Annals of Arithmancy

by White_Squirrel

Summary

Part 3 of The Arithmancer Series. Hermione won the war, but her career as the world’s greatest arithmancer is just beginning. Now, she has places to go, spells to invent, and a family to start. Oh, and a whole lot of dementors to kill.

Notes

Disclaimer: If you’re reading this, you probably know the drill by now. All maths in this story is real and correct to the best of my knowledge. All arithmancy in this story besides the tiny amount mentioned in the books is stuff I made up. JK Rowling owns the rest.

Well, here it is, the third and final instalment in the Arithmancer Series. The first two stories in this series went on way too long in retrospect—as long as the original books! But I had a lot of fun writing them—so much so that I wanted to do a continuation after the war. Annals of Arithmancy, however, will be much shorter and more episodic, showing the continued developments in Hermione’s life in the years after the war.

Just for some housekeeping stuff, I’m currently planning to put up a new chapter of Animagus at War next weekend. I’m trying to cycle through my stories once before deciding what to focus on, so we’ll see where it goes.
This office was probably meant to be comfortable and soothing for patients, Hermione Granger thought. There was no desk and no sofa for the doctor to look down from a seat of power—just two soft, comfy chairs facing each other. Hermione sat uncomfortably in one of them, remembering. She had been only twelve the first time she was here, a fair bit smaller and getting lost in the overly soft cushions, trying to come to terms with the experience of seeing a man supernaturally murdered before her eyes. There were days when she wished she could go back to that carefree time when that was the only thing she had to worry about.

The room hadn’t changed much in the past six years. Same stereotypical bookcase, potted plant, abstract art, and small windows to let in some light, but not so much that it lost its homey atmosphere. It was smaller than the stereotypical office she saw on the telly, though. Again, it was probably to make it feel more intimate and comforting, but now that she’d returned, it just felt confining to her.

The other woman sat in the chair across from her. She was about her mother’s age, but they didn’t look a whole lot alike. Her hair was straighter and more of a chestnut brown than her mother’s dark brown; her face was more pointed, and (Hermione couldn’t help noticing even after all these years) her teeth weren’t quite as nice. She still wore a kindly smile. Dr. Sylvia Hudson.

Her therapist.

“Well, look at you, Hermione,” she said. “You’re all grown up now.”

Hermione shifted awkwardly. This seat was still too bloody soft. “Thank you, Dr. Hudson,” she said stiffly. She didn’t really know what to say to that. In some ways, she felt like she’d never really had a proper adolescence. She did look more adult and put together, now. Dr. Hudson wouldn’t have missed her engagement ring, nor her other jewelry—understated, but clearly expensive. She was probably dressed a little more professionally than was called for, but at the moment, most of her wardrobe still said either “too busy not dying to care” or “literally a witch,” so she didn’t have much to work with, not to mention how she had felt the need to wear long sleeves despite the warm weather. Too many questions otherwise.

“I get the feeling a lot’s happened since we last met,” Dr. Hudson said.

Hermione chuckled ruefully. “Yes, you might say that.”

There was an awkward silence for a minute, and when she didn’t say anything more, Dr. Hudson asked, “So who’s the lucky man.”

She smiled at that, glancing down at her ring: “George. I must have told you about him. One of the twin class clowns? The last you heard of him would have been when he took me to the school dance.”

“Oh, so you’ve stayed together?”

She wiggled her hand back and forth. “It took us a few more months to really admit it to each other, but basically yes.”

“That seems like an interesting pairing for you,” she offered.
“I know. That’s what everyone said. But he’s smarter than he lets on—more responsible, too. And he makes me laugh. You know, he and his twin already own their own shop?”

“Really? What kind of shop?”

“A joke shop, of course. They sell…you know, pranks and stuff…” Hermione trailed off. She’d never had to explain Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes to a muggle before, and it suddenly occurred to her that she’d never in her life seen a joke shop in the muggle world. Maybe a store for “magic tricks,” but never one for just pranks. Strange that she’d never noticed that before. “It’s sort of like a cross between a toy store and one of those weird novelty stores. It sounds mad when I say it, but they’re very good at it.”

“I can imagine,” Dr. Hudson said with a smile.

“Only, it got firebombed last year. We’re only just now getting around to rebuilding it.”

Dr. Hudson’s mouth dropped open for a moment. She quickly recovered, but she grew more serious again. “Hermione, I…I think you’d better explain,” she said. “If I may say so, you have a look about you that I usually only see in war veterans, and the things I’ve been hearing about you…”

Hermione tensed perceptibly. “What have you been hearing about me?”

Dr. Hudson leaned back and folded her hands. “You seemed to have the worst luck as a student. A teacher murdered in Year 7 and near-deaths the next three years. When I last saw you three years ago, you seemed more distant than before, but when you didn’t show the next summer, I thought maybe you finally had a normal year…and then six months later, I heard about your house being firebombed. I thought you might be dead for a while, but then, four months ago, they said you joined the IRA and blew up a hospital! I actually called the police and told them there was no way you would join the people who killed your parents.”

Hermione gasped softly. Depending on how far that call had gone… “What did they do?” she asked.

“Some really scary-looking people showed up at my home and told me you’d killed your own parents, and I’d better not tell anyone anything different.”

“Merlin,” she breathed. “You’re lucky that’s all they did. Okay, it’s a long story. First off, my parents are still alive. I did burn down our house, but it was a cover. I had secretly moved them out to Australia the previous day.”

“They’re alive? Well, I’m happy for you. And I did hear the report that you’d been exonerated. So…I’m guessing you were on the run from the IRA that whole time?”

Hermione shook her head: “No, Dr. Hudson. I was on the run, but it wasn’t from the IRA. Or the government, mind. The real story is a bit less believable.”

“Frankly, Miss Granger, at this point, I think I’d believe anything.”

She smirked and pulled out her wand, “Well, we’re about to test that,” she said. “Legally, I’m not even supposed to tell you this, but confidentiality is still in play, right?”

“Um…yes, but frankly, I’d really rather not be privy to classified government secrets.”

“Don’t worry; these secrets are not classified by any government that has authority over you,” she said. She held up her wand for Dr. Hudson to see. “This…is a magic wand.”
“A…magic wand?” she asked.

Hermione nodded. She waved it, and the curtains were drawn closed. Dr. Hudson jumped in her seat. She waved it again, and the little table between then began to run around the room like a puppy. Dr. Hudson yelped and looked like she was about to faint.

“I’m a witch,” she said. “And I was on the run from an evil wizard these past few years.”

Hermione explained. It was hard to fit seven years of her life into half of an hour-long session, but she did the best she could. Magic was real. There was a hidden community of witches and wizards all over the world, scrupulously kept secret from the non-magical, “muggle” world, and she was a part of it.

“And if I tell anyone, those really scary people will come back?” Dr. Hudson asked.

“No, those people are gone now,” she said. “It’ll be less scary people this time, and they’ll wipe your memory of me, not threaten you.”

“What? But…how is that better?”

“It’s not, really. I’m on your side there, but most wizards don’t think the same way we do. And frankly, the other option is to tell everyone you’ve gone mad, so…”

“Right,” she groaned.

Hermione went on. The exclusive boarding school in Scotland she’d attended was a premier school for magic. She was a rare person with magical born to muggles, and she had been found by the school and had entered that world at eleven. She explained her previous visits first. The teacher who was murdered in her first year was possessed by the spirit of an evil wizard who hated muggle-born outsiders like her. The snake that had “bitten” her in her second year (though it really hadn’t) was a fifty foot-long basilisk that had nearly killed her with its gaze. The escaped convict in her third year —well, that was pretty close to how she’d described, except she hadn’t mentioned the soul-sucking demons before. Oh, yes, and wizards had tangible evidence of the existence of souls, too.

At the end of her fourth year, she said, Lord Voldemort had returned from the dead, and things just spiralled out of control from there until the magical world was at open war.

“So all those IRA attacks…?” Dr. Hudson asked.

“The ones in the past one to two years were mostly Death Eater attacks,” Hermione confirmed. “Including the one at the Nottingham hospital. My fiance’s brother and great aunt were killed there.”

“It sounds like you lost quite a few people,” she said sympathetically.

Hermione nodded. “Six I’d consider good friends, others whom I considered close mentors, and dozens of other acquaintances, including other classmates.”

“Goodness! I’m sorry for your losses, Hermione. I’m glad you’ve sought out help again. These kinds of traumas can be devastating for anyone.”

“That’s one of the reasons, yes,” she confirmed.

“Oh? And the others?”

“I…This is going to sound daft, but I feel like I don’t know what to do with myself now that it’s
“Ah. That’s an understandable reaction,” Dr. Hudson said. “There’s no need to worry about that. Fighting this war was such a large part of your life, and now that it’s gone, you need time to adjust.”

“Maybe,” she admitted. “I did have plans—still do have plans, in large part—but now that I’m finally here…well, it’s less appealing than it was before, at least.”

“That’s not uncommon either, Hermione. The grass is always greener, and all that. But that doesn’t mean your plans were or are bad ones. What were you planning to do?”

Hermione shrugged. “I thought after the war, I’d go back and finish school, get my mastery in Arithmancy, get married, and start a relatively quiet career doing magical research. And I suppose I can still do most of those things, but I definitely can’t get my mastery now.”

“Why not,” she said, confused. “It sounds like you’re more than capable.”

Hermione gave Dr. Hudson a level stare: “Because they already gave me my doctorate.”

---

One Week Earlier

“Hermione Granger,” said Professor Tinworth, “in consultation with Headmistress McGonagall, Griselda Marchbanks of the Wizarding Examinations Authority, and Head Unspeakable Algernon Croaker, I am pleased to inform you that you have been awarded the Doctor of Wizardry degree in Arithmancy.”

Hermione stared at Tinworth for a minute, her expression flat. She had only come in to discuss resuming her mastery. “Excuse me?” she said.

Tinworth flinched. He seemed a little nervous around her. It was true, she hadn’t got on with him when he the lead editor of Annals of Arithmancy and had turned his back on her under political pressure from Dolores Umbridge. So she supposed he had some reason to be uncomfortable around her, but this had nothing to do with that.

“I took the liberty of contacting a panel of accredited experts, and we agree that you qualify for a D.Wiz. degree,” he said.

Nope, she still couldn’t process it. “Is this some kind of joke?”

Tinworth flinched again: “No! I simply thought that given the unfortunate matter of the Wenlock Prize—”

She groaned. She’d been meant to received the Wenlock Prize for helping to prove that radioactive material was a sixth exception to Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration, but that wasn’t the point. “I don’t care about the Wenlock Prize, Professor Tinworth,” she said. “I don’t need some medal to validate me. What I want to know is how you can give me a doctorate when I haven’t even finished my mastery yet, let alone a dissertation.”

“Miss Granger,” he said, looking a little relieved, “we don’t do things the same way as in the muggle world. A mastery requires a major research project—a ‘masterpiece’ in the old parlance, but the D.Wiz. is awarded for extraordinary scholarship in general, not a specific dissertation. The two main criteria are an extended body of scholarship and research as a Master, and a major contribution to the field above and beyond the mastery level, but that’s not the same as a masterpiece. Many people earn a D.Wiz by writing a textbook. And when it is a research project, it’s often unpublished for a good
“But I never qualified for a mastery in the first place,” Hermione protested.

He shook his head insistently. “Your work on Gamp’s Law is more than enough for that, even working with a team. And Professor Vector told us about your continuing education, which fulfils the apprenticeship requirement for the mastery. For the D.Wiz., she told us enough about your ongoing research to prove your continued scholarship, and if Killing a dementor doesn’t represent a ‘major contribution,’ we may as well bin the whole field.”

Hermione sat back in her seat. “Doctor of Wizardry,” she muttered to herself. “What does that even mean? I’ve never seen a wizard addressed as ‘Doctor.’”

“Well, they used to be,” Tinworth said. “Before the muggles bastardised the term—no offence. It’s ‘Professor,’ now. That is, in addition to recognising you as one of the premier scholars of the field, the Doctor of Wizardry entitles you to use the title ‘Professor.’”

And that was when Hermione cracked. She started laughing and couldn’t stop at the sheer inanity of the situation.

“I’m going to go back to school in September as ‘Professor Granger’—the same title all the teachers have,” she told Dr. Hudson. “How ridiculous can you get? I mean sure, George thinks it’s the best prank ever, but really! I’m not the youngest woman ever awarded a doctorate in Britain—not even in maths. I checked. But I’m certainly the youngest witch, and I just can’t get over how absurd it is. Plus, in the magical world, I can’t even tell people to address me as ‘The Doctor’ without everyone looking at me funny.”

Dr. Hudson chuckled. “Trust me: the novelty wears off quickly,” she said. “Still, I should think that it’s a good thing on the whole.”

“It is a good thing,” Hermione said. “It’s just that…well, look at me. I’m eighteen years old. I’ve already reached the pinnacle of the career I’ve wanted since I was eleven. I haven’t even finished school, and I wouldn’t need to if I didn’t want to at this point. I’ve won a war. I’ve slain demons. I’m world-famous in the community where I live, and I make enough money from my hobbies that I’ll never have to work a day in my life…After all that, I don’t see what I could ever do going forward that would be as significant as what I’ve already done…And then I’m a mathematician, and a lot of mathematicians do their best work when they’re young anyway…”

“Oh, I see,” she said kindly. “Would you say, then, that you’re struggling to find meaning in your life?”

Hermione thought about that. “Maybe,” she conceded.

She nodded to her. “That’s something a lot of people your age feel when they leave home for the first time and are free to do what they want. Now, I think it sounds like you actually have quite a lot from which you can draw meaning, but I can see how it would be hard to compare that with what you did in the war.”

“Yes, yes, I suppose that makes sense,” Hermione said.

“And the war seems to have been a great struggle for you personally,” she continued. “Another common problem that you seen where there’s a war is returning veterans struggling to find their place in the world while also dealing with the trauma they’ve experienced. That can make it that much harder.”
Hermione sighed. “Yes, I think that’s definitely part of what I’m feeling,” she said. “The war’s changed me, I know. My parents have noticed. I’ve noticed…I’m a little more afraid of my temper than I was before, to be honest.” She thought about the desperate moment at the very end when she took down Bellatrix Lestrange…but she pushed the thought away.

“And that’s something else we can work on,” Dr. Hudson said. “I think I’ve got a fairly good handle on what kind of help you’re looking for now, Hermione. I don’t want to raise your expectations too much; it’s going to be a hard process, but it sounds like we have at least all summer to work on it.” She thought for a minute and added, “And let’s start with that second concern first, because that’s the one that can often cause the most severe harm. Have you had an assessment done for post-traumatic stress disorder in the past month?”

Hermione shook her head and settled uneasily into the cushions.

4 June 1998

“Cornelius Oswald Fudge,” the Chief Witch of the Wizengamot intoned, “you have been accused of the following crimes: breach of oath of office, abuse of authority, criminal negligence, reckless endangerment, taking bribes, conspiracy, unlawful use of Ministry resources, unlawful interference in an independent institution, namely Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and aiding and abetting a criminal, namely Dolores Jane Umbridge. How do you plead, Mr. Fudge?”

“Not guilty!” Fudge exclaimed to the Wizengamot chamber.

“Very well,” said Andromeda. “The prosecution may call its first witness.”

A wizard Hermione didn’t know rose to his feet and said, “I call Sirius Black as witness.” Hermione watched as Sirius took his place in the witness’s chair to testify to Fudge’s handling of the investigation that saw him sent to Azkaban.

By the time the war ended, the Order’s top five or so choices for the leadership positions in the Ministry were all dead, so they’d had to make do and cobble together anyone they could to run a transitional Ministry until elections could be organised. Thus, at the moment, Andromeda Tonks was acting as Chief Witch; Percy Weasley was the Transitional Minister for Magic, and Hestia Jones had reluctantly taken over as the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. Hermione was just glad she didn’t have to serve as prosecutor on top of everything.

The first round of Death Eater trials had gone remarkably quickly. For those who had escaped Azkaban at any point, be it in the first war or the second, the trial was merely a formality before they were sent back to prison. The hardest part was figuring out where to actually put them. Percy had decided the Ministry should turn over a new leaf and stop using dementors as prison guards, just as Dumbledore had wanted for a long time. Hermione wholeheartedly agreed, but that meant Azkaban was out of the question, since no one could figure out how to get the dementors to leave, or where else to put them. She’d heard a creative proposal to build a new prison on the Isle of Drear—he functional equivalent of a castle with a moat filled with crocodiles, except that here they would be Quintapeds. She didn’t think that sounded much better. For now, they were simply being held in a heavily-guarded castle in an undisclosed location.

For those who had not been convicted of a crime, however, it was much harder, and a lot of that work fell to her. Percy had made her Chair of the Demortification Committee—magical Britain’s answer to Denazification in Germany after the Second World War. (Her own name for it. She didn’t really like it, but no one had been able to come up with anything better.)
Building a case against a Death Eater and proving they were acting of their own free will was
difficult, even with magic. Rita Skeeter would be an invaluable witness with the information she had
collected for Hermione as a spy, but even so, Hermione was shocked when Percy informed her that
the case against Fudge was ready to go forward before a lot of the Death Eaters’ cases did. But there
was certainly a lot of interest. The spectator gallery was packed.

“So how do you think the trial is going to go?” she asked Percy as they watched.

“Hmm, it’s a tough call,” he said. “We threw everything we could at him, but a lot of it is subjective.
There’s a lot of wiggle room to say he was only incompetent as Minister, not criminal. But on the
other hand, everyone knows he was responsible for V…Voldemort rising to power again. I’m
worried it’ll turn into a…”

“A witch-hunt?” Hermione offered.

Percy glanced at her. “Not the word I’d use, but yes. A fair trial will probably give him five to ten
years. I wish I could say it were more, but there’s legitimate reasonable doubt.”

Hermione sighed. “I suppose so,” she said. “I’ll still feel better seeing him get his deserts.”

“Yeah, me too,” he said.

Fudge was only the start, of course, and not the main problem. If they wanted to make this past war
count for something, they had to rip out the bigoted ideology that allowed it war to happen root and
branch and make sure it never grew again. That was going to be a long, hard fight, and Hermione
didn’t know what the right answers were any better than anyone else.

What even was justice when a large fraction of the nation’s youth had (by muggle standards) been
impressed into committing war crimes? Most of the upper year students at Hogwarts had been
threatened into casting the Unforgivable Curses on each other last year, something normally
warranting life in prison. She’d looked up muggle law, and it didn’t look kindly even on the defence
doing war crimes, but that was for soldiers. As far as she could tell, the question had never
been tested for civilians, much less underage ones.

And to be honest, her hands weren’t completely squeaky clean, either.

One thing she had going for her, though, was the extensive muggle writing on Denazification in
Europe. The Allies had faced the same problem then: too many Germans had been legally complicit
in the crimes of the Nazis for it to be logistically possible to fully enforce the law. It wasn’t an exact
match since there was no foreign occupying force here, but it was probably the closest they could
come to truly dismantling the old pureblood hegemony that had ravaged the country for three
generations.

But Hermione knew she also had to learn from the mistakes of Denazification as well as its
successes. And there were many mistakes. Before the Marshall Plan, many of the Allies were de
facto trying to turn Germany into a nation of subsistence farmers to prevent it from militarising again,
and even after the Marshall Plan, the program was shut down in 1951 because it was considered
ineffective and counterproductive.

Yet some of the ideas, like the schedule of punishments were good ones. People who were merely
followers and didn’t commit any crimes had fines levied against them and some restrictions on travel,
employment, and political rights. Even that might be pushing it for people who had truly committed
no crime, but they could do like the British Army had done and only investigate people when they
applied for a government job or some other position of responsibility (contrasted with the Americans,
who questioned everyone over the age of eighteen). That might be the most important thing for magical Britain to ensure that the ideology didn’t grow up again with the next generation.

As for the rest of the Nazis, “Lesser Offenders” were merely given two to three years of probation. Only the serious criminals were imprisoned, many of them put to labour on reconstruction efforts, though Hermione was going to recommend against that last one. She wouldn’t trust even a second-stringer like Scabior with a wand.

She also wasn’t going to recommend censorship, as the Allies had done. But much stronger enforcement against criminal acts of bigotry, ensuring there was a strong voice in the media to counter any that the blood purists might set up later, and carefully vetting employees of the reconstituted Ministry—those were the things that might change the culture.

“By the way, I had something else to tell you,” Percy said, He lowered his voice and produced a sheaf of parchment. “We finally worked through the parchmentwork on the dementors, like you wanted.”

Hermione snapped her head around to look at him. “What did you find out?” she whispered.

“It was hard to trace them; the Death Eaters didn’t much care about what the dementors were doing, but we eventually found all the transfer orders. There weren’t any for the Ministry’s group. The two dozen dementors we found in Ministry holding after the battle were the same ones that were here on the fifteenth of September.”

“Penelope,” she said.

“It’ll be one of that group,” he confirmed. “If you can help her…”

“With only two dozen of them? Of course I can. This is excellent, really. I was worried I was going to have to make a deal with the dementors in Azkaban: ‘Give me the dementor that Kissed Penelope Clearwater, and I’ll spare the rest of you,’ or something. I really didn’t want to do that.”

“Yeah. Good,” he said. “I’ll start making the arrangements to move them somewhere you can do the ritual.”

13 June 1998

“S’ekballo eis to skotos to exoteron, esy pneuma akatharon!”

The dementor exploded as Hermione completed the ritual, the beam of concentrated sunlight piercing through to the ground at her feet. Where it had stood, a swarm of motes of light swirled in the air—all the souls it had consumed over the centuries. The lights floated up into the sky like sparks from a flame where they disappeared out of sight, presumably passing on to wherever they were meant to go. But this time, one of the motes remained. It floated a moment longer, then took off in a streak across the ground toward the south.

And miles away, she would learn later, in a hospital in London, Penelope Clearwater woke up screaming.

“That’s it,” she said when she saw the soul make its flight. “We saved her.” She motioned to George, and he lowered the mirror of the solar furnace to the ground.

Percy smiled. “Thank you, Hermione,” he said. “Even though we weren’t together anymore, it means a lot to me.”
Hermione took the Diadem of Ravenclaw off her head and stepped out of the circle of dead, brown grass where the ritual had been performed. She didn’t really need it at this point, but she kept wearing it to ensure she didn’t make a mistake. After more than a dozen of these rituals over several days, the remote stretch of moorland was starting to look like the surface of the Moon. Nothing would ever grow in the circle again unless they (at minimum) stripped it to bedrock and replaced the soil, but in her opinion, it was a small price to say.

“What do you think she’ll say when she finds out her ex is the new Minister for Magic?” she asked him.

“She’ll probably punch me in the face,” he said. “She broke up with me because I backed Fudge over Dumbledore when Voldemort came back. She might even campaign against me.”

“Oh. But does she know about you smuggling the Ministry’s plans out under their noses?”

“I doubt it. We haven’t spoken since we broke up. It’s alright, though. I deserved it.”

“Hm. Well, let’s call it a day, shall we?” she asked as George, Harry, and Ginny fell in behind them. “We did what we came to do. We can deal with the rest of them tomorrow.”

Percy shrugged and motioned the Aurors to corral the rest of the dementors. This was tiring work, after all. In fact, it had taken over a week to get this far. The ritual could only kill one dementor at a time; it had to be done in fair weather in the morning sunlight, on a different spot each time, and in a place where it wouldn’t raise too much suspicion for a patch of ground to have all the life sucked out of it. They could only kill a few of them per day, and it was only because they’d started looking for suitable locations weeks ago that she was able to start as soon as she did.

“You know, I’m getting better at this,” she said cheerfully. “Once I learn how to do multiple Patronuses, I might be able to do it on my own with the diadem.”

“You don’t have to kill all of them yourself, Hermione,” Harry spoke up.

“That’s a good point,” Percy agreed. “You can’t kill all the dementors in Azkaban single-handed. It would take years. Have you considered training some other teams to do it?”

She sighed: “I’ve considered it, but there are problems. For one, the mental state of defiance of the false death is something that has to be trained, like with the Patronus Charm, and it’s arguably harder given the mental bias wizards have that dementors are unkillable and soul-destroying. Not many people will be able to strike the killing blow, and I’m not sure what would be a safe way to train them. And even more important, the ritual itself could be extraordinarily dangerous in the wrong hands, so I don’t want to give it to anyone I don’t trust implicitly.”

“But what’s so dangerous about it?” Percy asked. “It’s powerful, yes, but it does good work.”

Ginny answered him quietly, “It’s because it comes from the horcrux ritual, isn’t it?”

“Exactly,” Hermione said. “Or rather, it’s based on the ritual I used on Harry, which is based on the horcrux ritual. I took the darkest ritual known, and twisted it to something light—and more advanced. Imagine what could happen if a dark wizard got their hands on it and twisted it to something dark again.”

Percy paled. So did Ginny, Harry, and George. She didn’t even need to tell them her thoughts on what that darkness might be. Maybe even a ritual to forcibly split the soul of an unwilling victim. It could unleash an evil even greater than the horcrux itself. She wasn’t certain that was possible, but she did not want to find out.
“Okay, then,” Percy said in a high, nervous voice. “We’ll worry about that later, then.”

“I think that’s the best idea,” she agreed. “At least we finally time, now.”
25 June 1998

**Dear Ms. Taylor:**

We apologise for the prolonged break in our correspondence. Our production was regrettably halted as a side effect of the unrest of the past two years, and unavoidable delays occurred in restarting our operations. Happily, Archimedes Jewellers has now resumed full production, and given the improved climate, we do not anticipate any serious interruptions in the future.

Our customers are important to us, and it pains us that we were unable to address your order until now. If you are still interested in the purchasing the piece you requested last year, it will be delivered upon payment of sixty-eight thousand United States dollars (US$68,000) by check or wire transfer to Archimedes Jewellers at Barclays—Lombard Street in London. If you do not wish to order this piece, but you remain interested in doing business with us, you may contact us at our business address.

Archimedes

δωξ μοι πᾶ στὰ καὶ τὰν γὰν κινάσω.

1 July 1998

Hermione walked up the front steps of Hogwarts for the first time since she was fighting for her life against Bellatrix Lestrange. It was a sobering feeling, seeing the castle in such a state. How would they go on when so many had died here? She felt a little guilty that she wasn’t here helping with repairs, but with Percy assigning her to the lead the Demortification Committee—now the Reconciliation Committee—she had enough duties on her hands already.

Her parents were flanking her, and wasn’t *that* a strange feeling?
“It’s funny how the one time we ever get to see your magical school, it’s half in ruins,” Dad said.
“Yeah…and funnier that I’m the one who caused a lot of it,” she said awkwardly.

Repairs were well underway, but building (or rebuilding) a castle was not a fast prospect, and
Hogwarts was such a magical place to start with that even with magic, it would take time. The debris
had been cleared away, but the Astronomy Tower and the South Bell Tower were still gone. They
hadn’t even started on those yet, although the great oaken doors to the Entrance Hall had been fully
replaced. Hermione tried to imagine what this place would look like in another two months. It was
the first of July, halfway between the battle and the nominal beginning of the new school year, and
Hogwarts did not look halfway back to being a functional school yet.

“It’s not very friendly to muggle family members, is it?” Mum said, remembering the hassle it had
been to make it possible for two muggles to even see Hogwarts, much less come onto the grounds.
The protections were there for good reason, but they didn’t make it easy.

“No, it’s not,” Hermione said, “though to be fair, I’m not sure I ever saw any magical parents here
either. There aren’t any visit days or even public Quidditch games. Maybe something to suggest to
Professor McGonagall.” She knocked on the doors, and they opened on their own. She probably
only imagined the castle shuddering at her touch.

The Entrance Hall was stark with most of the trappings removed—the portraits, the House Point
hourglasses, the statue of the Architect, and so forth—but it was intact, the walls and ceiling repaired.
The Great Hall was also repaired, although there was nothing to see in there right now besides the
enchanted ceiling. Her parents were still awed by it.

“This is amazing. You said this place was bigger than any muggle castle, but I didn’t understand
how big that was,” Mum remarked, looking at the high ceiling.

“I don’t know about bigger, but it’s certainly taller,” Hermione replied. She continued the tour and
led them past the Grand Staircase and into the corridors. Mum and Dad frowned as they saw more
signs of the battle here—craters and scorch marks in the stonework. At last, they came to the north
corridor. This part of the castle was still in bad shape. Large parts of the walls were knocked down
and open to the air, the interior damaged by the elements. Several professors and other volunteers
were there, working on rebuilding the wall. The castle was healing, but slowly.

“Goodness!” Dad said softly. “Magic did all that?”

“All that and more,” Hermione answered. “Pretty much tore off the whole side of the building and
demolished the Hospital Wing. Not to mention the Astronomy Tower.”

Their presence was noticed at once. The group turned to look at them. A couple of the volunteers
gawked at the two obvious muggles, but the others waved encouragingly, and Minerva McGonagall
approached them at once.

“Good morning, Professor Granger,” McGonagall said with a smile, shaking her hand formally.

Hermione sighed. She should have seen that coming. McGonagall was one of the people who’d
recommended her for that degree. “Good morning to you too, Headmistress McGonagall. And I
really don’t need the title. It’ll only confuse things. You’ve met my parents, of course. Although a lot
has happened since then.”

“It has indeed,” McGonagall said as she shook Mum’s and Dad’s hands. “This was far bigger than
any one of us, but for what it’s worth, you have my sincere apologies for everything that has
happened since your daughter entered our world. Still, I couldn’t be prouder of how she rose to the challenge.”

“Thank you, Professor. That means a lot to us,” Dad said. “Not that we wouldn’t have picked up and taken her to Australia seven years ago if we’d known what was coming.”

She winced slightly: “And I wouldn’t have blamed you if you had. I’m glad you felt confident enough to come today.”

“Mostly, we trust Hermione to keep us safe,” Mum corrected.

To her credit, McGonagall didn’t react to that, knowing what Hermione could do, but with the war over, Hogwarts was safer than it had ever been when Hermione was a student here, so things were much calmer now.

“So you will be returning as a student this autumn, Miss Granger?” McGonagall asked.

She looked to either side at her Mum and Dad. “Yes,” she said, “I still want to finish my N.E.W.T.s here. I know I don’t need to, but it’s the principle of the thing; I want to finish what I started. And even more importantly, after everything I’ve been through, I want to take a year and just be a normal teenager for once in my life.”

McGonagall smiled wistfully. “I can understand that, Miss Granger. I think there are a lot of young witches and wizards who feel that way right now. I take it your friends will be here soon?”

“They should be on their way,” she said. “You know how the Weasleys are. I came early with Mum and Dad so I could show them around—the parts of the castle that are accessible, anyway.”

“Of course. Well, as you can see, we are making progress. The school should be habitable and usable for classes in time for the term to start, although I’m afraid the repairs won’t be finished.”

“You’re expecting to start on time, then?” Mum asked.

“Indeed, Mrs. Granger,” she replied. “Hogwarts has stood as an institution for a thousand years. We can hardly let a little thing like being destroyed in battle delay us in reopening.”

Hermione giggled. “It’s good to still have you here, Headmistress,” she said. “By the way, if you’re reopening on time, when do you expect to send the letters out?”

“Not until I fill all our staffing vacancies, I’m afraid, Miss Granger. I don’t think we’ll be ready to send the letters out until into August. Why do you ask?”

“Because George and Fred want to make sure they can reopen the shop by the time the letters go out.”

“Ah,” she said dryly. “It seems I can’t escape their mayhem even after they graduated.”

At that, Hermione broke into a grin that would give George a run for his money and said, “You know you love it, Professor.”

“Good Lord, they’ve corrupted you!” McGonagall said, but she smiled as she said it. “But yes, I admit it will be a welcome change from Death Eaters and regular torture, Miss Granger. Will Mr. Potter and the youngest Weasleys be returning this autumn as well?”

“Probably. They’re not sure yet. Ron might be going the Kwikspell route.”
Harry and Ginny hadn’t been sure whether they wanted return. They were going to be married, which complicated things; and they wouldn’t be hurting for money, so they didn’t need to finish school. Molly was strongly in favour of both of them returning to finish their education, of course. On the other hand, Percy had quietly told Harry he could become an Auror straightaway, but with his connection to Ginny, he didn’t want to take those kinds of chances. (Percy had told Hermione the same thing, to which she laughed in his face.) Ron was looking into remedial courses outside of school, although Percy might be willing to fast-track him, too.

McGonagall nodded in understanding. After their chat, she told Hermione which parts of the school were currently safe to tour, and she continued to show her parents around. An hour later, it was time to head down to the Lake.

The real reason they were there today was for the dedication of the Battle of Hogwarts Memorial. In contrast to repairing the castle, building a memorial from scratch was a simple affair, so McGonagall and Percy had decided to put it up over the summer instead of trying to set it up during the school year.

There was already a crowd gathered by the Lake when the Grangers came down from the hill. Hundreds of witches and wizards stood around to watch—the families of almost everyone who had died in the battle and many of those who had fought and lived. Most were wearing formal robes. And here she was, wearing muggle clothes. Many in the crowd stared at her because of that, or because of her parents, but she walked forward with her head held high, trying to look confident. Her short sleeves left the MUDBLOOD scar on her arm clearly and shamelessly visible.

The crowd parted like water around them as they approached. The Weasleys were also at the front of the crowd, and Hermione hurried to George and kissed him.

“Hey, you,” he said quietly. “Did your parents like the tour?”

“As much as they could with the castle in this state. How are you doing, being back here?”

“I should probably ask you that more than the other way ‘round, Hermione,” he said.

“Hm. It’s strange, seeing it in daylight,” she mused. “I know it was daylight when we arrived that night, but in my head, it’s like it was dark the whole time.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. How are you feeling, though?”

“It’s…complicated. I keep remembering what this place looked like when it was on fire and falling down around me. I can’t remember the last time I ever saw Hogwarts looking peaceful. It’s almost alien like this…and I’m sad about the people we lost of course. But I keep thinking about how with almost a third of the defenders dying, how unlikely it was that you and all of your—our family all survived the battle, even with a lot of us staying behind the lines, and trying to figure out how that happened. A little guilty that that thought’s getting in the way of everything else, but Dr. Hudson says that’s one of the ways I process my feelings—through mathematically understanding what happened, I mean.” She lowered her voice. “So I’m obviously relieved about that, which makes it all the more uncomfortable to see all the people who weren’t so lucky, and wondering if I made the right decisions—”

“Okay,” George cut her off and pulled her into a tight hug. “Breathe, Hermione. Sounds like you’ve got a lot going on. We all do, I think—though, maybe not like that.”

“What about you? How are you feeling?” she asked.
“Probably a lot of the same stuff, but I’m okay,” he said. “I think Fleur is taking it the hardest.”

He motioned over to where Fleur stood with baby Nadia, staring out at the memorial, grim-faced. Fleur had been struggling with little help besides Molly since that fateful day when her husband died the same day their daughter was born. Bill wasn’t being honoured today, which couldn’t have made it any easier. There were too many casualties in the whole war to list them all here.

She also saw Harry and Ginny leaning against each other, their hands intertwined. They looked content, given the circumstances, but she didn’t miss how tight they were holding to each other. The ritual Hermione had used to remove Voldemort’s horcrux from Harry had effectively “horcruxed” Harry and Ginny to each other (though she needed a better word for it). The result was a mental connection not unlike Harry had had with Voldemort, with all kinds of side effects, not least that they had to share a bed most nights, or they’d get severe headaches. It was less romantic than it sounded.

Not many people spoke to Hermione directly, for which she was grateful, and soon enough, the crowd quieted as McGonagall and Percy stepped into the circle of the memorial—irregular grey stones set in the circle of dust.

When surveying for the memorial, McGonagall had decided to put it on the spot where Hermione had first slain a dementor. It was a good choice—a quiet spot for reflection on the west shore of the Lake—a symbol of hope, but coloured by the scar the ritual had left—a circle of earth turned barren, by now reduced to sandy soil, unusable for anything else. They’d paved it over with cobblestones so it wouldn’t just become a sand pit and erected a stylised circle of standing stones around it engraved with the names of the forty-three people who had lost their lives in the battle.

“Welcome, all of you,” McGonagall said. “Two months ago, Hogwarts Castle was the site of the most devastating battle in its history since the school opened. The school that was supposed to be a place of refuge and learning for the children of Britain became a place of terror and slaughter at the hands of a madman…Lord Voldemort came to Hogwarts seeking his ultimate victory—the destruction of his greatest enemy.” She glanced at Harry. “Instead, he met his end at the hands of one whom he had dismissed.” A glance at Hermione, now. Not exactly true, but Voldemort certainly had no conception of the magics she was bringing to bear against him. “But the cost of that victory was high. Forty-three of Hogwarts’ defenders lost their lives that night, many of them students—even children—but also teachers, house elves, and many brave citizens who took matters into their own hands to protect the school and the country they loved.

“The enemy brought all of their forces to bear to destroy Hogwarts, but we repelled them. The damage to Hogwarts will not heal easily, physically or emotionally, but we prevailed. And a day later on this very spot, we witnessed a miracle that kept that forty-three from becoming forty-four. And so, in remembrance of those who were lost, we have come back to this place to dedicate a monument to their memory…”

Hermione didn’t fully register all of McGonagall’s speech. She pointed out particular acts of valour by select members of the fallen and waxed poetic about the cause they fought for. Then Percy spoke. She knew this speech better since he’d been practising it all week. He didn’t feel that he deserved the post he now held, he said, but he had stepped up to do his duty to Britain, just like those who had not been affiliated with Hogwarts, but had come to fight anyway. And, while the memorial could not contain the names of all those who had died in the war, there were others who deserved equal recognition. Like Mad-Eye Moody. Like Oliver Wood. Like Bill.

They finished by reading the names on the memorial. There were a lot of tears as people came forward to pay their respects, and the whole thing left Hermione feeling emotionally exhausted, but at the end, it felt like progress had been made.
“We should kill them!”

“Take it easy, Zabini,” Hermione said. “This step shouldn’t be taken lightly. We have to examine the individual cases.”

“Does it matter?” Zabini insisted. “These are the worst of the worst. Just kill them and have done with it.”

“That’s almost word for word what Aberforth Dumbledore said. There’s a reason I kept him off the committee. If we make a recommendation like that, we need to back it up.”

The latest meeting of the Reconciliation Committee was the most contentious yet. It had taken them a long time to even get to the question of what to do with the worst offenders. There were plenty of easier trials to satisfy the public in the meantime and a lot of repairs to do. Now that they’d begun discussing it, things weren’t much better.

“Are we seriously considering this?” Cresswell said. “There hasn’t been an execution in muggle Britain for over thirty years, and magical Britain for longer. I can’t condone starting them again.”

“I thought execution for treason was still on the books in the muggle world,” Hestia said. “Shouldn’t that apply here?”

“It was,” Hermione corrected. “And also for piracy. Ironically, they abolished it in May.”

“To conform to international law,” Cresswell insisted. “They didn’t do it on a whim.”

Neville cleared his throat. “I’m not taking a side—yet,” he said, “but we aren’t bound by muggle law, here. The Queen, yes, sort of, but not muggle law. We can make our own decision.”

Blaise Zabini was on the Reconciliation Committee because he was the one person with a Dark Mark still living who could be called anything close to innocent, and he acted a representative of the “disgraced” Slytherin House. There had been objections, but Hermione had insisted. The Committee needed a check to hold them back from persecuting those who didn’t deserve it—someone like him. Ironically, he turned out to be the most militant towards the actual marked Death Eaters of any of them.

Hestia Jones and Dirk Cresswell had been obvious. Both represented the Ministry: Hestia the Aurors and Cresswell the bureaucracy. And Hestia also represented the Order and Cresswell the oppressed muggle-borns (even though Hermione was technically both). Neville represented the oppressed students of Hogwarts after McGonagall had declined the post. (Harry had also declined, saying he didn’t have the background for the legal stuff.)

At least they’d finally fixed the name. Hermione had never liked the “Demortification Committee.” She got the new name from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She should have thought to look into that earlier. They had an interesting philosophy about restorative justice over retributive justice, which she thought might be helpful. In her defence, she’d been focused on Denazification because Voldemort’s puppet regime might as well have been intentionally modelled on Nazi Germany, and many of them absolutely deserved retribution.

“Look, you complain about how muggle-borns coming into our world call us barbaric?” Cresswell said. “This is one of the reasons.”

“I’d say it’s a lot more complicated than that, Cresswell—” Hermione started.
“So you’re saying the Death Eaters don’t deserve to die for what they’ve done?” Hestia snapped.

“Maybe they do,” Cresswell said. “I’m saying it’s not our place to say. Most of the muggle world agrees capital punishment does more harm to society than—”

“Most of!” Zabini interrupted. “The muggles don’t even agree among themselves!”

“Okay!” Hermione stopped him. “One thing at a time, now. Healer Smethwyck, what’s your opinion?”

Hippocrates Smethwyck leaned forward. “As a Healer, I’m obviously very reluctant to invoke execution. I’m not categorically opposed, but we need to be extraordinarily careful in how or if we apply it.”

The Reconciliation Committee was to be a committee of seven, and with large segments of society already represented, Hermione decided the last two members of the committee should be prominent and trusted members of the community not affiliated with the Order or the Ministry. Emphasis on “trusted,” since a lot of those kinds of people were either Imperiused or enablers. Barnabus Cuffe of the Daily Prophet, for example, was a no-go. She had asked Mr. Ollivander, but he recused himself, not wanting to appear biased. St. Mungo’s had not been seriously interfered with by the Death Eaters, however, and Healer Smethwyck was judged a good fit for the Committee.

The last member was a surprise even to Hermione. She was one of the last people she’d expected, and not someone she automatically classed as “prominent,” but she was someone everyone knew and most people had good things to say about: Madam Rosmerta from the Three Broomsticks. Hermione had been baffled by the suggestion at first, but on further consideration, if there was anyone she trusted to have their finger on the pulse of the community without having an ulterior motive, especially a small community like wizarding Britain, it was a pub owner. Plus, her inclusion balanced a Hogsmeade resident against Smethwyck, a Londoner.

At the unspoken question, Rosmerta gave her own answer: “Personally, I see a lot people on this list who deserve to die. And we didn’t execute anyone after the last war; maybe this time around, we should show we’re really serious.”

“Last time we let a lot of powerful people get off,” Cresswell objected. “That’s not happening this time.”

And so it went. They spent quite a bit of time debating about the death penalty itself and what crimes warranted it. For her part, Hermione wanted to use the standards set in the Nuremberg Trials. At Nuremberg, the specific charges were crime against peace, war of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity; and it was the high-ranking leaders who were executed—the organisers of the Final Solution, which was a different perspective. Even Bellatrix Lestrange, if she were alive, wouldn’t have been charged with those things—murder and torture, yes, but not crimes against humanity.

Ultimately, they didn’t exactly resolve the question. Cresswell sounded like an absolutist on the issue—and he would have to be, Hermione thought, to stand firm after his captivity in Malfoy Manor. And Healer Smethwyck nearly derailed the whole committee when he said, “I move that any recommendation for execution by the committee must be unanimous.” But that very vote actually settled things enough for them to move forward and discuss the individual cases.

“Avery, Avery, Bulstrode, Gibbon, Goyle, Goyle, Nott, Nott, Osbert, Pyrites, Rosier, Rowle, Elizabeth Runcorn, Selwyn, and Travers,” Hermione said. “Does anyone want to open discussion about any of them?”
Zabini opened his mouth.

“Anyone *besides* Zabini?” she clarified.

He scowled: “I was going to say you don’t need to go after Theo, Greg, Millie, or Liz. Not trying to be self-serving or anything. They really didn’t do all that much.”

“I can agree with that,” Neville said. “They fought against us when we took the school, but that’s it. If they’d had time to graduate, it would have been different.”

“Fine. Any objection there?” Hermione asked. No one spoke, and she crossed them off the list.

“The Azkaban escapees,” Hestia raised. “Travers for sure. More if you want to count the revolving door the place became after the war officially started. Two years ago, we would have given them the Dementor’s Kiss.”

“That’s a valid point,” Hermione agreed. “Personally, I don’t think merely escaping from Azkaban alone is sufficient to warrant extraordinary measures, but it’s worth discussing. Although the Dementor’s Kiss is now moot, of course.”

“Give it to ‘em anyway,” Zabini suggested.

Hermione shot him a glare so fierce that he flinched back. She *was not* allowing the committee to go *there*.

This was a tougher call. The Unforgivable Curses had been punishable by life in Azkaban, not death. The wizarding world hadn’t been fond of the death penalty either. The Dementor’s Kiss had been prescribed for Azkaban escapees, but that was a public safety measure—dispatching criminals who couldn’t be contained by other means. However, most of the committee agreed with her that death should be reserved for those whose crimes went above and beyond the Unforgivable Curses, in keeping with the earlier standards, so Hestia’s motion was dismissed.

That dealt with the largest segment of marked Death Eaters. The remaining cases were the true organisers of the muggle-born oppression—the Ministry people: Umbridge, Albert Runcorn, Yaxley, and Macnair—plus the other people who had tortured and murdered from a position of “legal” power at Hogwarts: Alecto Carrow and Barty Crouch Jr, although Crouch was still on the run.

“Macnair was a bit player,” Zabini said. “He never had any real power in the Ministry, if we’re playing that game.”

“Fair. And Umbridge is still in St. Mungo’s,” Hermione said.

“They never figured out what you did to her?” Neville said worriedly.

“Dude, did you see what she looks like now?” Zabini demanded.

“No, but…it was just wand spells, right? Can’t they fix it?”

Hermione shook her head: “It was, but apparently, one of the spells I used doesn’t play nice with Skele-Gro, and it made it worse. I’m not sure *I* could reverse it now.” Healer Smethwyck grimaced at the image. “The point is, Umbridge can’t be moved from St. Mungo’s, so there’s not much point. Runcorn and Yaxley are the ones I care about.”

“Runcorn wasn’t a Death Eater,” Zabini pointed out.
“He was an organiser. He shared their beliefs. He worked toward the same goals, rounding up muggle-borns and having them imprisoned or Kissed. He deserves the same treatment as far as I’m concerned.”

“There’s another concern, Professor Granger,” Smethwyck said. “I understand that you placed both Runcorn and Yaxley in comas and relocated them early in the process. They didn’t have time to do much besides the organising.”

“Does it matter that much?” Neville asked. “They definitely would’ve kept doing it.”

Madam Rosmerta nodded: “Yeah, why should we let ‘em off easy just because they got caught sooner?”

“No, I’m actually with Healer Smethwyck on this one,” Hermione said. “We can’t go after them for what they were going to do. We’re already bending *ex post facto* a little. We at least have to judge them on what they actually did.”

“Definitely,” Hestia agreed. “We have to do this by the book. But the organising part ought to be enough.”

Hermione made a note of those names in her records. Okay, and what about Alecto Carrow?” she asked.

There was a pause, and then, Neville’s face hardened. “Okay, I’m taking a side now,” he said. “She was torturing eleven-year-old kids for months and calling it ‘teaching.’ I say kill her!”

“Kill her!” Zabini agreed.

It didn’t take long then. They needed only a brief overview of her crimes before they held the vote. Even Healer Smethwyck was swayed. Hermione was worried about Cresswell, but when the vote came out, it was six in favour of execution and one abstention. The motion was carried. The vote was the same for Barty Crouch Jr. If he were brought in alive, the committee would again recommended execution.

It took a little longer to go over the evidence for Yaxley, but ultimately, Hermione’s view won out. The vote was again six to zero with one abstention. However, for Runcorn, as he wasn’t a Death Eater, they were ultimately split five to two. Barring exceptional circumstance, he would be spared.

Then, there was the matter of the method. Hestia suggested throwing the condemned through the Veil of Death in the Department of Mysteries, but even if that was truly what that artifact was, and Hermione wasn’t sure she wanted to take that chance, she didn’t like keeping the executions totally secret. Rosmerta suggested death by Killing Curse, but that raised obvious ethical issues. Zabini said to burn them at the stake and was shouted down by everyone.

Hermione had a much simpler solution: the indignity of being dispatched the muggle way—the way muggle government had done it before the death penalty was abolished. Luckily, the committee liked that, and Hermione gave their ruling to the Wizengamot the next day.

“The Reconciliation Committee recommends,” she announced, “that for their crimes against humanity, Alecto Carrow and Corban Yaxley shall be hanged by the neck until dead.”

13 July 1998

“How do you feel about making that recommendation?” Dr. Hudson asked.
“You mean do I feel guilty about it? No, not really. I knew the Wizengamot would probably do whatever we said, but it was ultimately their call, not mine. Anyway, they deserve it…I’ve thought a lot about it. Human rights law has changed since Nuremberg, it’s true. The UN-backed tribunal didn’t execute anyone in Rwanda, for example, but that was over the strong objections of the Rwandans.”

“And you believe the United Nations’ view is wrong?” she asked.

“I can’t say that one hundred percent, but I think for the time and place of magical Britain throwing off the Death Eaters, it’s not appropriate. And can you honestly say if the Nuremberg Trials were held today, that they would take the death penalty off the table?”

“At risk of getting political, I think they would do on principle, but a lot of people would complain about it,” Dr. Hudson said.

“Hm. Maybe,” Hermione admitted. “But I’ve made my peace with it. It’s certainly better than the alternative. Under the old regime—the pre-Voldemort regime, all of the Azkaban escapees would have been subject to the death penalty by far cruder methods. And Azkaban itself was at minimum inhumane conditions with the dementors around.” She thought a minute more. “I’m sure Dumbledore wouldn’t approve,” she said, and she scowl a bit. “He saw lethal force as a necessary evil at best. He recognised the need to kill Voldemort, but in retrospect, I have to wonder if even that was more because of the prophecy. I know he would never have approved of the death penalty.”

“It sounds like you have a lot of unresolved issues with Dumbledore.”

“…Yes, I’d say so. The man was brilliant, a hero, and probably my second-best teacher. But I have real problems with the decisions he made. He pushed reform and reconciliation to the point where it became a risk to others.” She thought of Malfoy and his murder of Cho and Trelawney. “He was secretive—keeping things hidden from people he didn’t need to hide them from, sometimes ‘for our own good,’ and that got people hurt, too. I think he would have recoiled in horror from the rituals I created to end the war…

“I felt like I’d reconciled with him for the most part in those last few months,” Hermione continued. “I wish I could have built a proper scholarly relationship with him after the war. It could have been the most fun I had during my whole time in school. But at the same time, I don’t know if I’ll ever forgive him for what happened to Sturgis Podmore.”

“Mm hmm. It sounds like Dumbledore was a very complicated man,” Dr. Hudson said. “And it sounds like you have good reason to be angry with him. Unfortunately, when someone dies, the only thing you can do is come to terms with them as they were, and that’s never their best self.”

Hermione looked thoughtful, and her eyebrows slowly rose. “Actually, I think there is a way, Dr. Hudson,” she said.

“Excuse me?”

“Dumbledore’s portrait should be hanging in the Headmistress’s Office at Hogwarts. Magical portraits can move and speak, you see. They’re not properly alive; they certainly can’t to scholarly research. They’re more like computer simulations of their subjects, but they’re a whole lot of steps above ELIZA. More like…more like a holodeck simulation of a person on Star Trek.”

“Goodness!” Dr. Hudson exclaimed. “I…I can see how that would change a lot of things. In that case, I can give you some advice for that conversation—although I don’t know how well it will work with a simulation…”
31 July 1998

Harry’s eighteenth birthday was a small, family affair...Well, it was a family affair, anyway. Harry had a large family. All of the Weasleys plus girlfriends (who at this point were Hermione and Angelina Johnson) and in-laws (Fleur and Nadia), Hermione’s parents, Sirius, and Remus and his family made a total of eighteen people plus the guest of honour himself. But if they’d held the party out in the larger wizarding world, they would have been swarmed by hundreds of guests, so a “small, family affair” was an apt descriptor. It was probably the best birthday Harry had ever had.

“So, Harry, do you feel more grown-up now?” Hermione teased him. “You’re officially old enough to drink in the muggle world. Vote, too, for that matter.”

Harry dropped his head into his hands. “Bloody hell,” he groaned. “I hadn’t even thought of that. All that trouble, and I wasn’t even old enough to drink yet until today!”

“Good thing the drinking age for Firewhisky is only seventeen, eh?” Ginny said, ribbing him.

“Right, seventeen,” he said sarcastically.

Hermione’s eyes narrowed at Ginny suspiciously. “That’s right, Ginny. You’re still not technically old enough to drink in the wizarding world. Is there something I need to tell your brothers?”

Ginny grinned: “Not if you don’t want to get Bat-Bogeyed. Being a war hero has its advantages after all.”

“Oh of course,” she said. “Well, I hope you like your present, Harry. Although you should open the Twins’ first.”

“Really?” Harry said suspiciously.

“No prank,” George said.

“We wouldn’t do that on your birthday,” Fred agreed.

“Well, not only that.”

Harry was still wary as he opened their gift, especially given the large size of the box. But he was surprised by what he found: “It’s a…record player. You got me a record player?”

“Well, you’re going to be moving into your own place in the near future,” Hermione said. “And there aren’t any CD players or walkmans in the magical world. We thought you might like to have something like this.”

“Oh. That’s…actually a really good idea,” he said. “Not something I would’ve thought of.” He looked up at Hermione. “So I’m guessing you got me some Mozart to play on it?”

“Oh course not, Harry.” She handed him a large, square package. “I got you classic rock.”

He stared at her. “Classic rock?” he said incredulously.

“Hey, I’m not completely uncultured,” she said. Then, after a pause, “And I asked Sirius for advice.”

Harry laughed. “Thanks, Hermione.”

Hermione backed up while Harry continued opening gifts and found herself sitting by the young
mothers of the family.

“Should’ve asked me for advice on music, Hermione,” Tonks said. “I could’ve given you a few ideas.”

“I said classic rock, Tonks,” Hermione said. “Not that noise you call heavy metal.”

“Oi!” she protested while Fleur laughed. Tonks (who still went by Tonks for first and last name despite being legally Nymphadora Lupin) flashed her hair red in anger. The baby she was holding changed his hair from bright blue to red to match. “Don’t you start, Fleur,” she said. “It’s bad enough I have to take that from Remus.” She looked down at her baby. “How did we wind up in a family that can’t appreciate Iron Maiden, Sasha?” she asked.

Sasha just cooed at her.

Hermione laughed and reached a finger in to tickle his tummy. “Look on the bright side,” she said. “Sasha will probably grow up to be more cultured than any of us with you two for parents.” Sasha’s hair suddenly turned brown and curly when he saw her.

“Traitor,” said Tonks.

She laughed again and gazed back at Harry and Ginny and the rest of the party. It all seemed so normal. Sometimes, part of her still couldn’t believe it was real. When she woke up at night in a cold sweat, she was often disoriented, thinking she was back in the factory or the woods or worse, and that was when the nightmares weren’t too bad. But Harry? She knew he was suffering too, but she couldn’t remember the last time she’d seen him this happy. It was strange just how normal it all seemed, but right now, normal was good.

3 August 1998

“Witches and wizards!”

“Children of all ages!”

“The long wait is over!”

“Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes…”

“Is back!” George, Fred, and Hermione said in unison.

Diagon Alley was very different from the first opening of WWW. The atmosphere had been dark and fearful then, but now, it was more hollowed out. Some businesses were still rebuilding, and others would never return. The place still didn’t have the colour and activity that Hermione remembered from before the war, but like everywhere in magical Britain, it was healing.

“Yes, the ultimate one-stop shop for pranks, jokes, gags, and general mayhem for witches and wizards of all ages is back in business!” Fred told the waiting crowd. The turnout was really good today. Hermione supposed people still needed a laugh after everything that had happened. God, had it really only been a year since the shop was burnt down? Not much longer.

“Now, I know our selection isn’t fully restocked,” George continued, “but we’re rebuilding fast, and we have all your favourites: the Skiving Snackboxes, the Fanged Flyers, and of course, Weasleys’ Wildfire Whiz-bangs!” He flicked his wand, and a pair of fireworks shot into the sky, broadcasting their reopening to the entire Alley. (Percy would probably complain.)
“And if there’s anything you don’t see, it should be back on our shelves by Christmas,” Hermione added.

“Indeed. And new this year, we have the Death Eater wind-up toy,” Fred continued. “Shouts empty threats and then falls flat on its face, and it can also be beaten down by the Auror wind-up toy.” Hermione had vetoed a Voldemort wind-up toy like they’d done for Umbridge. A generic Death Eater was the closest she’d let them come, and even that felt like pushing it, but the crowd’s reaction was more positive than she’d expected.

“And we also have Manna, the official emergency rations of the Order of the Phoenix, made by our own Hermione Granger,” George said. Why people would want to buy something like that Hermione had no idea, but she’d made it for them anyway.

“And just for fun and frivolity, we’ve made an even tinier version of our Tiny Twister,” Fred added. “Check out our new Storm in a Teacup.” He produced a teacup and tossed its contents in the air, where they turned into a miniature tornado just large enough to envelop him. That got a bit of applause.

“I’m still not letting you do Hell in a Handbasket,” Hermione said, to laughs from the crowd.

Fred took it in stride. “Thank you, thank you,” he said. “And now, the moment you’ve all been waiting for: we officially declare Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes…reopened!”

They cut the ribbon with giant scissors just like last time, and the crowd entered. Hermione smiled at seeing the laughter and mayhem of their first opening recreated. True, there were more of an undercurrent of grief this time around, but people were enjoying themselves. However, they weren’t all customers. Hermione was also dealing with a group people who hadn’t come before: fans.

“Can I get your autograph please?”

“That was so cool the way you knocked down the Astronomy Tower!”

“Thank you so much. You saved my son in the battle.”

“Can you teach me how to destroy dark wizards too?”

“We heard you on Radio Free Britain.”

That last one made Hermione do a double take. She looked up after signing yet another autograph and saw a young woman with dark hair and an angular face, leading two young children through the store. This time, Hermione recognised her. She had saved her from Bellatrix Lestrange almost two years ago. “You’re Mary Cattermole,” she said.

Cattermole smiled. “Yes, I’m surprised you remember me. We just moved back from Normandy.” The muggle-borns who had fled the country were still trickling back in. It was a slow process. “I just wanted to thank you again. We heard your Radio Free Britain broadcasts, and they were a lifeline for us when they were on. The French wireless recorded and replayed them for the ex-pats. It was a great idea.”

“Oh, thank you, Mrs. Cattermole,” Hermione said. “I’m happy to hear that—and that you made it back alright.”

Cattermole left her to browse the shop, and a little while later, another familiar face came in: a tall witch with long, black hair who had been Hermione’s good friend for many years.
“Septima!” Hermione hurried over to her. “It’s good to see you. I’m glad you could make it today. It’s been too long with everything going on.”

Septima Vector looked around the shop distractedly. Hermione wasn’t sure if she’d ever been inside before. “It’s good to see you too, Hermione,” she said haltingly, rubbing her eyes. “This is even more colourful than I imagined.”

“It is a bit much. Are you alright?”

“I can manage,” she said.

Hermione could tell she was getting a bit overwhelmed. “Come on, let’s go in the back,” she told her. “Mr. Bagman, can you handle things out here?”

“Are you kidding me? It’s complete chaos!” Ludo Bagman called from the till.

“So, normal, then,” Hermione grinned. She led Septima to the back room where things were quieter and less hectic.

Once Hermione’s long-time Arithmancy teacher, Septima had been forcibly retired last year. A prolonged torture session with Cruciatius at Hogwarts combined with a bad head injury had left her with brain damage, so she couldn’t teach anymore. It wasn’t like the horror stories you heard from St. Mungo’s. In fact, if you didn’t know she was once a scholar, you might not even notice, but it had destroyed the life she’d had before. She could still do enough magic for her day-to-day life and even fight in the Battle of Hogwarts, but she’d lost all sense of numeracy, and she couldn’t do arithmancy at all.

It still made Hermione’s gut wrench just thinking about it. It didn’t surprise her that the main shop was a bit too much for her.

“How did you wind up with Ludo Bagman working the till?” Septima asked.

“He owes us money,” Hermione said. “Besides, he’s washed up and needs work anyway. He’s a decent enough employee. So where’s Marcus?” she asked.

“He’s with my nephew. I thought the shop would be too much excitement for him. But you’re welcome to come and see him anytime, Hermione.”

She smiled: “Of course, I will.”

Marcus Vector was Hermione’s godson, which still felt like a weird position for her to be in. Formerly Marvolo Crouch, the son of Barty Crouch Jr and a captive Bertha Jorkins. After the Battle of Hogwarts, with his mother dead and his father a fugitive, Septima had adopted him to give him some semblance of a normal life.

It was odd: there weren’t many babies born in the past year with the war on. Maybe as few as forty, like Hermione’s own birth year, but there were three in Hermione’s circle. And then, there was Columba Malfoy, who wasn’t, but who had indirectly shaped Hermione’s life so painfully. It was only because Narcissa Malfoy had been pregnant and came down with a late-night craving that their team had been captured at Malfoy Manor, where Hermione had been tortured by Bellatrix, and Bill had been fatally wounded.

But she tried not to dwell on that. She couldn’t blame Narcissa for it, as much as part of her wanted to. She’d seen the look on Narcissa’s face back at the Manor. It was the look of a woman who was in way over her head.
She shook off the memory and changed the subject: “So how are you doing, Septima? I know you were looking for work before, and it can’t be easy with a baby at home.”

“Don’t worry about me, Hermione,” Septima said. “I have enough in savings to get by until Marcus is a little older. And I’m getting help from my nephew and his family. Georgina loves him.”

“That’s good,” Hermione said. “You know I can help too if you need it. Now that I’ve got my jewelry business back up and running—”

“You really don’t need to do that—”

“It’s not any trouble,” she cut her off. “Beside, I need to make sure my godson is provided for, don’t I?”

