of your next Hogsmeade weekend in your next letter._

_Sirius_

Holly glowed with pride, enjoying Sirius’ approval. After their dancing lesson, which she was improving at each day, to her delight, she quickly penned a return letter to send in the morning.

Holly was startled awake early on Christmas morning by a surprise visit from Dobby, who wanted to wish her a Merry Christmas and give her a gift. Her initial shout of surprise also woke her roommates, who rolled out of bed for their presents. Feeling guilty for not buying anything for Dobby, Holly quickly searched her trunk, finding a particularly short, blue scarf. Dobby was utterly delighted to receive the gift, and gave her his own in return. He had made her a pair of mismatched, Quidditch themed socks, buying the wool from his own wages. He cried happy tears as Holly pulled them on.

Before he could leave, Holly, in a surge of warm feelings, pulled him into a hug, which set him off even more. She felt her own eyes filling with tears as she released him, much to Dobby’s horror. “Dobby has upset Holly Potter! Dobby is a bad elf!” Holly barely managed to catch him before he could slam his head against her bedside table.

“Dobby stop! It’s fine, you didn’t upset me, alright?”

Once Dobby went limp, she carefully released him. He peered up at her with wide, green eyes. “Why was Holly Potter, miss crying?”

Holly blushed, as she quietly said, “It just hit me how lucky I am to have a friend as good as you.” That set the little house-elf off crying again, and it took her and Hermione talking to him soothingly for several minutes until he recovered.

Once Dobby left to return to the Kitchens, Holly moved on to the rest of her Christmas gifts. She received a book, _Quidditch Teams of Britain and Ireland_, from Hermione, and a huge bag of Dungbombs from Ron. Sirius sent a useful penknife, with attachments to “unlock any lock and undo any knot”, which Holly quickly put in her bag. Hagrid gave her a huge box of sweets, including all her favourites. Mrs Weasley’s gift was a new jumper (pink, with white holly blossoms) and many home-made mince pies. In a small package at the very bottom she found the Dursleys’ gift – a disposable razor blade from the corner shop. She rolled her eyes and left it to the side.

When Holly and Hermione met Ron in the Common Room, he looked far more nervous than Holly expected. He was wearing her present to him, a Chudley Cannons hat, and shuffled his feet as they approached. “I’m sorry I didn’t get you something else,” he blurted out. “I just couldn’t think of
anything else to get you.”

Holly stared at him. “What are you talking about?”

“It’s, well… Dungbombs aren’t something girls usually like, are they?”

She smiled as she realised what he was worried about. “Relax, Ron. I definitely appreciate them.” When he continued looking unsure, she frowned. “You don’t need to always get me incredibly girly things. Girls can like whatever they want. Or do you think Ginny isn’t a girl because she likes Dungbombs?”

“Oh of course not,” Ron said, nervously glancing around in case his sister heard.

“Then let’s go,” Holly replied, looping her arms through her friends’ and leading them along.

After several hours of relaxation and leisure, culminating in a snowball fight, Holly and Hermione excused themselves to begin preparations. Ron goggled at the idea of needing three hours to get ready. Once they reached their dormitory, Hermione vanished into the bathroom, leaving Holly in Lavender and Parvati’s capable hands. Sally-Anne and Fay seemed amused by her worried look as the other two girls swept her up.

The next hours were a whirl of cosmetics and fabric, as the girls collaborated on her hairstyle and makeup. She sat with Parvati before her, carefully applying products to her face. Holly was pleased to realise she now recognised most of them. Behind her, Lavender hummed as she ran her wand over and through Holly’s hair. When they were finished, Holly carefully stepped into her new dress robes and put on her jewellery – the necklace, which Professor Flitwick had returned last night, the bracelet and the earrings. After stepping into her heels, she took a deep breath and stepped in front of the mirror.

She was beautiful. Her hair, bright and vibrant red, had been teased into gentle waves that framed her face and cascaded over her shoulders. Parvati’s makeup made her face look elegant and flawless, with sharp eyeliner and bronze eyeshadow emphasising her eyes. Her eyebrows were arched into delicate curves, her lips were brightened with lipstick and her cheeks glowed with a deep blush. Her necklace drew the eye to her bare throat and collarbones, sitting above the dress itself. With Rita’s suggested additions, and the flared waist of the dress, Holly suddenly looked like she had curves.

Holly stared, unable to believe the transformation she had undergone. She was broken from her stupor by Hermione’s voice behind her. “Oh my goodness! Holly you look gorgeous!” Blushing and turning to her friend, Holly felt her jaw drop. Hermione was almost unrecognisable, with her signature bushy hair now sleek and shiny, twisted into an elegant knot on the back of her head. She wore robes of periwinkle-blue, which moved airily around her.

Hermione’s bright smile dimmed as Holly continued staring at her. She shifted awkwardly, clutching at her own hands. “Do I look alright?” she asked, suddenly vulnerable.

Shaking herself, Holly smiled at her friend. “You look incredible. Just… you’re absolutely beautiful.” Hermione beamed at her. Holly glanced around, noticing her roommates were almost ready as well. Parvati’s robes were incredibly pink and frilly, and her hair was being braided with gold ribbon by Lavender, while she picked out matching bracelets. Lavender looked very pretty as well, with striking robes of gold that stood out dramatically against her dark skin. Sally-Anne wore beautiful pearl robes that shimmered rainbow colours with every move as she help Fay tie a fancy bow around her robes, so deep purple they almost seemed black.
Once everyone was ready, the girls went down to the Common Room. Fay and Sally-Anne, who hadn’t secured dates, waved goodbye and left for the ball. Holly, Parvati and Lavender waited for their dates. When Hermione waited with them, Hermione smiled mischievously. “I’ll walk down with everyone. My date can wait for a few extra minutes.”

Lavender and Parvati’s dates, Seamus and Dean – both looking very pleased – arrived a few minutes later. With bright smiles the girls practically floated along on their partners’ arms. Just as Holly was about to go up and fetch him, Ron stepped out, tugging at the sleeves of his bottle green dress robes. She thought he looked rather fetching. He glanced around as he crossed the room, until his eyes fell on the pair. His jaw fell open at the sight of them.

Hermione’s hand pressed into the small of Holly’s back, guiding her over to where Ron had stopped moving. Holly bit her lip as Ron continued staring. She gave him a nervous smile. “Do I look alright?”

That seemed to shake Ron out of his stupor, as he swallowed and nodded. “You- you look incredible,” he said, voice sounding slightly strangled. “Both of you are just, so beautiful.” Holly blushed and Hermione beamed. Ron tentatively offered Holly his arm. She took it, and the three made their way down to the Entrance Hall.

As eight o’clock approached, Ron glanced at Hermione. “Shouldn’t you find your date?”

“She’s not here yet,” she said calmly. His reply was cut off as Delacour walked past, in beautiful silver-grey satin robes, accompanied by Ravenclaw Quidditch captain, Roger Davies. Ron grimaced in embarrassment, while Holly sneered at the blonde.

A group of Slytherins came up from the dungeons, Malfoy leading with Pansy Parkinson attached to his arm. They looked around and caught sight of Ron with a sneer, before noticing Holly and Hermione beside him. Pansy gaped, and Malfoy looked him he had swallowed something sour.

The oak front doors opened then, and Professor Karkaroff led the Durmstrang students through. Krum followed directly behind him with a sour expression as his eyes swept the hall. His gaze locked on Holly and his expression brightened, much to Holly’s confusion.

“I’ll see you later tonight,” Hermione said, and began moving through the crowd. As she reached Krum, he held his arm out for her to take, and Holly realised he had been looking at Hermione. Ron stared in disbelief, as Hermione beamed and took Krum’s arm. “Her date is Krum,” he said faintly. “Oh Merlin.”

Before he could say anything else, Professor McGonagall called the champions to wait beside the doors. As the other students filed in to the Great Hall, Cedric turned and smiled at Holly. “How are you both tonight?”

“Brilliant,” Holly said, giving him a bright smile back, and polite smile to Cho.

“Glad to see you found an appropriate partner,” Cho said, glancing at Ron. Cedric’s smile became slightly fixed. As Holly gritted her teeth and took a breath to snap back, Ron pulled her away. Hermione quickly stepped forward, bringing Krum closer.

“Viktor, these are my friends, Holly Potter and Ron Weasley,” she said. Krum looked them over consideringly, before nodding politely.

“Hermy-own has told me many things about you both,” he said gruffly. “Ve will haff a talk soon, yes.” Before Holly could do more than nod in reply, Professor McGonagall returned to lead the
champions into the Hall. They walked through the applauding crowd, to take their seats at the judges’ table.

Dumbledore beamed and Madam Maxime clapped politely, but Karkaroff and Bagman were glaring venomously at Hermione and Holly respectively. To Holly’s surprise, Mr Crouch was absent, replaced by Percy Weasley, who was staring at Ron and Holly with a strange expression. As they approached, he pulled out the chair beside him with pointedly. Getting the hint, she and Ron moved to sit beside him.

“So, how long has this been going on?” he asked with raised eyebrows.

“What?” Holly asked. She glanced at Ron, who shrugged and shot his brother a curious look.

“How long have you two been together?” Percy asked impatiently. “It can’t have been too long, or one of the others would have written to Mother about it.”

As they realised what Percy was talking about, Holly blushed and Ron sputtered, “We’re not— we haven’t— we’re just friends! And why are you even here?”

Puffing up importantly, Percy said, “I’ve been promoted. I’m now Mr Crouch’s personal assistant, and I’m here representing him.” Crouch was sick from overwork and stress, Percy told them, as he bragged about being trusted enough for the position.

“Yeah, but has he stopped calling you Weatherby yet?” Ron asked. Percy scowled and huffed, ignoring his brother for the rest of the meal. As people ordered their meals, to appear magically before them, the champions talked with their partners. Krum regaled Hermione with descriptions of Durmstrang, to Karkaroff’s displeasure. Fleur Delacour was also talking about her school, practically ranting about how much better Beauxbatons was in comparison to Hogwarts. Holly forced herself to look away before she said anything scathing.

Once everyone had eaten, Dumbledore cleared the tables and chairs and conjured a stage for the Weird Sisters to play on. She started as the other champions stood with their partners. She pulled Ron up to join them, making their way onto the dance floor. There was a moment of panic, as the music began playing and she struggled to remember the steps. Then Ron took her hand and waist and they began moving, and then she knew what she was doing.

As they revolved around the dance floor, Holly and Ron exchanged a look, grinning at how ridiculous it seemed. They weren’t great, but they weren’t stepping on each other’s feet, which she counted as a victory. Glancing around, she saw Cedric grin at her, and give an approving nod. The dancing lessons had clearly been good for Hermione as well, as she seemed to glide along in Krum’s arms. After a short time, other couples joined the dance floor – Ginny with Neville occasionally treading on her toes, Dumbledore dwarfed by Madam Maxime, even Moody with a nervous Professor Sinistra.

When the final note of the song faded, applause rang out once more, before a faster, upbeat song began. Without even thinking, Holly and Ron shifted into the simple foxtrot Cedric had taught them, spinning around the floor. Holly couldn’t keep back a joyful laugh, swept up in the music and adrenaline. As that song came to an end, and they clapped, a hand touched her shoulder. She turned to find Krum looking awkward and Hermione looking amused.

“May I haff the next dance?” he asked, looking between Holly and Ron. They shared a glance, Ron giving a shrug.

“Um, sure,” she said, taking the offered hand as the next song started. Hermione slipped past her
with a smile, and claimed Ron, pulling him away to dance with her.

Holly and Krum fell into time with the music. Despite his duck-footed walk, the Durmstrang champion danced well, leading Holly confidently around the dance floor.

“I haff been vanting to speak with you for some time,” Krum said suddenly. He stared at her intensely.

“What about?” Holly asked, unsure what the famous Viktor Krum wanted from her.

“I vos vondering vot you meant at the Vorld Cup. You made it sound as if your Minister vos behind something…”

“Oh!” Holly said, remembering Krum trying to ask her about it earlier. “Yes, he’s covering up something awful. My godfather, Sirius Black was framed for a crime and sent to Azkaban without trial thirteen years ago.” Krum stumbled before catching himself and gaping at her.

“H- how do you know this?” he asked, voice thick with horror.

“He broke out last year, and showed us the person who framed him, Peter Pettigrew. Unfortunately, he got away and Fudge wouldn’t believe any of us. He would have had Sirius Kissed if w- he hadn’t escaped.”

They continued to revolve around the dance floor, Krum looking stunned. After a long pause, he shook himself. A determined expression crossed his face. “Vot are you doing about it?” he asked.

“Well, I have been talking to Rita Skeeter about it. I’m hoping she’ll be able to get the word out, and if enough people are on our side, Fudge will have to give in. Oh, and I’ve been telling people about it myself.” She shrugged. “I don’t really know what else I can do to help him at this point.”

Krum nodded solemnly. “It is good of you to do this for him. If there is anything you need my help for, just ask.” As Holly stared at him in surprise, he smiled grimly. “We haff heard of Azkaban. No one should be sent there, definitely not an innocent.”

“Thank you, Mister Krum,” Holly said, beaming up at him.

He grimaced at that. “Call me Viktor,” he pleaded.

Shortly after, the song ended, and the pair made their way to a table of drinks at the side of the room. As they sat, Holly passed a Butterbeer to Viktor and opened one for herself. A moment later, Ron and Hermione stumbled out of the crowd. Seeing the pink on their faces, Holly handed her Butterbeer to Hermione and grabbed a few more. Hermione moved to sit beside Viktor, and Ron flopped next to Holly.

Struck by an idea, Holly raised her bottle towards the others. “To excellent friends, old and new.” Viktor gave a bemused smile as he gently clanked his bottle against the trio’s.

“Ah, yes, excellent. That’s exactly the thing we like to see.” The group looked up to see Percy bustling over to them. Despite his pompous demeanour, he seemed rather ruffled around the edges. “Wonderful to see you all getting along. That’s the point, you know – international magical co-operation!” He gave Holly a pointed look, before glancing at Viktor.

“Oh right,” Holly said, gesturing from the other champion to Percy. “Viktor, this is Percy Weasley, Ron’s brother.” Viktor glanced between Ron and Percy before nodding, then stood and offered his hand to Percy.
After an expectant pause, Percy shot Holly a mildly frustrated look. “I am also Mr Crouch’s personal assistant,” he said importantly as he shook Viktor’s hand. “I’ll be acting in his stead to judge the tasks.”

“A pleasure,” Viktor said, retaking his seat.

Before Percy could say anything else, a figure slipped from the crowd and latched onto his arm. He stiffened, and Holly stared as she realised it was Rita. “There you are, Percy darling. I’d wondered where you’d got to.” She smiled as she caught sight of Holly and her friends. “Oh, hello Ron, Hermione, Holly dearest, lovely to see you all. Percy was just telling me all about his work with dear old Barty.”

“Has he told you about his promotion yet?” Ron asked, grinning at how uncomfortable his brother looked.

Rita’s face lit up. “No, he didn’t. Oh, you’ll have to tell me all about it!” With that, she dragged Percy away. He looked back at them with a resigned expression as they vanished into the crowds once more. Holly and her friends exchanged confused glances before bursting into laughter. Viktor sat watching them with a bemused smile.

Once they caught their breath, Ron turned to Viktor. “I saw you at the World Cup,” he said. “That was some of the best flying I’ve ever seen.” Holly nodded in agreement.

Viktor shrugged awkwardly. “I haff many years of practice,” he said modestly. “Far more than you, I think.” He pointed at Holly. “You fly very vell too. I vos votching you face the dragon. How long haff you been flying?”

Blushing at such praise from Viktor Krum of all people, Holly replied, “About three years now. I made the team during my… first… year…” She trailed when she noticed Viktor gaping at her.

“Perhaps I am misunderstanding,” he said slowly. “You haff been playing Quidditch for three years. How long haff you been flying?”

Holly glanced at her friends nervously. “Um, just three years.” As Viktor gaped at her, she added, “I was given the spot on my team after my first flying lesson.”

He looked around at Ron and Hermione in disbelief. Holly’s friends nodded in confirmation. “It’s true,” Hermione hold him. “Holly was the youngest seeker in a century.”

Viktor shook his head and then pointed firmly at Holly. “Ve must play, you and I.”

“Oh, wow, okay,” Holly said, stunned and flattered that Viktor thought she was up to the challenge.

As the current song ended, a pair of figures slipped from the crowd and moved to join the group. Holly looked up to see Cedric and Cho standing over them. “Mind if we join you?” Cedric asked with a tired smile.

“Oh, of course,” Holly replied. Once the pair pulled chairs over, she said, “We were just talking about Quidditch.” The Seeker couple immediately perked up, and Cedric turned to compliment Viktor on his flying. As they fell into conversation, found her gaze being drawn to Cho, and her memory wandered back to their last conversation.

Feeling her anger rising once more, Holly turned away. Her eyes fell on Hermione, to find her looking increasingly bored by the in-depth Quidditch discussion. Suddenly, an idea struck her, and
she stood.

“Hermione, would you like to dance with me?” she asked, holding out her hand. Hermione blinked at her before glancing around. Ron smirked, Cedric grinned and Viktor raised his eyebrows. Cho looked as if someone had shoved a lemon in her mouth. As Hermione hesitated, Holly added, “Please?”

With a warm smile, Hermione took her hand and joined her. “I’d love to.” Without a backward glance, the pair took to the dance floor. In short order, they were spinning in each other’s arms. Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Making a point, are we Holly?”

Holly blushed and nodded. “I hope that’s alright?” she asked shyly.

“It’s fine,” Hermione said with a laugh. “I understand. When you learn about something unjust, you have to do something about it, even if it’s something small.”

“Like you with the house elves,” Holly said whispered in realisation. Hermione nodded. A guilty weight welled up in Holly’s stomach. “I’m sorry Ron and I haven’t been helping with SPEW,” she said. “I guess we haven’t been thinking about how important it is to you.”

“Don’t worry about it Holly,” Hermione said kindly. “Although, if you do want to help…”

Holly considered it, biting her lip in thought. “… I think you’re going about it the wrong way,” she said at last. “It’s a laudable goal, but you can’t make them want freedom or pay. I think you should talk to them, explain to them why this is so important to you. As far as they’re concerned, you’re coming into their home and telling them they should give up everything they know and value.”

Hermione frowned in thought as she spun Holly, whose emerald dress flared wide. “But isn’t it more important for them to be freed?”

“I don’t know,” Holly said with a shrug. “For elves like Dobby, sure. But Winky… even if Mr Crouch was a bad person, losing him has messed her up. You can’t force them to accept what they don’t want. Talk to them. Teach them. Who knows,” she grinned, “they might even teach you something back.”

As the song finished, and the pair slowly separated, a hand fell on Holly’s shoulder. With a sense of déjà vu, she turned, to see a determined Ginny and a terrified Neville. “Dance with me,” Ginny demanded, setting her jaw, before elbowing Neville.

With a wince, Neville looked at Hermione. “Would you please dance with me?” he asked quietly. Hermione shot Ginny a knowing look, before moving to stand with Neville.

“Of course,” she told him. “You two have fun,” she added to Ginny and Holly as she pulled Neville away.

Holly turned back to Ginny, who blushed slightly as she took her hand. “Shall you lead, or I?”

“I only know the steps to follow,” Ginny said. With a shrug, Holly shifted into the lead stance, guiding the redhead across the dance floor. Despite her earlier confidence, Ginny suddenly seemed flustered. After a long moment, she took a deep breath. “I’m sorry I couldn’t come as your date,” she said. “I didn’t know you’d end up stuck with Ron.”

Holly blinked at her, before snorting. “Oh, he’s not that bad. He even managed to not step on my toes,” she grinned teasingly. Ginny grimaced and poked her tongue. “Really though, are you
having a nice night?” Holly asked.

Nodding enthusiastically, Ginny said, “Tonight has been incredible. I’m glad Neville asked me.” She winced dramatically. “Even if my feet will hate me in the morning.” Holly laughed as she sent Ginny into a twirl, her light green robes and flaming hair billowing around her. Ginny was laughing as she was pulled back to Holly.

Eventually, the music faded once more. Holly, hearing an echo of Moody in her ear, spun quickly, to find Ron reaching for her shoulder. He froze, before shaking his head. “It’s getting late,” he said. “This looks like it will be the last song. Viktor’s gone to find Hermione. He and Cedric decided the champions and their partners should close the dancing as well.”

Holly shot an apologetic look at the pouting Ginny. “Sorry, Ginny, I guess that’s our dance done. Thank you for asking me. It was fun.” Ginny’s pout transformed into a wry smile.

“You’re very welcome. So did I. Now, have fun, and watch your toes,” she stage whispered, before poking her tongue at Ron. He rolled his eyes at her as she vanished through the crowd.

“Brat,” he said fondly, as he took Holly’s hand and lead her in the final dance.

Holly simply laughed, “You Weasleys are the best!”

“We’re just a normal family,” Ron shrugged, though his ears turned pink.

“You’re incredible!” Holly exclaimed. “I’ve never really thanked you for everything you’ve done for me. You’ve been by my side this whole time, and risked your life countless times.” She grinned as Ron reddened and sputtered. “Thank you.” Carefully, Holly stepped in closer, pulling him into a gentle embrace as they slowly revolved. A moment later, his arms encircled her.

“You don’t need to thank me for all that,” Ron mumbled from somewhere near her ear. “You’re my best friend. I’d do all of it again in a heartbeat. I’d do anything for you, if you asked.”

Holly buried her face in the shoulder of his robes as she felt joyful tears form in her eyes. Ron pulled her closer, continuing to gently guide their steps.

Finally, the song ended. Holly and Ron separated, joining the crowd in a final wave of applause for the Weird Sisters, before making their way from the Hall. They waved to Viktor and Cedric as they passed them, reclaiming Hermione in the process. The trio made their way to the Common Room in tired but satisfied silence. Reaching the dormitory, Holly quickly changed and collapsed on her bed. She was asleep before her head hit the pillow.
After a Boxing Day of lazy relaxation, the trio met with Cedric to prepare for the Second Task. When they arrived, they were greeted by a large blackboard, which was covered in notes, and Cedric’s broad smile.

“Lovely to see the three of you. How did you enjoy the Ball?”

“It was amazing!” Holly beamed. “I never thought I could have a night like that.”

“Yes, it was wonderful,” Hermione agreed. Ron simply shrugged, but was unable to keep a small smile from his face.

“I’m glad you had fun,” Cedric said, before breaking into a grin. “I thought you should know there are some rumours going around.” The trio exchanged exasperated looks. “The biggest one is that you, Holly, stole half the girls away from their dates. Of course no-one can say exactly who they were, aside from Ginny, and Hermione here.”

Holly hid her face in her hands as her face heated up. She couldn’t keep from smiling as Ron and Hermione smothered their laughter. Shaking her head and sighing, she asked, “What are the other rumours?”

Cedric’s grin somehow grew wider, reminding Holly of the Twins. “Well, people are saying that during the final dance, you and Ron got rather close, so now they’re discussing whether the two of you are an item.”

Holly’s jaw dropped. She looked around at Ron, who was staring at Cedric in shock. The silence was suddenly broken by a choking sound, as Hermione doubled over in laughter. Holly crossed her arms with a huff and pouted at her. Cedric’s deep laugh joined, and she felt a smile creep onto her face. Ron shook his head before helping Hermione to her feet.

“Any other delightful rumours to share?” he asked acerbically.

“No,” Cedric chuckled, “that’s all of it.”

“Well then, I suppose we should get to work,” Holly said pointedly.

Nodding soberly, Cedric gestured at the blackboard. “I hope you don’t mind me starting without you. I’ve recorded the clue, and what I know about the lake.” Holly glanced at the board, quickly reading over the ominous poem, as well as Cedric’s notes from it. He had broken down the dramatic language into what they actually knew: They had a one hour time limit to retrieve something important to them from the Merfolk.

On the other half of the board, he was listing challenges the lake might provide, and offering solutions. ‘Can’t breathe underwater’ was the first listed, paired with ‘Bubble-Head Charm’. ‘Deeper means darker’ was linked to ‘Lumos’, which, along with the Bubble-Head Charm, marked a new complication: ‘Maintaining multiple charms’. Ron and Hermione looked impressed.

“There are Grindylow and Kelpies in the lake as well,” Holly mentioned. Cedric added them to the list with a nod. Then, he turned to face the trio with a grin.
“Alright, let’s get started on the most important spell.” He tapped on ‘Bubble-Head Charm’. “It’s a tricky spell, but after the Conjunctivitis Curse and Flame-Freezing Charm, you shouldn’t have much trouble getting it.” Cedric demonstrated the wand motion and incantation, creating a magical bubble around his head. Holly was unable to stifle a giggle at his ridiculous appearance. “Now you try it,” he said, voice echoing oddly.

Holly nodded, and raised her wand.

During dinner, the night before term resumed, Holly received several important letters. The first was from the Queer Group, congratulating her for receiving her hormones, and sharing their own tales. She smiled as she pictured the group’s antics, looking forward to seeing them again. She wondered how they would react when she told them about the Ball.

The next was from Sirius.

Dear Holly,
During the next Hogsmeade weekend, come to the Three Broomsticks at two o’clock. Moony will meet you there.
Sirius.