Septima smiled and reached out to pull her into a hug. “You’re a good witch, Hermione. And thank you. I know little Marcus will be in good hands.”

They chatted a while longer about Hermione’s doings over the summer before Hermione decided to head back out and make sure the shop was still standing (never a complete guarantee in this place). The rest of the day ran surprisingly smoothly, but around lunchtime, George received an official looking letter. He stared in surprise when he took it from the owl.

“George? What is it?” Hermione asked.

“I think it’s my N.E.W.T. results.”

“Oh! Well, let’s see how you did, then. Come on!” she said excitedly.

George chuckled as he opened the envelope. Last year’s O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students had been allowed to sit their exams at the Ministry over the summer. Most of the classes were still competently taught to the students who actually showed up, right up until the battle, so many of them took up the offer. George had sat his N.E.W.T.s too since he hadn’t had the opportunity before. It was mostly for Hermione’s sake, even though she’d told him he didn’t have to, but he’d insisted, saying he wanted to be better than a school dropout for her, even if it was for a good reason at the time, and it was all very sweet.

They looked over the parchment together. “O in Defence, naturally,” George said. “E in charms. A’s in Herbology and Potions.” He hadn’t taken the Potions class, but he was good at it—a good job better than an A at free-form, she thought—and it was a certification thing. He looked up at her: “Not a great showing.”

“Nonsense. I’m proud of you, George,” she said. “For being out of school two years, that was a perfectly good showing, and just finishing was more than you needed to do for me.” She pulled him in for a kiss.

11 August 1998

Harry’s and Ginny’s wedding, unlike Harry’s birthday party, was held outdoors, and there were a lot of guests. With the amount of public interest, they had briefly considered the Hogwarts grounds as a venue, but they decided it wouldn’t be right. Instead, they decided to set up a tent in the paddock next to where the Burrow had stood.

The Burrow was going to be rebuilt. The Weasleys hadn’t exactly decided what they were going to do, but there was an unspoken agreement that Arthur and Molly were going to be heading back
there. They had done a bit of groundwork, but they were waiting for school to start and for things to settle before seriously working on rebuilding.

Pretty much everyone wanted to be at the wedding. Viktor Krum had come back all the way from Bulgaria for it, and a couple of Charlie’s dragon-wrangling mates from Romania. Quite a few of Fleur’s extended family were there (one of them was flower girl), and plenty of Harry’s and Ginny’s friends from Hogwarts.

Looking out over the crowd, it was every bit a storybook wedding. Hermione was standing just to the right of the tufty-haired little minister as maid of honour—because of course she was going to be the maid of honour, even though she’d never once thought about it before Ginny had recruited her. Her dress was tasteful, anyway—a pale summer yellow that was more flattering than she’d expected.

Harry stood across from her, backed by Ron, and she had to admit, he looked more at ease than any groom she’d ever seen, which was unsurprising given his special circumstances. Ron looked far more nervous despite the fact that it wasn’t his wedding. As far as Hermione was concerned, the ceremony was going off without a hitch—which made her keep her wand a bit closer. She kept half-expecting Barty Crouch Jr to crash the party and start cursing people, but the odds of that were objectively low.

Finally, the music swelled, and Ginny began walking down the aisle on the arm of her tearful father. She was wearing a simple, white dress that cut off at the ankles for mobility—something Hermione thought was a very sensible choice. Her face, on the other hand, was stunning. She wore Muriel’s old goblin-made tiara on her head; Fleur had done her hair in an elaborate braid, and Hermione had applied her Sanctitatis Apparentia charm so that she was literally glowing with a soft, white light. Of course, the way Ginny was looking now, her smile could light up the tent all on its own. When she reached the front, Harry smiled just as wide back at her.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said a slightly sing-song voice as the Minister drew everyone’s attention. “We are gathered here today to celebrate the union of two faithful souls…”

Hermione just barely held back a snort. She’d unified Harry’s and Ginny’s souls months ago in a far more literal sense than the minister could imagine, and that had been almost completely by accident.

The ceremony itself was short. While muggle churches would sometimes insert a homily, Harry and Ginny had only a prayer and a traditional scripture reading before the exchange of vows.

“Do you, Harry James take Ginevra Molly to be your lawfully wedded wife…?”

Hermione could hear Molly sobbing behind her. She knew she considered Harry to be as good as a son already, not to mention Ginny being her only daughter. It still felt uncomfortable hearing it after all the tears that had been shed in the war. A quick glance at the other bridesmaids, Luna, Fleur, and Angelina, showed they were at least keeping it together.

Once they had exchanged vows, the minister said, “Please present the rings,” and Ginny turned and took Harry’s ring from Hermione. She had engraved the rings herself, since she was a professional jeweller, after a fashion. Harry’s was a gold band engraved with an intricate fractal pattern charmed resistant to wear, encircling the words, Love is as strong as death, and passion as fierce as the grave. And, of course, a Greek numeral kappa-zeta for the twenty-seventh piece produced by Lady Archimedes. She had a reputation to uphold, after all. Ginny’s was kappa-eta.

“…then I declare you bonded for life.”

The tufty-haired wizard waved his wand high over the heads of Harry and Ginny and a shower of
silver stars fell upon them, spiralling around their now-entwined figures. As Fred and George led a round of applause, the golden balloons overhead burst; Birds of paradise and tiny golden bells flew and floated out of them, adding their songs and chimes to the din.

Seeing their passionate kiss, Hermione wasn’t sure if Harry and Ginny even noticed, but she was happy for them either way. She caught George’s eye, and he winked at her. Next summer, she thought.

Chapter End Notes

Recall that in this story, it was Madam Puddifoot who was Imperiused by Draco and got Cho killed, not Madam Rosmerta.
1 September 1998


“Hard to believe it’s been three years,” Dad said.

“It’s been a long three years,” she said. And of course, while it had been three years since the last time her parents saw her off here, it had been only a little over one year since she last stood in this spot. That had been the first time she’d killed a man, collapsing a wall on Robert Jugson.

Like everything else, the atmosphere here was different from what it was both before and during the war. With the war over and the optimism of a new school year, it was like a weight had lifted off the crowds on the platform. But at the same time...she saw an awful lot more crying children—not the majority, but a lot. She heard more than one child begging their parents not to make them go back.

She’d changed too, she thought. She wore her purple-trimmed, nanotube-lined robes rather than ordinary wool. She only carried a trunk as an affectation now. She could and did keep most of her things in her new enchanted handbag. Crookshanks padded along behind her on foot. It had taken him time to warm up to her again after she had “abandoned” him, but they seemed to be friends again.

“It’s strange,” Dad said. “For all that’s happened, I think this is the most at-ease I’ve ever felt seeing you off like this, Hermione.”

“I think so too,” Mum agreed. “We always had something to worry about, even if it was just you entering the magical world in the first place.”

“But now you know I can take care of myself?” she ventured.

Mum gave her a weak smile. “Maybe not exactly what I was thinking, but I pity anyone who crosses you. Be careful all the same, Hermione. And have fun. We love you.”

“I love you.” She hugged Mum and Dad and kissed them both on the cheek.

A little ways down, she saw the Weasleys seeing off Harry and Ginny. They had indeed decided to come back for their final year. And despite Molly’s disapproval, Ron had not, though he had got his act together and started an internship in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. He was also the new starting Keeper for the Chudley Cannons, but, as Fred and George teased him mercilessly,
that wasn’t much of an accomplishment. (Professional Quidditch in a society this small was only a part-time job unless you played for a national team, so he could make it work.)

George met her before she stepped onto the train. “You know, there’s still time for you to back out if you want,” he said.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It won’t be that long, George. We’ll see each other on Hogsmeade weekends. Let me have one normal year at Hogwarts.”

He pulled her into a hug. “Love, I would never take that away from you,” he said. “Still, I was thinking. Since you technically hold the title of Professor, you might qualify for a professor’s privileges—you know, like being able to come and go as you please outside of classes.”

“And take points and give detentions?” she suggested. “No thanks. I did the commuter student thing, and I’ll pass. Don’t worry. The first visit will be here before you know it.” She kissed him and stepped onto the train, Crookshanks hopping up after her. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Good luck.”

The train soon pulled away from King’s Cross, and she was off to Hogwarts again.

Walking through the train to catch up with Harry and Ginny, she definitely noticed the change in the atmosphere here. A boy who was probably a fourth- or fifth-year came out of one of the compartments, took one looked at her, then gasped and darted back inside. Other students poked their heads out into the corridor and just stared at her. In one compartment, she heard crying, and she looked in and saw a little girl (or she seemed a little girl to Hermione) curled up in one corner, sobbing. Two other younger students were sitting in there, but they just looked very uncomfortable and at a loss as to what to do.

“Hello?” Hermione said.

The crying girl looked up, and her eyes grew very wide, and she couldn’t seem to find her voice. She wasn’t anyone Hermione recognised, but she certainly recognised Hermione.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

“I…I…” the girl stammered.

Hermione sat down next to her, trying to look approachable. “What’s you’re name?” she asked.


Hermione nodded and smiled. “Are you a first year, Annie?”

Annie shook her head: “No…Second year.”

Oh. Of course, she should have thought of that. For the second years, their only memories of Hogwarts were as a place of terror. Come to think of it, she remembered an Oliver Rivers dying in the battle. A Hufflepuff in her year. “Ah. I’m sorry,” she said. “I can’t imagine what it was like there last year. Most of what I’ve heard was from Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood, and it sounded bad.”

Annie sniffed and nodded, but didn’t say anything.

“All I can tell you is, I remember what Hogwarts was like when it was peaceful, and it was nothing
like what I saw there back in May. It was one of the most beautiful places I’d ever seen. It was all full of joy and wonder and…well, magic, and the worst thing we had to worry about was losing house points—and I was more uptight about that than anyone.”

“Y-you?” Annie said. “But didn’t you…Dumbledore’s Army? And breaking into the Ministry, and —”

Hermione chuckled. “Yes and yes. I changed a lot over the years. I learnt it’s always good to have a healthy scepticism of authority. But anyway, the Death Eaters are gone, and Professor McGonagall is in charge now. It’s going to be different this year, like the old days.”

Annie brightened a little bit, but she still asked, “But what about Professor Crouch—er, Barty Crouch? What if he comes back?”

“Then he’ll have to get through me,” Hermione said, trying to sound like she was sure how that fight would go, and Annie smiled. “What house are you in?” she asked.

“Ravenclaw.”

“Good. Luna Lovegood’s going to be back this year, so you can talk to her if you have any trouble.”

Annie felt better after that, and Hermione got up and moved on, but it wasn’t long before she heard more trouble. It wasn’t a crying child this time. Instead, it was a scrawny young boy being surrounded by three others, two of whom looked older, taunting him.

“You shouldn’t’ve come.”

“How’d you even get here? You Imperius somebody?”

“Go home, snake!”

“Excuse me,” Hermione stepped in, making all the boys stop and stare. “Is there a problem here?” she asked in low tones.

The oldest of the boys almost seemed to smile. He turned to face her and said, “Granger! Good, you’re here. This Death Eater scum isn’t supposed to be here. We need to get rid of him.”

“He’s one of them,” the other older boy said. “That’s Corvinus Mulciber.”

Ouch, she thought. A name like that…But still, he was what? Twelve, thirteen last year? “I’m pretty sure he never came up on the list,” she said. “What did he do?”

“Well…” he was brought up short. “He was teacher’s pet for the Carrows and everything.”

Hermione looked back at Corvinus briefly. He shook his head frantically in denial. She didn’t fully believe him. God, he’s terrified of me. Though she suspected the bullies were also exaggerating.

“I didn’t do anything,” Corvinus said. His voice was cracking.

“Yeah, you did!” the youngest of the bullies said. Hermione wished she knew any of their names so she could do something more about it. Merlin, she’d been out of the loop so long…

“N-no,” Corvinus said. “The Carrows were only nice to me because of my dad. I didn’t do anything!”

“I saw you laughing when they tortured Neville—and the Dumbledore’s Army people!”
Hermione winced. She’d have to delicately ask Neville about that when she could. “That’s
distasteful, but not technically illegal,” she said. “We dealt with students who were collaborating with
the Carrows and Crouch, but we have other ways of handling the children of Death Eaters. What I
meant was, did he inform on people? Try to get people in trouble?”

Corvinus shook his head again, and she believed him better this time. “Well…no. Not really,” the
other boy admitted.

“Does it matter?” the oldest bully said. “His dad was one of the ones Imperiusing everybody. His
kind don’t belong at Hogwarts.”

Hermione’s face turned hard. “Really? I’ve heard those words before,” she said. “Only, I was on the
receiving end last time.”

“Yeah, from people like him.”

“That’s enough. Corvinus, hold out your arm.”

The younger boy understood and held out a trembling left arm. It was bare.

“There you go. He’s not a Death Eater,” she said. “And it sounds like he wasn’t a collaborator
either.”

“He still believes all that crap!”

She gave the bully a look that made him shut up fast. “Maybe he does,” she said. “But that’s only
because he was brought up with it. If you’ve never been taught anything else, it’s very hard to break
out of it even if you want to, but he’s not too young to learn a new way of thinking, or else he
already wouldn’t be here.” She fixed her gaze on Corvinus, then. “Corvinus, don’t listen to them,”
she told him. “I may not agree with your views—I probably don’t, in fact—but you aren’t
responsible for what your father did, and if you’re willing to rethink what you’ve been taught in the
past, you have as much right to attend Hogwarts as I do.”

Corvinus stared at her in seeming disbelief, but the bullies hissed indignantly. “Why the hell are you
sticking up for him?” the middle one demanded. “His dad would’ve killed you soon as look at you!”

Hermione turned slowly to look at the three bullies, crossing her arms to hide the fact that she was
fingering her wand just in case. Her expression made all three of them flinch. At least it was good for
that much. “Why?” she said, then she quoted rapid-fire: “What do you mean by quoting this proverb
concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set
on edge'? As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.
Behold all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who
sins shall die.” She looked from one boy to the next. “You can’t understand what the Reconciliation
Committee is trying to do if you don’t understand that. Come on, Corvinus, you can come to my
compartment.”

She didn’t have a compartment per se, but she walked back to where Annie had been sitting.
Corvinus hesitated, then hurried after her. When they reached the compartment, Annie’s eyes
widened, and she stared at him worriedly.

“He’s okay, Annie. I’ll vouch for him,” Hermione said, and she relaxed.

A few minutes later a small boy came in, dragging a heavy trunk behind him. “Hi,” he said
cheerfully. “Can I sit here?”
“Sure,” Hermione said. “Here, let me help you with that.” She drew her wand and levitated the trunk that was worryingly weighing him down up to an overhead compartment.

“Whoa! Cool!” he said. “I’m Zeke.”

“Hermione,” she replied, shaking his hand.

Zeke sat down in the remaining empty seat, looking around at everything with wide eyes. “This place is amazing, isn’t it?”

Hermione stared at him. There was only one kind of person who would say that. “You’re a muggle-born first year, aren’t you?”

“Yeah! How did you know? Can you read minds?”

The tension broke, and she laughed. “No, it’s because I was one once. I’d know that look anywhere. Come to think of it, shouldn’t you have been one of the kids we relocated last year?”

“Uh huh. That was you? It was weird. Nothing really happened besides the two wizards coming to help us move, though. Mum and Dad were really worried, but it was kinda like a holiday.”

Hermione resisted the urge to smack her forehead. The other kids in the compartment looked varying degrees of resentful. Annie said, “It wasn’t for us.”

Zeke’s face fell. “Oh…er, sorry?”

Hermione sighed. “It’s alright, Zeke. Did the person from Hogwarts tell you about the war?”

“Erm, yeah, but I don’t know that much.”

“Lucky you,” Annie muttered, then a little louder: “Hermione was out there fighting, you know. She helped take down You-Know-Who himself!”

Zeke stared at her with wide eyes. Hermione rolled her own eyes and said, “Not how I would’ve introduced myself, but yes.”

“Wow! What was that like?” he asked. Kids. She hesitated in answering. Maybe she could steer him onto safer topics?

“Bellatrix was chasing me through the greenhouses,” Hermione said. “I just slipped past her and managed to shatter all the glass in Greenhouse One with her inside it, but she shielded against it. But then, right in the middle of the fight…a giant tentacle reach high up over the curtain wall and crashed down onto Greenhouse Four!” The kids gasped. “That was when I saw the…” She stopped and looked at Zeke, who still looked enthralled. “In retrospect, this probably wasn’t the best story to tell to someone who’s going to be riding a boat across the Lake in a few hours.”

“Scaring the firsties already, Hermione?” a familiar voice came from the door, and she saw Ginny grinning in the doorway.

“Hi, Ginny. And no, I didn’t mean to. Zeke here just wanted to know about the Giant Squid.” And somehow got her talking about the battle, too. She turned back to the boy. “And for your information, that was the only time I’ve ever seen the Giant Squid angry, and that was only because of the ritual. Normally, even if you fall in the Lake, it’ll just lift you back into the boat if it does anything.”
“Neat!” Zeke said.

“Ginny, this is Zeke, Annie, and Corvinus,” she introduced the kids. “And this is…” She smiled. “Ginny Potter.”

That made Annie and Zeke very excited and they practically mobbed Ginny. She took it in stride though, laughing as they peppered her with questions, a couple of them unintentionally too personal from Annie. She wound up signing a couple autographs where Hermione hadn’t had to, or at least hadn’t had to first, which was very gratifying.

“You kids behave yourselves,” Ginny said as she left. “Hermione’s a professor now, you know.”

Hermione groaned. “Not what that means, Ginny!” she called after her.

“You’re a teacher?” Zeke said in surprise. “What do you teach?”

“I’m not a teacher, Zeke. I hold the title ‘Professor’ because I have a degree in arithmancy. It’s like a wizard university thing. But it’s not the same ‘Professor’ as the teachers.”

“Why’d you come back, then?”

“Because I never finished my classes. I was kind of busy last year. By rights, I shouldn’t have the degree yet either, but they insisted.” She chuckled: “If George were the one telling the story, he’d say Tinworth told me, ‘Here’s your Doctor of Wizardry; please don’t curse me!’”

All three of the kids laughed at that. She made sure to explain it a little more clearly so they wouldn’t be confused later. (Zeke had lots of questions.) By them, it seemed like they were pretty well settled in, though, so Hermione got up to find her other friends. The train ride had been weird at the start, but it seemed pretty normal now.

Hermione paused in the Entrance Hall, admiring the new display case. In some ways, it was the crown jewel of the rebuilt Hogwarts. For the first time in centuries, the legendary artifacts had been reunited for all to see: the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, the Chalice of Helga Hufflepuff, the Locket of Salazar Slytherin, and, temporarily, the Diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw.

Here, carefully protected under heavy wards, students could see and learn about the great artifacts for themselves—though granted, they still didn’t know what the Chalice and the Locket were supposed to do. The Gryffindors would have to be educated about the Sword, since it had a habit of disappearing and reappearing to a “worthy Gryffindor” in time of need. They wanted to try to avoid it becoming lost again.

And as for the Diadem? That wouldn’t be stay here all that long. Hermione was the keeper of the Diadem, with the blessing of Helena Ravenclaw, because she was the only one who could actually use it. She was working on making a visually identical replica that could sit in the case while she was holding the original.

Many other students stopped to admire the artifacts as they entered. Many of them hadn’t even known they were returning to Hogwarts. And Professor Flitwick would tell the first-years about them when he brought them to the Sorting. But for Hermione, she walked on and took her seat quietly in the Great Hall. Her purple-trimmed robes stood out, but other than that, she was doing her best to blend in with the crowd.

It wasn’t long before Professor Flitwick brought in the new first-years. She almost couldn’t believe how young they looked. The difference she felt from when she had stood in that line was incredible.
There were a lot of them, too, in part because there were a half-dozen extra muggle-born first-years who were supposed to start last year, but hadn’t been able to.

They stood in stark contrast to her own class which was tiny. Her class was now merged with the class below, of course, but that didn’t make much difference as there were only three returning students from the Class of 1998. Everyone who had attended last year had sat their N.E.W.T.s or otherwise and hadn’t wanted to return, and of the muggle-born and muggle-raised students who were excluded, only three of them had survived and were able to return: herself, Harry, and Dean. (Justin was still trying to heal his hands, and Sally-Anne just didn’t want to come back.) And they were balanced by the five muggle-borns in the class below who (if they had survived) were now held back to sixth year. Then, there were the deaths among the then-sixth-year class in the battle and the two Slytherins who had been expelled, and the final tally of the Class of 1999 was only twenty-four, the smallest in living memory.

Hermione waited and applauded politely as the first-years were Sorted. Zeke went to Hufflepuff. Then, as their line cleared out, Professor Flitwick made an announcement: “By Hogwarts bylaws, any students who temporarily left Hogwarts and were enrolled in a different program in the meantime are to be re-Sorted. We have four such students here this year.”

Four? Hermione thought. She didn’t know there were any others. There certainly weren’t in her year, but the other three turned out to be muggle-borns who had managed to get out and spend a year at Beauxbatons rather than just going into hiding. Naturally, Flitwick called on her last. She rose from the Gryffindor Table with and approached the stool.

So much for blending in, she thought. At least he didn’t use her new title. “Well, I knew this was coming,” she said so the Hall could hear. “I don’t suppose we can just skip this bit?”

“Rules are rules, Miss Granger,” the Hat said aloud. “You’re a troublesome one. Not in three hundred years have I had to Sort a student three times.”

“Then why don’t you just keep it simple and put me back in Gryffindor, Mr. Hat?” she asked.

“Oh, no you don’t,” the Hat said. “I let you slide on your second opportunity. I will not let you squander a third.”

“Squander?” her indignation broke through. “Do you know what I’ve done with Gryffindor? I am Lady Archimedes, Slayer of Dementors!”

“You could do a lot of good towards uniting the Houses of Hogwarts,” it offered.
“And I still intend to work toward that, but I don’t need the drama. I’m just here to learn this year, Mr. Hat. I want to have a nice, normal year and just be a teenager for once while I still can.”

“Hmph. Nonetheless, I will not allow you to go back to Gryffindor.”

“Fine. Put me in Ravenclaw, then. It’ll be fun rooming with Luna.” Really, it would be better that way. Her roommates were all gone. She would have been rooming with Ginny, but she would be sharing private quarters with Harry now, so it would be good to still have a friend to room with.

“Very well. Ravenclaw,” the Hat grumbled. “But mark my words, Hermione Jean Granger. If you somehow manage to appear before me a fourth time, I’m putting you in Slytherin, and damn the consequences!”

Hermione smiled and waved to Harry and Ginny before walking off to the Ravenclaw Table, charming her robes from purple-trimmed to blue along the way. She sat down next to Luna who looked very pleased. A few seats away, Luna’s roommates glanced at each other nervously. Even during the height of the war, she knew, they’d never really got alone.

A moment later, Professor McGonagall rose from the Head’s seat and addressed the school. “Well, that was... unusual,” she began. “Good evening, and welcome to Hogwarts. I am Headmistress Minerva McGonagall.” She was interrupted by cheers. Hermione supposed those words would be very good to hear for most of the school after Snape’s tenure. “Yes, thank you,” she went on. “I know Professor Dumbledore always liked to give the announcements after the Welcome Feast, but I feel it is more important to get them out of the way first when everyone is still alert, so I ask for your patience a little while longer.

“My first announcement, most of you already know, but I repeat it now for the sake of the new students. Hogwarts suffered greatly in the recent war. The final battle against Lord Voldemort took place here, and many brave students, teachers, and citizens gave their lives to restore peace and freedom to Britain. They will be dearly missed. The castle itself was not spared, and even now, the repairs are ongoing. The dormitories, adequate classroom space, and the infirmary are fully operational again, but large parts of the castle remain closed. I ask everyone to stay out of those areas, as the structure may be unsafe. Also, until the Astronomy Tower is rebuilt, Astronomy classes will be held on the grounds at Professor Sinistra’s discretion.

“I know many of you will still be hurting, but I assure you, together, we will recover. If any of you feel you need additional help or just someone to talk to, the doors of the Heads of House and Madam Pomfrey will be open to you, and we will be able to call on additional counselling if it is called for.”

Hermione frowned. It was better than nothing, but psychology and counselling in the magical world were a long way behind the muggle world. She hoped there wouldn’t be too many problems with it.

“Now, since there have been so many changes in staffing, I would like to reintroduce the entire teaching staff to you so everyone is familiar with them,” McGonagall continued. “Professors, please stand as I call your names... Professor Flitwick remains as Charms Master... Professor Sinistra as Astronomy Professor... and Professor Binns as History Professor.”

There were some groans from the students. Binns really needed to be replaced, but McGonagall had enough on her hands as it was. They were lucky they’d reopened with a full staff at all, which was itself a good deal smaller than muggle schools would tolerate.

“Additionally, Professor Hagrid will be resuming his duties as Care of Magical Creatures Professor, although I’m afraid our stock of animals is rather limited at the moment.”
There was some applause for Hagrid, especially from Gryffindor as he stood towering over the High Table. Hermione didn’t have all the details, but from what she had heard, Professor Grubbly-Plank had never really wanted to be a full-time teacher and had turned in her resignation over the summer, saying, “Let me out of this madhouse!”

“I would also like to thank Professor Tinworth for taking a one-year contract to continue as Professor of Arithmancy.”

That had been a surprise. Tinworth had only agreed to a temporary post to finish Septima’s term last year as a personal favour. Hermione hadn’t expected him to take a contract of any length.

“My own former post of Transfiguration Professor will be filled by Madam Sisenna, the editor of Transfiguration Today, also on a one-year contract.”

Hermione choked a little. Madam Sisenna, too? She had a feeling McGonagall had guilted her into serving the same way she had Tinworth: to make up for the injustice of passing Hermione over for the Gamp Prize under pressure from Umbridge. It certainly seemed effective.

“Next, Patricia Rakepick has also agreed to join us on a one-year contract as Professor of Ancient Runes. Professor Rakepick was the Head Curse-Breaker at Gringotts for several years before going freelance, and she took a temporary staffing position at Hogwarts once before in 1987…And for the first time in many years, on a two-year contract, the new Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor will be…” McGonagall sighed. “Sirius Black.”

Sirius leapt to his feet and waved his hands in the air as if to his adoring fans. No one really responded in kind until someone wolf-whistled at him—someone Hermione was fairly certain was Ginny—and the Hall broke into laughter and cheers.

If they’d had a hard time finding people qualified to fill Ministry jobs, they had an even harder time with the Defence Professorship. Voldemort’s curse on the post had probably broken with his death, but no one wanted to be the one to test it. Hestia Jones had been willing to take the job two years ago, but that was under pressure from Dumbledore, and she didn’t want to press her luck. Any other year, Remus probably would have done it, but he didn’t want to take the risk with a baby at home. So in the end, the only qualified person who volunteered was Sirius.

That was probably a bad sign.

McGonagall still looked annoyed when she took control again: “All of these posts will be filled with permanent appointees in the next year or two, but we also have three new permanent hires this year.”

With so many positions open, she’d had to accept a lot of temporary posts. Sirius probably would have stayed only one year too, until Harry graduated, except that he had to stay a second year to prove it could be done. “I am pleased to announce that Daisy Hookum, author of My Life as a Muggle, will be joining us as Professor of Muggle Studies. And I should think that someone with real experience in the muggle world ought to be able to clear away all the propaganda that was spewed out by our previous ‘Professor’.”

“Hear! Hear!” someone shouted. Considering the previous Muggle Studies Professor had been hanged, the one before that had been a pureblood with no experience with muggles, and the one before that had run off and got himself possessed by Voldemort, this was a refreshing change.

“Professor Hookum’s husband, Tilden Toots, has graciously agreed to leave his show on the Wizarding Wireless to serve as Herbology Professor. And finally, we welcome the esteemed Potioneer Regulus Moonshine as Potions Master.”
“Oh, God,” Hermione muttered. “Moonshine?”

“As for Heads of House, Professor Flitwick remains Head of Ravenclaw. Professor Sinistra will be Head of Gryffindor. Professor Hookum will be Head of Hufflepuff. And Professor Toots will be Head of Slytherin.”

Slytherin looked scandalised. A Herbology teacher named “Toots” was their new head? They’d surely expected the Potions Master—not just because of Snape, but because Potions naturally lent itself to more of a Slytherin personality. “Moonshine” wouldn’t have been much better, but at least Regulus was a proper Slytherin given name. (Of course, as Headship was based on what house they had been in school, McGonagall probably didn’t have a choice in the matter.)

“You will notice one omission from this list,” McGonagall went on. “After consulting with the Board of Governors, Divination class will no longer be offered at Hogwarts. This is not a new development; it is a move we have been considering from before the end of the first war. For those students who do have the Sight, Hogwarts will help to arrange an apprenticeship or an independent study. We are not offering any additional classes to replace Divination this year. We are investigating the possibility, but we have not had time to come to a decision.

“And my final announcement for the evening…” A wry smile came over her face. “Quidditch tryouts will be held starting Saturday. Tuck in.” She didn’t even have time to sit down before the cheers started.

Hermione relaxed into the feast as copious food appeared on the table. It would be good to have Quidditch back, even though she wasn’t much of a fan herself. A return to normalcy was important. She looked around the table at her new house-mates. “So how have you been, Luna?” she asked.

Luna turned to her. She looked tired, and her eyes didn’t look as bright as they used to, but she answered, “It hasn’t been too bad, Hermione. Neville’s been helping me a lot.”

She nodded. Luna had lost her father in the battle, and she was all alone now, family-wise, though she had plenty of friends. She and Neville had been very close over the summer, especially since he had also lost his grandmother, but Hermione was still worried for her. It was hard to tell with the robes, but she might have lost some weight over the summer, and she’d been known to miss meals at times before. She had a healthy enough portion on her plate now, but she ate slowly.

After a little while, Hermione leaned close to her and whispered, “Have you been eating enough, Luna?”

Luna paused and looked up at her. “Not at first, I suppose,” she said softly, “but I’ve been getting better. What about you?”

Hermione blushed. She knew she wasn’t exactly one to talk. She absolutely did miss meals when she was engrossed in her projects with the diadem, and she’d lost a bit of weight herself last spring. “I’m doing fine most of the time,” she said.

“Perhaps we should remind each other to come to meals, then,” Luna suggested. “I know I can get distracted, too.”

Hermione blushed harder. Leave it to Luna to say the uncomfortable truths. It was help she didn’t want to admit she needed, but she nodded. She noticed Latisha Randle and Morgana Dempster, Luna’s two remaining roommates, staring at them, though she doubted they could hear. When she looked at them, they flinched and quickly looked away. She rolled her eyes. From what she’d gathered from Luna, Morgana had never been that bad, and Latisha had grown up a lot in the past
year. They’d both been in the D.A., certainly. They just didn’t have much tolerance for Luna’s weirdness.

Those two weren’t the only ones flinching from her gaze, though. Across the Hall, half a dozen Slytherins were watching her warily as if waiting for her to strike.

“This is so awkward,” she said to no one in particular.

“What do you mean?” said Morgana.

“I feel like half the student body are afraid of me…and so is Professor Sinistra. Of course, I did kind of help knock down her tower.”

“Can you blame them?” Morgana said. “A lot of us saw it come down, not to mention the Giant Squid attack.”

“I know, but a lot of that was a fluke,” Hermione insisted. “People don’t need to look at me like I’m the next Dark Lady—or the next Dumbledore.”

“It’s just new to them,” Luna said. “I’m sure they’ll get use to it if you make an effort appear exceptionally ordinary.”

Hermione smacked her forehead. “That’s a hopeless cause,” she mumbled.

“Oh well,” Luna said cheerfully. “My mum always said being normal was overrated.”

She chuckled a little: “I’ll bet she did, Luna.”

The feast concluded more or less pleasantly, with some discussion of the war, but mostly small talk about what the new teachers would be like and who would win the Quidditch Cup this year. It was really starting to feel back to normal, even if Hermione didn’t qualify as such. Finally, Professor McGonagall let them go with one final announcement: “I was considering singing the school song for old times’ sake, but I decided to ask Professor Flitwick to compose a proper tune for it first. As most of you have never heard it sung before, you should count yourselves lucky.” There were some laughs from the older students. “Now, off to bed with you.”
Patricia Rakepick

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The runes say, JK Rowling owns Harry Potter.

It has come to my attention that the exchange regarding Corvinus Mulciber in the last chapter was not as clear as it should have been about his innocence. I have rewritten that passage to rectify this.

Sorry this took so long. The conversation with Dumbledore was very difficult to write, and I had plenty of other stuff going on, too.

Thanks to MooNOrchiD for creating a couple of excellent pieces of fanart for the Arithmancer Series. They’re posted over on DeviantArt under the name Candidpop.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2 September 1998

Hermione slept better that night than she had all summer. She’d forgotten the soothing feeling of Hogwarts’s magic that filled the air here. It was subtle and wouldn’t keep the nightmares away every night, but that first night, it felt like heaven.

Latisha and Morgana were already up when she woke. They didn’t look frightened now, but they also didn’t look like they’d felt as much benefit from the castle. For them moment, they were just keeping their distance. Luna was still fast asleep, clutching an armful of the duvet like a teddy bear. That might very well be normal for her, she thought. She knew you could never really predict whether Luna would be an early riser or a night owl day to day, so she woke her to make sure she wouldn’t miss breakfast.

“Mmm, good morning, Hermione,” Luna said with a yawn. In her pyjamas, Hermione could see she had lost some weight, but she didn’t look too bad.

“Good morning, Luna. How’d you sleep?” she asked.

“Very well, thank you. The wrackspurt infestation that had built up around Hogwarts is clearing up very nicely.”

“Er…sure, Luna,” Hermione said awkwardly. “Come on, we don’t want to be late our first day of class.”

Luckily, despite her oddness, Luna was an easygoing roommate. Certainly more than Lavender and Parvati who tended to hog the bathroom doing makeup. That was one thing she wouldn’t miss. They both got ready quickly and went down to the Great Hall where, aside from Hermione having to remind her self to go to the Ravenclaw Table and not Gryffindor, breakfast went very smoothly.

Harry and Ginny looked well-rested, as did Dean. Astoria Greengrass looked tired, but as well as she ever did. Georgina Vector was fifteen now. Merlin, when had she grown up? Overall, the level of excitement from the students was decidedly up, something she never expected to see for the first day of classes, at least from any but the first-years.
Hermione made the rounds to her friends after she was done eating. Ginny waved to her as she approached.

“Hi, Hermione,” she said. “Having fun with Luna?”

“Yes. It was actually very relaxing. Good morning, Ginny, Harry. So, how is married life treating you two?” she teased.

Harry blushed deeply at the question, but Ginny broke into a wide grin. “It’s great,” she said. “And we get our own room to ourselves, too.”

“It must be nice,” Hermione said. “I didn’t even know Hogwarts had rooms for married students before this summer.”

“I guess they used to need them because it was more common in the old days,” Harry said. “Now, it’s kind of a tradition that people don’t get married before graduation.”

“But hey, it works for us,” Ginny said before kissing her husband.

“Oi, get a room, you two,” Dean piped up.

Hermione giggled. “They’ve already got one Dean. I don’t think it’s going to stop them. How are you settling back in?”

“Eh, pretty good,” he answered. “It’s weird being back, especially with different roommates, but damned if I haven’t slept that well since…hell, maybe since Voldemort came back.”

Hermione smiled and relaxed at seeing a kindred spirit. “Yes, yes, and hell yes,” she said. “The castle’s so different in peacetime. Are you coping otherwise?”

He shrugged. “Okay, I guess. I saw a shrink over the summer. One who works with veterans. It really helped once I figured out what to say.”

She nodded: “I’ve been seeing one since first year.”

“Overachiever,” he grinned.

The only trouble that morning came when Professor Flitwick handed her her class schedule. She frowned as she read it over. There were only four classes on it.

“Professor Flitwick?” she called when the small wizard finished handing out the timetables. “I think there’s a mistake on my timetable. I also signed up for Defence and Alchemy.”

“Oh?” Flitwick said. “That’s odd. I was told by Professor Black and Professor McGonagall you wouldn’t be needing them.”

“Wouldn’t need them? Why not?”

“I suggest you ask them, Miss Granger.”

Oh, she was going to—especially Sirius. She hurried to find him before he left for class.

“Sirius!” she called.

He turned and looked at her, but didn’t say anything, waiting.
“Sirius?”

“That’s ‘Professor Black’ to you,” he said with a grin.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I’ll call you that if you’re actually my teacher,” she said. “Speaking of which, why did you refuse me in your Defence class?”

“Sorry, Hermione, but you’re not qualified.”

“What? How am I not qualified?”

“Because you’re overqualified, of course. Really, after seeing how you handled Bellatrix, I don’t think there’s anything I can teach you. Besides, learning by experience is the best way, isn’t it?”

She stared him down. “For an extremely terrifying and painful definition of ‘best,’ maybe,” she said.

“Eh, close enough,” he said. “Go on, enjoy your free time. If you want to take the test at the end of the year, I’m sure you’ll ace it.”

And…she couldn’t refute that. So long as she stayed in practice, anyway. She’d could’ve taken the exam this past summer if she’d thought of it. “Alright. And thank you, I guess,” she told him.

“No problem, Professor Granger,” Sirius said. She grumbled as she walked away.

Alchemy was much less certain as a class to start with. The class hadn’t been held since Dumbledore’s Death a year and a half ago. The current seventh-years (including Hermione) had missed out on the chance to cover the full two-year curriculum. And Hogwarts lacked a qualified alchemist to teach the class. For that matter, she didn’t have much idea of what alchemists actually did for a living, since few of them were skilled enough to make the Philosopher’s Stone. She knew they did Alchemy in the Department of Mysteries. Perhaps an Unspeakable could teach the class, though she didn’t know any Unspeakables even in passing besides Neville’s Great Uncle Algie and his son, Saul.

However, Professor McGonagall surprised her when she said, “My apologies, Miss Granger. Given the staffing shortage, I’m going to be teaching Alchemy myself for this year, and unfortunately, I’m only qualified to teach the elemental alchemy unit of the class. Since you’ve already taken half of that unit, I didn’t think you would want to repeat it. I’m sorry I couldn’t be of more help, but you were the only person it affected, so I thought it an adequate compromise…That said, if you do want to join the class, I can still add you.”

“Oh. Er, thank you, Professor,” Hermione said. “I would still like to join the class. Elemental alchemy is more relevant to my arithmancy research anyway.”

“Research?” she said. “For your own interest, or…?”

“It’s related to extending my work on Gamp’s Law,” she explained. She still wanted to prove that antimatter could not be produced my magic for her own peace of mind. “That’s much longer-term, but I still need the class.”

“Very well,” McGonagall said, and she added the class to Hermione’s schedule. “I’ll see you this afternoon, Miss Granger.”

“Thank you, Professor.”

And so, she was down to five classes—or really only four and a half: Transfiguration, Charms,
Potions, Ancient Runes, and Alchemy. And she was only in Potions out of a desire to finish what she’d started. She never taken as few as five classes in her life before, and while that was still considered a full load of N.E.W.T.s by most, it wasn’t anything like the seven or eight that the most studious took. At least she’d have plenty of free time for arithmancy.

And she did still feel the need to submit a formal mastery project for arithmancy. Not that she technically needed it, but she didn’t want people saying she was taking credit she didn’t earn again.

Hermione had been revisiting her idea of doing her proper mastery project on fractal geometry. She had a lot of stuff that was more impressive, but it wasn’t the sort of thing she wanted to be disseminated too widely, and she liked the appeal, after all she’d done, of doing her thesis on a light, purely aesthetic topic. There were certainly practical applications of fractal geometry; her Shotgun Curse was a devastating weapon, but she was more enamoured of the beauty of fractals than anything else. A thesis focusing on using magic to compute and draw fractals, to imprint them into paintings and weave them into tapestries, plus a few simple charms to prove she had the arithmantic chops to back it up, would be perfect. Being a whole new field of arithmancy, it wouldn’t take much. Others could fill in the blanks after her (and would, come what may). She would certainly have to keep an eye on the field as it developed.

It was also a little bit thumbing her nose at the people who expected all of her work to be epic, powerful magic. She could publish a simple, middling-quality mastery project just because it was something she enjoyed, and no one could say anything because everyone already knew what she was capable of. That would make it clear she wasn’t going to be bound by those expectations.

Hermione’s one morning class on Wednesdays was Transfiguration with Professor Sisenna, and when she walked in, she suddenly felt how strange it was to be back in a classroom setting. Besides Dumbledore’s Alchemy class, it had been two and half years since she’d been in one. She sat between Harry and Luna and waited for the lesson to begin. By rights, Luna should have been a sixth-year, as she had missed what should have been her sixth, but she had been quietly homeschooled by her father before his death, so she was probably up to it. (The same applied to Ginny, but since she could get all the answers from Harry telepathically if she wanted, they were kind of a package deal.)

When they started, Hermione felt terribly rusty in class. She was still very accomplished in the subject, but it hadn’t exactly been her top priority in the war, and doing the actual book work required her to refresh her memory about a lot of things. She feared she would be off to a rocky start, though she would probably have little worry about catching up by the end of the year.

In retrospect, she probably should have expected Professor Sisenna to ask her to stay after class.

“Professor Granger—” she started.

“I don’t need the title, ma’am,” Hermione interrupted.

“Very well, Miss Granger. I wanted to formally apologise to you for the trouble with the Gamp Prize three years ago. I don’t have an excuse except to say that we made a politically-motivated decision that hurt both of us. The Board caved to pressure from the British Ministry, and we nearly got relocated to the Continent anyway. And meanwhile, you were denied the recognition you deserved.”

“Thank you, Professor Sisenna,” Hermione said, “but honestly, I’m over that. It doesn’t matter.”

“Ah…well, that’s kind of you, but still, we’d like to correct the record—”
“That won’t be necessary, ma’am,” she insisted. “I’ve moved on, really. Let it stand as a reminder to future generations. And personally, I don’t want to be treated any different from anyone else this year.”

Professor Sisenna chuckled uncomfortably. “I don’t know if anyone here will be able to do that, Miss Granger, but I’ll try.”

Having reached a tentative understanding with her, Hermione went on her way. She had Potions that afternoon, which was nothing to write home about. Professor Moonshine wasn’t as good a teacher as Professor Slughorn, she thought, though he was miles better than Snape. Things were blessedly calm in his class after so many years. To her surprise, the returning students said that Barty Crouch had actually been a competent Potions professor when he was actually teaching and not torturing students, but it was good to have somebody normal at last.

And Alchemy was just review for her at this point. Professor McGonagall did alright with it, although she couldn’t match the passion of a true master like Dumbledore. There wouldn’t be anything new there until spring, but Hermione still went out of respect.

3 September 1998

Hermione’s first class on Thursday was Ancient Runes with Professor Rakepick. This and alchemy were the two she didn’t share with Harry and Ginny, though Luna was there, having tested into Runes a year early to start with, so she was probably top of the class.

Patricia Rakepick was a tall woman with bright orange hair and an oddly medieval look about her. She wore a cloak that looked more like a long cape over a red tunic, and a wand holster on her belt that looked more like a scabbard for a dagger. Her eyes were blue and had a twinkle in them that reminded Hermione of Dumbledore, though she had a more self-assured look about her than he ever had.

“Welcome back to Hogwarts,” Rakepick told the class. “I’m sorry it couldn’t be under better circumstances. Bathsheda Babbling was a good woman. But I am confident I can fill her shoes and finish your education strong to equip you for any use of runes you may need when you leave my class. I’ve assembled an intensive curriculum with a bit more emphasis on warding and other protections than the N.E.W.T. exam. Oh, I’m sure you’ll all do fine on the exam,” she said, dismissing their concerns with a wave of her hand. “I believe in making classes practical. An intelligent class like you should be able to keep up.”

The students stared at each other nervously. As Professor Rakepick began teaching, it soon became clear that this would be the hardest class of the year for most of them. She seemed to take the curriculum as more of a guideline and wasn’t afraid to go beyond it, and at a fast pace. Hermione was pretty sure she could keep up with all the independent work she’d done with runes, but it would be a challenge.

Finally, the class was over, and the thoroughly intimidated students were released to go. However, Professor Rakepick called after them, “Miss Granger, could I speak with you for a minute?”

Hermione stopped and returned to the classroom. “Yes, professor?”

“I wanted to ask you in particular about where you stand with Ancient Runes given the intermittent nature of your education.”

Hermione gave a half-shrug. “It wasn’t that intermittent, ma’am,” she said. “I basically got through
the whole sixth-year curriculum. After that, a lot of practical experience with specific problems, but no more academic study.”

Professor Rakepick nodded. “That’s understandable,” she said, “though practical experience can often be the best teacher. I heard the accounts from the battle. People say you were doing things with runes that no one had ever seen before.”

She shook her head slightly. “I don’t really think of it that way, ma’am. I couldn’t measure up to a Cursebreaker in my skill with runes. I was doing new things with arithmancy, but I was expressing them in conventional ways with runes.”

“That’s neither here nor there,” she said dismissively. “It was new rune work in some ways. I understand you developed several innovative new rituals, including one that can kill dementors?”

“Well, yes, that bit’s true.”

“That sort of thing is a Cursebreaker’s bread and butter, Miss Granger. Rituals of great power. Deep soul magic. I would very much like to have a discussion with you about your work during the war sometime.”

And suddenly, it clicked. The world-famous Cursebreaker taking a one-year post at Hogwarts? Sure, she’d taken a post here once before, but her reason was obvious. She was here for Hermione. Hermione and her work on rituals. And Hermione wasn’t so sure she wanted to talk about them. “That does sound interesting, Professor, but a lot of what I did are things that I would rather keep secret. They’re very dangerous—”

“Young lady, I have work at the most treacherous cursed sights in the world,” she interrupted. “I think I can handle a few dangerous rituals.”

“I didn’t mean dangerous to you,” Hermione said. “I meant the damage that could be caused should they fall into the wrong hands. And I’m sure you’re perfectly trustworthy, but I hope you can understand my caution in releasing this information to anyone.” And the Deplorable Word, she thought, you’re not getting at all. She hadn’t even told George the secret of how she’d killed Bellatrix, although she’d left a few hints while she was developing it. That one she was keeping strictly to herself.

Professor Rakepick looked a bit taken aback. She didn’t seem like the type who took kindly to being told “No.” But she answered, “Yes, it is prudent to be cautious with information like that, but information held too closely will die. It is important to find people you can safely share it with, and I of course come with the highest recommendation from the goblins.”

“I understand, Professor,” Hermione said, mainly so she could end the conversation quickly. “And I will think about it. I’ll need some time to decide how far I want to take this.”

“Hm. Very well,” Rakepick sighed. “I hope to talk with you soon.”

Hermione left the classroom quickly. She wasn’t sure what to do, and there were few people with whom she could speak about it. Arguably no one who knew the full details. But there was one person, she realised—one with whom she didn’t always agree, but whose wisdom she definitely respected.

12 September 1998

Professor McGonagall graciously gave Hermione an hour in the Headmistress’s Office alone—no
McGonagall herself and no Sorting Hat. She knew the importance of keeping such dangerous knowledge confidential. The portraits of the other Headmasters and Headmistresses of Hogwarts were there, but they were bound by the castle not to spread the information they heard, and they were wise witches and wizards who had understood the importance of secrecy in life, too.

And the most important of the portraits, of course: directly above Professor McGonagall’s chair hung the portrait of Albus Dumbledore.

Hermione had spent a lot of time thinking about what she would say to Dumbledore. It was only fair that she told him most of what she had done to save Harry and help win the war, but she wasn’t entirely sure what she wanted from him. An understanding, maybe? Dr. Hudson suggested she needed closure to her tense relationship with him during the war. To some degree, she just wanted to understand his actions during that time.

And now, despite her disagreements with him—or perhaps because of them—she wanted his advice one more time. Professor Rakepick had forced the issue. Hermione had sat on it a week to mull it over and consider her request.

She took a deep breath and stepped up to the Headmistress’s desk. “Hello, Professor,” she said.

Dumbledore’s portrait smiled down at her. “Hello, Hermione. It’s good to see you again,” he said.

Of course, several of the other portraits of former Heads also greeted her as if she’d addressed them directly. “Sorry. I should have been more specific,” she said.

“You are surrounded by dozens of portraits addressed as ‘Professor,’ Granger,” another voice drawled. “I should think that would be an obvious consideration.” The portrait of Severus Snape hung nearby, and he was as disdainful as ever.

“Excuse me, Professor Snape,” she said. “I haven’t done this much before. Even I can’t be perfect at everything the first time.”

Some of the other portraits murmured at her perceived disrespect. Armando Dippet huffed indignantly. Snape, however, just rolled his eyes. “I see your manners haven’t improved, Granger,” he said. “Your fiance has clearly been a poor influence on you.”

Of course he knew about that. Portraits in general were notorious gossips—not much else to do as a painting.

Magical portraits were not like ghosts, which could not truly change and retained little to nothing of the time after their deaths. Portraits could learn and remember—even teach if it wasn’t too difficult. But at the same time, portraits were only simulations of their subjects. They were very good simulations, but they could only regurgitate what they had been told and act how their subjects would conventionally act. They weren’t capable of true spontaneity or creativity, whereas ghosts were.

“That will do, Severus,” Dumbledore said, albeit kindly. “I daresay Hermione has earned the right to a degree of familiarity.”

“Hogwash!” said Phineas Nigellus Black. “You’re too soft on the children, Albus. You can’t coddle them if you want them to show proper respect.”

Hermione cut in before they could start an argument: “It’s good to see you too, Professor Dumbledore.” If only in paint form. “There’s been a lot I’ve been wanting to discuss with you.”
“I can well imagine,” Dumbledore said. “I’ve heard much about your exploits in the war, but I only understand a little of them. The stories people tell border on the fantastical.”

Hermione smirked a little. “You must have heard the battle, even if you didn’t see it,” she said.

“We did hear a fair amount,” he said, “and more was reported to us by other portraits. We certainly heard the collapse of the Astronomy Tower.” Hermione blushed crimson. “I am truly sorry I could not be there to help. You should not have had to bear this burden—none of you. But nonetheless, I am proud of you, Hermione.”

“Thank you, Professor,” she said uncomfortably. “It’s…been a hard time, especially with the Ministry taken over.” That might not have happened had Dumbledore lived, she knew. “I…er, I wish we could have parted on better terms.” Or any terms, really.

“As do I. I am grateful that you stood by me, and especially with young Harry.”

There was an awkward silence that none of the other portraits dared to interrupt. Harry—there was a complicated topic. She didn’t know how to broach the subject, but as it stretched, she finally just came out and said it: “I never fully trusted you again after Sturgis Podmore’s death, Professor.”

Dumbledore sighed: “Yes, I suspected as much. Which is why I am all the more glad you continued to work with me.”

“I didn’t have much choice, did I?” she countered. “You had the horcrux books. For that matter, at the time it happened, you still held all the cards. Harry hadn’t finished learning Occlumency yet. I had to stay for Harry’s sake. But after Podmore died, I didn’t quite trust you to have our backs, and I went off and did my own thing a lot more.”

“I’m sorry that I gave you that impression,” he said. “You must know that I placed all of my hopes in Harry and in you, and I wished both of you every success.”

“Can you really blame us? Harry has a lot more reason to have a grievance with you than I do. He suffered a lot of emotional hardship over the years, but that’s his business. He can come and talk to you if he wants.”

“Of course, Potter always has to get special treatment,” Snape interrupted.


Hermione shot both of the portraits a sharp look. “I don’t need to hear that from you, Professor Snape,” she said. “Did you know Harry—?” She stopped herself. “No, he deserves the right to decide whether to tell you anything, portrait or no.” She turned back to Dumbledore’s portrait. “Between my complaints and Harry’s, I think we had good cause to doubt you, Professor Dumbledore. I knew we were still on the same side, but I couldn’t rely on you like I did before.”

Dumbledore nodded. “That was probably wise, Hermione. I am well aware that I was not perfect, and—forgive me—being rather cleverer than most men, my mistakes tended to be correspondingly huger. I did my best, under the circumstances, but I can admit that I in all likelihood did make mistakes.”

“Yeah. Frankly, sir, I think the whole prophecy thing was poorly handled, for one. That we needed to guard it at all? That the guards needed to be so poorly protected? Arthur shouldn’t have had to rely on luck to survive Nagini’s attack. That’s a big part of the reason why I started making messaging rings. And that Podmore was so exposed to being Imperiused should have revealed a serious flaw in your plans.”
“All valid points,” he admitted. “I thought that I was making the best decisions under the circumstances, but good people can still disagree on the best course of action…Incidentally, I notice you now speak of Sturgis’s death, not his tragically receiving the Kiss.”

“His body is dead. I checked, just to be sure. As for his soul, you must have heard of my final act of the war. I fully intend to release it in time.”

“Yes, the slaying of a dementor. Many dementors now, if the rumours are true. I never thought I would see the day—and I suppose I didn’t—but to truly kill a dementor was beyond my wildest hopes. Though I am heartened as no doubt you are to see that the Kiss does not annihilate the soul.”

She was, though some of those souls probably wished it did. Penelope Clearwater was delirious from sensory deprivation when she woke up and had needed intensive therapy.

“And from what I hear, you saved Harry’s life with similar magics?” he continued. “That is two miracles you’ve achieved that I feared were utterly impossible.”

She dipped her head. “Yes, well, I’ve probably forgotten more soul magic than Voldemort ever learnt.” Not entirely true. She could refresh her memory pretty quickly. “You probably wouldn’t approve of how I went about it.” Dumbledore raised an eyebrow, and she looked around the room. All of the portraits were listening intently. Snape looked especially interested. But they would keep the secret, probably even from McGonagall. “The spell to destroy the horcruxes outright first of all. We didn’t have the Sword of Gryffindor, and I needed something that wouldn’t destroy Harry’s body anyway. So I created a variant of the Killing Curse that severs the soul from the body instead of just killing at the nervous system level.”

The other portraits started murmuring to each other, and Dumbledore sucked a breath and leaned back in his portrait-chair. “Hermione,” he said gravely. “Such dark magic is not to be trifled with. To create such a dark spell…My apologies, but it is a very worrying sign.”

This was the point where she began to feel the simulated nature of the portrait. She doubted the real Dumbledore would have been so inflexible in such desperate circumstances. “I didn’t see any other option, sir,” she defended herself. “I might have been able to devise a true light ritual to do the same thing, but not in the time we had. Certainly not without Ravenclaw’s diadem available as a resource. For what it’s worth, I still view it as an act of cleansing corruption. The horcruxes were unnaturally bound and unnatural fragments of a soul. They were a lot easier to dislodge than a living soul would be. I tried my hardest not to let my spell corrupt me, and I don’t think I would have been able to muster the malice to cast it on a natural person.”

The portrait considered this a long time. She worried she’d pushed it outside its “programming,” but eventually, it spoke, “That is good to hear, though I regret that you felt it necessary to go that far. You are right that the horcruxes were a corruption that needed to be purged. And admittedly, it is true that all of the ways of destroying horcruxes require very dark magic. Even Fiendfyre can be cleansing in the right hands. But I would be lying if I said I was comfortable with it, and you should exercise great caution.”

“I have been. I don’t expect to be destroying more horcruxes or expelling souls anytime soon, and the rituals I used to save Harry were true light rituals, even though I had to go to some pretty dark places to figure them out.” And she began to explain. How she had had to dissect the horcrux ritual itself and dream up ways to make it even worse in order to create a new light ritual she could use to reverse it. How she had had to rip Harry’s soul out of him and put it into Ginny’s body for safe-keeping to expose the horcrux to her curse. She didn’t hold much back, but Dumbledore listened to all of it.
“Incidentally, you were right about one thing, Professor,” she said. “The secret ingredient was love. And I don’t know if anyone but a muggle-born, even you, could have figured how true that was.”

“Oh?” he said.

“True love’s kiss.”

“True love’s kiss…?” he considered. “Ah! How ingenious. The wisdom of not only children’s tales, but muggle ones. Something Voldemort would never have understood.”

“True love’s kiss?” Snape repeated incredulously. “This isn’t the tale of Sleeping Beauty, Granger.”

Hermione smiled. “I didn’t believe it myself until I saw the equations fall into place, Professor Snape,” she told him. “A mother’s sacrifice, certainly. Sacrificial magic is well-documented. But love by itself? To be honest, I thought Professor Dumbledore was grasping at straws with that one. But now I’ve seen it’s power. Love is the strongest magic in the world…There’s even more to the story that’s Harry’s to tell, but I believe it. In any case, the ritual to kill a dementor is built along similar lines, but that’s more about straight-up purification. And—did you hear about the ritual we used to kill Voldemort?”

“We felt it firsthand, Granger,” Snape spoke up. “The other portraits say it could be felt through the whole of Britain. If Albus is worried about you performing dark magic, he should begin there.”

“That ritual was neither light nor dark, when used properly,” she countered. “It was more about judgement than anything else. Though I admit it was far more dangerous than I would have liked. Professor Babbling paid the price for it—willingly. I got it from the Bible, by the way. Job Chapter 3.”

Dumbledore thought and remembered: “Let the day perish in which I was born…” He shuddered. “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that you only paid lip-service to Sybill’s prophecy, Hermione. But I confess I only vaguely take your meaning. That ritual sounds very worrying to me. And it isn’t just your work in rituals and soul magic that concern me. There are the reports of your behaviour late in the war. You must admit, you have drifted towards dark magic over time. Many of the spells you used in the battle were such. You killed several people that night, and I have not yet heard a clear explanation of how you killed Bellatrix Lestrange.”

“And you won’t get one, sir,” she said coldly. “I’m not letting that out to anyone. But as for the rest, we’ve had this conversation before. I did go quite a ways down that road. I avoided the darkest curses that cause lingering or progressive damage, but yes, I used dark spells. I killed seven people including my share in killing Voldemort—if you count the acromantula, which I do—and I have to live with that. But all of them arguably deserved it, and more to the point, all of them were trying to kill me. I’m not afraid to respond in kind in self-defence.”

Dumbledore sighed: “I do understand, Hermione. It is not the path I would take if I had the choice, but I cannot fault you so long as you remain vigilant against letting corruption take root. I believe you are trustworthy with dangerous magics.”

Hermione blinked in surprise. “I’m glad you think that, sir. That’s actually the reason I wanted to ask your advice.”

“Oh? Then I am happy to give you any advice I can. What did you want to know?”

“It’s about Professor Rakepick. The new Ancient Runes teacher. I learnt last week she took this post to get close to me. She’s interested in learning about my studies in ritual-craft. I’m not sure if I should
let her. Knowing how dangerous my work could be…”

“Ah. Yes, I can see your concerns. Professor Rakepick is exceptionally intelligent and very well-respected, but she is also a witch who plays by her own rules, shall we say, no matter who tells her otherwise. Not to mention being aggressive in the pursuit of knowledge. In her previous tenure, I had to let her go for recruiting students for dangerous assignments against my express orders. Oh, the students were fine,” he added when Hermione’s eyes widened. “She managed them very strictly to keep them safe. In that respect, she was responsible, but she was very cavalier about the rules the rest of the time. All in all, I would suggest you exercise caution in what you tell her. I don’t believe she would use it for ill, but she would not be as scrupulous as you are about the risks.”

Hermione nodded. “But there’s another consideration,” she said. “The dementors…I fully intend to kill every last dementor in Azkaban, even if it takes years,” she said fiercely. “They’re soulless abominations of absolute corruption. The trouble is, there are a lot more dementors around the world, and I can’t possibly get to them all. Sooner or later, I’m going to have to tell other people how to kill them.”

“And you fear that knowledge of that ritual could lead to other, more dangerous ones if it fell into the wrong hands.” Dumbledore stroked his beard. “Yes, it’s a difficult choice. You will have to tell some people the secret. In that respect, a Cursebreaker would be a natural choice. They already work with a great deal of dark magic. They know how dangerous it can be, and they are usually bound by honour and strong oversight to act responsibly with it. I do not believe Professor Rakepick would pass your knowledge on to anyone unsavoury.”

Ah. That made her feel a bit better. Maybe she could talk to Rakepick and start with the dementor-killing ritual. If she focused on that, she’d feel a bit better, although she would probably have to explain a lot of soul magic to her anyway. “I’ll think about that, Professor. Thank you.”

“As always, I’m happy to help, Hermione. It is a noble calling, ridding the world of dementors, and I wish you every success.” She nodded and smiled a little. “Was there anything else?” he asked.

She raised an eyebrow. “There’s a lot more I could say…It’s funny, actually. Here, I’m talking about how careful I’m being with my secrets when that was one of my biggest complaints about you…I’m not sure what to think about that,” she muttered to herself, not having thought of that before.

“In what way do you mean?” Dumbledore asked.

“I mean secrets are absolutely necessary in wartime, but you always played things closer to the vest than seemed warranted. You were slow to move forward with your Occlumency plan and involve Harry and me with it. I still think that plan was needlessly complicated, by the way. You took your time doling out the information we needed about horcruxes, to say nothing of the fact that you didn’t have any plan for saving Harry.”

“Perhaps,” he agreed. “Forgive an old man’s sentimentality. I wished to spare you the burden of the knowledge, even though I knew I could not hold out forever, so I was reluctant to tell either of you before I had to.”

Hermione’s expression softened. She’d had an inkling of that when they discovered that Harry was a horcrux, but this made it much clearer.

“You may be right, Hermione,” he continued. “You have learnt secrecy after some harsh lessons, whereas for me, it had become an old habit when I was younger than you are now. A difficult family situation and some rather unfortunate mistakes in my youth followed me throughout my life. Always I held back, remaining the inscrutable mentor rather than speaking plainly, insisting on holding all the
cards and sometimes manipulating my allies against their wishes. You showed me more than once that I ought to be wary of the consequences of doing so, as speaking plainly was clearly the better course with you. Now, I hope you can at least see the uncertainty I faced in leading.”

Could she? She supposed she could. She had long since rationalised most of the choices Dumbledore had made in his last year and a half, even though she disagreed with them. Still, it felt a lot better to know he had struggled with those choices as much as she had.

“There’s one thing I still don’t understand, Professor,” she decided.

“What is that?”

“Draco Malfoy. You seemed to know something was up with him, but the way you let him carry on at the end got three people killed, including yourself.”

“I’m afraid my memory is incomplete there, being so close to my death, but I fear I can only plead sentimentality again. Voldemort would have killed Draco if he failed to kill me outright, and I still hoped I could save him—body and soul—even at that late hour.”

“Even after Cho died?”

“Yes, even then. I convinced myself that it was an accident. That Draco had not expected the necklace to kill anyone before being detected. I believed—or wanted to believe—that there was still some good in him, but alas, his desperation got the better of him before I could reach him. Perhaps I acted too slowly with him, but can you say you wouldn’t hesitate to condemn a child you had seen grow from the age of eleven?”

Hermione crossed her arms and considered that. She could allow that letting Cho’s death slip through was a simple mistake, but after that? A lot of harm came from it. And it was Malfoy. But then, there were few people with whom she’d had such an antagonistic relationship as him. “Malfoy personally? No, don’t think I would,” she said, “but there are others I might have. I certainly took a chance with Zabini. So…I guess I can see where you were coming from.” She took a deep breath. “I don’t think I’ll ever truly understand you, sir. We just have too many fundamental differences. But looking back, I think I understand a lot of your decisions better, even though I disagree with many of them.”

Dumbledore smiled. “I think that’s the best any of us can hope for, Hermione. So, what will you do next? Besides ridding the world of dementors, that is?”

“I haven’t decided in general. I have a lot of things on my list, but they’re all ‘next two years’ kind of things. Barring catastrophe, money won’t be a problem, so I don’t know where I’m going to go from there.”

“You are very young, still,” he said. “I’m sure you will find your calling in time. What are you doing in the meantime?”

She shrugged: “Finish school, get married. I have a standing invitation to help write the next generation of Arithmancy exams next year. A few more projects I want to do. But right now, I mostly want to relax, have fun, and maybe do what I can to reconcile the houses of Hogwarts.”

“Reconcile the houses?” Armando Dippet cut in. “Now there’s a hopeless cause.”

“Completely hopeless,” agreed Phineas Nigellus Black.

“And why not?” Hermione protested. “Everyone’s seen firsthand the dangers of house divisions, and there are already people willing to reach out. With Voldemort dead, why shouldn’t we try to start
“I didn’t say it was a bad idea, girl,” said Phineas Nigellus. “I just said it was hopeless.”

She crossed her arms: “I guess I’ll just have to prove you wrong, then. Minister Weasley didn’t appoint me head of the Reconciliation Committee for nothing.”

Snape’s portrait snorted derisively. “The houses of Hogwarts have been divided for a thousand years, Granger. There have been many dark lords during that time, most of them from Slytherin, and none of their defeats ever changed a thing. Why should this one be different?”

Hermione stared Snape down. “In the muggle world, slavery was considered acceptable all over the world for five thousand years before it suddenly wasn’t, Professor,” she said evenly. “Just as an example. It vanished from most parts of the world in the space of a century—at least legally—and that was a far more radical change. Other forms of discrimination, which are probably a better analogy, are vanishing even faster. The pace of such things in muggle world is only quickening, and ten percent of the magical world is muggle-born. The time is ripe for a change.”

Chapter End Notes

Possible spoilers for Hogwarts Mystery.

As of this writing, Patricia Rakepick’s story in Hogwarts Mystery is still being written. As far as I know (I don’t play it), she has just been hired as Defence Professor for the 1988-1989 school year, and with the curse on that position, there is a good chance she will die in 1989 in the game. If that does happen, well, obviously, it didn’t happen here.
The Goblin's Demand

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I vote for JK Rowling. (Except I’m not, you know, British.)

I think I can say I have a game plan at this point. I didn’t decide on it so much as it grew organically, but here it is. For the time being, I am probably going to focus on this story. It’s outlined for 25 chapters total, so I think I can finish it within six months. And I am trying to get this up to a chapter per week, which would be four months. It’s just been a nightmare finding time to write lately.

I do want to try to get a few chapters of other stories out in the meantime, most likely Animagus at War. That way, I’m hoping I can ramp it up to take over another story full-time once Annals of Arithmancy is done, but it’s proving difficult so far.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

22 September 1998

Despite her ambitious pronouncement, Hermione didn’t regard it as her personal duty to foster inter-house relations—not really. She’d had enough of that kind of leading for a long, long time, and more to the point, she’d only be at Hogwarts another year. She couldn’t fix all the school’s problems in that short a time. The more important thing was to make sure the movement could carry itself on its own merits. She mainly focused on setting up younger muggle-borns like Dennis Creevey and Zeke Jones, and younger Slytherins like Georgina Vector and Corvinus Mulciber, to take the next steps—encouraging inter-house friendships and clubs, and so forth—and being conscious of why it was important, which seemed to be lacking in past years. She hoped by the time she graduated, she would have recruited enough students that it would be self-sustaining.

Hermione told Professor Rakepick that she would be willing to share some of her research with her, and they were hammering out a schedule that would work for both of them.

George surprised her with a visit on her birthday on some pretence or other. She strongly suspected that the visit wasn’t officially approved by Professor McGonagall, but she doubted anyone was about to complain.

The following Tuesday came the first really big event of the term in her mind, from the Daily Prophet:

TRANSITIONAL MINISTER WEASLEY CALLS FOR ELECTION ON OCT 22

New permanent Minister/Wizengamot to be chosen in 30 days

Profiles on candidates for Minister: Page 2

Changes to Ministry Charter: Page 5
Hermione was briefly taken by surprise when she read the headline, though she should have expected it. It had been nearly five months, long enough to go without a permanent government. There had been talk about elections and even a couple of media statements, but she had been mentally filing them as being some vaguely defined time in the future until now.

She turned to the candidate profiles. Even Percy’s own family didn’t know if he would stand for the election. He was already the youngest Minister in history by a wide margin at only twenty-two. On Page 2, she saw that he was not standing. Two years ago, she would have been shocked by that, but by now, she knew he’d grown up a lot.

Three candidates were standing, though: Dirk Cresswell (who would surely be the muggle government’s preferred choice); Gawain Robards, the new Head of Magical Law Enforcement, who was decent, but not exceptional; and Josefina Zabini, who was probably the closest they could find to a blood-purist sympathiser. Name recognition might get her a few votes, but Hermione knew she wasn’t on good terms with her turncoat son. Neither Cresswell nor Robards would have been her top choice either, but Cresswell definitely seemed like the best of them.

3 October 1998

Hermione felt much more composed this time when she entered Professor Rakepick’s office. She had combed through her notes carefully and selected the ones she wanted to reveal. Rakepick would assuredly want to know more and would probably be able to extrapolate from what she told her, but this seemed like a solid place to start.

Hermione had strongly considered making Professor Rakepick sign a magical contract to protect her knowledge of soul magic and not to misuse it, but she was concerned Rakepick would take offence at the perceived lack of trust. So she asked Dumbledore’s portrait what the standard procedure was in situations like this; what safeguards had Nicolas Flamel demanded of his apprentices, for example?

It was a contract, as it happened, but a very limited one—a contract intended to restrict the apprentice’s freedom as little as possible once the apprenticeship was over—one that would have very few teeth if it came down to it. She was expected to judge her apprentice’s character before and during the apprenticeship itself. One thing it did do was give her the right to end the apprenticeship at any time for a large number of reasons involving a loss of trust, but she would have done anyway if it came to it.

“This is something you will need to deal with sooner or later, Hermione,” Dumbledore’s portrait had said. “There will no doubt be great interest among young arithmancers in becoming your apprentice.”

She’d nearly objected that having an arithmancy apprentice wasn’t the same as teaching soul magic, but it sort of was. As a Master Arithmancer (even if that wasn’t her highest degree), she had a responsibility to train up an apprentice to the point where they could do cutting-edge research on their own, and they could go in the direction of soul magic unless she specifically forbade it.

“It’s not ideal,” she said.

“Perhaps not,” Dumbledore said, “but there comes a point where every master must step back and trust in their apprentice, and sometimes it will be a mistake. If you wish to release this information whilst still controlling it, your only other option would be to found a new guild for soul magic or ritual craft—or perhaps a secret society, rather.”

And he was right, she admitted. It would be too much of a restraint on killing dementors to keep it...
secret, despite the risk. Besides, even if modifying the rituals wasn’t as hard as creating them, she
doubted anyone who wasn’t an arithmancy apprentice or master could manage it, even if the
knowledge got out. It wasn’t something just any wizard—or any dark lord—could do.

So that was the option she brought to Professor Rakepick.

“An apprenticeship contract?” Rakepick asked, arching an eyebrow.

“Something close to it,” Hermione said.

“Isn’t that a bit much?”

“I don’t believe so. I considered making it stricter. I wanted to show how serious this is.”

Rakepick read the contract over carefully, but she signed it. “Alright, Master, what do you have to
teach me?” she said.

“Don’t call me that,” Hermione said. She took out her notes and set them on the desk. “First, how far
did you get in Arithmancy?”

“An Outstanding on my N.E.W.T., but no formal training after that, although I’ve picked up a few
things over the years.”

“Right. Well, this will be something of a qualitative overview of my work in ritual-craft, with an
emphasis on the practical side.”

“Oh? Meaning?” Rakepick asked.

“Meaning my primary goal is to teach you how to kill dementors,” Hermione said. “That’s
something I’m not going to be able to handle all on my own. So the practical aspects will be more
important than the theory.”

“Hm. I appreciate the practical knowledge, Miss Granger, but I think I can handle a bit of theory.”

“It’s more than ‘a bit,’ Professor. I told you these were completely new arithmantic techniques. I can
give you an overview and a lot of the tools, but I’ll have to give you a crash course in vector calculus
and linear algebra to even try to fill in the details.”

Rakepick wasn’t fazed: “Like I said, I’ve picked up a few things over the years.”

She smirked: “We’ll see, Professor. I’ll start with an overview of the procedure for the ritual, and we
can dig into it from there.” Rakepick nodded. “So, for some background, I came at this problem from
the direction of reversal rituals,” she continued. “Killing a dementor isn’t a reversal as far as I know,
but that was how I got into soul magic in the first place. That story isn’t fully mine to tell,” she staved
off the obvious next question and started sketching on a blank parchment, “but it laid a lot of the
groundwork I needed. To reverse a ritual, you can’t necessarily derive an arithmantic inverse. What
you can do is find opposing components to the individual parts of the ritual and combine them to get
an opposing effect. They might be arithmantic opponents or alchemical opponents, or possibly
others, but that’s the basic idea.”

“So to kill a dementor, you have to find opposing ritual components to the dementor’s magic?”
Rakepick suggested.

“Exactly.”
“The Patronus Charm, then,” she said.

“Not entirely. The Patronus repels dementors, but it doesn’t hurt them—or I should say it doesn’t damage them.”

“Ah—yes, that’s true,” Rakepick said. “I should have seen that. Dementors feed on positive emotions, and yet that’s exactly what the Patronus uses to repel them. It’s not an opposing element. In fact, it’s not even obvious how it repels them rather than just redirecting their attention.”

“Complementary elements can still do damage,” Hermione said. “You’re seventy percent water, but you can still drown. But in the case of the Patronus, I think the emotional component is more for our benefit, and it’s the raw power of light magic against dark magic that does it. Light repels darkness from its presence very strongly. But you’re partly on the right track. The Patronus is crucial to the ritual, just for a different reason.” She pulled out another sheet of parchment. “Look here. A pair of Patronuses are amplified by these runes to start the process. Trapping the dementor between them holds it in place—”

“And the amplified light magic is strong enough to do actual damage,” Rakepick finished for her.

“To start to, yes. Here is where we need to add the actual opposing component to the dementor’s magic. Which is…?” she prompted.

Rakepick considered this. “If it’s not the Patronus, some kind of light, I think. Maybe purity, but that’s an abstract concept. We know fire doesn’t work—not even Fiendfyre. Although, if you found a light counterpart to Fiendfyre…”

“No, Professor, but again you’re on the right track. The old texts say dementors are ultimately spirits of decay, not despair. Muggles have a saying: ‘Sunlight is the best disinfectant.’”

“Sunlight?” she replied incredulously.

Hermione smirked: “Sunlight concentrated to a temperature that no mundane material can withstand and no forge can reach—bringing forces to bear that we simply haven’t been able to before.”

“Merlin!” she breathed. “I can see how that would hurt something that can’t normally be hurt. That sounds rather dangerous.”

“It is if you’re not careful.” She showed her design of the rig she’d been using for the parabolic mirror. “I built it so the beam can’t intersect where the casters are standing.”

Rakepick nodded as she inspected the diagram. “Interesting…” she muttered. “Yes, very good. It’s not even new magic. It wouldn’t surprise me if other wizards had build something like it in the past.”

Hermione frowned: “It’s possible, but for what purpose? Unless it’s Archimedes’ death ray, it would be massive overkill for most magical purposes.”

“Well, naturally. That’s why no one’s come up with this before. Although if those numbers are right, that is a frightening amount of power running through that runic circle.”

“Mm hmm. Which isn’t even the full story. Obviously, there are two more major components of the ritual: sacrifice and intent.”

“The sacrifice I know about,” Rakepick said darkly. “I’ve seen the memorial circle down by the Lake—blighted to dust and ashes where nothing can live and grow. I will tell you, it’s one of the most ominous signs I’ve seen in my career, Miss Granger. I understand the necessity in principle, but
that’s not something you want to leave lying around if you can help it.”

“I know,” Hermione said sadly. If, in a hundred years, some muggle tried to build on one of those dead circles, they would find themselves under a heavy curse. “Someday, when I have more time, I want to try to figure out if the scaring will heal over time, or if there’s a way to bury or scatter it without spreading the corruption.”

Rakepick considered that. This was closer to her field of expertise. “It’s hard to say. It’s not an ordinary curse. Although dementors can be starved with enough time and effort. Maybe a ritual equivalent of that?”

“Maybe. But working out the sacrifice, this is where the maths really gets to shine,” she continued. “Because ritual magic operates on the Principle of Equivalent Exchange, you can model it with conservation laws using Noether’s Theorem. That’s a mathematical formulation that lets you calculate the sacrifices and other ritual components to minimise side effects and ensure that the ritual balances out. It’s based on the calculus of variations, which is a field of analysis, something Master Arithmancers are barely starting to explore.”

“But it’s calculus,” Rakepick said. “I know a fair amount of that.”

Hermione shook her head: “Calculus of variations. The word ‘calculus’ can mean different things in different contexts, just like ‘algebra.’ This is analysis, and analysis is to calculus what alchemy is to transfiguration. That’s why it was so difficult to systematise ritual magic.” And what I’m relying on to keep my methods from spreading too widely.

“Fair enough,” Rakepick sighed. “I can see why you said this would be difficult to learn, Miss Granger, although the procedure looks straightforward enough. What about the intent component? What’s that?”

“It’s a little complicated to describe,” Hermione said. “Mainly defiance of the dementor’s soul-consuming power. You dismiss the Patronuses and stand before the dementor in defiance with nothing to shield you. That’s the ‘significant’ act that gives the ritual form, even though the runes will hold it in place. I find it helps to have a healthy dose of righteous hatred, too. Put all of those forces together, and they’ll tear the dementor apart.”

“I can imagine. I’ve heard a few things about your expression of righteous anger—”

Hermione held up a finger. “Not righteous anger, Professor,” she said. “Righteous hatred. There’s a difference.” Though that was something of a sermon in itself—almost literally. In her view, righteous hatred was perhaps the rarest of human emotions—reserved only for true soulless monsters like the dementors. She didn’t know if Professor Rakepick would be interested in the theological nuances at all, and they set it aside for another time.

“Well, Miss Granger,” Rakepick said, “I think I can agree that this is every bit as momentous an achievement as I’ve heard. I think we’ll start with the runic-based aspects of the ritual though. I’ll see if I can find the time to read up on advanced arithmancy in the meantime.”

Hermione agreed to that. Privately, she wondered if Professor Rakepick would have the patience for the maths involved. But she could work with this. After walking the Cursebreaker through some of it, she was more confident about being able to teach people how to kill dementors without the secrets of soul magic becoming too widely known, so things were looking up there.

As they were wrapping up, Hermione finally got the chance to ask a question she’d been wondering about: “So what do you do when you’re not teaching, Professor?”
“Oh, most anything I want, Miss Granger,” Professor Rakepick said looking most pleased about being able to talk about her work. “I travel a lot. Take whatever cursebreaking-related jobs are available. Help people when I can. I’m rarely short on work. If people have a problem with ancient curses or sealed vaults or the like, they know who to call.”

“Is that very different, being freelance? I’d imagine most people would think to call Gringotts first.”

“And pay the goblins’ rates?” she smirked. “Nah. The nice thing about being freelance is I don’t have to worry about overhead. And I can adjust my rates when I need to. You see, Miss Granger, for me, it’s not always about the money. I’m interested in the rare and exotic—the problems no one else knows how to solve. Not whatever’s the most lucrative. I’ve even been known to do charity work because learning strange new magic is its own reward. You can’t do that as a Gringotts Cursebreaker.”

“I can understand that,” Hermione said. “I’m not sure what the scale of the market is, though. I assume you can still make a good living from it?”

“When you’re as good as I am, you can,” she said smugly. “And I’ll admit, Gringotts is a good place to get experience and make connections. Connections are very important in my line of work. Let me tell you about one of my first jobs as a Gringotts Cursebreaker. We arrived in a village in northern India. I still don’t know how they scrounged up enough money to hire Gringotts. It wouldn’t surprise me if they’re still paying in instalments. But they were desperate. There was Thuggee cult that had stolen a sacred Sanskrit runestone from the village—one of the oldest in India—and had kidnapped a bunch of their children and blighted their fields for good measure. The cult was in league with the vizier for the local Maharaja, and—”

“Wait a minute,” Hermione stopped her. “That’s the plot of Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.”

“Well, where do you think they got the idea?” she insisted, and Hermione just stared. “Of course, the real story involves a lot more detective work and a lot less running and fighting—though there was some of that. The hardest part of that job wasn’t getting the runestone back; it was undoing the blight they’d caused.”

“Oh…Er, it certainly sounds exciting,” Hermione said uneasily.

“Most definitely. But my point was, after that, I became know across all of northern India. People knew my name and would know to call me if they needed help with something else. Are you thinking about going into Cursebreaking, Miss Granger?”

“No, I was just curious. I’ve think I’ve had enough excitement for a long time, Professor.” Not to mention I’ve got my work cut out for me with the dementors, she thought.

“Hm, we’ll see,” Professor Rakepick said knowingly.

---

23 October 1998

CRESSWELL ELECTED MINISTER

Defeats Robards and Zabini

Ballots had been distributed to the of-age students for the election at Hogwarts, and Hermione had of
course voted for Cresswell. Despite his relatively pacifistic stand on the Reconciliation Committee, she still regarded him as the most competent and trustworthy of the three candidates. As far as she knew, so did Harry, Ginny, and Dean. Luna she wasn’t sure about.

Cresswell had won with a comfortable plurality of the vote, while Madam Zabini had snagged just under twenty percent, with Robards in between. It wasn’t the most decisive win, but Hermione hoped it would be the start of a bright new era for magical Britain.

2 November 1998

It was just over a week later when Hogwarts received a surprise as the new Minister Cresswell entered the castle during breakfast with an especially grumpy-looking goblin by his side.

“Headmistress,” Cresswell called as the whole Great Hall turned to stare at the pair.

“Minister Cresswell,” McGonagall said, rising to greet them. “This is a surprise. How may I help you?”

But it wasn’t Cresswell who answered. Instead, the goblin growled out, “You can help us by returning my people’s stolen property.”

McGonagall gasped softly, but Cresswell reluctantly took it in stride, though he muttered something to the goblin first: “What Ambassador Brodrig means is that the Sword of Godric Gryffindor is under claim by the Goblin Nation through the family line of King Ragnuk the First.” He paused for emphasis. “They are demanding it be returned.”

A flurry of whispers and shouts of protest rippled through the Great Hall. Many of the older Gryffindors stood up to shout the goblin down, but Professor McGonagall fired off a few loud cracks from her wand and quieted them down. “That is enough!” she told the students even more harshly than usual. “This is a matter of international relations, and I will not see Hogwarts disrespect a foreign dignitary so. Minister, Cresswell, I think this is a matter better discussed in private.”

“But Professor—” someone called out.

“That will do, Mr. Towler!” she cut him off. “I am perfectly capable of defending the honour of my own house.”

McGonagall came down from the High Table and stormed out of the Great Hall after the two officials, but as she did, Hermione nodded to Harry, and he stood up. The two of them followed her into the Entrance Hall, where Ambassador Brodrig made a beeline for the display case that held the Founders’ artifacts. The goblin’s hands were clenching and unclenching as if he were itching to smash the glass and pick up Gryffindor’s ruby-encrusted sword.

“I’m sure we can resolve this matter amicably—” McGonagall started before she noticed their two guests. “Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, what are you doing here?”

“Harry and I were instrumental in reuniting the Founders’ artifacts and cleansing the ones that were —” Hermione eyed Brodrig warily. “—corrupted. Plus, Harry was the last person to hold the sword, so—”

“Um, actually, I wasn’t the last person to hold it,” Harry cut in.

Hermione thought back. “Oh, that’s right,” she said. “I saw Colin swinging it around at one point in the battle, didn’t I?”
Harry narrowed his eyes in concentration, apparently mentally consulting with Ginny. “I heard it was Neville…Yeah, Dean says it was Neville…Colin says he had it, but it disappeared, and Sally-Anne had it after him.”

Hermione sighed and covered her face with one hand. “So we don’t actually know who was the last to hold it,” she summarised. However, she turned back to Brodrig and said, “But that just proves our point, Ambassador. The Sword presents itself to any worthy Gryffindor in time of need, right?”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “And there were a lot of Gryffindors that needed it that night.”

“Then maybe we should be investigating them for theft as well,” Brodrig said, showing his sharp teeth.

“You’ll do no such thing, Ambassador,” McGonagall stopped him. “That would be absurd. If there is any legal trouble to be had, Hogwarts as an institution will bear the brunt of it.”

“Hmph. And these two?” the goblin said. “What is their interest in the matter beyond mere sentiment?”

“Er…” Hermione said

“Concerned parties, Ambassador,” Harry said, to her surprise. She looked at him, and he mouthed, Ginny. Of course, Ginny had picked up a few things about goblins from Bill. “This relates to a lot of our work during the war, and we feel we have useful information to weigh in on it.”

Hermione wasn’t sure where he and Ginny were going with this, but McGonagall seemed to be. “Indeed,” she said, “Mr. Potter found the Sword of Gryffindor—”

“The Sword of Ragnuk the First,” Brodrig interrupted.

“If you say so,” McGonagall said icily. “But he is the one who recovered it after a long period of being lost, allowing it to be displayed here in the first place. He was the holder of it until very recently, and I, for one, would still argue he is the most worthy.”

Hermione started to catch on. “Right, and I am the rightful holder of the Diadem of Ravenclaw, with the blessing of the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw.”

Brodrig turned and glared at her. “That is irrelevant to this discussion, witch,” he growled.

“It’s part of the collection of the Founder’s artifacts, with the Sword. It’s relevant to our disposal of the collection as a whole.”

“The sword of Ragnuk the First is not part of any ‘collection,’” the goblin shot back. “It is the inheritance of Ragnuk’s heirs under goblin law, if you cretins would bother to pay attention to anyone but yourselves—”

“We know what goblin law says,” Harry cut in. “Property is held to be the inheritance of the heirs of its maker, never sold to others. We’re saying there are other interests involved—”

Finally, Cresswell took back control of the situation. “That is why we are here negotiating, Ambassador,” he said. “We want to find an amicable resolution for what to do with the sword that everyone can tolerate.”

“There’s hardly anything to negotiate, Minister,” said Brodrig. “The sword belongs with the Goblin Nation.”
“It belongs in a museum,” Hermione retorted before she could stop herself. She blushed when her brain caught up with her.

“It is stolen property and would be with us even now had it not been for the actions of the their Godric Gryffindor,” he responded.

“Gryffindor didn’t steal it!”

Harry and Professor McGonagall stared at each other when they realised they’d spoken at the same time.

“The sword has Godric Gryffindor’s name on it,” McGonagall said, calming down. “It was custom-made for him and is enchanted to return to members of his house.”

“An enchantment added by wizards to cement the theft.”

“That’s not the story I learnt, Ambassador,” she said.

“Nor I,” Hermione agreed. “And I learnt it from the house elves, not just my housemates. The house elves tell their own stories about the Founders, and they have long memories. Godric Gryffindor commissioned the sword from Ragnuk. He didn’t steal it. Perhaps under goblin law, his son did, but he didn’t.”

Cresswell nodded in agreement. “And this is another reason I wanted to discuss the matter, Ambassador,” he said. “The sword is over a thousand years old and has become an artifact of historical and cultural significance to both our peoples. It held meaning for us even before the war. There’s an argument to be made that it’s an important part of our common cultural heritage, something we have a right to as part of our identity.”

“But how do you decide who Ragnuk’s heirs are after a thousand years?” Hermione asked. “If his bloodline still exists at all, it should have been mixed into the whole goblin nation centuries ago, and I know the goblin kingship isn’t hereditary.”

“We still keep track,” the goblin rumbled.

Like the Malfoys kept track, you mean, but she didn’t say it.

There was silence for a minute before Professor McGonagall spoke again: “Look, Ambassador, our chief concern here is that this is the first time the artifacts of the four Founders have been united in a thousand years. It’s both an important part of our heritage and an important symbol of how we are trying to resolve the divisions between the houses here at Hogwarts. To remove the sword would be disruptive to the school and would breed resentment at a delicate time.”

Brodrig glared even more fiercely at McGonagall, then. “You say that, witch, and yet you allow this child—” He motioned at Hermione. “—to remove one of your artifacts from your vaunted ‘collection’ whenever she wishes?”

At that, Hermione was indignant. “I reached an agreement with Hogwarts and with Professor Flitwick in particular,” she snapped. “The diadem is a special case because it’s the only one of the Founders’ artifacts that’s currently in use—and with good reason. I still need it for killing dementors, if nothing else. It’s on indefinite loan to me because I’m the only person in Britain who knows how
to use it right now, on the condition that I keep it in the display case when I’m not using it. I also made a replica for display purposes—” She stopped short. “Now there’s a thought. I could probably —”

“Hermione—” Harry said worriedly.

“Miss Granger—” Cresswell warned at the same time, and she stopped again. She could see how she was getting close to saying something that would offend Ambassador Brodrig.

Of course, the goblin caught on to her meaning, but he wasn’t as angry at her as he had been at McGonagall. He turned and regarded her appraisingly. “So, you think you could replicate this ‘priceless cultural artifact,’ witch?” he said.

“Hermione…” Harry whispered again.

“I’m not saying I could get it exactly right, Ambassador,” she said. “And I certainly couldn’t do the enchantments, but I believe I could make a replica that looks good enough to display—including the rubies. I’ve been doing similar things for a while based on my alchemy work.”

“Hmm, yes, I heard a rumour about a young witch trying her hand at gemcraft,” Brodrig said. “But you mean display it in your case.” He motioned to the sword before him. It wasn’t a question. “A goblin could tell the difference instantly.”

That wasn’t what she’d meant, but she decided to let more mature heads argue the point. “I think Miss Granger was referring to something closer to what she is doing with the diadem,” Cresswell said. “The sword could be displayed at Hogwarts for a certain amount of time, especially for special occasions, and would be held by the Goblin Nation the rest of the time. If you wanted to trade for the replica while Hogwarts has the original, you would be welcome to.”

“We would not sully ourselves with such a mockery, Minister,” Brodrig hissed.

Suddenly, an idea hit Hermione. “What about a different trade?” she cut in. “A new sword—an original piece.”

Everyone stopped. “Excuse me?” said Brodrig.

“I could make a new sword and loan it to the Goblin Nation in exchange for a loan of this sword. I’ve done it before—swordcraft, I mean. Under your law, it would still belong to me. Museums and even private collectors will loan exhibits to each other, sometimes, so it’s a reasonable transaction.”

She’d learnt that researching famous jewelry pieces for her business.

“You would part with your sword, Granger?” Brodrig asked.

Again, not what I meant, she thought. And he probably knew it. But she answered, “I’m willing to if that’s what’s necessary, Ambassador, but my sword is not the best I could do. It’s bespoke for me—shaped for my hand and my fighting style, such as it is, and designed to be functional rather than attractive. Goblins have different-shaped hands, and it wouldn’t have the significance to you that Gryffindor’s sword does to us. I thought that I could make a new sword, bespoke for…for Ragnuk’s heir, I guess, or the current goblin king, or maybe even you, yourself, Ambassador. Complete with jewels, minor enchantments, and the best metalworking I can devise.

“Miss Granger, do you really think you can do that?” Professor. McGonagall said.

“Of course. Ma’am. I’ve actually been wanting to do a project where I can pull out all the stops—put in everything I can really do.” She motioned to huge gems on the sword’s hilt. “I couldn’t sell rubies
that big in the muggle world. People would flip out and ask questions I can’t answer. This would be a good opportunity to try it—if the Goblin Nation agrees, of course.”

“Oh, really? And do you really think you can create a sword worth of a goblin master craftsman, Granger?” Brodrig asked.

Hermione smiled, deliberately showing teeth. “Why don’t you wait and see what I come up with, and then we can discuss it?”

Brodrig stared at her for a minute, but slowly, his mouth twisted into a feral smirk. “Clever girl,” he said in a way that sent shivers down her spine. “You’ve had fairer dealings with the Goblin Nation than most witches, Granger. I think I can take the time to inform King Ragnok of your proposal. It should be amusing, if nothing else.”

“Ragnok the Seventh, and a different name,” Cresswell muttered to her for clarity.

“Thank you, Ambassador,” she said.

“Very well,” the goblin continued. “Minister, Headmistress, I am authorised to grant you a reprieve until King Ragnok sends his answer. Be grateful the Nation is feeling generous.”

“We will remember that, Ambassador,” McGonagall said with finality.

Chapter End Notes

I think I might have written myself into a corner with Slytherin’s locket being goblin-made. It didn’t really need to be in the first place to be resistant to Hermione’s anti-horcrux spell, and it overcomplicates things here. I might just go back and retcon it so it wasn’t goblin-made at all. What do you think?

And I did want to bring up the Sword of Gryffindor in the battle, but when the sword-vs-horcruxes subplot fell apart (and with good reason), it just kind of fell by the wayside, and there didn’t seem to be a good place to fit it in. I’d consider changing that too, but that would be a lot more complicated, so I’m not so sure. Any ideas about that?
21 December 1998

Hermione joined many of the other arithmancers of Britain in a conference room in the Ministry of Magic for a meeting with the Wizarding Examinations Authority. Technically under the aegis of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, although that was mainly because they were involved in certifying students qualified to use a wand—and because there wasn’t enough work to justify a whole other department—they had a room on Level Two, and it was a far more involved meeting than the WEA usually got up to.

Professor Tinworth was there, of course. Septima was there, even though she couldn’t contribute much anymore. Hermione had even written to David Anderson from the MACUSA Arithmancy Society and convinced him to visit. And there were a few others she didn’t know as well. Griselda Marchbanks was also there for the initial meeting.

“Thank you all for coming,” Marchbanks opened creakily. “For the record, this is the first meeting of the Committee for the Arithmancy O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. Examination Standards, 2000 Edition. We should have met this past summer, but with the war having just ended…and one of our members still being a student at Hogwarts…” She smiled at Hermione. “We had to make do with a compressed schedule. We want to have the new standards completed by next September the first, so that whoever the next Arithmancy Professor at Hogwarts is—and our private tutors—can begin teaching them in the new school year.”

Everyone glanced around at each other. They all knew there was a good chance the next Arithmancy Professor for Hogwarts was in that very room.

“You will be responsible for drafting the next generation of standard arithmancy examinations to be implemented in June of 2000. Some of it will probably need to be done by post, but I’m sure we can work around that. This will be an opportunity to take stock of the advancements in the field over the past fifty years and reassess the needs of new arithmancers. I am confident that with the talent in this room, we can continue to hold Britain at the cutting edge of the field.”

“I think Granger’s got that covered already,” someone said, evoking laughs from the group, but it was all good natured.

As they began the meeting, there was a little discussion about the outline of the course, but that wasn’t expected to change much. Maths didn’t really change, especially secondary-level maths, though spellcrafting did change some. Then, there was a lot of discussion of the minutiae of the course and what specific skills should and shouldn’t be tested. Hermione made the occasional
comment here and there, but she stayed mostly silent. It hadn’t occurred to her until now, but she had no idea what changes to the curriculum were worth making. After all, what did change over the years? Was it just a matter of modernising the exams?

She tried to think through it logically. The question was, what major changes had there been in arithmancy and magical theory in general since 1950, or alternatively, what advanced arithmancy skills had been most important for her own research (even though she was far from typical)? And what emphasis and techniques in the lower years would the next generation of arithmancers need to best learn those new developments?

Her first thought had to do with vector calculus—but no, that was past N.E.W.T.-level. And while her muggle calculus textbook treated differentials as kind of an afterthought, the arithmancy text didn’t do too badly. The next most obvious area was something that could do with a change, however. “Linear algebra,” she told the committee.


“Not per se, but vectors and matrices are,” she said. “We teach them, but I think we do a poor job of conveying why they’re important in the curriculum. We do prognostication and equation solving and trigonometry, but not the core spellcrafting applications of them, nor how they really relate to each other.”

Septima furrowed her brow in concentration. “You’re…you’re talking about your molecule-arranging spells, Hermione?” she asked.

“Among others,” she said.

“But you haven’t made those spells public,” said one of the other arithmancers. “Just your work on Gamp’s Law, and I’m not sure everyone even in this room understands that.”

“It’s true; I’ve been pretty cagey about my alchemy- and gemcrafting-related arithmancy experiments to avoid disruption,” Hermione replied, “but those aren’t the only applications, and even those fields are going to grow over time. I’m not the only person who’s thinking about these things in the muggle world, you see. In another generation, it’ll be muggle-borns who are merely gifted bringing these ideas into our world. In two generations…they might well be common knowledge.”

“Two generations?” someone said incredulously. “That’s hardly relevant!”

“Yes, it is. If these are going to be the exams for the next fifty years, we’re doing a disservice to the next generation of students if we only look back at the last fifty years. We need to consider what arithmancy will look like in 2050, not 2000, and that even I don’t know, but I can take a guess. I think we would do well to expand in that direction.”

And that got a whole new conversation going. It was still a little new to her, being in a community of arithmancers like this. She’d never seen this many in one place except for the award ceremony. But when she talked, they listened…and that gave her another idea.

“Oh, and there’s one other thing,” she added.

“What’s that?” asked Septima.

She smiled: “I think we should give serious thought to switching over to the the ‘eigenvector’ terminology.”
“Hermione…” a voice whispered.

Hermione shifted in the bed, only vaguely aware of her surroundings.

“Hermione…” the voice said a little louder.

She mumbled softly, starting to come awake. She heard something shifting behind her, and a hand stroked her head.

“Wake up, sleepyhead.”

“Too early…” she groaned, nestling farther under the duvet.

“Never too early on Christmas, love,” George said, and he leaned over and kissed her.

Then, Hermione smiled serenely: “Mmm…happy Christmas to you…” Suddenly, her eyes flew open, and she rolled over. This caused her to roll right out of bed with a yelp and in doing so collide with George’s legs. He yelped even louder as they both tumbled to the ground with a thud.

Hermione finally came to her senses blushed a deep magenta as she figured out that George hadn’t actually climbed into bed with her. “George…” she groaned. “What are you doing in my room?”

“Waking you up for Christmas, silly,” he said, laughing.

Just then, her parents burst into the room. “Hermione, are you alri—?” Mum said, then stopped as she saw the sight of Hermione sprawled sideways across George’s legs. Dad just raised an eyebrow in stern inquiry.

“Um…this isn’t what it looks like?” George said sheepishly. Hermione just dropped her forehead to the floor.

It wasn’t hard to clear up the mix-up, though it did evoke quite a few red faces and some laughs from Fred, Harry, and Ginny. Traitors. The whole extended Weasley clan was gathered together in Prewett Manor for a hearty breakfast followed by the opening of presents. This was certainly the Weasleys’ most lavish Christmas since before the war started, and Hermione was shocked by how many gifts she received herself; the only one with more presents was Harry, but they soon saw that a large number of both of theirs were tokens from acquaintances or fans as a thank-you for killing Voldemort. With those set aside, they were more proportionate. Naturally, baby Nadia was showered with gifts, but was more interested in playing with the wrappings. Hermione ended up both giving and receiving more than her share of books, but she also handed out some small pieces of jewelry.

All in all, it seemed to be a very pleasant holiday.

She had spent Christmas Eve with the Vector Family, of course: Septima, little Marcus, Georgina, and Georgina’s parents. They were all doing very well, and Septima had settled into her role as a parent much better than Hermione had feared.

Beyond that, she had plenty to do over the holidays, even thought she wasn’t going to be killing any dementors this time. Between the winter weather and everything else, there just wasn’t time. The low Sun alone didn’t matter; the parabolic mirror worked fine as long as the Sun was more than a few degrees above the horizon. But the cloud, rain, and snow put a real damper on it. She’d have to see if there was anything she could do about that long-term, especially if a dementor needed killing quickly for some reason, but for now, she let it lie.
She also still had to meet with King Ragnok about his sword. It turned out he actually was the heir of Ragnuk the First under some complicated goblin inheritance rules connected to the goblin kingship that Fleur had explained, but she still didn’t really understand. In any case, Ragnok wasn’t committed yet, but he was intrigued by her offer to produce a sword for him in trade for the Sword of Gryffindor, and she had to get his measurements and have a look at the kinds of swords goblins used. Fleur warned her that he was probably more interested in gauging her gemcrafting skills to see how much of an economic threat she could be, but she was going ahead anyway. She’d already reached an understanding with the goblins on that point.

Or maybe Ragnok just wanted to watch her fail, but she wouldn’t let that stop her.

For Christmas Day, though, she could relax and enjoy time with family. They’d reached the end of the piles of gifts when Charlie brought out one more, a small one, and handed it to Molly and Arthur.

“Mum, Dad,” he said, “this is from all of us kids—even Ginny, even though she couldn’t do much from school.”

“Oh. Well, thank you, children,” Arthur said. He and Molly opened the box, and inside was a simple key.

Hermione was confused. “You got them a car?” she whispered to George as quietly as she could.

George smiled: “No, we got them a house.”

“That’s the key to the New Burrow,” Charlie said.


“But son, the Burrow isn’t finished yet,” Arthur said. “We’ve only finished the first floor.”

“But that’s all you need, Dad,” Charlie said. “Most of us have places of our own, and Percy basically took over the Manor as Minister.”

“And I can hang out here under I get placed as an Auror,” Ron added, being the only other one who didn’t officially have his own place. “You never went inside while we were building, so we just finished up the ground floor and first floor while you weren’t looking so they’re ready for you now.”

“We knew you wanted to move back in sooner rather than later,” Percy said. “Now the house is ready, and you can build new rooms as you need them like when you were first starting out.”

Molly and Arthur looked around at their children. “Oh—children—” she said, holding back tears. “This is so wonderful! Thank you. Thank you so much.” Both of them began hugging all of their children.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were doing that?” Hermione asked George softly. “I’m the one who tripped the Taboo and got it burnt down in the first place. I should’ve helped.”

“You were at school,” he said. “And it wasn’t your fault. If it wasn’t you, it would’ve been Harry or Ginny inside a day. C’mon, just be happy for them.”

She looked back at Molly and Arthur, who were still embracing their family. She could do that.

_____________

21 March 1999
1:45 AM
“You know, I really thought my days of sneaking out of bed in the middle of the night at school were over,” Hermione whispered. Not to mention sneaking your boyfriend onto the grounds, though granted, George had done the same more than once.

“Yeah, me too,” Neville whispered back. “But hey, the equinox is in the middle of the night. What can you do? At least it’s a weekend.”

“I don’t think Professor Flitwick will be too angry with us if we’re seen,” Luna said. “And we are doing research.”

“More like he’ll know he can’t do anything to us,” Hermione muttered to herself. For the most part, her opinion was that it was common courtesy to continue respecting the school rules even though they could pretty much get away with anything short of murder at this point, but Luna insisted they needed to come out on the grounds now, so they had bundled up in the chilly night air, went out with the way lit only by their wands, and walked down to the Lake.

“Luna, I hope I’m not interrupting a date with Neville or anything,” she added. “After he came all the way out here…”

“Oh, no. Nothing like that,” Luna said, “although I am happy you came up to the castle, Neville. This is serious research. Everyone knows the best time to catch nargles is on the equinox.”

Hermione looked at Neville, but he just shrugged back at her.

“Erm…well, I’ll help you if I can,” she said. “I really don’t know if we’ll find anything.”

Luna turned back to look at her. “I know you don’t believe in most undocumented creatures, Hermione,” she said. “Nargles are one of the easiest to catch if you know how, so I wanted to try to prove to you that they’re real. It means a lot to me that you can keep an open mind about them.”

“Oh. Thanks, Luna,” she said. Hermione didn’t have the heart to tell her she was more concerned with not wanting Luna to be wandering outside alone in the middle of the night, even though times were pretty safe now. She was prepared to eat her words if they actually found something, but she wasn’t expecting anything.

“They’re easiest to see now because it’s their mating season,” Luna said. “You just have to surprise them and scoop them up very quickly.”

She looked down at the illustration Luna had made of what to look for. The nargle was clearly a type of fairy, but smaller than the other species she’d seen. From the leaves and flowers she’d drawn around it, it was about an inch high. It was also green and had four arms. And…she looked closer. And its hands were actually blue. She looked up and saw that Luna had brought a sieve that she was waving around like a butterfly net.

If it were anyone but Luna she would have thought it was a prank at that point. Come to think of it, she wasn’t a hundred percent sure even with Luna.

Luna ran ahead of them, giggling, and Hermione hung back a bit and glanced at Neville. He got the message and slowed his pace as well. Hermione tried to think of a polite way to ask him…she wasn’t sure what. If he was really okay with Luna’s weirdness, she supposed. The pair had been together for a while, but as nice as she was, Luna could be difficult at times because of it, and Hermione had concerns.

But Neville caught her meaning. “Yeah, that’s Luna,” he said affectionately.
Hermione snorted softly. “Yes, she sure is. Can I ask you…? How does that work? I mean…how much of the stuff she says do you believe.”

Neville sighed. “Not much, honestly—when it comes to those creatures, that is. She didn’t make them up out of thin air, though—or her dad didn’t, rather. Other people have talked about them. I think she might find one or two. I’m trying to keep an open mind, but manage her expectations too, you know?”

“Hm. I think you have more patience for her than I do, Neville. She’s a good friend, but…”

“She’s really sweet and caring,” he said firmly. “And really bright, even with…this. When it’s not about the stuff that used to be in The Quibbler, she’s very insightful and she’s always there for you.”

“Yes, I know all that,” Hermione reassured him. “And I’m very glad you know it too. I still think you have more patience for her than I do, though.”

“I love her,” he said simply.

She nodded: “I can tell.”

“You know, Luna has a good head for animals that do exist, too,” Neville said. “After we graduate—you know we don’t have much to tie us down here anymore, so I’ve been thinking of taking her on a trip to South America or someplace where there’s still real magical creatures out there to discover. And it works out because she does animals, and I do plants.”

Hermione’s eyes widened: “You’re really serious about her, then?”

“Uh huh.” He looked her in the eye. “I really am. We’ve been there to support each other for so long; that’s not going to end anytime soon.”

She smiled: “Well, best of luck to you both, then.”

Suddenly, Luna’s voice called over the grounds, “Hermione, Neville, come here! I can see them!”

Hermione and Neville both chuckled. “We’d better catch up with our little oddball,” Hermione said, and they hurried to follow Luna.

Something small and green flew past Hermione’s face.

“What was that?”

23 April 1999

It was getting to be crunch time for Hermione at Hogwarts—by which she meant less than two months before exams. She hadn’t truly freaked out over exams since her first year, but the class workload was increasing, and she was juggling a lot of other projects, so things were getting stressful.

She laughed at herself that she could even call times like this stressful when just over a year ago, she was working herself to death trying to invent a ritual to save Harry’s life and constantly living in fear of another disaster like Malfoy Manor.

But things were too busy to keep up with everything she wanted to do and still maintain a social life (as George and her parents kept reminding her she needed to do). As the time grew shorter, she set aside two of her projects until the summer. She had a sizable stack of notes by now about her proof
that antimatter could not be transfigured, but that had to be put on hold. She thought she was on the right track. It was just that there was a lot of group theory and quantum physics to put together to build the framework of a proof, and she still had a long way to go.

Hermione had also stowed away a half-finished flying robe. That one, she admitted, was pure vanity —and not strictly legal if anyone found out—but she wanted to created a better flying robe than the one she had last summer.

After she’d examined Voldemort’s body and discovered that his impossible unsupported flight spell was actually supported by a robe with charms for a flying carpet on it, she’d wanted to recreate it for herself. That was no easy task, though. To use the flying carpet charms, the robe had to be made from a perfect rectangle of cloth, recut and sewn into a wearable garment. That was doable, but it meant the robe had to be loose and billowing, with sleeves as voluminous as anything she’d ever seen Dumbledore wear. It was unwieldy to run in and to some extent even to fight in, but Voldemort had cared more about looking intimidating with it.

Even so, it was such a clever idea that Hermione wanted her own—and a better one than before. Her first robe hadn’t been able to do any more than hover—or it had done a bit more, but she hadn’t been able to figure out from her quick inspection how Voldemort had controlled his flight, so she needed to experiment. That would have to wait till summer when she had more time and space.

Arguably the most important project she was working on, though, was Ragnok’s sword. She’d set herself a lofty goal, and it was every bit as challenging as she’d expected.

She looked over the notes and the bare, black blade she had made, basically finished, but unsharpened. The blade was made of carbon nanotubes wrapped around a tungsten core and inlaid with platinum wires, like her own Snickersnack, and she’d already tested its hardness. The shape of the sword was simple enough. Looking at how goblins handled swords and having a few conversations with Nearly-Headless Nick about general sword wielding, she’d settled on a large falchion somewhat like a kriegsmesser, even though it was uncommon for falchions to be so ornate or jewelled. She wanted this to be a functional weapon as well as an art piece, and that seemed the best shape.

Hermione hadn’t started making the hilt yet, however, as the metalwork was the trickiest part. The hilt would have silver metalwork over the tang, studded with jewels and enchanted not to wear or tarnish, and it would of course have to be finely engraved. Gryffindor’s sword had an engraved image of a wizard on the hilt, among other ornaments, and Ragnok’s sword would have to be equally ornate. At first, she didn’t have any idea what image to use. The goblins didn’t have any recent cultural heroes to portray since Urg the Unclean in the 1700s. After speaking with Fleur at length about the project, Hermione decided that the best symbol to use would be a dragon—a symbol of power for the goblins that was already what they put on the galleon.

Fleur had also told her that she would need to do all the artwork herself for the sword to be an acceptable “gift.” This was a little annoying, but she could manage the small area and relatively low detail of a sword hilt. Plus, she had a cheat, of sorts: fractals. Since she was working on those for her mastery project anyway, they were a quick and easy way to create organic-looking detail fast for the background of the image.

Tonight, however, she focused on the gems. She pulled out her notes and calculations and the pseudo-alchemical diagrams she used to make them. She had an idea for a new colour pattern that she wanted to try, and after some painstaking calculations, she made the adjustments to the runes and laid out the ingredients: aluminium oxide leached from the soil, along with chromium, titanium, and iron, with which she could make something that had never been seen before.
There was a certain rare type of sapphire called a parti-coloured sapphire that was multiple different colours—different impurities in different parts of the same stone. Naturally, the colours blended into each other and were sometimes muddy. They were almost never the deep red of a ruby. But with her atomic-level precision, she could colour sharply-defined sections differently if she wanted: a stone that was truly part ruby and part blue sapphire.

She coded the runic diagram for a relatively simple trillion cut. The actual moment of casting was always a treat to see—all the work and setup going into a single spell to create the gem with magic guiding every atom to its proper place. When it was done, in the middle of a small pile of metal powder there was a triangular gem made of three red and three blue wedges.

And…it didn’t look right. It was better than her first attempt, a gem with alternating red and blue facets that she’d mostly expected to be too muddied to work anyway, but it still wasn’t the look she was going for. It was too artificial, like bits of two gems had been cut and pasted together.

She made a note of the result and put the gem in her box of failed experiments. She’d considered disassembling the ones that didn’t work out, but she’d decided to save them. Someday, decades hence, they might make a fun exhibition piece for Archimedes Jewellers to freak people out.

Hermione was brainstorming other ideas when she heard a pop, and Dobby appeared beside her.

“Dobby!” she said. She quickly checked her watch to make sure he wasn’t there to tell her she should go to bed (George’s idea). No, it was still early evening, and she wasn’t that out of it. “Um, what is it?” she asked.

Dobby wrung his hands a little. “Excuse me, Miss Hermione,” he said timidly. “Sonya and I would like to speak with you and the Messieurs Creevey.”

“Oh?” she said. “What’s—? That’s alright.” She resisted the urge to asked what was happening now. He would tell her if it were urgent. “Where are they?”

“This way, Miss Hermione.”

Dobby led her to an empty classroom. Colin and Dennis were already there, as was Sonya.

It had been a rough couple of years, but Hermione’s oldest elf friend had taken well to freedom. She was wearing a dress that was probably meant for a toddler and had gone back to her short hairstyle, and she had generally looked happy when Hermione saw her, though she looked pretty serious now.

“Hi, Colin. Hi, Dennis. Hi, Sonya,” Hermione greeted them as she sat down. “So what’s going on?”

“We dunno,” Colin said. “Sonya just said she wanted to talk to us.”

Sonya looked up at them nervously, and Dobby held her hand and spoke for the two of them. “Miss Hermione and Messieurs Creevey,” he said. “We is wanting to talk to you because…Sonya and I would like to be mated.”

Sonya nodded in agreement, her ears flapping. Colin and Dennis gave the pair blank looks.

“Uh, wha’d’you mean, ‘mated’?” Colin finally broke the silence.

Sonya blushed as she answered him with a squeak, “Mister Colin, Dobby and I wishes to be mated. Er, we will be mated to each other to have an elf baby.”
This was clearly not the conversation any of them wanted to be having. Dennis’s face turned very red as he processed it, and he suddenly blurted out, “Wait, you’re pregnant?”

Sonya’s eyes nearly popped out of her head. “No!” she squeaked in horror. “We would never have babies without your permission, sirs! It is not being right!”

“What? But you said—?”

“They said they wanted to, Dennis,” Colin cut in.

“Yes, they’re…” Hermione said, and she sighed. “They’re asking permission. Elves who are still slaves need their masters’ permission to have children. But Sonya, you and Dobby are both free elves. You don’t need either of our permission to start a family.”

“Um, yeah,” Colin agreed. “We told you we don’t care about any of that stuff.”

“But you is still our employers,” Dobby said. “It is only right that we asks. And a baby elf will take time from our working.”

“Even then, it doesn’t matter,” she said. “In the muggle world employees rarely—maybe never need permission from their employers to have children. In fact, employers are normally required to give time off for it.” The two elves stared in amazement. Even after all this time, they still didn’t fully understand being treated like human employees.

“Elves really have to ask permission?” Dennis said in confusion.

“Unfortunately,” she said. “Hogwarts elves have it pretty much automatically, but private owners—” She chuckled. “—they care about a house elf’s pedigree as much as they would a prize kneazle.”

“Really?” Colin said. “But aren’t most people who own house elves…”

“Purebloods? Exactly. Hypocrites. Anyway, Dobby, Sonya, you don’t need our permission, but you certainly have our blessing to get married and start a family.”

“Ours too,” Colin agreed.

Now it was the two elves who gave them blank looks.

“Married?” Sonya said as if the concept were completely alien to her.

Hermione smacked her forehead. “And…house elves are matriarchal because most couples aren’t kept together long enough to raise the children together. You don’t have marriage, do you?”

“They don’t?”

“They’re not?”

Sonya nodded to the Creeveys: “Most elf fathers are not at Hogwarts and has duties to their own families, sirs. Most elf children are taken care of only by their mothers.”

“About four-fifths, I think,” Hermione said.

“That’s awful!” said Colin.

Sonya pointedly didn’t comment, but she said, “At Hogwarts, it is different, and elf fathers can help take care of babies, but none of us thinks of being married.”
Hermione, Colin, and Dennis all stared at each other. Dennis summed it up appropriately: “Well… this is awkward.”

Dobby and Sonya still had their blessing, of course. Privately, Hermione still had a gut feeling that they “ought” to be married, too, but she had to admit she didn’t have a good idea of what that meant across species. One more thing to worry about later.

1 May 1999

The first anniversary memorial ceremony for the Battle of Hogwarts was even larger than the one that had installed the memorial itself ten months earlier, namely because the students were all there. They all lined up along the lake shore with families of the fallen, Ministry officials, and pretty much everyone who wanted to come.

Hermione gazed around the crowd and the grounds. The crowd was the largest she’d seen at the school with the possible exception of the battle itself. Security was tight, and Aurors were everywhere in case Barty Crouch showed up. The atmosphere was sombre and a bit tense, but the Hogwarts grounds were a study in contrast. Where the people were dressed in black, the grounds had bloomed into brilliant flowers this spring—probably more than any year she’d been here before. Dementor exposure had left the grounds nearly fallow a year ago. Now, the fields were filled with colour. Even just outside the dead circle of the memorial, wildflowers had sprung up almost like a fairy ring. And the castle itself was almost back in pristine condition. The new Astronomy Tower was still under construction, but would be finished by next autumn.

“Really cleaned up this year, didn’t it?”

Hermione turned and smiled as George approached. She hurried to him, and he swept her up in his arms and kissed her soundly.

“George! It’s so good to see you,” she said.

“You too, Hermione. I can’t stand this long-distance stuff.”

She chuckled. “It’s only a few more weeks, now. You’ll be fine.”

“Hm…” George looked out over the grounds as she had. “It’s hard to believe it’s been a whole year,” he said.

She sighed. “Yeah. It still trips me up how different everything is. I still hear Bellatrix’s laugh in my sleep sometimes or wake up not knowing where I am.”

George held her closer. “I still get nightmares where I hear you screaming,” he admitted. “I accidentally hexed Fred once because of it.”

“Maybe you should talk to my therapist. I know you’ve been doing well for the most part, but it can’t hurt.”

“Huh. Maybe…Still, it’s been a long time since I’ve seen Hogwarts looking this nice. I bet the firsties don’t have any idea…” he trailed off.

“Except for the memorial,” Hermione said.

“Yeah…C’mon, I think you’ve earned the right to relax for the day, Hermione.”
“Of course, George,” she said. “Come on, they’ll want us up front.”

The ceremony wasn’t too different from when they installed the memorial, except this time, it was Minister Cresswell who was speaking. And there was a little more recognition to be given out:

“A year ago here at Hogwarts,” Cresswell said, “we witnessed the greatest magical battle on British soil in living memory. That night was a terrible one in our history, and it seems as if there isn’t a single family in Britain that was not affected by it. But that night also saw victory in that terrible war: the death of Voldemort and the fall of the Death Eaters and the genocidal blood-purist ideology they espoused. With their fall, Magical Britain can now live free again as a nation where witches and wizards of all backgrounds can live together as equals.”

Hermione noted the lack of a mention of other magical races, but she let it go. This wasn’t the time or place.

“But without doubt,” Cresswell continued, “we owe a particular gratitude to five brave people who worked together to destroy Voldemort. Voldemort wielded power so great that it seemed that no one alive could stand against him, but these five undertook a dangerous experimental ritual to kill him, one of them giving her life for it. In recognition of this exceptional bravery and service to the nation, the Ministry of Magic and is pleased to award the Order of Merlin, First Class to Harry Potter, Ginevra Potter, Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood, and Bathsheda Babbling.”

Thunderous applause rocked the crowd. Hermione had been surprised a few weeks ago when she was told that she would be receiving an Order of Merlin for the battle. Then she’d chided herself that as much as she felt she’d simply been fighting for her life, that was the decisive moment of the war. That would certainly be worth a medal in the muggle world—maybe even the Victoria Cross in they were in the army.

She still thought her crowning achievement was the Dementor-Slaying Ritual, not the battle, but that was neither here nor there.

Harry had tried to resist harder, saying that Hermione had done all of the work. And Professor Babbling, he supposed. But Hermione knew that Harry had been as critical to the movement as she was. He deserved the award as much as she did, as did Ginny and Luna.

Cresswell invited the four of them forward along with Professor Babbling’s brother to receive their awards, and Hermione smiled and waved as he placed her medal around her neck. She gazed out at the crowd, taking in the faces and painfully aware of the ones who were absent. Probably the most surprising face she saw was Narcissa Malfoy. It was strange to see the woman who had been the wife of the richest and most powerful Death Eater standing there looking so small and alone. She had Columba on her hip: a beautiful one-year-old girl with golden hair who was rarely seen in public, but no one else standing with her.

Narcissa had been one of the biggest controversies of the Reconciliation Committee and the Death Eater trials. While she hadn’t been Marked and hadn’t done much of anything herself, they could have put her away for a long time for aiding and abetting. However, ultimately, the fact that she’d sung like a canary and thrown herself on the mercy of the Wizengamot, and the consideration that she was a widowed mother of an infant had spared her from Azkaban.

Minister Cresswell asked the five of them to step down. There were more awards to hand out. Harry’s concern had been that if they got an Order of Merlin, First Class, all of the defenders of Hogwarts should have at least got Second Class. After all, all of the defenders together had held off the Death Eaters long enough to perform the ritual. But that would have meant handing out the awards like candy, so instead, Cresswell had instead asked for citations for conspicuous acts of
valour in the battle for the Second Class awards, which still left quite a few. McGonagall and Neville for leading the charge to take back the school. Tonks, Astoria, and Georgina for leading the children to safety from the kitchens. Snape for his actions as a spy and for killing the giants. A few others.

After the awards were handed out, the ceremony ended with a reading of the names of the fallen in the battle, and the crowd soon dispersed. Most of the students walked back up to the castle, but Hermione lingered and held George’s hand as they walked around the grounds. It wasn’t easy spending the year apart with only the occasional Hogsmead visit to see her fiance, so they were taking their time when they could.

She caught sight of Narcissa again as they walked. Narcissa’s once-estranged sister, Andromeda, stood awkwardly nearby. Andromeda’s family were spaced around Narcissa and Columba, probably to make sure no one harassed them during the ceremony. It was hard to believe how different the two sisters had turned out. On one side an aloof pureblood princess, and on the other side a woman who had married a muggle-born and who had a grandson the same age as Narcissa’s daughter.

Narcissa gave Hermione a wide berth—unsurprisingly given how brutally she had killed her other sister, Bellatrix.

She looked back to where Remus and Tonks were standing, looking much more cheerful than during the ceremony as little Sasha played with his mother’s medal.

“What’re you thinking about?” George said.

“Sasha’s the only one who still has his father,” she mused.

“Come again?”

She turned back to him: “We know four babies who were born at the end of the war if you count Columba Malfoy, and Sasha’s the only one who still has his father around.”

“Ah. Yeah, war’s hard like that. I know there were a lot of folks in my year who were missing parents too. And you already know about your year.”

She nodded. Just like the two world wars—uncomfortably so in fact, if a bit closer together—mercilessly decimating society.

“Hey, cheer up,” George insisted. “Thanks to you, we don’t have to worry about that anymore.” He tapped a finger against her own medal.

“We can only hope,” she agreed.

“Trust me, no future dark lord will show his face while you’re around, Hermione.”

She rolled her eyes: “And if I just want a quiet life, George?”

He chuckled: “A quiet life? That’d last about a month with you.”

Hermione lips quirked into a smile. “Well, I guess we’ll find out,” she said.

George smiled back wistfully. “Two months,” he said, kissing her.

“Just about.” She thanked God again that her mum and Molly were handling the wedding planning. That would have been too much.

He kissed her again. “I love you,” he said.
“I love you too, George. And you’re right…Here’s to a better future.”

Chapter End Notes

Believe it or not, the scene with Hermione, Luna, and Neville hunting for nargles was originally meant to be all the way back in fifth year. I had planned out a subplot where Umbridge was punishing Luna for talking about “imaginary” creatures, so Hermione decided to help Luna search for them. Back then, they were supposed to successfully catch a nargle to prove Umbridge wrong. Unfortunately, as fifth year dragged on (and on, and on), that subplot wound up being one of the things I cut. I still wanted to have the scene, but there was never a good time for it until after the war ended.
Disclaimer: If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended, that JK Rowling has but slumbered here while Hermione Granger did appear.

Fun fact: this chapter was originally Chapter 5, but I kept thinking of more things to do. I think it’s going to speed up a bit from here.

And…I didn’t remember until days after the fact that Neville isn’t at Hogwarts this year. That makes the scene with Luna in the last chapter a bit complicated. I’ve changed the chapter to address this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

10 June 1999

Defence Against the Dark Arts. The third of Hermione’s six N.E.W.T.s, and the only one for which she hadn’t sat the class this year. (She’d considered sitting Muggle Studies as well, but honestly, what was the point?) Charms and Transfiguration had gone well. She actually felt a bit rusty when it came to the written part of the Defence exam, but she was confident she could make it up in the practical.