Holly passed it to Ron and Hermione, as she opened the final letter. Her eyebrows shot up as she read it.

Holly dearest,
I thought I should let you know, you’ll be wanting to read the paper tomorrow. It’s going to be divine. Thanks for the wonderful scoop.
Best wishes,
Rita.

Her friends were just as surprised. “I suppose that means the article about Sirius is about to be printed,” Hermione said softly.

“Yeah,” Holly nodded. “Hopefully it will get people on our side.”

“I’m sure they will,” Ron said bracingly. “People always believe what’s in the paper.”

The next morning, the trio hurried down to breakfast, in the hopes of borrowing a copy of the Daily Prophet. They waited impatiently throughout the meal, until finally, with a loud whoosh of wings, the mail arrived. Holly barely paid attention to her food, watching for anyone with a paper nearby.

A few seats down, a Prefect sipped on pumpkin juice while unfolding her newspaper. A moment later, she choked, spitting her drink everywhere. Exclamations of shock echoed from around the Hall, including the Head Table. Holly looked up to see Professor McGonagall openly gaping at her paper.

There were several tense minutes, punctuated by hushed whispers, during which the papers were passed around. Finally, Ron managed to grab a copy, which he passed to Holly, who spread it on the table between them.

FUDGING THE TRUTH! INNOCENTS IN AZKABAN!

Sirius Black is a figure of fear in the Magical World; working as You-Know-Who’s right hand, committing mass murder, and most recently, escaping the inescapable Azkaban. However,
shockingly, recent evidence unearthed by the Daily Prophet reveals that he may be innocent of all charges.

Holly Potter, The-Girl-Who-Lived, claims to have seen Peter Pettigrew, alive and well, despite supposedly being slaughtered 14 years ago. Further, she revealed that it was Pettigrew, not Black, who was working for Voldemort, and killed a dozen muggles. Her story, wild as it is, was supported by multiple other witnesses, including the then Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor, Remus Lupin, and the current Potions Master, Severus Snape. But, you may ask, how could this have happened? Surely Black would have explained during his trial.

Further intrepid investigation by Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent, revealed that Sirius Black never received a trial. On the authority of Bartemius Crouch, who was the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, he was sent directly to Azkaban. Horrified by this terrible miscarriage of justice, our intrepid reporter dug deeper. She discovered, to her horror, that this was not the only case. Nearly a dozen individuals reside in Azkaban, with no record of trial or conviction.

One might hope this perversion of justice could be excused as a terrible tragedy from a time of war. Sadly this is not the case. Our investigation revealed that in 1993, Rubeus Hagrid, Groundskeeper of Hogwarts, was arrested for a series of petrifications at Hogwarts. He was sent to Azkaban without trial, and later released when the real perpetrator was caught.

The public might turn to the Ministry to fix this injustice, if they did not know this truly chilling fact. Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic himself, is connected to it all. Fudge was, after all, the arresting officer in the case of Black. We can be sure that his cooperation was necessary to send the innocent man to Azkaban. Further, he personally escorted the Aurors sent to arrest Hagrid. When asked why the beloved Groundskeeper was being arrested, Fudge claimed he needed to “be seen to be doing something.”

Some might excuse this as an act of desperation, while under pressure from all sides. And yet, barely a year later, when confronted with evidence of Sirius Black’s innocence, from five credible witnesses, he refused to listen and sadistically attempted to have the man Kissed immediately.

Can we, the people of the Wizarding World, trust a Minister who would so relish seeing an innocent man suffer the worst fate imaginable, to avoid the embarrassment of being wrong? Can we trust someone who would condemn innocents to Azkaban for his own political gain? Any one of us could fall under his ruthless gaze and be whisked away to the worst place on Earth, with no trial and no justice. We cannot abide the rule of a man who has built his career on the oppression and silence of those who might stand against him.

Holly sat back in here seat, eyes wide.

“Fucking hell,” Ron said softly. Hermione was so stunned she failed to react. Giving herself a shake, Holly passed the paper along, and reached for a plate of toast.

“Rita definitely doesn’t do things in half measures.”

Despite the scandalous article, the term was still set to begin. Reluctantly, the students were ushered out of the Great Hall. The trio set off across the grounds, to Care of Magical Creatures. As they waded through the thick snow, Hermione hummed thoughtfully.

“I hope Rita’s article will help Sirius’ case,” she said.
“How could it not?” Holly asked with raised brows.

“I think it’ll convince people,” Ron said. “Rita is trusted by most people, and she put together a good argument.”

Hermione worried her lip between her teeth. “I’m just concern that it might provoke Fudge into doing something rash. Remember how he blew up and accused Snape when Sirius escaped last year? He could come after you, Holly.”

“Let him try,” Holly said grimly. “Everyone’ll be watching now.”

When the trio arrived at Hagrid’s cabin, they found their classmates huddled together, whispering about the article. Shaking her head, Holly walked over to Hagrid, friends at her heel. “How are you Hagrid? Have a nice holiday?”

Her huge friend smiled down at her. “Nice enough,” he said gruffly. “What abou’ yeh lot?”

“It was lovely,” Hermione said brightly. Holly grinned and Ron nodded agreement.

Hagrid’s black eyes crinkled into a grin. “I’m glad yeh enjoyed yourselves. Now what’s this I keep hearin’ about the two of yeh bein’ a couple?” he asked, gesturing at Holly and Ron. “Why didn’t yeh come an’ tell me?”

Hermione bit at her fist to stifle her giggles as Holly and Ron groaned. “We’re not dating,” Holly said in exasperation. “We just went to the ball as friends.”

“I know, I’m only teasin’,” Hagrid said, before patting her on the shoulder. “Though I think yeh would be quite the couple if yeh were.” Holly and Ron blushed and stammered, and Hermione completely failed to hide her laughter. Hagrid turned to the rest of the class and called, “Alright yeh lot, tha’s enough chatter. This way now.”

With that, he strode off around the Beauxbaton horses’ paddock, leaving the class hurrying in his wake. They approached the edge of the forest, to see a beautiful unicorn tethered to a tree. A loud, “Oooooooooh!” echoed from many of the girls in the group. Holly barely refrained from joining them.

“Righ’, boys keep back fer now,” Hagrid said as they reached the edge of paddock. “Unicorns avoid people, but they prefer women. Approach slowly now girls. Yeh gotta be respectful. Very noble unicorns are, and very proud too.”

Holly hesitated for a moment, unsure how the unicorn would react to her. The stairs to her dormitory had recognised her as a girl, but that was an enchantment. Would a living creature see her in the same light?

Before she could get herself completely wound up, a large hand pressed against her back and pushed her forward. She stumbled half a dozen steps before catching her balance. Hagrid muttered apologies as he continued ushering her forward.

The unicorn tossed its head as the girls gathered around it. “Easy there, girl,” Hagrid soothed. “Unicorns avoid people, but they prefer women. Approach slowly now girls. Yeh gotta be respectful. Very noble unicorns are, and very proud too.”

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The unicorn tossed its head as the girls gathered around it. “Easy there, girl,” Hagrid soothed. “Unicorns are very powerful magical creatures. Yeh can use the horn in potions, and the hair for wands. Their biggest skill is their speed. Unicorns can outrun near anythin’. Now, this girl’s been around people more than others, so why don’t we try givin’ her a pat. Holly, go up to her, nice and slow, and let her have a smell of yer hand.”

Taking a deep breath, Holly slowly approached the pure white mare, hand outstretched. The
unicorn eyed her as she neared, but didn’t pull away. Nostrils flared as it smelled her, and then
pushed its snout into her palm. She gasped at the soft feel of its hair, marvelling at the warmth it
radiated.

After a minute of stroking the beautiful creature, she stepped back, allowing Hermione to carefully
replace her. She slipped over to where Hagrid was watching proudly. “That was amazing. Thank
you,” she said quietly, before impulsively hugging him. Pulling back she asked, “I do want to
know, what happened to the Skrewts? Did they all…?”

“No, they’re all fine. Professor Dumbledore came down ter talk ter me during the holidays, asked
if he could borrow them for the, uh…” he trailed off, glancing at Holly. “Nevermind wha’ for. The
unicorns were his idea actually. ‘Add some variety to the curriculum’ he said. Beautiful creatures
unicorns. Not as interesting as the Skrewts, but still beautiful.”

Holly hid a smile.

The next fortnight rushed past, and suddenly they were heading down for the first Hogsmeade
weekend of term. Holly made a quick stop at the Post Office, sending her reply to the Queer
Group, detailing the events of and up to the Yule Ball, and the distress of experiencing unexpected
homophobia.

The trio spent a few hours roaming the village, wandering into any store that interested them.
Eventually, they took refuge in the Three Broomsticks for a late lunch, where Lupin brought out
their meals with a wry smile. As they ate, they noticed Bagman sitting in the corner, arguing with
several angry looking goblins. After a short, heated discussion, Bagman excused himself and
practically fled the inn, with the goblins hot on his heel.

A minute later, Rita Skeeter entered, with bright yellow robes and vivid pink nails, and
accompanied by her photographer. After buying drinks, the pair moved through the press of bodies
towards a table near the trio. Her voice sounded furious over the babble of the crowded inn. “How
dare he speak to me like that?! Who does he think he is?! Perhaps we should do some digging on
him now, hmmm?”

Holly exchanged baffled looks with her friends, before calling, “Are you alright, Rita?”

Rita looked up in surprise, before breaking into a broad grin. “Holly, darling! And Ronald,
Hermione! So lovely to see you! I’ve been hoping to bump into you. Did you enjoy my article?
Absolutely incendiary if I do say so myself.”

“It was certainly… nice to see the truth getting out,” Holly replied diplomatically, shooting Ron a
glare as he snorted quietly.

“What were you saying before?” Hermione asked quickly. “Did someone insult you outside?”

Rita huffed, “That puffed up idiot Bagman called my work a load of drivel. He also passed on a
message. It seems the Minister was displeased with what I wrote about him, and has barred me
from the Tournament.”

The trio gaped at her. “He can’t do that!” Ron said indignantly. “Can he?”

“Apparently he can,” Rita said drily.

“That’s terrible!” Hermione said. “What are you going to do?”
Rita grinned at them. “Oh don’t worry dears. A silly little ministerial order isn’t enough to stop me from getting to a good story.”

Holly’s brows furrowed. “But if you’ve been banned, how will you-?”

“Oh uh,” Rita wagged a finger at her, “that would be telling. Now, I’ll leave you three to enjoy your afternoon of freedom. And I’ll be seeing you soon.” With a wink, she waltzed away, photographer following doggedly behind.

The trio exchanged a long look. “Is it bad that she terrifies me sometimes?” Ron asked.

“At least she’s on our side,” Holly said.

“For now,” Hermione added darkly.

When three o’clock arrived, Lupin reappeared at their table. “Ready to go?” he asked tiredly. Holly jumped to her feet, eager to know what Sirius had organised.

“All ready,” she said. Ron hurriedly sculled his half full Butterbeer, before hiccuping and scowling. Lupin chuckled, and ushered them from the inn. He led them along the streets of Hogsmeade, before turning to enter a tall building. They climbed a set of stairs to the second floor and walked down a hall until they reached a door numbered 27. A tap of Lupin’s wand unlocked the door, and he bowed them in.

They moved through a short hall, past a battered looking coat rack, into what was appeared to be a combination of living and dining rooms. A waist high counter ran along one side of the room, with a small kitchen area visible on the other side. A large table filled the space, with a worn couch to the side. A large black dog, which had been draped across the couch, perked up as they entered.

Before Holly could react, a hex flashed over her shoulder and Padfoot leapt into the air with a yelp.

“How many times do I need to tell you, dogs aren’t allowed on the couch,” Lupin reprimanded. He turned and closed the door, before waving his wand and muttering spells. The instant he finished, the dog blurred and Sirius stood before them.

“It’s wonderful to see you Holly,” he said, reaching out and pulling her into a hug, which she warmly returned. “You’re looking wonderful. And you both as well, Ron, Hermione.” He beamed, embracing them as well. “I have to thank you all for making the article this morning happen. It’s absolutely brilliant! I’ll bet Fudge was furious.” He gave a loud bark of laughter.

Holly’s face heated up, and she tried to shrug casually. “I just saw an opportunity to get your story out.”

“It’s certainly putting pressure on the Ministry to investigate properly,” Lupin said, carrying a cup of tea. “It’s all over Hogsmeade, and everywhere else most likely. People are horrified, and many are questioning the Kiss on sight order. If enough people stand up, Sirius might even have the chance for a fair trial.” Noticing the trio standing rather awkwardly, he waved them to the couch.

“Please, have a seat. You’re a terrible host,” he told Sirius, who grinned.

“Thank you! You’re the host. I’m the freeloading mutt, remember?” Lupin rolled his eyes.

Once they were all seated – the trio upon the couch with Sirius and Lupin facing them on wooden chairs – talk turned serious.

“You did incredible on the First Task, Holly”, Sirius said. “Outflying a dragon, even a blind one, is no mean feat.”
“Do you know anything about the Second Task yet?” Lupin asked. They quickly filled them in on the clue from the egg, and their current plan. Sirius and Lupin looked impressed. “I’ll do some research for you,” Lupin offered. “I might be able to find defensive spells designed for use underwater.”

“Sounds like you’re well prepared,” Sirius said. “Make sure you keep practicing your Bubble-Head Charm. The last thing you want is for it to pop when you’re at the bottom of the lake.” Holly cringed at the thought.

“Now,” Lupin said, putting his cup aside, “we asked you down here to ask some questions.”

Sirius’ expression turned grim. “Such as, what you meant when you said Voldemort possessed a teacher in your First Year?”

The trio winced and exchanged glances. “Um, well…” Holly took a deep breath. “During our First Year, Dumbledore hid the Philosopher’s Stone at Hogwarts, behind a bunch of magical protections, because he knew Voldemort wanted it. Our Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Quirrel, was working for Voldemort, and let him share his body to hide in the school. At the end of the year, he tried to steal the Stone, but was stopped.”

Sirius sat gobsmacked, but Lupin’s eyes narrowed. “Stopped by Dumbledore?” he asked suspiciously. Holly cringed and shook her head.

“Uh, no,” she said nervously, “Dumbledore had gone to the Ministry. We did try to tell Professor McGonagall, but she didn’t believe us, so we had to go after him ourselves.”

Lupin sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. Sirius made a strangled sound. “Three First Years stopped Voldemort?” he asked incredulously.

“Just Holly,” Hermione corrected. “Ron sacrificed himself to get us past a giant chess set, and only one of us could get past Snape’s puzzle.”

Sirius stared at Holly in horror. “Oh Merlin, what happened? How did you get away?”

Holly shrugged with feigned nonchalance, “He needed my help to get the Stone from where Dumbledore hid it, since it was impossible for him to find. But when he grabbed me it burned him. Mum’s sacrifice meant he couldn’t touch me. So I, uhh… grabbed him and hung on as long as I could. Dumbledore got there just after that.”

She exchanged nervous looks with Ron and Hermione as the stunned adults processed her words. Lupin sighed, “I would say at least you had a safer Second Year, but according to Skeeter’s article, people were being petrified.”

“Wait, what?” Sirius said.

With a grimace, Holly blurted, “Lucius Malfoy slipped an enchanted diary containing Voldemort’s school memories into Ron’s sister’s cauldron. It possessed her throughout the year, made her open the Chamber of Secrets and use the Basilisk inside to attack people. The Diary tried to steal her life at the end, but Ron and I saved her.”

Ron snorted. “You mean you saved her, and I babysat Lockhart.”

Sirius was stunned into speechlessness again. Lupin looked horrified, but shook himself and said, “Wait, Basilisks don’t petrify, they kill.”
“No one saw its eyes directly,” Hermione explained hurriedly. “Mrs Norris saw it in a puddle, Colin through a camera, Justin through Nearly Headless Nick, and I used a mirror when I saw it.” She shuddered.

“You faced Voldemort and a Basilisk in your Second Year?” Sirius asked in a strained voice. His face was very pale. “How did you survive?!”

“Um, well, after Riddle stole my wand, Fawkes brought me the Sorting Hat and pecked out the Basilisk’s eyes so it couldn’t kill me with them. Then the Hat gave me Gryffindor’s sword and I… killed it with that.”

Sirius latched onto her hesitation. “You’re leaving something out,” he accused. Holly grimaced and squirmed in her seat.

Ron sighed, and answered, “She stabbed it in the mouth, but one of its fangs got her back. She only survived because of Fawkes crying on her.”

Sirius suddenly stood up, crossed the room and picked up Holly, who squawked in surprise. He pulled her into a tight embrace. Then, goddaughter still firmly in his arms, he returned to his seat. Holly squirmed for a moment, mortified at being treated like a child, but she had to admit, it felt nice to have someone care.

Lupin smiled at the pair before asking, “And what happened to Voldemort’s diary?”

“I stabbed it with the Basilisk’s fang,” came Holly’s muffled reply from Sirius’ shoulder. She squeaked as the embrace tightened. “I’m okay Sirius, really. I’m fine.” She could feel Sirius trembling.

“You’re not fine!” Sirius said hoarsely. “You shouldn’t have had to go through any of that! You’ve almost died three times in three years, and now you’re stuck in this Tournament! What the hell was Dumbledore thinking?!”

Holly slowly relaxed in Sirius’ grasp, as he mutter imprecations against Dumbledore. Lupin recovered his tea and reheated it with a tap of his wand, before asking Ron and Hermione about their studies. The bushy haired witch leapt into the conversation eagerly, while Ron feigned a resigned sigh.

Holly was distracted from their conversation by Sirius shifting, until he could look into her eyes. “I need you to do your best to be safe, Holly,” he said quietly, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face.

She squirmed, face burning. “Don’t worry about me-”

“Of course I’m going to worry about you!” Sirius interrupted. “I’m you’re godfather. It’s my job to worry about you, and keep you safe. I haven’t been a good one until now, I know. I messed up, Holly,” he continued over her objections. “I wasn’t there for you and I should have been and I’m so, so sorry. But I’m going to do better now. I’m going to do my best to be the godfather you deserve.”

Holly ignored the tears she felt on her face as she hugged Sirius tightly. “You’re already the best godfather I could ever have.” She relaxed as he embraced her back.

She lost track of how long they sat together, before Sirius stood, and carefully placed her on her feet. “Right,” he said, clearing his throat and wiping at his eyes, “why don’t we see about getting you keyed into this place.” He led her over to the door. He tapped the handle, muttering spells
under his breath before standing back. “Alright, just touch your wand to the handle.” She did so and he gave her a broad grin. “Now you can drop by anytime. You know, if you need to talk, or just get away.” Then he sobered. “I don’t want you sneaking out on your own, mind. Make sure you bring your friends along to watch your back. But we’ll be here if you need us for anything.”

“Only you could tell someone to sneak out responsibly,” Lupin called with sardonic weariness. “And yes, the three of you are welcome, anytime. However, it is time for the three of you to go back to Hogwarts. I’ll escort you up.”

“Oh, you don’t have to do that Professor Lupin,” Hermione said. “You’ve been working all day.”

“I insist,” Lupin said firmly.

After a final farewell embrace, Sirius returned to dog form and flopped on the couch with a canine grin at Lupin, who rolled his eyes but smiled. As they made their way through the village and up the hill towards Hogwarts, Lupin kept his hand upon Holly’s shoulder. His grip was so tight it almost hurt, and she realised that he was as worried for her as Sirius was.

When they reached the gates, she turned and firmly hugged him. “Thank you,” she said quietly.

Lupin blinked at her in surprise before smiling and returning the embrace. “Always, Holly,” he said softly. “Always.”

As February arrived, Holly continued training with Cedric. The older champion pushed her, determined to improve her performance. So far she couldn’t maintain her Bubble-Head and Light Charms – while casting other spells – for long enough. Cedric had put his foot down.

“If you can’t keep the Bubble-Head going for two hours, at the absolute least, I’m not letting you in the water.”

“But the rhyme only says one hour.” Ron pointed out. Cedric shook his head.

“It says we have an hour to look. I expect we will need most of that time just to find whatever they’ve taken. The time doubles when we include the trip back.”

Thus, Holly turned her attention to practicing in every spare moment. She earned many strange looks as she walked through the halls with her head bubbled. Fred and George even took to testing her, flinging Stink Pellets and Dung Bombs when she least expected it. The repeated and extended use seemed to help, and she held the spell longer and longer.

The weeks marched along in a rhythm of classes and training, until the Second Task loomed before them. After classes, on the eve of the Task, Hermione and Ron were summoned by Professor McGonagall. They hadn’t returned by the time Holly reluctantly turned in for the night.

When Holly awoke, Hermione remained absent, her bed unslept in. Now extremely worried, she dressed in her swimwear – a green one-piece swimsuit Hermione had picked out for her “if you ever want to”. She threw her robes on over it, and hurried down to check on Ron. She learned from Neville, to her growing distress, that he had not returned either. After offering Neville distracted thanks, she rushed to her Head of House’s office.

Holly knocked on the door and was promptly bid to enter. She did so, hurrying to Professor McGonagall’s desk as she said, “I’m sorry to bother you Professor, but Ron and Hermione didn’t come back last night, and they’re still missing this morning and I…” Her voice trailed off as she noticed the pained expression on Professor McGonagall’s face. “What’s going on?” she asked
tensely.

“I’m really not supposed to tell you Miss Potter,” Professor McGonagall said stiffly, then sighed, “however, you are about to be told, in any event. The Second Task is for each Champion to recover a hostage from the Merfolk village at the bottom of the Lake.”

Holly stared at the Professor in horror. “You can’t be serious! The song said past an hour the thing I miss most won’t come back! And you took my friends! How could you do something like that?!?”

Professor McGonagall looked shocked. “You misunderstand, Miss Potter,” she said quickly. “The wording of the song was simply to encourage you to make haste, as the time taken is a factor for scoring. The hostages are not in any danger. Professor Dumbledore has assured their safety.”

Holly recalled her most recent conversation with Sirius and Lupin, and how angry they had been over Dumbledore’s decisions. She couldn’t help but ask, “Is that what Professor Dumbledore told Nicholas Flamel three years ago?” Then her hand flew to her mouth as she realised what she had said.

The Transfiguration Professor’s face paled and her nostrils flared. After a tense moment, she spoke softly. “I understand that you are worried about your friends, Holly, but you will not disrespect the Headmaster. Professor Dumbledore has enchanted the hostages to protect them from harm, and the Merfolk have guaranteed their safety.” She took a deep breath, before standing, and ushering Holly from the room. “We must hurry to the Task now. The sooner we get there, the sooner this will be over with.”

Holly gripped her wand tightly as she followed Professor McGonagall down to the lake. A stadium of seats had been erected across the water from the judge’s table. She was greeted by smiles from Cedric and Viktor, whom she gave distracted waves.

As the stands filled, Holly nervously disrobed, feeling incredibly self-conscious. Trying to distract herself from the watching crowd, she looked down at her swimsuit. Her breath caught as realisation struck her. Visible in the skin-tight material were the shapes of breasts sitting on her chest. They were small, but they were there and they were on her body and she had breasts. She felt her cheeks warm as a bright, happy, right feeling rushed through her.

Before she could truly enjoy the revelation, however, her eyes drifted further along her body, to where another, unwanted bulge in her swimsuit was visible. Her cheeks burned hot with shame and horror as she realised just how exposed she was. She turned away from the stands, bringing her arms down in a desperate attempt to hide.

“Holly, what’s wrong?” Cedric asked, giving her a look of concern. Krum turned towards her as well, brows furrowed. Holly shook her head, unable to voice her shame. She felt her breathing grow quick and shallow, and her panicked thoughts turned to escape.

Before she could move, a firm hand gripped her shoulder. She looked up to see Professor McGonagall, who conjured a curtain between her and the crowd. Holly’s breathing calmed slightly at being granted a measure of privacy. “What is the matter, Holly?” her Head of House asked gently.

Holly swallowed and struggled to find words. “I can’t- my- the swimsuit is too tight. I- I’m showing… down there.” She gestured down along her body, unable to address the issue more directly.

After a moment, comprehension dawned on the Professor’s face. “Not to worry, that is easily
solved.” She then tapped her wand against Holly’s hip. Holly glanced down in time to see her swimsuit ripple, and sprout a small skirt-like addition, that covered the offending area from sight.

She heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank you, Professor.”

Professor McGonagall gave a satisfied nod. “Good luck, Miss Potter. Be careful in there,” she said before moving back towards the crowd, Vanishing the curtain casually. Cedric gave Holly a cautious smile, which she returned weakly.

At that moment, Bagman approached, giving Holly a dark look. “Now that you are all here, we can get started.” He quickly moved the champions to stand along the lake edge, evenly spaced apart, before returning to the judge’s table. He pressed his wand against his throat, and his voice boomed across the water. “Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have precisely an hour to recover what has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One… two… three!”

As the echoed sounded shrilly, the champions sprang into action. With surprising synchronicity, Holly, Cedric and Delacour cast the Bubble-Head charm on themselves, while Viktor performed a more complicated wand motion. Holly didn’t wait to see what he was casting, and waded into the water. She glanced to the side to where Cedric walked beside her, and they dived into the deep together.