However, the practical exam quickly turned out to be different from what she was expecting. Whereas the O.W.L. exam had involved old witches and wizards asking students to demonstrate particular spells, the N.E.W.T. practical was administered by a group of Aurors. The Auror she faced when she was called in was a young-ish man she didn’t recognise. “Hello, Miss Granger,” he said. “I’m Auror Crowdy.”

“Pleased to meet you,” she said.

“This should be very interesting,” Crowdy said cheerfully.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m eager to she you in action in the duel, Miss Granger.”


“Weren’t you informed?” he said. “You’re meant to duel against an Auror as part of the exam.”

Hermione quickly turned to Sirius, who was watching from the side of the room. “This wasn’t how the O.W.L. exam went,” she said.

“Yes, but this is a more advanced exam,” Sirius replied. “And that was a different time, especially that year—Umbridge,” he coughed. “Come on, I’m sure it’ll be easy for you.”

“Well, I suppose,” she said. She hadn’t been in a proper fight (or duel) for a year, but she’d been practising the spells. “Auror Crowdy, if you’re ready?” she said, pulling out her ivy wand.
He nodded to her. They took their places at opposite ends of their section of the Great Hall and faced each other. Hermione became acutely aware that she hadn’t ever done any formal duelling at all. It had never really come up. But Crowdy bowed to her, and she bowed back, and then he raised his wand.

“One…” Sirius counted off. “Two…Three!”

Crowdy whipped off a pair of red spells nonverbally, so fast that Hermione barely caught the wand movements. She was pretty sure they were a Disarming Charm and a Stunning Hex. She threw up a Shield Charm to block one and sidestepped the other while snapping off a silent Relashio, which could be as good as an Expelliarmus, but was faster to cast.

Crowdy deflected the hex and threw another pair of spells at her while she tried an Impedimenta. Going back and forth, he managed to hit her with a Tripping Jinx. That stung, mainly that she’d slipped up like that, but she turned it into a roll, not trying to shield or push off the ground like a less experienced fighter, not wasting a spell to stop her fall, but instead casting her Dazzling Laser Hex as she dropped. The strobing green light distracted Crowdy long enough for her to roll to her feet and try a stronger spell.

“Everte Statum!” she cast aloud.

He shielded the hex. A coil of rope flew at her head as Crowdy cast Incarcerous, and Hermione deflected it with an Incendio.

“Getting a bit rougher?” he called.

Hermione didn’t answer. Multiple targets, she thought. Within the confines of the test, it was a good move. She cast a Shield Charm and ran, diving behind a desk, to the surprise of the other examiners.

“You’re not supposed to—” one of them started.

Hermione ignored him. Avis, Avis, Avis, Avis, she cast, conjuring four birds around her. She leapt back to her feet and pointed her wand at Crowdy. Oppugno! she cast, closely followed by Protego to block his counterattack.

“Ah! Ah! Evanesco!” Crowdy said, erasing the birds as they attacked at high speed and pecked at his face. “Bloody hell. Flagello!”

A Whipping Hex flew at Hermione, and she blocked it. That jolted her a little, and she responded with a silent Terebradent. He dodged, and the hex made a worrying grinding sound when it hit the wall behind him.

“Um, Hermione, Auror Crowdy, that’s a little much—” Sirius started.

“I’ve got it, Sirius,” she muttered absently.

“Furnunculus,” Crowdy said out loud.

“Chiroptera Mucosa,” Hermione cast as quickly as she could.

The other examiners stopped to watch. They were getting a little outside the rules of the exam. The O.W.L. Defence exam had been almost entirely actual defence. Few offensive spells were tested, and they were incapacitating spells like Expelliarmus and Incarcerous. They couldn’t test any spells that could do significant injury in case the students failed to deflect them. N.E.W.T. students, however, were meant to be a little more reliable. A pair of experienced fighters like Hermione and Crowdy
could afford to play even faster and looser, and their hexes gradually escalated. Soon, there were weak Cutting Curses and Piercing Hexes mixed in, each of them trusting the other to block them, like a professional duel.

Until Hermione zigged when she should have zagged, and Crowdy used the opening to toss a verbal *Bombarda* at her. Cast at low power, it wouldn’t do serious injury, but it would be a duel-ender if it connected. But Hermione slipped, only half-got up a shield, and it shattered. She was knocked off her feet, and in that dazed moment, she suddenly saw not an Auror, but a black robe and a white mask before her eyes.

Her eyes flew wide open like a madwoman’s. She sprang to her feet and shouted, “*Confringo!*” at the Death Eater.

“*Hermione!*” someone called, but she ignored it. The Death Eater seemed taken by surprise. He just barely dodged the curse, which exploded a chunk of the wall behind him.

“The hell?” he yelled.

“*Reducto!*” she cast.

This time, he shielded and cast three binding spells in quick succession. Hermione weaved and blocked and cast *Lumos Ardens* and *Fulmina* back at him.

The Lightning Hex made the Death Eater spring into action. Despite taking a glancing blow, he ran to dodge and threw a Bone-Breaking Curse at her legs followed by a *Defodio*.

“*Crowdy!*” the voice shouted again.

He was too fast for her. She needed to trip him up. She drew her second wand, pointed it at his feet and cast “*Resonantia!*”

Her Resonance Curse vibrated the floor, rapidly amplifying the natural frequencies. The ground began to crumble under his feet and sharp chips of stone kicked up into the air like sand on a loudspeaker. A wave of her wand, and the pebbles began to pelt him.

Sirius ran out, shouting for her to stop, but she slipped his grasp. Why wasn’t he fighting? She dodged both him and the Death Eater as she kept it up.

“Gah! *Confingo!* *Depulso!*” The Death Eater cast at her. Many of the shards of rock flew at her, and she wasn’t fast enough to block them all. Scraps appeared on her face and hands. Then, she wasn’t fast enough to dodge a follow-up Cutting Curse that tore through her robes and opened a long, but shallow gash on her side.

“*Hermione!*”

“*Constringofila!*” she cast back and caught him this time. His clothes began to constrict around him, the threads sliding past each other to restrict the movement of his arms, squeezing his chest so he couldn’t breathe. She dodged around Sirius again while the Death Eater. He gasped, winded, and stumbled as he tried to figure out what was happening to him. He recovered quickly and cast a spell to strategically slice up his robes without them falling off, but not fast enough to stop Hermione’s followup attack.

He went down hard. Hermione dashed toward him as he scrambled away from her. She threw out curse after curse, only some of which appeared in the curriculum. He was only shielding now, but she wouldn’t let her guard down until she’d knocked him out. But then, the Death Eater’s words
finally got through to her.

“AHHH! Stop! I yield! I yield!”

Hermione froze, nearly dropping her wands, and a sense of horror gripped her. That wasn’t a Death Eater. Then Sirius grabbed her in a bear hug and knocked her wands from her hands, nearly tackling her to the ground.

“Oh, God! Oh, God! I’m so sorry! Are you okay?” she said in a panic.

Auror Crowdy had fallen to the floor and backed against the wall, holding his wand up to desperately try to maintain his Shield Charm against her onslaught. His robes were in tatters, and his face was scraped up, and he probably had a couple of broken bones. A patch of the floor of the Great Hall was cracked and littered with shards of stone. God, she could have killed him.

Hermione wasn’t in much better shape herself, especially with that gash on her side. Her robes were ruined, too, and she should probably get professional help for her injuries. She nearly collapsed in Sirius’s arms.

“Auror Crowdy?” Sirius asked softly.

Crowdy grunted as he pushed himself to his feet. “I’ll live,” he said, “but I think the exam is over.”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione repeated, staring down at the floor. “I don’t know what came over me. I can usually handle this, but…all of a sudden, I felt like I was back in the battle. I didn’t mean to hurt you. Really.”

Sirius helped her to her feet and put an arm around her shoulders. “It’s not your fault, Hermione,” he said. “It happens to the best of us. You should have told me you were having flashbacks.”

“I’m not!” she protested. “I mean I wasn’t. I still have nightmares, and I’m a bit jumplier than I used to be, but I haven’t had a...a real flashback before...I haven’t been in a real fight since since the battle. I guess didn’t know how I’d react. Auror, I—”

“It’s alright, Miss Granger,” Crowdy said shakily, and she looked up at him. “I’ve seen this kind of thing before in the Auror Office. I’d also say you should have told us, but if this is the first time it happened...”

“It is.”

“Then you should probably see a Healer.”

“I am. I’ll talk to my therapist after graduation.”

“But right now, you should both see a Healer,” Sirius cut in. “Let’s go. We’ll have to test the rest of the class later.” He led both of them including a very red-faced Hermione to the Hospital Wing.

11 June 1999

Madam Pomfrey had healed Hermione in a trice, and the other examiners had picked up the slack after Auror Crowdy left, but the incident yesterday had certainly caused a mess. More than half the seventh-year class had seen Hermione and Crowdy walking up to the Hospital Wing looking like they’d tried to kill each other, and small as that class was, the story had spread from there. People
looked afraid of her again, and she was a little afraid of herself—not because of her temper, like before, but because of chance that she could have another flashback—even if it seemed unlikely after it took an actual duel to trigger the first one. She was a little more vigilant and even a bit jumpy, but she made an effort to calm her thoughts with Occlumency, which did help.

Today, she had her Ancient Runes exam, which went not quite as well as she’d hoped, but that was no great surprise. Her recent practical knowledge of Runes was a bit more specialised than they wanted for the exam, and her classes hadn’t exactly been the top priority they once were this year.

Mainly, however, she took the opportunity after her exam to have one last talk with Professor Rakepick.

“I must admit, Miss Granger,” she said, “I would have liked to hear more about your general studies in soul magic. I’ve gleaned a fair amount from our little lessons and your two friends—that use of True Love’s Kiss was inspired, by the way—but the underlying theory is still quite murky.”

“Frankly, Professor, I’m okay with that,” Hermione told her. “Truth be told, I haven’t really developed the field beyond those few spells and rituals anyway, and I’m not keen on anyone else doing the same.”

“You can’t keep the knowledge secret forever, Miss Granger,” she said with an ominous edge.

“I know that, but I can control how and to whom the knowledge is released, for a little while, at least, so I can ensure that the people who would use this knowledge for ill will be behind those who will use it for good and anticipate the threats and counter them.”

“And you don’t believe I could be one of the people who anticipates those threats?” Rakepick said haughtily. “With my extensive experience, I daresay I have a better or at least a broader understanding of what dark wizards are capable of than you do.”

“I’m not ruling out meeting again in a year or two,” Hermione said evenly. “I’d just rather see you in action first. It’s not that I don’t trust you. I just don’t trust anyone. I haven’t even told my fiance some of the things I’ve discovered, and having seen what they can do, he agrees with me…Incidentally, what do you plan on doing now that you’re leaving Hogwarts? Do you have any plans for what you’ll do next?”

“I’ll try my hand at killing dementors I think. There’s sure to be good money in it.”

Hermione gave her a sharp look.

“Don’t look at me like that, Miss Granger,” she said. “Not all of us can live entirely off jewelry like you can.”

And…she couldn’t refute that. Besides, Rakepick wasn’t going to be the only person around who could kill dementors. If her prices were too steep, someone else could undercut her. “I don’t think I’d charge if there’s a living victim to be saved,” she offered.

“Hm. Fair. Though I wouldn’t advertise the fact either. Too easy to exploit. Actually, I was hoping I could join you to see a couple of the rituals done this summer. This is something where I wouldn’t want to go off on my own without practical experience.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. The infamously headstrong and independent Patricia Rakepick wasn’t confident enough to start killing dementors solo? But it would help solve her problem; it would be a good to see how she acted in the field. “That’s fine,” she said. “I’ll send you an owl.”
“Excellent.” Rakepick relaxed—rather like a cat, Hermione thought, lounging back comfortably while keeping that vague air of superiority. “So what will *you* do after you graduate, Miss Granger?” she asked.

Hermione leaned back and considered the question. “I don’t really know. I’m getting married in three weeks. We’re going to Italy for our honeymoon. It’s fitting, really—back where it all began,” she mused. “And I have a couple other projects to finish, but after that, I don’t really know.”

“Only a couple?” Rakepick said knowingly.

“Short-term,” she said. “And arithmancy-themed. A lot of the longer-term things that interest me are probably more in your line of work. Figuring out how Ravenclaw’s diadem works, for example.”

“Ah, then perhaps you can become a world traveller like I am.”

Hermione didn’t answer, but she grew thoughtful. At least a few of the things she wanted to do would involve travel. She still wanted to get DNA samples from the remaining giants. She hadn’t forgotten her work on the night after the battle toward that goal. And she might be killing dementors in other countries too, or training dementor-killers. But she hadn’t thought about much more than those specific issues.

“You know, in the old days, it was traditional for young witches and wizards of means to spend a year travelling the world after they graduated,” Rakepick encouraged her.

“Like a Grand Tour?” she said.

“Come again?”

“In the 1700s or so, children of muggle nobles and landed gentry would go on a tour of Europe when they came of age. It fell out of favour after the railroad became widespread, but we—they—whatever—still have something a little like it. It’s called a gap year.”

“Yes, that sounds about right. I didn’t know muggles did it too. You might find it an interesting lifestyle, Miss Granger.”

“I think I’ve had enough of your kind of interesting for a lifetime, Professor,” she shot back. “But I suppose there might be few arithmancy puzzles around the world that need solving just like there are runic ones, even accounting for arithmancy being a much younger field.”

The woman smiled: “Something to think about, then. And, what did you mean, ‘back where it all began’ for your honeymoon?”

“Oh,” Hermione chuckled. “Professor McGonagall delivered my original Hogwarts letter to our hotel room in Venice. It’s a beautiful town, and I’ve never had the chance to go back there. Now, I can finally catch up.”

---

16 June 1999

The second week of exams featured Potions and Alchemy, and then she was nominally done. But on Wednesday, she did go down to the Great Hall for one more meeting with the Arithmancy examiners.

“Good morning, Professor Tinworth, Professor Marchbanks,” she greeted them.
“Good morning, Professor Granger,” old Griselda Marchbanks replied. Professor, again. But in two more days, it would be appropriate, so she let it go. “Can we help you? The next committee meeting isn’t until Tuesday.”

“Yes, I know,” Hermione said. “I just wanted to submit my Arithmancy Mastery project.”

“Yes, your Mastery project?” Marchbanks said in surprise. “But you already have a Doctor of Wizardry.”

“Yes, but I never formally submitted a Mastery project. I wanted to do it by the book so I can’t be accused of favouritism or cutting corners.”

“I don’t think anyone could accuse you of that after what you’ve done, Miss Granger,” Tinworth said.

“Even so, I want to put it on record.”

“Very well,” Marchbanks said. “What have you produced? Your proof on Gamp’s Law?”

Hermione shook her head. She motioned to the Entrance Hall, and Harry and Ginny walked in, carrying a large, framed tapestry between them. It was a sky-blue field with a golden, vaguely sunflower-spiral pattern repeated over and over again in ever-smaller islands as the colours shifted slowly.

“What on Earth…” Marchbanks said.

“This,” Hermione said, “is a proof of concept for combining high-level fractal geometry with magic. I used it to create a tapestry that displays Julia sets, which also vary with the time of day and the weather.”

The examiners looked at each other. “Come again, Professor Granger?” Tinworth said. “What are we seeing?”

“This image symbolises a sunny day like we have now,” Hermione said, motioning up to the enchanted ceiling, and then she explained. A Julia set was created like the Mandelbrot set—repeated squaring and adding of points on the complex plane. Except instead of the Mandelbrot set, which added every point to zero, a Julia set started with a particular complex number as a seed and added that to every point. So there was a different fractal for every point on the plane.

The tapestry itself was three feet, six and two-thirds inches square, the smallest she could fit a thousand and twenty-four threads on each side. The warp and the weft served as the coordinate plane, addressing the threads like a computer would, and a thirty-two by thirty-two grid of blocks on tiny runes on the back did the calculations, computing the correct colour at each intersection based on inputs from a master cluster on the frame that set the seed coordinates and the colour palette. It was effectively a computer with one thousand and twenty-four processors—more than most supercomputers, except that the processors were a far cry from a microchip. They couldn’t even do full arithmetic—just the same few hard-coded operations over and over again.

It was slow by muggle standards, taking a full minute to compute each frame. But each small processor ran at thirty-two thousand operations per second, a blazing-fast speed for anything magic. That was only possible because of a cheat that used the interplay between the threads and the runic clusters that essentially let each thread compute its own operations, and another cheat that made repeated operations very efficient. That technically made it a computer of sixty-four thousand processors, more than five times the number of any supercomputer in the world, and yet it was also a hundred thousand times slower.
Her conclusion was that magic made it so that the most efficient way to build a computer was an insane number of very slow processors rather than a small number of very fast ones like a muggle computer. She even had a paper half-written about it. It was scalable and much more energy efficient and could probably be made competitive with muggle computers if you had a good reason—although at this point, it was merely a curiosity.

But most of that was beyond the scope of her project. She was mainly showing that it was possible to do the heavy calculations involved in fractal geometry with magic through her art project. It took a lot of experimentation, a minute at a time, but she was able to make it show an abstract depiction of the current weather. With judicious choices of the seed coordinates, which themselves traced near the boundary of the Mandelbrot set, she could create elaborate wheel and spiral patterns with an arbitrary number of arms. And with those, she could make the tapestry take on the appearance of a lightning bolt, a flurry of snowflakes, a fluffy cloud, a sunburst, a swirl of wind, a string of dewdrops, crystals of frost, and even the dark whirlpool of the Milky Way on a starry night.

“This seems to be more runic than arithmantic,” Marchbanks pointed out.

“All heavy maths that takes more calculation than a human can manage is like that, ma’am,” Hermione. “The arithmancy needed to make the tapestry do it all was very complex. I have my notes here.”

The examiners looked over her notes. They weren’t as impressed as she’d hoped with the tapestry itself. There just wasn’t much of a market for abstract art in general in the wizarding world—not with their traditional culture and talking portraits all over. But they were impressed with the maths.

“Well, I’d say this is up to the standard, Professor Granger,” Professor Tinworth concluded. “I see no reason not to accept it, since you already have your degree anyway.”

“Thank you, Professor. I just wanted to tie up the loose ends.”

18 June 1999

On the last day of term, everyone was relaxing, all of the exams being finished. Most of the seventh-years were relieved that they’d made it through a quiet school year for once in their lives. For Hermione, however, they year hadn’t been entirely quiet, and there was quite the stir today when, not long before the Leaving Feast, Minister Cresswell, Ambassador Brodrig, and King Ragnok himself appeared in the Entrance Hall to finally resolve the matter of the Sword of Gryffindor. Fleur had come too out of personal interest (and concern for Hermione’s well-being), as had the new head of the Goblin Liaison Office at the Ministry. Some of the students gathered around the edge of the Entrance Hall to watch.

Fleur hurried to Hermione’s side as they entered and whispered some advice to her.

“It’s rare for zee Goblin King to show ‘imself above ground,” she said. “I’m not sure why he’s so interested in you.”

“Seeing my talent with jewels, probably,” Hermione said softly.

“Maybe. Well, when you greet zee king, you should bow, address ‘im formally, but be to zee point. Don’t waste his time.”

“You told me that last time I met him,” she replied.

“It bears repeating,” Fleur said. “Especially in a sensitive situation like this.”
Brodrig banged the butt of a battle-axe loudly on the floor, cutting off all conversation, and announced to the Entrance Hall: “All hail His Majesty, Ragnok, Seventh of His Name, King of the Goblins of the British Isles, Grandmaster of Tailory, and Protector of the Underground Realm!”

A few students, most of them muggle-born, stepped out and bowed awkwardly, although there were also some whispers in the shadows. However, Professor McGonagall came out front and centre and bowed to him. “Your Majesty, Hogwarts is honoured by your presence,” she said.

“Headmistress,” the goblin greeted her dismissively. King Ragnok looked much the same as the last time Hermione had met him. Despite being a tailor—apparently—he looked the part of a tough goblin commander. His robes were elegant, but not ostentatious. He walked over to the display case and nodded to himself after verifying the sword was still there. Then he turned and addressed the Entrance Hall: “Six months ago, we laid claim to the Sword of Ragnuk the First, which has sat in Hogwarts since its rediscovery six years ago. At that time, we granted a reprieve from collecting the sword on the request of Hogwarts student Hermione Granger. Now, we have returned to settle this debt.”

Hermione stepped forward. Her new sword was strapped to her waist. She stopped at a safe distance from Ragnok and bowed to him. “Your Majesty, my original offer still stands,” she said. “I offer a trade under goblin law of the Sword of Ragnuk the First for a new sword of my own make.”

“So you have you said, Granger,” the king growled, “but do you believe you have created a sword of equal worth to Ragnuk’s?”

She tread carefully here. “In terms of historical significance, no,” she said, “but otherwise, I invite you to examine it for yourself, sir.” She took the sheathed sword from her hip and held it out flat on her palms. Ragnok twitched a hand, and Brodrig came forward to retrieve it. He handed it to Ragnok, who examined it and unsheathed it.

“I call it Dragontooth,” Hermione said.

He held up the sword—a black blade, slightly curved and covered in runes with a hilt that gleamed like fire. He waved it experimentally.

“It will handle a bit different than you’re used to,” she added. “It’s more rigid, but it also has a thinner grind, and it’s sharper.”

People in the hall whispered upon seeing her sword. Even Fleur was surprised. Dragontooth was more ostentatious than Gryffindor’s sword because Hermione had taken inspiration from more modern pieces. Gryffindor’s sword had only a couple dozen rubies on it. More recent ceremonial swords like the Sword of Offering in the Crown Jewels were completely covered with sometimes thousands of diamonds. For this creation, she’d leaned more toward the former while borrowing some of the look of the latter, which still meant a hundred and twenty-three gems.

The hilt, a long, hand-and-a-half thing that was wider than it would be for a human hand, was made in the image of a Chinese Fireball dragon walking along it like a chameleon on a tree branch. She’d originally planned to make it in silver, but the colour didn’t look right, so she’d used electrum instead. The “branch” part was engraved with a very appropriate fern-like pattern: the golden dragon curve. The dragon’s eyes ought to have been gold, but again, for contrast, she used two deep blue diamonds to help catch the light.

The cross-guard was an S-shaped piece stylised to look like the dragon’s breath, carved with swept lines with rows of sapphires studded in between them. Those had been tricky to make. It had taken seventy-two sapphires and rubies, most of them made with the red and yellow of chromium and iron
organically swirled together to make the image of fire. Twenty-four blood rubies were embedded in each of the dragon’s sides, flush with the metalwork so as not to interfere with the grip, completing the image of a red and gold dragon.

But the crown jewel—as it were—of the sword was the pommel, which was made from the tail of the dragon circled around a six-hundred-carat rainbow star sapphire that had taken as much work and planning as all the other gems put together. That gem was so significant she gave it a name of its own: the Star of Albany. (She even drew up documentation for Archimedes Jewellers, even though it would never be public.) The six sections of the sapphire were coloured ruby-red, padparadscha-orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. That was similar to her earlier efforts, but with white lines of titanium dioxide separating the sections and adding a slight blending around the edge, it looked much more natural.

Engraved on the blade amid the smaller runes, on one side, it read, DRAGONTOOTH, and on the other, it read, RAGNOK VII REX.

Ragnok studied the sword carefully. “Hm…” he said. “Not bad, for a human.”

“Rubbish!”

“It’s fantastic!”

“It’s brilliant!” some of the students shouted.

“Silence!” McGonagall cut them off. “We will show proper respect in this school!”

Hermione looked over at Fleur. Fleur gave her a smile and a nod, confirming what she’d been thinking. She knew enough about goblin culture to tell that was a compliment.

Ragnok ignored the commotion. He gave her a sharp look and said, “The gems are all magically created, Granger. Not carved from the living rock.”

“I never pretended they weren’t, sir,” she replied. “They are permanent, if you’re worried about that.”

“Hmph. If they are, then that raises a new set of problems. Being able to create gems like these with magic is extremely subversive, especially since you have been selling them in the muggle world. Now, there are also concerns about secrecy. You could be very disruptive, Granger, possibly an economic threat.”

The tension in the hall skyrocketed. Brodrig’s hands tightened on his battle-axe, and McGonagall and Flitwick both stepped forward, twitching for their wands. Hermione didn’t know what the students would do if things got violent. Had Ragnok planned this? He must have, right?

“Sir, have I violated the Statute of Secrecy with my business operations?” she demanded. “Have I violated any of Gringotts’ policies regarding currency exchange or large transactions—or caused major market disruption in general, for that matter? If I have inadvertently neglected any fees, I will pay them.”

Ragnok stared her down, but she didn’t break her gaze. “No, Granger, you have been very scrupulous with your business,” he confirmed. “But still, it seems that with your skills, this ‘Dragontooth’ should have been trivial to make—an idle fancy at swordcraft.”

“I assure you it was anything but, sir. That sword took a lot of planning and designing, and each size and shape of gem needed its own runic array, calculated for the geometry of the faces. I have been
working on it diligently over the past six months, and I put all of my skill into it. I...I think I understand your philosophy about property better now, sir,” she said more quietly. “It’s hard to let something like that go.”

Ragnok raised an eyebrow at Hermione, and she noticed that Cresswell had raised two. Evidently, that wasn’t what the Minister had expected. He looked nervous. Then, Ragnok began speaking to Brodrig in Gobbledygook. They seemed to argue for a minute before reaching a consensus. When the king spoke again, it seemed to be with a bit more respect. “You make a compelling offer, Granger,” he said. “A sword that is undoubtedly of great monetary value and fighting capacity, bespoke for us from the most famous witch of your generation. And yet this is balanced against a long-sought artifact of our people. Can you say they are of equal worth?”

Hermione shook her head, but didn’t answer directly. “I have done all I can on this matter, sir. The decision rests in your hands.”

He nodded. “A wise thing, to know your limitations,” he said. Then, he turned to the Hall: “Minister Cresswell, Ambassador Brodrig, Headmistress McGonagall, be it known that we grant Journeywoman Granger an indefinite loan of the Sword of Ragnuk for display in the exhibit at Hogwarts, in exchange for her loan of Dragontooth to the Goblin Nation—a trade under Goblin Law.”

Brodrig banged the butt of his axe on the floor like a gavel, and the two goblins turned and strode out.

Minister Cresswell was staring at Hermione Granger, as was Professor Flitwick. “Journeywoman,” Cresswell said, shaking his head.

Hermione winced slightly. “I didn’t just crack some secret code to making the Goblin Nation my best friend, did I?” she asked. “As convenient as that would be, I don’t think I could handle the absurdity.”

Professor Flitwick chuckled. “Certainly not, Miss Granger. The Goblin Nation has more dignity than that. But for a witch or wizard to be called ‘Journeyman’ by a goblin is rare. It means that your craft is competitive with the lower grades of goblin-make.”

“It’s a sign of great respect,” Cresswell said. He stepped closer and added, “and privately, I suspect it was what you said about goblin philosophy that earned it regardless of the quality of the sword, but no, you don’t get anything else for it.”

“Oh, good. I was getting worried after all the other crazy stuff that’s happened.”

A little while later, it was time for the Leaving Feast. That was a strange feeling in itself, since Hermione had never been to one of these when things were even close to normal—the illusion of normalcy, perhaps, but they always seemed to be associated with some horrible trauma in the days or weeks before. Now, when Professor McGonagall rose to make her speech, things were truly hopeful.

“Another year at Hogwarts has ended,” McGonagall said, “and I think we can all be thankful that it was a very nearly uneventful one.”

“Hear hear!” a few people shouted.

“For those of you who are returning across the Black Lake tomorrow, you have had the misfortune to witness what are quite possibly the six worst years in Hogwarts’ history—for three of you, the
worst seven years. All of us have lost good friends and family these past few years, and it was only through great effort that Hogwarts was able to reopen at all.

“But tonight, after all this time, we can truly celebrate. We together have weathered the storm and come out on the other side. Whether you are returning next year or not, we are sending you out into a magical world that is freer and brighter than it has been in a generation. The pain is still sharp for many of us, but all I can say to you now is to remember those who were lost, live your lives to the fullest, and above all, to preserve this new, hard-won world in their memory, so that, God willing, the next generation will never have to feel the sting of war.”

19 June 1999

Harry, Ginny, Hermione, and Luna got a boat together the next morning as they cross the Lake a final time and watched Hogwarts Castle recede into the distance.

“I hope the Giant Squid isn’t still angry with us,” Ginny said.

“No, rousing the Leviathan only applied on the day of the ritual,” Hermione said. “It might be a little less friendly than before, but it won’t try to hurt anyone.”

Harry mostly just gazed back at the castle. “Feels strange, leaving here,” he said.

“Does it?” Hermione said.

He looked at her. “Doesn’t it for you?”

She shrugged. “I spent four and a half years out of eight here. It wasn’t a home to me like it was to most people.”

“It was to me, though,” Harry said. “For every time a teacher tried to kill me, for all that time fighting for our lives and the two times I got kicked out of here myself, Hogwarts is still the only real home I’ve ever had.”

Ginny scooted closer to Harry and laid her head on his shoulder.

Luna looked up from where she was trailing her hand through the water. “Home is where your family is, Harry,” she said. “I think you’ve been home for most of that time.”

Harry smiled: “Yeah, I guess so, Luna.”

“Yes—none of us got a full Hogwarts education,” Hermione said. “Luna spent the longest here—six and a half years. But the whole time we still had each other.”

Suddenly, Harry laughed incongruously. That tended to happen when one of them thought of something funny. The reason was only revealed when Ginny said, “Wow, that was corny.”

Luna giggled. Hermione swatted Ginny on the arm and said, “Shut up! It’s true.” …And corny, she admitted to herself.

“Oh, okay, it’s true,” Ginny said. “Except now I’m not sure any of us know what we’re doing next.”

“What do you mean, Ginny?” Luna asked.

“Well, I know I always imagined I’d play professional Quidditch,” Ginny said. “I know it’s not a full
time job, but I wanted to do it since I first got on the team. Harry and I can’t do that now, though.”

“Why not?” Hermione asked.

Ginny stared at her as if it were obvious. “Each of us getting an extra pair of eyes from the other? It’s an unfair advantage.”

“Oh…sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. We made it through the war alive. That’s enough for us.”

“Still…maybe there are other jobs that involve flying?” Hermione asked.

“There’s a few.”

“I know we’ll fly a lot regardless,” Harry said confidently. “We have money, so—”

“We don’t have to find something anytime soon,” Ginny finished for him.

“Actually,” he added hesitantly, “I’ve been kinda thinking about charity work…”

Hermione tilted her head and regarded him. “You know, I can absolutely see you doing that, Harry.”

Harry looked unsure, but he seemed to find that encouraging. A moment later, Ginny reached up and kissed him, which clearly encouraged him more.

“Well, I have an idea about what I’m doing,” Luna said.

“Oh?” Ginny said with interest.

“Mm hmm. Neville and I have been talking about travelling. We could hunt for the Crumple-Horned Snorkack—and other magical plants and animals.”

Ginny’s eyes widened when she made the connection. “Are you getting married?” she said excitedly.

“We haven’t talked about it directly, but I think we’ve both been moving in that direction,” Luna replied.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she squealed.

“Because nothing is certain yet, Ginny,” Luna said calmly. “What about you, Hermione? Have you thought any more about what you’re going to do?”

“I’ve actually thought about travelling, too,” Hermione said. “Back on the day after the battle, I thought of travelling to collect specimens of endangered magical species so that maybe they can be cloned someday. And talking to Professor Rakepick about her work—at first, I thought she was mad, but I think there might be a place for that in my field. I still need to talk it over with George, though.”

“True, he still has the shop—and Fred,” Ginny said. “Still, I think he might be interested.” She and Harry both giggled. “Though I don’t think I ever would have pegged George as the world traveller over Fred.”

Hermione and Luna both laughed too. Soon they boarded the train and talked of more trivial things until they returned to London. Later than evening, Hermione stepped off the train and returned to her family, pulling her trunk behind her. She hugged her parents and kissed her fiance while Luna went
to Neville, and the Weasleys also reunited.

As they held each other, Hermione said to George, “We should talk when we have time. I think I have an idea of what I want to do.”

21 June 1999

“Well, Ms. Granger, I think we’ve reached a decision,” Professor Tremaine said when Hermione’s final exam was completed. “I must confess I was surprised you wrote back again after that MI5 business you were mixed up in, but clearly, your maths skills haven’t diminished. You are approved for a Master of Science degree in mathematics. Congratulations.”

3 July 1999

For most of her life, Hermione Granger imagined getting married in a church, but it was never something she paid much mind. She wasn’t one of those little girls who planned out her dream wedding. She had more interesting things to think about, and marriage was always some vague, far-off time in the future.

When George Weasley asked her to marry him, she suddenly imagined not getting married in a church. As much as she had assumed it before, she now assumed without much thought that they would be getting married at the new Burrow. It was where Harry and Ginny were married. It was where Bill and Fleur would have been married if they could have. It only made sense.

And yet, now Hermione found herself back in a church.

It was her parents who made the decision, and she was still grateful that Mum and Molly handled the planning. Her parents said that even after all this time, she should invite friends and family from the muggle world to her wedding. It was only right, to say nothing of the fact that they and Septima and maybe a few school friends would be practically the only ones on the bride’s side of the wedding. But including muggles meant they had to hold the ceremony in a proper church, so she went along, and they booked their old church in Crawley.

Right now, Hermione stood outside the sanctuary while the wedding party walked in. She worked to keep her breathing even, though she wasn’t as bad as she’d feared she might be. Certainly, Mum was impressed with her composure. It seemed Occlumency was fairly effective at dealing with pre-wedding jitters, although the excitement was still getting to her.

Like at Harry’s and Ginny’s wedding, the wedding party was small, and all too soon, the bridal march began. She stepped into the sanctuary, and the guests rose as she walked down the aisle. Sunlight steamed through the stained glass windows, bathing the congregation in a multicoloured light. Hermione smiled, hoping she looking perfectly at ease.

She was certainly drawing stares. She wore the replica of Ravenclaw’s Diadem on her head. She had initially wanted to wear the real one, but with the way it kept her constantly on the edge of sensory overload, she decided that even with her Occlumency skills, wearing it on one of the most emotional days of her life was a bad idea. You couldn’t tell the difference from a distance, and the muggle side of the room—actually both sides, given its history—were dazzled by it.

Her dress was only ankle-length—a little unconventional, but she had insisted. While she didn’t look over her shoulder so much anymore, she at least wanted the concession to safety of not having a dress that she wouldn’t be able to run in or that she could trip over. She had actually entertained the
thought of wearing Snickersnack on her hip too—for purely stylistic reasons—but that would have been too much. In the old days, a gentleman might have worn a sword to his wedding, but for a bride to wear one would just look silly.

And there was George, grinning like a loon. She could read him well enough by now to tell he was a little nervous, but it was mostly genuine. Fred stood beside him, looking calmer. The pair would have looked almost indistinguishable standing at the altar, except George’s grin and the whisker-like scars on Fred’s face distinguished them. If it weren’t for those things, she would be scrutinising very closely to make sure they hadn’t switched places even today.

Hermione stopped at the altar with Ginny by her side and smiled at the Minister from whom she’d taken first communion a decade ago. He nodded slightly and spoke, “In the presence of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we have come together to witness the marriage of George Fabian and Hermione Jean, to pray for God’s blessing on them, to share their joy and celebrate their love…”

She couldn’t see now, but she imagined the groom’s side of the church looking a little lost. They hadn’t used the traditional liturgy at Harry’s and Ginny’s wedding, and from what she gathered, it wasn’t usual in the wizarding world, even among those who went to church. In the corner of her eye, she saw Ginny looking unfazed, at least.

Molly had managed one concession to wizarding tradition that might cause friction. After talking with George and Hermione, they had agreed to change the vows a little.

“…And do you, Hermione Jean, take George Fabian to be your husband, to have and to hold from this day forward; under curse and under blessing, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as a faithful companion in the magic of life as long as you both shall live?”

“I do,” Hermione said.

And that was that. Ginny and Fred gave her and George the rings, and they put them on each other’s hands and kissed. From there to the reception was mostly a blur to Hermione, at least until she went back over it with the real Ravenclaw’s diadem. The vows would probably raise a few eyebrows, she thought. They should have properly said “in life and in magic” for magical tradition, but that would have been too obvious. Hermione didn’t care, though. Her wedding had gone off famously, and she and George could finally start a new chapter in their lives together.

4 July 1999

Hermione and George stepped off the gondola and onto the Piazzetta di San Marco and looked around at the historic streets.

*Eight years,* Hermione thought—less three weeks. And even for one as young as she, it had been a long eight years.

She drew a deep breath. “Well, I’m back,” she said.
Constringofile: Stylised from the Latin for “I constrict threads.” Credit to Belial666 for this idea.

For fractal nerds, the Julia set on the tapestry is similar to one with the seed \(-0.7 + 0.3i\) at 1,000 iterations.

Dragontooth is similar in size and general shape to Orcrist (Thorin’s sword) in the Hobbit movies, but black and silver with a narrower blade and a very different hilt construction.
Disclaimer: Where are we going and why are we in this handbasket? I don’t know, but JK Rowling might have some ideas.

It’s jobs season in my line of work, and things are crazily busy right now. However, the worst of that will be over in another two weeks, so things should be calmer after that.

This is shorter than I wanted because I split the chapter in half. My outline has grown from 23 chapters to 26 already when I wanted to keep it short, but I realised I need the next chapter separate to really do it justice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

19 July 1999

Hermione wasn’t sure herself what she was dreaming about when George woke her, only that there was a lot of blood and death and flashing curses. Pain, too, though pain in a dream was no more than a dull ache without an external source. The feeling of being battered and wrung out after a fight only to find more enemies coming was far more familiar. She did know, though, that she was thrashing violently and nearly shoved her husband out of the bed before she woke.

“Hermione! Hermione, wake up!” George yelled as he tried to shake her awake.

She gasped and sat bolt upright as she was suddenly wide awake. She didn’t know where she was. She felt around for her wand frantically until she remembered. New flat, of course. It was her and George’s first night in their own flat. That was why she was disoriented. She slumped, feeling far more exhausted than she ought to, and George put his arms around her and pulled her close to his chest.

“What was it?” he asked her softly.

“It—I don’t know,” she murmured into his shoulder. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Are you sure?” he said.

“Mmm…I don’t remember much besides spellfire. What time is it?”

He looked at the digital clock behind her. “‘Round five,” he said sleepily. She’d insisted on finding a flat that was wired for electricity, even though in retrospect, they probably wouldn’t use it for much. She was still deciding if it was safe to put in a computer. “Get some more sleep, ‘kay?” he added. He started to pull her back down to the bed.

She tried to shake him off. “Might as well get up, now.”

That only made George pull her closer. “C’mon, it’s too early, Hermione,” he yawned.

“George…” she sighed.
“No, you can still get a couple more hours in,” he insisted. “Come back to bed, my darling wife.”

Hermione rolled her eyes in the dark. “Keep talking like that at five in the morning, and you’re going to be defeating your purpose,” she quipped. But even so, she lay back down and cuddled into his side. She did need the sleep. She closed her eyes again and tried to relax. George held her close, and she felt the tension drain from her limbs. He understood her all too well. She’d had to wake him from nightmares a couple times, too.

George did have to work that morning, nominally at least, because someone had to keep the shop, after all. It was an easy commute. Thanks to the Ministry’s influence, there were plenty of flats available for magicals in muggle London within a few blocks of the Ministry and the Leaky Cauldron. Before they had started looking there, Hermione had never realised how insular even wizards who lived in the cities were. She tagged along with George this morning, for lack of anything else to do.

“What nice living so close, isn’t it?” he asked her.

“I suppose,” she said. “Strange, sort of. I’ve never lived in a big city before, much less downtown. I’m not used to everything being in walking distance.” Hogsmeade didn’t count, going there so rarely at school.

“Yeah, I get it,” he agreed. “Fred and I have lived around here a couple years; it’s nice, but long-term, I’d prefer living in the country to raise a family like our folks did.”

Hermione blushed. “That’s sort of my feeling, too. A lot of muggles feel that way too, though they prefer the suburbs more. It’s easier to maintain wards in the country, too.”

George gave her a concerned glance, but he was familiar with this kind of talk from her. “You’ve thought about this kind of thing?”

“Sort of,” she said. “I’ve thought a couple times—after we’ve been together a while and saved up enough money to do it right—about just building a new house and doing the wards ourselves—get Ron and Fleur to help, do it all in quartz, the works.”

“Oh, wow. That would be something. Blimey, with your skills, we could build it stronger than—the old pureblood families.” Malfoy Manor, he meant, and she knew it.

“I know—if we do it right. And we’d account for continental drift, too.”

He nodded seriously. “Figured you’d want to take care of that. Just as long as you don’t turn into one of those pretentious rich gits with their big manor houses.”

In response, Hermione stuck her nose in the air and spoke in the most pretentious voice she could manage, “I would never, husband. I am perfectly grounded. Clearly, the purebloods simply lack the class to appreciate my refined style.”

George cracked up laughing. He put his arm around her shoulders and said, “Oh, Hermione. See, this is why I married you.”

“I thought the way I kicked Death Eater arse was why you married me,” she said.

“No, that’s the reason I think you’re the hottest witch in the world, not to mention the scariest, but the way you can keep up with me in a game of wits is why I married you—one reason anyway.”
She smiled. “Well, that is something we share.”

“So, if you’re gonna build a house, where do you wanna go?” he said. “Any ideas?”

“Nothing definite. I think there are a few promising sites up in the general Liverpool-Manchester area.”

“Oh? That far out?”

“Going by the ley lines. The ones at the south end of Britain are more built up.”

George pondered that as they walked down Diagon Alley. They soon arrived at Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. When they opened the door, the chimes played, “What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor?” Hermione stopped and looked around, soon spotting Fred, and gave him a sceptical look.

Fred shrugged: “It was that or ‘Greensleeves’…It’s a work in progress.” He turned to George. “Oi! Loverboy! ‘Bout time you got back!”

“Hah. You’re just jealous I got a honeymoon before you did, brother,” George said.

“I’ll have you know Angelina and I are doing just fine,” he said. “So how was Italy, my globe-trotting twin?”

George gave Hermione a grin. “It was fantastic,” he said. “So how’ve you been? Holding down the fort alright?”

“It’s been quiet enough. It’s good you got back before the Hogwarts letters went out, though. We could use your help too, Hermione.”

“Well, I suppose I could lend a hand,” she said, looking around at the shop. She’d always admired how lively and colourful it was in here, even if it could get to be a bit much after a while. It was technically her shop too, even before she got married, since she’d helped fund it.

Together, they started opening up the shop for the day. “So, anything interesting happen while we were gone?” George asked.

“Eh, some,” Fred said. “Angelina asked Harry and Ginny to go out and give the Harpies a lesson in formation flying.”

George stopped. “Wait, seriously? They’re teaching the Harpies?”

“Can they really teach that?” Hermione added. “I mean, if they’re formation flying, they coordinate telepathically, don’t they.”

“I dunno,” Fred answered. “All I know is Ginny was all over it. She thinks if they can’t play Quidditch, they can have a future in coaching. Let’s see…Ron went on a date with some local Chudley fangirl named Renata.”

“Chudley has fangirls?” George said.

“Apparently. And hey, Ron’s a good strategist. I’m thinking about putting an outside bet on them actually winning with him on the team.” George and Hermione both laughed. “Anyway, it’s been pretty quiet other than that.”

The customers began to trickle in. It was much quieter than the few times Hermione had been in the shop, since those had been opening days or the peak season. They didn’t have so much to do as the
customers milled about, browsing through the wares.

“You know, Hermione,” Fred suggested, “now that you’re all domestic, maybe you could join us in working on new products.”

George narrowed his eyes at his brother, but Hermione chuckled. “Trust me, Fred. I’ll have plenty to do. But I’m sure I can come up with a few ideas… I’m still vetoing Hell in a Handbasket, though.”

“Hm, how about a Bolt from the Blue?” Fred suggested.

She wrinkled her nose: “That sounds even worse.”

“How would you even do that?”

“Dunno, but we can try. What about a Castle in the Air?”

Hermione stopped and thought. “That could work if it’s small enough. More of a coffee table piece, though.”

“Might be able to incorporate it into the toy line,” George suggested.

“I’d like to have more of a theme, though,” said Fred. “Hm, we’ll have to think about it some more.”

She did help some, of course, although it got a bit awkward at times. One young boy was looking at Self-Propelling Custard Pies a little too eagerly, and she thought she’d steer him toward some less messy pranks. However, the boy froze when he spotted the scar on her arm. Hermione blushed and covered it with her other hand. She hadn’t thought so much about her scar in the past year. At Hogwarts, it was covered by her robes, and on their honeymoon, she just wore short sleeves without caring what people thought, but it wasn’t the kind of thing she wanted a child to see. “Sorry,” she muttered.

A middle-aged witch hurried up to join them, apparently the boy’s mother. “Nathan, there you are,” she said, taking his hand.

But the Nathan kept staring. He slowly raised his eyes to her face, and a flash of recognition crossed his expression. “Whoa. You’re Hermione Granger, aren’t you?” he said.

At that, Hermione cracked a smile. “Yes, that’s me, Nathan,” she said warmly.

“But it’s Hermione Weasley now, Nathan,” his mother corrected.

Hermione shook her head. “No, I’m sticking with Granger, ma’am,” she said. “My scholarly career—it’s easier to keep the same name.”

“Oh, excuse me,” the woman said. “Ms. Granger, then. We haven’t met before, but I just wanted to thank you…”

She still got that a fair amount. All of them who had played a major role in the battle did. It didn’t really bother her anymore.

The other excitement of the morning were the jokes and pranks that got tossed around. It started when Fred tried to stick her and George together with a Sticking Charm. The shop tended to do that to people, she reflected. Lighthearted fun was the rule, and random jinxes that might have started a fight at Hogwarts could be a simple joke here. And maybe that wasn’t so bad. Hermione retaliated be
“Rithimus” at Fred when he wasn’t looking.

Fred didn’t notice anything at first. He told the customer, “Seven sickles and fifteen knuts for Weasleys’ Dragon Roasted Nuts.” He stopped and looked around with a funny look on his face. When the customer paid, he said, “Thank you for your coin today. Now, I send you on your way.”

The customer gave Fred and even funnier look and then walked out of the shop. Fred let out a wordless sound of questioning and looked around. When Hermione caught his eye, she smiled and wagged her wand in her hand for him to see.

“You—” he said dramatically and stomped over to her. “—have played an unworthy prank! A Rhyming Jinx upon the flank?”

“Constant vigilance,” she reminded him. “Besides, you deserve it. And it’ll entertain the customers. Isn’t that what we’re supposed to be doing?”

Fred’s face twisted into a wicked, fox-like smile: “If you can dish it out, well then, you’d better take it back again.”

“Say, that’s pretty good,” George said. “Think we could make a product out of that? I know it’s just a jinx, but—”

“Maybe if we do something more sophisticated like making him speak in limericks,” Hermione said seriously, stroking her chin.

Fred glared at them for ignoring him. “To prank the master in his store, of course you know that this means war!”

And they were off. All three of them were pranked or jinxed at least twice before closing time, and some of the customers even got in on it. She was right, she was sure of it. The shop bred this kind of behaviour. But all in all, Hermione thought, it was a good day.

30 July 1999

“Thank you for taking Marcus for the night,” Septima said.

“We’re happy to help, Septima,” Hermione said. “What kind of godmother would I be if I couldn’t give you a break once in a while?”

Marcus Aurelius Vector was sixteen months old and decidedly fidgety as Septima held him in her arms. “Well, thank you all the same, Hermione,” she repeated, grunting slightly as she shifted the child.

“Ne-ne!” Marcus squealed.

“Yes, Marcus, that’s Auntie Hermione,” Septima cooed.

“Here, Marcus,” Hermione said cheerfully, taking the toddler in her arms, trying to get him to stop wriggling. She could tell now the little boy had unfortunately inherited his father’s mop of straw-coloured hair, though he had his mother’s chubby cheeks. She could only hope Septima’s personality would rub off on him rather than either of his birth parents.

“Normally, my nephew and niece take care of him, but—” Septima continued.

“You don’t need to worry about it. I understand. Have a nice night on the town.”
She smiled. “Alright, then. Here’s his bag. That should cover things for the night.” George took the nappy bag from her and set it inside.

“By the way,” Hermione said, lowering her voice. “We haven’t heard anything lately. Has there been any word about Barty Crouch?”

Septima turned serious. Marcus’s unfortunate birth father—the one marked Death Eater still at large, and one of the smartest. “No,” she said. “Completely gone to ground, according to the Aurors. If he’s still alive. I imagine he’ll make a play for Marcus sooner or later, but there hasn’t been any sign. We need to be watchful, though.”

“Don’t worry. We will be ,” George said.

“Thank you. Well, I’m off. I’ll be back later to pick him up.”

“That’s fine. Have fun, Septima,” Hermione said.

Septima took her leave, leaving the young couple with the baby. Almost immediately, Marcus began fussing more and crying.

“Figures,” George said. “The minute she leaves…”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I’m not surprised,” she said, bouncing Marcus gently. “He’s in a strange place with people he doesn’t see that often—it’s okay,” she cooed to him. “You’ll be fine with Auntie Hermione and Uncle George.”

It didn’t seem to be helping. George gave her a questioning look.

“Don’t look at me. I’m an only child,” she said. “You were five when Ginny was his age. Do you have any idea what you’re doing?”

“Do you really think my mum would trust me and Fred with a baby?”

“Great. Well, at least there’s one person in this family who knows how to take care of a baby. Dobby?”

*Pop!* Dobby appeared and hopped eagerly at the prospect of taking care of a little one. He still spent most of his time with Dan and Emma, but he would be a godsend for a young, inexperienced couple like them. He quickly assessed the situation: “He is needing his nappy changed, Ms. Hermione.”

“Thank you, Dobby,” she said. “Ugh, changing nappies. I wasn’t thinking about doing that for at least another five years.”

“But Dobby can do it, can’t he?” George suggested.

She gave him a sharp look: “I won’t have us getting lazy with the children like some pretentious rich purebloods, George Weasley.”

“Okay, okay,” he said, holding his hands up. Then he paused and thought for a minute. “Five years?” he asked, sounding a bit disappointed.

“Well…” she said awkwardly. “I’m not quite twenty, and witches live longer than muggles. I don’t see any need to hurry, especially with my line of work.”

“Ah. I mean to say, I understand,” he said. “My mum might disagree with you, though.”
“Did you…want to start sooner, George?”

“I…I dunno. I just sort of assumed, growing up the way I did…”

There was an awkward silence filled only with Marcus’s whimpers, which Dobby wasn’t any keener to break than the two of them.

“Let’s see how we fare with this one first,” she said decisively.

“Good idea!” George said. “Dobby, how about you teach us how it’s done?”

---

7 August 1999

Hermione watched warily from the north compass point and cancelled her Patronus, ready to cast it again even if it probably wouldn’t help. She felt the icy feeling begin to return and shuddered even as Patricia Rakepick strode forward to stand face to face with the dementor that was now bound and burning in the centre of the ritual circle.

This was the most dangerous part. Hermione had no doubt that Rakepick had the technical competence to perform the ritual, but just as you had to have the right mindset to cast the Patronus Charm, if the woman didn’t have the proper mindset to kill a dementor, disaster could result—and that mindset was something that couldn’t be fully taught.

Rakepick stood her ground and shouted, “I defy you!” The dementor jerked back as if struck. Hermione could see the effort and determination on her face. She pressed on, reciting the three ritual phrases:

“Pou sou thanate to nikos? Pou sou thanate to kentron?”

“Den echete kyriarchia edo!”

“S’ekballo eis to skotos to exoteron, esy pneuma akatharon!”

The dementor was struck more violently each time, and with the third spell, it exploded into a shower of light. The souls trapped within drifted up as sparks from a fire and vanished into the sky. She had the mindset of holy defiance after all. Hermione sighed with relief at seeing the ritual completed perfectly—or nearly perfectly. “Good job—” she started.

Rakepick turned to her with a smile on her face. “Thank you,” she said breathlessly. “That was…exhilarating.”

“Your boot is on fire.”

The Cursebreaker looked down and saw a small flame leaping up from her slowly-charring shoe. “Ah! Aguamenti! Dammit.”

Hermione giggled. “Standing a little too close to the sunbeam. Don’t worry, I’ve done it a couple times, too. Other than that, perfect. Just never do that ritual in sandals.”

“Duly noted, Professor Granger,” she said dryly. “So do you think I’m ready to do it on my own yet?”

“If you mean with your own team, yes, Professor Rakepick. Even I haven’t done it solo yet.”

She had walked Rakepick through the dementor-killing ritual in each of the roles, first as Patronus
Caster, then as Mirror Operator, and finally as Primary Caster. There were other things to learn, too—how to select the appropriate site for the ritual, how to set up the runic circle, and so forth. Hermione hadn’t attempted the ritual solo yet, though. It was tricky because she had to maintain two Patronuses at once with one wand—admittedly doable; McGonagall could manage three—while operating the mirror at the same time, then switching to the banishment spells at the end. She could do it with the Diadem of Ravenclaw, but she wanted to be extra sure before she tried it in the field.

“And yet how many of these things have you killed?” Rakepick asked her.

“Fifty-eight, including that one. That’s no reason to get reckless. I’m working up to a solo slaying by summer’s end.”

She was here every Saturday, now, taking care of another shipment of dementors from Azkaban Island, and sometimes other days too, still ramping up the pace. Even then, it would take years to get rid of all of them; there were over two thousand dementors on the island, but at least Minister Cresswell was serious about eradicating them. That was why it was so important to help more people be able to do the ritual.

“Well, two more to go today,” she said. “You want to take point on these, Professor Rakepick?”

“I might as well,” she replied primly.

The two of them and the two Aurors who were helping walked back to where the other dementors were quarantined, in cages so they couldn’t get away. By now, just bringing them near the cratered ritual grounds was enough to make them rattle at their bars, sensing their coming doom. The intense emotions of fear, despair, and anger radiated from them. Hermione staggered as she approached, the cold seeping in as she heard screaming and Bellatrix’s cackling and felt that ache again, sharper than in her dreams.

George hurried to her side to support her. He still insisted on being here every time. “Are you okay, Hermione? Do you want to take a break?”

“I’m fine,” she assured him. “Got caught a little off guard, is all. It happens.”

“Are you sure you’re okay to keep coming out here twice a week?”

“I can handle it, George. I’ve talked to Dr. Hudson about pacing myself. I’m just not used to not taking point…Actually, Professor, I think I will lead the last one,” she called. “Actually casting the spell gives back some of what the dementors take away.”

In truth, it wasn’t quite that easy. With Dr. Hudson’s help, she was managing, but it was never easy with the foulest creatures on Earth. She was certain that if she came face to face with a boggart now, it would still become a dementor. But that would make it all the better when they were finally rid of them.

“Fair enough,” Rakepick conceded. “I could feel what you mean. It’s…it’s a new feeling, using that kind of magic.” Hermione just nodded. “So, Professor Granger,” she continued, “any thoughts of taking on an apprentice yet? I’m sure you’ve had requests by now.”

“Yes, but I’ve only just graduated, and I’m still trying to establish myself. I don’t think I’m ready for that yet—although there’s a rising sixth-year at Hogwarts I’m keeping an eye on.”

1 September 1999
Hogwarts started that autumn as usual—nothing new and catastrophic happening so far. Things finally seemed back to normal there. The reconstruction was finished with the new Astronomy Tower dedicated just before school started. Granted, Professor McGonagall did have her work cut out for her hiring three new teachers, and the Board were still looking at options for new electives after Divination was cancelled.

For Hermione, she was surprised how little interest she had in the goings on at the school just a couple months after she’d graduated. The only thing she really cared about was the new Arithmancy Professor and the new standards being implemented.

McGonagall had asked Hermione herself to be Arithmancy Professor, to which she’d laughed in her face—then apologised and politely declined, of course. The new professor was a man named Zeno Finch with whom she was somewhat acquainted from the standards committee. He seemed competent enough, and she left it at that.

---

23 September 1999

Luna Lovegood’s wedding dress was the talk of magical Britain—not necessarily in a good way, but Luna didn’t care, and Neville was too dazzled by her beauty to say anything against it. It somehow managed to look like it had the cut of a traditional wedding dress and like it was made out of autumn leaves at the same time in a way that made Hermione dizzy.

“I originally planned to go with rainbow,” Luna said at the reception, “but I thought this would be more appropriate for the autumnal equinox.”

“It’s…it’s very Peter Pan,” Hermione observed. “Whimsical. It works on you.”

“Thank you, Hermione,” she said. “Though I’ve always thought I’m more of an Alice, myself.”

“So where are you two off to?” Ginny asked.

“Winnipeg, Canada, for now,” Neville said. “It’s the best time to see the autumn leaves there, and they’re more colourful than they are in England. Maybe down to the States next week.”

“That sounds nice,” said Harry.

Luna nodded: “And we can look for Snowshoe Jackalopes. We should just catch the end of their breeding season.”

Everyone looked to Neville for clarification.

“Real animal,” he said with a smile, “though I haven’t heard of them living that far north.”

“The Upland Trout might be harder to find, though,” Luna said. “And the Axehandle Hound, there might not be any left since muggles started using chainsaws. But it’ll be fun either way.”

They looked to Neville again, and he shook his head. But like he’d said last spring, there was every chance Luna would discover at least a few of the creatures she talked about, so it would be more than worth the trip in their eyes.

“And we’ll be looking for plants too, of course, right Neville?”

“Of course, Luna-Love,” he said. “I really want to find some Blue Snowdrop bulbs. They’re native to the region, but they only flower in extreme cold.”
“Hermione, George,” Luna said, “didn’t you say you were going to travel the world, too? Arithmancy projects?”

Hermione shrugged. “It’s true. I’ve been focusing on the dementors for now, but I’ve been getting a few letters from people around Europe. Someone in Greece wants me to go take a look at the Antikythera mechanism. Apparently, there are some ancient magical artifacts related to it. And there’s Bolyai Castle in Hungary that seems to have non-Euclidean geometry leaking out of it, if I read the letter right.”

“That sounds like something that’s up your alley,” Harry said.

“Maybe. Non-Euclidean geometry’s less fun when you’re inside it, but I suppose someone has to do it.”

“Well, if you’re travelling, I have some ideas for New Year’s,” Luna asserted. “You should all come.”

Chapter End Notes

Rithimus: Latin for “rhyme.”

For a general update, I want to let you know that my other stories still aren’t abandoned. I just don’t have time to keep pace right now. Once jobs season is over, things should be better. The next chapter of Animagus at War is in progress, and I’ve got another chapter or two of How to Fight a Dragon Army that I want to get posted before How to Train Your Dragon 3 comes out.
Party Like It's 1999

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: For better or worse, JK Rowling owns the Potterverse.

I saw The Crimes of Grindelwald last night, and I thought it was decent, but not great. I think I’ve said before, JK Rowling is a good storyteller, but a bad worldbuilder. In this film, however, she was not on top of her game. I think she was trying to do too many things at once like in Order of the Phoenix and the end of Deathly Hallows. She also broke her own worldbuilding and continuity as badly as she (and the co-writers) did in Cursed Child.

Therefore, for the purposes of my stories, I’m going to consider the Fantastic Beasts movies as an alternate universe to the original Harry Potter books…rather like Cursed Child, in fact. Maybe she meant them to be part of the film canon, but I’m not convinced she even thought that far. Anyway, I will take elements from the new films freely, but I won’t be afraid to leave some things behind.

Caroline Atoll, Kiribati

31 December 1999

09:55 GMT

Hermione looked out at the dark ocean, faintly lit by the flickering torchlight. A warm, tropical breeze blew from the east, and she savoured the feeling of it on her face and gazed up at the sparkling stars. The air was filled with the sounds of crashing waves, calling seabirds, and the drums from the party. It certainly wasn’t how she was expecting to spend New Year’s Eve—especially New Year’s Eve morning—but she couldn’t argue with Luna’s taste.

The beach was rocky, covered with bits of coral that crunched under her sandals, and she could hear George coming easily. She turned around to see him silhouetted against the torches, carrying a pair of wine glasses in his hands. A troupe of Polynesian dancers were gathered on the beach behind him. In the small magical community, they came from all over the Pacific, making for an interesting performance when they tried to dance together.

A ways down the beach on the half-mile-wide spit of land, a similarly-sized group of muggles, including journalists, looked like a swarm of fireflies as they broadcast the beginning of the “new millennium” to the world.

She could just make out George’s smile as he approached. “Care for a glass, dear?” he said.

“No, thank you, George,” she said. “It’s too early.”

George looked pointedly around at the nighttime scene.

“It may be almost midnight here, but my body still thinks it’s ten in the morning,” she insisted. “And have you seen Luna’s itinerary? If I start drinking now, I’m going to pass out somewhere over the Atlantic.”
“You’ll be fine,” he insisted. “We don’t have to be anywhere for hours.”

She sighed. “Alright, but just the one. I’m taking it easy until we get back to Europe, at least.” She took the glass from George and sipped it, and he directed her back to the group.

“Hey, Hermione,” Ginny said cheerfully. She was already a couple drinks in and had acquired several leis around her neck. “This was a great idea Luna had wasn’t it?”

She looked across the group. Luna was dressed as a hula girl or something equivalent and had convinced one of the locals to teach her how to dance. Neville watched her enthusiastically. And Harry—Harry looked perhaps more relaxed than she’d ever seen him—on the ground, anyway.

Hermione smiled. “Yeah, it’s pretty nice,” she said.

“I certainly never imagined celebrating the new millennium like this,” she continued. “There was a time I thought we might be celebrating it in a tent in the woods.”