The pair swam alongside each other, as they had planned during their final session of practice. Ron had pointed out how invaluable having someone to watch your back would be underwater, where attacks could come from any direction. When the waters grew dark, they lit their wands. Holly glanced around constantly, wary of the many aquatic dangers in the lake.

They passed over a bed of tall weeds, which shifted ominously. Just as Holly was about to look away, a swarm of Grindylow surged up at the pair. In moments the pair was surrounded by dozens of the small, horned water demons. Their long fingers clutched at her legs, dragging her through the water. She brought her wand to bear, casting furiously. “Relashio! Relashio! Relashio!” she incanted, blasting them with jets of boiling water. The demons recoiled, and Holly kicked out, desperately trying to reach Cedric. He swam to meet her, rapidly firing spells. They pressed against each other, back to back, giving the water demons no safe angle of attack.

To Holly, it felt like an eternity of desperate spellcasting passed, before the swarm thinned and then vanished back into the weed bed. She heaved a sigh of relief and smiled at Cedric. He returned a tired grin, before gesturing for them to continue.

They continued swimming deeper into the lake, watching for signs of merpeople or their hostages. After nearly twenty minutes they heard haunting mersong, singing the clue from their eggs. The pair sped up, following the song until they encountered the merpeople village. The merpeople watched their progress through the village, pointing and whispering. In a square at the centre, they found a choir of merpeople, and the hostages, tethered to the tail of a huge merperson statue. Ron, Hermione, Cho Chang and a very young girl with silvery hair, who was probably Delacour’s sister, floated there. They were all seemingly asleep and unaffected by the water.

Holly and Cedric approached cautiously, keeping wands trained on the merpeople, who merely laughed. Once they were relatively sure of their safety, they turned their attention to the hostages. Holly hesitated, looking between her friends, while Cedric cut the weed rope binding Chang with a small knife. Realising that Hermione must be Viktor’s hostage, Holly took the knife and freed Ron. As she started cutting at Hermione’s bonds, the merpeople surged forward, dragging her back before she or Cedric could react.
“You take your own hostage,” one said in a croaky voice. “Leave the others…”

As Holly tried to free herself, Cedric swam close, and pressed his bubble against hers. “They’re right, Holly,” he said, voice echoing strangely through both bubbles. “We need to go back now.”

Despite everything, Holly felt her cheeks warm at the closeness. She shook her head stubbornly. “No way! I’m not leaving Hermione down here! Or her,” she added, gesturing at the young girl.

“Don’t worry, they’ll be fine, Holly. Viktor and Delacour will be here soon to get them. Besides, Dumbledore wouldn’t let anything happen to them,” he said with unwavering confidence.

Holly, feeling much less faith in Dumbledore’s infallibility, shook her head stubbornly. “Look Cedric, just go. I’m going to stay, and make sure everyone is okay.” Cedric looked incredibly conflicted, glancing back and forth between Holly and the surface. “It’s okay,” she pushed. “Please, go. I don’t want you to sacrifice your chance at winning this Tournament just for me. You’ve already helped me through so much. I don’t want to drag you down. Go, and win for Hogwarts.”

Cedric stared for another moment, before nodding and setting his jaw. “You are to wait for no longer than fifteen minutes. If you wait any longer to come up, your charm could burst while you’re still underwater.”

Holly hesitated, then nodded. “Fine, it’s a deal. Now go!” She pushed Cedric away, and he grabbed Chang and began swimming for the surface. Holly returned to the hostages, putting away her knife to show she didn’t intend to free the others. She peered through the water, looking for any sign of the other champions. If only she could guide them here, but the water was so dark.

Suddenly, an idea struck her, and she brandished her wand once more. She closed her eyes and remembered the feeling of rightness she had felt shortly before the Task began, when she realised her body was becoming more feminine. She let it fill her up before casting, “Expecto Patronum!”

Her tiger Patronus burst forth, radiating silvery light much farther through the lake than any simple Lumos. Holly grinned as it swam circles around her, while the merpeople gaped and pointed.

Barely a minute later, a monstrous shape appeared from the darkness. Holly nearly hexed it, before she realised it was Viktor, with a shark’s head. He waved to Holly, before swimming to Hermione and biting at her bindings. Feeling concerned for Hermione’s safety, Holly darted forward and punched him in the shoulder. When he turned to her, she handed him the knife, which he used to efficiently free Hermione. Gripping her tightly, he moved to leave, but hesitated before pointing to Holly and tilting his head questioningly. Holly shook her head and pointed at Delacour’s sister. Viktor nodded, before rapidly ascending with Hermione in tow.

Holly continued waiting, enjoying the warm glow of her Patronus. As the minutes dragged on, worry gnawed at her. Delacour should have been here by now, especially with Holly’s beacon lighting up the water. Something was wrong.

She drew the knife and the merpeople tensed. Before they could move, she brandished her wand threateningly. They stayed back, and she set to work cutting the girl free. As soon as she floated loose, Holly grabbed her and Ron under the arms, and swam for the surface. The merpeople swirled around her as she struggled with her hostages’ heavy weight. She paused a moment, turning her wand on Ron to cast a Feather-Light Charm. After repeating it on Delacour’s sister, she continued on, keeping an eye on the merpeople in case they attacked her. The sight of daylight shining down invigorated her, and she kicked with all her might, until her head breached the surface. The merpeople’s heads emerged all around her, now smiling, while Ron and the little girl came awake. The little girl looked scared and confused, while Ron spat a mouthful of water and grinned at Holly. “Wet, this isn’t it? What did you bring her for?” he asked, noticing the young girl.
Holly quickly dispelled her Bubble-Head Charm and took a deep breath of the fresh air. “Delacour didn’t turn up. I couldn’t leave her,” she said.

Ron shook his head, “Holly, you prat, you didn’t take that song thing seriously, did you? Dumbledore wouldn’t have let any of us drown!”

“They already had me fight a dragon in this Tournament,” she pointed out bluntly “And I don’t think Dumbledore is that infallible anymore.” When Ron didn’t have an answer, she grunted, “C’mon, help me with her, I don’t think she can swim very well.” They towed Delacour’s sister through the water towards the bank where the judges stood watching. Holly saw Madam Pomfrey fussing over the other champions and their hostages, wrapped in delightfully warm looking blankets. Delacour however was being held back by Madam Maxime and fighting tooth and nail to get to them.

“Gabrielle! Gabrielle! Is she alive? Is she ‘urt?”

“She’s fine!” Holly called, as a white-faced Percy Weasley splashed out to them, and dragged Ron to the bank. Dumbledore helped Holly to her feet, while Delacour broke free and rushed to hug her sister desperately.

“It was ze Grindylows… zey attacked me… oh, Gabrielle, I thought… I thought…”

Suddenly Holly was seized by Madam Pomfrey and dragged over to the others. She was wrapped tightly in a blanket and forced to drink a dose of potion that warmed her until steam literally gushed from her ears.

“Congratulations Holly!” Hermione beamed. “Although Cedric says you both got there first. Why did you wait?”

Holly grimaced. “I didn’t want to leave anyone down there, okay? I don’t care about winning, I just want to make it through this bloody Tournament without dying.”

An uncomfortable silence fell over the group. Holly irritably swat at a beetle that buzzed past her head. She turned her attention back to the lake, where Dumbledore was conversing with the Merchieftainess. “A conference before we give the marks, I think,” he said to the other judges as he straightened up.

Madam Pomfrey recovered Ron from Percy’s clutches, before brining Delacour and her sister over. Delacour was covered in cuts, with torn robes, but she refused to be treated before her sister. She turned to Holly, breathlessly saying, “You saved ‘er. Even though you ‘ate me, you kept ‘er safe.”

Holly winced. “Yeah, I…” She sighed. “Look, I’m sorry for how I’ve treated you since you got here. Every time I see you, something just rubs me the wrong way. I don’t even know what it is. But that’s no excuse for the way I’ve treated you, so I’m sorry.

Delacour’s elegant brows rose as Holly babbled. “Zen, you do not know?” Holly shook her head. “You are jealous.”

“What.” Holly blinked at her. “No, I’m not jealous I just…”

Shaking her head, Delacour said, “I ‘ave seen zis before. You are jealous.”

“I…” Holly thought back on her past interactions with Delacour. As understanding reached her, she dropped her face to her hands. “I’m so sorry,” she said. Idly she realised her dislike for Professor Burbage also stemmed from jealousy.
Delacour laughed brightly. “Meess Potter, you saved Gabrielle, I can forgive you for zis.” She rolled her eyes exaggeratedly.

Holly smiled warmly. “Call me Holly”

“Zen you must call me Fleur.”

At that moment, Bagman’s magically amplified voice echoed over the lake shore. “Ladies and gentlemen, we have reached our decision. Mer-chieftainess Murcus has told us exactly what happened at the bottom of the lake, and we have therefore decided to award marks out of fifty for each of the champions, as follows…

“Miss Fleur Delacour, though she demonstrated excellent use of the Bubble-Head Charm, was attacked by Grindylows as she approached her goal, and failed to retrieve her hostage. We award her twenty-five points.”

“I deserve zero,” Fleur said glumly, shaking her head.

“Mr Cedric Diggory, who also used the Bubble-Head Charm, was first to return with his hostage, and he returned two minutes inside the time limit of an hour. We therefore award him forty-eight points.” The Hogwarts section cheered, with the Hufflepuffs the loudest of them all.

“Mr Viktor Krum used an incomplete form of Transfiguration, which was nevertheless effective, and was second to return with his hostage. We award him forty-three points. “

“Mr Har- oof,” Bagman glared at Percy, who it seemed had accidentally elbowed his fellow judge. “Ahem… Miss Holly Potter also used the Bubble-Head Charm. She returned last, and well outside the time limit of an hour. However, the Mer-chieftainess informs us that Mist- Miss Potter was first to reach the hostages, with Mister Diggory, and that the delay in her return was due to her determination to return all hostages to safety, not merely her own. Further, she created a corporeal Patronus, which assisted Mister Krum in finding his hostage.

“Most of the judges,” he paused to glare at Karkaroff, “feel that this shows moral fibre and excellent sportsmanship, and merits full marks. However… Miss Potter’s score is forty-seven points.”

Holly gaped as she realised she was now tying for first place with Cedric, who reached over and ruffled her hair. The Hogwarts students cheered even more loudly, and Holly received congratulations from the other champions.

Bagman continued, “The third and final task will take place at dusk on the twenty-fourth of June. The champions will be notified of what is coming, precisely one month beforehand. Thank you all for your support of the champions.”

With that, Madam Pomfrey herded the champions and their hostages back to the castle. As relief rushed through her, Holly laughed to herself. Maybe she could actually survive this.

The Monday following the Second Task was, in fact, Ron’s birthday. Holly and Hermione had put their heads together to come up with an enjoyable present. When they met him in the Common Room, gifts hidden behind their backs, he eyed them with eager curiosity. “What’s all this then?” he asked.

“Happy Birthday, Ron!” they said in unison.
The redhead grinned broadly. “Thanks, girls. Now what did you get me?”

Hermione began, “Well, first we got you some of your favourites.” She held out a large bag of Honeydukes lollies, shaking her head as Ron’s eyes lit up.

“We also,” Holly continued, holding out the second gift, “got you this.”

Ron accepted the package, excitedly removing the wrapping. He looked up at them confusedly as the book inside was revealed. “Okay, I know I don’t study enough but really?” he asked sardonically.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It won’t kill you to read, Ronald,” she huffed.

“I think you’ll enjoy this one, Ron,” Holly said, turning the book so he could read the title, Spell Strategies: A Duellist’s Guide. “You always get so focused and engaged whenever we do duelling during our practice, and you give such creative and helpful suggestions. I mean, I thought you’d find this interesting, at least.” As Ron looked down at the book, Holly shifted in place, biting her lip nervously.

Finally, he looked up at her with a warm smile. “It’s great, thanks. Both of you.”

Holly grinned with relief, before looping her arm with him. “Alright, let’s get going then.”

Hermione took Ron’s other arm, as the trio went down for breakfast.

Throughout the day, something odd drew Holly’s attention. Other students of various years kept shooting her strange looks. The Slytherins especially seemed quite amused over something. Not wanting to ruin Ron’s birthday getting into arguments, she did her best to ignore them all.

After lunch, while waiting for Arithmancy to begin, Holly was approached by Terry Boot. He was followed by a resigned looking Lisa Turpin. “Are you and Ron Weasley actually dating?” Terry asked bluntly, while Lisa sighed in exasperation.

Holly shared a baffled look with Hermione. “No. What are you talking about?”

Terry shrugged. “That’s just what people have been saying for the last week.”

“Why would they say that?” Hermione asked, as Holly mouthed wordlessly.

Lisa stepped in, “Well, there’s been a few things. You went to the Yule Ball together, and he was ‘the thing you would miss most’ during the Second Task.”

“And Parvati told Padma that you were giving him a gift this morning,” Terry added. “Apparently it was very romantic.”

Holly pinched the bridge of her nose and took a deep breath. “No, we’re not dating. We’re just friends.”

“Then why-”

She spoke quickly over Terry. “Today is his birthday, that’s why we both,” she gestured to herself and Hermione, “gave him presents.”

As Terry opened his mouth, likely to ask more questions, Professor Vector arrived, immediately quelling the discussion.
That night, during dinner, Holly felt intensely aware of Ron’s presence beside her, and of the sounds of people talking around them. Every time she even looked at him, it seemed as if everyone in the hall was staring. She couldn’t help but flinch when their elbows bumped together.

Even Ron noticed the change in her behaviour, shooting her concerned looks. Eventually he asked, “Are you alright? You’ve been acting funny since you got back from Arithmancy.”

Holly exchanged a nervous look with Hermione, before gesturing for Ron to lean close. Quietly, she told him about the rumour Terry had asked about. As she spoke, he looked progressively more confused. “That doesn’t make any sense,” he said at last, shaking his head and scowling. “People will believe any ridiculous rumour.” He returned to his meal, though Holly noticed that he was flinching from contact with her as well now.

During the following week, Holly and Ron avoided getting too close to each other. Every time they were near, it was as if everyone was watching, and whispering about them. Frequently, Hermione acted as a buffer, walking or sitting between them, in the halls or during classes. After several days of watching the pair flinch away from each other, Hermione was visibly frustrated.

That Friday, during breakfast, Holly was surprised by a screech owl delivering her a letter, from Rita.

_Holly dearest,_

I believe you have a Hogsmeade weekend tomorrow. It would be delightful if you and your friends would join me for afternoon tea at the Three Broomsticks. I have some things I’d like to discuss with the three of you.

Awaiting your reply,

Rita

Holly showed the letter to Ron and Hermione, who were intrigued. She quickly wrote a reply on the back of the letter.

_That works for us. We will meet you at the Three Broomsticks at 1pm._

She handed it to the screech owl to return to Rita, before glancing over to Ron and Hermione. Holly bit her lip in thought, then with feigned nonchalance, said, “So, I have some things I need to take care of at Hogsmeade tomorrow, before we meet with Rita. The weather is miserable now, so why don’t you two stay warm in the Three Broomsticks, and I’ll meet up with you later?”

Hermione immediately narrowed her eyes at Holly in suspicion. Before she could say anything, Ron firmly said, “That sounds like a good plan. We’ll see you for the meeting with Rita.” Hermione let out an irritated huff and stalked off to class. Holly and Ron shared a confused glance, before quickly looking away.

During the final class of the day, Double Potions, Hermione was once again seated between Holly and Ron. The trio worked on their potions in an uncomfortable silence. Snape drifted around the room, looking down his nose at each potion. When he reached Holly’s cauldron, he leant down, inspecting her potion closely. “I wonder, Potter, how familiar you are with Boomslang skin,” he said, quietly enough that only Holly could hear.

Holly paused in dicing the next ingredient, looking up at Snape. “Why do you ask?” she queried carefully.

“Have you been in my private stores, Potter?” he asked, eyes boring into hers. Before she could
think to answer, she felt a strange sensation. It was as if something was being pressed against her head without touching her. She gasped as she realised it was touching her mind. Snape’s eyes widened and he leaned back with a hissed intake of breath.

“Stay behind after class, Potter,” he said, at normal volume. He stopped and stared for several seconds at Ron and Hermione, who stiffened in their seats. “Granger, Weasley, stay too.” The trio exchanged worried looks.

As they continued working distractedly on their potions, Karkaroff entered the classroom and spoke with Snape. They had a short conversation, after which he waited by Snape’s desk for the remainder of the class.

When the lesson ended, the trio waited at the back of the room, while the rest of the class filed out. In the quiet room, they clearly heard Snape hiss, “What’s so urgent?”

“This,” Karkaroff said, pulling up his left sleeve to show his inner forearm. Branded into his skin was an image of the Dark Mark that had appeared over the Quidditch World Cup. Hermione gasped, and Karkaroff’s head snapped around as he realised the trio were there. “What are you doing here?” he snarled, face twisting in rage.

“They are here because I told them to remain behind,” Snape said coldly. As Karkaroff turned to glare at him, Snape sneered, “Consider not interrupting my classes in the future.” With a growl, Karkaroff stormed from the room.

Snape’s voice cut through the ringing silence, “Come here.” The trio cautiously approached, standing before his desk as he sat facing them. He stared at them over his steepled fingers as they resisted the urge to fidget. Finally, he took a deep breath and asked, “Firstly, I suggest you forget everything you just saw. Now, how long have you been learning Occlumency?”

The trio exchange a look, then Hermione answered, “We have been practicing since August. We decided to learn after we saw you use Legilimency on Pettigrew.”

Snape closed his eyes for a long moment. “And you have, of course, been attempting to learn the subtle and dangerous art of Occlumency without any supervision.” The trio grimaced at the scorn in his voice.

“We’ve been following the instructions in a book on Occlumency I found,” Hermione volunteered.

“Did this book inform you that, to advance any further, you require a Legilimens to test your skills against?” he asked. Hermione nodded. “And I suppose you came up with the abominably moronic idea of attempting to learn Legilimency yourselves?” Hermione winced, then nodded again.

Snape pinched the bridge of his nose. “Legilimency is among of the most dangerous of the magical arts. An inexperienced Legilimens can accidentally do irreparable damage to their target. Someone learning the art must be taught by an experienced Occlumens, at the absolute minimum.” The trio exchanged horrified looks.

Straightening with a sigh, Snape glared at them. “None of you are to attempt to learn Legilimency. If I discover you have defied me, any of you who are not lobotomised will suffer consequences far more painful. Am I understood?”

The trio shared dejected looks, knowing their attempts to learn Occlumency were finished. They nodded glumly. “Good. Now, I will be testing your Occlumency shields during your Potions lessons.”
“What?” Holly blurted, staring at Snape in astonishment. Ron and Hermione looked just as amazed.

The Potions Master smirked at them. “If you are to continue, studying the art of Occlumency, it is my duty as your teacher to see that you have at least some chance of surviving the attempt.” While the trio gaped at him, he continued, “As I was saying, I will take the opportunity to test your Occlumency during your Potions lessons. It will be at random intervals, and you will not receive warning. A real Legilimency attack will rarely offer any such concessions. If your Occlumency skills do not improve to my satisfaction, I will provide you additional time to practice in detention. And I will be most displeased if your distraction impedes your Potions work.” His smirk grew wider at their horrified expressions. “You are to tell no one about this. Now, get out.” The trio fled.

Shortly after midday on Saturday, Holly parted ways with Ron and Hermione upon reaching Hogsmeade. Her first stop was the post office, where she sent another letter to the Queer Group, about the Yule Ball, finding a partner and how the night had gone. Then, she made her way through the side streets until she reached Lupin’s apartment. She hesitated for a moment, worried about intruding, but she reminded herself that she had been granted free access.

Tapping her wand against the handle to unlock it, she stepped into the entry hall. As she hung her cloak, she paused, frowning as strange sounds reached her ears. There were muffled voices, and a sound she couldn’t name. She slowly moved down the hall, looking for the source of the sound.

When she reached the living room, her eyes widened at the sight before her. Lupin was sitting up the couch, and upon his lap was Sirius, completely bare-chested. They were kissing each other passionately. Holly stood, staring at the pair, numbly noticing how Sirius’ hands were tangled in Lupin’s hair, and how Lupin clutched at Sirius’ thighs. Shaking her head, Holly cleared her throat. “Um, hi?”

The kissing pair flinched and looked around to see her. Lupin swore loudly, pushed Sirius off him, and flipped over the back of the couch. Sirius let out a loud, “Oof!” before levering himself to his feet and grinning at Holly. “Good morning, Holly,” he said casually. “How are you today?”

Before she could answer, Lupin, peeked over the edge of the couch. “Why are you here, Holly?” he asked. Then his eyes widened. “Oh Merlin, I’m late!” With that, he bolted from the room.

Sirius grabbed a seat from the table, waving for Holly to sit on the couch. As she sat, he cheerfully asked, “So, what brings you to our humble abode?”

Holly cleared her throat again, trying to ignore her Godfather’s shirtless state. “Umm, so yesterday, in Potions, Karkaroff came in to talk to Snape. Ron, Hermione and I had been asked to stay behind, so we saw him showing Snape his arm. He… it was like he’d been branded with the mark that appeared at the World Cup. Hermione said it was Voldemort’s mark. Do you know what that could mean?”

Sirius shook his head, looking grim. “I don’t know exactly what it means,” he told her, “but if someone has Voldemort’s Mark on them, it’s almost certainly a bad sign. I’ll write to Dumbledore about it, see what he knows. For now, I don’t want you to worry about this. You need to stay as far away from Karkaroff as possible. Don’t be alone with him, ever. The fact you saw that could make him even more dangerous.”

“I’ll be careful,” Holly promised solemnly. Licking her lips, she continued, “I also wanted your advice on something.” Sirius looked at her curiously. “So… after I went to the Yule Ball with Ron,
someone started this rumour that we are dating. Then he was my hostage during the Second Task, so everyone’s taking that as proof that the rumour is true. And now it feels like everything we do, someone will see it and twist it into ‘evidence’. It’s getting to the point we can barely be around each other. I don’t know what to do.”

Sirius barked a laugh. “Ah, Holly, it’s refreshing to hear you asking for help with something as normal as this. Now, my advice on this: fuck it.” Holly blinked in surprise. “Look, you’re well known in Hogwarts, which means there’s always going to be someone making up some rumour about some aspect of your life. The best thing to do is just ignore it all. Anyone who knows you will know better than to listen to the rumours, and anyone else,” he shrugged, “fuck ‘em. Their opinions are meaningless.”

Holly sat back, taking a moment to process the counsel. “But what if it’s something that makes people dislike me?”

“Do you really need every person you meet to like you?” Sirius asked sceptically.

Holly blushed and shook her head. “No, I just don’t want to be fighting an uphill battle with everyone I meet.”

Sirius leant forward, gripping her hand comfortingly. “Just be yourself. You’re a wonderful person, and anyone who gets to know you will see that. And if they can’t because of some stupid rumour, they’re not worth a second of your time, anyway.”

“Thanks, Sirius,” she said, smiling, as her blush deepened.

At that moment, Lupin rushed back into the room, looking much neater. “I need to get to work now. You two take talk for as long as you need, but Holly, when you leave, please try to avoid being seen. We don’t want anyone asking why you were alone in my apartment.” He vanished out the door before either of them could reply.

“I probably shouldn’t have distracted him, but it’s just far too fun,” Sirius said, grinning shamelessly.

Holly shook her head, unable to keep a smile from her face.

“On the topic of kissing friends,” Sirius smirked, “that’s also something you should consider trying.”

“What?” Holly asked, stunned.

“You said this rumour is affecting your friendship with Ron. But, if it were just utterly impossible, the pair of you would be laughing it off. The only reason you two would be so badly affected by it, would be if there was at least some part of you were curious.”

Holly squirmed uncomfortably in her seat. “I couldn’t date Ron,” she said eventually with a grimace. “We’ve been friends since we were eleven.”


Holly found herself blushing intensely once again. Glancing at her watch, she realised the meeting time was approaching. “Thanks for the advice, Sirius,” she said as she stood.

Sirius looked regretful as he also stood and pulled her into an embrace. “You be safe out there,
Holly.

“I’ll do my best,” she promised. “Now, how am I supposed to get out of here without being seen?”

Rolling his eyes, Sirius said, “Moony is getting paranoid in his old age. You’ll be fine, there shouldn’t see anyone on your way out.”

Holly poked her tongue at him. “Better safe than sorry. I wish I had my Invisibility Cloak, it would come in handy right about now.”

“It wouldn’t be a bad idea to carry it with you at all times,” Sirius pointed out. “It got me and James out of many close calls.”

Bidding Sirius a final goodbye, Holly slipped out of the apartment, and back to Hogsmeade. On the way to the Three Broomsticks, she took a moment to make a quick stop.

She entered the Three Broomsticks, glad to be out of the biting wind, and scanned for her friends. She found them at a table in the corner, and quickly made her way over to them. Sliding in beside Hermione, she handed them both a large block of Honeydukes chocolate. “Sorry for ditching you,” she said. “And sorry for how I’ve been acting this last week.” Ron looked confused, but gladly accepted the chocolate, while Hermione smiled gratefully.

“Thank you, Holly.”

Soon after, Rita arrived, without photographer this time. “Good, you’re here,” she said briskly. “I took the liberty of booking us a private room. It’s so hard to enjoy a meal with all this noise.” She waved at the mass of students around them. “Come along, then.” Turning, she led the confused trio upstairs, and into a private room, with a small table.