“Glad we dodged that bullet,” Harry said, pulling her in and kissing her on the temple.

“You know the millennium is next year, don’t you?” Hermione said.


“Technically, it was Prince who said that.”

“C’mon, love, just enjoy the party,” George cut in.

Well, she could do that. A minute later, the music stopped, and everyone joined in the countdown. Luna was somehow counting down in Gilbertese.

“Tenua—uoua—teuana—Tekeraoi nte ririki ae bou!”

Hermione kissed George, and most of the party cast spells into the air. (The muggles down the beach had been told it was a fireworks show.) They stayed at the party a while longer and made small talk with the eclectic crowd, but Hermione and George left early because they had an extra portkey to catch that the others didn’t.

________________________

Sunshine Coast, Australia

31 December 1999

13:09 GMT

The young couple walked around the cars to reach the backyard of the house where the party was being held. When they arrived, they saw a large fire pit and a man cooking on a barbecue. Hermione scanned the crowd and waved when she spotted her parents.

“Hermione, good. You made it,” Dad said. He brought her and George over to meet the family who were throwing the party. “These are the good friends we made while we were living here, Julian and Liz Moorhouse, and their son, Robert.”

Julian and Liz looked a fair bit younger than her parents, and Robert was a boy who looked about twelve. They seemed a good sort, Hermione thought. She and George shook their hands, and Julian asked Mum and Dad, “So this is the infamous daughter?”
Hermione gave her parents a surprised look.

“We didn’t tell them until after your name was cleared,” Dad said. “But we had to explain why we were going back to England so suddenly.”

“It certainly came as a shock to us,” Julian said, “especially when ‘Wendell and Monica’ told us that their real names were Daniel and Emma. It’s good to finally meet you.”


“Pleased to meet you,” Julian said, shaking his hand. The Moorhouses seemed like a fun, laid-back sort. They were certainly interested to hear Hermione’s story of being framed as a terrorist by the “IRA” and what the two of them were up to now. They were rather more interested in the fact that George ran a shop than Hermione’s cover story as a vaguely-defined consultant, but that was perfectly understandable.

“We’ll have to leave a bit early, I’m afraid,” Hermione said later on. “We have another party to get to.”

“Oh? Here?” Liz said in surprise.

“Some of our friends we’re travelling with,” she said truthfully.

“We originally weren’t going to travel at all for New Year’s,” Mum said, “but we thought we’d visit since Hermione and George were going to be travelling in the area anyway,” Mum said. She didn’t mention that “in the area” meant four thousand miles away.

“Oh, come to see the Australia Zoo, then?” said Liz. “That’s where the tourists usually go.”

“The Great Barrier Reef, actually,” Hermione said, giving them a cover story that would justify not staying in town any longer.

“You should see the zoo anyway if you have the chance,” Dad said. “We went to see the crocodile feeding there.”

Mum rolled her eyes. “And your father decided to get Steve Irwin’s autograph.”

George looked between the pair of them in confusion. “Who’s Steve Irwin?” he said.

“He’s an animal keeper who’s famous for—basically for being Hagrid, but normal size,” Hermione told him.

“With crocodiles?” he asked.

“Mm hmm. The world hasn’t ruled out the possibility that he’s crazy.”

Later, they rang in the new millennium a second time, and they stayed and talked a little longer after that, but eventually, they had to leave to catch their Portkey back to Kiribati. On their way out, George mused, “I wonder how that Steve Irwin bloke would react if he saw a dragon.”

Hermione giggled. “He’d probably be thrilled—before he got burnt to a crisp.”

Caroline Atoll, Kiribati

1 January 2000
They made it back to Kiribati in time to watch the sunrise. It was a beautiful sight, seeing the sun peek over the ocean horizon. The dancers had started again, greeting the new millennium, and the warm sunlight seemed to hold the promise of the future.

Of course, for the witches and wizards there, this was only the start.

“Weird to think it’s still afternoon on New Year’s Eve back home,” Ginny said.

“It is odd,” Luna agreed. She’d changed clothes at some point. Now, she was wearing a traditional Chinese dress. “We’re east of Hawaii, but it’s still yesterday morning there.”

“Time zones,” Hermione. “You never appreciate how confusing they are until you travel to the other side of the world.”

“Speaking of which,” Neville cut in. “Don’t we have another Portkey in like five minutes?”

Luna’s eyes grew wide. “Eep! It’s almost time to go!” she said.

---

**Hong Kong, China**

**31 December 2000**

**15:59 GMT**

“Luna, I think you might have cut it a bit close with that Portkey,” Hermione said breathlessly. Even with the Chinese Bureau of Magic helping out, they’d barely made it to the harbour in time without being noticed by the muggle crowds.

Luna shrugged: “I know, but this was the best place to see the—”

She was cut off by the sound of fireworks as the clock struck midnight. Again.

George pulled Hermione in for another kiss, the romantic. They were here because Luna and George had both wanted to see the muggle fireworks, and since they skipped Sydney, Hong Kong seemed to be the best place for it, despite the tight timetable. Hermione could barely hear herself think through the thunderous noise, but she had to admit, it was an impressive show. It lit up the whole sky like nothing she’d ever seen. The only thing that came close was…

Was the bombardment of the wards of Hogwarts during the battle.

She swayed as her mind latched onto the comparison. She tried to shut it out. *It’s different*, she told herself. The tempo. The sounds. The colours, and especially the patterns. Spells didn’t explode in starbursts like fireworks did. She’d even seen the Twins’ fireworks a few times in the past year and a half, which was why this trip hadn’t raised red flags for her, but that hadn’t prepared her for the sight of the whole sky exploding above her.

George grabbed her hand and leaned close to her ear. “Hey! You okay?”

“Yeah,” she said automatically, then corrected herself. “Mostly.”

He looked up at the sky. “Yeah, I got it too. Took me a minute ’cause I work with fireworks so much, but…”
She didn’t answer. Instead, she looked over at Harry and Ginny. Harry was standing still, looking up at the sky. She could see he was shaking. Ginny was holding his hand, and his knuckles were white.

Hermione walked around in front of Harry and waved so she wouldn’t startle him. When he and Ginny looked at her, she asked, “Do you want to go? I don’t think this was a good idea.”

Harry and Ginny looked at each other for a minute. “We’re already here,” Ginny said.

“Might as well stay,” Harry agreed. “Besides, didn’t you say we need to face our fears? Er, unless you want to go, of course.”

She shook her head ambiguously. “It was my therapist who said that, and it’s supposed to be in a more controlled and planned way…” Still, if it worked, it worked. She turned to Neville and Luna. “Are you two doing okay?”

“Of course, Hermione,” Luna said cheerfully. She was smiling, but her smile vanished when she saw Hermione’s face. “Oh, dear. I’m sorry. I didn’t think of that, honest.”

“It’s okay, Luna.”

“Oh, but Neville…”

Luna’s husband was stoic. When he looked down at her, he managed a smile. “I’m okay, Luna-Love,” he said, and Hermione thought it said a lot about their relationship that he sounded sincere, and Luna didn’t question it.

“I thought it would be fun…” she said. “I’d like to come back for Chinese New Year…”

“We can do that,” he assured her. “Something more traditional should be good.”

Despite their misgivings, Hermione did agree it could be good exposure therapy, though she definitely relaxed when the show was over, and they should definitely talk about it later. George was understanding, but he was a fireworks connoisseur, so he had a different perspective.

“Well, I guess that wasn’t so bad,” she said when it was done. “And it was kind of fun. I just think it would have been more fun in a few years.”

“I’m glad it wasn’t too bad for you,” George said. “I really liked the fireworks. They gave me some ideas, too.”

“We’re doomed,” Hermione said.

---

*Flinders Ranges*

*300 miles north of Adelaide, Australia*

*1 January 2000*

*19:05 GMT*

It was twilight when they returned to Australia, in the south this time. They arrived in a rocky scrubland filled with low hills and dry stream beds different from what any of them besides Luna had seen personally. An Australian Aboriginal wizard met them to lead them to the gathering.

“I came here once before,” Luna said softly as they walked. She was wearing an Akubra hat now.
Hermione had stopped questioning it. “Years ago, when Mum was still alive. It’s beautiful at sunrise.”

Hermione could agree. Already, the approaching dawn made the land look like golden flame. And it only got better as they crested the next hill and saw a wholly new magical site laid out before them.

“Wow,” Harry said.

Flinders Ranges was the site of the most important ley line intersection in Australia. At its heart was a stone circle of similar design to the one at Hogwarts. The stone circle in the Flinders Ranges, however, was not hidden in a cave deep under a medieval castle. It sat on a low island in the middle of a shallow lake that spread out like a mirage close to a mile wide before them. A permanent sheet of water as smooth as glass in a region where all the other lakes dried to salt beds.

There were a few other wizards there, but no crowds like in Hong Kong. But they were hardly alone, for before them, the one thing disturbing the lake, lay the largest living thing on planet Earth.

“There he is,” Luna said.

“Oh. My. God.”

The sentiment was unanimous.

It moved like an enormous anaconda through the water, its back exposed like a slowly-undulating ribbon. A cloud of steam billowed from its nostrils like a locomotive. It moved at a surprising speed, faster than a human could move on dry land. As they approached, they could see eyes like glowing furnaces set in deep sockets peeking out just above the waterline. As the crowd grew, several of the native wizards began chanting something, and the beast began swimming toward the shore to meet them.

“Is this safe?” Ginny said.

“Don’t worry. He’s friendly,” Luna said.

The ground began to shake as the thing approached, and then, there were shrieks as a head the size of a house burst out of the water. The Rainbow Serpent of Australia was over a quarter mile long and at least fifty feet in diameter. The enormous basilisk Harry had killed at Hogwarts couldn’t even wrap around its neck. It was so big it could probably swallow a Brontosaurus whole without unhinging its jaws, able to subsist only on the pure magic of this ancient site. Even if it were flesh and blood, it would have to weigh forty or fifty thousand tons, and it was unequivocally a creature of stone. Its scales glistened in every colour of the spectrum like innumerable opals arranged in multicoloured rings a few feet wide, each a slightly different shade. A Greater Elemental of Earth.

The Rainbow Serpent’s head and neck slid out of the water at the edge of the lake. The earth rumbled more violently, and a small hill rose up beneath it, supporting its neck in a position where it could look down at the visitors. The visitors yelped when a forked tongue longer than a Burmese python flicked out of its mouth and licked at the ground. Its tongue was a shiny black with glowing orange cracks like fresh volcanic rock, and intense heat radiated from its mouth.

“I bet even Steve Irwin would freak out if he saw this,” Hermione said.

“I think anyone would freak out if they saw this,” George said. “Are you sure this trip was a good idea? I didn’t even see the basilisk at Hogwarts, and this is damn near giving me flashbacks.”

“If you had seen the basilisk, I don’t think it would,” she assured him. “This looks nothing like it.
This is…magnificent.”

“It’s beautiful,” Harry spoke up, breaking the tension. To her surprise, he was smiling like a schoolboy at the sight. “It’s…” He struggled to find the word. “Magic,” he decided. “Does it have a name?”

Luna spoke with one of the local witches in low tones. Hermione couldn’t imagine she knew the language, but it seemed to be something private between the two of them. Luna looked up and answered, “They local clans call him Wonambi.”

Harry approached the serpent, but stopped a few yards away, holding his arm up against the beast’s searing-hot breath. But he stood his ground, bowed, and said, “Hello, Wonambi.”

“Can you speak to him?” Hermione asked.

“Not in Parseltongue,” he said. “I lost that when—you know—but Fawkes could always—”

A rumble passed through the ground, so deep that they felt it in their feet and their chests as much as heard it.

“What was that?” Ginny asked.

“He was saying hello, of course,” Luna said as if it were obvious.

“Infrasound,” Hermione said. “At that size, he might not be capable of making sounds above the bottom of the piano. Most of his ‘speech’ will be too low to hear.”

“Then how do you know what he’s saying?” said Ginny.

Luna whispered to the older witch again. They discussed for a minute, and Luna looked up when she saw the rest of them staring at her. “I’m sorry. There’s a partial initiation of sorts for outsiders. The…Leader?” She checked the word, and the older witch nodded. “The Leader says it’s a secret.”

“There may be information elsewhere,” Hermione said. “Dumbledore said there are other World Serpents still living…Although I think even he didn’t know much about them.”

“I don’t think even their guardians know that much,” Luna said. “All the Greater Elementals have amazing powers, but the World Serpents are so vast we don’t really understand them.”

“Aside from the power of simply being able to exist at that size, you mean,” Hermione said.

“Well, yes, there is that. And they can travel long distances through solid rock and control the earth itself—”

“Is it okay for us to be here, Luna?” Neville cut in. “I mean, if it’s secret and all?”

This time, the Leader spoke up directly. “We appreciate your consideration,” she said. “You may stay as long as Great Wonambi accepts you as his guests, and he is free to speak to you as he wills.” Which didn’t help much if they couldn’t interpret it, but maybe that was the point.

“Oh, well, tell her thank you, then,” Hermione said as she continued gazing up at Wonambi. “I’d love to get a better view. He’s too big to get a clear picture. Is there any way we can do that?”

“You may approach from the air,” the Leader said. “That is the only way to come close to him.”

That made sense. Wonambi was probably too big to lift his head off the ground, which in turn was
likely why he lived in water.”

“You want a broom?” George asked.

Hermione shook her head: “No, I think this is a good time to show off my newest project.” She bent down and pulled a bundle out of her handbag, which was revealed to be a loose-fitting, black robe embroidered all over with faint runes. Shrugging it on, she raised her arms and lifted into the air.

All the local witches and wizards stopped and stared at her. A few demanded to know how she was doing that, but that was her own secret to keep.

“Looking great, honey!” George called.

“Thank you, George.” It was the first time Hermione had tried her new flying robe outdoors. It still wasn’t as good as Voldemort’s had been, but it had come a long way from her prototype. It still amused her that the new “spell” Voldemort had used to appear more intimidating was something so mundane: a cloth with the enchantments of a flying carpet and cut into a robe.

The hard part was figuring out intuitive controls that still allowed her a good range of motion. This robe was mostly controlled with leg movements, but she’d had to put a fair amount on the arms. She was still more comfortable with it than a broom since it lifted her by her whole body, but it was still hard to do what she wanted and be able to use her arms. It was very much a work in progress.

Wonambi lifted his chin a little as she rose into the air, and his eyes followed her.

“Thank you for meeting us, Great Wonambi,” she told him. There was another infrasonic rumble that felt like a wave of pressure in the air. She still had no idea how anyone could properly talk to him. Still, Wonambi was even more magnificent from above. She could see his full quarter-mile length laid out in the water—hundreds of bands of shimmering colour in a muted, but polished rainbow. And she could bet that, like the fictitious sandworms he superficially resembled, even a Killing Curse could only kill one of those segments at a time. All of the Greater Elementals seemed to have some form of immortality, after all. In fact, if the stories we true, Wonambi had been living since before the end of the last ice age.

She flew along his length, getting a closer look and a few photos. She thought she could learn something about him with continued study, but she honestly had no idea where to start, and they were short on time, so before long, they bid farewell to Wonambi and the Leader and continued on their next Portkey, which was already getting tiring.

---

**Sofia, Bulgaria**

31 December 1999

21:50 GMT

Of course, Viktor insisted on seeing her fly.

“You cannot say you have found new way to fly without broom and not show me, Hermione.”

“He’s got a point,” Harry agreed. “If I hadn’t seen it, I’d sure want to.”

“Hell, even I haven’t seen it yet, and I’m family,” said Charlie. It was a short enough trip that he’d popped down from Romania for this hour, not that distance mattered so much with Portkeys.
“Oh, very well,” Hermione agreed. She put on her flying robe again and did some simple manoeuvres for Viktor. She could tell he was impressed. It was pretty clear it was the robe that was doing it and not some groundbreaking new spell, but since she didn’t give any details (not least because flying carpets were embargoed in most of Europe) it looked more arcane and mysterious than it really was. Viktor soon joined her in the air with George, Harry, Ginny, and Charlie all following soon after—all of them on brooms of course. They flew around for a few minutes and watched from just at the tree line as the muggle fireworks exploded over the city—a much more sensible and measured display than Hong Kong.

Once the fireworks subsided, they were greeted by a new figure upon returning to the ground. Viktor greeted the man warmly: “Minister Oblanski. It is good to see you.”

“You as well, Mr. Krum,” Oblanski said. “And happy millennium.”

“Thank you, sir. This Chavdar Oblanski, Minister for Magic of Bulgaria,” told them.

They all greeted him, but Oblanski was particularly interested in Hermione. “You are Professor Hermione Granger?” he asked.

“Yes, Minister.”

“Were you just flying without broom?”

“Uh huh,” George answered for her. “Because she’s just that good.”

“George,” she chided. “I’m afraid the details are a secret,” she said.

“I am not surprised, Professor Granger,” Oblanski said, “but I had something else to ask. I have heard story dat you are killing dementors in England.”

“Yes, when I have time, sir.”

“Very impressive. I was hoping we could hire your service in near future.”

Hermione frowned. “Oh? What’s the problem?”

“There is nest in mountains dat has proved very hard to unseat and threatens local residents. If you could remove dem for us, it would be very helpful.”

“Ah,” she said. “It would depend how many there are, but I suppose I could do it. I probably will have to charge for out-of-country, considering how many there are to deal with back home, but sure, owl me this week, and we can arrange a date.”

“Thank you, Professor Granger. I look forward to it.”

Viktor was also interested in a longer visit from their group. “And Harry and Ginny, perhaps you could return sometime soon as well,” he said. “I have heard good things about your flying skills. Perhaps you could give exhibition, da?”

Harry and Ginny looked at each other, and Ginny immediately made the decision. “We’re in.”

London, United Kingdom

31 December 1999
“We’re only halfway through, and this is already tiring,” Hermione said. “I feel like Louis Wu in Ringworld, teleporting west around the world to make his birthday last forty-eight hours.”

“Louis who in where?” Harry said.

She rolled her eyes: “Remind me to buy you a copy. It’s a sci-fi classic.”

“Well, I’m enjoying it,” Harry said. “I never got to travel as a kid. It’s good to be able to do it now.”

“It is fun. I always enjoyed my family’s holidays. Just not the whole world in one day, please.”

Harry shrugged. Hermione looked around Diagon Alley, which was as crowded as she’d ever seen it, with a special gathering here at Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes where Fred and George had prepared a New Year’s Fireworks show of their own. Evidently, word had got around, too. She could swear she saw some of the same wizards in London that she’d seen in Hong Kong. Luna’s idea must be more popular than she’d thought.

The clock struck twelve, and the fireworks went wild—not as all-consuming as the ones in Hong Kong, but much more magical. Of course, there were also muggle fireworks over the Thames.

But amid the sparks of the fireworks, Hermione felt a different sort of spark—burning against her chest. Her eyes widened as she pulled out her old Order of the Phoenix ring, still worn, but nearly forgotten on a chain around her neck. She held the ring up and read the message:

BARTY CROUCH IS ATTACKING—HELP—GPV

She knew those initials. “George! Harry! Barty Crouch is at the Vectors’!” she shouted.

A large section of the crowd surrounding them froze and stared. But the Aurors, among them Ron and Tonks, sprang into action, as did her friends.

Hermione and George both knew where the Vectors lived to Apparate there, but most of their friends hadn’t visited directly, and the Aurors would have the same problem. She trusted Harry and Ron to have that in hand, though. For herself, she grabbed George, and they Apparated to the Vectors’ residence. They came down in the trees behind where she anticipated Barty Crouch would be, mindful of staying out of the line of fire.

They Apparated into a noisy battle, but a far cry from the worst they had seen in the war. A line of figures in Death Eater robes stood at the edge of the tree line in front of them, casting a steady stream of spells that impacted like fireworks against the wards of the Vectors’ house. A few spells came out from the house, but there weren’t enough to slow down the attackers.

“Nearly a dozen of them,” she whispered.

“How long before the Aurors get here?” George asked.

“Longer than I’d like. Maybe we can provide a distraction.”

George set his face into a grim expression. “Let’s go, then,” he said.

They sneaked forward, darting from one tree to the next. Some of the pranks might be good right about now, but they’d never planned for this kind of situation, so they had to stick with spells. One of the Death Eaters went down at once, but the other dove out of the way of Hermione’s curse, and
the others began turning, splitting their attention between the wards and their new enemies. Spells began flying their way. One them exploded in the dirt near Hermione with a deafening boom. Her heart started racing. This was the first true fight they’d been in since the war ended, and she almost could have sworn there was a boggart around from the way the feeling of fear crawled over her skin and her thoughts, but she kept fighting.

It was faster than she expected that the Aurors arrived, along with Harry, Ginny, Fred, Neville, and Luna, and suddenly, the tide turned. A dozen fighters ran in from the trees and cut the Death Eaters down with shocking speed.

Except they kept firing spells it random directions even when they went down.

“What the—?” Hermione started, but when they reached the attackers, her heart sank. They weren’t real. The “Death Eaters” were nothing but straw men in black robes rigged to shoot actual fireworks.

George was there beside her, confused. “Wait a minute,” he said. “If these guys aren’t real, then where’s—”

Hermione gasped and whirled around and shouted, “PROTEGO!”

No dice on the dramatic timing. Nothing impacted her Shield Charm. But she wasn’t fooled: “The real Crouch’s invisible somewhere.”

“Sweep the perimeter!” Ron shouted.

They fanned out, searching carefully, but not even a minute later, the wards shattered with a sound of thunder.

“Bugger! Inside! Quick!”

Hermione turned and ran straight at the house. A wave of her wand, and she blew the door in, hoping there was no one directly behind it. She looked back and forth, searching for Septima. When she ran into the parlour, a flash of green lit up in the corner of her eye. She dove, and the Killing Curse passed over her head. Then, she rolled and cast a Stunning Charm back where the spell had come from.

She heard a scream and a baby’s cry. Septima was crawling across the floor, trying to get Marcus away from his deranged father. The rest of her family was scattered around the room, trying to hold him back. Crouch himself looked half-mad, gaunt, with his hair grown long, but that made him no less capable a fighter.

But on the other hand, he was outnumbered ten to one. The Aurors burst in moments later, and Crouch still had the sense to run for it. He threw out a few curses, then smashed out a window and took off. By the time they caught up with him, he Apparated away.

It had happened so fast. Before she knew it, Septima thanked Hermione profusely, and little Marcus hugged her.

“I don’t think he’ll come back anytime soon after that display,” Hermione said. “That had to have taken time to set up, too. It won’t be easy for him to do again.”

“Thank you, Hermione,” Septima said. “I was afraid we wouldn’t be able to get help fast enough.”

“Well, I had a little help. That was good thinking getting that message out, Georgina,” Hermione said.
Georgina blushed faintly. “I had to find it in my room,” she said. “I had it in a box with other mementos from the war.”

“Then it’s all the better that you thought of it. You did good tonight.”

Georgina’s parents and Septima agreed, and Georgina accepted the compliment. It heartened Hermione to see her younger friend’s fast thinking to protect herself and her family. They’d been lucky tonight.

The Aurors quickly finished their sweep of the perimeter and started cataloguing the evidence. As they worked, Ron recapped the situation: “He knew you lot were all travelling for the holiday, I reckon. All of the living slayers of Voldemort out of the country. He probably wasn’t expecting you to show up. And most of us Aurors were tied up in Diagon Alley. It was the perfect time to attack.”

“Except that we were here for midnight, and Georgina got a message out,” Hermione said. “The Death Eaters never worked out the details of the rings, I think, and not many of us still wear them. He didn’t think we could get here quickly. If things had gone differently…” She shuddered.

“Yeah, I know,” Ron said. “He still nearly had us with those fake Death Eaters. He’s tricky.”

“Wonder why he didn’t try to recruit real followers,” Harry mused.

“Dunno, mate,” he said. “Whole country’s against him. A lot of galleons on his head. Maybe he didn’t trust anyone. And he knows it’s possible to throw off an Imperius—*his* Imperius, no less.” Suddenly, one of the other Aurors nudged him in the side. “Oh, right!” he said, taking out a notepad. “Can you, er…describe in your own words what happened here?” he trailed off awkwardly.

Ginny gave her brother a flat look. “You saw half of it yourself,” she countered.

“I’ll need to get a statement,” Ron said.

“Alright, we can do it then, mate,” Harry agreed.

“But can we do it quickly?” Luna said. “We’re supposed to be in New York in a few hours.”

---

*New York City, USA*

*31 December 1999*

*04:59 GMT*

Even after an event like that, their whirlwind tour wasn’t over. Septima, Georgina, and Georgina’s parents assured Hermione they were fine, and some of their other friends were on call, so the travellers did leave to catch their next Portkey.

For muggles, it was impossible to get into Times Square on New Year’s Eve without getting there at least six hours in advance, but once again, wizards were able to bend the rules a bit. Quite a few had followed them from Hong Kong and London. Hermione wasn’t sure how she felt about that, but honestly, she found the view from New York rather underwhelming. A large crystalline ball was “dropped”—which really meant being slowly lowered on a flagpole at an angle that made it impossible to see when it hit the bottom, and it wasn’t even at the top of the building—while everyone counted down to the new year. Then, anyone who had a partner with them kissed, and a million people started singing “Auld Lang Syne” without really knowing the words. It felt like it was less about “watching the Ball drop” and more about *being there* at the biggest and most famous party
And she really was annoyed at the people singing “Auld Lang Syne” that badly. Luna seemed have the same idea because she suddenly started belting out, “Of all the money that ere I had, I spent it in good company…” All of the British wizards in earshot started singing along. The confused looks on the Americans’ faces were one of the best parts of the night.

Howland Island National Wildlife Refuge, USA  
31 December 1999  
05:45 GMT

Their next stop couldn’t have been more different from the cold and crowded Times Square. Seven thousand miles from New York, they found themselves on a two-mile-long island with nothing on it but grass, an eroded concrete pillar, an airstrip that had once been intended for Amelia Earhart…and a sign that said “No Tresspassing” in four languages.

“Um, Luna? Are we supposed to be here?” Harry pointed out.

“It’s fine, Harry. Neville and I got a permit to ‘study the wildlife,’” she answered.

A warm sea breeze was at their backs, now, and seabirds flew through a golden sky against the setting sun. It made sense that Luna wanted to come here, although Hermione was a bit surprised no one else had. Probably because the island was too poorly known. But this was the last sunset of the old millennium—the last land that would see the sun east of the International Date Line.

Yes, this was more her speed.

“So let me get this straight,” Ginny asked her friend. “We saw the first sunrise of the new millennium.”

Luna nodded.

“And then, thirteen hours later, we see the last sunset of the old one.”

Luna nodded again.

“And we’re west of where we started even though the date line goes the other way.”

“Yes.”

“Ugh. Hermione’s right. Time zones are weird. And I say that as someone who took Arithmancy.”

“Just enjoy the sunset, Ginny,” Harry told her.

Hoover Dam, Arizona side, USA  
1 January, 2000  
07:01 GMT

“This is neat,” Luna said as she walked along the sidewalk overlooking Lake Mead. She came to the small plaque that marked the state line. “It was so hard to find a time zone border that was easy to get

Neville laughed and grabbed hold of her on the 2000 side. “I think you’re having a little too much fun with this, Luna,” he said. He pulled her Stetson off her head to get closer to her face and kissed her.

“Where are you getting all these outfits, Luna?” Ginny asked. She’d been wearing an ushanka in Bulgaria, too, and Hermione suddenly noticed she was now wearing chaps and boots with spurs.

Luna shrugged: “Around. And I need my hat back, Neville. I wear a Stetson now. Stetsons are cool.”

He laughed and put her hat back on. “At least we can celebrate the new year twice in the same place here,” he said.

“Good, because I’m starting to feel a bit dizzy,” Hermione said.

“Yeah. At least there’s only one more Portkey to go,” George agreed.

They eventually moved away from the dam on the 1999 side once Luna was finished playing hopscotch between Arizona and Nevada. They climbed over the nearby ridge where it was darker and quieter. It was then that something large and pale flew through the dark sky, illuminated in a moonlit-silver despite no moon being in the sky.

“There he is!” Luna cried, pointing, and then she cupped her hands to her mouth and produced a sound that shouldn’t be able to come from a human mouth—something like a cross between an eagle’s cry and grinding metal. A similar cry answered her, and the pale shape flew toward them.

When it drew closer, it was plain to see what it was. The light wasn’t a reflection. The edges of its feathers were glowing with silvery moonlight. Its six wings beat like a hurricane as it slowed and hovered before them, and it came to rest on a nearby rock, standing tall. It was a Thunderbird.

“Oh, he’s beautiful,” Luna sighed. “I’ve never seen one up close before.”

“He’s…certainly impressive,” Ginny agreed.

“His name is Frank,” Luna said cheerfully.

“Frank?” everyone said.

“Mm hmm. He has the scar on his leg. Newt Scamander’s grandson told Neville and me about him.” Luna approached very cautiously, showing the Thunderbird her open hands. Frank shifted his footing nervously and examined her, but soon, her winning personality calmed him down. He bent down, and she petted him on the head. “Professor Scamander rescued him from traffickers in Egypt. He’s been skittish around humans ever since, but you can still find him in places like this if you know where to look.”

The fourth of the Greater Elementals towered over them. Frank must have had a wingspan of thirty feet. Compared with the others, Fawkes the Phoenix was positively tiny, even though a phoenix was the size of a swan, which was just about the largest mundane bird in the air. Although it made a strange sort of sense: the Greater Elemental of Fire, the most rarefied element, was the smallest, while the one of earth, the densest element, was the largest.

Frank sang in response to Luna’s attentions. Unlike Wonambi, who could only communicate with
something close to an earthquake, Frank could produce a complex and emotive song. While it wasn’t as melodious as Fawkes’s with its tinny undertones, it did sound very much like birdsong—and sometimes like other animals like a dolphin or even an elephant.

“I think he’ll let you pet him if you approach slowly,” Luna said. “Neville, come here.”

Neville approached slowly, as Luna had, while his wife reassured Frank. After a few minutes, Frank let Neville close enough to touch him. Luna carefully introduced the rest of them to him one at a time. Up close, Hermione was reminded of the eagle from *The Rescuers Down Under*, except with something more like a dragon’s tail. He really was a magnificent creature—as much as Wonambi in his own way.

Harry and Ginny slipped away toward the end of the hour, though, and Hermione didn’t think it was for the stereotypical reason. She followed them and found Harry looking out silently at the starry sky over the desert landscape, with Ginny standing some distance away. She knew Ginny must be taking care of him, but Hermione still wondered. “Knut for your thoughts?” she asked.

Harry stayed silent for a minute, but then he answered, “We’ve been thinking about travelling more…You know, seeing the world like this.”

“You could,” Hermione offered. “You’re not hurting for money or anything.”

“I know, but…I don’t think wandering aimlessly suits me. I want to do something more with it.”

Hermione blinked that was surprisingly frank and self-aware for Harry. In fact, it sounded like something Ginny would say. She looked to Ginny. She supposed it wasn’t surprising that they were rubbing off on each other after a year and a half with linked minds.

“Part of it can be exhibition flying, like Viktor said,” Ginny explained. “But Harry’s thinking maybe we can travel for some kind of charity work.”

Harry nodded. “Being out here, we’ve been thinking more about it,” he said.

“Really? What do you want to do?” Hermione asked.

“I dunno. I know I want to do something, but…My first thought was something to do with orphans or other kids in need, but that gets…complicated. I don’t know anything about how stuff like that is supposed to work, plus, I think a lot of overseas orphanages really are as bad as the places Uncle Vernon threatened me with, so is that even the best place to start or…?”

Hermione winced. She’d more than once been tempted to go hunt down Harry’s uncle since the end of the war. “That’s true,” she said. “There’s a reason why orphanages have mostly closed down in Britain. But how to go about it is above my pay grade.”

“We have plenty of time, though, Harry,” Ginny said. “I’m sure we’ll figure something out. And we should get back. It’s almost midnight on this side of the border.”

---

**Pago Pago, American Samoa**

**31 December 1999**

**10:59 GMT**

“Well, this is it,” Hermione said as they counted down the seconds. “The last midnight on the tour.”
“Was it worth it?” George said.

“For you? Of course,” she said. “And I like seeing Luna so happy. But next year, we’re staying home. I don’t care if it’s the real millennium. Once is enough for me.”

The clock struck twelve, officially starting the new millennium for every inhabited land in the world.

“There’s still time to go back to Howland Island,” Luna said a few minutes later. “It’s on maritime time.” She giggled. “It still has another hour.”

Hermione felt queasy. “No thank you, Luna,” she groaned. “I’ve had enough flying through the fourth dimension already. People weren’t meant to take so many Portkeys in one day, and this would mean two more jumps for a time zone where no one lives. Beside, wouldn’t you rather enjoy this place than go back to an empty island?”

“I suppose so,” Luna admitted.

All told, Hermione and George had taken eleven Portkeys to get around the world. They had rung in the new year nine times and had seen two different sunrises before they ever saw the sunset of the day before. All told, they’d been up for nearly thirty hours, and that was enough for her.

“You do look pretty done for the day,” George told her. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m dead on my feet,” she said. “And I really might lose my…whatever meal I had last if I take another Portkey. See, this is why I said we should book a couple nights at the resort here instead of going back to England.”

“I love you,” George grinned.
A Giant Problem

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, even if you’re starting to wish she didn’t these days.

If anyone wants to write Hermione and Georgina’s Excellent Adventures, be my guest. The apprenticeship lasts three years, and only a smattering of it will be shown here, so there’s sure to be plenty more to cover.

24 June 2000

Hogwarts closed for its second year after the war, and Harry and Ginny met Sirius at King’s Cross Station when the Hogwarts Express pulled in. Why he had taken the Express, Harry had no idea, but he’d learnt not to question Sirius’s oddities.

“Hey there, Pup,” Sirius said when he saw Harry. “What’re you doing here?”

“Just wanted to say hi,” Harry said. “We heard a rumour you were leaving Hogwarts. Is there a problem up there?”

“No, no problem. I just didn’t want to do it anymore,” Sirius said.

Harry frowned: “Why not?”

His godfather chuckled. “You think I wanted to be a teacher? Definitely not my style. I’m more used to sticking it to the Man than being the Man.”

Ginny raised an eyebrow. “Sticking it to the Man?”

“Hey, I was a child of the sixties. Come on, since you’re here, what do you say we get some dinner?” Harry and Ginny shrugged and followed him out of the station. “Anyway, my reviews weren’t even that good,” he continued.

“You were a decent teacher,” Harry reassured him.

“Only ‘cause look who you had for comparison. I can do the job, but the kids deserve better than me. I only did the first year for you, and I only did the second year to prove the curse was broken. I recommended Moony for the position for next year if he wants it. I really think he should take it.”

Harry and Ginny had to admit Remus would be better teacher than Sirius, and Sirius seemed happy to be done with Hogwarts. “So now what’re you gonna do now?” Harry asked him.

He shrugged. “Probably just kick back and enjoy my retirement.”

“You’re retiring at forty, you deadbeat!” Harry exclaimed.

“Hey, that’s ‘filthy rich deadbeat’ to you. Besides, you haven’t even had a job yet.”

“Ginny and I have actually been doing stuff, though.”
“We’ve done exhibition flying in three countries,” Ginny agreed.

“And yet I’m the one with a Firebolt Millennium,” Sirius retorted.

They stopped. “You’ve already bought a Firebolt Millennium while you were busy at the school?” Ginny said.

He grinned: “The better question is, why haven’t you bought a Firebolt Millennium already?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I tried the Firebolt Millennium. They asked me to when it was in development. The handling is mediocre. Bloody fast, but too much of a hair-trigger. I don’t know how that happened after the original was so good.”

Sirius frowned. “Probably the war. Did they lose anyone who worked on the original?”

“I…don’t know,” he admitted. “I do know they were planning to release a Firebolt II in ’98, and the war delayed them for a couple years.”

“Hmm, might be that, then. Still, I’m good with the ‘bloody fast’ part.”

“Of course you are.”

22 August 2000

It had taken nearly two weeks from when Hermione saw the press release to contact the Swiss Ministry, convince them of just why this trip was so important, locate someone at CERN who was read into magic (they employed so many people that there were a couple), and arrange a trip for her to visit, but at last, she was in Geneva, where she could finally start up her work on antimatter.

They also asked her to kill a few dementors while she was in the country, but it was mostly for the antimatter.

Her contact, Dr. van der Werf, met her in the front lobby. He was an older man dressed far more casually than she’d expected. She’d never been around muggle scientists much before, but a surprising number of them at CERN were in T-shirts and jeans. He smiled when he saw her.

“Dr. Granger, it’s an honour to meet you,” he said, shaking her hand vigorously.

“Pleasure, Dr. van der Werf,” she replied. “Thank you for meeting me…Just call me the Doctor.”

Van der Werf gave her a funny look.

“Sorry. I can’t get anyone in the magical world to call me that either.”

“I can imagine,” he said. “My son was so excited when he told me about your work on magic and radioactivity. I even read the paper. I didn’t know the magical theory enough to understand it, but what I followed of the math was good work.”

“Thanks. And you’d be the opposite of everyone else, then,” she said. “They only understood the magical theory.”

“Ah. Shame.” He led her through the hallways to the control centre. It was almost like something she’d expect from NASA, albeit more stylised. Researchers bustled around long, semicircular rows of desks that were lined with a near-solid wall of computer monitors stacked two high, all showing various aspects of the equipment and data processing for the facility.
“So, you wanted to hear about the new Antiproton Decelerator?” van der Werf asked.

“Yes. They told you about my new project?” she asked.

“Did they ever.” He lowered his voice. “I nearly had a heart attack when the Swiss Minister for Magic told me you were worried about using magic to create antimatter.”

“Yes, but I strongly suspect it’s impossible,” she corrected. “And I also suspect the Swiss Minister was just parroting the words. I’m trying to prove it’s impossible, but I need magical readings of actual antimatter.”

Antimatter was extremely difficult to come by, for obvious reasons. Natural potassium produced positrons, but it was only one in a hundred million atoms in an element where the relevant isotope had a half-life of over a billion years, so it was almost undetectable. Hospitals produced short-lived positron sources for PET scans on the spot, but only in tiny amounts. University laboratories might have sodium-22 tabletop sources of positrons, but they were still just positrons, and seeing how electricity and magic interfered with each other, she wasn’t sure they would give accurate readings.

There were no antiproton sources at all outside international facilities like CERN.

“Well either way, I’ll help you with that any way I can,” he said. “That isn’t something we want to let lie.”

“Yes. Let’s start by seeing how the machine works.”

“Of course.” He led her to one of the desks, and she began taking notes on a small notepad. “We produce antiprotons by bombarding an iridium target with protons from the Proton Synchrotron,” he explained. “We then feed them into another synchrotron ring to slow them down. It’s quite simple; he just have to reverse the polarity.”

Hermione gave van der Werf a sharp look.

“Sorry,” he said. “I just like saying that. But it’s the same principle. With the opposite polarity, the magnets slow the beam down instead of accelerating it. We keep it focused by bleeding off energy by synchrotron radiation and cool the beam from 25 GeV to 5.3 MeV where we can deliver it to other experiments.”

She jotted down the numbers and made the conversion to both speed and temperature. They were numbers that could be considered “cool” only by the ridiculous standards of particle physics: nearly a tenth the speed of light and about fifty billion degrees. Not the best conditions to be working under, but she’d have to take what she could get.

After studying the setup for a while, she asked, “How close can I physically get to the beam?”

“You mean while it’s running?” van der Werf said. “About a foot of metal shielding and equipment. It just runs through a pipe that goes through the tunnel. Although if you need to get to one of the detectors, you won’t get anywhere close.”

“The pipe should work if anything will. Would it be possible to put some temporary detection spells on it to get some readings?”

He looked around cautiously. “I probably shouldn’t, but yeah,” he said. “If they’re short-acting, and they don’t interfere with the equipment too badly.”

Van der Werf took her down to the beam line, and Hermione tried a few spells. Unfortunately, when
she actually took her readings, she ran into the obvious problem.

“Damn, I was afraid of that,” she groaned.

“What? Was your theory wrong?” van der Werf said nervously.

“No, no, not that. It’s the fact that the antiprotons are ionising radiation independent of being antimatter. Ionising radiation interferes with magic, and I can’t get a clear read on them. I’d need neutral antihydrogen to do that, but considering you can only make a few atoms at a time…”

“Oh, of course, your original paper,” he said. He was refreshingly quick on the uptake. “Yes, I can see how that would be a problem. I’m sorry I can’t help you any more than this…There might be a chance, though. If you come back in two years when we have ATHENA up and running, we’ll be able to produce cold antihydrogen in bulk.”

Hermione twitched. “Define ‘cold’ and ‘bulk’,” she said.

“We designed it to run at fifteen kelvin—below the critical point—and we’re hoping for on the order of ten thousand atoms in a shot.”

“Oh. That’s…actually pretty close to what I need. Contact me when I can come and see it, will you?” she gave him her card. “And thank you for your help.”

1 September 2000

Minerva McGonagall was ready for a new year at Hogwarts. It promised to be a good year, she thought. Finally, the echoes of the war were fading. The staffing lineup had stabilised with her three new permanent hires. She was grateful that Remus Lupin had agreed to come back, bringing his family with him. It had been a long time since they’d had young children visiting the school. She’d almost forgotten what it was like seeing a toddler run around the castle, but it was a nice change.

Minerva had also scored a major coup by finally getting rid of Binns. She’d had to reach out to the continent to find a replacement, but it would be well worth it.

And finally, she made one more major shake-up at the school. Looking back at the whole of the past decade and her part in it, she concluded with a heavy heart that she had not been as effective as she could have been, and it was because she’d been trying to take on too many duties. So she decided it was high time for Hogwarts to have a full-time Deputy Headmaster. For that position, she’d managed to convince Phoebus Penrose from the Ministry of Magic to join the school this year.

Maybe this would truly be a normal year. Wouldn’t that be strange?

25 December 2000

Percy stood up at the Weasley Family’s Christmas dinner with an important announcement. Audrey Sprayberry, the girlfriend he’d brought home a few months ago and whom he’d met during his brief stint as Acting Minister, stood up with him.

“Mum, Dad…the rest of you lot,” Percy said.

“Oi!” Ron and Fred protested.

Percy ignored them. “We have some news for you,” he continued. “Audrey and I are getting married
next spring.”

That got plenty of applause from the family. Molly practically squealed over the prospect of another daughter-in-law, of course. Ron, who was currently unattached, congratulated them politely.

Only Fred didn’t look immediately happy for them. Instead, he looked around at the table and said, “Well…this is awkward.”


He broke into a grin: “Because Angelina and I are getting married, too.”

1 July 2001

Georgina Vector, newly graduated of Hogwarts and the proud holder of an Outstanding N.E.W.T. in Arithmancy, stood tall as her heroine regarded her. She had expected some more ceremony for this—maybe a shadowy room where Arithmancers in billowing robes chanted…something. She wasn’t sure where she was going with that. But instead, Hermione seemed relaxed. She had invited Georgina over to her and George’s flat for dinner, and the place looked…lived in. Nothing fancy, even though they could afford it, with half-finished pranks and arithmancy projects stacked on one side table, with the promise of more in the back room. There were even a pair of house elves tending to a tiny, squeaking elf baby—house elves in proper clothes, no less.

“So, Georgina, you want to be my apprentice?” Hermione said. “You can relax by the way. We’re friends.”

Georgina tried to calm down. “Er, yeah,” she said. “I want to follow Aunt Septima, and honestly, who else could do it but you, Hermione?”

“Oh, any Master Arithmancer could,” she answered. “And keep in mind, I won’t be like a normal mentor.”

“I know! That’s why I want to study with you—because you’re the best in the world.”

Hermione chuckled. “That might be true, but it also means I’ll expect a higher standard of work from you. For any apprenticeship, it would mean three more years of education, and difficult years at that. But by my standards, your seventh year is when you’re just starting to do real maths. You’ve only learnt the basics. And there’ll be quite a bit of travel, too. We’ll be investigating interesting arithmantic cases around the world. I’ll need you as an assistant for that as much as an apprentice.”

“Sure,” Georgina said. “I understand.” Plenty of masters made their apprentices do the menial tasks, or so the stories said. She was prepared for that.

“And there’ll be some risk—not like in the war, but it will mean exploring old, abandoned buildings, possibly encountering curses and magical traps. And of course dementors. I’m still killing dementors regularly, and I’d be remiss if I didn’t teach you that, too.”

Her eyes widened. “You’d teach me how to kill dementors?”

“Do you know how many of those things there are around? I need more people to be able to kill them if we’re ever going to be rid of them—people I can trust. Any apprentice of mine is going to need to be able to do that.”

“Wow, that’s great.”
“Uh huh. You say that now. But mostly importantly of all,” Hermione said, “you should know, I have no idea what I’m doing.”

She froze. “Uh…what?”

“If you want to do this, you need to know what you’re getting into, Georgina, but the truth is, even I don’t know yet. I’m still learning myself what being a professional arithmancer is like, and for being a freelance arithmancy consultant, along the lines of a cursebreaker? I’m completely making it up as I go.”

“Oh…” Georgina said. “But you know the arithmancy, right? Even if you don’t know what you’re doing, I know you can teach. And even if the rest doesn’t work out, your name on your resume will look pretty damn good. I’m sure about this.”

Hermione nodded solemnly. “Very well. There will be restrictions, of course. Advanced arithmancy can be very dangerous if you don’t know what you’re doing. I’ve invented a lot of new techniques myself: atomic rearrangement, soul magic, analytic ritual-craft. You are not ready for those…In fact, you shouldn’t even try to do spellcrafting on the fly like I do. That takes the same kind of mental discipline I use to do complex calculations in my head. I can teach you those skills, but it will take more time and effort, so don’t go running off trying to do them on your own.”

“Okay, Hermione, I get it,” Georgina said. “I’ve seen what you can do. And I’ve heard stories of people who delved into things they weren’t ready for. I’ll be careful of my limits.”

“All right, then,” she replied. “You know, I think its time I finally arranged that trip to Russia. I could use your help there.”

“Ooh,” George interrupted from the side of the room. “Making sure she serious?”

“A little. But I really have put it off too long.”

Russia? What’s the big deal about Russia? Georgina thought, but she answered, “Sure, I can do that.”

“Excellent,” Hermione said. “Welcome to the team…my young apprentice,” George chuckled for some unknown reason.

“Yes…Mistress,” Georgina said.

“Don’t call me that.”

18 July 2001

Hermione, George, Georgina, and Hagrid made up the group that entered the valley. They had considered both Grawp and Madam Maxime to join them, but the giants dealt with small groups better, and between Hagrid and Hermione, they should be able to deal with any trouble.

“Me and my big mouth,” Georgina mumbled.

Most witches and wizards feared the giants, and with good reason. They were big, aggressive, and magic-resistant, and that meant bad news for any wizard anywhere near them. With Voldemort’s half-dozen giants in his army, the Battle of Hogwarts could have gone much worse if Snape hadn’t started using Killing Curses on them. No sensible person wanted anything to do with them.
And yet Hermione wanted to save them. Georgina had heard her mention this idea over the past three years, but she’d never explained it in detail to her until now. The giants were going extinct, she said. There were too few of them left to sustain a viable breeding population, and they would all be gone within their lifetimes. But the muggles, she claimed, had ways to save their race—to create new giants from nothing but their blood.

That was hard enough to believe, since it sounded like something only a powerful alchemist or a seriously dark ritual could do, but beyond that, Georgina just didn’t see the point. “Why bother?” she’d said. “Just let them go—”

She was cut off by the most awful look she’d ever seen on Hermione’s face—not angry, as terrifying as that was to see, but contemptuous and disappointed. To see that from her as either a friend or a mentor hurt. It was a small, probably unconscious glance as her scarred arm that made Georgina see her mistake. She apologised profusely, and she still feared Hermione would end her apprenticeship on the spot, but she didn’t.

Hermione was silent for an uncomfortable long time, and then she said, “I don’t think we think the same way, Georgina.” And before Georgina could interrupt, she added, “I don’t blame you. It’s just that it’s easy to forget sometimes that we do come from different worlds…I’m invoking my authority as your Arithmancy Mistress here. I could tell you all about it, but I think the trip itself will do you more good.”

That felt a bit ominous. Georgina would have gone on the trip anyway, but that shut up any objections she’d had.

And she didn’t like to think about it, but she thought Hermione was right. They didn’t think the same way. What Voldemort and the Death Eaters had done to muggleborns—their fellow witches and wizards—was horrendous, and she wouldn’t wish that on anyone, but if the giants died out on their own…well, she didn’t have that visceral reaction that Hermione did. She just wasn’t used to thinking about the giants like that.

Which was why Georgina was now descending the mountainside to the camp of the giants deep in the Ural Mountains, and she was shaking. This was not how she’d expected an arithmancy apprenticeship to go. She was already running on Pepperup since it wasn’t safe to sleep near the giants’ camp (not to mention the snoring could deafen you), so they had to keep a watch. And going to meet the giants really was dangerous. Hagrid had emphasised that very well.

“All use any magic unless it’s an emergency,” he’d said. “They don’t like it. Don’t surprise ‘em. And when we walk up to them, keep yer eyes on the Gurg. That’s the key: keep yer eyes on the Gurg. It’s disrespectful if yeh don’t before he recognises yeh, and the others won’t bother yeh while he’s talkin’ to yeh.”

That didn’t make her feel any better. As they drew closer to the camp, some of the giants stomped out and roared in challenge, beating their breasts. It felt like an earthquake. But Hagrid was on it. He held up the roll of cloth high and called out, “We bring a gift for the Gurg!”

Some more roars sounded from around the valley, and after a minute, the giants backed off. The four of them walked forward and quickly located Hraudung, the Gurg, lounging beside the lake with a giantess beside him. He was massive. Grawp towered over Hagrid, but Hraudung would be half again as tall as Grawp if he stood up. Dutifully, Georgina kept her eyes on him as they approached, no matter how much the giants they were passing made her nervous.

They arrived before the Gurg, and Hermione snapped her fingers and pointed at the ground. Hagrid set the roll of cloth down in front of Hraudung. “Greetings, Gurg of the Giants,” she announced. “I
am Hermione Granger of Britain. I bring you a gift.”

Nice and simple, like Hagrid said. You didn’t want to confuse them because a confused giant was an angry giant. They stood motionless, watching Hraudung. Georgina itched to pull out her wand, or to look around and keep an eye on the other giants, but she didn’t. In the corner of her eye, Hermione stood calmly, or was very good at faking it with Occlumency.

Hraudung roared something that sounded an animal braying at a deafening volume, and Georgina flinched, but she stood her ground. Moments later, another giant came over, shorter and leaner, but still big enough to make the ground shake when he walked. Hagrid nudged her with his boot when she started to look that way, and she quickly turned her eyes back to the Gurg.

“Gurg says, ‘What did you say?’” the smaller giant rumbled.

Hermione repeated her greeting, word for word, and the smaller giant translated it into their deep, braying language. On hearing this, Hraudung’s eyes lit up. He lazily rolled the cloth to him and inspected it. It was black, thick, and incredibly tough—not dragon-hide, but at least as strong physically and charmed against damage from casual or accidental contact with fire. It had taken a lot longer than Georgina had expected to make, too. Hraudung examined it, soon noting its strength, and he rumbled a question.

“Gurg says, ‘What is it?’” the translator said.

“It’s called nanofibre.” Hermione enunciated the word. “I made it.”

Hraudung passed the cloth around, though only to what seemed to be a trusted few. They also examined it and tested its strength. They had knives of some sort, but they still had a very hard time cutting it. Finally, the Gurg made a pronouncement.

“Gurg says, ‘Nan Fibber is a good gift. I am pleased.’”

“Thank you, Gurg. I am glad,” Hermione said. “I ask the Gurg to speak with us when we return tomorrow with another gift.”

Hraudung agreed, and they left, walking backwards until they reached the edge of the camp and then continuing to a nearby cave. Georgina nearly collapsed as the adrenaline left her system. She hadn’t even done anything, and she was completely on edge. “Bloody hell, is it always this tense?” she gasped.

“Worse when there were Death Eaters tryin’ ter compete with us,” Hagrid said. “I think that went well.”

Georgina groaned and flopped onto her back.

19 July 2001

The second day in the mountains was nearly as tense as the first to start with. Hermione led the way down into the valley and presented their second gift, a giant-sized burning glass for starting fires, charmed unbreakable and made from…actually Georgina wasn’t sure what it was. It wasn’t normal glass, though. Hraudung seemed pleased that they’d done what they’d said, and he invited them to sit and talk. That was when things finally relaxed—as much as they could around giants, anyway.

Once they sat down, they were allowed to look around at the camp. It wasn’t much. There were campfires and a few lean-tos, but most of the giants, if they had anything at all, slept on what looked
like nests of small branches and leaves that actually must have taken serious time and patience to make. Apparently, they were big enough that the elements didn’t bother them. Hermione claimed gorillas in Africa did the same thing, which again didn’t inspire Georgina with confidence.

They stayed and spoke to the giants for a while. Hermione introduced the rest of them and explained the George was her husband, Georgina was her “servant,” and Hagrid was the son of Fridwulfa, though hardly any of the giants remembered who she was. Then, they explained in simple terms that the new Ministry in Britain wanted to be friends with the giants and that all but one of the bad wizards were dead or captured. All of them said their piece then, including Georgina, which was nerve-wracking, but Hraudung and some of the others seemed to like what they had to say.

Hermione also carefully broached the topic of what life was like for them in the valley. This elicited the expected grumbling about it being too crowded and some of the giants not liking each other. Then came the first big play: they asked where the giants would like to go if some of them could leave and said they would talk to the Russian Ministry about doing it. This was risky because it wasn’t certain they could follow through, but Hagrid took the lead there and explained it all in a way he claimed satisfied everyone. With that idea planted, they promised to come back with another gift tomorrow and left.

20 July 2001

Today, Georgina was far more relaxed than she’d expected, able to really pay attention now that the third meeting had started smoothly. Hermione’s third gift had been a surprise—a hunch based on Grawp’s love of the bits and bobs around his hut, especially the noise-making ones. It was a musical instrument: a set of tubular bells that was the size of a child’s toy piano to Hraudung—big enough that Hagrid was needed to carry it. You could play it by flicking the little mallets that were attached, but the really magical part was that it was enchanted to play multiple songs on its own at the touch of a lever.

Hagrid thought it was a good idea, and Hraudung loved it. He also insisted on playing it and listening to it for quite a while before settling down to talk to them again, but they eventually got back to business.

“There aren’t enough giants left,” Hagrid explained it. “Yer all one tribe, and yeh can’t get wives from other tribes like yeh should.”

Hagrid had Dumbledore’s old notes about the giants. Apparently, they used to practise exogamy to prevent inbreeding because they lived in such small tribes. But now, there was only one giant tribe left, even though it was bigger than normal, so they couldn’t do that anymore, and inbreeding was worsening.

That was partly the Russian Ministry’s fault for making them all live in one valley. Hermione had speculated that the Russian Ministry wanted them to go extinct, and Georgina could believe it. But of course, to someone like Hermione, that was Dark Lord stuff, and she wasn’t going to stand for it.

“We have some of the old tribes,” Hraudung said through his translator, and he rattled off some of their names in a feat of intellectual prowess that surprised Georgina. “We can still follow the Rules. What else can we do?”

“But tribes can die out,” Hermione said. “Just like families for us. If something bad happens, and there are no more sons.”

“I saw the tribal marks of the giants Voldemort took ter Hogwarts, Gurg,” Hagrid said. “They were
They were? Georgina hadn’t known that—or even what that meant. “Excuse me. What’s…Tribe Gogmagog?” she spoke up.

“The giant tribe that lived in Wales before they were expelled,” Hagrid said. “Me mum’s tribe. I reckon they wanted ter go back fer revenge.”

Through some gentle prodding, they eventually convinced Hraudung that he had a problem. He wasn’t happy about that, but Hermione said she knew a solution.

“There’s a new ritual called ‘cloning,’” she said. “It uses giants’ blood to make more giants. It’s very powerful, and that means it takes a long time, but we know it works because people tried it on smaller animals. We can use cloning to make more giants who will be a different tribe. And if we have blood from many giants, it will make them stronger.”

Slytherin that she was, Georgina was sure Hraudung would be suspicious of this whole thing—and not without reason. From what Hermione had described coming out here, she was massively overselling what cloning could do, but she was certain continued research and magical help would solve the problems. As for the giants, they looked a little leery, but the group had already proved their good intentions by bringing gifts, so that gave them a lot of trust.

Hermione explained what she needed, and Hraudung ordered his translator to try it first. It was simple, if mind-numbingly dangerous, and not for the giants. Hagrid cut the giant’s palm with his super-sharp dagger, the one Hermione had given him that would cause very little pain, and Hermione collected a small phial of blood from the cut and labelled it.

Georgina got up and touched George’s shoulder before they started. “I think we should be ready for trouble,” she whispered to him. He looked around and quickly agreed. The two of them walked a short distance away to where they could draw their wands quickly in case the giants suddenly decided they didn’t like this.

But the translating giant (they never had learnt his name) seemed okay with it. Then, Hraudung ordered another giant to give his blood, and they repeated the process. Through some cajoling and appeals to his pride, Hagrid soon convinced Hraudung himself to do it. Hermione was determined to collect the blood of every giant in the valley, and…honestly, it wouldn’t take that long. There were so few of them.

That thought was what made Georgina see the whole situation with new eyes.

There were so few giants anymore. She looked around and really paid attention. The giants were a simple folk, but they were still people. Hraudung’s conversation made that increasingly clear. Their size made them look more numerous than they were, but these few, sixty or so in number, were all that were left in the world. Worse, they were shunned by all, and they were battered and bruised, which according to Hagrid was from being forced to live in a (for them) confined space where they constantly butted heads with one another.

These were the last of a once-great race that spanned the globe: pushed to the margins of society, wanted killed by some, and then exploited by Voldemort for curse fodder, which lost them six or eight of their already small numbers. Even now, they were rapidly dying out with little chance to recover.

She didn’t fully understand it, it came up on her so unexpectedly, but Georgina suddenly felt very sad about it. She began to see where she’d gone wrong with Hermione, and that something truly valuable would be lost if the giants were allowed to die out.
“Georgina?” Hermione said, breaking her out of her musings. She’d paused in her work, watching her with concern. “It’s something wrong?”

Georgina collected herself. She knew what she needed to do. “How can I help?” she said.

14 September 2001

“Georgina, I need my notebook on Extension Charms,” Hermione said. Her apprentice quickly retrieved it from her luggage and handed it to her, and she began leafing through it.

Harry was attempting to lighten the mood a bit, talking to some of MACUSA’s Aurors. “It was right after we got here this morning,” he said. “People were already asking for my autograph. I mostly ignored them, but then, this little kid came up to me and said, ‘You’re Harry Potter, the stunt flier!’”

Hermione and George both laughed inappropriately. The American wizards around them were stone-faced.

Ginny giggled a little: “I know it sounds daft, but Harry nearly started laughing and crying at the same time. It was the first time anyone’s ever said that to him,” she explained for the benefit of the bystanders.

“I’m sorry,” Hermione composed herself. “Really. It’s, er…that would have been a lot funnier in Britain.”

“Eh, I can understand,” one of the Aurors said. “Living lives like ours, you get by anyway you can. By the way, Mr. Potter, I believe we may be distant related. I’m Senior Auror Eliakim Potter.”

Harry and Ginny both stared. “Er…pleased to meet you,” Harry said. “I’ve never met another Potter before. We’re the last ones in England.”

Hermione let them catch up because at that moment, David Anderson from the American Arithmancy Association arrived to help her team. “It’s good to see you again, Professor Anderson,” she greeted him. “I wish it were under better circumstances.”

“Indeed. Likewise, Professor Granger.”

“Oh, and this is my apprentice, Georgina Vector,” she introduced. Georgina shook his hand. “How bad was it here at MACUSA?”

“One wizard died,” Anderson said. “Muggle-born. We’re pretty sure he was in the North Tower right where the first plane hit and didn’t have time to Apparate away. There was some damage to the upper floors of the Woolworth Building, but at least no pieces of the planes went through it. All the utilities are out, and of course, you can see the mess outside.”

“Damn. I’m sorry to hear that,” she said.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Anyway, I assume you’ve been told, we need to get the Woolworth Building in shape so we can keep running MACUSA out of it without attracting muggle attention. And it needs to be extra-safe for this afternoon. President Bush is coming to tour the site, and security’s going to be a nightmare.”

Hermione looked up. “Oh? I hadn’t heard that bit. But I’ve been thinking about it.” She showed him her notes. “Look here; there should be a way to overlap the spaces more seamlessly. Connect them to a switch like a muggle-worthy compartment in a suitcase instead of just hiding it behind a wall.”
“Maybe. The power requirements, though…” Anderson said.

“They shouldn’t be much more than you need to hide the magical part of the building anyway,” Hermione said.

“Hmm…yes, I can see that. And it’s mostly the areas around the doors we need to worry about anyway. Okay, I think we can implement this in the time we have. Come on, there are some folks from Magical Accidents and Catastrophes who are supposed to help us. Ah, and there probably aren’t any here, but we need to keep an eye out: if we find any human remains, we’re supposed to put them in evidence boxes, label them, and hand them to the muggle cleanup workers or police.”

Hermione frowned. That reminded her uncomfortably of the aftermath of the Battle of Hogwarts, but there was always going to be something somewhere. She and Harry had agreed to send a letter to MACUSA asking if they needed any help the day of the attacks. To their surprise (perhaps because they were war heroes), MACUSA said yes. Hermione was lending her Arithmancy experience. Anderson was right; it would be difficult. President Bush personally was in the know, but the Secret Service weren’t and wouldn’t be so easily distracted by the magical equivalent of, “Look over there!”

Harry mainly wanted to help people in need here, but MACUSA had him doing threat assessment. Ginny and George were helping with what cleanup there was in the magical part of the building and its surroundings. The debris clouds from the collapse had reached the Woolworth Building and beyond, so there was plenty to do there.

“I’m kind of surprised MACUSA’s getting involved at all,” Georgina said after everything was explained to them. “Everything I’ve heard says they take separation from muggles very seriously.”

“I imagine it has something to do with the attack happening three blocks away from their own headquarters,” Harry said. “And they’re still hardly doing anything to help the muggles,” he grumbled.

“I know you want to help, Harry, but it kind of is a muggle thing,” Ginny said. “Not everything bad that happens is caused by dark wizards.”

Hermione didn’t like it much, either. She knew why it was necessary, but people needed help out there. “Well,” she suggested, “when we have a bit more time, it seems like there’s always a nest of dementors around somewhere that need killing. And Georgina needs the experience.”

“Oh, that’s right,” Eliakim Potter said when he overheard. “You’re the Demonslayer, aren’t you, Ms. Granger?”

She raised her eyebrow. “Is that what they’re calling me now?”

“Well, some people. Discovering how to kill dementors is no small feat.”

“Hm. I’m not sure why I didn’t expect to get that from humans,” she admitted. “Now, the dementors, of course—my reputation has spread among them?”

“Really? How do you know?”

“The last nest of dementors I cleared out? They’d heard of me. When I walked in, they panicked and said, ‘It’s the Angel of Death.’”

Auror Potter whistled long. “Damn,” he said. “When even the demons call you that, you must be doing something right. I’d like to see that.”
“Well, maybe in a few days when things calm down in New York, we can arrange something. George? Are you interested in staying a bit longer?” she called.

“I think we can squeeze it in,” he agreed.

It seemed like a good plan, and they made arrangements. The next morning, however, Harry and Ginny announced they were going home early for health reasons.

“Is something wrong?” George asked with concern.

“I’m pregnant,” Ginny said.

31 October 2001

The good mood lasted six weeks.

Molly was over the moon, of course. This was only her second grandchild. Sirius and Remus tried to give Harry a celebratory cigar as a joke, which Ginny was not happy about. Remus was also excited because he and Tonks were already expecting their second, so their child would have a friend going to Hogwarts. Although that didn’t portend well for Hogwarts.

Things were going pretty smoothly until Arthur burst into Hermione’s and George’s flat from a dreary Halloween rain. He was out of breath and looked pale as a ghost.

“Arthur?” she gasped.

“Hermione, you’re needed at the Ministry. Now,” he said.


“Not yet, but it’s bad. There’s been a mass breakout at Azkaban!”

Hermione blinked in confusion. “But there are no prisoners in Azkaban.”

“Not prisoners. Dementors! Over five hundred dementors smashed through the wards and scattered all over the North Sea.”
The Fall of Azkaban

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: (Insert sounds of “Also Sprach Zarathustra” here.) That has nothing to do with JK Rowling, but whatever.

Ugh, finally. I’ve really been trying to get this done, but between the holidays, getting distracted by another story, and this being a complicated chapter, I just haven’t been able to get through it. I want to try to finish the next one this week, but no promises.

1 November 2001

“Potter luck,” Harry grumbled. “I’m telling you, it’s my bloody Potter luck.”

“How is it your bad luck, Harry?” Hermione said. “The dementor eradication is my project.”

“Because I’m helping put out fires at the Ministry in the middle of the night and not in bed with Ginny right now.”

“Oi! Too much information,” George said half-seriously.

Hermione smacked him in the arm: “Get your mind out of the gutter, George. This isn’t the time.”

The major players in magical Britain were rapidly assembling in the Ministry Atrium, including quite a few of Hermione’s friends and family. One young woman in hastily assembled robes stumbled out of the Floo and made a beeline for Hermione.

“Hermione!” Georgina said. “I got your Patronus. How bad is it?”

“Bad,” she said. “From what I hear, five hundred dementors smashed through the wards and scattered in all directions.”

“My God…”

“Granger!” an angry, accented voice called. An old wizard stomped over. George and Harry stepped closer to her and went for their wands, but she waved them back. “What do you have to say for yourself?”

She took a deep breath. “I should have considered the possibility that the dementors would break out of Azkaban to escape eradication. I assumed that because it had held them for three hundred years, there wouldn’t be any problems, and I was wrong.”

“I had to put my country’s entire Auror force on high alert because of this breakout,” the wizard growled. “Your dementors are already coming onto our shores. What is the British Ministry doing to contain this?”

“That’s what we’re here to figure out, Ambassador,” she said. “Excuse me.” She pushed past him on the pretext of speaking to one of the Ministry officials.
“Who was that?” Georgina whispered.

“The Dutch Ambassador, or so I presume,” she whispered back. “And he won’t be the only one. We’ll have to deal with at least Belgium, Germany, and the Nordic Union, not to mention all the dementors that wander back to our own shores.” Then, more loudly: “Georgina, I’m putting our regular arithmancy lessons on hold and skipping straight to the dementor-killing ritual. We’ll go faster with two.” Georgina nodded. “Mr. Robards, how bad is it?”

The Head of Magical Law Enforcement looked grim—though not directly angry with her. “How bad do you think, Granger?” he said. “Four guards Kissed. We’re keeping their bodies in stasis until you can get their souls back. Practically all of them have frostbite from being overrun by the dementors, and two of them were clubbed to death with rocks.”

“Rocks?” she gasped.

“Rocks! Have you ever seen a dementor do that before in your travels? Because I certainly haven’t.”

“No! …But I suppose if their powers were useless to protect them, it wouldn’t take much thought to pick up a rock and even things out.”

“Well, I’ve alerted the force. Aurors will be going in teams of three until further notice, which will stretch us thin even though I’ve called in everyone I could spare. Having to maintain a Patronus and repel physical attacks is going to be hard for two.”

“Good,” Harry said, falling back into his tactical role. “What about the public?”

“It’ll be on the front page of the Prophet tomorrow, and the Minister’s sending them hourly updates till press time. Now, the question is, what are you doing about it, Granger?”

“What can I do?” she said. “I mean, I can kill them, Mr. Robards, but I don’t have any experience tracking dementors, and I don’t know how much is possible over long distances.”

“Well, the things leave a trail don’t they?” Georgina interrupted. Everyone turned and looked at her. “You know, dark magic?” she said. “And I suppose frost.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “Frost, of course. And poor weather. And maybe dark magic. I’d need some readings. But it’s something we could potentially track if it’s fresh enough.” She sighed. “That only leaves about six hundred miles of shoreline to search in Great Britain alone.”

“We can work with it, though,” Robards said. “We have our own techniques to track dementors, and I’d wager you can improve on them. Though we’ve rarely had to deal with dementors so uncooperative.”

“Right, so we have methods to track them,” she said. “And we know where they’ll go once they hit land: major population centres, especially where emotions are running high. Concentrations of magic. Although if they’ve changed their tactics with the rocks, we can’t get too complacent, and if they’re thinking strategically, they could—” She froze and changed gears instantly. “George, Ginny! Does the whole family know about this? Is anyone with my parents right now?”

“I’m on it,” George said. “You’ll be okay?” She nodded, and he hurried off.

That was the most immediate risk handled. Hermione and Georgina were just starting to discuss the possibilities for tracking dementors with Robards when the Nordic Ambassador came up and grabbed her roughly by the shoulder. “Granger!” he roared.
Hermione didn’t like the Nordic Ministry in general. They were far too friendly with Durmstrang and its blood purism. She was sorry to say this was about the reaction she expected of him. She tried to twist out of his grip as he gave her a good shake. “What have you done?”

She drew herself up and answered, “I made a mistake, Ambassador, and I apologise. The dementors proved more capable than I expected. We’re working now to solve the problem.”

“And why should we trust you with that, mudblood?”

Silence fell on the Atrium. Everyone in earshot turned and stared at the Nordic Ambassador. The only sound was Georgina shouting, “Don’t call her that, you bastard!” as she drew her wand on the wizard. She then added something very rude in Norse from Ancient Runes class that was probably more offensive in how badly it butchered any attempt at Swedish. Hermione held her back and hissed at her to calm down. Like it or not, the Ambassador had diplomatic immunity.

The silence didn’t lift until Minister Cresswell strode grimly over to them. “Ambassador Nilsson,” he said. “I don’t appreciate your language. I hope you can understand that we don’t hold with that kind of talk here after the ordeal we went through three years ago.”

Nilsson’s nostrils flared. He didn’t like an upstart muggle-born Minister anymore than an upstart muggle-born dementor-slayer, but he held back this time. “I apologise, Minister,” he said. “I allowed emotion to get the better of me. But my point stands. Why should we trust Britain to deal with this dementor problem when it was you who let them out in the first place?”

“Excuse me,” Robards cut in. “Has anyone ever held back a physical assault by that many dementors before? My people were doing well to get the wards closed again behind the rest of them.”

“Is that supposed to instill us with confidence?” he snapped.

“It’s saying that I defy your people to do any better.”

“How can we if we don’t have all the tools we need?” He turned back to Hermione. “Granger, do you expect us to stand idly by while you solve the problem you yourself created?”

“No, I—”

“You guard your dementor-killing ritual jealously, and yet now they come to our shores, where our people are defenceless against such numbers. We demand you release the ritual to us so we can take care of them on our own!”

“Us too,” said a witch she was pretty sure was the French Ambassador, even though France was probably out of the immediate firing line. “We cannot rely on your chosen few anymore.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll release the ritual!” she said. “There’s no time to hold back. But I want people vetted by Tinworth and Rakepick. They know most of the best arithmancers on the Continent, and they understand how dangerous this magic could be in the wrong hands.”

“You’re worried about that now?” the Nordic Ambassador said.

“Yes, now, because it really is that dangerous. Imagine a dark lord who has the power of the dementors, can’t be stopped by a Patronus, and is smarter than they are. That’s the kind of thing they could do. Besides, I don’t have time to interview people myself to figure out who understands the theory behind the ritual enough to do it right.”

“But it’s not that hard, is it?” Harry said. “I’ve done it plenty of times, and I barely understand it.”
“But I’ve led you every time,” she countered. “If something goes wrong…remember what happened when you made a mistake in Potions class?”

“Yeah?”

“Imagine that times ten, and you’ll die if you don’t know a way to fix it on the spot,” she said, sobering him. She’d never explained or even fully quantified the consequences of a misfire—only emphasised to her friends that it would be very bad. “I’ll share the ritual, but I at least need to make sure the people who use it don’t get themselves killed.”

Another witch came up—an older woman with a stern expression. “Minister Cressvell, Professor Granger,” she said with a thick accent, “I am afraid Germany is out. We are not going to try to eradicate our dementors if dis is going to be de result.”

“What? But you can’t!” Hermione gasped.

“Can’t ve?” she said sharply. “It’s our business what ve do with de dementors dat reach our shores. You forfeited any right to dem when dis happened. Ve successfully contained de dementors for hundreds of years until you Brits started exterminating dem and drove dem to desperation.”

“But—we finally have a way to be rid of the dementors!” Hermione protested. “To free all the souls they’ve consumed. Isn’t that better? We can solve the problems that happened at Azkaban—”

“And what happens vit de next problem dat comes up, Professor Granger? Ve managed vitout killing dem before. Ve don’t need to risk dat peace by provoking dem.”

“My colleague makes a good point,” Nilsson came back. “I’ll have to talk to my Ministry about whether we want to continue.”

Hermione felt more drained than when Arthur first brought word of the breakout. “This program will work,” she said weakly.

“You seem strangely fixated on this, Professor Granger,” Nilsson said. “Do you have some personal issue with the dementors?”

“What? They’re dementors!” she protested.

“And? Do they truly mean nothing to you? I’m surprised. Did you not just a few months ago make a foray to the giants, Professor Granger? I believe you told a number of people that you have plans to save the entire giant race.” Her eyebrows rose. She was surprised he’d heard about that. “Word does get around, you know,” he said.

“Are you seriously trying to compare the dementors with the giants?” Hermione said.

“And why not? They’re both magical races with their own needs and desires. Why should you want to save one and destroy the other? Especially with your personal history?”

Hermione trembled with anger. The man who called her “mudblood” just a few minutes ago using that against her? “If you’d ever seen how a dementor shows up under a Soul-Detection Charm, you wouldn’t be asking that question, Ambassador,” she said.

“A charm you invented. Convenient, isn’t it? Even if you have shared it freely. How do we know that it shows truth?”

Some of the bystanders were nodding along with him, especially among the foreign delegations.
Hermione felt like she’d been struck in the chest. Dementors were soulless monsters. She’d *proved* that. Almost everyone in Britain agreed they needed to be got rid of, and she didn’t think she’d heard anyone defend them for the dementors’ own sakes. But now, Nilsson was trying to undo all of that. He was swaying people to his side, and it felt like her entire plan was falling apart. She couldn’t speak as the other dignitaries took their sides.

“France is provisionally still in, but we want an active role in *zee* process.”

“Belgium and *zee* Nezerlands stand wiz France.”

“As I said, I’ll need to talk it over with my Ministry.”

That was bad enough, but it was only getting worse. Not long after, Ron and another Auror Apparated into the Atrium, dragging an unconscious wizard with them. They both looked shaken.

“Auror Weasley? Auror Savage? What’s going on?” Robards called to them.

“Azkaban’s locked down, sir,” Ron said as they dragged the man over. “Double patrols and everything. The dementors are still restless, but we can hold them for now…Er, we didn’t exactly tell them, but we let them think Hermione won’t be there for a while because she’ll be hunting down the escapees.”

“Which is kind of true,” Hermione admitted.

“Yeah, but that’s not the important part, sir. We think we know how the dementors got out. Look at this. Minister, Hermione, you’ll want to see this, too.” He held out the unconscious man’s arm and rolled up his sleeve. His arm was bare.

“There’s nothing there,” Robards said.

“Yeah, we know. He’s smarter than Voldemort was.” Auror Savage cast a revealing spell at the man’s arm. Hermione wasn’t sure what it was, but it seemed to be intended to draw something out. A tattoo appeared—the ink seemingly pulled up from deeper under the skin. Not a Dark Mark; this was an illustration of a snake coiled around a raven, but not killing it.

Robards frowned when he saw the image. “Weasley, is this what I think it is?” he said.

“I’m afraid so, sir,” Ron said. “We almost didn’t catch him, except we did more checks on the ward stones than procedure said and found him tampering. Finding the tattoo was sheer luck.”

“Damn and blast,” he growled.

“I don’t understand,” Hermione said. “What is it? Some kind of dementor emblem?”

Robards shook his head. “No, Granger. This is the symbol of the Lestrange Family.”

Her head snapped up. “The Lestranges? But they’re all dead! Every one of them accounted for!”

“Not if they had an adopted child,” Ron said. “Not legally, I mean. We’re still going through the possibilities, but we’re thinking of someone who was like them in spirit—who was closely associated with them from the end of the first war and hated his blood family.”

“Crouch,” she hissed.

“With followers,” Harry said gravely. “Three years, lying low almost the whole time, and this is why.”
“Okay, this is officially a Death Eater attack!” Robards called. “Send word to all patrols. Weasley, get that bastard into interrogation. I want to know how they got through the wards. Savage, start revising the dossier on Crouch. Granger?”

“I was going to start dementor tracking, Director,” she said. “Georgina, go warn your family, then meet me…hmm…Scarborough Castle. Do you know it?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. Meet me there as soon as you can. We’ll start searching.”

“And be ready for a fight,” Robards added. “Five hundred dementors are bad, but we know how to handle them. The dark wizard who let them out is far more dangerous.”

She nodded. “Okay, let’s get started.” Georgina hurried out, and Hermione started on her own way, quickly sending a Patronus message to George. As she left, she whispered, “See, Harry? If Barty Crouch was involved, Halloween wasn’t luck. It was clearly symbolism.”

“And be ready for a fight,” Robards added. “Five hundred dementors are bad, but we know how to handle them. The dark wizard who let them out is far more dangerous.”

She nodded. “Okay, let’s get started.” Georgina hurried out, and Hermione started on her own way, quickly sending a Patronus message to George. As she left, she whispered, “See, Harry? If Barty Crouch was involved, Halloween wasn’t luck. It was clearly symbolism.”

“No the time, Hermione,” he groaned.

16 November 2001

The trail led all across Europe. They even made some forays into Germany and Denmark hunting down the escaped dementors, though they mostly stuck to countries that remained friendly with Britain. True, Germany and the Nordic Union were doing their part in rounding them up, but they were only confining them, something Hermione considered an escape risk since the dementors weren’t going out of their way to present themselves for sanctuary, and with no appreciable sustenance, they were sure to get restless sooner or later. It would just take longer.

The work meant long hours for her and Georgina, where their families couldn’t always be there with them, following the subtle trails dementors left as they moved, all too often losing them, devising better methods of tracking, and teaching Georgina to run the dementor-killing ritual. It was tiring work. The dementors didn’t sleep and could sense when they were getting close, and worse yet, Hermione had a growing inkling that some of the demons were following them.

Barty Crouch was lying low. A few attacks here and there, but the attackers always slipped back into the shadows. The good news was that the Aurors didn’t think he had more than a fraction of the followers Voldemort had, even just counting his inner circle since Crouch hadn’t started assembling them when he was still in school, and he had far less fertile ground. The bad news was that some of the dementor attacks appeared human-coordinated, and yet the man himself was proving elusive.

Hermione and Georgina were hiking through the Ardennes in Belgium at evening, trying to follow the trail of an estimated half dozen dementors that had been terrorising muggles and wizards alike for the past few days, probably drawn to the battlefield. This hunt had taken hours longer than they’d anticipated, and they were losing the light fast, but if it was between the risk of following at night and losing the trail entirely by dawn, Hermione was willing to go for it.

“So I’ve been thinking,” Georgina said as they hurried through the frost-bitten brush. “What would happen if Harry or Ginny got Kissed? I mean, since they’re—” She whispered. “—horcruxed to each other?”

Hermione hadn’t taught Georgina much of soul magic yet beyond the dementor-killing ritual, but she had explained exactly what was done to Harry and Ginny. She owed her apprentice that much. “I have no idea, and I don’t want to find out,” she said. “And it’s not really a horcrux, either. It wasn’t a
dark ritual that did it, much less the specific one.”

“Isn’t that what you said before, though?”

“No, I said it was ‘something like a light horcrux.’ We really need a better name for it. Here’s an exercise for you, Georgina. Your Latin’s better than mine. What do you call a light horcrux?”

“Me?” she said in surprise. “Well, I…” She sighed and tried to think. “Horcrux. Clearly derived from the Latin crux horribilis. Which is weird considering it was invented by a Greek wizard. So maybe a light horcrux could use an antonym of horribilis. Er, bonum, magna, magnifica, pulchra, beata—oh, mirabilis, duh. Crux mirabilis—um, miracrux?”

“Miracrux…” Hermione tried the word. “Yes, that sounds good. ‘Crux’ would be the generic form—any soul fragment, neither light nor dark—I still can’t believe I just said that. But it works in the sense of ‘that which saves from death.’ Wait…hm…yes. Crux Sancta could be used when the religious meaning is intended.”

Georgina chuckled. “That sounds like something an alchemist would say.”

“Yes, a lot of religious symbolism worked in there. But if you recall, I am a licensed alchemist, even if my work is barely alchemy.”

“Heh, that’s not what the other alchemists say if they rumours I’ve heard are true. Most of them are still trying to figure out how you make diamonds—or at least claim they are.”

Hermione opened her mouth to retort when they heard a bloodcurdling scream. Both women turned and ran in the direction of the sound. It was closer than it should be considering they’d hardly seen anyone all day. They could feel the world growing colder as they ran. They must be getting close.

A minute later, they came to a clearing, wands ready, but there were no dementors. Only a family and a small tent. They took in the scene: two adults, three children. One of the children lay unresponsive on the ground.

Only the one?

Hermione ran to them, kneeling down beside the boy and checking for a pulse. “My God, what happened? Que s’est-il passé?” There was a pulse. Good. She just had to find the dementor.

The mother spoke in French-accented English: “I don’t know! Everyzing got cold and dark, and zen ‘e just fainted!”

Muggles.

“Don’t panic, Madame, I can help,” Hermione said. “Georgina, why do you think they didn’t go for all of them?”

“Better question: where are they?” Georgina said. “They were just here. I can feel them, but I can’t see them.”

The pieces fell into place. “It’s a trap!” Hermione shouted.

Well over a dozen dementors came gliding out of the trees, far more than they expected, completely surrounding them. The Earth grew cold, and all hope seemed to fade. The muggles couldn’t see the black robes, which was probably a blessing, but they could definitely feel them.
“What’s happening?”

“What are you?”

“How did it get so cold?”

“Expecto Patronum!”

“Expecto Patronum!”

Hermione and Georgina both cast their Patronuses, Hermione’s a silvery otter, and Georgina’s, oddly enough, a seal. They spread out and began circling the clearing, trying to keep the dementors at bay. The muggles screamed. They could see the Patronuses, but the impossibility of the sight overrode the comforting feeling they gave. Hermione cut them off: “Quiet! Pick up the boy and get ready to run.”

“What are they?”

“Just do it!”

Several of the dementors charged from different directions. The strength of their dark aura suddenly increased, but Hermione and Georgina pushed back with all their might. Hermione divided her Patronus in two (Georgina was still working on that), and the three animals swam in a fast circle through the air around them, pushing the dementors back as fast as they advanced.

“We need an opening!” Georgina said.

“I know!” Hermione focused and made her Patronuses charge together at one side of the circle, pushing the dementors away from there, before circling back to a defensive position. She prayed the gap was enough. “Run! Now!” she shouted.

The muggles were reluctant to move, but between the two of them, they pushed them along and back into the trees. The dementors followed. They had an escape route, but the mass of them crowded together was no less daunting. And Hermione saw now that some of them were arms with sticks and rocks—dangerous even to a witch. Fighting dementors physically was a difficult prospect. Only the Patronuses could really hurt them, and more by repelling them than anything else, and they took a lot of concentration.

“We need shelter!” Hermione told the campers.

“Cabins back at the main campsite,” the father pulled himself together.

“Take us there.”

They ran. The campsite wasn’t too far away, luckily, though it was uphill. They were panting by the time they reached the cabins with the dementors still hot on their tails. Hermione ran up to the nearest cabin, spelled the door open, and barged inside. A young couple screamed as she and Georgina entered, waving the family in with them, and slammed the door behind them.

“Who are you?”

“You can’t do this!”

BANG! Two dementors slammed against the door. There was a sound of cracking wood, and frost formed on the doorknob.

“Wards!” Hermione ordered. They cast protective spells around the cabin that would keep the
dementors from touching the walls. They wouldn’t be much good long-term, but she hoped they would be enough. Only then did she relax. “Okay, we’re safe for a little while now,” she told the campers.

“What the hell?” the man who was renting the cabin said, but the family mostly ignored him.

“What was that?” the mother said, nearly frozen with horror. “What were those…I saw floating rocks, but I felt…”

“Like you’d never be happy again,” Hermione said.

The woman turned ashen and nodded. “What are they?”

“Invisible demons. My apprentice and I are hunting them, but we didn’t think there were that many.”

“Demons? Are you mad?” the man from the cabin said. He was on his feet now and protecting his wife or girlfriend.

Georgina wasn’t having it. “Sit down,” she ordered. “Don’t you feel the darkness in the air? We’re surrounded, and if you want to live, you’ll listen to us.”

There was a dull thumping coming from all around them. The dementors were pounding on the wards. Hermione and Georgina could feel the shaking in the magical fields. That shut the residents up pretty well.

The mother was still clutching her youngest child in her arms. He was breathing, but gave no indication he was anything but in a deep coma. His lips were a telltale blue from the Kiss. “What happened to Martin?” she pleaded. “Why won’t he wake up?”

“He’s been cursed,” Hermione improvised. The truth would be too much for them. “I’m sorry. The only way to lift the curse and wake him is to find the demon that cursed him and kill it.”

“But how? They’re invisible,” the father said.

“We can see them. We’ve been fighting them for years…Do you ever watch horror movies, Monsieur?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, we’re in a horror movie, now, and it’s the same rule: we have to survive until sunrise.”

“The…the things will go away at sunrise?” the woman from the cabin asked.

“No. At sunrise, we can kill them.”

The group looked around at each other. No one spoke what they were all thinking: sunrise was hours away, and in most horror movies, there was only one monster, almost everyone still died.

The oldest of the three children was the one to work up the nerve to ask the other question they were all thinking: “Madame, who are you?”

Hermione looked from one frightened face to the next. She shouldn’t, but she couldn’t help it. “I’m the Doctor.”

It was too bad they weren’t British, but the kids’ eyes grew wide.
“Seven muggles,” Georgina said, taking stock and switching back to English. “We should just Apparate everyone back to Brussels. If we take turns, we can manage it.

“Maybe, but we can’t go,” Hermione said.

“Why not?”

“We have to stay on their trail.”

Georgina opened her mouth to respond, but she stopped when she saw Hermione pointing to the unresponsive boy. She cursed under her breath. “Hermione, if I’ve ever said ‘You should have been in Slytherin,’ I take it back.”

“We can take those two,” she said, pointing at the residents of the cabin. “And the other two kids. If we take turns…No, it’s too risky. We need a third. Dobby!”

Pop!

Dobby appeared in the middle of the room, eliciting more screams from the muggles, but the elf himself wailed and dropped to his knees as the dementors’ aura hit him. Hermione hated doing that to him, ever since he fainted from the dementors back in her third year, but they didn’t have a choice. Hermione directed her otter Patronus to cuddle up to him and help him to his feet.

“Missus Hermione! What is—?” he said shakily.

“Dobby, I’m sorry about this, but we’re surrounded by dementors, and we’ve got a bunch of muggles with us,” Hermione said. “One of them’s been Kissed. We need you to take them to the Belgian Ministry and explain what happened. Call Sonya if you need help. Don’t push yourself too hard.” She turned back to the muggles. “Listen up. This is Dobby. He’s an elf—you know, like Santa has. Actually, he’s on loan from Santa Claus. Let’s go with that. He’s going to take you to a place in Brussels where you’ll be safe, alright?”

“Yes…Doctor,” the couple from the cabin said.

Dobby quickly popped the two of them away, and Hermione spoke to the parents. “He’ll take your other two children next. They’ll be safe; I promise. I’d trust the people there with my own godson. We’d prefer if you went, too. Either way, I can lift the curse at dawn. Martin doesn’t have to be here.”

The parents conferred with each other briefly. There was a whispered argument before the father took the boy who had been Kissed. “How can we contact you if there’s a problem, Doctor.”

“The people there will know how. They take these demons very seriously.”

“Then we’ll go,” the mother said. “Please help my son, Doctor.”

“I will,” she promised. Soon, Dobby and Sonya both appeared and quickly took the family to safety in Brussels.

Hermione broken into a grin. “YES!” she cried. “I’ve been trying to get someone to call me that for three years!”

Georgina glared at her: “Hermione, is this really the time?”

Before she could answer, a grating, rasping noise came from outside. The dementors were speaking.
Frost formed on the doorknob again, and it seemed to conduct the sound. “Angel of Death,” one of them hissed—in English, but in a voice like death itself.

For her part, Hermione just said, “Yeah, that’s me.”

“Leave us. You cannot withstand all of us. Your powers are worthless at night.”

That was true, but she wasn’t telling it that. “I can’t do that,” she said. “Not after you Kissed that muggle boy.”

“He is not important,” the voice hissed.

“And that’s why we hunt you,” she said. “You can’t escape from us.”

“We will kill you.”

“Others know the secret. Our numbers are growing. Sooner or later, we will find you.”

The thumping on the outside of the cabin grew worse. There was a crack and a sound of smashing wood.

“Time to go!” Hermione said. “Georgina, stay on the trail.”

Alone, they could safely Apparate around the forest and gain the mobility they desperately needed. Now, they and the dementors were hunting each other, which still wasn’t great, but was better than simply being hunted. The Belgian Aurors evacuated the campground and set up a perimeter, but they refused to get close to the dementors themselves—not when they were physically arming themselves. That meant it was a long, hard night until dawn finally came.

17 November 2001

The Sun rose, and the tables turned. Hermione and Georgina, with the help of a few Belgian Aurors who were willing to help pull in the perimeter, managed to coral the dementors in a clearing in the forest in the morning light. Unfortunately, just like they could smash through wards with enough effort, dementors could break through just about any perimeter if they were hemmed in by Patronuses alone.

“You cannot hold all of us!” one of them hissed. Hermione suspected it was the “leader” who was speaking last night.

“You can’t all escape, either,” she said.

“We are legion. We cannot be defeated. You will die before you can end us.”

“We’ll see about that.”

The dementors pushed harder, straining the perimeter. Hermione was starting to sweat, and the Aurors looked about ready to pull out. They were losing and knew it. “What will you do in the face of this power,” the dementor said.

Hermione took a deep breath. She hadn’t wanted to do this with the dementors that were confined in Azkaban. Not when they had them under control, and they could just brute force their way through the lot of them. But now, she was at a disadvantage, and she had to compromise.

“Give me the one who Kissed the boy, and you can go,” she said darkly. “Otherwise, we’ll just kill
The dementors were silent for a moment. Maybe it was her imagination, but the leader seemed to radiate an air of indignation. The others, however, began to turn and look at either other. Suddenly, one of them bolted for the perimeter, pushing straight through one of the weaker Patronuses to get out. But before anyone could react, half a dozen more dementors chased the runner down grabbed it, and practically threw it at Hermione. It made a shrieking sound like nails on glass. No honour among soul-thieves, apparently.

“Quick! Hold it!” she ordered. They restrained the dementor as the others fled. “We have to do the ritual now, then check with that family. If it’s the wrong one, we might still be able to get the others.”

The looks on the Aurors’ faces told her they weren’t interested in chasing the others. Still, they performed the ritual, and after the dementor was destroyed, they soon learnt Little Martin woke up. One problem solved, but as they left the area, Hermione was subdued.

“Is something wrong, Hermione?” Georgina asked.

“I feel like I need a shower after making that deal,” she muttered.

Georgina frowned. “I don’t think there was much else we could do.”

“I know. I still don’t have to like it.” She kept walking with her gaze turned down. “And that dementor was right about one thing. We don’t have any way of handling them at night, and they’re learning. We need to be able to counter them next time, or it’s going to go worse.”

23 November 2001

“So as you can see, Master Ficino, we need a way of preserving morning sunlight through the night or on cloudy days to use it in the dementor-killing ritual in case of emergency.”

Hermione hoped this detour to Ferrara would pay off. After asking around, it seemed that the Head of the Order of Paracelsus had the best chance of being able to help them. The man was happy to meet her and hear their case, at least. Now, he stroked his beard thoughtfully.

“It’s an interesting problem,” Ficino said. “As a matter of fact, there is an obscure alchemical technique that is very close to what you are looking for.” He rose from his seat and rummaged around his cabinets. When he found was he was looking for, he came back with a glass bottle that glowed with a bright white light. “Here we go. This is Bottled Sunlight,” he said. “It stores sunlight for various ritual and alchemical purposes. It lasts a long time, although the glow drains it eventually, and it’s not that difficult to make. I understand you have a certification in alchemy?” Hermione nodded. “The procedure adapts many of the techniques of fire alchemy. You should be able to learn it without much trouble.”

“That sounds perfect, Master Ficino,” Hermione said. “That’s exactly the kind of thing I need.”

“Well, yes, but there is one complication,” he said. “How much sunlight does this ritual take?”

“Oh. A ten-foot diameter parabolic mirror for several minutes, concentrated to a point.”

“Goodness! Then no, the glass bottles will never be able to withstand that kind of energy.”

Hermione frowned. That would be a problem. But then again, she had done some original research in alchemy of her own. “Maybe we can adapt the procedure somehow,” she said. “I have some ideas
for metal casks that might serve.”

“Oh?” Ficino said. “I suppose if you make them strong enough, that could work. Might I see your designs?”

And that got them started. With his expertise and her study of alchemically strong and neutral metals, she was pretty sure they could work something out. And better yet, because the sunlight was concentrated and stored in a small space, the casks should release a coherent beam that she wouldn’t have to focus.

Bloody hell, with the size of her mirror, that was almost equivalent to a ten thousand watt laser! That was…actually pretty cool.

“Georgina, are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Hermione grinned.

“Um…not really,” Georgina said. “What are you thinking?”

“Archimedes’ Death Ray.”

11 December 2001

Hermione swallowed a phial of Pepper-Up Potion and closed her eyes, taking deep breaths and steeling herself to face the dementors again.

“Pepper-Up Again?” George said with concern.

“I have a feeling it’s gonna be another long night,” she said.

“Still, you’ve been using a lot of it.”

“Coffee gives me jitters this late at night, George. The spellwork is hard enough as it is.”

She looked back at her husband, bundled up against the Highlands cold. He frowned. “This isn’t good for you, Hermione. You know that. You haven’t been sleeping enough. And its dangerous tracking dementors at night.”

“The dementors are more active at night. And it’s not so dangerous now that we have the Bottled Sunlight.” She patted the titanium-tungsten cannister on her hip where she would normally wear her sword.

George shook his head. “It’s still not good for you, fighting dementors day after day. I’ve seen your hands shaking. I’m about this close to cutting you off on the all-nighters. Besides, it’s almost Christmas.”

“They’re not going to stop for Christmas,” she said.

He sighed. “All right: I’m worried what will happen if you get Kissed. You’re not on top of your game right now.” He smirked a little. “And only I’m allowed to kiss you.”

“I’m not going to get Kissed,” she promised, though she privately hoped it was a promise she could keep. A good ten percent of the dementor hunters around Europe had been Kissed at some point or other in the past few weeks. Some more than once, though they didn’t seem to suffer worse for it, thank God. Even Germany had called in a dementor-slayer to help some of their Aurors who had been Kissed—but not Hermione herself.
George looked to her apprentice in exasperation. “Georgina, help me out, here,” he said.

Georgina rubbed her face tiredly and looked nervously at Hermione. “Normally, I might agree with you, George, but I’m getting worried about how close this group is getting to Hogwarts. If they attack Hogsmeade unawares…”

Ron was their Auror escort for the night. At least Britain was good about providing them. “Yeah, I think she’s right, George,” he agreed. “The dementors are more aggressive than they used to be. In the Department, they’ve been saying to always assume they’re on the attack.”

George sighed, but he agreed to keep going. Hermione suspected he’d force her to take a holiday sooner than later. They followed the trail through mountains and forests, taking it by broom when they could. Dementors were fast—fast enough to escape a chase if they knew they were being followed, but she hoped they had the element of surprise on their side.

It was around midnight when they caught up with them—sooner than a lot of these chases ended up, if they caught the demons at all. But there were only three of them—fewer than she was expecting. “Keep an eye out!” she called. “There might be more of them around.”

The trio of dementors radiated anger amid their aura of despair, so thick she could feel it even with Patronuses about. “You hunt us at night,” one of the three hissed. “You mock us. You cannot touch us now. Do you really think you can hold us till morning?”

Hermione turned to face the demon. “We don’t have,” she said. “We’ve learnt from our shortcomings, too.” She moved her cannister of Bottled Sunlight into the firing position. It wasn’t just a bare cannister. She’d rigged an iris with a spring-loaded rotary lever onto the neck so she could open it and close it quickly and a handle arrangement that let her shoot it from her hip like the Terminator, just because she thought it looked cool. “Mind your eyes!” She tilted the cannister up above the tree line and turned her head away as she flicked the trigger lever.

A brief, laser-like beam of blinding white light stabbed up into the sky for a split second with such power that she felt like there ought to be science fiction sound effects.

The dementors didn’t move.

“Which…doesn’t mean anything to you because you don’t have eyes,” she said. “Dammit. I was talking about this.” She levelled the cannister at the dementor’s chest and flicked the lever again. It certainly felt that. It jerked back and shrieked, then launched into a stream of blasphemous oaths that almost literally hurt her ears to listen to.

“Muffliato!”

“Thank you, Ron,” she said. “Georgina, would you like to take point on this?”

“Me?” Georgina gasped.

“I think you’re ready. And I need to handle the Death Ray to make sure nothing goes wrong with it. George, Ron, Patronuses?”

They laid out the runic circle and took their places, slightly different from before. The modification to allow the ritual to work with Bottled Sunlight conveniently also allowed the light to be fired from other points of the circle to avoid hitting the other casters. They had to cancel the Muffliato, and the dementor’s angry threats were a bit distracting, but Georgina completed the ritual with flying colours. The Bottled Sunlight burned through it just like natural sunlight, and the dementor died just like all the others.
Georgina was grinning when she finished the ritual, releasing the trapped souls to their Destination. “That was amazing!” she said. “I could really feel the light magic from the ritual.”

“I know,” Hermione said. “Why do you think I take point so often? How did it feel?”

She searched for the words. “Like…like everything was in alignment. Like I was cleansing the Earth of something that Shouldn’t Be There—Ugh, the words don’t get the feeling across.”

“I understand, though. That’s why I’ve been pushing this effort so hard. You understand how important it is when you’re in the circle. Come on. Let’s take care of the other two.” She laid out a new circle on untouched earth and used her Patronus to corral the second dementor into it.

The second ritual seemed to be going as well as the first, until Georgina recited, “With the life of the Earth, we drain away the darkness,” and stepped into the circle.

As the grass began to die underfoot, a shout rang out from the trees: “For the Dark Lord!”

The shout was answered with spellfire as close to a dozen wizards jumped out of the trees and blasted the circle. Hermione turned and saw the curses flying. One of the wizards was Barty Crouch. The spells struck, breaking the circle.

In a split second, the world seemed to fill with clashing colours that weren’t seen, with a deafening cacophony that wasn’t heard, a pressure that should have crushed them flat that wasn’t felt. Hermione took it all in at once. The runic circle was damaged. The ritual had been interrupted!

Calculations flew through her head at light-speed, but she didn’t need to cipher them out.

“OUT! OUT! OUT!” she screamed. She ran. Acting on pure instinct, not thought, she banished George away and summoned Georgina, who was closer to the centre, at the same time. Hermione made no effort to slow her down, and she bowled her over and sent them both sprawling on the ground.

There was an explosion that wasn’t. Hermione felt like she was being ripped apart even though there was no pain. Dizzy, she lay flat on the ground.

She had to get up. There were enemies about.

She sat up and nearly passed out and vomited at the same time, she was so disoriented from the magical backlash. The dementor was nowhere to be seen, and the ritual circle was blackened ash that seemed to burn cold. A dozen wizards lay groaning around her. She saw Barty Crouch. He lying on the ground and looked ill. She struggled to raise her wand. By the time she got a spell off at him, he had a Shield Charm up.

She put up a Shield Charm of her own against Crouch’s curse. He looked too weak or dazed to cast a Killing Curse, which was good because she wouldn’t have been able to dodge it. She looked around for her friends and family. Ron and George were both conscious. Outside the circle. Good. They were both on their hands and knees while they struggled to duel neo-Death Eaters who were equally incapacitated. Not good. Georgina was lying half on top of her and struggling to right herself.

“What…the hell…were you—ugh—thinking, Crouch,” Hermione grunted.

Crouch hissed like a snake. “It worked, didn’t it, mudblood? …Took you down.”

“And you too! …Idiot! You’re supposed to be…a magical genius. Do you know what happens…if the Dementor-Killing Ritual is…interrupted?”
“Worth it to avenge the Dark Lord.”

“He’s lost his mind,” Georgina said softly.

“And all the more dangerous,” Hermione said.

“You’ve lost, Granger,” Crouch said. “Avada Kedavra!”

Hermione couldn’t move fast enough, but somehow, Georgina did, grabbing her around her waist and throwing with all her weight, rolling Hermione over on top of her. The Killing Curse passed just over both of them.

“Thanks.”

The Death Eaters were starting to push to their feet. She had the feeling this wasn’t what they’d signed up for, which was good because they could have overwhelmed them by numbers if they’d had their act together. Crouch and Hermione stood up at the same time, but any duel would be clumsy. One dodge would probably knock either of them over.

“You think you can beat me…when Bellatrix couldn’t?” Hermione panted.

“Oh, yes, I think I can,” Crouch sneered back.

Curses started flying, but most of them went wide. Crouch’s superior numbers were a liability now because there were more of them to become collateral damage. Several ran for it.

As the duellers grew steadier, the duel got fiercer. Crouch and Hermione were the best duellers in this forest, and both sides started edging away from them even as they took potshots at each other. Despite her bravado, Hermione was concerned. Crouch probably could overpower her. Luckily, she had a trump card. She didn’t have to beat him.

CRACK!

She just had to hold him off until reinforcements showed up. By the time everyone left in the clearing was steady enough to duel close to normally, Aurors had arrived, summoned by Ron. Unfortunately, there weren’t enough to stop Crouch from cutting and running before they could get Anti-Apparition Wards up. In moments, he was gone.

Hermione fell to her knees. “Guerrilla tactics,” she muttered. “Hit and run. A lot faster and more flexible than anything we did in the war.”

George stumbled over to her and hugged her close to his chest. “Bloody hell, that was too close!” he said. “I was so worried.”

“Yeah. I was scared for you too, George.”

“Um…Hermione?” Georgina cut in.

“What?”

“What does happen if the Dementor-Killing Ritual is interrupted?” she asked nervously.

Hermione frowned deeply. “I…don’t know,” she said. “I think maybe I should…” She dug Ravenclaw’s diadem out of her handbag (she’d been using it to help with the great dementor hunt). She put it on her head and considered the factors involved. “The backlash from the life-draining will have done the most damage to fast-dividing cells,” she said shakily. “There are two—no, three
outcomes I can think of. Option one, nothing happens. Option two, we’re in for several very unpleasant weeks.”

“What’s option three?” Georgina asked.

“Option three, we’re all dead in forty-eight hours.”

“WHAT?!?” everyone shouted.

Hermione ran her fingers through her hair. A handful of hair came with them, and she started to feel sick to her stomach. “Well, that’s a no on option one,” she said.

Georgina fainted.

12 December 2001

“Good news, Professor Granger,” Healer Pye informed her at St. Mungo’s. “Your bone marrow is damaged, but it’s regenerating normally. You said it was a botched ritual that did it?”

“An interrupted ritual,” she corrected. “I’ve done that ritual hundreds of times, and I’ve never botched it worse than singeing my feet.”

“Then how weren’t you fatally injured? This looks like bloody radiation poisoning—I mean, I’ve never seen a case myself, but I’ve read about it, and from a ritual, I’d expect even worse.”

“The damage it causes is tied to the location, not to the targets. We got out fast enough; our bodies can repair themselves.”

“If you say so,” the Healer shook his head. “That’s certainly what it looks like is happening, but I still don’t understand how.”

“Are you kidding me?” Georgina protested. “How are you so calm right now? My hair is falling out!” She ran her fingers through her hair and pulled away another clump. “That’s not normal!”

“Yes, which is strange that the progression is that fast,” Hermione said. “Probably because the damage was all-or-nothing rather than cumulative—”

“Hermione!”

“It’ll grow back. If we’re lucky, faster than it normally would from this kind of thing.”

“Normally? This was a disrupted ritual that’s literally never happened before.” Georgina made a face and heaved up bile from her stomach.

“Yes, but I know the physiological effects caused by the ritual, and there are other things that do it that are well-documented in the muggle world. Radioactivity I’ve told you about. Some poisons as well. Heavy metals. The important thing is that there was no permanent damage.”

“When you put it that way, I suppose,” said Healer Pye. “However, your immune systems will need a few weeks to recover. We have potions to help with that, but I’m afraid you’ll be out of the field until then.”

Hermione groaned. “Just about the worst possible time. The dementors and Crouch are still out there.”
“Hey, what about Barty Crouch?” Ron spoke up. “And the rest of his guys. They were hit by the ritual, too.”

“It should slow them down, at least” Pye said. “If they don’t get to a Healer, they should be too sick to get out of bed right now.”

“Yeah. Maybe he’s learnt his lesson,” Ron said hopefully.

Hermione shook her head. “I saw the look in his eyes,” she said. “His followers, maybe, but he’s not going to learn from that. And I’ll bet he’ll manage a few more guerrilla attacks in the meantime. Ugh…” She broke off as her stomach heaved. “Well, nothing for it, I guess. At least there are others out helping right now.”

George patted her shoulder weakly. “Look on the bright side, Hermione. You’ll be able to stay home for Christmas. And maybe we can see that film you’ve been talking about.”
The Last Death Eater

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: O Fortuna, velut luna, statu JK Rowling!

Credit to TheChairIsAgainstTheWall for guessing the movie in the first scene.

31 December 2001

“Mummy! Auntie Miney!” A sandy-haired, three-year-old in footie pyjamas ran through the crowd to find the two women. Hermione acted quickly and scooped the boy up in her arms.

“Marcus! What are you doing out of bed?” Hermione asked.

Little Marcus clung to Hermione and buried his face in her shoulder. “Auntie Minie, I had bad dream,” came his muffled voice.

“Oh, dear. What happened, Marcus?” she asked.

“Dad was there,” he said softly, and Hermione stiffened. She shot a sharp look over his shoulder and silently pointed at Arthur and Harry to go in and check the house, just in case it wasn’t a dream. “He took me ‘way,” the boy went on, “an’ it was cold, an’—an’ there was snakes.”

Hermione sighed and patted him on the back. Marcus had that quality of many very small children that he picked up on everything and was too smart for his own good. He really oughtn’t know about his father or especially any connection with snakes. “Now, now, Marcus, there aren’t any snakes here,” she assured him, “and you don’t need to worry about your father. If he wants to get you, he’ll have to go through all of us first. Look, see?” She motioned to the crowd gathered at the party. Harry stepped out of the door of the Burrow and flashed a thumbs-up. It was clear.

It was precisely because of Barty Crouch’s attempt to grab Marcus two years ago—and Hermione’s temporary incapacity now—that they had decided to hold their holidays at the Burrow, gathering everyone there—the Vectors, the Lupins, Hermione’s parents, Sirius, and the whole Weasley clan. She’d hoped the kids wouldn’t pick up on that, but no such luck. Nadia and Sasha had been asking awkward questions, too.

“Here, Marcus,” she said, handing the boy over to Septima. “Go back inside with Mummy, and don’t run off.”

“Come to Mummy, Marcus,” Septima agreed, and the now much calmer boy went without a fuss.”

Hermione sat down and fist her hands in her short hair. It had grown back quickly at first so that by Christmas, she looked like she’d had a pixie cut rather than a military buzz cut, but it seemed to have slowed down, now. Things hadn’t improved much in the past weeks, either. Britain’s allies were still tenuous, and there were New Death Eater attacks in multiple countries. They had to get Crouch! They couldn’t let this become another war.

“You okay, love?”
She looked up to see George offering her a glass of brandy. She took it gratefully. “Thanks, George. He’s a good little boy, but I wish he would stay put on a night like tonight.”

Her husband squeezed her lightly around the shoulders. “Kids are gonna make trouble,” he said. “Why, even Percy had his moments at that age, or so we heard. Anyway, I think Crouch is smart enough not to make a move at a party like this.”

“I hope so. I’m worried he’s not sane enough to think that way. Attacking that ritual…”

“So he learnt his lesson, then. Relax, we’ve got loads of skilled fighters around tonight.”

She smiled. “Of course, George.”

They circled the party slowly, making small talk with the guests. Hermione always kept an eye on the darkness surrounding the Burrow, but all seemed quiet.

Fleur was having an animated conversation with Harry and Ginny, trying to sell them on baby names. Ginny was five months gone, now, and she wore a dress that flaunted it, which a very Weasley thing to do.

“‘Ermione! ‘Ere! You should back me up,” Fleur roped her into it. “I zink Victoire is a very pretty name, no? If zee baby is a girl and is born at the start of May, I zink you ‘ave to use it.”

“Victoria, you mean,” Ginny countered. “I can entertain the idea, but I’m going to at least give my kid a proper English name.” Fleur huffed and folded her arms indignantly. “Besides,” she added. “With my family’s genes? It’s going to be a boy.”

“Ginny, that’s not how it works,” Hermione said. “It’s the father’s genes that determine if it’s a boy or a girl.”

“Oh, really?” she said, surprised. Hermione laughed. “Oi! We can’t all be you, Hermione. And anyway, Harry, didn’t your family have just one boy for, like, the last three generations?”

Harry blinked. “Uh, maybe? You’d have to ask Sirius.”

“Statistics of small numbers,” Hermione insisted.

“You know, you can just check what it is,” George pointed out.

“But where’s the fun in that?” Ginny grinned.

“Mm. A long as you pick a neutral colour for zee wallpaper,” Fleur sniffed. Ginny rolled her eyes.

Fred was looking even more smug and fox-faced than usual as he stuck a worryingly-large dragon-headed firework into the ground. “Hey, Weasleys!” he called. “And the rest of you lot. Come see George’s and my newest creation. We’ve been working all week on this one.”

Everyone got a good look at the firework. Many people were nervous. Harry piped up, “Oh, boy. Everybody get back. You don’t wanna stand close to a Weasley original.”

“Hey, we’re not that bad,” Fred protested.

“We’ll see,” Ginny said.

“Hm. No respect, brother,” said George.
“Very rude,” Fred agreed.

“Boorish.”

“Insulting!”

“I think we’ll have just have to show them.”

“Indeed,” the Twins said together. As everyone chuckled at their antics, they lit the firework—and then bolted. Everyone looked at each other in horror and bolted after them, but it wasn’t as bad as all that. They laughed as they played it up, though you still didn’t want to be too close in case of a misfire. But it went off without a hitch. With a loud *WHOOSH*, the firework soared high into the air and burst into a large flaming dragon. It unfurled wings as large as a Ukrainian Ironbelly as it swung around and swooped down low over the crowd, making them all duck, before it sailed back up and exploded into a dozen starbursts that filled the sky.

“Okay,” Ginny said, “I have to admit, that was pretty cool.”

Hermione thought it was pretty cool, too, but she wasn’t quite through with them. She walked up behind the Twins and grabbed each one by the ear. They yelped in pain and bent down close to her. “I might have known…” she said sagely. “I might’ve know *that’s* what you two would take away from that film, that is.”

“Hey, we couldn’t let that Gandalf bloke one-up us,” said George.

“He’s already showing off with that big staff of his,” Fred agreed. “I mean aside from being dead.”

Hermione suppressed a smile. She hoped she could keep that plot twist a secret until the next film came out.

Ginny spoke up, calling to the party: “Say, you could do that thing with the staff, couldn’t you, Hermione?”

“What the thing with the bridge?” Hermione clarified. “Sure, all he did was break a small stone bridge. I think anybody here could do it.”

“Sure, but can you do it with the badass staff?” Ginny said.

She rolled her eyes. “I don’t have a staff, Ginny.”

“Could you make one?”

“Probably,” she shrugged. “It’s an interesting question—or rather the more general question is. Not all wizards in the world use wands, and there’s a lot more room for variation within the bounds of wandcraft. I wonder what the limits are…”

“And she’s off,” George said, causing the rest of the party to laugh and Hermione to smack him in the arm. “Hey! You gotta admit, Hermione, it’d look pretty cool if a Death Eater came up, and you could stop him just by lifting up a staff and shouting, *YOU—*”

“**AHHH!** George!” she cut him off when his shout made everyone jump.

“Heh, you totally should,” Fred agreed. “It wouldn’t have to be real. You already did that scary ‘In place of a dark lord’ speech, didn’t you?”

She had. Hermione blushed. She’d almost forgotten that: five years ago, shortly after Dumbledore’s
death, and she’d scared the pants off some of the junior Death Eaters—and Bill and Harry.

“She did.” Harry said. “How could I forget? You should do it, Hermione. You’ve been doing Lord of the Rings stuff for years, now.”

“Yeah, let’s see it,” said Georgina.

Hermione could tell they weren’t going to let her get away without trying it. She’d have to improvise something. She found a branch on one of the trees that was about the right size and severed it with her wand. Then, she picked it up and took a place nearer to the fire where she thought the lightning would be about right. The wand-work would be tricky, but she could manage it. Placing her wand against the staff pointing down, she raised it high and shouted:

“YOU! SHALL NOT! PASS!”

She brought the butt of the staff down hard on the ground. There was a flash and a puff of dust and sparks that preceded a loud CRACK, and a spiderweb of cracks radiated out on the ground. She jumped back as one of the cracks opened toward the fire, which suddenly collapsed into a small sinkhole.

“Eep!” she squeaked. She dropped the staff. “Oops. Sorry. Lost my concentration for a moment. I wasn’t sure what spell I should do and…”

“No harm done, Hermione,” Arthur said. He waved his wand, and the fire shifted back into place and re-lit itself. Yep, definitely more practical than Gandalf’s magic.

---

29 March 2002

The dementor-hunting resumed not long into the New Year. It was still dangerous, and no one was really happy about it, but they’d learnt from their mistakes. Unfortunately, Barty Crouch was stepping up his game, too. Twice more he had sent people to attempt to disrupt a Dementor-Killing Ritual with the intent of killing them off, but they had arranged enough defences to stop him. Twice again he had attempted to kidnap Marcus: once from a visit to Hermione’s and George’s flat, hoping their defences would be weaker in a muggle area (they were, but not by enough to fail), and once walking down the street in Hogsmeade with Septima. That had prompted a major lock-down since he’d come so close to Hogwarts.

The evening of the twenty-third of April looked like a routine night raid on a nest of dementors in Ireland—depressingly, nothing out of the ordinary for the past six months, except that Hermione was ready to try out her new toy.

“I think this is just about the final version,” she said, holding up her Death Ray. The Bottled Sunlight was a useful tool, but its range was rather limited, especially as you often couldn’t afford a miss, and even with the handles, it was hard to fire accurately from the hip. So Hermione had built a more complex rig around the cannister, like a rifle, but where the cannisters could be quickly popped in and out with spares stored on the belt or on the back. It was rather like an over-size water gun, but all in brass and steel—much more “steampunk”, she thought was the term.

“Looks fancy,” George complimented. “This one have a name, too?”

“Yes,” she said. “I called it Invictus.”

The gun worked great. Even though it didn’t look that different to wizard eyes, the better control made her work far smoother. They tracked down the dementor nest and started killing them, as usual.
However, tonight, there was a problem. Barty Crouch hadn’t been able to stop them again, but he had another way of disrupting a ritual.

As Georgina stood before the dementor to banish it, a glowing, not-quite-corporeal Patronus entered the circle and Gaius Vector’s voice came through: “Hermione, Georgina! He’s got Marcus! Septima is hurt! We need help!”

The circle nearly destabilised on the spot just from the Patronus. Georgina’s exposure to the dementor was supposed to be unblocked, especially by a Patronus. “Dad!” she shouted. She started to twitch.

“DON’T MOVE!” Hermione shouted. She held Invictus trained on the dementor’s back, slowly burning through its body. They’d already sacrificed the life energy from the Earth. An interruption now would release the energy and incinerate everything within a hundred yards. And probably cause dangerous mutant magical plants and animals to grow on the spot afterwards. “Georgina, finish it!”

Georgina remembered herself and forced herself back into the dementor-killing mindset, despite the added weight of concern for her family. She completed the ritual, and they quickly packed up and returned to the Vectors’ house.

“Do we have any idea where he is?” Hermione demanded when they arrived.

Georgina hissed. “We’ll never find him. If he’s as smart as you say he is, he’s probably under Fidelius right now.”

“…Damn, you’re right.”

“Hermione!” Gaius called.

She ran into the parlour. Gaius was waving his wand over Septima, who was laid out on the floor out of necessity. “Oh, God,” she breathed and skidded on the carpet to kneel by her side and started casting what diagnostic charms she knew. “Dammit, I need to study up on this stuff more.” Septima was clearly in a bad way. Her bones were painfully twisted, and from the way she was lying, it looked like her spine was bent. Chalky nodules were forming on her skin. She looked dazed, and she was crying, her tears leaving what looked like lime scale on her face, and she had a metal cap molded to her skull.

“I’m sorry, Hermione,” she said. “I tried to stop him. I couldn’t—”

“Shh. It’s okay, Septima,” Hermione said. “Crouch is too strong to fight without backup. We’ll get Marcus back. Somehow. Gaius, have you done anything for her?”

“I’ve stabilised her for now,” Gaius said. “But her pulse is irregular, and I’m having trouble keeping her chest from caving in. I haven’t been able to do more because I don’t know what he hit her with.”

“I don’t recognise it either. It might be an original. Some kind of decalcination curse. I might be able to reconstruct it, but it’ll take time.”

“Pompeia’s Flooed St. Mungo’s. We can take her through as soon as we can move her.”

“No, no, no, she won’t be able to survive the Floo Network in this condition…Actually, I don’t know if she can survive any of the normal methods of magical transportation. They’re far too rough. How do you normally move someone with crushed ribcage?”
“Well…if it’s that bad, they can push a stretcher through the Floo and slide them across.”

“Oh, of course,” Hermione said. “Okay, keep on her chest. I’ll levitate her,” Hermione said.
“Georgina, tell your mother to call for a stretcher.”

They got a stretcher from St. Mungo’s to stick through the Floo and slid Septima across it without the usual whirling. Gaius went through to help her, and Hermione called after him: “Gaius, tell them not to use Skele-Gro until they’re certain it will work! I have a bad feeling about that curse.”

That left Hermione and Georgina standing with George and Pompeia in the ruins of the Vector household. Ron, a couple other Aurors, and Percy had arrived and were investigating. Harry came a few minutes later along with a very pregnant Ginny—clearly over Harry’s objections, though she immediately took a seat.

“Okay, everyone,” Hermione addressed the group. “Barty Crouch kidnapped Marcus Vector—his son, unfortunately, if you didn’t know—and if he has any shred of sanity left, he’ll be hiding under Fidelius somewhere.”

“I don’t know what we can do, then,” Harry said. “He can hide out forever under Fidelius. We did, when we had someone who could cast it.”

“But Crouch doesn’t know how to live off the land like we did, Harry. He’ll have to go out for clothes, supplies. He should have a bit of exposure.”

“Right,” Ron spoke up, “so the question is how do we smoke him out? Bait a trap somehow?”

George growled softly. “Might work, but I’m saying no. Crouch still wants revenge on us, you know.”

“And us,” Ginny spoke up. “Not exactly a good time.” She patted her stomach.

Ron winced: “No, bad idea, then. In fact, you two might wanna get somewhere safer until the baby comes.” Even Ginny didn’t object, which showed how serious it was.

“Say, doesn’t Marcus have the Trace on him?” Georgina asked.

Hermione stopped and thought. Had she really missed—? No. “Ron, go ahead and check it, but I doubt it—And Harry, tell Remus to check the Hogwarts Registry too, but he’s probably too young to be in there—No, if I can figure out how to disable the Trace in a few months, I’m sure Barty Crouch can do it in four years. I think we’re on our own there.”

“Okay, then,” Ron said. “We’ll have to do it like the Death Eaters tried to. Track Crouch’s followers and try to narrow down the area. Even with the Fidelius, we can set up a perimeter, right?”

“I suppose,” Percy said. “If we have the wandpower. The Death Eaters were never able to bring enough force to bear to do it, even to find Harry.”

“Well, yeah, but they had a lot of other stuff to worry about too, right?” He smiled. “And even Barty Crouch can’t beat Hermione.”

28 April 2002

Hermione really wished people would stop pinning their hopes on her like that. Her rituals may have won the war, but she never would have got through the war without Harry, George, Ron, and a lot
of the rest of the Order, and this was even less in her wheelhouse. She offered a few tips, but Ron and the other Aurors were doing a decent job at tracking down Crouch on their own. Hermione’s job was just to keep up the pressure on the dementors so the Aurors didn’t have to.

But now, the noose was tightening. The Aurors had tracked Crouch’s followers, to some surprise, to a small town near Northampton. That would solve their problem of getting supplies, and it would be a ready source of hostages if the time came, but it was a little less secure than a rural area. That wouldn’t be much concern with the Fidelius Charm, but Hermione, George, Harry, and Ginny had left immediately when the Death Eaters traced them to Nottingham. Crouch seemed to be playing a different game.

Right now, the Aurors were ostensibly doing a street-by-street search of the town, even though that wouldn’t get through the Fidelius Charm. The real trick was that Brixworth was small enough to lay detection wards over the whole area. They wouldn’t last long, but it would be long enough to narrow down the location further…or so they wanted Crouch to think. They probably could manage that plan if they had a few weeks, but the resources it would take and the risk to the Statute of Secrecy would be unacceptable. Rather, it was a double bluff. The search was a cover to lay the wards, one they expected Crouch to see through, and the wards were a ruse to smoke him out and get him to move instead of sitting comfortably behind his own. The backup was lying in wait.

The signal came swiftly, but not in the form they expected.

_Bang. Bang bang bang. Bang bang._

Hermione whirled around and stared in the direction of the sounds. “Gunshots,” she breathed.

“Death Eaters?” Georgina squeaked. “They’re using guns now?”

“Or they armed the muggles,” Ron said darkly. “Imperiused them to boost their numbers.”

“But where would they get that many guns?” Harry asked. “Did they raid an armoury?”

Hermione pulled out Ravenclaw’s Diadem, put it on, and closed her eyes. This operation just got a lot harder. “They made them,” she said. “It’s a lot simpler than my chemistry stuff; they could do it. Anyone! How many muggles could twenty Death Eaters Imperius at once and keep control of them?”

Everyone looked at each other, and Ron grimaced: “If it was Voldemort, I’d say Merlin help us, but without him…maybe a hundred?”

Harry asked the obvious question: “Do we have much choice?”

No, they didn’t.