Once they were seated, and a platter of pastries had been delivered, Rita drew her wand and cast several spells at the door. Putting her wand away, she fixed Holly with a piercing look. As the silence dragged on, Holly resisted the urge to squirm. Ron broke first, asking, “Was there a reason you brought us here?”

Rita folded her arms. “I know that Sirius Black is an Animagus, and that Remus Lupin is a werewolf.”

“What?” Holly asked, freezing in place.

“We don’t know what you’re talking about,” Hermione said quickly.

Rita scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Don’t bother. I listened in on your conversation with Lupin months ago.”

“Why?” Ron asked.

“How?” Hermione asked, more insistently.

Holly squinted at Rita, trying to read her expression. “What do you want?”

Leaning forward, she said, “I’m telling you I know your secret, so that you will keep mine. If you betray me, I’ll give away your godfather and friend.” She looked at Ron. “I listened because I knew you were hiding something from me.” Then she looked at Hermione. “As for how… that is the secret to my success. It allows me to get into most places and ferret out others’ secrets.” With that, she stood up. Her form blurred and shifted, and there was suddenly a small beetle flying
before them. It hovered for several seconds, before blurring and becoming Rita once more. She took her seat before the stunned trio, with a smug smile.

Finally Holly shook herself, saying, “That’s very impressive. But I still don’t understand why you’re showing us this. Even knowing Sirius and Lupin’s secrets, you’re taking a huge risk.”

Rita reached over and pinched Holly’s cheek. “You are a smart one. I’m telling you for my safety. I need to be able to attend the Tournament without worrying about being swatted out of the air.” She glared at Holly pointedly, who blinked in confusion. With a noise of frustration, Rita added, “Just after the Second Task, you nearly hit me.”

Holly thought back, before gasping in horror. “Oh Merlin, I’m so sorry! I had no idea!”

Rita picked up a pastry and leant back in her seat. “You’re lucky you missed, or we wouldn’t be having this conversation.” Then she sighed. “But I suppose you didn’t know, so I can’t actually blame you for it. Just don’t do it again.” Looking around at the trio, she gestured to the tray of food. “Come now, eat. These are quite delicious.”

They ate in awkward silence for several long minutes. After dabbing at her lips with a napkin, Rita looked at Holly again. “Now, I was also hoping you could help me with something.”

“Yes?” Holly asked cautiously.

“I’ve been looking into Gilderoy Lockhart for an article. Since he was your teacher a few years ago, I wondered if you might have any interesting titbits to share about him.”

Ron snorted loudly. “Oh, we can tell you plenty about that fraud.” Looking delighted, Rita quickly pulled out her Quick-Quotes Quill. When she was ready, he continued, “Not only was he the worst Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher we’ve ever had, he also confessed to stealing the credit for all of his accomplishments, and Obliviating the real heroes. He tried to do the same to us, but the wand he stole was broken and backfired on him.”

As Rita took notes, Holly remembered the final fight with Lockhart, and how he had planned to leave them, and Ginny, trapped in the Chamber of Secrets. Suddenly an idea struck her. “I have a story for you that will be far more interesting than Lockhart,” she said.

“Oh?” Rita said, one brow raised. “Do tell.”

“Voldemort.” Holly ignored the others flinching- “was a half-blood, named Tom Marvolo Riddle, who attended Hogwarts about fifty years ago.” She smiled as Rita gaped.

AN: Wow, I’m so sorry this has taken so long to update. I’ve been super busy with study, and writer’s block has sucked. I don’t know how long it will take me to finish the next chapter, but I absolutely plan to finish this fic, I love writing it and I’m glad I can share it with you all! Thanks for all the support it means so much!

Also, huge thanks to my beautiful Miss Vincible, for editing and story planning. And to my Jamie, for putting up with my constant rambling.

I have made some minor edits to Chapters 7 and 14. 7 is a small additional paragraph near the end of the chapter, to fix a plot hole. 14 is just fixing an error.
The next day, the trio met with Cedric once more to continue preparing for the Third Task. They had skipped training the previous weekend, communally deciding they needed the day off. When the trio reached the training room, Cedric had yet to arrive. As Holly and Hermione went to sit down, Ron stopped them.

“I’ve got an idea. Since we don’t know what the Third Task is yet, I figure we should work on general skills. I was thinking, we haven’t done much on improving situational awareness, and that’s always going to be useful.”

“How are we supposed to practice that?” Holly asked.

Ron waved his arm at the desks and chairs. “Let’s scatter these around the room. That way, when practice duelling, you’ll need to pay extra attention to your surroundings, without being distracted from the duel itself.” When Cedric arrived, he found them rearranging the room.

Once Ron explained his idea, Cedric immediately agreed, assisting them to quickly move the furniture. For the next several hours, the four of them duelled in the room, frequently colliding with the various obstacles. Holly was left nursing bruised legs and hips, and envying Ron’s skill at using the environment to his advantage. He had consistently herded her into crowded sections, preventing her from dodging effectively. She had felt incredibly outmatched.

After the room had been straightened up, Holly grabbed Ron’s sleeve. “Go on ahead, please,” she said to Cedric and Hermione. “I need to talk with Ron about something.” Cedric hesitated, noticing the uncomfortable look on Ron’s face. Before he could say anything, Hermione grabbed his robes and dragged him from the room.

“I’ll see you in the Common Room,” she told them before pulling the door shut.

Holly turned to Ron, who now looked mildly nauseous. She couldn’t hold back a snort of laughter. “Would you relax? We’re having a private conversation. It’s not like people are seeing us holding hands.” Ron flinched, and she rolled her eyes. “This is what I want to talk to you about, okay? Sirius gave me some advice about these rumours yesterday.”

“Alright,” Ron said cautiously, “what did he say?”

“He said, and I quote: ‘fuck ‘em.’” Ron gave a surprised snort of laughter while Holly grinned. “Basically, he thinks we should just ignore them, and I agree with him. Ron, you are the first friend I ever had. I refuse to let anyone ruin something that special.”

Ears turning bright red, Ron looked everywhere but at Holly. She allowed the silence to stretch, while he squirmed in his seat. Finally, he managed to look up at her. “You really think of me like that?” he asked, voice quivering slightly.

Holly reached out and gently took his hand. “Ron, you’ve been my friend since the very beginning. I don’t know what I’d do without you. Please don’t let people who don’t know a thing about us ruin our friendship.”

Ron gripped her hand tightly, even as his ears grew redder. “Never.” He grinned, “If giant chess pieces and Grims and—” he shuddered, “-spiders won’t keep me away, why should I let a bunch of
rumourmongers. I'm with you, Holly. No matter what.”

With a relieved smile, Holly leant forward and hugged him tightly. He squeezed her back just as hard. When they separated, Ron rubbed his ear. “Sirius gives good advice.”

“Yes, he does.” Holly grinned mischievously. “He had some other advice.”

“What else did he suggest?” Ron asked curiously.

“He said we should try snogging.” Holly laughed as Ron fell out of his chair with a squawk.

“I thought you said we shouldn’t listen to rumours,” he said, scrabbling to his feet.

“We shouldn’t,” Holly said firmly. “Sirius just seems to think that if we don’t try it, we won’t get over being awkward. And he says it’s rather fun.” With a small giggle, she added, “It certainly looked like it, when he and Lupin were making out.” She laughed as Ron’s eyes bugged at her.

Shaking himself, Ron cautiously asked, “So, do you think we should? Try it, I mean.”

“Do you want to?” Holly asked.

Ron paused, thinking for a moment, before he nodded. “Yeah, I think so.”

“Okay,” Holly said, standing and approaching until she stood before him. They stared at each other, unsurely. Ron bent his head, as Holly raised herself onto her toes, tilting her head up. As she felt Ron’s breath against her lips, she wondered when he had grown so much taller than her. Then their lips touched.

Holly closed her eyes, focusing on the feeling of Ron’s lips against hers, strangely soft and dry. There was a slight wispy sensation against her face, and she realised Ron was beginning to grow facial hair. She wasn’t having as much fun as Sirius had seemed to.

Suddenly Ron pulled away. Holly moved back a step, taking in the furrow of his brows. “That was…” she paused, unsure what to say.

“Weird.” Ron finished for her. “Like if I tried kissing Ginny. I take it back, Sirius gives terrible advice.” They looked at each other for a long moment, before bursting into laughter.

“At least we know, now,” Holly said, as their laughter calmed. She smiled at Ron, “Thank you. For everything”

“You don’t need to thank me. I’ve just tried to be a good enough friend for you.”

“You’ve succeeded,” Holly told him. Looping her arm in his, she pulled him towards the door. “Now, let’s get going, or Hermione will be on our case about how much homework we have left tonight.” She grinned at Ron’s theatrical groan.

Holly was incredibly happy to have things back to normal with Ron. Whispers and stares continued to follow the pair but were firmly ignored. Hermione was thrilled at no longer being relegated to staying in between. The trio walked from the Great Hall to Care of Magical Creatures, arm in arm. Hagrid beamed at them when they arrived.

When the class began, he proudly showed them Nifflers – small, fluffy, black, long snouted creatures, which were incredibly talented at finding treasure and shiny objects. They spent an incredibly fun lesson sending their Nifflers to burrow into the earth to find hidden coins. As the
lesson ended, Hagrid reprimanded Goyle for pointlessly trying to steal some of the coins. “It’s leprechaun gold. Vanishes after a few hours.” At final tally, Ron’s Niffler collected the most coins, earning him a huge slab of Honeydukes chocolate.

Despite his victory, Ron was pensive as they returned to the castle. “What’s the matter, Ron?” Hermione prodded.

Ron glanced at her, brows furrowed. “I was just thinking about the World Cup, when I repaid Holly for the Omnioculars with the leprechaun gold. Why didn’t you tell me it disappeared?” he asked Holly.

“Oh,” Holly blinked, thinking back to those events. “I never noticed it had gone. I was more worried about my wand, and the Death Eaters.”

“Well, I’m sorry,” he told her seriously. “I didn’t know leprechaun gold vanishes. I thought I was paying you back. You shouldn’t have given me that Chudley Cannon hat for Christmas.”

“Forget it, all right?” Holly said, shaking her head. “I was going to buy you a Christmas present anyway.”

Stopping and scowling, Ron snapped, “I don’t want your pity and I don’t need your charity!”

The girls shared a startled look. “Ron, I haven’t been buying gifts for you because I pity you. I buy things for you because you’re my friend, and I want you to have nice things.”

Ron gave a growl of frustration. “Look, just forget it,” he said shortly, striding back towards the castle once more. The girls exchanged another worried look before chasing after him.

“We can’t just ignore this, Ron,” Hermione, grabbing his sleeve to halt him. “This is obviously upsetting you.”

Ron stood with fists clenched, looking away from them. Holly moved around to stand before him, noting in the way his jaw tightened and relaxed. She gently reached out and took his hand. “Ron, please talk to us. We want to help.”

He closed his eyes, taking a long, deep breath, before unclenching his hands. “Alright, fine,” he said tersely. “Can we go sit down somewhere?” The trio made their way to the lake, sitting in the shade of a tall beech tree.

The girls waited quietly, while Ron gathered his thoughts. Finally, he said, “The problem I have with you buying me things is because it is humiliating. The only real things I have that aren’t hand me downs were things you bought me. I’m completely reliant on you to have anything! And worse,” he said, face darkening further, “I know people would say that I’m only friends with you because I can get stuff from you.”

Holly was horrified. “Ron,” she breathed, “you know we don’t see you that way.”

Ron waved a hand through the air in frustration. “It’s not about how you see me! You don’t understand what it’s like to be poor, to have nothing. Where the only things you get are cast offs or charity! Where everyone looks down at you, with pity at best!”

“I know exactly what that’s like,” Holly said softly. “That was my entire life with the Dursleys, until Hagrid showed up. Before then, the only things I wore were Dudley’s old clothes, which were about five sizes too big. I know what it feels like to go without. And now I can try to make it so other people don’t have to go through that.” She shook her head emphatically. “I couldn’t bear to
Ron looked away from her, ears turning red as he stared over the lake. Hermione went to speak, but Holly held up a hand. Sometimes, she knew, silence was more useful. After several minutes, Ron finally grimaced and sighed and looked back at her. “Alright then, how about this? When it’s a day for presents, you can get me whatever you want. Any other day, you have to ask me first, and respect me enough to listen if I say no.”

Tilting her head, Holly considered it and then nodded, “Agreed.” As Ron went to put out his hand, she added, “On the condition that when I offer, you genuinely think about it, and don’t just reject it immediately.” She offered her hand. “Sound fair?”

Ron hesitated before taking it. “Fair.”

Beside them, Hermione sighed in relief.

The next day, the trio nervously entered the Potions classroom. Despite their anxiety, Snape ignored them as he swept to the front of the room to begin the lesson. As Holly gathered ingredients and started brewing her Potion, she ran through some Occlumency exercises, trying to clear her mind.

While she was chopping her dandelion root, she noticed Hermione freeze and gasp softly. Glancing up, Holly saw Snape staring across the room at her friend. After several long seconds, the Potions Master blinked, and Hermione relaxed. When he glanced in her direction, Holly quickly resumed her potion-making.

Shortly after, as they were shredding Wiggentree bark, Ron flinched suddenly, cutting himself. His quiet curse echoed in the quiet classroom. “10 points from Gryffindor, for your foul language Weasley,” Snape drawled from across the room. The Slytherins sniggered loudly. Ron glared back at Snape, face tense with concentration. He sighed in relief when Snape turned away.

Holly continued working on her Potion, anxiously waiting for the Legilimency attack. As she set her cauldron to simmer, she felt Snape’s presence against her thoughts. She stiffened, trying to clear the spike of fear at the mental touch. Before she could calm herself, she felt Snape latch onto it and ride into her mind. Her vision swam and the Potions classroom vanished.

She was five, struggling to cook as she balanced on a stool, with Aunt Petunia yelling at her for every mistake… She was seven, hiding up a tree as Ripper the bulldog growled from the base, and the Dursleys laughed… She was ten, staring at the ceiling of her cupboard, trying to ignore the gnawing in her stomach and the sound of her relatives eating dinner…

Her vision cleared, and she dimly noted Snape’s withdrawal from her mind. She looked up to see him staring at her, face an unreadable mask. Holly looked away, cheeks burning with shame. Snape’s voice cut through the quiet sounds of bubbling potions, making her flinch. “Stay after class, Potter.” Malfoy made some cutting remark which she missed, as she tried to keep her mind clear, and emotions under control.

The rest of the lesson passed in a haze for Holly. She remained at her seat, slowly packing up, as the other students filed out. Ron and Hermione hovered near the door. “I asked for Potter only,” Snape snapped at them. “Get out.” With last concerned looks, her friends left. As the door shut behind them, Snape cast several spells at it.
Holly stared at the floor, arms wrapped tightly around herself. She heard Snape approach, and stop before her desk. She felt him looming over her and flinched. He immediately stepped back, and she realised her breaths were coming quick and shallow. Desperately, she ran through Occlumency exercises, trying to put aside the fear and shame bubbling inside her. As her breathing steadied, she looked up, meeting Snape’s dark eyes.

He stared for a long moment, before saying, “I want you to tell me about the cupboard under the stairs.” Holly went rigid.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said, without thought.

Snape didn’t blink. “I saw it, Potter. You can’t hide it from me. Tell me.”

“No!” she said sharply. She trembled in her seat, her Occlumency failing completely as her breathing grew ragged.

With a flick of his wand, a drawer in Snape’s desk opened, and a flask flew into his hand. He strode around the desk, uncorked the potion and crouched before her. “Drink this,” he ordered firmly, pressing it against her lips. Holly flinched away but Snape tipped her head back and poured the mixture into her mouth. She swallowed automatically, barely registering the taste. Immediately, the trembling stopped, and her breathing evened. It was as if a blanket had been wrapped around her emotions, muffling the fear and clearing her thoughts.

“Sorry,” she said instinctively. “What was that?” she asked, glancing up at Snape.

“Calming Draught,” he said, remaining crouched before her. “Tell me about your life with your relatives. I will know if you lie to me.” As he stared into her eyes, she felt a light touch of his mind against hers.

Woodenly, Holly told him how her relatives hated her, first for her magic, and now for her gender as well. How Dudley had always been the beloved child, showered with affection and gifts and care, while she had nothing. How she hadn’t truly known happiness until Hagrid arrived and showed her another world.

As she trailed off, Snape continued staring into her eyes. “You’re not telling me everything. What was the cupboard?”

Holly shook her head. “I can’t,” she said, a touch of desperation entering her voice. “I’m not allowed.”

Snape’s expression grew grim. The silence stretched between them, his eyes boring into hers. “You will tell me,” he said sternly. She shook her head and looked away, unable to speak.

Snape finally sighed. “You promised me a favour, Miss Potter. I am now calling it due. Tell me about the cupboard under the stairs, now.”

She stared at him, struggling with herself. Fear and honesty warred, until she bowed her head in surrender. “It’s where they kept me, at night while I slept. Or during the day as punishment, if I messed up a chore, or Dudley blamed me for something, or if I used accidental magic. I wasn’t allowed food while I was being punished, for days, sometimes weeks. They only moved me into Dudley’s second bedroom when my Hogwarts letter arrived addressed to my cupboard.” Feeling something on her face, she raised her hand to wipe it. To her muted surprise, she was crying.

Snape stood, causing her to look up at him. His face was expressionless as he reached down and picked up her book bag. Then, he took her arm, guiding her to stand. He led her out of the
classroom, to where her friends were waiting anxiously. “Take her to the Hospital Wing, now,” he said shortly. He passed Holly to Hermione, and dropped her bag into Ron’s arms. “Tell Madam Pomfrey that Potter has already taken a Calming Draught.” With that, he swept off down the hall.

“Let’s go,” Hermione said, pulling her forward gently. Holly followed without thought. The warm blanket still surrounded her emotions, muting them, but it seemed to be growing thinner.

Ron and Hermione watched anxiously as they led her through the halls. When they neared the Hospital Wing, Holly began trembling once more, and her breathing grew ragged. “Madam Pomfrey!” Ron shouted as they entered the Wing.

The Matron bustled over, frowning disapprovingly. “Do keep your voice down Mr Weasley,” she reprimanded, before her eyes fell on Holly. “What happened?” she asked, directing them to the nearest bed.

“Professor Snape kept her after class,” Hermione said, when Holly remained silent. “She was crying, and he told us to bring her here. He said to tell you that she’s already taken a Calming Draught.”

Madam Pomfrey froze halfway to the potions cabinet. Her face was pale as she looked back to where Holly sat on the bed, trembling and crying. Suddenly she snapped into motion, quickly grabbing several potions from the cabinet and hurrying back to the bed. “Granger, fetch that curtain and set it up around the bed. Weasley, help me get Potter onto the bed. If you have another class today, you are now excused from it. I will need you here.”

Now looking terrified, Holly’s friends hurried to obey. Holly’s eyes were wide and unfocused as she stared forward. Her shivers were growing more intense, and her breaths were coming fast and shallow again. “Can’t you give her another Calming Draught?” Ron asked worriedly.

“A Calming Draught can’t help this,” Madam Pomfrey said grimly, “and another so soon would poison her.” She looked at Ron and Hermione. “I need the two of you to help her through this. I’m going to counteract the Calming Draught. She will be even more distraught than she is now. I need the two of you to stay with her, so she knows she isn’t alone. If it becomes too much, I can give her a Sleeping Draught, but quite frankly, that is simply delaying the inevitable. She needs to work through these emotions.”

Reaching out carefully, she raised Holly’s head, and tipped a potion to her lips. “You need to drink this now, Miss Potter,” she said gently, helping her drink it slowly. As she pulled the flask away, Holly’s face screwed up in anguish. She choked out a loud sob, and curled into a tight ball. She curled as small as she could and sobbed into her pillow. She could sense her friends close by, but couldn’t bear to look at them. She didn’t deserve them. Nothing else mattered. She had told someone. Uncle Vernon was going to kill her.

She felt a hand touch her head and gasped, flinching away. Gently, the hand moved to stroke her hair, and she heard Hermione’s voice murmuring quiet reassurances. A moment later, someone took her hand. She glanced up slightly, to see Ron, rubbing his thumb across the back of her hand. Their presence reminded her how much her life had changed. She had friends and magic and a Godfather who loved her. She was safe from Uncle Vernon now. As the fear eased, so did her tears, until she was able to slowly uncurl from her ball. She felt as if something toxic had been drained from her, leaving her strangely hollow, but light. She shot her friends a weak, embarrassed smile. “Sorry about that,” she said, trying to ignore the tremor in her voice.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Hermione said kindly. Ron gave her a warm smile, nodding in
agreement. Hermione hesitated a moment before asking curiously, “Do you want to talk about what happened?”

Holly opened her mouth to reject the offer, and then stopped. ‘*My least favourite person in Hogwarts knows now. What is the point of keeping it from my closest friends?*’ She nodded instead, slowly saying, “Snape saw my memories when he was testing my Occlumency. He kept me behind to ask about it.”

Her friends exchanged worried looks. “What did he see?” Ron asked cautiously.

She took a deep breath. “He saw my childhood with the Dursleys. He saw that they hated me, and how they treated me. And…” she swallowed and looked down in shame, “he saw that they kept me in the cupboard under the stairs.”

For a long beat, her friends stared uncomprehendingly. Then Hermione’s hand flew to her mouth and her eyes widened in horror. “Oh my god,” she whispered.

Ron’s face darkened with fury a moment later as he understood. “I knew something was wrong when I saw the bars on your window, but this…” He trailed off, breathing heavily.

Holly nodded wearily. “If anything happened that could be blamed on me, I’d be locked inside. I wasn’t allowed to eat when that happened.” She winced as Ron’s grip on her hand became painfully tight. He released her with a soft apology.

“I… I’ve never told anyone before,” Holly said, keeping her eyes fixed on the bright white sheets of her hospital bed. “Uncle Vernon drilled it into my head. ‘Don’t tell anyone or we’ll leave you in there’, he’d say. And then Snape pulled it from my mind, and demanded I explain.” She grimaced. “Fucking asshole.”

She stiffened as arms suddenly encircled her, before relaxing into Hermione’s embrace. Ron wrapped his arms around both girls. Holly sighed, feeling intensely grateful for her truly incredible friends.

Madam Pomfrey kept Holly overnight, giving her a sleeping draught granting mercifully dreamless sleep. When she returned to classes the next day, she felt incredibly fragile. Her feelings of gratitude for her friends somehow grew greater, as they worked tirelessly to shield her from curious stares and questions.

By the end of the week, Holly felt far more stable. She even managed to make it though double Potions, with Snape probing her Occlumency defences once again. As the lesson came to a close, she waited for the other students to file out before marching up to Snape’s desk. Ron and Hermione hovered by the door. Snape raised an eyebrow at her imperiously. “What do you want, Potter?”

Holly suppressed the urge to scowl. “I need to talk to you about what happened at the end of the last class. What you forced me to share could get me very badly hurt. I want your guarantee that you won’t share any of it, with anyone.”

Lip curling back, Snape quietly said, “Really? And why should I promise you anything?”

Her eyes narrowed dangerously. “I could just take this to Professor Dumbledore,” Holly said sharply. “We can see what he thinks about you drugging me and violating my privacy.”

Snape was unmoved. “He knows.”
“What?” Holly breathed, as blood rushed from her face.

“I shared the details with him immediately after our lesson,” Snape replied coldly.

Holly stared at him in horror, before bolting from the room. She barely heard her friends exclaim in surprise behind her, or the sound of them giving chase.

They caught up to her on the seventh floor, as she stopped before the stone gargoyle that guarded Dumbledore’s office. She was gasping for breath as she wildly listed off various sweets. At the statue’s stoic refusal, she snarled, “Get out of my way you stupid hunk of rock!”

“Holly, stop,” Hermione said firmly, grabbing her by the arm. “Why do you need to see the Headmaster so badly?”

“Because he knows about the Dursleys and if he tells them he knows Uncle Vernon will kill me!”

Her friends stared at her with horrified expressions. As Hermione mouthed silently, Ron turned to face the gargoyle. “Right, the password is a sweet? I’ll get us in.” He proceeded to rapidly name dozens of magical sweets. Despite her racing heart, Holly couldn’t help the fond smile that crossed her face.

Suddenly, the gargoyle leapt aside and the wall behind it slid open. Ron made a noise of disgust. “Cockroach Cluster, really? Merlin, Dumbledore really is mad.” Ignoring him, Holly darted forward onto the revolving staircase, climbing rather than wait to be slowly carried.

Reaching the polished oak door, Holly banged on it firmly with the brass door-knocker. After a moment, Dumbledore’s voice called, “Come in.”

The Headmaster sat at his desk, hands folded as he watched the trio enter with a genial smile. Ron and Hermione looked around the room in wonder. “Ah, good evening, Miss Potter, Miss Granger, Mr Weasley. To what do I owe the honour of this visit?”

Ignoring the many contraptions and the soft chirp of greeting from Fawkes, Holly planted herself before the desk, crossing her arms. “Snape used Legilimency on me during our Potions class on Tuesday. He says that he told you what he saw. Is that true?”