A few minutes later, Hermione looked around at the assembled force, most of them from Dumbledore’s Army: herself, George, Fred, Harry, Georgina, Angelina, Susan Bones, Hestia Jones, Penelope Clearwater, Padma Patil, Lavender, Neville, Luna, Percy, Sirius, and Aberforth Dumbledore, and that wasn’t even counting the Aurors, including Ron. Nearly three dozen fighters against Crouch’s estimated force of no more than half that wizards, except now they could be outnumbered three to one by bewitched muggles.

“A muggle gun isn’t any more dangerous than a Piercing Hex,” Harry addressed the group. “It’s just that they’re so fast that you can’t dodge or put up a shield. Go in pairs; one you keep a Shield Charm up at all times. The good thing is, muggles can be disarmed, stunned, or have their guns damaged, and they won’t have any other tricks. And even Imperiused, most of them won’t be good at fighting
wizards—but don’t get cocky; some’ll be soldiers.”

They moved out, spreading around the perimeter marked out by the Aurors and keeping a sharp eye out for any armed muggles. It was a guess, really, but it would be the best way for Crouch to come up with a force multiplier. Hermione went with George, although she was good enough with two wands to handle guns on her own. The rest of the team paired up and advanced toward the fray.

“You know, it’s a good thing Dora’s almost due, or we might’ve had to stun her again,” Sirius commented to Harry. “Don’t tell her I said that.”

“You mean it’s a good thing it was full moon last night, or we would’ve had to stun Remus,” Harry corrected him. “Dora wouldn’t let us get the drop on her again.”

“Heh. True, although what about you?” Sirius said. “Isn’t your baby due about now? Ginny can’t be happy about this.”

Harry looked grimly out at the town where the last of the Death Eaters were hiding, and he winced as if he’d heard a loud noise. “She’s not,” he said, focusing on Ginny’s mental voice. “Okay, okay, Gin! She’s ordering me to stay back at the command centre if I want to have any additional kids.”

Sirius laughed louder than he should have. “Lily would’ve approved, Harry. Get back there, and don’t get yourself killed.”

Harry barely had time to get away before a hail of bullets rang out and impacted on the shields of the advancing wizards. Hermione staggered under the impacts. It looked like they’d found the right place, but as Harry predicted, muggles didn’t have enough tricks to hold their own against wizards, even outnumbering them three to one. They went down to Stunning and Disarming Spells quickly… So of course, that’s when the Death Eaters jumped in.

Hermione would later learn there were sixteen of them, although only she only saw four where she was. She saw Crouch a little bit out of her range. They were throwing Killing Curses, forcing her and George and the others to dodge, losing half their cover. There was confusion as she threw spells at top speed, using Ravenclaw’s Diadem to focus only on the opponents at hand—and on protecting her husband. Luckily, Crouch’s followers were much more fresh-faced than the old, inner circle Death Eaters—people who had hailed from old, dark families and trained for decades. These New Death Eaters just didn’t have the same level of experience.

Dumbledore’s Army focused on the Death Eaters as much as they could, holding the Imperiused muggles at bay with pure defence. Some of the attackers were injured, but one by one, the Death Eaters fell. Some tried to Apparate away, but they couldn’t get through the Anti-Apparition Wards that had been carefully layered on the town, from the outside in so they wouldn’t notice until it was too late.

Unfortunately, as soon as they figured that out, someone shouted an order, and the muggles turned their guns on each other.

“NO!”

“Stop them!”

Stunning Hexes flew through the air more thickly than she’d ever seen. Hermione herself dropped her Shield Charm so she could double cast as many spells as she could, deftly dodging the remaining curses flying back her way. It wasn’t until nearly all the muggles had been dropped that it registered to her that they were hesitating. The Imperius Curse was enough to get them to kill strangers, but
with so many bewitched, the magic was stretched a little thin to force them to kill their neighbours. That hesitation probably saved dozens of lives. When the dust cleared, nearly all of the Death Eaters were dead or restrained. A couple were running, but they could at least get their faces from a Penseive, or so she hoped, though it wasn’t without cost.

“Hermione!”

She snapped out of it and looked around to see half the town burning. Wizards and muggles alike were running around frantically. She immediately turned to check on George, but while he looked the worse for wear, he was okay.

“Hermione!”

It was Fred and Percy, carrying Ron between them. As they approached, she saw he was unconscious and bleeding badly.

“Ron!” George yelled, and they rushed to him. Hermione waved her wand over him and was oddly relieved to see it was mostly just bleeding, which was the one thing she could heal well, even with dark magic involved.

“I’ll do what I can for him,” she said. “Someone get Crouch before he gets away! *Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur.*”

Ron was stabilised with help from the other Aurors to be sent to St. Mungo’s, and the rest of Dumbledore’s Army came stumbling back. Harry was near-frantic when he saw him, but he’d be okay. However, four of the attacking force had lost their lives, including two Aurors. Lavender was struggling, sobbing as she carried a body half-over her shoulder to the group. The lightning scar that covered her face stood out sharply in the firelight, and Hermione choked when she saw her lay the body down: Padma.

“She saved me,” Lavender cried. “We both came to get justice for Parvati, but she…” She trailed off, unable to speak.

Sirius came back carrying another body, and she was even more shocked by this one: Aberforth Dumbledore.

“Aberforth!” Hermione said. “I can’t believe it! Why was he even here?”

“Said something about wanting to finish the job,” Sirius said. “He wasn’t happy Crouch got away before…”

“Well, we got Crouch this time,” she said. She motioned, and Crouch was dragged to the group, bound, dazed, mute, and under guard.

“Finally,” Harry said. He looked around. “Hey, where’s Neville?”

“Harry! Hermione!”

It was Neville’s voice. They all turned to see Neville dragging another prisoner to them.

“I got him! I got Crouch!” he called.

“What?”

He dragged the man to them. He was much younger than Crouch, and with a darker skin tone—
maybe Spanish or Italian. He only looked Hermione’s age, though she didn’t recognised him.

“He almost escaped,” Neville said. He was covered in blood, but it didn’t seem to be slowing him down. “We spotted him trying to get through the Anti-Apparition Wards, but we stopped him.”

“Neville, what are you talking about?” Harry said. “That’s not Crouch. This is!”

“He’s using Polyjuice, Harry!” Neville said. “He wanted us to go after that one. This is him!”

Hermione paled. That was exactly the kind of thing Crouch would do, and Neville was a step ahead of her. If even he was caught up with him. She exchanged look with Harry, and he nodded. “Check the perimeter!” he shouted. “Bring anyone you find back here! Even if they’re a friendly or a muggle!”

Most of Dumbledore’s Army scattered again, checking for anyone else who had got away. Neville stayed behind. “Harry, this is him,” he insisted.

“If he’s using Polyjuice, he could be anyone,” Harry said. “How can you be sure?”

“Harry, I’ve read his file. I know how he moves. This is Crouch! Trust me!”

“Stupefy!”

“Stupefy!”

“What the—?”

Luna had cast first. And Neville was duelling her.

“Harry, that’s not Neville!” Luna screamed.

Hermione joined the fight, and several of the D.A. turned around to help. “Antidote to Polyjuice!”

Hermione yelled. “Anyone?”

Neville suddenly dropped the man he was carrying and lunged for Crouch. At the same time, she shot a Killing Curse at Luna, who ducked. Definitely not Neville, then. Even under Imperius, he wouldn’t do that. Hermione tried to stun him, but she had to duck another Killing Curse aimed at her. The false Neville somehow dodged and weaved his way to the man who looked like Crouch, but to her shock, he didn’t rescue him. He pointed his wand at him, the tip glowing green.

“No one move or I’ll kill him!” he shouted, his tongue flicking between his teeth.

“Stop! All of you!” Hermione and Harry ordered at the same time. She didn’t know what his game was, but it didn’t look good.

“Oh, you’re so clever, little Loony-love,” fake-Neville mocked her. “No, I’m not your Neville. And I’ll save you the trouble, mudblood. I have the antidote here.”

He produced a phial of potion, drank a sip, poured a sip in the mute Crouch’s mouth, and tossed it to Luna. She sniffed it and waved her wand over it, but only when the first two began changing did she trust it and pour some into the mouth of the unconscious man who’d been dragged to them. Everyone watched in horror as Neville, as Hermione had expected, turned into Crouch; the unconscious man turned into Neville, and Crouch shrank down…and turned into Marcus.

“Marcus!” Georgina cried. She started to run toward him, but Crouch—the real Crouch—produced a second wand and pointed it at her.
Crouch looked around twitchily. “Nobody move. Nobody call for help. And don’t go for those fancy rings and necklaces; I know about those too. You’re going to let me leave with my son in peace—or I kill the boy!”

“You’re mad!”

“You wouldn’t!”

“He’s your son!”

“He would,” Harry said hollowly, shutting up the objectors. He turned to face them. “You’ve never seen how twisted family can get. He’d do it.”

“Listen to your ‘saviour’,” Crouch agreed. “He knows about family gone wrong. Now, you’re all going to stay right there while we walk out of here. He moved slowly to pick up Marcus.”

But Harry spoke up again: “Oh, you’re good, alright, Crouch. But you forgot one thing.”

Crouch froze and looked him in the eye. “What’s that, Potter.”

“Who I’ve got in my head.”

Crouch’s eyes widened a fraction, and he turned.

“Avada Kedavra!”

**THUD!**

Crouch’s Killing Curse sailed out behind him—right through where Ginny would have been if she were actually there. Harry and Ginny weren’t stupid. Crouch wasn’t stupid either, of course; he only half-turned and kept one eye on Harry. But to do that move, he had to move the wand that was trained on Marcus behind him, and he couldn’t point his other wand at Marcus for fear of accidentally double-casting—which was exactly what he did. But Georgina anticipated that and dove down and to the side under the curse. As she did, she summoned Marcus to herself, and at that moment, Harry’s silent Stunning Hex hit Crouch directly in the face. He went down hard.

Georgina staggered back to her feet on shaky legs, clutching a crying Marcus to her chest. “He could have killed me, Harry,” she said.

“I knew you’d dodge it,” he said. “Any apprentice of Hermione’s isn’t going to get caught out by a single spell like that.”

Hermione smiled. “Brilliant. You see, this is why you’re the hero, Harry,” she said. “And now…it’s finally over.”

Barty Crouch awoke chained to a chair somewhere under the Ministry of Magic.

“So, Mr. Crouch, you want to try that again?” Hermione asked smugly.

His response was rather less than polite.

“Told you he’d say that,” Neville said—the real Neville this time.

“And you too, Longbottom,” Crouch hissed and spat at him.
Neville clenched his fist and took a half step toward him, but restrained himself from hitting him. “Oh, I really wish I could do this myself,” he said, “but I’ll have to content myself with legal justice. Bartemius Crouch Junior, it is my great pleasure to inform you that you have been tried in absentia and convicted of abuse of authority, torture of vulnerable persons, crimes against humanity, and—hell, I don’t know. A bunch of stuff. In payment for these crimes, you shall be hanged by the neck until dead, to be carried out—” But he stopped there, because Crouch started laughing like a madman.

“What the hell?” he said.

Crouch kept laughing.

This time, Neville did hit him, a backhanded slap, hard across the face. “Listen to me, you bastard!” he yelled. “You’re done! We caught all your lackeys. We’re pumping them for information to make sure we got them all. We got your son back, and you’re going to be executed! You’ve failed!”

“Ha ha ha!” Crouch cackled. “You think you’ve won. Heh. Foolish boy! You think you beat me! Ha ha ha ha ha—”

“Shut up!” Neville yelled.

“Go crying home to mummy! Hee hee hee!”

Neville lunged to punch him in the jaw.

“Neville!”

“Neville!”

Hermione and Ron rushed to grab him before he could land a blow.

“Mate, it’s not worth it,” Ron said.

“He deserves it!” Neville tried to break free.

“Yes, I deserve it! HA!” Crouch yelled, grinning madly.

“Neville, wait,” Hermione said. “Something’s wrong. I have a bad feeling about this.”

Everyone turned and stared at her. “What?” Ron said. “He’s not another impostor, is he?”

“No, I don’t think so.” She raised her wand to Crouch with trembling fingers and whispered, “Atma Prakata.”

Barty Crouch’s soul was dark, laced with green—not necessarily evil in itself, though perhaps someone to keep an eye on—but what horrified her and everyone in the interrogation room was the sight of the long tear running through it with ragged, blackened edges.

She flinched back. Horror dawned on Ron’s face, and Neville looked uneasy. “You made a horcrux,” Hermione said.

Crouch laughed even more madly than before.

“A horcrux!” Ron gasped.

“You mean one of those—?” Neville asked, and they nodded. “Then that means we can’t…”
“We can’t kill him,” Hermione confirmed. “Or his spirit will get away like Voldemort’s did.” She felt sick. The horcrux wasn’t even the worst of it. The worst part was that she knew damn well that Crouch was smarter than Voldemort about strategy.

“Where did you put it?” she demanded. He only started laughing again. Part of her wondered if he’d lost his grip on sanity completely, but she grabbed him by his robes and shoved him against the wall. “WHERE?!”

“Hermione!” Ron called.

“Ha ha ha,” Crouch cackled. “Dropped it into the water somewhere over the Mediterranean. Hee hee. Didn’t much pay attention to where!”

Hermione let go of his robes and stepped back, ashen faced. She could hardly believe it. He’d beat them, after all that. They’d got the dementor problem mostly under control even with Germany stonewalling. They’d stopped Crouch’s New Death Eaters, got Marcus back, and captured Crouch himself, and now, at the end, he’d still outsmarted them. She drew her wand, her face twisted with hate.

“Hermione, don’t!”

“Dornröschen!”

Crouch slumped in his chair in a deep coma. Ron stared at her.


“But—”

“If he wakes up, he can probably figure out a way to kill himself even if he’s restrained—turn his magic on himself or something. And have a Cursebreaker check him for deadman’s spells that’ll kill him. We can’t take any chance of his soul escaping, or it’ll be our first year all over again.”

Ron shuddered. “Bloody hell, you’re right. I’ll take care of it.”

“Good.” She turned and left the room.

She passed George, Harry, and Georgina waiting for her outside. She spared them only a glance and said, “I’m going out.”

George started to follow. “Where—?”

“I need some time alone,” Hermione said.

“I’m not so sure you should—”

“I’ll be fine, George. I just need to vent a bit.” She quickened her pace as he followed her. As fast as she could, she took the lift to the Atrium and Apparated away.

Georgina wandered carefully toward an artificial clearing in the forest near the Burrow with George following close behind. Even between the two of them, it had taken some time to find her, but George had a few ideas of where Hermione would go—a forest somewhere away from people where she could do a lot of damage without hurting anything—and Georgina knew roughly what signs to look for.
“Are you sure she’s okay?” Georgina asked. “I’ve never seen her like that—not up close, anyway.”

“I have,” George said, “and it’s bloody scary, but she won’t hurt herself…er, she won’t do any permanent damage to herself, but she loses control sometimes. She needs someone to reign her in.”

They reached the clearing. Georgina took one look and clapped her hands over her mouth. “Um… George?” she said. “I think you can skip the reigning her in part.”

Hermione was on her hands and knees in the middle of the clearing, her shoulders shaking as she panted for breath. The trees around her were…not destroyed, but in ruins nonetheless, each one in a different way. The first shredded into splinters. The next—it was hard to pinpoint the difference, but it looked like it had shattered like ice. One tied into knots, another fallen over limp like rubber, one completely denuded of bark. They seemed to get more creative as they went along. There was a tree on fire that was burning out more slowly than it should. One was glowing unnatural colours. A small tree seemed to have turned to stone right down to the smallest twigs—or more likely those carbon nanotubes she’d talked her about. Georgina recognised the signature of the pool of water around the roots. Two trees were fused together in a way that gave her a headache. There was a tree whose branches had split open like sausages, the heartwood layers separated like layers of an onion. Another had received similar treatment, except that the wood fibres had been separated from each other, turning it into a massive ball of fluff.

Hermione had taught Georgina enough to understand the shape of most of what she’d done, but a couple of them baffled her. The fluff ball seemed like it should have taken more power than a single witch could muster. She shuddered. She’d almost forgotten how scary Hermione could be when she was angry.

“Hermione!” George said. He rushed to her side and helped her up, holding her tight. “Are you alright?”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said. Her voice was hoarse. “I lost my temper.”

He looked around at the clearing. “Yeah, no kidding.”

She struggled weakly in his arms—not really against him, but just in frustration. She flexed her fingers. Her hands and feet ached, though she couldn’t remember hurting them in particular. “I’m sorry,” she repeated. “It just feels so worthless.”

“Please calm down, love,” George said and kissed her. “It’s not worthless. We won.”

“It is! There’s still a hundred or so escaped dementors out there. We caught the man who did it; we caught Europe’s most wanted wizard, and we can’t do anything to him because he has a horcrux! A horcrux we can’t get to, maybe ever, which I knew we should have been worried about four bloody years ago!”

“Come on, it’s not as bad as all that,” he said. “It’s a just setback. Other people can solve it. He’ll keep for a few decades, and this time next week, he won’t have any followers left who can break him out. He’s safe. And we saved your godson. You’ve more than done your duty.”

She shook her head: “I still should’ve been working on the horcrux problem. I don’t want the life of one comatose man hanging over us like that.”

Georgina sighed and smacked her in the back of the head. “OW!”
“Hermione, stop,” she said. “That’s six months of dementor exposure talking. We’ve been telling you you’re overdoing it. You need to relax. Go home, and spend the night with your husband. You’ll feel better.”

Hermione blushed. “Georgina!”

George grinned and kissed her hard on the mouth. “She’s right, you know.”

She rolled her eyes: “Fine. Take me home, George.”
3 May 2002

Harry’s and Ginny’s baby wasn’t born on the first of May, but he was born on the third. It was a memorable experience for all involved. Ginny coped with her labour pains in part by projecting them to Harry. Harry fainted on the spot. He claimed he was taken by surprise, but she said that didn’t excuse the second time it happened. Still, the birth went smoothly with the delivery of a seven-pound, twelve-ounce baby boy.

The date meant that meant Fleur was still pushing for her choice of name, but Ginny put her foot down. Harry led the family into the delivery room (in controlled quantities; it was a big family), and told them, “Weasleys, I am proud to present James Victor Potter.”

“Oh, he’s beautiful!” Molly cooed.

“He is,” Ginny said. “Although he has Harry’s nose. Unfortunately.”

“Worse that that,” Harry said. “I think he has my dad’s nose. But he looks like he’ll have Ginny’s eyes, so it should balance out.”

Ginny gave him a look. “His eyes are blue—oh, the shape,” she read his thoughts.

“All babies have blue eyes, dear,” Molly said. “He does look rather like you when you were born.”

“Say, I've just thought of something,” George said. “James and Morgan will be going to Hogwarts at the same time.”

They had woken the morning after the raid on Barty Crouch to learn that Tonks had had her baby, too. There were an awful lot of spring birthdays in this family, Hermione reflected. Morgan Lupin—a girl, for now. She looked a bit different from Sasha, and they weren’t sure she’d inherited a full share of her mother’s gift, but time would tell. It did imply something interesting about the genetics of Metamorphs, though.

“Geoo-orge,” Ginny whined. “He was just born. You don’t need to talk about Hogwarts yet.”

“Not to mention the two of them will be there are the same time as Sasha,” Hermione deadpanned. “Hogwarts may not survive.”

15 May 2002

Harry rubbed his eyes, hoping the dark circles didn’t show too badly. “You really didn’t pick the best time, Mr. Spudmore,” he said. “I have a two-week-old baby to care for, and I’m not expecting to be doing much of anything in public for a while.”
“I do apologise, Mr. Potter,” said Randolph Spudmore. “We wanted to track a full season’s worth of sales first, and then we did some of our own testing, and then there was that unfortunate business with Barty Crouch. But the Quidditch World Cup is only two months away, so we wanted to contact you as soon as possible.”

“Right,” Harry groaned, “and you want me to do a detailed study of what’s wrong with the Firebolt Millennium? I mean, I told you what problems I had with it when it first came out.”

“Ah, yes,” Spudmore checked his notes. “Poor handling, hair-trigger steering: you felt it didn’t have the strong control of the original.”

“It doesn’t, unless you’ve changed it,” he said.

“So you say, but that is hardly a scientific assessment. The Millennium is a precision piece of equipment, and if we had an accurate study of what the problem was, we could try to fix it.”

Harry nodded, conceding the point. He tried to think of what kinds of tests he could do. Spudmore would surely have some in mind, but he wouldn’t need to approach Harry except for his own flying skill and his own tests—or possibly name recognition. It wasn’t coming to him, but he did think of something else. “Sorry, Mr. Spudmore,” he said, “my head isn’t really in it. But I think Hermione said something about this ages ago. I could call her and see if she’s at home if you want.”

“Oh! If she’s willing to talk to me, I’d be honoured, Mr. Potter,” he said.

“Alright.” Harry got up and went to the Floo. Calling Hermione’s and George’s flat, he stuck his head through the fireplace.

“Harry!” Hermione jumped up from the sofa. “What’s happening? Is something wrong?” She was still a bit on edge from the past few months.

“No, no,” he said. “It’s just, Randolph Spudmore from the Firebolt Corporation showed up at my door.”

“Firebolt?”

“Firebolt?” George repeated as his head popped into view.

“Yeah, he wanted me to do a study on why the Millennium is such a piece of rubbish.”

“Wait, what?” George said.

“Well, not that exactly,” Harry clarified, “but that’s basically what he meant. Hermione, I was wondering if you could help?”

“Tell him it’s too fast,” she said.

Harry blinked. “Er…”

“G-forces? Centrifugal force?” she said. “I told you this when you got your first Firebolt.”

“I know! That’s why I called you, but it’s been a while, and I haven’t got enough sleep for this.”

Hermione sighed resignedly, understanding that she’d have to explain it herself, but then, a smile formed on her face. “George,” she said sweetly, “you might want to come along. I think you’ll want
A few minutes later, Hermione and George stepped out of the Floo at Twelve Grimmauld Place—Sirius’s wedding present to Harry and Ginny. He hadn’t wanted his old house, so he’d left it Harry to fix it up. After some aggressive cleaning and a bit of remodelling, it looked much homier.

Hermione shook the broommaker’s hand. “Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Spudmore,” she said.

“Likewise, Professor Granger. And Mr. Weasley,” he replied. “Thank you for taking the time to speak to me.”

“No trouble, Mr. Spudmore,” Hermione said happily. “Though that will be a ten galleon consulting fee.”

George coughed, suppressing a guffaw. Harry snorted, started to get an inkling of what she was up to. They could hear Ginny laugh from upstairs when he projected the look on Spudmore’s face to her.

“Excuse me?” Spudmore said.

“Harry said you’re doing a study on the failure of the Firebolt Millennium, correct?” Hermione said.

“Oh, yes, yes, that’s correct, Professor Granger. Sales and reviews of the Millennium have been poor, and we’re trying to figure out what went wrong.”

“And you’re getting a professional Arithmancer’s assessment on a product that’s worth hundreds of galleons per unit. I’d say that’s worth a ten galleon consulting fee.”

Spudmore, who wasn’t stupid, but wasn’t used to people being so brisk with him, readily agreed to the consultation. He counted out ten galleons from his coin purse and handed them to Hermione. She pocketed them.

“It’s too fast,” she said, and she turned and walked back to the fireplace, leaving Spudmore sputtering.

“W-w-what?”

“That’s two and six-sevenths galleons per word,” she said casually. “Think that’s some kind of record, George?”

“Ms.—Professor Granger!” the man shouted.

She and George turned around, and George cracked up at the look on Spudmore’s face. Ginny cackled from upstairs, though that unfortunately made baby James start fussing.

“I think we’ve let him suffer enough, don’t you?” George said.

“I suppose,” she answered. “After all, Harry’s old Firebolt was a big help to us…although it did snap like a twig when hit by a hundred mile an hour crosswind. Best advise your buyers not to fly it in a hurricane.”

“Er…right,” Spudmore said in confusion. That was far outside its design specs. Harry motioned for all of them to sit again. “Professor, what do you mean, the Millennium is ‘too fast’?” the broommaker demanded.

Hermione sat and explained: “The Firebolt Millennium’s had a lot of complaints, hasn’t it? And let
me guess, the most common complaint is whiplash, followed by vertigo and an inability to control the steering.”

“Why, yes. You’ve read the reviews, then?”

“Nope. I hardly know a thing about it. Honestly, I can’t even recall the top speed at the moment.”

“Then how—?”

“Mr. Spudmore, all I needed to know about the Millennium was that the original Firebolt had a top speed of a hundred and fifty miles per hour, and I could have predicted these problems before the Millennium was even on the drawing board.”

“Wait, how’s that?” George cut in. “I think you even lost me there, and I’ve got better at deciphering your stuff.”

“Elementary, my dear Weasley,” she said, winking at him. “The original Firebolt has a top speed of one hundred fifty miles per hour. Firebolt Millennium is presumably meant to be better, else why make a new one? It can’t be just novelty. The original was still at the top of the market, and everyone knew it. A new model with no improvements wouldn’t boost sales. What improvements are there? Broomstick manufacturers like to advertise the speed of their brooms at the top, so it’s probably faster. Most people think faster is better, but they don’t account for G-forces, or they don’t know they increase with the square of the speed, so increases in speed above one hundred fifty miles per hour are useless for Quidditch—Oh! That’s a good article title. Anyway, at those speeds, there’s not enough room to turn inside the Quidditch pitch, and anyone with enough skill to use the speed will hurt themselves trying, so they aren’t going to enjoy the broom very much.”

She said all of this very fast.

Randolph Spudmore, if anything, looked more confused. “But…but…” he stammered, then decided on, “did you say it can’t turn inside the Quidditch pitch? The Firebolt Millennium can turn on a dime!”

Hermione slowed down to answer him: “I’m sorry; I was being unclear. I’m sure the broom can turn on a dime, but humans can’t. Look, the faster you fly, the greater the G-forces you have to withstand when making a turn. On a standard Quidditch pitch, the longest arc you can fit inside it—the widest possible turn—has a radius of curvature of 392 feet. I worked that out ages ago. At 150 miles per hour, you’re going to be pulling nearly four gees to make that turn. Four times the force of gravity. Have you worked with measurements in gees?”

“Not per se. I’m familiar with forces associated with turning and acceleration. I know the basic arithmancy, but at these speeds, we didn’t have any models for it; we’re in uncharted territory.”

“Not to muggles. They’ve gone up to nine gees, or more. Four gees is already close to the limit of most people’s tolerance before passing out without special clothing, and that’s not counting the neck strain. You’re going to get whiplash under those forces. Any faster, and a Quidditch player will pass out before they can get up to full speed. That means making the broom faster won’t help on the pitch and will only increase injuries. Better acceleration, maybe, but even there, you’ll need to be careful.”

Spudmore leaned back in his chair. “Merlin’s beard,” he muttered. “If we’ve really hit a wall in speed…”

“Bloody hell,” George exclaimed. “Hermione, I think you just crashed the broomstick market.”

She sighed and flopped back in her chair to stare at the ceiling. “Either now or five or ten years from
now when everyone figures it out. Still...just in case...” She smirked. “Harry, maybe you should write the article this time.”

“What?”

20 July 2002

Hermione looked out at the campground on the Tanzanian savanna. The mood here was a bit more relaxed than it was in England eight years ago. They were far enough out that there was less pressure here to keep the Statute of Secrecy, with a large section of wilderness warded off and cleared of large animals and acacia trees to build the stadium. Of course, Hermione and many of the British attendees were irrationally wary of attacks by dark wizards, but everyone said security was good this year. All the other countries were being extra careful because in the last World Cup, the Senegalese Yumboes had stolen all the food in a ten mile radius, risking a serious Statute of Secrecy breach and putting a number of impoverished muggle villages at risk. Unfortunately, the British showing wasn’t very good this year. Whether it was because the Quidditch League was still recovering from the war or some other factor wasn’t as clear.

“I think there are a few people who blame the bottom dropping out of the domestic broomstick market for the British teams not placing,” Hermione said, noticing a handful of the looks she was getting.

“Then they’re stupid,” George said. “S not like it makes the brooms on the market any worse.”

“I still feel awkward being here.”

“Come on,” he pulled her along. “We’re just here to support Viktor. Especially since Harry can’t make it.”

Harry and Ginny naturally hadn’t come with a baby at home. Even if Harry might have come for a night to watch for both of them, he and Ginny didn’t want to be separated across continents for any length of time.

They walked through the camp toward where the Bulgarian team was staying. It wasn’t easy to get close to them, but Hermione’s name could open a few proverbial doors, and once they got someone to actually tell Viktor who was there, he let them in at once.

“Hermione,” he said. “And George. Thank you for coming.”

“Well, we didn’t want to miss this after your last World Cup performance,” Hermione said. “Ron, Fred, and Angelina are around too, somewhere. And Neville and Luna are on a safari north of here. I guess Newt Scamander’s grandson has been running them all month. But they should be coming. Harry and Ginny sent their regards, of course.”

“Tell dem thank you as vell, den,” Viktor said. “And congratulations for deir new child.”

“We will,” said George. “They named him after you, you know.”

“They named him after the date,” Hermione said quickly. “Or near enough. Third of May.”

“Dey deserve all happiness after what dey have been through,” Viktor said with a smile. “And tell Harry I am sorry I never got to face him on pitch.”

“Oh, believe me, so’s he,” George answered.
“We just wanted to wish you luck in the final tonight,” Hermione said. “Rawya Zaghloul sounds like a tough opponent.”

“Thank you. She is very skilled, but I am confident,” Viktor said.

They stayed a little while longer before heading back to their own campsite. However, they did see one interesting sight when they found Ron talking animatedly with an Egyptian warlock about hieroglyphics.

“What’s up, little bro?” George cut in. “Whatever happened to ‘consorting with the enemy’?”

“Oi! Give me a break, George. That was years ago,” Ron protested.

“Relax, Ron. I was only joshing.”

“Hmph. If you want to know, after the mess with Barty Crouch, I reckon I ought to start studying runes and cursebreaking again. The Auror Department could use someone who can do stuff like that in-house. You know we missed two latent curses on him in the initial scan? The bloke was so paranoid I think impersonating Moody rubbed off on him.”

“But you got them all?” Hermione said nervously.

“Pretty sure. We even had an alchemist take a look at him, just in case. But that doesn’t rule out curses he laid elsewhere, waiting to activate. But we’ll get ahead of him. Don’t worry. And I’ll study up to try to make sure we don’t miss stuff like that again. It’s actually really interesting. I’m just out of practice.”

“Well, I’m proud of you, Ron,” George said, clapping him on the shoulder. “And good luck with that.”

The rest of the day and night passed without incident. Sadly, Egypt won the match when Viktor was narrowly beaten out to the Snitch by the Egyptian Seeker, but there were no dark wizard attacks and no mascots run amok this time. The Veela caused a bit of a stir, but they were given strict orders to stay in line, so it was nothing but a fun international outing for once.

23 September 2002

Georgina looked around in amazement as Hermione led her to the control room at CERN. The facility was enormous and filled with people. As she understood things, these were nearer to muggle Unspeakables than anything else, but there were thousands of them. And an alarmingly number of them went by “Doctor”. In the control room, dozens of muggles, most of them in casual clothes (one of them wasn’t even wearing shoes!) bustled about, working an array of controls and readouts that could rival the entire Department of Mysteries.

One of the older muggles greeted Hermione warmly, shaking her hand.

“Thank you for having me back, Dr. van der Werf,” she said.

“The pleasure is all mine, Dr. Granger.”

Hermione motioned to Georgina: “And this is my apprentice…Darth Maul.”

“What?” she said.

“Really?” van der Werf said.
“Sorry. Her name’s Georgina Vector.”

Van der Werf shook Georgina’s hand and led the two of them to a less busy corner of the room. She still didn’t fully understand this project of Hermione’s, but it was apparently so difficult that it took this place, supposedly the largest machine ever built, to make a speck of the material she was testing. Van der Werf turned out to be an in-the-know muggle whose main contribution to the project was explaining how the thing worked.

“We take the antiprotons from the Antiproton Decelerator and slow them down using a thin foil target, then confine them in a Penning trap,” he said.

“Wait, shouldn’t the antiprotons just crash into the foil and annihilate?” Georgina cut in.

“No, Miss Vector, the antiprotons will only annihilate with atomic nuclei, and only a tiny fraction of them actually hit a nucleus, atoms being mostly empty space,” he said. “The Penning trap uses electrodes to confine the antiprotons in a small section of the tube and an axial magnetic field to confine them near the axis.”

“Like this,” Hermione said, quickly sketching out a diagram.

“Ooo-kay… I think I get it,” Georgina said as she studied it.

“Yes, like that,” van der Werf confirmed. “The magnets are supercooled to fifteen kelvin, and the antiprotons quickly equilibrate to that temperature by Coulomb interaction once they’re confined.”

“In simple terms, a tiny amount of hot gas in a cold container doesn’t stay hot for long,” Hermione explained.

“Essentially yes. Then, positrons are introduced into the trap, and another pair of electrodes confine them in a larger cloud around the antiprotons. Where they overlap, they can combine into neutral antihydrogen…” He hesitated. “Although the vast majority of the particles are still charged. Will that be a problem, Dr. Granger?”

“If they’re at fifteen kelvin, it’s not,” she said. “The annihilation radiation might be, but I think I can compensate for that.”

“Alright, but also, I’m afraid you won’t be able to get as close to the beam line as before. The antihydrogen is produced in a big detector.”

“Yes, I know. I read the specs,” Hermione said. “I had some ideas for temporary detection spells that won’t show anything too suspicious in the detectors, if I could run them by you…?”

As Georgina understood it, it took a lot longer to make it work this time than before, but Hermione did find a way to take some readings of the antihydrogen. That wasn’t enough for her to solve the problem on the spot, which was expected, but she was confident this would complete it.

25 December 2002

Christmas dinner was still held at the Burrow, as always. Two grandchildren rather than one and two more wives made it a bit more crowded, but not intractably so.

Nadia was adorable as she squealed over baby James, and they made sure to take plenty of photos. Lots of gifts were exchanged. Harry always insisted on giving Dobby socks; the elf had quite the collection by now. However, Dobby caused quite a stir when he opened the package and said in a
strange, hissing voice, “Ooh, *sockses*. We likes them, don’t we, my Precious,” followed by a wet coughing sound.

Harry’s head snapped up, and he glared at Hermione and George, trying to decide which of them was responsible for this.

Hermione giggled and raised her hand. “Guilty.”

He rolled his eyes. “Why do I have a feeling this isn’t going to end well?” he said. “Your communication rings already look like the One Ring. If you ever make a ring of invisibility—”

“Why would she need a ring of invisibility?” said Percy. “She can just use the Disillusionment Charm.”

“It’s a muggle reference, Percy. Don’t worry about it,” she said. “You really should see more films. And Dobby, that was pretty good. The ‘*gollum*’ part still needs a bit of work.”

“Yes, my Precious,” Dobby said.

George leaned over and whispered in her ear, “Sonya’s gonna smack him silly if he tries that around her, isn’t she?”

“Probably.”

Dinner was very good. As usual, Molly worked her magic with help from various family members. Harry in particular had turned out to be quite good at cooking—a side effect of his unfortunate childhood, but he enjoyed it with Ginny helping.

“Hermione, dear, did you ever finish that project—the one you went to Switzerland for?” Molly asked over the table.

Hermione bit her lip sheepishly: “Er, not exactly, Molly. You see, I did complete the proof, but…I had to assume strong CP-symmetry.”

The Weasleys looked at her in confusion. “Um, is that a problem?” said Molly.

“Yes, because strong CP-symmetry is explicitly wrong. I mean, all CP-symmetry is wrong, but weak CP-asymmetry is covered by the sixth exception to Gamp’s law.”

“But what is CP…symmetry?” asked Ginny.

“It’s…basically CP-*asymmetry* is what determines that we have matter instead of antimatter in the universe. It you assume CP-symmetry, the universe should be empty.”

“Er…how is that useful then? I mean…uh…”

“What’s the use of starting a proof from a wrong assumption?” Percy finished for her. Ginny nodded emphatically.

“Because the strong CP-violation term is tiny,” Hermione said. “I think I can fill in the gap in the proof by including it as a small correction term. I just need better measurements to do it.”

Fred cocked an eyebrow at her. “But that was the biggest…whatever it is in the world,” he said. “How can you get better measurements than that?”

“With their next generation experiment,” she said. “They’re barely thinking about that now. It won’t
be running until about 2005, but I’m almost positive when it is, the results will come back so I can fill it in and prove antimatter really can’t be transfigured.

“Well, good,” Harry said. “As long as you can’t build a nuke or something.” He saw the uncomfortable look on her face and dropped his fork. “Hermione, please tell me you can’t build a nuke.”

She shook her head: “It would be a bit hit-or-miss, and I’d need to find a uranium mine…Yes. If I had free reign to test them, I could do it in a few weeks. Didn’t my parents ever mention that? I’m sure I told them.”

“N-no. It never came up,” Harry said.

“What’s this?” Arthur cut in. “You’re talking about muggle nukular bombs? How does that work exactly?”

“Um, maybe better if you don’t know, Arthur,” Harry said, and Hermione had to agree, just in case he said something unfortunate in the wrong place in the muggle world.

“A bomb that can destroy a whole city,” Hermione said. “Muggle thing. Luckily, they’re very difficult to make.”

“Supposed to be very difficult to make if your name isn’t Hermione Granger,” Harry grumbled. “Could someone else do that?”

Hermione shrugged: “I can’t see why anyone would want to, but I suppose so. Not many people would have the technical knowledge and the knowledge of how to magically enrich uranium, but it might be something to look into. I’ll write a letter to ICW asking about it. If no one’s done it in the past sixty years, it’s not urgent, though.”

“Fine,” he said, “but I’m gonna hold you to that.”
Cursebreaker

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: JK Rowling had a little story, whose profits were green as…hm, that only works for American money. Anyway, she owns it, not me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

5 May 2003

“Alright, boys, what do you have to show me?” Hermione asked.

Colin and Dennis Creevey smiled as they brought out a large box and opened it to display their new invention. “We’ve been working with Omnioculurs for years, but we still haven’t been able to exceed the limitations of magical photographs,” Colin explained. “The best we’ve been able to do is sync audio with a separate system.”

“I know,” Hermione said. “Ten-second clips only, or a little longer with special equipment.”

“Yeah, but there’s no reason we should be limited to that,” Dennis said. “Wizards are theoretically capable of doing magical television like the Wizarding Wireless, but it’s completely different magic—and embargoed by the Ministry.”

“And for a good reason,” Hermione replied.

“We know. The signals can leak onto muggle sets. But that’s where this baby comes in.” Colin motioned proudly to the device in the box. It looked like one of those telescopes bird-watchers used, done in the elaborate brass of the Omnioculurs. “This is the first ever all-in-one magical video camera. We call it the Creevey Bros. Mementoscope.”

Hermione’s eyes grew wide. She knew the Creeveys were continuing to innovate, but this was beyond was she expected. “A whole video camera?” she said.

Dennis nodded: “Uh huh. This can play back whole recordings with sound without having to jury-rig something.”

“The hard part was getting it to automatically record synced audio,” said Colin. “The crystals are kind of literal about recording only video. You know why this thing’s so big? That’s a regular Omniocular barrel in there. The barrel around it records an audio track on the inside wall with a diamond-tipped stylus.”

“So that’s why you wanted all those tiny diamonds,” Hermione exclaimed.

“Yep. Unfortunately we can only fit twenty minutes right now. Nowhere near muggle standards. But we have interchangeable cylinders, and it’s a lot better than sixty seconds.”

“That’s amazing,” she said. “I had no idea you were this far along.”

“Thanks,” said Dennis. “And unfortunately, we couldn’t fit an internal projection system. You have to take the crystal and the cylinder out to do it properly, but you can play it back in small scale…”
He took the Mementoscope out of its case and set it on a small tripod, aiming it at the wall. “Electric light works best, but if you insert a lighted wand…”

Colin snapped his fingers dramatically, and the switch for the room lights flipped. Hermione’s eyebrows rose. Wandless magic? Even if it was just a parlour trick, the Creevey Brothers had come a long way in showmanship.

Dennis inserted his wand into a bracket on the back of the Mementoscope. He flipped a lever, and a small picture appeared on the wall—a circle about a foot across. It showed an image of Colin wearing a Victorian suit. The outer cylinder began to turn, and a tinny recording of his voice began reciting in serious tones: “Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.”


“What can we say? We’ve had a lot of inspiration,” Dennis replied.

“Not to mention financial backing,” added Colin. “A third of this is still yours.”

“Of course. I’m proud of you,” she said. “And I think these will be very useful this year.”

4 June 2003

“Rolling,” Hermione said as she started the Mementoscope filming on its tripod. The picture in the viewfinder showed Neville standing on a rocky mountainside, the only greenery coming in the form of a scattering of creeping shrubs.

“Right,” Neville said. “We’re in the Canadian Rockies, British Columbia, and we’ve found a perfect bed of arctic willow.” He bent down to show the small “tree” to the camera. It was only a few inches high and sprouted from branches that crept a couple feet along the ground. “This is the most cold-tolerant woody plant in the world, and it probably has the densest wood grain you’ll find anywhere. An arctic willow this size in this climate could easily be over two hundred years old.” George whistled off-screen, impressed. “Yeah,” he said. “Let’s see if Mitzi can find a tree she likes.”

Neville pulled a creature from the warmth of his robes that from a distance looked like a stick insect and set it down among the leaves. The bowtruckle scrabbled over the small plant, looked confuse, then looked up at Neville and shook her head.

“Go on, Mitzi,” he encouraged her. “We’re looking for a small wand tree. Look at the others. This is the perfect kind.”

Mitzi ran across the rocky ground, examining tree after tree, seeming to sniff them out. After a few minutes, not as long as it would have taken searching by chance, she found an arctic willow with appropriate magical properties and held onto it, stroking its branches.

“Excellent,” Neville said. “Thank you, Mitzi.” He picked up the now shivering bowtruckle and tucked her back into his robes. “Luna, fetch the spade,” he called. “Now, this tree is small enough that we can just dig up the whole plant. We have a magical terrarium that will maintain the appropriate climate conditions.”

They dug up the willow and placed it in a terrarium, then moved on. Hermione would study it later to see if she could remove a large enough piece to make a test wand without killing it. Her renewed studies into wandcraft hadn’t turned up much yet. She’d made a passable magic staff, but she quickly
learnt there is was more complex than it looked. It was less vital to select the best quality wood for a staff, but making the core was much harder. The magical conductivity of the larger core was much greater, not to mention that it took multiple fibres to make, so it was difficult to do any magic with it that wasn’t just a flash in the pan. It was like playing a flute made from a two-inch pipe; you couldn’t force enough air through it to make it sound properly.

Wands, on the other hand, had a lot of variation due to the wood, and the more she thought about it, the more questions she had. What happened if she cut across the grain instead of along it? What if the wand wasn’t straight or very short or shaped like a fork? What if you used a natural twig? What if it was circular? What if you pressed together two halves made from different types of wood? What if you added a handle that was itself a magical material like dragonskin? What if you twined together multiple cores?

Some of the results were fairly obvious, and the Ollivanders were able to advise her on others. Wands made from multiple woods were exponentially harder to make and tended to act up with changes in humidity. Multiple cores had many of the same problems as staves and would react against each other if they were different materials. A crooked or branched wand just wouldn’t aim properly. Too short a wand was hard to use both because its magical conductivity was lower and because it had no “character,” as Old Mr. Ollivander put it. Hermione tried it anyway, but found it was lacking in something she couldn’t quite define.

She still thought she might be able to do something useful with a circular wand made into a bracelet. It would be less powerful, for sure, but it would be nearly impossible to disarm someone of it. Lately, however, she’d become interested in exotic woods, and she’d picked up a number of interesting samples on their North American tour. Part of a Huckleberry bush collected from the hollow of a redwood tree three hundred feet above ground level. A twig from a bristlecone pine that was dead three thousand years and sprouted probably four thousand years before that. Even petrified wood from Arizona, though she doubted she’d get much out of it.

For now, though, they had other work to do.

“So how are those uranium levels here, Hermione?” George asked her.

She waved her wand over the rocky soil. “Higher,” she said. “I could use this soil if I needed to, which is a bit worrying in itself, but there’ll be more closer to Lake Athabasca.”

She was pleasantly surprised when the ICW took her concern about magical nukes seriously. They had met with her, assembled a small team, sworn them to secrecy, and asked them to investigate what it would take to build a nuke with magic. The hard part would be acquiring enough uranium. Enriching it, normally the hard part for muggles, would be easy with her isotopic separation spells. But because magic was so sensitive to radioactivity, the team concluded that it they could probably blanket areas that were rich in uranium with detection spells through the rune stone network to find out if any wizards were trying to mine it. She was honestly worried that a sufficiently determined wizard could extract it undetected from normal soils, but it would at least slow them down by a lot.

Luna spoke up. “Hermione, if we’re going that way, I think we should try to find some Re’em. They’re a rare, endangered species, and there should be some around there. If you want to preserve magical beasts, too—”

“Yes, I do,” Hermione said. “Any kind of endangered species, really. We should be collecting samples, if we can. I just didn’t think endangered animals would be easy to find on our schedule.”

Hermione and Georgina had taken a day in the Pacific Northwest to collect DNA samples from Sasquatch. She was pleasantly surprised how dedicated Georgina had become to this project.
They documented that trip with the Mementoscope to show others on their return—something they should have done with the giants if they could have. Someone needed to tell these stories. America’s nearly two centuries of strict separation from muggles had forced non-humans to the margins of the magical world. Sasquatch, though not city-dwellers by nature, were all but forbidden from cities, unable to partake in magical society, and were hunted nearly to extinction after the Great Sasquatch Rebellion of 1892. Though they’d recovered some since then, they struggled with the effects of inbreeding even more than the giants.

“Re’em are supposed to be hard to find. And kinda dangerous,” George pointed out. “Do you think you can find some in the time we have?”

Luna smiled broadly and cracked her knuckles. This was her speciality. “Watch me,” she said.

14 June 2003

Neville and the others laughed as Mitzi waved around a stick that was three times her size, thoroughly perplexed at its lightness.

“Balsa wood,” Hermione said. “Lightest wood in the world, which you can get in any hobby shop, of course, but it’s better to take it directly from the tree.”

Mitzi regained her balance, then squeaked and brandished the stick like a wand.

Neville chuckled as he collected the bowtruckle. “Okay, Mitzi, we know it’s a good tree,” he said.

They walked back toward the town. Hermione hadn’t anticipated much activity from this stop in Mexico, but they were having fun here. She’d grabbed some pieces of palm stalks while she was there, too. When they returned, though, it was to quite the scene when a Mexican witch in Healer’s robes ran up to them, shouting, “¡Aritmante Aritmante!” and babbling rapidly in Spanish.

“Señora, señora, slow down,” Hermione tried to answer her. “Please, my Spanish is rusty.”

Just then a swarthy-looking wizard ran up, panting as if he were trying to catch up, and spoke over the frantic Healer, talking to her in rapid-fire Spanish that Hermione couldn’t make out. And then both of them stopped when Luna cheerfully piped up, “Oh, hello, Rolf.”

Rolf Scamander stood there with the Healer and faced the group. “Hello, Luna. Hello, Neville,” he said. Luna and Neville had met the younger Scamander a few times in their travels, and Luna liked him so much that Hermione was a little worried Neville might get jealous, but they have evidently become fast friends. “Professor Granger, I hope I’m not imposing,” he continued. “The Healers approached me for help, but I heard you were in the country, and I thought you could do more for them.”

“With arithmancy?” she said. “¿Aritmancia?” Perhaps some ancient Mayan puzzle would call for her expertise, but it didn’t make sense for a Healer to come for her.

“No, not arithamancy, Señora Professor Granger,” the Healer said, more slowly now. “They say you kill dementors. You understand the magic of the soul. Please, there is a boy at the hospital who needs help.”

Suddenly, she understood. “What happened?” she demanded.

The Healer composed herself and explained: “Two boys were playing among the ruins. We tell people not to go there, but you know how children are. They found something—an Aztec mask.”
“Probably over six hundred years old,” Rolf Scamander offered.

“Yes. We don’t know exactly what happened, but only one of the boys came back. He was wearing the mask, and it won’t come off. He went home and tried to kill his family. We later found out he killed his friend in the ruins and cut out his heart. He is clearly possessed, but we don’t know how to help him.”

“I tried to help. Gramps taught me some about possession and dark spirits, but this is beyond my expertise.”

“Please, can you do anything?” the Healer asked.

“One moment, Señora,” Hermione said. She motioned Georgina over to her. “My God—how much of that did you get, Georgina?”

“Enough,” she said grimly. “Luna translated what I didn’t catch.”

“And what do you think?”

“A horcrux. Maybe.”

“Aztec,” she reminded. “Wrong continent.”

“The Aztecs had contact with the European magical powers before Columbus,” Georgina said, “but you’re right; horcruxes weren’t exactly well-known…But on the other hand, they practised human sacrifice enough that they could’ve developed it independently.”

“Or something similar,” Hermione said. “I doubt it would’ve been exactly the same—which could be a valuable piece of data.” She turned back to the newcomers. “Mr. Scamander, thank you for bringing this to my attention,” she said.

“Señora, my apprentice and I will take a look and do what we can.”

The Healer thanked her profusely and led the group to the hospital. However, George tapped her on the shoulder as they went. “Psst. You sure you wanna get involved in this Hermione?” he whispered. “You don’t know if you can help, and if you can, you don’t know how long it will take.”

“I know, but this is the kind of thing I’m gonna need to study if we’re ever gonna solve the Barty Crouch problem, George. Besides, there’s a possessed boy who needs help, and I invented soul magic as a discipline. This sort of is my job.”

The boy was only about nine or ten years old. His face was covered by a vaguely skull-like mask elegantly carved from turquoise, and he was chained to his hospital bed with heavy shackles, padded to keep him from cutting up his wrists and ankles. The whole bed shook as he struggled to get away.

“Superhuman strength,” Hermione said. “Classic symptom of possession.”

The boy hissed and spat and growled something at her in a language she didn’t recognise. His eyes glowed red through the holes in the mask. She looked around at her friends. “Did anyone understand that?”

“It was Nahuatl,” Luna said. “The language of the Aztecs. I don’t know what it means, but I don’t think it was very nice.”

“Of course. Well, first: diagnosis…Atma Prakata.”
The boy shrieked and writhed on the bed as the spell hit. Whether it hurt him somehow or the mask simply recognised her as a threat she didn’t know. The mask turned black, but not the same shifting black cloud that surrounded a horcrux. This was an oily, black film that clung to the mask and sent out tendrils that wrapped around the boy’s head and down his neck like a fungus. It had an aura around it, but it was like the glare around a lightbulb rather than a cloud—except black.

“That doesn’t look like how you described a horcrux looking,” Georgina said.

“Because it’s not,” Hermione replied grimly. “Something different. It has more will than a normal horcrux, I think. You heard how quickly it possessed him. Specifically designed for it, maybe?”

The boy shouted something at her whose meaning was very clear from the tone.

“And different behaviour,” Georgina pointed out.

“Well, yes, it’s the soul of a different person.”

She lowered her voice: “I know, but it’s more than that. If it possessed the boy that easily, why isn’t it draining his soul like Voldemort tried on Ginny? And look what he did to the other boy. Cutting out the heart is an Aztec sacrificial practise, I’m pretty sure. I doubt he did that just for fun.”

Hermione’s eyes widened: “A different method to come back. Georgina, you’re brilliant. Voldemort needed powerful symbolic items: bone of the father, blood of the enemy, Ginny pouring out her soul into the diary. But the Aztecs performed human sacrifices by the thousands.”

“Quantity over quality?” Georgina said.

“And a clue to how it was made. Healer! I need everything you can get me on Aztec sacrificial practises,” she ordered. “We may save him yet.”

15 September 2003

“Occamys are very rare, and tricky to deal with,” said Rolf Scamander. “Their eggs are made of silver, so they’re very vulnerable to theft. As a defence mechanism, they’ll find a burrow or an enclosed space and distort space to fill the entire chamber. Not that they’re small animals. In open air, an occamy can grow up to fifteen feet long. Also because their eggs are silver, they make excellent treasure guardians. After all, the best place to hide a tree is in a forest.”

“Unfortunately, zis treasure is also protected by mathematical puzzles zee likes of which I ‘ave never seen,” said Fleur.

Being a single mother, Fleur couldn’t be too choosy about jobs, especially when Gringotts had its own ideas as her employer. This was officially a Gringotts operation because they insisted on being in charge, but they had sent Fleur as an overseer mainly because they wanted Hermione and Scamander as a consultant. (Luna and Neville sent their regrets.) They were all getting a pretty nice finder’s fee, though, and India was a good place to collect more wood and magical creature samples.

She’d collected a few other oddities in their travels. Baobabs from Madagascar. Wild banana trees from Indonesia. Tree ferns, which weren’t even seed plants, let alone true wood, but were evolutionarily the furthest removed plants that might work. And of course strangler figs and mangroves from here in India.

“I think we might want to deal with the angry magical creature first,” George pointed out.
“Good idea,” Fleur said.

The occamy screeched, its long, blue coils shifting in the outer chamber of the treasure store. Its head flashed past the door with an eye the size of a dinner plate and a beak that could probably swallow a man whole. The team flinched back, except Scamander.

“Don’t worry, it won’t come out unless its provoked,” he said calmly.

“And what do you think we’re doing now?” George asked.

Scamander just smiled. “You see, Gramps discovered that occamys can be captured rather easily with food if you approach them carefully,” he explained. “It’s easier with juveniles, but you just need the right equipment.”

The “right equipment” turned out to be a small bird and a rubbish bin. Juvenile occamys ate insects, but being winged serpents, adults preferred the taste of songbirds. With the promise of a meal and some careful manoeuvring, the guardian of the treasure was lured into the bin and trapped. With his and George’s help, Hermione took a blood sample from it before entering the chamber.

The outer chamber of the treasure store was lined with many runes and elaborate dials (and occamy feathers) that bore only a vague resemblance to an actual clock. It wasn’t clear how they were protected from the occamy, but they seemed to be in good shape. There was a sound of clanking gears from within the walls, presumably connected to a waterwheel in the adjacent river.

George was not very enthused by the appearance of the room. “This place gives me an uncomfortableness,” he said.

Hermione giggled. “Come on, it’s not that bad,” she said.

“I dunno. I think I’ve had enough of creepy cursed lairs for one lifetime. Especially with the clanking.”

“George, when have any of the other places we’ve been had creepy clanking?” she asked. “Luckily, mathematical puzzles are my speciality. Fleur, let’s see what we’ve got.”

Hermione, Georgina, Fleur, and the other Cursebreakers scanned the barrier into the treasure chamber and conferred with each other, translating the runes and mapping out the device. Slowly, a picture began to emerge. The chamber was locked by an elaborate tumbler system controlled by gear trains that each had different, slightly offset gear ratios that were all coprime to each other. Hermione recognised the astronomical ratios at once, but as for the others, teasing out what the gears were even supposed to do was a puzzle in itself.

“It looks like all this whole assembly does is make it super sensitive to the gear position,” Georgina said. “I wouldn’t think they’d be able to calibrate it that well.”

“Oh, you’d be surprised what you can do with medieval tools,” Hermione said, “but I think you’re right.”

“It’s designed to take an enchanted key,” Fleur offered. “I would guess it was spelled to set zee lock more perfectly than a person could.”

Hermione nodded. “Magic key, of course. If you want something to actually be secure and not an obstacle course for robbers. Oh, this is a beautiful piece of work, especially for it’s time. It’s a puzzle and a time lock and an astronomical calendar, all in one. The pieces are constantly shifting, driven by the Sun hitting the marker stones and the river. Magically self-repairing and self-calibrating to keep it...
going for centuries, even in droughts and storms, and only the key can open it.”

“Hm,” one of the Indian Cursebreakers, Ramanujan, spoke up. “What about this, Professor Granger? This looks like an automatic unlocking system.”

“I saw that, too,” Georgina said. “It’s hard to tell, but I think it was designed to open automatically once every lunar cycle in case the key was lost. But I imagine you don’t fancy waiting up to nineteen years for it to open for you.”

“Ah. Certainly not.”

“But zat means there is a way to unlock it without zee key, no?” asked Fleur.

Hermione studied the partial schematic they had assembled. Truthfully, that wasn’t a sure thing. There were sure to be all sorts of curses to protect the mechanism from tampering, some of which might destroy the treasure. Gringotts was willing to take the chance of unravelling them if it were the only option, but it did seem like there should be another way. The problem was that the numbers on the dials were all wrong for it to be an actual clock. Hell, what looked like the input dial for the unlocking mechanism was twenty-seven digits long, which made no sense for a time lock. Then there was an orrery and a five-digit counter of some kind, neither of which matched the gearbox for the locking mechanism, and then a massive flywheel about three feet across and eight inches thick, turning around at a surprising speed for something its size and age. This treasure chamber was clearly designed to last.

“I don’t know,” Hermione said. “None of this makes sense for a clock…How did the hindus keep time…wait, that might be it. I read about this ages ago when I was learning about numbering systems. In Hindu cosmology, the universe is old. Really old. And they way they measure time is different…yes, that’s twenty-seven digits! I think I’ve got it. In order to obfuscate the mechanism and keep someone from just reseting the lock to the next lunar cycle, it marks the time date in absolute reckoning.”

“Ow is zat?” said Fleur.

“In Hindu cosmology, time is cyclical, turning in grand cycles and megacycles adding up to one great cycle, the life of Brahma, that lasts for three hundred eleven trillion and forty billion years. Is that right?” Ramanujan nodded to her. “This thing records the date as the time since the purported creation of the universe, a hundred and fifty-five trillion years ago, measured in the smallest unit of time in the Vedic system.”

“Seconds?”

“No, truti,” Ramanujan said.

“What’s a truti?” asked Fleur.

“That is the trouble, isn’t it?” he answered. “It depends on the specific system…but it’s usually measured in microseconds.”

“Microseconds!”

“It’s doable, though,” Hermione assured her. “Georgina, scan the mechanism; see if you can work out the gear ratios to determine the units it uses in fractions of a day. Mr. Ramanujan, can you help me work out the exact date on the calendar?”

The date was relatively easy. It was just a matter of adding up various ages. On the large end, they
were fairly well defined, although there was the hiccough that they used sidereal days. The current age began in 3102 BC, and there were a bunch of partial cycles to add up before that, but they were mostly agreed upon. On Georgina’s end, however, it was more complicated.

“I’m only getting twenty-one thousand, six hundred rotations to the day,” she said, “but if I’m making sense of the gears feeding from the input to the date calculation, it’s two billion, nine hundred sixteen million truti.”

“That’s thirty-three thousand, seven hundred and fifty per second,” Hermione computed.

“How can they measure something that fast?”

“The way this is set up, something about the flywheel, I think,” she said. “Let me check with the camera.” Hermione took the instant camera from their gear and set it to the fastest shutter speed to take a photograph of the flywheel. It still wasn’t very clear, but after studying it closely and compensating for the rolling shutter, she exclaimed, “A transversal scale! I’ve never heard of one being used before Renaissance Europe.”

“Transversal scale?” Georgina said.

“Yes. Look here. The flywheel is marked with thirteen hundred and fifty divisions. Each division has a very slight diagonal line running from corner to corner across the width of the wheel, where those lines line up with the hundred divisions on the calibration scale marks the exact time, allowing the division of a four-second rotation period to less than a thirty-thousandth of a second. Brilliant. They probably only needed the marks for installation, but it’s just what we need to compute the unlocking position.

“But if it has to be accurate to a thirty thousandth of a second, how can we set it?”

“We can’t—not directly. We’ll have to rig up a gear train of our own that will set the tumblers at the exact right moment to line up with the flywheel. But it’s doable.”

“That’s good enough for me,” Ramanujan said. “Let’s get to work.”

22 January 2004

“It is not often that wandmakers ask for wood from a bonsai tree, Granger-sensei.”

“Well, I’m more of a dabbler in experimental wandcraft, Hamano-san,” Hermione told the artist.

“They are not meant for crafting,” Hamano told her. “They are pieces of art and take many years to make.”

“I am aware of that,” she said. “I’m not expecting to use bonsai trees for primary stock, but I did want at least one for comparison. You see, I have a theory that the very dense wood grain of such a slow-growing tree will make more powerful wands.”

“Ah, very interesting. Well, I suppose I can spare a couple of pieces for such a project.”

“Thank you, Hamano-san.”

Hermione acquired two bonsai pine trees that looked promising and were cultivated with straight trunks. They were both over a hundred years old, though the arctic willow was older than that. She had a pretty good sample of what was possible for very dense-grained woods by now. Her other test
was to try the very highest quality wood she could find, to compare the results. She’d bought several pieces of luthier’s wood from one of the best suppliers in Europe—hand-selected and seasoned for fifty years. Either way, it would be a very expensive wand, but the results would be very informative.

She went back to the hotel to meet with Georgina for some advanced arithmancy study. Hermione and George had taken a break from travel over the holidays, and George didn’t want to be gone too long now, either, because Fred’s and Angelina’s first child was due soon. (They were naming him Lee, of course.) But they were able to fit in a quick trip now.

As it happened, Percy’s and Audrey’s first, Molly, had already come in November. This meant Christmas had been slightly more awkward than usual this year with the elder Molly casually asking if Hermione and George were planning on having children anytime soon and if Ron had found anyone yet. (She’d long since given up on Charlie.) The answer was no on both counts. Honestly, Hermione was only twenty-four, and witches had a good decade longer than muggle women. She was in no hurry.