Dumbledore’s expression turned grim. He nodded slowly. “Indeed, he did.” Holly stiffened, staring at him intensely. “I had intended to speak to you about it during the weekend, but it seems we should discuss it now.” He sighed and carefully adjusted his half-moon glasses, before looking back at Holly.

“I would like to start by offering you an apology, Holly. I knew that you would suffer, when I left you on your aunt and uncle’s doorstep. I knew I was condemning you to ten dark and difficult years. But I never imagined that your relatives would treat you so terribly. I should have done more to ensure your wellbeing, and for that I am so terribly sorry.”

Holly swallowed past a sudden lump in her throat. “I thought you knew and didn’t care,” she said hoarsely. “My first Hogwarts letter was addressed to ‘The Cupboard Under the Stairs’.”

A terribly tired and sad expression crossed Dumbledore’s face. “Ah. I see. The addresses are created by magic, and those intended for students with magical parents are simply given to owls. Only the letters to Muggleborn students are checked and delivered by a member of staff. I assumed your aunt had informed you of your heritage, and thus, no one saw your initial letter.”

“But,” Hermione interjected, “what I don’t understand is why Holly was put there in the first place.
If you knew they were bad guardians, why did you leave her there?"

“Lots of people would have been willing to take her in,” Ron added. “Mum’s practically adopted
her already.”

“My priority was to keep Holly alive,” Dumbledore answered firmly. “You were in more danger
than perhaps anyone but I realised. Voldemort had been vanquished hours before, but his
supporters – and many of them are almost as terrible as he – were still at large, angry, desperate
and violent. And I had to make my decision, too, with regard to the years ahead. Did I believe that
Voldemort was gone forever? No. I knew not whether it would be ten, twenty or fifty years before
he returned, but I was sure he would do so, and I was sure, too, knowing him as I have done, that he
would not rest until he killed you, Holly.

“I knew that Voldemort’s knowledge of magic is perhaps more extensive than any wizard alive. I
knew that even my most complex and powerful protective spells and charms were unlikely to be
invincible if he ever returned to full power.

“But I knew, too, where Voldemort was weak. And so I made my decision. You would be
protected by an ancient magic of which he knows, which he despises, and which he has always,
therefore, underestimated – to his cost. I am speaking, of course, of the fact that your mother died
to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your
veins to this day. I put my trust, therefore, in your mother’s blood. I delivered you to her sister, her
only remaining relative.”

Holly snorted. “She doesn’t love me. She doesn’t give a damn –”

“But she took you,” Dumbledore interrupted. “She may have taken you grudgingly, furiously,
unwillingly, bitterly, yet still she took you, and in doing so, she sealed the charm I placed upon
you. You mother’s sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you.”

“Does that mean –”

“When you can still call home the place where your mother’s blood dwells, there you cannot be
touched or harmed by Voldemort. He shed her blood, but it lives on in you and her sister. Her blood
became your refuge. You need return there only once a year, but as long as you can still call it
home, whilst you are there he cannot hurt you. Your aunt knows this. I explained what I had done
in a letter I left, with you, on her doorstep. She knows that allowing you houseroom may well have
kept you alive for the past fifteen years. And that is why I must ask you to return there again.”

Ron gave a horrified choking sound. “You can’t send her back there, knowing how they treat her!”
he protested.

“I am sorry, but it is the only way to keep Holly safe from Voldemort,” Dumbledore said, with an
air of finality.

Holly leaned forward, steadying herself with her hands on the desk, ignoring a noise of protest
from Hermione. “Did you tell the Dursleys that you know about the Cupboard?” she asked.

Dumbledore steepled his fingers. “I was quite put out with them when Severus informed me of
their actions. I cannot spare the time to go myself, thus I sent them a Howler informing them how
abominable their actions have been.”

Holly felt her breath quicken as terror rushed through her. The edges of her vision grew dark. She
gripped the edge of the desk tightly, struggling to stay upright. “No. No no no no no. No you can’t.
Oh god, Uncle Vernon’s going to kill me,” she whispered. Hands steadied her, and she glanced aside to see Ron and Hermione holding her arms in support. Dimly she heard Dumbledore’s voice, saying something she couldn’t make out.

A red and gold shape appeared before her. Holly blinked, and it resolved into the form of Fawkes, Dumbledore’s phoenix. He blinked a shining black eye at her, before he began to sing. The music was gentle and soothing, yet held an unearthly tinge that left the hair on her neck standing on end. She stood entranced, feeling her racing heart slow, and the fear slowly leave her mind. As the song ended, she took a deep breath, and offered a weak smile to the phoenix. “Thanks, Fawkes,” she murmured. The phoenix chirped softly and flew back to his perch.

“Holly,” Dumbledore said gently. “I know you have been treated terribly by your family, and are afraid to return to them. I promise every protection I can offer to keep you safe while you stay there.”

When Holly didn’t respond, Hermione offered cautiously, “Could you please tell us protections you planning, Professor Dumbledore? That might help to reassure Holly.”

With a nod, Dumbledore explained, “To begin, your room will be placed under a Muggle Repelling Charm, to ensure you always have a place to yourself, where your relatives will not be able to reach you.”

Holly imagined Uncle Vernon’s reaction to having magic performed on his house and paled. “That would just make things worse,” she said faintly. “He’ll get me the moment I try to leave.”

“We will inform your Uncle that you are to be in regular correspondence with an adult, and that, should they not receive a message from you for several days they will come to ensure your wellbeing. I am sure Remus would be willing to take on that role.”

“You don’t know how much they hate magic,” Holly said with a shake of her head. “If Uncle Vernon gets pushed too far, he’ll kill me and try to run.”

Dumbledore frowned and sat back in his chair. He stared into the distance as he stroked his beard slowly. The only sound was the noises of Dumbledore’s many strange trinkets. “Perhaps a more radical alternative is needed,” he mused.

Leaning forward, he offered, “I can organise a rotation of volunteers to stand watch over you, every day, to ensure nothing can happen you. They will be eminently qualified to protect you, should the need arise. I’m sure even your Uncle would be hesitant to risk harming you under such scrutiny. Would that be acceptable for you, Holly?”

Holly bit her lip as she considered the offer. Uncle Vernon had been stopped before by the threat of Sirius. The idea of having other wizards present sounded sensible. Cautiously she nodded. “I think that could work,” she said slowly. “Who would you ask to do it?”

“No concern yourself with it. I believe I can find a supply of volunteers,” Dumbledore said genially. “Remus will gladly help, I’m sure. I will see to all the arrangements, and ensure everything is in place before the holidays. Is that to your satisfaction, Holly?”

Holly nodded, feeling strangely light. “Thank you, Professor. Um, we’ll let you get back to work…” she said, rising to her feet. Ron and Hermione quickly joined her.

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled at them, as he smiled warmly. “You are always welcome to come speak to me. Taking care of Hogwarts’ students is my responsibility, after all.” He paused in
thought for a moment then tentatively said, “I must ask, do you wish to end your Occlumency lessons with Professor Snape? I can have him stop if you wish.”

She opened her mouth to agree, but something held her back. The last week had been a torment of fear, almost too much to bear. But she couldn’t help but remember confronting Voldemort in her first year, how he had seen through her lies instantly. The thought of someone like Voldemort being able to learn all her secrets was terrifying. If she was going to be good enough, she had to continue. And it wasn’t as though there was anything worse for Snape to discover.

“I… don’t want to stop,” she managed to say, “but I would like a few weeks before we keep going.”

Dumbledore nodded, “I will take care of it.”

As the trio made their way to the door, he added, “Good luck in the Third Task, Holly.”

Holly shot him a final smile as the door fell closed.

As the Easter holidays approached, their homework load increased dramatically. Even with Hermione creating study plans, they struggled to stay on top of it. During breakfast on the last day of term, Holly was delighted to receive a reply from her Queer Group. Before she could read it, the bell for class rang, and she hurriedly slipped it into her bag.

In History, Binns droned on and on, Holly’s attention kept drifting down to her bag. Finally, she gave in and quietly grabbed the letter to read.

_Dear Holly,_

That Yule Ball sounds amazing, we’re all very envious of you now. Also, the girls insist you send a photo, so we can see how cute you look when all dressed up for a party. It’s a shame that the girl you were crushing on ended up being homophobic. I hope she didn’t reject you too harshly. Honestly though, you deserve much better. Also, Jessica has offered to teach you how to subtly check if a girl is gay, which should be handy for you in the future.

On our end, some good news, some bad. Bad first – Sam came out to their family, and it didn’t go over well. They’ve been kicked out of their house, and are currently borrowing everyone’s couches, until they can find a job.

Jamie has started dating a super sweet guy named Jason. He’s been amazingly supportive for her, and they’re adorable together. Also, Amanda, Naomi and Sarah have decided to start a family, so they’re trying for a baby. We’ve made a huge list of possible names for them. Feel free to send some suggestions.

Looking forward to seeing you again.

Tyler.

Holly made a mental note to ask around for any photos of her from the Ball. ‘_Hopefully I can find a way to make them look like Muggle photos,_’ she thought idly. As happy as she was at the good news, her heart went out to Sam. Despite how terrible the Dursleys were, they had never actually kicked her out. She hoped things improved for Sam soon, and wished she could do something to help.

The weeks passed quickly, until the final week of May, when Holly was directed to the Quidditch Pitch in the evening. Cedric met her in the Entrance Hall, and they crossed the dark grounds together. When they reached the Quidditch Pitch, they stopped short in horror. The beloved sports field was covered in low, twisting hedges. A voice called to them, and they saw Bagman and the
other champions waiting at the centre of the pitch. Holly and Cedric moved to join them, stepping carefully over the knee high hedges.

“Well, what d’you think?” Bagman asked cheerily. “Growing nicely, aren’t they? Give them a month and Hagrid’ll have them twenty foot high. Don’t worry you’ll have your Quidditch pitch back to normal once the task is over! Now, I imagine you can guess what we’re making here?”

After a beat of silence, Viktor grunted, “Maze.”

“That’s right!” Bagman crowed. “A maze. The third task’s really very straightforward. The Triwizard Cup will be placed in the centre of the maze. The first champion to touch it will receive full marks.”

“We seemly ‘ave to get through the maze?” Fleur asked with raised eyebrows.

Bagman bounced gleefully. “There will be obstacles. Hagrid is providing a number of creatures… then there will be spells that must be broken… all that sort of thing, you know. Now, the champions who are leading on points will get a head start into the maze,” he said with a smile at Cedric and a grimace at Holly. “Then Mr Krum will enter… then Miss Delacour. But you’ll all be in with a fighting chance, depending on how well you get past the obstacles. Should be fun, eh?”

“So the other tasks amount to what, a minute or two of head start?” Holly asked derisively. “Why did we even bother having them?”

Bagman’s face reddened and he glared at her. “The previous tasks were important tests of creativity and preparedness,” he blustered.

“Won’t the third task test that?” Cedric pointed out. “We know in general what we’re up against to prepare for, but we still need to adapt to the unexpected.”

“Also, everyone knew about the dragons beforehand, so that task was meaningless,” Holly added cheerfully. Ignoring Bagman’s furious sputtering, she asked, “Anyway, if there’s nothing else, can we go?”

“Why do you seem more confident for this task?” he asked as he fell into step beside her.

“Hagrid’s providing half the obstacles,” she told him. “They’re going to be dangerous, but I’ve had four years of experience dealing with Hagrid’s creatures. This is the one task I don’t feel utterly terrified of.”

As the other champions reached them, Fleur made a quiet noise of amazement. “Zen you truly nevair entered ze Tournament?” she asked Holly.

Holly turned to stare at the French champion incredulously. “Of course I didn’t. Why on Earth would I?”

“You do not vant fame and fortune?” Viktor queried.

Shaking her head, Holly said, “I inherited plenty of money, and I’m already more than famous enough.” She gestured at her scar. “All it does is make people act weird around me,” she continued bitterly. Viktor grunted, nodding in agreement. Fleur stared at her with open curiosity as the group
of champions continued across the grounds.

When they were halfway to the Beauxbatons carriage, Cedric suddenly stopped and pointed towards the Forbidden Forest. “Hang on, what’s that over there?” he asked. The other champions turned to follow his gesture. Holly peered through the darkness, until she saw a figure moving along the tree line.

“‘Oo is zat?” Fleur asked.

Viktor squinted, then said, “It is the Auror you haff teaching. The one called Mad-Eye.”

“What’s he doing at this time of night?” Cedric wondered.

Holly shrugged. “Perhaps he’s making sure no one is sneaking onto the grounds. He’s paranoid to worry about it, and he can check the forest easily with his eye.”

Fleur shuddered as the group continued walking. “Merde, zat eye is awful.”

“Why?” Holly asked, tilting her head curiously.

Fleur gave her a strange look. Slowly, she said, “I am irresistibly beautiful to most men, no? Many of zem will do almost anything to… see more of me than I allow.” As Holly looked at her without comprehension, Fleur sighed. “Zey wish to see me naked,” she clarified.

“Oh!” Holly said, eyes growing wide. She suddenly remembered all the times in Defence Against the Dark Arts that Moody’s magical eye had lingered on her, and shuddered.

“You see why I do not trust a man who can see though anything? ‘Ow can we be sure what ‘e is looking at?”

Cedric sputtered incredulously. “You’re not suggesting Professor Moody is some sort of peeping tom?”

Fleur shrugged. “I ‘ave no way of knowing whether ‘e is or not. Zat is the problem.”

The group fell into an uncomfortable silence. As they reached the Beauxbatons carriage, Fleur gifted them a smile and wave before entering. Viktor nodded to Holly and Cedric before turning and striding away towards the Durmstrang ship. The Hogwarts champions continue back to the castle together.

Holly winced as a muscle in her leg spasmed. She leaned down slightly to rub it, hopping Professor Vector wouldn’t notice. Cedric had been pushing her merciless to train yesterday and during lunch today. He had pushed her through learning multiple new spells, as well as practicing shielding and dodging. She was proud of how much she had improved, but her muscles were complaining now.

“-Miss Potter!”

She jumped, turning a startled glance back to the Arithmancy Professor. With chagrin, she realised she hadn’t been paying attention.

“I’m sorry could you please repeat the question, Professor?”

Professor Vector looked supremely unimpressed. “I asked you to turn in your homework on exponential probabilities.”
Blushing under the gaze of the entire class, Holly retrieved the parchment from her bag and dutifully presented it. Professor Vector took it and added it to the piles sitting on her desk, before returning to the blackboard. Holly sighed, picking up her quill to take notes, while studiously ignoring Hermione’s disappointed expression.

A moment later she let out a strangled cry, clutching at her forehead as her scar burned red hot. She felt a surge of hatred run through her, which she realised immediately was not her own. A few seconds later, the pain and emotion faded, but Professor Vector had already noticed.

“Enough, Potter,” she said firmly. “You are clearly in pain and need to visit the Hospital Wing. You will learn nothing in this state, and I won’t have you jeopardise your classmates’ learning either. Go.” She pointed to the door.

With a grimace, Holly quickly packed up and obeyed. Rather than go to the Hospital Wing, she made her way to the seventh floor. Sirius had made it clear that Dumbledore be informed as soon as possible if her scar hurt again, and this time she had felt emotions that were not hers.

Fortunately for her, the password was unchanged, and she was soon riding the revolving stairs up to the Headmaster’s office. There was a moment of silence after she knocked, before Dumbledore’s voice bade her enter.

As she stepped into the office, the Headmaster stood behind his desk offering a genial smile. “Hello, Holly. How may I help you this afternoon?” he asked, waving her towards a seat.

Holly clamped down on a rising sense of embarrassment as she sat. No matter how small something like pain in her scar might seem, she had promised to keep the Headmaster informed. “I came to tell you that my scar hurt rather badly, just now during Arithmancy.”

Dumbledore looked at her with an expectant air. Clearing her throat, Holly tentatively continued, “Um, there was also lots of hate. It was so intense, and I don’t really know how to explain it, but I know it wasn’t me feeling it.

“Indeed?” he said, raising an eyebrow. “Well then, you are progressing quite nicely in your Occlumency studies.”

Holly suppressed a grimace. It had been hard, going back to Potions class knowing Snape would be using Legilimency on her again. She kept telling herself that it was important to learn Occlumency. Despite her anxiety, Snape had avoided her memories of the Dursleys. After several weeks of probing, Holly and her friends had markedly improved their mental defences.

She refocused on Dumbledore as he continued talking. “Now, has your scar hurt at any other time this year, excepting the time it woke you up over the summer?”

“No, this is the only time it’s happened.” Dumbledore nodded, before standing and pacing behind his desk. After an uncomfortable pause, Holly cleared her throat. “Um, Professor?”

Dumbledore stopped and blinked at Holly, before retaking his seat. “My apologies.”

“Do you know why my scar is hurting? Because the last time this happened, Voldemort was at Hogwarts. We know he can’t be here now, so what’s causing it? Has something changed?”

“Well deduced,” Dumbledore said with an approving smile. “I have a theory, no more than that... It is my belief that your scar hurts both when Lord Voldemort is near you, and when he is feeling a particularly strong surge of hatred.”
Holly’s brows drew together. “But, it only used to hurt when he was near. Why is it different now?”

“You and he are connected by the curse that failed,” Dumbledore said. “I suspect that Voldemort is growing stronger, and the connection between you grows in kind.”

Holly stared at Dumbledore in horror. “So if he gets powerful enough to come back, will he be able to do it back to me? Is he going to start seeing me? Can he use Legilimency on me?”

Dumbledore nodded grimly. “If he were to truly return, that is a possibility. However,” he raised a hand to forestall Holly’s panic, “I believe your grasp of Occlumency will serve in protecting you from such an occurrence. That does make it even more important to continue your studies with Professor Snape.”

Taking a steadying breath, Holly brought her emotions back under control. “Yes, of course,” she nodded. Once she felt calmer, she glanced around the room awkwardly. A patch of silvery light caught her eye, reflecting from a glass case. Glancing behind her, she saw a black cabinet, from which bright silver light shone. “Um, Professor,” she said, looking back to the Headmaster. As he looked up at her, she gestured to the cabinet. “What is that?”

Dumbledore looked where she indicated. “Ah, yes,” he said, before standing and moving to the cabinet. He opened it, picked up a shallow stone bowl and carried it to the desk. There were strange runes and symbols carved around the edge, and the bowl contained a strange, glowing silvery substance that seemed both liquid and gas.

“This is a Pensieve,” he told her. “I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind. At these times I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into the basin, and then examines them at one’s leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form.”

Holly blinked down at the bowl. “This stuff’s your thoughts?”

“Certainly. Let me show you.” Dumbledore drew his wand and pressed it against his temple. As he drew it away, a glistening strand of the same silvery white substance clung to the wand. He added it to the bowl, and Holly saw her face appear swirling at the surface of the bowl. She resisted the urge to grimace. While it was getting better, it was still hard not to see a boy’s face in her reflection.

“The Pensieve can also be a rather useful protection against Legilimency,” Dumbledore continued. Smiling conspiratorially at Holly’s curious look, he said, “After all, if the thoughts are not in your mind, the Legilimens will find it quite difficult to find them.”

Holly nodded thoughtfully, before asking, “But isn’t a Legilimency attack unexpected, more often than not? It’s hard to prepare in advance without knowing when or where it’s coming from.”

“Yes, you are quite right Holly,” Dumbledore said. “And that is why Occlumency is a useful skill to learn, even if one has a Pensieve.” Looking up from the desk, his blue eyes twinkled at her. “Now, I’m sure you would like to enjoy your serendipitous free period with your Housemates, and not with a distracted old man.” Grinning at the exaggerated self-deprecation, Holly bid him a good afternoon and left the office.

As the Third Task approached, Cedric, Ron and Hermione pushed Holly relentlessly. They practiced during their lunches every day, learning new spells and practicing old ones. They also
dedicated their Sundays to running drills of dodging and spell co-ordination, at Ron’s insistence. Holly quickly learned half a dozen new spells, from the Impediment Jinx to the Freezing Charm, though she struggled with Disillusionment.

The morning of the Third Task dawned, and the Great Hall was filled with the cacophony of excited students. Holly tried to ignore them and focus on her breakfast, but as the Daily Prophet was delivered, a horrified shriek drew her attention. Across the Hall, Malfoy was clutching at the newspaper with a horrified expression. Up and down the Slytherin table, other students looked equally as distraught. At Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, the newspapers spawned expressions of shock and disbelief. Holly looked along her own house’s table, to see similar incredulity.

Those without papers quickly set to looking over shoulders, or borrowing from friends, and a wave of stunned silence washed over the Hall. The teachers frowned down at the sight in confusion, until Professor Burbage reached for her newspaper, and gasped, before turning it towards the others.

Holly, Ron and Hermione sat in bemused silence, until a paper finally made its way to them. At the sight of the headline, Ron made a strangled choking sound, Hermione gasped, and Holly barely stopped a wild laugh.

**HE-WHO-MUST-NOT-BE-NAMED: HALFBLOOD HYPOCRITE**

_You-Know-Who was the most terrible dark lord of all time. The Dark Lord and his Death Eaters terrorised our country for over a decade, seeking to purge our society of those with Muggle heritage. And yet, an intriguing truth has been discovered: despite his stance on the superiority of Purebloods, the Dark Lord himself was not one._

_As hard as it is to imagine the feared Dark Lord as a child, he indeed was one once. Named after his Muggle father, Tom Riddle, he was raised in a Muggle Orphanage, unaware of magic until he received his Hogwarts letter._

_Hogwarts records show Tom Riddle began attending Hogwarts in 1938, and was sorted into Slytherin. He was by all accounts a model student, achieving high grades, and was even entrusted with responsibilities as Prefect and Head Boy. But even back then, his dark and hypocritical nature was present._

_It has been uncovered that the Chamber of Secrets incident of 1943, which was blamed on then-student Rubeus Hagrid, was in fact the work of Tom Riddle himself. The attacks targeted Muggleborn students, causing several petrification and the death of Myrtle Warren. Riddle was the one who supposedly discovered Hagrid with an Acromantula, which was deemed responsible for attacks. However, during the most recent opening of the Chamber of Secrets, the monster was discovered to be a Basilisk. Using the ability of Parseltongue that he secretly possessed, Tom Riddle was able to control the beast. Despite his own Muggle father, Riddle used the basilisk in an attempt to “cleanse” Hogwarts of Muggleborns, as Salazar Slytherin intended. When the attacks threatened the closure of the school, he halted the attacks, and found a patsy to frame._

_He succeeded in this, resulting in Hagrid’s expulsion from Hogwarts. Riddle then continued his schooling, graduating at the top of his class. He disappeared from public view for several years, before reappearing and taking employment at Borgin and Burkes, a peddler of Dark artefacts. Who knows what secrets Riddle gained under their employ? Riddle worked there for almost a decade, before vanishing once more. He would not reappear until 1970, when he revealed himself to the world as the Dark Lord, and began the First Wizarding War, seeking to purge Muggleborns from our society._

“Rita’s in excellent form,” Holly said lightly, passing the paper along to Seamus and Dean before
falling into a fit of giggles. Ron and Hermione’s laughter joined her.

The loud whispers echoing around the Hall slowly began petering out as the Heads of House swept along the tables, ushering their charges to their exam classes. The trio gathered their things. Holly, being exempt from exams, had taken to studying at the back of the classroom instead.

“Wait a moment, Miss Potter,” Professor McGonagall called. Holly and her friends halted, looking back to their Head of House. “Not you two,” she added, waving Ron and Hermione off. “The champions are congregating in the chamber off the Hall after breakfast.”

“But the task’s not ‘til tonight!” Holly exclaimed.

“I’m aware of that, Miss Potter. The champions’ families are invited to watch the final task.” Holly’s eyes widened and her breathing quickened at the thought of seeing the Dursleys, so soon after Dumbledore’s Howler. Professor McGonagall placed a hand on her shoulder. “Breathe, Miss Potter. Your relatives aren’t here. In and out, lass, there you go.”

Once Holly’s breathing had steadied, she glanced up at her Head of House, feeling mortified. “You know about them?” she asked in a small voice.

Professor McGonagall nodded. “The Headmaster informed me when requesting my assistance in providing guards,” she said gently. “Now, Molly and Bill Weasley, and Remus Lupin are waiting to see you.”

“The Weasleys are here? And Professor Lupin?” Holly asked, stunned.

Her Head of House gave her a small smile. “Yes, the Headmaster and I ensured they came to take their place as family. I expect they are eager to see you.”

Holly felt a wide grin grow across her face. “Thank you very much, Professor,” she said, before hurrying across the Hall to the side room. She grinned as she passed Cedric and his parents just inside the door. She exchanged nods with Viktor in the corner, where he was speaking with his parents in Bulgarian. She saw Fleur rapidly conversing with her mother in French, and waved to the young Gabrielle, before spotting Mrs Weasley, Bill and Lupin standing by the fire. To her delight, a black bear-like dog sat beside them. At the sight of her, it jumped up and bounded over to her, tail wagging furiously. Holly only had a moment to brace herself before it slammed into her, knocking her on her arse. She gave a muffled shriek as a huge tongue slathered her face.

“Sir- Padfoot, get off!” she cried, finally managing to push the huge face away. She struggled to lever herself upright, as Padfoot sat back and watched with his tongue lolling out. Bill and Lupin approached, grinning, before helping her to her feet. Holly wiped at her face as they moved over to Mrs Weasley.

“Surprise!” Mrs Weasley said brightly. “Thought we’d come and watch you, Holly.” She reached into a pocket and produced a large handkerchief, gently taking Holly’s chin and scrubbing her face clean. “I don’t know why you brought that beast, Mr Lupin,” she tutted. “He’s an utter menace.”

“He is,” Lupin agreed mildly, “but he’s been missing Holly a great deal. I wouldn’t hear the end of it if I left him at home.” He caught Holly’s eye with a conspiratorial smirk.

Once Holly was deemed clean enough by Mrs Weasley, Bill said, “Charlie wanted to come, but he couldn’t get time off. He said you were incredible against the Horntail.”

“Thanks,” Holly smiled, feeling flush with pride. “It was mainly training with Cedric that helped though.” She glanced around to look at her fellow Hogwarts champion. As she did, she noticed
Fleur staring at Bill with great interest. Catching her eye, Holly raised an eyebrow. Fleur pointedly glanced at Bill then looked at Holly expectantly.

“I should introduce you to the others,” Holly told her group, gesturing for them to follow as she approached the Delacours. Gabrielle noticed their approach and began bouncing up and down. Holly grinned at the pleased look on Fleur’s face.

“Fleur, I’d like to introduce my- my family,” Holly said, with a nervous glance at the Weasleys and Lupin. She hoped she wasn’t being too presumptuous. Despite her fears, Mrs Weasley beamed delightedly. “This is Mrs Weasley, and her eldest son, Bill. And this is Remus Lupin,” Holly continued quickly, pointing to each in turn. “And this monster is Padfoot,” she said, ruffling the fur on his head. “Everyone, this is Fleur Delacour, the champion for Beauxbatons.”

Mrs Delacour, a beautiful woman with long blonde hair, seemed bemused by the group, but Fleur took it in stride. “Zis is my muzzer, Apolline Delacour, and my younger sister, Gabrielle,” she said imperiously. “Muzzer, zis is Holly Potter, ‘Ogwarts’ second champion. She was ze one ‘oo saved Gabrielle.”

Apolline Delacour gave a broad smile, which made her seem radiant, before offering her hand to Holly, Mrs Weasley and Bill with a warm, “Bonjour.” Gabrielle blushed, and hid behind her sister.

As Lupin took her hand he leaned forward, kissing the air above it. “Enchanté, madame,” he said with a smile. Mrs Delacour smile grew warmer in return.

Holly glanced towards Viktor in the corner of the room. He glanced up from his conversation with his family, looking surprised by the group that had formed. After a quick word to his parents, he moved across the room, leading them towards Holly.

“Mother, Father, I vould like you to meet Holly Potter. Holly, my parents, Stefan and Nadia Krum.” Holly shook their hands, smiling in greeting. As she began introducing her guests, the large gathering attracted the Diggorys’ attention, drawing them over.

The next few minutes were spent in a wave of greetings and introductions. Holly grinned as the groups mingled and conversed. Fleur eagerly talked with Bill, the Diggorys and the Krums chatted about the Quidditch World Cup, and Mrs Weasley exchanged recipes with Mrs Delacour. She started as a hand appeared on her shoulder, looking up to see Lupin looking rather serious.

“Could I have a word, Holly?” he said, gently steering her away from the gathering. She followed him to the corner of the room, frowning in confusion. Her fingers idly played with Padfoot’s fur, as he stayed firmly by her side. “Professor Dumbledore spoke to us and asked me to assist in guarding you, at your muggle home. He also told us why such measures are necessary.”

Holly felt her breath catch as a wave of fear and shame washed over her. Uncle Vernon’s voice screamed threats and insults in the back of her mind. She struggled to push the feelings down with Occlumency. Lupin looked down at her, eyes filled with such compassion that she was forced to look away. She took a shaky breath and opened her mouth to answer, but no words came out. Lupin gently placed a steadying hand on her shoulder.

“It’s alright. You don’t have to say anything. We simply want you to know, we are here when you need us.”

Holly swallowed and nodded jerkily. Clearing her throat, she said, “Um, we should get back.” Flanked by Lupin and Padfoot, she rejoined the group.
Eventually the gathering of champions and their families separated. Holly took her group on a tour
of the grounds, before they returned to the castle for lunch. Ron and Hermione were shocked to see
the Weasleys, Lupin and Padfoot there. They were joined by Fred, George and Ginny. As they ate,
Holly heard the other students loudly speculating about that morning’s article.

With a frown, asked, “Could we go see Hagrid after lunch? Rita’s article this morning mentioned
some of his secrets, and I would like to check on him.”

“What article are we talking about?” Bill asked, leaning forward curiously.

Fred spoke with an air of supreme casualness, “Oh, just the article about how You-Know-Who was
a halfblood named Tom Riddle.”

Mrs Weasley choked, spitting out her tea. Bill’s jaw dropped. Padfoot gave a loud bark from under
the table, which sounded a lot like his laugh. Lupin remained the most composed, simply
becoming very still. “I beg your pardon,” he said with a slightly strangled voice.

Holly, Hermione and the Weasley children quickly explained the article to the stunned adults, to
ever increasing incredulity. Mrs Weasley almost did not believe them, until Ginny retrieved a copy
of the paper.

Once they had processed the revelations, and understood Hagrid’s involvement in the article, the
adults were more than willing to visit Hagrid. After the younger Weasleys and Hermione left for
their exams, Holly’s group made their way down to his cabin.

“Jus’ a mo’,” Hagrid called as they knocked on his door. A moment later, he opened it, looking
incredibly surprised to see them. He quickly ushered them in, serving them each a mug of tea. Out
of the corner of her eye Holly noticed Padfoot being thoroughly licked by Fang and smothered a
grin.

As he took a seat with them, Holly jumped in quickly. “Did you see the news in the papers this
morning, Hagrid?”

He paused with his mug halfway to his mouth, face twisting with emotions. Clearing his throat, he
gruffly said, “Yeah, I saw. I didn’t like Tom after what he did, but I never thought he would turn
out like that.”

“Still, it’s good for the truth to finally come out,” Lupin pointed out.

“Do you think you could use this to appeal your expulsion?” Bill asked. “Surely there’s enough
evidence there to show your innocence.”

“I dunno,” Hagrid said with a frown. “Not sure how I’d go about doin’ that.”

“I’m sure Professor Dumbledore would be able to help you with it,” Mrs Weasley said, reaching up
to pat the large man on the shoulder, but only reaching just above his elbow.

“I’m not sure it’s worth the bother,” Hagrid said gruffly. “I don’t remember much o’ my classes.
I’d probably have to start all over again.”

“I think you should, Hagrid,” Holly said firmly. “Even if it’s hard, it’s worth it. You deserve the
chance to learn magic. It’s not fair the Tom Riddle took that away from you. If you just give up,
you’re letting Voldemort win.”

“Holly!” Mrs Weasley gasped.
“I know it’s harsh,” Holly said with a grimace, “but it’s the truth. If you can recover from what he
did to you, it can show people he’s not all powerful. People will see that if we drag him into the
light, it will show how weak he really is.”

As she finished speaking, the only sound was the crackling of the fire. After a moment, Lupin
cleared his throat. “You’ve certainly given this some thought,” he said with a raised eyebrow.

Holly shrugged, looking down at the table. “I was just thinking about my Queer group, and how
important it was to see other people like me. Being able to see people who are grown up, and have
whole lives and relationships made me realise that I can have a future too.” Glancing up to find
everyone staring at her, she blushed. “Anyway, Hagrid, I just think that you deserve the
opportunity to learn magic, and if you do, it could mean a lot to other people affected by
Voldemort.”

Hagrid cleared his throat. “I get wha’ you’re saying, Holly. You’re right, it is important. I’ll talk to
Professor Dumbledore after the Task. Speaking of, you take care now. Don’t be getting’ ahead of
yourself.” Holly nodded in acquiescence, shooting him a smile, which was returned with a warm
grin. “Attagirl,” he said, before reaching across the table to pat her shoulder, knocking her from her
seat.

Holly barely ate during dinner, her roiling stomach destroying any shred of appetite. She managed
a smile as Mrs Weasley waved up to the staff table at Percy, who looked embarrassed but pleased.
Sitting between him and Dumbledore was none other than the Minister for Magic, Cornelius
Fudge. It looks like he had arrived to see the final task of the tournament.

As the meal came to a close, Dumbledore directed the champions to the stadium. As she joined the
other champions, Cedric patted her on the back. Fleur smiled encouragingly to her, while Viktor
nodded in greeting. The quartet followed Bagman across the grounds to the former Quidditch pitch,
which was now hidden by the twenty foot high hedge maze. As they arrived, Holly noticed a beetle
on the back of Bagman’s robes and smothered a smile.

The stands began to fill soon after. Hagrid, Professor McGonagall, Professor Flitwick and Professor
Moody arrived, informing the champions that they would patrol the outside of the maze and
provide rescue if signalled with red sparks.

Once the stands were full, Bagman began announcing the event, reminding the crowd of the
current standings. Holly and Cedric were tied for first place, Viktor in second, and Fleur in third.
two – one – ”

With a shrill blast of the whistle, Holly and Cedric moved into the maze. They quickly cast \textit{Lumos}
to light up the darkness as they moved forward together. As they reached a fork, Cedric gave a
strained smile. “Left or right?” he asked.

Shrugging, Holly started down the right path. She felt comforted by Cedric’s solid presence at her
back. Behind them, the sound of Bagman’s whistled rang out. Viktor had entered the maze. When
the pair reached a second fork, this time turning left, the whistle signalled Fleur’s entry.

Holly glanced back at Cedric. “Shouldn’t we have run into something by now?” she asked softly.

“Yeah,” Cedric answered with a frown. “This is weird.” Suddenly a look of horror appeared on his
face. Surging forward with a yell, he grabbed Holly and dragged her backward. She gasped as a
vicious sting missed her by inches.
Looking up, she was greeted by a terrifying sight. One of Hagrid’s Blast-Ended Skrewts, which had grown to an enormous ten feet. Holly scrambled back as Cedric dragged her to her feet.

Releasing a blast of fire from its end, the Skrewt surged towards them. Holly raised her wand instinctively, casting a Shield Charm just in time. The Skrewt slammed into her translucent shield then began to climb over it, stinger lashing menacingly through the air. Just as it reached the top, Cedric lashed out with, “Stupefy!” A blast of red struck the Skrewt on its exposed underside, and it flopped bonelessly to the ground.

Holly swallowed shakily. “That was close.”

Cedric nodded, before ushering her forward. “Let’s move, before it wakes up.” Holly quickened her pace.

The pair hurried through the twists and turns, growing more confused by the absence of obstacles. Suddenly, in the distance, a loud scream rang out.

Stopping, Holly yelled, “Fleur?! as she looked around for the source. Cedric swore softly.

“I can’t tell where it came from,” he said grimly. He reached out to push Holly gently when she didn’t move. “The best thing we can do is keep moving forward. If we find her we can help. If not, the sooner this is all over, the better.”

Holly nodded, before using the Four-Point Spell to regain her bearings. “Right, let’s go that way,” she pointed decisively.

They hurried along the path for several minutes when a new sound reached their ears. Running footsteps thudded behind them, rapidly growing louder. As they turned, they saw Viktor round the corner, wand raised. Before they could react, the Durmstrang champion yelled, “Crucio!” and suddenly Cedric was screaming on the ground.

Horrified, Holly snapped her wand up. “Stupefy!” Viktor pulled his wand away from Cedric, raising a shield just in time. Holly felt a white hot flame ignite inside her as she placed herself between Cedric and Viktor. “How dare you,” she hissed. Brandishing her wand, she flung spell after spell at him. Viktor backed away, repeatedly recasting his shield as it wavered, while staring at Holly.

Just before he reached the corner, his shield broke under Holly’s Knockback Jinx, and a beam of red flashed low to the ground, catching him by surprise before he collapsed. Looking back, Holly saw Cedric, shaken but determined, with wand extended from where he lay.

“Are you alright?” she asked, reaching down to help Cedric stand.

“Yeah,” he panted as he rose unsteadily to his feet, his body trembling. “Yeah… I don’t believe it… I never thought he would do something like this…”

“Neither did I,” Holly said, frowning at Viktor’s limp form. “What should we do about him? If we just leave him, he’ll probably get eaten by a Skrewt.”

“He’d deserved it,” Cedric muttered. Shaking his head, he raised his wand and conjured a shower of red sparks into the air, hovering over Viktor.

The pair continued on, exploring the dense maze. Several times they encountered dead ends, and were forced to turn back, but with both other champions down, their sense of urgency had fled. Cautiously, they advanced.
Finally, after what felt an eternity of exploring, they turned a corner and saw light ahead. The Triwizard Cup sat, glowing brightly, on a pedestal at the end of the path. Holly let out a relieved laugh. Cedric gave her a tired grin, and they moved forward together.

As they approached, Holly noticed movement to the left, and pulled Cedric to a stop. Moments later, an enormous spider burst from the hedges between them and the Cup, and began bearing down upon them.

“Stupefy!” Holly yelled. The red jet struck the spider, but it barely flinched, rapidly approaching them.

Cedric stepped forward, incanting “Incendio!” to bring forth a wide gout of flames. The spider reared back, chittering wildly.

Quickly, Holly turned her wand to the ground with a whispered, “Glacius.” The ground before her became slick with a layer of ice, and the spider, off balance from the flames, slipped and fell.

As the spider clicked and chittered, impotently trying to gain traction on the frictionless ice, Holly aimed her wand at its eyes. “On three?” Cedric nodded, sighting along his own wand. “One… two… three! Stupefy!” The combined Stunning spells struck the helpless spider in the eyes, and it collapsed before them.

Cedric turned to grin at Holly, panting slightly. “Alright, Holly?”

Holly shook her head at him. “Let’s just finish this already.”

Chuckling, Cedric waved his wand, clearing away the ice, and moving the limp spider aside. With cautious steps, the Hogwarts champions approached the Cup. They stood before the plinth, bathed in the glow.

After a long moment, Holly glanced at Cedric. “What are you waiting for? Take it.”

“I wouldn’t have made it here without you, Holly,” Cedric said, looking at her seriously. “You deserve to get the credit too.”

Holly shook her head. “I haven’t done anything except hold you back.”

Cedric stared at her in disbelief. “You have got to be kidding,” he laughed. “You found out about the dragons. You and your friends pushed me to train harder, in ways I never would have thought of. I don’t think I could have made it through this maze without you helping me.”

“You know I never cared about winning this,” Holly said stubbornly. “I’ve just been trying to survive. Stop being noble and take the damn Cup already so we can get out of here.”

“No,” Cedric said. “We take it together or not at all.”

Holly gave a frustrated groan. “Fine, let’s just finish this stupid Tournament.” Cedric beamed at her. She felt her cheeks warm, and couldn’t help but smile back.

“On three?” Cedric said, hovering his hand above the Cup’s handle. Nodding, Holly mirrored him. “One… two… three!”

They grabbed the handles together. Instantly, there was a jerk behind Holly’s navel and her feet left the ground as a swirl of colours and wind surrounded the Hogwarts champions and the Cup.
AN: Sorry this took so long. Writer’s block sucks.

Hope y’all enjoy the cliffhanger. Next chapter will be up soon.
Graveyard and Guardians

AN: I have updated Chapter 1, adding some scenes to improve the pacing.

Trigger warnings for torture, death, transphobia, misgendering and deadnaming.

After an eternity and an instant Holly felt her feet slam into the ground. Her legs gave out under her, as the Cup dropped from her grasp.

Holly lifted her head to see their new location. They were in an abandoned graveyard, surrounded by overgrown tombstones and monuments. “Where are we?” she asked, rising to her knees.

“I’m not sure,” Cedric grunted as he got to his feet. Reaching over to pull Holly up, he asked, “Did anyone tell you the Cup was a Portkey?”

Holly shook her head. “Do you think this is part of the task?”

“I dunno. Wands out, d’you reckon?” Nodding, Holly drew forth her wand, absently lighting the area with a Lumos.

Suddenly, the sound of approaching footsteps had the pair turning, wands raised. A short figure moved slowly towards them, carrying what appeared to be a baby. Holly couldn’t make out the face behind their hood.

“Hello?” Holly called tentatively, lowering her wand. “Who are you? Can you tell us where we are?”

The figure stopped by a large marble headstone, barely a few feet from them. There was a pause, before Holly’s scar exploded with pain. She collapsed to the ground, dropping her wand and clutching her head in agony. Dimly she heard Cedric yell her name, before a high, cold voice said, “Kill the spare.”

A second voice incanted “Avada Kedavra!” Bright green light shone through her eyelids, and something heavy struck the ground. Her scar burned more painfully than ever before fading. She forced her eyes open, looking up in desperate terror.

There was no sign of Cedric, or the Triwizard Cup, and the high-pitched voice gave a furious shriek. “How could you let him escape, you imbecile?!”

“I am sorry my master,” whimpered the figure. As he lit his wand, Holly realised suddenly that it was Wormtail.

“You!” she gasped, struggling to her hands and knees. Spying her wand, she reached for it, only for it to fly away from her, into Wormtail’s grasp.

“Up against the headstone!” he said shakily, jerking his head at the marble headstone, while keeping his wand trained on her. Eying the wand, she slowly rose to her feet.

“Hurry up, you fool! They will find us!” the high voice hissed, and Holly realised it was coming from the bundle in Wormtail’s arms.

“Move!” he squealed, jabbing his wand threateningly at her. Reluctantly she moved closer. In the flickering wandlight, she saw the name Tom Riddle inscribed on the tombstone. Her blood ran
cold.

She tensed, not sure what she planned to do, but unwilling to obey any longer. Before she could act, a spell struck her, freezing her in place. Wormtail’s hands were clammy as he forced her around and slammed her back against the tombstone. He conjured ropes to bind her tightly against the stone, before the Petrification was removed. As she opened her mouth to snarl an insult, he shoved a wad of black cloth into her mouth. Then, he placed his strange bundle down, and vanished behind the tombstone.

Holly looked around desperately, hoping to find some means of escape. The bundle moved fitfully, and her scar ached as she looked at it. Tearing her eyes away, she spotted a huge snake circling the headstone. She regretted getting herself gagged. Perhaps she could have talked the snake into helping her.

Wormtail returned after a short time, huffing as he pushed an enormous cauldron to the foot of the grave. As he lit flames beneath it, the snake slithered away. The liquid within the cauldron boiled quickly and began sparking like flames. Once it grew bright enough, Wormtail spoke. “It is ready, master.”

“Now,” hissed the bundle. Wormtail opened the bundle, revealing a disgusting creature. Like a human child warped into something scaly and raw and hairless. It was thin and feeble, and bore eyes of malicious, gleaming red. Holly’s shriek of horror was muffled only by the cloth in her mouth.

Picking up the thing with a look of revulsion, Wormtail quickly carried it to the cauldron and lowered it into the liquid. Then he raised his wand and spoke in a trembling voice “Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!”

The grave beneath Holly’s feet cracked open, and a trickle of dust flew from it into the cauldron, turning the liquid a noxious blue.

Wormtail’s voice grew even more fearful and shaky as he drew forth a knife. “Flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive – your master.” He held his right hand over the cauldron and swung the knife at his wrist. Holly slammed her eyes closed, cringing at the scream of pain and the splash. Red light burned through her eyelids.

Through moans of pain, Wormtail somehow continued. Holly watched in horror as he approached. “B-blood of the enemy… forcibly taken… you will… resurrect your foe.”

Holly bit down on her gag as the knife pierced her arm, wincing and glaring at Wormtail. He ignored her, collecting the blood in a vial and pouring it into the cauldron before collapsing to the ground. The potion turned a blindingly white.

When nothing happened for a long moment, Holly felt a moment of hope, but it was dashed as steam billowed from the cauldron and then a figure rose from inside.

“Robe me,” it hissed in the high, cold voice. Sobbing, Wormtail picked up the bundle of robes and pulled them one handed onto the figure. Below Holly, the snake returned, circling the grave once more.

Out of the cauldron stepped Lord Voldemort.

After spending a moment examining his new form, he reached into his robes and drew forth a wand. Flicking it at Wormtail, he sent him crashing against another headstone, where he collapsed.
in a whimpering heap. Looking back at Holly, Voldemort laughed.

As Wormtail muttered pleas, Voldemort said, “Give me your arm.” When Wormtail extended his stump, he snapped, “Your other arm!” As Wormtail continued to whimper piteously, Voldemort reached down and wrenched up his left arm. Pushing up the sleeves, to reveal the bright red brand of the Dark Mark, he spoke softly. “It is back, they will all have noticed it… and now we shall see… now we shall know…”

He pressed a long, white finger to the mark, which turned jet black. Holly hissed as her scar throbbed and Wormtail yelled in pain. Straightening and looking around, Voldemort mused, “How many will be brave enough to return when they feel it? And how many will be foolish enough to stay away?”

Then he turned to face Holly once more. “You stand, Harry Potter, upon the remains of my late father. A muggle and a fool. Still, he served his purpose. He has proved far more useful in death than he ever was in life.” He gave a cold laugh. “You see that house upon the hillside, Potter? My father lived there. My mother, a witch who lived here in this village, fell in love with him. But he abandoned her when she told him what she was… he didn’t like magic, my father… rather like your muggle relatives, from what I have heard.”

Holly froze, eyes wide. Voldemort gave a raspy chuckle. “Yes, I have learned a great deal about you. It has been most fascinating to learn about your family. Indeed, we are quite similar, in a way. My mother died giving birth to me, leaving me to be raised in a Muggle orphanage, where I was hated and feared, for the power that lived inside of me.”

Stepping close to her, he whispered, “They were meant to be your family, and they locked you away, treated you like dirt. Don’t you wish you could get even, Harry? Get back at them for everything they put you through? I could give that. Swear yourself to me, and you can make them pay.” He raised his wand to Holly’s face. She flinched away, but no spell touched her. The rag in her mouth disappeared, allowing her to gasp a deep breath.

Voldemort stared at her expectantly. Holly shifted her jaw, sore from being held open so long, before saying defiantly, “My name is Holly.”

With a smile that didn’t reach his eyes, Voldemort said, “You have even fashioned yourself a new name, as I did. Come, take your place by my side, and you will never be powerless again.”

Holly opened her mouth, but no words came out. She couldn’t help but remember her time with the Dursleys. Years of neglect and cruelty and being punished for things she didn’t understand and couldn’t control. She thought of how good it had felt to scare her aunt and uncle into submission with the threat of Sirius.

Then she shook the thoughts away. Even as awful as the Dursleys were to her, she knew it would be wrong to hurt them the way Voldemort wanted. And it wouldn’t stop with them. Hermione’s parents, who were good and kind, were under just as much threat in a world with Voldemort. As was every Muggleborn and Halfblood, and even Purebloods who stood in his way.

She set her jaw. “No.”

Voldemort’s eyes burned as he stared at her. Suddenly the silence was disturbed by muffled cracks and swishing cloaks. Masked and hooded, dozens of wizards Apparated into the graveyard. Slowly, they approached. Voldemort flicked his wand and the cloth reappeared in Holly’s mouth. Then, he turned to survey the approaching Death Eaters.
After a pause, they approached on their knees and kissed Voldemort’s robes, though some hesitated longer than others. Once they had supplicated themselves, they backed away, and stood to form a loose circle around the grave.

“Welcome, Death Eaters.” Voldemort spoke quietly, yet his voice carried. “Thirteen years since last we met. Yet you answer my call as though it was yesterday… we are still united under the Dark Mark, then! Or are we? I smell guilt. There is a stench of guilt upon the air. I see you all, whole and healthy, with your powers intact and I ask myself… why did this band of wizards never come to the aid of their master, to whom they swore eternal loyalty?

“And I answer myself, they must have believed me broken, they thought I was gone. They slipped back among my enemies, and they pleaded innocence, and ignorance, and bewitchment… And then I ask myself, but how could they have believed I would not rise again? They, who knew the steps I took, long ago, to guard myself against mortal death? They, who had seen proofs of the immensity of my power, in the times when I was mightier than any wizard living.

“And I answer myself, perhaps they believed a still-greater power could exist, one that could vanquish even Lord Voldemort… perhaps they now pay allegiance to another… perhaps the champion of commoners, of Muggleborns and Muggles, Albus Dumbledore? It is a disappointment to me… I confess myself disappointed…”

There was long pause, as shifting and muttering swept around the circle. Then, Voldemort brandished his wand, and Wormtail was dragged forward along the ground with a cry of pain.

“Wormtail here returned to me, not out of loyalty, but out of fear his old friends. In his desperation, he indeed helped me, returning me to my body. But just now, he allowed a witness to escape, carrying word back to Dumbledore. So he deserves this pain.”

“Please, master… please…” Wormtail sobbed from the ground.

Voldemort raised his wand. “Crucio!” Wormtail writhed and shrieked upon the ground, blood from his arm splashing across the ground. After what seemed an eternity to Holly, Voldemort raised his wand and the screaming stopped.

“Witness the price of disloyalty and failure,” Voldemort said coldly. With a gasp, Wormtail clawed feebly at the ground, trying to pull himself away. “Avada Kedavra!”

There was a flash of green, and Holly stared in disbelief and horror at Wormtail’s body. The circle of Death Eaters swayed like trees blown by a strong wind, and the muttering grew louder. Suddenly, a dark purple beam shot towards Voldemort. The Dark Lord’s eyes widened, and he slashed his wand up. A shield of shining silver appeared, just barely in time to catch the spell with a bang.

“You dare defy me, Nott!?” Voldemort shrieked, firing back a sickly yellow spell that raised the hairs on Holly’s neck as it passed.

The Death Eater conjured a shield of his own, snarling, “I will not bow to the will of a filthy Halfblood like you, Riddle!” With an enraged shout, Voldemort slashed his wand, releasing a thin black jet of magic that pierced the shield and slammed into Nott’s body. He fell with a gurgling cry.

Voldemort’s head snapped to one of the standing Death Eaters. “What is this?” he asked coldly. When the Death Eater hesitated, he snarled, “Answer me, Lucius!”
Lucius Malfoy’s voice came from beneath the hood, speaking in carefully measured tones. “My Lord, there was an article printed in the Daily Prophet this morning, which made the claim that your father… was a Muggle.”

Voldemort stared at Lucius for a long moment, before spinning and launching a Killing Curse at the downed Death Eater. As the green flash faded, he hissed ominously, “I am the greatest sorcerer in the world! None can compare to my power! None have dared to delve where I have delved, to learn what I know! I am immortal! And you dare to question my purity? I, who united our forces and raised us above the filth of the corrupted Wizarding World!”

One of the Death Eaters threw himself to the ground. “Forgive us, Master! We knew it could not be true, but we could not help our doubts.”

In response, Voldemort placed him under the Cruciatus Curse, allowing him to scream and struggle for a long minute. When he raised his wand, the Death Eater was left twitching and gasping on the ground.

“You ask for forgiveness? I do not forgive. I do not forget. Thirteen long years… I want thirteen years’ repayment before I forgive you. I want your undying faith and loyalty!” The remaining Death Eaters kneeled, each offering assurances of their devotion.

Then, Voldemort was turning to face her again. “But we have forgotten our guest. Harry Potter has kindly joined us for my rebirthing party. He is here as my guest of honour, thanks to my most faithful servant, who has been working tirelessly at Hogwarts. When he returns, he will be rewarded for his loyal service.”

Voldemort’s gaze swept along the circle. “You all thought this mere child was enough to defeat me. His survival was not from any power of his own. He was protected by old magic, through the sacrifice of his mother… a protection I admit I had not foreseen. I could not touch him as long as the traces of that protection remained. But now, his blood courses through my veins. I can touch him now.”

A long, white finger touched her face, and she screamed into the gag as Holly felt the worst pain imaginable in her scar. Voldemort laughed, before removing his hand and raising his wand.

“Crucio!”

She had been wrong. The pain before had been nothing, compared to the agony she felt now. Every nerve screamed and she just wanted to die.

Then, it was gone, and she hung limp against the ropes, panting for breath. Around her, the Death Eaters laughed.

The laughter cut off as Voldemort spoke. “You see, I think, how foolish it was to suppose that this boy could ever have been stronger than me. But I want there to be no mistake in anybody’s mind. Harry Potter escaped me by a lucky chance. And I am now going to prove my power by killing him, here and now, in front of you all, when there is no Dumbledore to help him and no mother to die for him. I will give him his chance. He will be allowed to fight, and you will be left in no doubt which of us is the stronger. Just a little longer, Nagini,” he added, and the snake circling Holly moved away.

He flicked his wand, and the ropes holding Holly vanished. She fell to the floor heavily, before clawing the gag from her mouth. Pushing herself to her feet, she glared up at Voldemort.

“Retrieve your wand, Harry Potter,” he said, gesturing to Wormtail’s body. Holly felt sick as she
realised what she needed to do.

Straightening her back, she met the Dark Lord’s gaze. “My name is Holly,” she said firmly. He gave only a cruel smile and gestured to the body again. With measured steps, she approached and knelt beside it.

Wormtail’s face was locked in an expression of pain and terror. Pushing down a wave of revulsion, she searched the pockets of his robes, until she found her wand. She paused, then reached down and closed his eyes, before standing to face Voldemort.

“You have been taught how to duel, Harry Potter?” Voldemort asked with a cruel smile. His red eyes caught hers, and she felt a sudden presence in her mind. Her thoughts turned to the mismanaged Duelling Club from her second year. As the image of Snape casting the Disarming Charm played, she steeled her will, and pressed against the foreign presence. With a mental shove, she forced the Dark Lord from her mind.

As reality returned, she saw Voldemort’s eyes widen, then narrow. “We bow to each other, Harry,” he said, bending slightly with a mocking smile. “Come, the niceties must be observed… Dumbledore would like you to show manners… Bow to death, Harry…”

The Death Eaters laughed again. Holly’s lip curled and lifted her left hand to raise two fingers at him. “For the third time, my name is Holly, you utter bastard.”

Voldemort’s face twisted. “I said, bow.” He pointed his wand at her, and she felt her spine curve under an invisible force. “Very good.” As he lifted his wand away, the pressure vanished, and Holly straightened with a snarl. “And now you face me, like a man… straight backed and proud, the way your father died…”

Holly lashed out with her wand. “Incendio!” A jet of fire surged forward. Voldemort raised his wand lazily, and the flames splashed uselessly against his shield.

“Now, now Harry, that is quite terrible sportsmanship,” he chided. “You must wait for the duel to begin. Flouting rules has consequences, after all. Crucio!”

Holly’s desperately cast Protego shattered beneath the Unforgivable. Her world devolved into agony. She screamed.

Finally, mercifully, it stopped. Holly stumbled to her feet, raising her wand in a trembling hand. She staggered, almost falling against the watching Death Eaters, but they pushed her back into the circle.

“A little break, a little pause… that hurt didn’t it, Harry? You don’t want me to do that again, do you?” Voldemort taunted.

“Go fuck yourself, you deformed wanker,” Holly snarled back.

Voldemort’s voice was cold. “I asked you a question. Answer me! Imperio!”

The feeling of the Imperious Curse washed over Holly, as a voice whispered ‘just answer “no”… say “no”… just answer “no”…”

Holly focused her will and rage, slicing through the mind-numbing bliss. The lingering ache of the Cruciatus returned to her. “I said fuck you.” Defiantly, she pointed her wand at Voldemort.

Silence filled the graveyard. The Death Eaters were frozen, as still as the surrounding gravestones.
Voldemort’s voice was as sharp and dangerous as razor wire. “Then die, Harry Potter. Avada-”

“Diffindo!” Holly yelled desperately, as the Dark Lord finished his Killing Curse. She knew she was dead, but she hoped to at least hurt him as she went.

The green and yellow jets collided, and became a beam of golden light, connecting Holly’s wand to Voldemort’s. She clutched her wand tightly as it vibrated violently. Then, the duelling pair were lifted from the ground, flying over the startled Death Eaters, and were placed down in a clear area. As the Death Eaters approached, the golden light shifted and splintered, creating a dome shape web that locked them out. “Do nothing!” Voldemort yelled, struggling to break the connection. “Do nothing unless I command you!”

The air was split by the sound of phoenix song, full of unearthly beauty. The sound filled Holly with hope, and renewed determination. Between them, the beam changed, forming beads of light along its length. Holly’s wand shuddered and grew hot as the beads slid towards her. Focusing her will, she pushed back, forcing the beads away from her. Voldemort looked stunned and fearful, as the beads inexorably approached. With painful slowness, the bead touched his wand.

Instantly, screams echoed out from the wand. There was a momentary flash of a shield, before suddenly, a grey shape of solid smoke appeared from the tip. Slowly it formed into the shape of a person, until the figure of the Death Eater Nott fell to the ground. The shade stood, hissing to Voldemort before turning to Holly.

“Don’t let go, Potter,” it said, voice echoing distantly.

Voldemort’s wand emitted several more flashes, and then another form appeared. The shade of Wormtail stood, looking between the duellist in amazement. He moved aside as more shades emerged. An old man, Holly didn’t recognise, as well as a woman, who shouted encouragement.

Then the next shade took Holly’s breath away, as her mother appeared. She moved closer to Holly, speaking softly, “Your father’s coming… He wants to see you… it will be all right… hold on, Holly…”

The shade of James followed quickly, moving to stand by her. “When the connection is broken, we will linger for only moments… but we will give you time… help is coming Holly, you must hold on for a few moments more…”

Nodding, Holly swallowed back the lump in her throat. The shade of Nott approached, ignoring glares from her parents. “Tell my son what happened here, Potter. Tell him he must forge his own path. He should kneel to nobody.” Holly’s stomach twisted as she remembered one of her classmates was Theodore Nott, and realised this was his father.

“I will,” she gasped. Muffled cries of alarm from outside the dome drew her attention. Looking over, she saw Dumbledore striding between the graves, flanked by Moody, Lupin and Sirius. Her heart leapt.

“Har- Holly,” Pettigrew whispered urgently, creeping closer. He cringed as the shades of her parents looked at him, before pushing forward. “Beware of Moody. He is a fake, a Death Eater in disguise.” Holly’s eyes widened. Her wand vibrated so powerfully, she needed two hands to hold it. “Please, take my body. Clear Sirius’ name. Tell him, I’m so sorry. For everything.”

Holly could barely nod, through the effort to keep hold of her wand. “Do it now,” her father whispered. “Be ready to run… do it now…”
“NOW!” Holly yelled, wrenching her wand away. The song ended, the cage vanished, but the shades lingered, closing in on Voldemort. Holly dashed back to the graves, ducking as spells lit up the night. Looking up, she saw the Death Eaters hurling spells at Dumbledore. The Headmaster blocked everything, not breaking stride towards Voldemort. Above him, Fawkes circled, calling out a song of battle.

Raising her wand to her head, Holly tapped herself, shivering at the cold feeling running down her body. A glance at her hands confirmed the camouflaging spell was working. Holly began moving cautiously around the gravestones, back towards Wormtail’s body. As she crept passed, she kept her eye on the battle.

Sirius and Lupin were an incredible team, moving together in tandem. Lupin deflected oncoming attacks, while Sirius launched a flurry of hexes, jinxes and curses. Despite fighting far greater numbers, they were holding their own.

Dumbledore gave a sweep of his wand, and the ground heaved, throwing half the Death Eaters from their feet. Before he could press the advantage, Voldemort joined the fray, shrieking with fury. Holly’s eyes were dazzled by the brightness of the spells that flashed between them.

Looking over to Moody, she frowned. Wormtail’s warning echoed in her mind, and as she watched, her breath caught. None of Moody’s spells were hitting the Death Eaters! She saw him dive behind a large tombstone, which he quickly enlarged. Then, he looked towards Dumbledore, and naked loathing crossed his features. He began to raise his wand at the Headmaster’s back.

With a snarl, Holly snapped up her wand. “Expelliarmus!” The red spell blazed across the graveyard. Moody, so focused on Dumbledore, failed to notice it until it struck him. His wand was ripped from his hand and he was sent rolling out from behind his cover. The Death Eaters began to press their advantage, hurling dark curses that he scrambled to avoid. The attacks faltered as Voldemort shrieked, “No! Do not harm him!”

As Holly caught Moody’s wand, she saw him spot her with his magic eye, and a look of pure hatred crossed his face. Beyond him, Dumbledore looked shocked, before his expression firmied into steely determination as he raised his wand once more.

Moving quickly, Holly reached grave of Tom Riddle. Grabbing hold of Wormtail’s body, she removed her Disillusionment Charm. She looked around for a means of escape, and her heart sank when she saw none. As she opened her mouth to call out to the Headmaster, movement caught her eye. Voldemort’s snake slithered closer, hissing ominously. It reared back, ready to strike, when a cry sounded from above.

Holly looked up to see Fawkes diving towards her, claws outstretched. Desperately, she threw up her hand to meet him. He grabbed her, filling her with warmth, just as the snake lunged. Her vision filled with flames, and the graveyard vanished.

Everything was fire. The Earth burned, the sky burned, the air burned, and Holly burned. The flames sang with beauty and power and terror. And then the fire vanished and the song stopped and reality returned in a rush.

As the flames receded, Holly saw a scene of utter pandemonium. She was outside the maze, at the entrance. Yells and screams came from the stands. She saw the Hogwarts’ teachers and Madame Maxime trying to reassure the students. Nearby, she saw Fudge, flanked by a pair of serious looking wizards.
Her fiery appearance turned all eyes upon her. With a flutter, Fawkes alighted on her shoulder, banishing the heaviness that had settled upon them. She rose to her feet, ignoring the muttering crowd. Looking over at the Minister for Magic, she spoke loudly. “Voldemort is back!”

Shrieks sounded in the stand. Fudge flinched so hard he almost tripped. The Minister hurried over to her. “What are you talking about, Harry? What’s going on? Merlin! Is that a body?! Who is that?!”

“I said, Voldemort’s back.” Holly pointed down at Wormtail’s corpse. “This is Peter Pettigrew. He helped resurrect Voldemort. And he framed Sirius Black.”

Fudge stared at her and began sputtering. “You-Know-Who… returned? Preposterous. And this can’t be Pettigrew. Come now, Harry-”

Holly raised her finger and jabbed the Minister in the chest. He stepped back with a squeak. “Listen to me, you snivelling idiot. Pettigrew took my blood and brought Voldemort back. Voldemort killed him and tried to kill me! Dumbledore is fighting him at this very moment. You need to get your head out of your ass and start doing something about it!”

Fudge puffed up in indignation. “How dare you- I am the Minister for Magic! You think you can order me around! I know what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to undermine me, making up all sorts of nonsense to destabilise the government and discredit me!”

With a snarl, Holly stepped forward, grabbing the Minister by the front of his robes. “You disgusting coward!” she yelled. “You care more about your reputation than stopping a lunatic murderer! Voldemort is back and you’re worried about how popular you are!”

“Unhand me!” yelled Fudge. “Aurors!” One of the serious looking men began moving towards Holly and the Minister, drawing his wand.

Suddenly, in a swirl of colour, Dumbledore, Lupin and Padfoot appeared. Taking in the situation with a glance, the Headmaster quickly moved to Holly’s side. “Let Cornelius go, please Holly.”

Grudgingly, she complied. Fudge brushed himself down, turning to Dumbledore. “Dumbledore, you must control your student!” he blustered. “This silly boy is yelling nonsense about You-Know-Who and Peter Pettigrew.”

“Voldemort is back, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said firmly. “I witnessed him myself, as did Remus here. He has returned, and his Death Eaters have answered his call.”

Fudge paled, eyes darting from Dumbledore to Holly to Lupin. “Y- you are all in on it,” he muttered. “You’re trying to discredit me and take over the Ministry. I won’t have it! Auror!” he snapped, turning to the nearby wizard. “Arrest them!” The Auror stared at him in disbelief.

“You will find that quite impossible, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said firmly. He seemed to radiate power in that moment. “You cannot simply order someone’s arrest without evidence of wrongdoing.”

Fudge’s face purpled, and he snapped, “We’ll see about that, won’t we!” Then he turned and stormed away, towards the gates.

The Auror approached slowly, swallowing. “Is he really back?” he asked Dumbledore seriously. When Dumbledore nodded, he swore softly. Suddenly, he remembered the corpse on the ground, and straightened. “I’ll take custody of the body from here,” he said formally, though his voice tremored slightly. “We can find known associates of Pettigrew, confirm that this is him.”
Lupin stepped forward. “My name is Remus Lupin, and I assure you, that is Peter Pettigrew. We were friends at Hogwarts,” he explained. At his feet, Padfoot stared at Wormtail.

Nodding, the Auror asked, “Would you be willing to provide memories, for confirmation?” As Lupin nodded in agreement, Dumbledore placed a hand on Holly’s shoulder.

“Remus, I am taking Holly to my office. May I borrow Padfoot? I believe he will be of great comfort to her.” Lupin agreed, and Padfoot shook himself, before moving to press firmly against Holly’s side. She tangled her fingers in his fur, feeling much steadier.

A sense of numbness fell over Holly as Dumbledore led her into Hogwarts and up to his office. As they stepped into the room, a figure sitting in one of the chairs jumped to its feet, revealing Rita Skeeter. She looked between Holly and Dumbledore, fear etched on her face. “Is it true?” she whispered. “Is You-Know-Who really back?”

“He is,” Dumbledore said solemnly. Rita covered her mouth in horror.

“Oh, Merlin! He’s going to kill me! You have to help me, Dumbledore, please!” Holly realised with a jolt just how much danger she had put Rita in.

“I’m sorry!” Holly blurted. “I shouldn’t have told you all that stuff about Voldemort.”

Rita blinked at Holly. “What. Don’t be ridiculous Holly, this isn’t your fault,” she told Holly with a shaky smile. “I knew it was risky when I wrote it. It was bound to make a lot of people unhappy with me. But no one could have predicted You-Know-Who coming back.”

Dumbledore ushered Holly forward, into a chair, before smiling kindly at Rita. “I’m sure we can find some way to keep you safe from Voldemort. I assure you that for now, you are safe within Hogwarts. Now, I need to speak with Holly privately. If you would kindly wait in Professor McGonagall’s office, I will see that arrangements are made for you.”

With a last, nervous look at Dumbledore, Rita nodded, and hurried from the room. The second the door closed behind her, Sirius blurred into human form, kneeling and pulling Holly into a tight embrace. She clung to him as all the fear and pain crash down on her. Burying her face in his chest, she began to sob.

Sirius stroked her hair, muttering soothing words into her ear. When her tears ran dry, she sat back, breathing deeply. “Sorry,” she murmured as she wiped her eyes.

“My dear child, you have nothing to be sorry for,” Dumbledore said gently. Moving to sit beside her, Sirius threw his arm across her shoulders and pulled her gently to lean against his side.

Dumbledore sat at his desk, looking incredibly worn. “I am sorry to ask this of you Holly, but I need to know what happened after Cedric left the graveyard.”

“We can leave that ‘til morning, can’t we Dumbledore,” Sirius snapped, his grip tightening. “Let her have a sleep. Let her rest.”

Dumbledore leaned forward and spoke gently to her. “If I thought I could help you by putting you into an enchanted sleep and allowing you to postpone the moment when you would have to think about what has happened tonight, I would do it. But I know better. Numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it. You have shown bravery beyond anything could have expected of you. I ask you to demonstrate your courage one more time. I ask you to tell us what happened.”
Holly sniffed and looked away as she wiped her eyes again. From the corner of her eye, she noticed one of Dumbledore’s cabinets, and an idea wormed into her mind. “Could… could I show you in the Pensieve? I don’t… I’d rather not have to talk about it aloud right now.”

She glanced up to find Dumbledore’s eyes filled with conflicted emotions. After a long moment, he nodded. “As you wish.” Standing, he quickly retrieved the Pensieve from its cabinet. Once it was placed carefully on the desk, he approached Holly.

“I will extract the memory for you,” he told her, drawing his wand and placing the tip carefully against her temple. “You must focus on the memory you wish to share. Much akin to the casting of a Patronus. As with your Occlumency, keep your mind clear of other thoughts. When you wish to stop, simply release your focus.”

Holly nodded, closing her eyes, and focusing on everything that happened after Cedric vanished in the graveyard. As the events of the evening played through her mind, she cringed, but the impact of them felt muted, distant. Idly, she realised it was the effect of extracting the memory. When she reached Fawkes rescuing her, she considered ending it, but decided to continue for completeness’ sake. Once Dumbledore returned in her memory, she pulled her mind away.

She slumped in her chair. When her eyes fluttered open, she saw Dumbledore carefully carrying a long, misty white strand on the tip of his wand. Sirius rubbed her back, muttering words of encouragement, as Dumbledore placed the memory into the Pensieve. Glancing up, the Headmaster said, “Sirius, if you would stay with Holly while I view this.” At Sirius’ nod, Dumbledore bent over, vanishing into the memory.

Silence filled the office. Holly leant against her godfather tiredly, wishing she could simply sleep. Sirius stroked her hair gently, watching her with concern. Looking up at him, seeing his gaunt face, she suddenly wanted to talk about something, despite her earlier statement. “I saw mum and dad,” she said softly. Sirius’ brow furrowed in confusion. “In the graveyard,” she clarified. “Voldemort forced me to duel him, but something happened with our wands, they connected somehow. Then these – they weren’t ghosts, but close – of the people he killed came out of his. Mum and dad came out.” Sirius hissed in a breath. “They called me Holly,” she said with a small smile.

Sirius returned it. “I told you they would love and accept you, no matter what.”

Holly blushed, nodding. “I know, but it was nice to hear.” She hesitated for a moment, before continuing. “There was something else. Wormtail’s shade came out too.” Sirius stiffened. “Voldemort killed him for letting Cedric get away. He… he warned me that Moody was a Death Eater in disguise, and then he asked me to take his body back to clear your name. He said he was sorry for everything.” Sirius stared at her, various emotions warring across his face. Finally, he raised a hand to cover his face. He took a deep breath and sighed.

“I… can’t say that I’m sad he’s dead,” Sirius said, “but I’m grateful for what he did.”

Suddenly, a silver flash emanated from the Pensieve, and Dumbledore reappeared. He looked more tired than Holly had ever seen him. With a sigh, he said, “Thank you for that, Holly. Would you mind if I kept this for a while longer?”

Holly nodded, feeling her eyelids growing heavier. “Sure, as long as you need,” she said, words growing slurred.

“Come,” Dumbledore said, waving for her to stand, “we will take you to the hospital wing. I do not want you returning to the dormitory tonight. A Sleeping Potion, and some peace… Sirius, would you like to stay with her?”
Sirius nodded, blurring into his Animagus form. Holly leaned on him gratefully as they went down to the hospital wing. As the doors opened, she saw Cedric seated in one of the beds, his parents hovering nearby. Mrs Weasley, Bill, Ron and Hermione stood to one side, talking to a tired looking Madam Pomfrey. The sound of the door drew their attention. “Holly! Oh, Holly!” Mrs Weasley cried, hurrying over.

Dumbledore raised a hand to forestall questions, insisting that Holly needed quiet and rest. Madam Pomfrey stared dubiously at Padfoot but allowed him to stay at the Headmaster’s request.

“I must take care of an urgent matter,” Dumbledore told Holly. “I would like you to remain here tomorrow, until I have spoken to the school.” With that, he hurried from the room.

Holly quickly changed into the provided pyjamas and climbed into bed. Padfoot curled up at the end, leaving her feet feeling rather warm. Madam Pomfrey brought her a potion for dreamless sleep. Before she took it, Holly mentioned, “I have a cut on my arm. Don’t you need to heal it?”

Madam Pomfrey tsked, pushing the goblet into her hands. “Yes, I saw the blood. I can heal it once you are asleep. Now drink.”

Holly obeyed and sank into blissful oblivion.

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Slowly, awareness returned.

Holly blinked at the blurred ceiling before reaching out to the bedside table. After a moment of blind fumbling, she found her glasses, and carefully put them on. Sitting up, she looked around the hospital wing. The Weasleys and Hermione were absent – gone for breakfast she supposed. Padfoot lay asleep on his back, legs in the air, tongue lolling from his mouth. She suppressed a giggle.

Cedric sat in the opposite bed, flipping through a copy of the Daily Prophet with a bored look. Several beds down from her, a grizzly figure lay sleeping. She felt a surge of shock as she realised it was Madeye Moody, missing his eye and leg. Wildly she realised this was the disguised Death Eater from the graveyard, and quickly grabbed her wand from the bedside table.

The quick motion drew Cedric’s attention. He quickly jumped from his bed, pausing to pull something from his bag. Hurrying to her side, he cautiously asked, “Are you alright?”

Holly kept her eyes and wand fixed on Moody’s sleeping form. “What’s going on? Why is he here? Why isn’t anyone guarding him?”

Cedric looked between her and Moody in confusion. “Dumbledore brought him in last night, while you were asleep. He told Madam Pomfrey that he’d been kept in a trunk all year.”

Slowly, Holly lowered her wand. “So he’s the real Moody?”

Cedric gave a nod and a shrug, before shuffling his feet. “I wanted to tell you that I’m so sorry.” She looked at Cedric with furrowed brows. His face was twisted with remorse. “I never should have insisted you take the Cup with me. It’s my fault you were in that graveyard in the first place. And then I left you there alone. You deserve this more than me.” He placed a small bag on her lap. It settled with the clink of shifting coins.

Holly looked between the bag and Cedric, baffled. “What are you talking about? None of what happened was your fault. You didn’t know the Cup was a Portkey. And I certainly don’t blame you for dodging the Killing Curse.” She grabbed the bag and pushed it back towards him. “I don’t want
or need this. I’m just glad you’re alive. They only wanted me, and if you’d stayed, they would have killed you.”

“I’m glad you got out. You would have been killed if you stayed, and I-” She broke off, swallowing and looking away. Cedric gripped her hand tightly. She took a deep breath. “No matter what else happened, I’m glad you’re still alive.”

She squeaked in surprise as Cedric suddenly leant forward and pulled her into a hug. After a moment, she relaxed into the embrace and hugged him back. When the pair separated, Cedric sat heavily on a nearby chair.

There was a long beat of silence before Holly cleared her throat. “Um, so what happened after you, uh, got back to Hogwarts?”

“It was rather disorienting,” Cedric told her. “I landed on the Cup and felt the Portkey activate again. Then I was being hauled to my feet, and everyone was cheering and congratulating me.” He grimaced. “Once I got Professor Dumbledore’s attention and told him what had happened, he took over. He did something to the Cup, somehow figuring out where it had come from, and made a new Portkey. Then he, Professor Moody, Professor Lupin – and his dog,” he added with confusion, “all touched it and vanished.”

Holly nodded, feeling immensely grateful for Dumbledore’s quick thinking. Cedric shifted in his chair, before sitting up straighter. “Oh, something else happened while you were asleep. Remember how Viktor attacked us in the maze?”

“Yeah, of course,” Holly said with a shudder. Cedric gave an apologetic smile.

“Well, it turns out he was Imperiused. After Dumbledore vanished, Professor Flitwick brought Viktor out of the maze and I told everyone what happened. The Minister sent someone running to get the Aurors, and they arrested him and took him back to the castle. When they woke him up, he told them he’d been Imperiused.”

“They took him at his word?” Holly asked, stunned.

Cedric shook his head. “They weren’t sure whether or not to believe it, so Snape offered some Veritaserum, which showed that he was telling the truth. I guess whoever was pretending to be Professor Moody did it.”

Holly sank back onto her pillow, feeling a pang of regret for some of her recent, less than generous thoughts towards Viktor.

As she opened her mouth to ask after Fleur, a sudden burst of motion across the room startled her. Holly flinched, training her wand on the movement. In the other bed, Moody sat upright, remaining eye darting around the room.

“Where the bloody hell is Dumbledore!” Moody yelled. “Get Dumbledore here now!”

Padfoot jolted awake, rolling over and looking around wildly. He caught sight of Moody and gave a small huff that sounded amused. Madam Pomfrey hurried from her room, looking incredibly put out. “That’s quite enough of that Alastor,” she snapped. “You need to rest and stop disturbing my other patients!”

Moody levered himself upright, glaring with his remaining eye. “I’ll rest after I’ve spoken with Dumbledore!”
Throwing up her hands, Madam Pomfrey waved her wand, releasing a silvery shape that raced from the room. Then she turned a gimlet eye on Cedric, sending him back to his bed, before she began fussing over Holly.

Several minutes later the doors opened, and Dumbledore stepped through. He inclined his head to Madam Pomfrey, smiling at Holly and Cedric, before moving to Moody’s bedside. “How are you, Alastor?” he asked.

“How the fuck do you think I am, you stupid bloody bastard?” Moody snarled. Madam Pomfrey tutted loudly and shot him a fierce look, which he ignored. Dumbledore remained unfazed. “I was ambushed in my own home by three dead men, tortured, interrogated and locked in a trunk for months! And to top it off, my fucking eye and leg are gone!”

Dumbledore nodded sagely. “Yes, I can see how that would be quite vexing. However, now that you are awake, I hope we can share what we each know, to gain a clearer grasp of what we face.”

Moody glared at him before falling back against his pillow with dark muttering.

“Now, you said you were captured by three men? I assume two were Voldemort and Peter Pettigrew. Could you enlighten me to the third?”

“Barty Crouch Junior,” Moody growled. “And he was the scum who pretended to be me.”

Dumbledore stroked his beard thoughtfully. “Yes, that would make sense.”

Moody almost snarled, “If you don’t tell me what you’ve figured out right now, I’ll shove that beard so far down your throat you’ll be shitting hair for weeks.”

“That’s quite enough of that,” Madam Pomfrey said loudly, glaring at Moody. She turned to Dumbledore. “Headmaster, please, there are students present.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes, you’re quite right Poppy. Alastor, please mind your language.” Moody scowled but nodded. “Now, I believe I have deduced the majority of the events that lead us to this moment.

“The true identity of your doppelganger leads me to suspect Bartemius Senior helped his son escape Azkaban. Most likely shortly before the public declaration of the death of his wife. I expect she took his place in Azkaban, and Bartemius kept his son hidden for all these years.

“Of course, no one is perfect. He would have made mistakes and had many near misses. I suspect that his former employee, Bertha Jorkins, must have witnessed something incriminating, and to protect his secret, he memory charmed her. That would explain her transfer to work under Ludo, and her suddenly terrible memory.

“Then, her disappearance while holidaying in Albania lead me to believe that was where she fell into Voldemort’s clutches. I’m sure he would be able to break the memory charm on her, learning of a loyal Death Eater outside Azkaban, as well as of the Triwizard Tournament. From there, it is simple to follow the logic behind his plan, the culmination of which we saw tonight, with the kidnapping of young Holly here, and the return of Voldemort.”

Holly shared a wide-eyed look with Cedric, as Dumbledore took mere scraps of evidence and weaved them into a complete story.

Moody turned his remaining eye onto Holly. “And just who the hell is she?”
Blinking in surprise, Holly realised that Moody must have been attacked before anyone told him about her transition or name change. Grabbing his wand from the side table and slipping out from under the blankets, she approached carefully. “I guess we haven’t actually been introduced. I’m Holly Potter.”

Glancing between her and Dumbledore, Moody slowly asked, “Is this some sort of disguise-?”

“This is who I am,” Holly interrupted firmly. “If you won’t respect that, you won’t get your wand back.”

Moody stared at her for a long moment, before bursting into laughter. Beside her Dumbledore gave a small sigh. Padfoot gave a laugh-like bark. “Oh, I like this lass, Albus. She’s got fire,” Moody said, giving her a scarred and lopsided grin. “Now, how the hell did you end up with my wand?”

“I disarmed the imposter,” she replied primly. As Moody chuckled appreciatively, she delicately handed him his wand. “I did have a warning that he was a fake, and got him in the back,” she admitted. Moody’s grin became rather feral.

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Moody told her firmly. “That’s called being smart.”

“What?” she asked, before she could stop herself.

“If you’re in a fight against someone with more experience and power than you, you should absolutely use any advantage you can get,” he said firmly. “There’s no such thing as fighting dirty – there’s living or dying.”

“That is quite enough,” Madam Pomfrey snapped. “There will be no more talk of dying. Now my patients need rest, Headmaster,” she glared at Dumbledore, making it clear that it was not a suggestion. In the face of an enraged Mediwitch, even Dumbledore retreated. A gesture to Padfoot had the Animagus hurrying over to nuzzle Holly affectionately, before racing after him.

With the Hospital Wing firmly under her control once more, Madam Pomfrey ushered Holly back to her bed. Holly sighed, wondering how long it would be before she could leave.

Madam Pomfrey released Cedric that evening but kept Holly behind for an extra day. Her friends informed her that Dumbledore had spoken to the school, warning them not to ask Holly questions about her experience. She felt rather grateful, not wanting to relive the event any more than necessary. Her recollection still felt muted and dull, and she realised the memory was still in Dumbledore’s Pensieve. She idly wondered if she could simply leave it there.

The people she saw on her way back to Gryffindor Tower steered clear, staring and whispering to each other. She felt too tired and wrung out to care what they were saying. She preferred spending her time with Ron, Hermione and Hagrid, talking about simple, safe things. Whenever she saw Cedric in the hallways, he smiled and waved; once he stopped to pull her a firm hug that left her blushing.

During dinner, a few days before the Hogwarts Express was set to take them home, her eyes drifted across the Slytherin table. Her gaze landed on a weedy looking boy with brown hair. She noticed the seats on either side of him were conspicuously empty. Her promise to the ghost of Nott echoed in her ears as the boy stood and made his way from the Hall.

“I’ve got to go do something,” she told her friends, before hurrying after him. As she left the Hall, she spotted him descending to the dungeons. She raced to catch up.
“Nott!”

Turning a corner, she stumbled to a stop. Nott stood facing her, glaring as he held her at wandpoint. Carefully she held out her empty hands.

There was a long pause, before Nott snapped, “What the hell do you want, Potter?”

Licking her lips nervously, she said, “I need to talk to you.” Nott gave her an expectant look and she grimaced. “Privately.”

Nott glared at her, eyes full of suspicion. Holly repressed the urge to huff impatiently. After a long moment, he grimaced. “Fine,” he said. He jerked his head back at a door halfway down the corridor. “In there.” As Holly stared at him expectantly, he twitched his wand. “You first.”

Unable to contain her sigh this time, Holly carefully moved around the Slytherin and entered the room – it looked like it had once been a potions lab. She made sure to keep her movements slow and her hands visible to him throughout.

Once the door was closed, Nott slowly lowered his wand, but kept in in hand. “Well?” he asked.

Swallowing the lump that suddenly formed in her throat, Holly forced herself to speak. “I promised to pass on a message from your father.” Nott went very still.

“He- he wanted me to tell you what happened in the graveyard. Where I was taken.” Falteringly, she described the return of Voldemort, how he had greeted the Death Eaters who came, how Nott’s father had refused to yield and died for it. She shared the message his shade had given her.

“ENOUGH!” Nott roared, raising his wand at her again. “How dare you use my father’s name like this,” he snarled. Despite the rage twisting his face, Holly saw unshed tears in his eyes. “As if my father would betray the Dark Lord. As if he would ever ask you to tell me something like that.”

Holly gazed at him sadly, ignoring the trembling wandpoint. “I’m sorry, Nott, but that’s what happened.” She hesitated a moment, before pushing herself to continue. “If you don’t believe me, Dumbledore has a copy of my memory. Ask him to see it, tell him you have my permission.”

Rage and grief and disbelief warred across Nott’s face as he stared at her. “Why?” he asked, barely a whisper.

“Because I made a promise.”

Nott’s wand wavered and his lip began to tremble. “Get out,” he snarled at her. Once more moving carefully, Holly circled past him. The door slammed shut behind her. She faintly heard him begin to sob as she walked away.

The final day of term arrived, and Holly made sure she was completely packed. Once she was satisfied, she made her way to the Hospital Wing. Madam Pomfrey was arguing with a healthier looking Moody, who seemed determined to leave, sans leg and eye. Finally, she threw up her hands and stalked over to Holly, muttering under her breath about insane Aurors with too much pride for their own good.

“Aren’t you glad I’m such a compliant patient in comparison,” Holly said with a teasing smile.

The Mediwitch looked unimpressed, though her lips twitched slightly. “I assume you’re here for your potions then, Miss Potter.” A swish of her wand summoned a familiar box, filled with
Masculinity Muffling Mixtures and Feminising Philters, enough to last the summer. Holly beamed at it.

“I have also been asked to give you this,” Madam Pomfrey said, holding out a vial full of silvery gas-liquid. Her memory of the graveyard, Holly realised with a grimace. The Mediwitch noticed and gave her a firm look.

“I know that will be an uncomfortable memory for you, Miss Potter,” she said gently, “but it is important that you face it. Hiding from such things will do you no good. I won’t insist you reclaim it now, I know it would distract you from enjoying the Feast tonight. But I would ask you to promise me that you will restore that memory before you return to Hogwarts.”

Face twisting as though she had bitten into a lemon, Holly nodded. “Fine. I promise.”

Seemingly satisfied, Madam Pomfrey handed it to her, and ushered her out of the Hospital Wing. “Enjoy your holiday, Miss Potter.”

That evening, at the Leaving Feast, Holly felt the stares of her fellow students. As she sat at the Gryffindor Table, she caught Cedric’s eye. He beamed at her, leaving her stomach fluttering and her face feeling hot. Looking away, she noticed Moody had claimed his place at the table. His wooden leg was restored, but his missing eye was covered by a patch.

Throughout the meal, a tension hung in the air, many students shooting Dumbledore curious and expectant looks. Finally, the remaining deserts disappeared, and Dumbledore stood. The already quiet Hall fell silent.

“The end of another year,” said Dumbledore. “I would like to thank our international guests for joining us. The Triwizard Tournament’s aim was to further and promote magical understanding. In the light of Lord Voldemort’s return,” a panicked whisper swept the room, but Dumbledore simply spoke over them, “such ties are more important than ever before.

“The Ministry of Magic does not wish me to acknowledge this fact. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so – either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief, however that the truth is generally preferable to lies, and that we should honour the bravery of those who have faced him.

“Two of our very own students, Cedric Diggory and Holly Potter were taken to Lord Voldemort. Cedric escaped, and gave warning, to help us rescue Holly, with true loyalty and dedication to his friend. For this, I honour him.” He raised his cup in a toast to Cedric, the majority of the Hall followed suit. Cedric ducked his head.

Dumbledore continued, “Holly herself fought Lord Voldemort and survived.” Feeling many shocked stares, Holly kept her eyes fixed on Dumbledore. “She risked her life to return the body of Peter Pettigrew, to clear her godfather’s name. She showed, in every respect, the sort of bravery that few have ever shown in facing Lord Voldemort, and for this, I honour her.” He turned, once again raising his cup, and the Hall followed suit. “To Holly Potter.” Through the standing bodies, Holly noticed many Slytherins remain firmly seated, with defiant expression.

“Every guest in this Hall will be welcomed back here, at any time, should they wish to come. I say to you all, once again – in the light of Lord Voldemort’s return, we are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided.
“Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Difference of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.

“It is my belief – and never have I so hoped that I am mistaken – that we are all facing dark and difficult times. Some of you in this Hall, have already suffered directly at the hands of Lord Voldemort. Many of your families have been torn asunder.

“Should there will come a time when you have to make a choice between what is right, and what is easy, remember these bonds – of unity, of friendship, of family, of love. Remember what is truly important.”

On the train ride home, Holly felt her heart begin to race, her breath to grow short. She was going back to the Dursleys. Mrs Weasley had apparently asked to take Holly immediately, but Dumbledore remained insistent on the value of the blood protection. She knew he had promised some form of protection while she was there, but her mind continued to swirl with terrible imaginings of Uncle Vernon’s rage. Her vision grew fuzzy at the edges.

She jumped as someone touched her. Looking up, she saw Hermione, gently holding her hand with a concerned expression. “Are you worried about going back to your relatives,” Hermione asked gently. Holly, unable to speak, nodded. “If it’s too much for you, we can talk to my parents. They will be willing to help if we explain it to them.”

Taking a shaky breath, Holly shook her head. “I- I need to do this. Dumbledore’s right. With Voldemort back, I need the protection.”

Ron reached over to rub her back soothingly. Holly found herself relaxing into the gentle touch. “We’ll stay in touch. If you need anything, we’ll be there for you.”

Suddenly the door of the compartment slid open, and Malfoy stepped in, flanked by his ever-present guards. “How sweet,” he sneered. “I’m sure little princess Potter will need plenty of comfort knowing the Dark Lord will be coming for her soon.”

Holly felt her rising anger boil away her fear. “Fuck off,” she snarled at him. Her hand gripped her wand in her bag.

“You’ve picked the losing side, Potter! I warned you! I told you, you ought to choose your company more carefully, remember? When we met on the train, first day at Hogwarts? I told you not to hang around with riff-raff like this! Too late now, Potter! They’ll be the first to go, no the Dark Lord’s back! Mudblood and Muggle-lovers first! Well – second – after freaks like yo-”

He was cut off by a loud blast of magic, as Holly, Ron and Hermione blasted the Slytherins with multiple hexes. Fred and George, who had joined in, stepped on their unconscious bodies on their way in. After dragging the unwanted guests into the hallway, the twins produced a pack of cards and started a game of Exploding Snap. The exciting game and friendly banter kept Holly’s dark thoughts from spiralling out of control.

When Holly asked how the twins’ planned joke shop was coming along, they exchanged dark looks. “It’s pretty much dead in the water,” George said glumly.

“We can’t afford to get it off the ground,” Fred added.

“What?!” Ron squawked. “What happened to all the money you won off Bagman?”
Bagman, the twin revealed, had paid them with leprechaun gold, and was completely unable to repay his many debts. In an attempt to settle with his goblin creditors, he had bet on Holly winning the Tournament. Unfortunately for him, the goblins refused to accept her tie with Cedric as a win. The goblins had grabbed him after the Third Task and he hadn’t been seen since.

“Well, I can’t say I feel any sympathy for the git,” Holly said. “Though I’m sorry you can’t get your money back, Fred, George.” Then, struck by an idea, she grinned. “Actually, I think I have a solution.”

With the twins help, she grabbed down her trunk, throwing it open and rifling through. “Aha!” she said victoriously, before pushing the bag of Triwizard winnings into their hands. “That should take care of your money problems.”

The twins looked flabbergasted. “We can’t take your money,” George said, trying to hand it back.

“Yes you can. I’m investing in your business. The ideas you two come up with are brilliant. You can make people laugh, and I think with everything that’s going on, we’re going to need a lot more laughs soon. And you can consider it a prank as well,” she said, eyes dancing mischievously.

“How’s that?” Fred asked, baffled.

“Half of that was Cedric’s,” she told them, “but he refused to take it. So I’m investing it on his behalf. He gets an equal share, whether he wants it or not.”

The twins stared at her before bursting into laughter. After thanking her profusely, they left to store the money safely away. They had their heads together already, whispering ideas and plots.

Holly flopped back into her seat, feeling strangely lighter. Hermione looked torn between pride and horror. Ron simply goggled. “Blimey, that was a lot of money, Holly,” he said, awestruck. Holly shrugged.

“I really didn’t want it. It would just be a reminder of the Tournament that I don’t want.” Glancing at him, she saw he was still struggling with the idea. “If you want, I’ll give you a thousand galleons as well.”

Ron’s ears went pink. “I don’t need you to give me money, Holly.”

“I know,” she said, shrugging. “I would like to, though. It wouldn’t come close to repaying everything you and your family have done for me, but it would be a start.”

Ron didn’t seem to know what to say to that and fell into a contemplative silence.

When they arrived, there was a surprise waiting for Holly on the platform. Beside Mrs Weasley and Hermione’s parents, Lupin stood smiling gently. “Professor Lupin, what are you doing here?” she asked, after receiving a rib-crushing hug from Mrs Weasley.

“I’m here to help finalise the arrangements with your family,” he replied. His voice was deliberately light. Then he smiled wryly. “And I haven’t been your Professor for a long while now, Holly. You can call me Remus.” At Holly’s hesitant look, he chuckled. “Or Moony, if you prefer.”

“Okay, Pr- I mean, Remus,” Holly stammered out. He gave her a warm smile.

Holly said her goodbyes to her friends, with many hugs and promises to write. Then, Remus levitated her trunk onto a trolley and lead her through the barrier to King’s Cross. They saw Uncle
Vernon waiting with a scowl, eyes scanning the crowd. Holly couldn’t keep herself from giggling as his gaze passed over her without recognition. As the pair approached him, he sneered at Remus’ worn looking clothes.

“You’re looking in the wrong place for handouts,” he snarled, puffing up as if indignant at the very idea of charity. “Get out of here, you useless layabout.”

Remus gave him a cold look. “I am here to escort Holly back to your house and set up protections for her. As I’m sure Professor Dumbledore explained in his letter to you.”

At the Headmaster’s name, Uncle Vernon’s face paled dramatically. He stared at Remus in horror. “You’re one of them,” he gasped.

Holly grinned. “Yep. In fact he’s a very close friend of my godfather,” she said brightly. Uncle Vernon whimpered, backing up until he struck the platform barrier. Then he looked at Holly and his eyes bulged. “What the devil are you wearing, Boy?” he hissed.

As he turned back to glare at her, Holly realised why he had struggled to recognise her. Her long hair was braided in an intricate style down her back – she mentally thanked Parvati for the spell. Her face, already softened from several months of the Feminising Philter, bore a thin layer of makeup, enhancing the effect. She loved the eyeliner making her eyes seem larger. She wore a light blouse and shorts, which hugged her rapidly developing figure. Her feet were clad in simple flats.

It was gratifying to be given such obvious proof of her transition’s effectiveness.

Holly noticed a few passers-by glancing at Uncle Vernon with mixed curiousity and concern. Knowing Remus was here to protect her, she felt suddenly confident. Raising an eyebrow at Uncle Vernon, she said, “You’re making quite a scene, Vernon. I wonder what people must be thinking of you.”

His face spasmed with rage at her disrespect, before he looked around, noticing the confused looks. Turning, he stormed off through the station. Holly and Remus followed him to the Dursleys’ car. Uncle Vernon looked furious at Remus joining them in the car, but his protests died under a single cold look.

Throughout the trip, Remus made casual conversation with Holly. He kept the topics light, asking after her friends and her grades. She reciprocated, asking how his job was going, and how Sirius was. She noticed Uncle Vernon gripping the steering wheel in a painfully tight grip. He stared resolutely ahead, teeth audibly grinding.

When they arrived at 4 Privet Drive, Uncle Vernon practically bolted from the car. Remus helped her carry her trunk up to her room, before leading her back to the sitting room, where they found Uncle Vernon whispering to Aunt Petunia. Her face was pinched, as if she had sucked on a particularly foul lemon.

“Holly, could I trouble you for a cup of tea?” Remus asked. His voice was gentle, but his eyes were hard as he looked at the Dursleys. Glancing between her red-faced Uncle, her pale Aunt and the cold look on Remus’ face, Holly nodded. She retreated to the kitchen.

As she waited for the kettle to boil, she took a steadying breath. The Dursleys would behave, she knew, as long as Remus was here. She hoped whatever protections were placed would be enough to maintain it. Grabbing the whistling kettle, she busied herself making tea, the way she remembered Remus enjoyed from their meetings the previous year.
Returning to the sitting room, she found her relatives sitting on the couch facing Remus, with sickly expressions. Uncle Vernon even looked slightly green. She handed Remus his cup, receiving a smile of thanks before retreating to an armchair in the corner to watch and listen.

Remus took a long sip before addressing the Dursleys. “As long as Holly remains here, she will be under guard. We will be watching to ensure she is safe, and not being mistreated in any way.”

Aunt Petunia’s face twisted with disgust and horror. “I will not have you people traipsing in and out of our house! God only knows what the neighbours would say about us. You have no right to come here and invade our privacy!”

“You lost your right to privacy when you abused Holly,” Remus said, voice hard and cold as ice. Aunt Petunia flinched back. “We will be here, and we will be watching. For security purposes, whoever is on guard will be invisible, so you won’t have to worry about your precious reputation,” he said contemptuously.

Turning to Holly, he drew out a small silver item. “This is for you Holly. It is a two-way mirror, connected to another held by Sirius. Simply call his name into it, and you will be able to speak with each other.” Holly eagerly accepted the mirror, smiling at her reflection. She still found liking her appearance an odd, but nice experience. “We expect you to call regularly. If we haven’t heard from you in at least two days, you will receive a check-up visit. Without the invisibility,” he noted to the Dursleys, who cringed at the thought.

“Now,” he drained his cup before continuing, “I will be applying some enchantments to Holly’s bedroom, which will prevent you from entering it.” Gesturing for Holly to follow, he left the room. After a quick glance at her thunderstruck relatives, she hurried after him.

In Holly’s room, he paced around the edges, waving his wand and muttering incantations under his breath. After a few minutes, Holly piped up from the bed. “Won’t this get in trouble for underage magic?” Remus paused, giving her a curious look. Holly shrugged. “Before second year, a house elf used magic here and the Ministry blamed me.”

“Ah yes,” he said, nodding in understanding. “The Trace is actually rather unreliable.” Holly grinned as he dropped into his teaching voice. “It detects not only the spells an underage witch or wizard casts, but all magic that is performed around them.”

Holly’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “But wouldn’t it be going off all the time for someone like Ron? His family are always using magic.”

Remus nodded. “Yes, but the Ministry simply assumes any magic performed in a magical dwelling is performed by adult wizards.”

Holly’s eyes widened at the implications. “So someone like Draco Malfoy can practice as much as he wants over the holidays, but if Hermione or I tried, we’d get in trouble? How is that fair?!”

“It’s not,” Remus said with a tired smile. “That is rather a trend with the Ministry. you see.” Holly grimaced, nodding in agreement. “For today, however, Professor Dumbledore informed the Ministry that an adult wizard,” he bowed slightly, “will be here performing magic. So you’re in the clear.”

After considering this for a moment, Holly grinned. “Does that mean I can use magic right now?”

Remus paused, and shot her a quelling look. “Technically, they will assume I am casting the magic. I wouldn’t risk it, however. All it would take it for two spells to be considered cast much too
quickly to attract the Ministry’s attention.”

With a disappointed sigh, Holly began unpacking by hand. She filed away the knowledge that she could get away with magic if she was at a wizarding home. ‘That might come in handy,’ she thought.

Once they finished their respective tasks, Remus led her downstairs once more. Aunt Petunia was in the kitchen, shakily beginning preparations for dinner. Uncle Vernon sat at the table, glaring at it. They jumped as Remus entered the room.

“I have finished the protections on Holly’s room. I suggest you avoid it, unless you want a very disorienting experience.” He shot Holly a warm smile. “Have a nice holiday, Holly.” Then, with a smile that promised terrible things for the Dursleys, he said, “We’ll be seeing you, Vernon, Petunia.” With a flourish of his wand that made Aunt Petunia squawk in fright, he tapped the top of his head, and faded out of view.

With a smirk at her horrified relatives, Holly said, “I think I’ll go chat with Sirius. We haven’t talked in a bit and I’d hate for him to miss me.” Giggling, she sashayed out of the room.

**AN: Holy shit this took a while, sorry y’all.**

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