In the meantime, Georgina was really coming into her own as an arithmancer. She had taken to multivariate calculus, differential equations, and linear and abstract algebra very well, and Hermione was increasingly trusting her with solo projects, consulting, and even confiding a few more details of soul magic and her other high-level projects.

“I think I know which project I want to use for my Mastery,” Georgina told her that night.

“Oh, really?” Hermione said. “It’s about time. I was getting worried. I’m not sure when it’s really supposed to be, but—”

“I know, I know, I’ve been dragging my feet deciding,” Georgina said. “I’ve got a bunch of stuff I could use, but I wasn’t sure which one I wanted to do—kind of like you.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Right, right. I’ve been a bad influence on you, Georgina. So what’s your project?”

“Apparition. You took some notes on it years ago, but you never did anything with it. It could be good to do an arithmantic analysis.”

“Ambitious. But yes, I think you could do it. There are certainly some interesting questions to be answered…You know, I’ve always found it interesting that the limiting factor is relative velocity rather than distance. That results in some interesting effects. Like the limiting distance is always the same east-west, but the closer you are to the equator, the easier it is to go north-south.”

“Really? …I guess I can see that. Huh,” Georgina said. “So what about you, Hermione? Do you have a big dream project anymore?”

“Oh, nothing on the scale of what I’ve already done, thank God,” she said. “I’ve had thoughts about studying Ravenclaw’s Diadem, trying to figure out how it works. Arithmancy as a field hadn’t been invented when Rowena Ravenclaw made it, and no one’s had the chance to study it in centuries. I think it’s doable. It’s just that there always seems to be so much else to do.”

“That sounds interesting.”

“It definitely is, but…it might be a bit more interesting if I weren’t the only who could use it. I suppose being able to copy it and return the original to Hogwarts permanently would be good, but there are a lot of interesting artifacts out there. Take Harry’s invisibility cloak. A normal invisibility
cloak wears out in ten or twenty years, but Harry says that cloak’s been in his family for generations, and no one knows why. There’s little mysteries like that everywhere in the magical world. Most of them aren’t that important, but there’s simply too much to study in a lifetime."

Georgina pondered that for a while and they started working on her Apparition project, but they were soon interrupted by a petrel arriving at their window carrying a letter. Someone wanted Hermione’s help. Immediately.

“That’s a dragon.”

“Indeed.”

“I think you have the wrong person.”

“You were recommended as a dragon fighter, Granger-sensei.”

Hermione spun around to face the Auror. “I was? Since when?”

“November of 1994, in a duel between Harry Potter and a Hungarian Horntail, Potter credited his success to Hermione Granger.”

Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I invented the spell he used against it,” she said. “Looking back, I think he got a lucky hit in. I’ve never faced a dragon myself…well, adult, anyway. We need Charlie for this.”

“Bit short on time for that, don’t you think?” George said.

She shot him a look that said, Not helping. “Can’t the Aurors handle this?”

“We can, of course, but we would have appreciated your help, Granger-sensei. If you could perhaps teach us the spell you used?”

She considered her options and decided it wouldn’t be too big an issue for her to show it to them. “Alright. It’s a bit tricky, but I can try. First off, you’ll want to make sure you’re casting it far enough away that the dust won’t get on you…”

“Is that a Chinese Fireball,” Georgina spoke up as they worked.

George squinted at the dragon that was cutting a fiery path through the countryside, coming worryingly close to a muggle town. “Yeah, looks like it,” he said. He quickly got out the Mementoscope and used the viewfinder for a closer look. “Yep, Chinese Fireball.”

“In Japan?”

“Oh, they’re found all over the Far East. Should maybe call ‘em Oriental Fireballs. I picked up a lot from Charlie.”

Hermione finished explaining her spell to the Auror and demonstrated it: “Dialego Kathar Magnesia.” A cloud of magnesium powder rose into the air twenty feet in front of her. “Now, this is the part you’ll want sunglasses for.” She slipped a pair on and cast a small fireball at the cloud.

BANG!

A blinding flash illuminated the whole area. George and Georgina barely had time to turn away, but the Japanese Auror clapped once and said, “Excellent! This will be very helpful.”
ROAAAR!

The dragon’s call echoed across the valley, and it turned aside from its path.

“Oh, bugger, we just attracted it toward us didn’t we,” Hermione said.

“Not so excellent,” the Auror agreed.

George laughed nervously. “Should probably tell Charlie about that reaction. I don’t think it’s been tested before.”

“Uh, guys?” Georgina said practically as the dragon flew toward them. “Shouldn’t we be getting out of here?”

The Auror shouted something in Japanese, and half a dozen other Aurors ran out or Apparated in to meet them.

“I hate to bring it up, but they might appreciate our help stopping the rampaging dragon that we attracted to them,” Hermione pointed out.

Georgina grumbled and muttered, “Bloody Gryffindors.”

“Okay! Everyone who knows how, get ready with the spell!” Hermione ordered, and they lined up with her. “Careful, we might only get one shot at this. Wait for it…”

The dragon was well above their level now, and it began diving toward them. It blew out a fireball that illuminated its lion-like face, but it fell short of the group.

“Wait for it…” The dragon picked up speed and extended its wings for what might have been a strafing run. “NOW!”

“Dialego Kathar Magnesia!”

A cloud of grey dust flew into the air in front of the group, far larger than she’d ever seen before. At the same moment, Stunning Hexes flew through it from the Aurors.

“DUCK!”

BOOM!

The blast knocked Hermione off her feet, or maybe it was the rush of wind from the dragon’s wings. The dragon screeched with a cry that was almost louder than the flashbang cloud. The ground shook as it landed behind them. Hermione moved on instinct and ran to the side before she could see clearly. She felt a burst of flame just behind her.

When she looked up, she saw the dragon. It towered over her, the size of a small elephant. It snarled and thrashed wildly, blind and disoriented if not deaf. Flurries of sparks flew from its mouth, coming close to scorching her. Red light still flew around the area, but Stunners were only slowing it down. It was then that Hermione realised she’d been separated from the rest of the group. Just her and one Auror with the rest of them scattered in a wide semi-circle around the beast. She could just hear George shout over the fray, “I need a broom!”

“It’s disabled! Knock it out!” Hermione said. She raised her wands, shielding with one. She just needed a good shot.

Before she got one, a fireball exploded at her feet, and she and the Auror were blown back again,
rolling against a rock wall. She pushed herself to her knees. The dragon was close. Too close. She raised her wand again and threw as much power as she could into the spell.

“Dornröschen!”

The spell was too slow. She’d had to trade power for speed when she designed it, and the dragon twitched its head out of the way before it could connect.

“Run!” the Auror yelled, and he pulled her out of the way of another fireball that knocked them to the ground.

“Thanks,” she said. She felt dizzy.

The dragon growled as it loomed over her, swiping at the ground blindly. She struggled to reorient herself and aim her wand again, but just then, something whooshed past her, and a line of fire fell from above, cutting a path directly between her and the dragon. Hermione was confused for a moment. Whatever that was, it seemed worse than useless, but then the fumes hit, and she coughed and choked, and the dragon turned away.

George descended beside her on a broomstick. “And you said Hell in a Handbasket was a bad idea!” he yelled. “Need a lift?”

Hermione was speechless. However, the Auror was quicker and said, “Can it carry three?”

“Long enough,” he said.

They both climbed onto the broom and lifted above the fight. The dragon was completely encircled by a low wall of flame that it nonetheless seemed unwilling to cross, instead trying to blow it away with its wings. The buffeting shook the broom, but George held it steady. He quickly set the Auror down on a roof, and Hermione decided she was ready. “Can you get me closer to its head?”

“Probably gonna regret this, but okay?” George said. He flew in low up the dragon’s back, and Hermione leaned down to get her wand as close as she could. “Dornröschen!” she hissed. Her hand ached from the force of the spell, but it struck home, and the dragon fell asleep—only a natural sleep at its size, but it was enough.

They landed on the roof overlooking the dragon to make sure it didn’t escape. Georgina immediately Apparated up to join them, followed by the rest of the Aurors. “Everyone alright?” she called.

They were. The rest of the group had had more room to run. “Thank you, Granger-sensei,” the lead Auror said, bowing to her.

Hermione awkwardly bowed in return. “You’re welcome, Auror. But I’m sorry I attracted it here in the first place. You should really thank George.”

“Thanks to you both, then,” he replied. “You did defeat it, and we would have had to fight somewhere if not here.”

And that was that. Once the Japanese Ministry had things under control, they quickly left.

“George, that was absolutely brilliant,” Hermione said.

He smiled winningly at her: “Thank you, love. And I think the Mementoscope recorded the whole thing.”
Oh, _that_ was going to make an interesting home movie. “How did you stop it with a firebreak like that?” she asked. “It’s a _dragon._”

“It wasn’t the fire; it was the brimstone. Burning sulphur hurts a dragon’s eyes and lungs the same as us. A wizard in Poland killed a dragon with just sulphur once, Charlie says. What did I tell you? Hell in a Handbasket: a bit much for pranks, but _great_ for dragon-fighting.”

Hermione stopped, agape. She knew George could fight, but seeing him go against a dragon like that was something else. She slowly turned to her apprentice: “Georgina…you’re in charge for now. I need this man to tear all my clothes off.”

George grinned and took her by the hand. “We’ll be in our bunk,” he said, then added, “I officially love that show now.”

Chapter End Notes

Many of the ideas for Hermione’s experimental wands come from Core Threads by theaceoffire.
Not so Separate

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: A rolling Rowling gathers no Moss.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I July 2004

“Georgina Pompeia Vector,” Hermione said. “In recognition of your successful completion of an apprenticeship in Advanced Arithmancy—sometimes under extraordinarily difficult circumstances—and of the quality of your dissertation on the arithmantic analysis of Apparition, the Wizarding Examinations Authority is pleased to grant you the title of Arithmancy Mistress.”

She handed Georgina her diploma and a rather archaic sash that was meant to be worn at formal events, though Hermione had never had occasion to wear one. Georgina beamed as she took them and hugged her. “Thank you, Hermione,” she said, “and I just want you to know, as hard as the past three years have been, I wouldn’t trade them for the world.”

Hermione smiled back. “You’re welcome, Georgina. I’m just glad you made it with me not knowing what I was doing.”

“Please, you were brilliant. How many apprentices get to travel the world, kill dementors and discover lost treasure like that?”

“Not many, I suppose. Good luck, Georgina.”

“You too, Hermione.”

Hermione had a pleasant walk home, enjoying the summer weather. “Congratulations, Hermione,” George said. “So what are you going to do now that you’ve graduated your first apprentice?”

She shrugged. “Probably not too different from what I’ve been doing, really, except it’ll just be the two of us now…And Neville and Luna. We seem to have a habit of running into them.”

“Probably would with Harry and Ginny too if they didn’t have another baby on the way.”

“True,” she said. One thing did occur to her as they approached their flat, though. “You know, George, we’ve been in our flat for five years, now.”

“Uh huh.”

“And we’ve got more than enough money. Maybe it’s time to start thinking about a house.”

George stopped to face her. “Really? Any particular reason?”

“No. Not short term. It’s just that when we do settle down, it would be nice to have. Better-protected, too.”

“Ah. Makes sense. So you wanna buy a house?”
“Er…I’m willing to consider it, but I haven’t given up my idea my idea of building a house of our own. I’ve drawn up a few sketches, made some plans for the wards and rune stones. Oh—that’s not as much as it sounds. I just thought, with Georgina’s apprenticeship done, maybe it’s time to take a more serious look.”

George smiled warmly and kissed her. “A nice house of our own in the country? Sounds wonderful, love. Where do you wanna put it.”

“Oh, that’s the easy part. I already marked out the best ley line intersections that aren’t already taken.”

“Ah. Nice.” They walked arm in arm back to their flat, Hermione’s head resting on his shoulder. “You know there’s gonna be more people asking to be your apprentice,” he noted.

“Yes, I know, but I’m going to take at least a year before starting another one.”

“Oh, works for me.”

18 August 2004

“Good morning, Weasleys,” Harry said as he balanced little James on his hip. “I would like to introduce you to the newest member of our family, William Kingsley Potter.”

That was maybe the most emotional birth since Nadia for the family. Mrs. Weasley cried over Harry and Ginny naming their second child after Bill. Fred and George quizzed them about Kingsley, but it made sense to honour the man who had led them into battle at Hogwarts. It was certainly better than, oh, Albus or something. Hermione even brought Marcus around to meet to ever-growing list of Weasley cousins, and a joyous time was had by all.

Over the coming months, they would see that unlike James, little Billy had inherited Harry’s green eyes. Ginny insisted he’d be a looker like his father, which left Harry quite flustered and unsure how to respond. Fred insisted that he’d have to compete with baby Lee, who had the advantage of being born on Valentine’s Day. Hermione thought the whole conversation was ridiculous.

19 September 2004

“We didn’t really need to come out here today,” Hermione said.

“So? Live a little,” her husband replied. “We might as well pick a location before winter comes.”

“Alright, alright. Let’s check it out.”

Hermione and George had looked over the ley line map and decided on their first choices for where to build their house. It could really be anywhere the ley lines were good since they’d have a Floo, and they wouldn’t be any more isolated than a lot of old, pureblood manors. In fact, it might send a message that they were building one of their own.

There were exactly two locations in the British Isles where four regional-scale ley lines intersected that didn’t already have a stone circle on them, and Hermione considered those her first choices. The first was in South Yorkshire, about midway between York and Sheffield; and the second was in Shropshire, about twenty miles west of Birmingham.

They visited both locations to get a feel for them. The South Yorkshire location was marked on the
map as Hawkhouse Green, although it was no more than a cluster of four farmhouses today. It was three miles away from the nearest town the size of Ottery St. Catchpole, Askern, and one mile from Moss, a tiny village of three hundred. The Shropshire location was on the outskirts of a village of two hundred called Quatt and was about four miles from a larger town called Bridgnorth, but it was otherwise much more isolated.

They talked it over, and it was pretty clear Hawkhouse Green was the better choice, even if their family would be a bit miffed they were moving so far north. It no farther from the outskirts of Doncaster than from Askern and, it had a couple other villages nearby and a few immediate neighbours—close, but not too close. The house would have to be two hundred yards back from the road and behind a hedgerow, but that suited a magical family just fine.

Hermione waved her wand like a dowsing rod and led George to the exact place where the ley lines converged, a horse pasture that probably technically belonged to one of the farmhouses. They could feel the magic humming through the air on the spot. “So what do you think, dear?” she asked.

George looked around at the scenery. “I like it,” he said. “It’s a lot like home. Maybe a little quieter. No paddock or apple orchard, but we can work something out once we have the space. How about you. Is it everything you wanted?”

“Well, no place it perfect, but this…this is pretty nice,” she said. “I think this is it.”

“Great,” he flashed his winning smile. “Hawkhouse Green it is. Now, let’s go find the owner and ask how much he wants for this field.”

Hermione smiled back and kissed him. “Yes. Let’s.”

“Happy twenty-fifth, love,” he added.

31 December 2004

“Who would’ve thought we’d be spending New Year’s Eve like this,” Hermione said.

“It was your idea to come here,” George reminded her.

“I know, it’s just…seeing all this…” She looked out at the plain of rubble stretching up and down the beach as far as the eye could see, then waved her wand to clear another small patch of it. She winced when the uncovering revealed a human arm.

“Got another one!” she called, and the recovery team hurried to collect it.

The death toll from the tsunami was surpassing 120,000 at last count. That number was known to include dozens of wizards and perhaps more once the proverbial dust cleared. It had been an exhausting week: rescue, recovery, and by now mostly cleanup in the areas wizards frequented.

Half the Weasley clan had come when the news broke. Wizards had poured in from all over the world to help the displaced, the injured, and the dying—wizard and muggle alike. The officials looked the other way or outright condoned it as long as the muggles didn’t remember any magic being cast, but it seemed like so little in the face of such devastation.

Hermione and George had spent most of the week on Sumatra, where the worst of the damage had occurred, but now that the window for finding survivors was more or less closed, they’d moved on to India and Sri Lanka, repairing magical settlements and recovering artifacts, some of which they’d seen before on their world tour. Ron, meanwhile had gone east. Apparently there were some new
runic discoveries he wanted a look at. Most of the rest had given up hope of making much more
difference and had gone home for New Year’s, and Hermione couldn’t really blame them for that. It
was far more death than they’d seen even in the Battle of Hogwarts.

Still, they kept working until sundown before returning to the tent city set up for the displaced
wizards and recovery workers. The nights here were more pleasant than she’d feared. People in
difficult situations like this found ways to entertain themselves. When they returned to the camp,
however, they were greeted by a man in well-pressed robes that, while not ostentatious, still looked
out of place amid all this destruction.

“Professor Granger,” he said as he approached them, “it is good to meet you. I am Chandra Sahadev,
Indian Minister for Magic.”

“Oh! Pleasure, Minister,” Hermione said. “Can we help you?”

“You and your husband have been helping a great deal already, Professor Granger,” Sahadev said.
“We very much appreciate it.”

“Oh. Well, thank you, Minister,” she said, “although we’ve mostly been in Indonesia this week.”

“That’s understandable. In fact we sent some of our own people there as soon as we could spare
them. I wanted to thank the two of you personally on behalf of all the countries affected by this
disaster. I’ve been making the rounds to many of the international relief workers today.”

Ah, that made a bit more sense. “We’re happy to help, Minister,” George said.

Sahadev nodded and took a letter out of his pocket. “I was also asked to speak to you on behalf of
the Indian Cursebreakers’ Association. They express their gratitude for your help at several
cursebreaking sites over the years and for recovering certain valuable artifacts from the rubble over
the past two days, along with your relief efforts. In light of this, they wished to present you with a
gift.”

Hermione’s eyebrows shot up. A gift certainly wasn’t what she expected. “That’s very generous of
them,” she said. “And I’m kind of surprised they’re doing it now. What is it?”

“Now that is an interesting story,” he said. “The tales say that you wore a basilisk-skin coat in the
British Wizarding War.”

“Yes, it was a gift from Cursebreaker Ashoka Narahari,” she said. “It saved my life a couple of
times.”

“But you don’t wear it any longer?”

“No, not anymore. Damaged beyond repair in the Battle of Hogwarts, I’m afraid. Sleeves gone,
hem’s in tatters. I kept it, but I shouldn’t think I’ll ever wear it again.”

“Yes, that’s what we were told when we enquired at the British Ministry. Therefore, in recognition
of your contributions to India’s people and cultural heritage, the Cursebreakers’ Association would
like to present you with this new basilisk-skin coat to replace the one that was destroyed.”

An assistant came up and handed the new coat to her, and her eyes grew wide. It was a fancier-
looking style than her old one, double-breasted with silver buttons instead of tortoiseshell and a
matching belt. To her surprise, the colour was brighter than her old coat, which was a dark forest
green and was itself more colourful than the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets had been.
Additionally, the sleeves could be undone and pinned back so she could wear her buckler with it.
Though she’d since been informed it wasn’t technically a buckler, that wasn’t probably the closest term.

“This…this is a beautiful coat,” she stammered.

“I’ll say,” George said. “Let’s see you try it on.”

Hermione obliged, shrugging the coat on and turning around for him. It was just about the right size, too. “So what do you think?”

“Damn sexy, love.” He leaned towards her.

“George, not now,” she whispered, then turned back to the Minister. She guessed she wouldn’t be able to get away with refusing. “Minister Sahadev, tell the Cursebreakers’ Association they didn’t have to go to the trouble, but I absolutely love the coat.”

It was good to get a replacement for her old coat, she decided. She’d have to add a nanofibre lining like the old one, of course. Maybe be a little smarter about the thermal properties of the nanotubes, too. The old one was always a bit too warm for the places she wanted to wear it. And she’d have to keep an eye out for some appropriate way to reciprocate to the Cursebreakers Association now that she actually had the capability.

---

26 March 2005

“I’m the Doctor, by the way. What’s your name?”

“Rose.”

“Nice to meet you, Rose. Run for your life.”

“See, this is why I wanted a television,” Hermione said.

“And this is also why you wanted people to call you ‘the Doctor’?” George said. “I don’t get it.”

“Oh, you will, dear,” she told him. “You will. Look, the sonic screwdriver is practically a wand already…Say, do you think you could make your toy wands look like that?

George turned to her. “Think that would sell well?” he asked.

Hermione laughed. “I can guarantee just about every muggle-born will want one.”

---

1 April 2005

“I suppose I should have expected this,” George said.

“Well, the house isn’t just going to be a present for me. It’s going to be for you, too,” his wife informed him.

“I know. And if you want to break ground today, that’s fine with me. I won’t even do any pranks.”

Hermione stood on her toes and kissed him on the cheek as they walked arm in arm out to the field at Hawkhouse Green. At present, there was only a muggle surveyor with them, although they had talked to architects and builders whenever they were home since last autumn. Now, they were ready to start digging. She made an exact note of the centre of the ley line convergence and told the
surveyor to mark it down. Then, she picked up the shovel.

“Shall we?” she asked.

“With you? Always,” George said.

Together, they took the first ceremonial scoop of dirt from the field. The surveyor was kind enough to take a photo.

“Well, that looked good,” he said when he finished. “Do you really want to build this far from the road, though?”

“Yes, we’re sure,” Hermione said.

“Yeah, very important we put it right here,” George said. “It’s…er, feng shui.”

The surveyor gave them a funny look.

“Oh—oh, yes,” Hermione improvised. “This spot has the best feng shui here for thirty miles around.”

The surveyor shrugged and continued back to his truck. He was getting paid either way. “Alright. You might have to pay extra for landscaping when you’re done, though.”

Once he was out of earshot, Hermione whispered to George, “I’m surprised you know what feng shui is.”

“Isn’t that just Chinese for ‘geomancy’?”

“Er…yes I suppose it is, but it means something different to muggles.”

They were off. On Monday, the builders would come to start properly digging the foundation. Most of the work would be done on the muggle side, since they had more resources there and new building techniques, and they could get it properly wired for electricity, television, internet, and so forth. Plus, Hermione had more money in the muggle world from her jewelry, outside the capital controls of the goblins.

There would be some magic discreetly put into the building, like setting the massive quartz columns she was carving into the subbasement, but most of it would come afterwards—setting runes and enchantments for protection and efficient functioning to make it a truly magical home—besides having wards so strong they would have been fit for the Malfoys. This was going to be good.

7 July 2005

Hermione was helping Fred and George open the shop for the day when she first heard it—a distant bang, like a firework. She looked up. “George, did you hear something just now?” she asked.

George looked up from the till. “Yeah, I think I heard something.”

“You aren’t setting anything off, are you?”

“No, not before the shop opens. Thunder, maybe?”

“Not expecting any storms—” She stopped when she heard another bang. “Okay, that’s not a good sign.”
Fred came out from the back room. “Hey, is someone setting off fireworks in the city?”

There was a third bang.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” she said.

But they didn’t see anything amiss, so they cautiously continued opening up until shortly after the store opened, when a breathless boy ran in the door and shouted, “There’s been an explosion at King’s Cross!”

The three of them stared in horror, fearing the worst. It had been so long since there was a serious bombing in London. Had some followers of Barty Crouch or copycats reared their heads again? Then, George called out, “Verity, cover the till!” And they Apparated to King’s Cross.

The station was in chaos. Muggles were running everywhere. Bobbies and emergency personal hurried to reach the victims. Among them, they quickly spotted a couple people in Auror Robes and others brandishing wands. Hermione, George, and Fred ran up to one. “Auror—!” she started.

“Granger! We need you in the tunnel!” the Auror barked.

“What? What happened?”

“The train on the Piccadilly Line exploded about a minute after it left the station. We need people to help shore up the tunnel and get the survivors out. Now!”

Her brain caught up with what he was saying. Smoke was pouring out of one of the tunnels as injured muggles stumbled out. She nodded and ran into the fray.

“Wizards!” he shouted behind her. “Check everyone for a Dark Mark—any type! Even the muggles! If there’s any Death Eaters here, we can’t let them get away!”

The tunnel was longer than she expected. She had to run nearly five hundred yards, pushing past frantic survivors to reach the train. The scene was ugly. The bomb had gone off in the first car, so she had to navigate most of the train to reach the damaged tunnel section, and the tunnel was narrow, so much of the blast was directed into the train. Finally, she stepped out of the destroyed wall of the train and into the tunnel.

A couple other wizards were already there, casting Repair Charms, but they could only do so much with those.

“Granger! Good,” one of them said. “We need help with this. We need to keep the tunnel from collapsing, but we don’t want it to look repaired, or the muggles will get suspicious. You have any tricks for that?”

“I can try,” she said. It was a difficult operation, but she had a few ideas. Running her wand along each crack, she knitted the aggregate structure of the latticework of concrete and steel behind them. It would look the same. The signs of tampering would probably be hidden if the muggles tried to disassemble the wall to investigate, but it would hold together. She climbed up the remains of the train car and applied the same fix to the ceiling.

Once the tunnel was stable, she climbed down and joined the rescue workers pulling victims out of the tunnel. A few of the seriously injured that she could help, she healed, turning life-threatening injuries into superficial ones, again being careful to avoid muggle suspicion. A few others she pulled out from where they were buried under the rubble.
When she got back to the station, she was in for another surprise. Harry was there.

“Harry!” she ran to them. “What happened? Are you hurt?”

“No, no, I’m fine,” he said. “Ginny’s with the kids. I got a Patronus from Ron and came to help.”

“Oh, of course. Were any wizards…”

“A few,” he said. “No one we know so far. The muggle police are still trying to put the pieces together, but we think they hit three places: here, Edgeworth Road, and Liverpool Street.”

“Any idea who did it?”

“No. No sign of any Death Eaters yet.”

“With the slow response time we had, they might’ve got away.”

Ron joined them, now. “We’re not sure if it was wizards,” he said. “We’re still trying to figure out what happened. We’re telling the muggles it was a power surge until we know more.”

“Is that wise?” she said. “What if it was a muggle bombing?”

HE shrugged. “Then they made a mistake and had trouble identifying the culprit. It won’t change the response much.”

“What about the muggles? With all these wizards around…”

“It’s King’s Cross. There are modified Anti-Muggle Wards on all the exits. They won’t remember anything magical they see in here.”

“Is that going to be enough? There are cameras everywhere.”

“King’s Cross,” he repeated. “But I’m worried about the other stations.”

Hermione was, too. A big event getting a heavy magical response in the middle of the city, with CCTV everywhere? That was going to be a lot harder to hide than even the wizards going to the Hogwarts Express in autumn. She should keep a close eye on it in case they needed a muggle technology expert. Arthur tried, but she feared he wasn’t up to the task.

But as it was, they kept working. There were hundreds of injured, probably dozens dead once they counted them up, and the muggles needed help. About fifteen minutes later, they heard another explosion, much more prominent than the first round. Everyone looked up.

“That sounded close,” Hermione said. “Less than half a mile, I’d guess.”

They ran out and scanned the horizon, and they soon found a new plume of smoke rising above the rooftops. They hurried to the location and found a bus had exploded. The scene looked disturbingly like the old photos of Peter Pettigrew’s attack on Sirius in 1981.

“I don’t think that was a power surge,” Hermione said.

“No, ‘fraid not,” Ron agreed. “Was anyone on scene before us?” he called.

One or two Aurors had beat them there, but not by much. It was looking less and less like a Death Eater attack, though. King’s Cross would make sense, but a random muggle bus? Not so much.
Minutes later, they received word that the entire Tube system had shut down. It wasn’t until around eleven that the muggle authorities settled on a muggle terrorist attack as the explanation. Bus service was suspended at the same time. By three o’clock, a statement purportedly from al-Qaeda had surfaced taking credit for the attacks. At five, Gawain Robards finally gave the Ministry’s first statement.

“After extensive investigation, we find no evidence of Death Eater involvement in the attacks this morning. All signs point to a muggle terrorist attack with no connection to the wizarding world.”

“Has there been any word from other Ministries?” a reporter called out.

“The Iraqi and Afghan Ministries say they can’t find any related activity there…” Robards said.

“Not surprising,” Hermione muttered. “The statement was from Al-Qaeda-in-Europe or something like that.”

“Does the Ministry believe it was al-Qaeda?” came another question.

“We don’t have definite confirmation, but we think it very likely. The muggles are still investigating, but that’s the working theory for them, too. I reiterate, there is no direct threat to the wizarding world. However, I urge everyone to stay vigilant and exercise cautious when travelling in major muggle cities. We will be increasing security around Magical London locations to prevent any further incidents in our world.”

“‘Our world,’” Hermione grumbled as they left. “I think you’re right, Harry. Maybe we should be doing more. This affects us too. Pfft. All that, and it wasn’t even wizards, let alone Death Eaters.”

“Just bad luck that they hit King’s Cross, I suppose,” Harry said. “Or good luck if you’re one of the muggles we helped. Don’t know that there’s much else we can do, though.”

“No, I suppose not.”

Chapter End Notes

And in this chapter, we see why Hermione is still wearing a basilisk-skin coat in the cover image even though it was more or less destroyed in the Battle of Hogwarts. The background of the picture will be explained in the next chapter. Bonus points if anyone recognises it.
10 November 2005

Hermione looked across the desk at the new Minister for Magic. After the attacks in London in July, so close to the magical quarter, it wasn’t surprising that Dirk Cresswell hadn’t survived reelection and was replaced by the more security-minded Head of Magical Law Enforcement. Even if it hadn’t been for that, she wasn’t sure he would have made it. Gawain Robards had been ambitious back in the aftermath of the war, and he was always certain to run again.

For Hermione’s first official meeting with Minister Robards, however, he was not alone. Beside him sat a dark-skinned man with elaborate tattoos on his face. He also had an official ICW badge. It looked like this was going to be an international operation, whatever it was.

“Thank you for coming, Professor Granger,” Robards said.

“Of course, Minister,” she replied.

He introduced his guest: “This is Turi Te Kanawa. He’s a representative from the ICW’s Special Administrative Committee for Antarctica.”

“Pleasure,” she said, shaking the man’s hand. “Antarctica?”

“Yes. Thank you for seeing me, Professor Granger,” Te Kanawa said.

She nodded. “How can I help you?”

“Are you aware of the situation at the South Pole, Professor?”

“I know it houses the Anchor Stones of the International Portkey Network, and it’s the most powerful magical convergence on Earth. That’s about it.”

“Did you also know that there is a muggle scientific base directly above the pole?”

“I…suppose I did, yes. I never really thought about it—Wait, above? Where is the circle, exactly?”

“Set on the bedrock under the ice. Almost nine thousand feet down. The ice sheet moves over time, so we couldn’t put it on top, and we didn’t even build the circle until muggles had a presence there, so we had to keep it hidden from them.”

“Okay, so is there a problem?”
“Yes. For the past nine months, I was stationed at the South Pole with the winter-over staff to oversee the Anchor Stones. There are always at least two magicals embedded with the muggles to keep the Anchor Stones hidden from detection and alert the ICW of any problems. This past winter, however, I realised that the muggle scientists are not going to miss them any longer. When I explained to the New Zealander Minister, she asked around and decided I should speak with you directly, among others.”

Hermione waited, and at this point, Te Kanawa pulled out a portfolio and began to spread it on the desk. “Last summer—southern summer, that is—the muggles began building one of the most powerful radio telescopes in the world at the South Pole.”

Hermione looked down at the photos, then up at Te Kanawa’s face, and back to the photos. Slowly, the realisation began to dawn on her. “Oh dear…”

“You understand, then,” he answered. “The Anchor Stones have the highest concentration of earth magic anywhere on Earth. Even then, for most experiments, the muggles would never notice through nine thousand feet of ice.”

“But since there’s the least radio interference and the most sensitive instruments in the world there, it’s enough to show up on the telescope.”

“Exactly. And unfortunately, that wasn’t the only experiment they began. The second was a neutrino detector: ‘IceCube.’ A cube a thousand yards on a side, under the ice. We don’t fully understand how ley lines interact with ice sheets, so we can’t always predict how it will turn out, but I think that might be even worse.”

She looked over the portfolio. She was pleasantly surprised to see that Te Kanawa had annotated it with coherent scientific notes, though she supposed it was his job to understand this sort of thing. She wasn’t an expert in it herself, but she understood enough to make sense of the pictures. “Hm…from these photos, it doesn’t look like this is the first radio telescope they’ve built there,” she pointed out.

“No. There’s one older detector: AMANDA. Neutrino detectors aren’t as bad because they’re all wired, and the strings of photomultiplier tubes from AMANDA don’t come closer than half a mile from the Anchor Stones themselves, but IceCube is going deeper.”

“How close will it get?”

“Two hundred yards above and four hundred yards away from the dome, but it’s the depth that’s important. The lowest tubes will be at an elevation of thirty-two degrees from the Anchor Stones, much lower than AMANDA. With them being so close and covering such a wide area…”

“They’d be lowering the detectors directly into the ley lines,” Hermione concluded. “And these photomultiplier tubes are thousand-fold amplifiers—”

“Million,” Te Kanawa corrected. “Or more.”

“Millions-fold amplifiers. That close to the most concentrated magical field in the world, even a tiny leakage of magic would blow them out at that distance. You’re right: something will have to be done to bend the ley lines away from the experiments or otherwise block the magic.”
“Is that safe, Professor Granger?” Minister Robards cut in. “You showed the weaknesses of bending ley lines in the war.”

“Yes, I did, but nine thousand feet under the ice and two thousand miles from civilisation around the strongest concentration of magic in the world? We can compensate for that weakness with proper planning.”

Te Kanawa smiled in a way that made Hermione uneasy. “That’s what I was hoping you would say, Professor Granger,” he told her. “The Antarctic Committee understands the problem and wishes to action. They’ve recommended assembling a team that can go to the South Pole and make the necessary changes to the Anchor Stones.”

“Oh,” Hermione said. “You want me on the team, don’t you?”

“We would be honoured to have you, Professor Granger.”

“Right. I assume it wouldn’t be just me.”

“Certainly not. This will be a large operation. The rune carving alone would take a whole team. We’ll need at least a dozen experts working for the entire winter season to complete it before the muggles notice in the next construction season. Quite possibly two dozen.”

“And when is the next winter season?”

“February through October or November.”

“Nine months! But the polar night is only six!”

“The weather is hostile to muggle travel longer than that, I’m afraid,” Te Kanawa said apologetically. “I’m hopeful that the ICW will provide a few Portkey passes to visit home if we do this.”

“I feel like there should be a ‘Your mission, should you choose to accept it,’ in there,” she quipped, but Te Kanawa just shrugged. Hermione sighed. She enjoyed travelling the world and solving new challenges, but spending eight or nine months at the coldest and darkest place on Earth wasn’t her idea of a pleasant holiday. Still, this would probably be the largest magical engineering project of her generation in the world—not something to be passed over lightly.

“I’ll have to talk it over with my husband, Mr. Te Kanawa,” she said. “But you can put me down as interested.”

“Bloody hell! Antarctica?” George exclaimed.


“Yeah, yeah, I get it. But still…” He took a deep breath. “They want you to go and spend nine months in Antarctica?”

“Us.”

“Come again?”

“They want us to go,” she said.

George looked her in the eye. “They really said that?”
“No. I’m saying it.”

George responded to that by kissing her.

“I’m not sold on this, mind,” he added a minute later. “So if I understand this right, the muggles are doing experiments that will detect the magic running through the South Pole if we don’t do something to hide it?”

“Yes, that’s basically it,” Hermione said.

“And I take it this a big, once in a lifetime magical project?”

She shrugged: “Once in a generation, at least.”

“And they need you to make it work?”

“I don’t think I’m essential, but I do think I would have something to contribute.”

George glanced out the window of their flat and sighed softly. “You know I enjoy the travelling, Hermione, but still, nine months straight through the Antarctic winter?”

“Can’t be helped,” she said. “But I can talk to Sirius and Remus about enchanting some mirrors to call home, and there should be Portkey trips for visits…well, most of the time.”

“What does that mean?”

“We’ll be working on the Portkey Network. International Portkeys will be intermittent for a lot of that time, sometimes shut down entirely. Hm…I’ll have to ask about the Quidditch World Cup. The magical world would grind to a halt if that were disrupted.”

“Phew, I’ll say,” he replied, wide-eyed. “Are you sure this is safe?”

“Safe? No, it’s the South Pole. But safer than a lot of things we’ve done in the past.”

George rolled his eyes. “That’s not saying much. Alright, I can understand the trip,” he said, “but there is our house, you know? Didn’t you want to finish that?”

Hermione nodded uncomfortably: “I thought of that. The builders should be able to do a lot of the construction while we’re away, and we’ll be able to check on them from time to time. It might slow us down, but I think it’s worth it.”

George thought about this, and then pulled her into a hug. “Okay, I can see how important this is to you, so…you can count me in. Besides how bad can it be with the ICW backing us up?”

She smiled and kissed him again: “Thank you, George.”

“Although we will have to figure out how we’re going to explain it to Mum.”

Hermione groaned.

15 February 2006

The team wasn’t fully assembled for the first time until shortly before the Antarctic winter was to start. Hermione looked around the meeting room at the ICW headquarters in Switzerland. There were a couple dozen of them in total. Patricia Rakepick and David Anderson were there, but those
were the only ones she knew personally. Hermione had brought no fewer than three people to the team: herself, George, and her new apprentice.

Shortly after accepting the post, she had put an ad out for a new apprentice. She figured she should give some young Arithmancer the opportunity to participate in this once in a lifetime experience. Applications had poured in from all over the world, and after interviewing a few, she had chosen a young Beauxbatons graduate named Musa Kama.

George wasn’t the only spouse in the group, but there weren’t many of them, and she’d had an easier time selling him for the team because of his own experience as an artificer. It would be good to get an out-of-the-box perspective like his, she’d said.

Hermione was expecting either someone from the ICW proper or someone from the Antarctic Committee to speak with them, but the woman who addressed the group, one Ingrid Nelson, turned out to be the Minister of Magic for New Zealand herself.

“I want to thank all of you for agreeing to join the 2006 South Pole Winter-Over Team,” Minister Nelson told the group. “For those of you who don’t know, as the New Zealander Minister, I am also the head of the Special Administrative Committee for Antarctica, and while you are at the South Pole, you will legally be under New Zealand’s jurisdiction. I don’t expect any problems to come from that, but it’s good you know just in case.

“All of you have accepted a very important task,” she continued. “This will be one of the most complex operations we’ve ever run in Antarctica and a vitally important one to maintain the statute of secrecy. It is essential that we divert magical interference away from the ice above the Anchor Stones while maintaining the integrity of the Portkey Network, especially during the Quidditch World Cup.

“We called you in today because the muggle South Pole Station is now going into a ‘soft close.’ You will be going in at the same time as the last flight out so that no summer visitors will see. That’s currently scheduled for the twenty-fourth, but from this point, you’ll need to be ready to go on short notice. This is an unusual situation this year because you will be about a third of the winter-over staff at the South Pole. Adequate quarters are of course available from the summer staff.”

“Now wait just a minute, Minister.” It was Patricia Rakepick who cut in. “If we’re going to be a third of the people there and working full-time on runes, how are we going to keep that secret from the muggles there.”

“The Statute of Secrecy will be suspended for this operation,” Nelson said, and several people gasped. “There is simply no way to keep this secret from them on site. It’s not a large building. All of the muggles at the station will be allowed in the know and sworn to secrecy, most likely through magical contracts.

“This may come as a surprise to some of you, but the Statute of Secrecy is not very strongly enforced at the South Pole. The long months of profound isolation and the need for regular monitoring of the Anchor Stones makes it hard to stay hidden. There are always at least two in-the-know muggles at the station, and this won’t be the first time we’ve let the entire winter-over staff in on the secret.”

Hermione and George were surprised, but it made sense. Two dozen people would be hard-pressed to hide in the shadows of a building that (from what she’d read) was the size of an average department store for eight or nine months, even with magic. It was a very interesting arrangement that she hadn’t seen before—and ironic that they were suspending the Statute of Secrecy to preserve it. She was suddenly eager to see how it worked out.

Minister Nelson went over the basic rules of the operation, which were mostly common sense, to be
honest, aside from rules for protection against the extreme cold. Various members of the team asked for clarifications or more information, and they began to get a clear picture of what they would be doing.

“What happens in cases of emergency?” one of the other Runes Masters said. “Would it raise suspicions if we intervene?”

“Mr. Te Kanawa?” Nelson deferred to her liaison.

“It’s less worrisome this year because the Statute is suspended,” he said, “but we do intervene discreetly—though not always successfully, I’m afraid. In ‘99, the muggle doctor on site developed cancer. We try to help with healing if we can, but it’s hard to bring in real Healers unnoticed, and of course, magical healing hasn’t really been researched for cancer. But we kept her from getting too much worse before she could fly out. The next year, a young man was poisoned and died. We tried to help him, but we didn’t have the resources, and even we couldn’t figure out who did it. And twice since we’ve assisted with muggle medical evacuations to ensure the aircraft made it through safely. Most of this isn’t important, though, because we’ll have far more resources this year and more leeway to use them.”

That was reassuring. The ethical issues of having wizards live and work in close quarters with a small group of muggles who didn’t know the secret could be complex, but they would be moot for this operation. However, one other concern popped up in Hermione’s mind when Minister Nelson said, “You’ll need to be careful of anything you do in the surrounding area. We believe there’s a hibernating World Serpent sleeping under the Anchor Stones—”

Wait, what?

“Hold on, you believe, Minister?” Hermione said incredulously. “How could you not know whether there’s a thousand-foot-long Greater Elemental underneath the most important stone circle in the world?”

“Professor Granger, we deliberately haven’t looked too closely into it,” Nelson said. “We don’t want to risk waking it up.”

---

20 February 2006

“I thought we were leaving on Thursday,” George said as they hurried to pack.

“But they said inclement weather could change that,” Hermione reminded him.

“Why are we in such a hurry, anyway? What does it matter if the team’s a few days late?”

“Maybe they think we need all the time we can get,” she said. “Or maybe because they want to get the secrecy contracts squared away as soon as possible. Come on, George. We can make it with time to visit our family. They’re on New Zealand time, so we don’t need to leave until this evening.”

They did make it to the Portkey Office at the Ministry in time to catch their Portkey. That didn’t take them directly to the South Pole, however. Instead, it took them to a staging point where the team was assembled at a large stone circle deep in the Sahara. The scenery was featureless sand except for a small, rocky ridge of curiously bright tans, browns and golds a short distance away.

“Okay, their having us on,” George said as the hot air hit them.

But this really was the staging point—one of the major ley line intersections in the world, and in some sense centrally located to assemble the team. Soon, they were all there with their luggage. Some of the Cursebreaker-types had several large trunks with them. However, Hermione and
George travelled quite light—Hermione even lighter than usual. She’d bought a special mokeskin handbag for this trip for greater mobility. Mokeskin was expensive, but it was worth it. With a stroke along the zipper, it would shrink to the size of a coin purse so that she could fit it in her pocket and have her arms free. George did have a bit more luggage, and Musa even more than that, but she’d given him a hand with his packing, too.

The reason they were here was an obscure way to move large groups of people quickly in the magical world—larger than could be moved with individual Portkeys. They could simply transport the entire contents of one stone circle to another circle along the same ley line. It wasn’t very practical except in situations like this one, but used occasionally since it was the fastest way to transport bulk cargo across continents. Because of the transport wards involved, this was actually the only magical way in and out of the South Pole.

The team assembled in the circle. The total came to fourteen master scholars, five apprentices, three spouses, three muggle liasons, and one teenaged child of one of the masters, and they would be in contact with a larger team of experts around the world. Turi Te Kanawa was the official leader, even though he was mostly administrating. The braced themselves as they waited to go.

“Portus Maxima engaging in five—four—three—two—one—” Te Kanawa said, and they moved.

It wasn’t like a Portkey. In fact, it wasn’t like any form of magical travel Hermione had experienced with their violent spinning, compression, or whipping winds. There was simply a flash of white light, and she felt a pulse of magic, and she blinked, and they were someplace else. Someplace entrancing.

The South Pole was magical like something out of a story book in ways that no other place she’d ever seen could equal. They were in a perfect, hemispherical dome nearly the size of a Quidditch Pitch, carved directly out of the ice, yet it was barely cool inside rather than frigid. That would have worried her with more than eight thousand feet of solid ice above their heads, but with the amount of magic coursing through this point, it would probably hold up to anything short of a nuclear explosion.

Inside the dome was a vast stone circle. Like the one at Hogwarts, it was made of trilithons of perfect, glowing quartz set into a floor of black obsidian, but this was a triple circle: ten, then twenty, then thirty. The trilithons were twice the size of the ones at Hogwarts, as tall as the ones at Stonehenge, and the outer circle was eighty yards across. These were the Anchor Stones of the world.

The ice outside the dome was as clear as glass under the immense pressure. No sunlight filtered down here, but the light from the Anchor Stones cast an eerie light out across the landscape, illuminating in bluish tones a bleak scene of rocks scoured down by the grinding ice sheet. Hermione knew that if she could extinguish the light from the Stones and watch for a year, here and there she would spot a tiny flash of blue light from a neutrino hitting a water molecule—the only natural light that could exist this far down.

It was an ice palace of indescribable beauty, set amidst a backdrop of magnificent desolation. The great wonder of the modern magical world…and they had eight months to improve it beyond what some people thought possible.

“This…this is more than I ever expected,” George whispered.

“I’ve never seen anything like this,” Musa said in awe. He gazed out at the landscape. “I was envisioning a crystal sphere, but I never thought of being able to see through it.”

“I know a lot of cursebreakers who would kill to stand here right now,” said Patricia Rakepick as she
admirned the Anchor Stones. “They keep this place well-guarded.”

The whole team looked around, amazed at the sight, but Te Kanawa said, “I’ll go up and see if they’re ready for us. Once you’ve visited the station, you’ll be able to Apparate in and out of here from anywhere, but they have a designated area for it.”

He vanished, and a few minutes later, he returned and said the station was ready. They took Portkeys up to the surface in groups of five or six—shorter hops than anyone would normally take, but it was the only way up. There was no magical lift that could run that far. They landed in the reception area of Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. Several of the team yelped in pain from their ears popping. They’d have to remember the pressure differential, Hermione thought. The Anchor Stones were at sea level pressure despite being fully enclosed.

When they had all arrived, a middle-aged woman with tied-back brown hair appeared, wearing a jumper that said ANTARCTICA on the front. “Welcome to the South Pole,” she said. “I’m Liesl Shernthanner. I’m the winter site manager for this year.” Despite her name, she had an American accent. She looked over the group. “This is the entire magical team? I hope?” They nodded awkwardly. “Good. I and a few others have been read in in past years, but this is going to be interesting explaining to the rest of the winter-overs. Most of them are in the cafeteria now.”

“I explained the basics to them and gave a demonstration right after the plane left,” Te Kanawa added. “I think some of them still don’t believe it, so we’ll do a more detailed briefing now, not to mentioned working out the secrecy contract.”

“Don’t worry, we’re sensible here,” Shernthanner assured them. “Most of us are scientists. We’ll believe what we see. It’s just that I’m sure some of them are thinking their memories are playing tricks on them right now. We’ll make sure everyone’s on the same page and take care of the contracts, and then we move on to movie night.”

“Movie night?” Hermione spoke up.

“Yes, ma’am—er…” she checked a stack of files. “Dr. Granger, is it?” Hermione nodded. “You see, we have a tradition that we do every year after the last flight leaves for the winter. We set up a movie screen in the cafeteria, and we always show a double feature: both versions of The Thing back-to-back.”

Most of the wizards looked confused, but Hermione’s eyes widened. “Oh, you are evil,” she said.

“I know, but it’s really a lot of fun,” Shernthanner said.

“Fine,” Hermione replied, “but if you have panicked wizards cursing at shadows tonight, on your head be it.”

22 April 2006

The with the hum of the generators was a constant companion by now, along with the whistling of the katabatic winds outside. And it always felt dark, even in brightly-lit rooms. Some of the muggles and many of the wizards were feeling it by now. Being stuck indoors for so long wasn’t that unusual for winter, but never seeing the sun was a strain. Some of them spent hours working down below among the Anchor Stones. A couple people had lost it and just stared at them vacantly for hours and had to be pulled out. They were more careful after that. It wasn’t that much worse for Hermione than the factory in Nottingham, eight years ago now, but even she was making extra sure to get enough exercise and vitamin D.
The sun had gone down on March 22 and 23, taking thirty hours to cross the horizon. Some of the muggles claimed it was “romantic,” and had it not been fifty below outside, Hermione might have agreed. Civil twilight had ended on the fifth of April, when the sun was six degrees below the horizon. They were then in full night by most people’s standards and would be until September. (The astronomers only counted it come the twelfth of May, but they weren’t much bothered either way because they were all radio astronomers.) They had got some beautiful views of the Southern Lights, though.

Two months in, and it had become routine to see witches and wizards wandering the station, poring over sheets of writing in dead languages, equations that didn’t relate to anything recognisable as normal physics, and arcane alchemical-looking diagrams. Hermione had devised a global version of the Mathemagician’s Map: the Geomancer’s Map, which helped with mapping the lines. It didn’t show people on it, but it did have a whole world atlas compressed into the parchment and could geometrically compute the positions of the ley lines at any scale.

Naturally, witches and wizards were also seen animatedly discussing a sport played on broomsticks and talking to their families through magic mirrors. (Although the mirrors weren’t always reliable. They had to be specially enchanted to tap into the Portkey Network to work across national borders, and that wasn’t always working.)

In the meantime, they had examined the muggle science experiments in detail, learning more about physics than most wizards ever did. Unfortunately, they weren’t much closer to a solution to their problem.

Hermoine and Master Saom, the team’s Khmer expert, were standing in front of a whiteboard (great invention, that), looking over a diagram of ley lines around the Anchor Stones. Musa leaned against a nearby desk and also regarded the diagram.

“I don’t see any way around it,” Hermione said. “We can bend the ley lines around the south pole site, but there’s still going to be leakage that will interfere with the electrical equipment.”

“That is true,” Saom said, “but I am still hopeful that we can minimise the leakage.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t see how,” she replied. “Not unless we carve more runes into the dome, which has other problems.” The ice wall around the Anchor Stones wasn’t static. It flowed seamlessly around the dome at about an inch per day. That was good because they didn’t need to worry about the strength of the ice; the stones themselves created the bubble. But it also meant they couldn’t carve anything into it.

One of the muggle astronomers, Stefano, was idly watching and spoke up now: “Would a Faraday cage help?”

Hermione and Musa both turned around to regard Stefano. “A Faraday cage?” she said.

“Yes, a metal covering that blocks electrical signals,” he said. “You say magic interferes with electrical signals, so—”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “I suppose it might work…if it’s made of the right material.”

“No good. If it did, it would break the circle,” Saom countered.

“Where do you get that?”

“We’d have to cover the dome all the way down to ground level to make it work,” Saom told her. “Otherwise, magical energy will scatter around the edges of the cage. But if we did manage to block
it all, it would impede the ley lines.”

“Oh, right. Of course,” she sighed.

Stefano grew even more interested then. “The magic scatters around the edges?” he said.

“Yes, any stray magic will just bend around them like ripples around a rock,” Hermione said offhandedly.

“Then…could you make something like a coronagraph?”

“What’s a coronagraph?”

“Aha! Here, look.” Stefano came to the whiteboard and drew a diagram of a telescope, showing the path of the light through it, but he also drew some extra stuff in the middle. “A coronagraph is a stop that goes in the light path,” he explained. “It filters out scattered light from the focal path to block the light from a central star so you can see objects near it. There’s one on the Hubble Telescope, and they’re talking about using them to hunt for planets.”

Saom studied the diagram in confusion. “How does that help us, though? What we’re trying to do is completely different.”

“I’m not so sure,” Hermione spoke slowly. “Magic is an energy field. We usually think of it as a fixed ley line grid, but it’s not. It pulses and flows in currents around the world. It interferes with electricity. It’s capable of moving at the speed of light—Apparition and Portkeys. It’s superficially like an electric field, but the ley lines form a grid, not loops running from sources to sinks.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Stefano interrupted. “You’re saying that magic is an energy field that can be described like electromagnetism?”

“Not exactly, but changes in the field produce waves, which dissipate into the environment and can influence other things.”

“That’s very interesting. You should really talk to the neutrino people about this, Dr. Granger—someone who knows more quantum physics than I do. Who knows? Maybe you’ll find the key to the Theory of Everything.”

“I suspect it’ll raise more questions than answers, but I’ll make a note of it,” she said.

Musa had still been studying, but he spoke up now: “I’m not sure I follow, Hermione. Spells travel at different speeds, and a lot slower than the speed of light. How does that connect?”

“Because spells themselves aren’t waves,” she said. “They’re self-propelled and self sustaining magical fields. Like…ugh, it’s not something you can do with electromagnetism. Think…think about a whirlpool in water. The whirlpool sends out water waves whose speed is determined by the physical properties of water, but the whirlpool itself can wander about at random. It’ll spin itself out as it loses energy, but spells do the same thing.”

“Oh, I see!” Musa exclaimed. “Spells and magical effects usually travel slowly, but if we successfully bend the ley lines away from the station, the leakages are going to be waves that travel at the speed of light. And…” He looked over the diagram of the Anchor Stone. “Most of those waves will be at resonant frequencies of the stone circle because pulses in the currents of magic hit resonances between the nodes—”

“Like resonant circuits,” Hermione clarified to Stefano. “…sort of…not really. Never mind.”
Most of this wasn’t new, but it was something magical theorists rarely paid attention to. It was important for Portkeys and long-distance communications like the mirrors, but not for most practical applications like spellcrafting and cursebreaking. Ergo, it was the new angle they needed.

“Yeah, yeah,” Saom started to catch on. “Those waves will be on a smaller scale than the stone circle. Half-wavelengths equal to the gaps between the stones.”

Hermione nodded decisively. “And if they’re smaller than the circle, we can block them with a coronagraph the size of the dome.”

“We can?”

Musa understood at once: “Of course, Alchemical shielding?”

“Alchemical what?” Stefano said.

“Alchemical shielding,” Hermione told him. “I invented it years ago as a way to contain dark artifacts. Thin sheets of gold, titanium, and tungsten pressed together that can block active magic… This could work. Stefano, can you call the other astronomers in here? I think we’re on to something.”

31 July 2006

Hermione and George appeared at the centre of the Anchor Stones of Hogwarts, Portkeying back from the South Pole for one of their authorised visits. Harry and Ginny were there to greet them along with Professor McGonagall.

“Happy birthday, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Thanks,” he replied. “It’s good to see you two.” And Ginny ran up to them and hugged both of them.

“Good morning, Professor McGonagall,” Hermione added.

“Good morning, Professor Granger. How is the South Pole project going?”

“It’s coming along pretty well,” she said. “We had a slow start, but we’re back on schedule. Of course, we’re all but off-duty now until the Quidditch World Cup is over. But it’s been very… different. Working that closely with muggles, even for me, it’s not in my experience.”

McGonagall looked interested, and perhaps a little concerned. “And the muggles…haven’t caused any problems?”

“Oh, not at all. The muggles are completely geeking out over magic. They love it.”

“Really? I wouldn’t have thought so many muggles who have no connections with our world would be so…positive, I suppose.”

Hermione smiled: “I was never concerned. They’re all scientists down there. Pretty much all of them have read The Lord of the Rings and seen the films, and many of them read other fantasy. Once I actually proved magic exists, they were as passionate about learning about it as…well, me.”

McGonagall’s eyes widened. “Merlin help us,” she said.

Hermione giggled. “Maybe. But that fact is, not one of them would admit to thinking magic is
wrong. I feel as safe there as I do anywhere in the magical world."

“Goodness! How times have changed. I wish you luck on the rest of your project.”

“Thank you, Professor, although for now, we’re taking a break. Can’t have Portkeys getting blocked right now.”

“No, we definitely can’t,” Ginny agreed. “Have you been following the World Cup? Fleur’s convinced France is gonna win the whole thing.”

“Well, they might,” Hermione said, “although I’ve got a good feeling about Burkina Faso. By the way, is anyone in the family going to the final? I want someone to get Mementoscope recordings. The muggles are really interested to see some actual Quidditch.”

Harry and Ginny both laughed. “I don’t blame them,” Harry said. “We’ll see what we can do.”

“But right now, let’s get to the party!” Ginny said.

10 October 2006

Internet at the South Pole came by satellite, so it was a bit slow, but it was fine for Hermione’s purposes. She didn’t have that much free time anyway with their work on the Anchor Stones nearing completion. Today, however, one of the headlines shocked her, and it sent her scrambling for her and George’s magic mirror.

North Koreans Say They Tested Nuclear Device

“Oh, God,” she whispered.

…The United States Geological Survey said it had detected a tremor of 4.2 magnitude on the Korean Peninsula.

“Four point two. How much is that…?” She scanned down the article until she saw an actual estimate.

Most of the world’s seismic networks that look for nuclear blasts are designed to detect explosions as small as one kiloton, or equal to 1,000 tons of high explosives. On instruments for detecting earthquakes, such a blast would measure a magnitude of about 4, like a small tremor.

She sat back and sighed. The good news was a blast that size, if it was a nuclear weapon, had to have been a fizzle. They didn’t actually have it working right yet. The bad news was that she would expect that from a wizard experimenting just as much as a small, outdated dictatorship with delusions of grandeur.

“Um, Dr. Granger?” one of the muggles said nervously. “Is this bad? Like…is there magic involved or something?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so, but it worries me enough to check.” She hurried to her and George’s room. “George, I need the mirror,” she said.

He handed it to her. “Something wrong, Hermione?”

“Maybe. It’s in North Korea, so it’s not that urgent, but I want to check. Harry Potter.”

Harry’s face appeared a minute later, looking surprised at the unexpected call. “Hi Hermione,
George. What’s up?”

“Harry, have you seen the muggle news today?”

“No. What happened?”

“It looks like North Korea set off a nuke.”

His eyes widened as only a muggle-raised wizard’s would. “Are we in trouble?” he said.

“Us directly? No, I don’t think so. Honestly, I’m probably being paranoid. Odds are it was just their muggle scientists, but I’d like to check. Can you get the mirror to Minister Robards? I want to run it up to the ICW.”

“Yeah, sure, I’ll go right away,” he said.

She spoke to Minister Robards and was happy to pass the problem off to him to contact the ICW. In the coming days, the ICW investigated and determined the bomb was nuclear, but there were no wizards involved in its creation. Even so, the ICW put a closer watch on wizards connected with North Korea and uranium mines in East Asia. It would take only one muggle-born true believer smart enough to understand Hermione’s methods to cause disaster.

21 October 2006

“I want to thank all of you for you contributions to this project,” said Turi Te Kanawa to the assembled team. “What you have done here this winter is nothing short of miraculous—a feat of magical engineering that many didn’t think possible nine months ago and a critical operation for Protecting the Statute of Secrecy. This revised stone circle and the shield above us will create a magical quiet zone of unprecedented depth for the most sensitive of muggle experiments. Not to mention making my job a lot easier.” The crowd laughed. “To our muggle colleagues, on behalf of all of us, thank you for your contributions. We couldn’t have done it without you, and I think this has been an excellent learning experience on both sides. Well done, all of you.”

The crowd cheered. All of the wizards and a fair few of the muggle scientists were down at the Anchor Stones for the final activation ceremony. Stefano was certainly eager to see it. Musa was standing tall, proud of his work, as were many others. They were finishing on schedule today, the original planned date of the first flight in from McMurdo. They would still be going home today, despite the summer staff being delayed by the weather.

They’d tested everything in small scale and at partial power, and they had confirmed the accuracy of the new runes and the shielding as much as possible, but this would be the first time they fully activated the new array. A few of the wizards were nervous; something could still go wrong. But Hermione was confident.

She looked around. The custom-designed spherical coronagraph covered about half the dome, shaped vaguely like a flower, and not covering at all at the bottom twenty feet. To the surprise of most of the team, it didn’t detract from the scene’s beauty. In fact, it livened it up some. The alchemical shielding was suspended gold-side-in just below the dome surface by the same enchantment that excavated the dome itself. Reflecting the faceted, white light of the Anchor Stones, though currently dimmed, the entire dome looked like a colossal crystal sunflower.

“I will now activate the stone circle,” Te Kanawa said. “IceCube, BICEP stand by.” The dome fell silent as the whole crowd waited anxiously to see what would happen. Te Kanawa turned to one of the trilithons and muttered a long incantation.
The circle activated. The Anchor Stones flared to their full brightness, and it looked as if the sun shone down from the roof, bathing the whole dome in a golden light. The crowd broke into applause that thundered in the enclosed space despite how large it was. The circle was working beautifully. But they soon quieted again. They needed confirmation from above. Hermione looked to the dark-shrouded region where IceCube was, blocked from the direct light by a black curtain embedded in the ice, transfigured so it would give off no radiation.

“It’s looking good down here,” Te Kanawa said into the mirror. “How does it look up there?”

“IceCube,” came a voice from the mirror. “The readings dropped to zero a minute ago. We’ll need a day or two to monitor, but it’s a lot better than it was.”

“BICEP here,” another voice said. BICEP was the current radio telescope on the ice sheet. “I turned the gain all the way up, and it’s nothing we wouldn’t see in the Atacama. There’s no magical interference that I can see. I think you’re clear.”

The crowd cheered again. The shield was working, blocking the magical interference at the surface—at least as much as they could be sure before the full instruments were built. They’d done it.

They were still celebrating when the earth began to rumble and shake under their feet. They abruptly stopped and looked around. Nothing was visible, but the rumbling grew louder, and there were scattered shouts.

“What’s happening?” Stefano shouted.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Hermione said as she dropped to a half-crouch.

BANG!

Screams filled the air.

BANGBANGBANG!

The noise was like cannon shots, deafening. George grabbed Hermione, and they both quickly looked up, poised to Apparate out, but the dome itself was okay, still excavated in a perfect half-sphere no matter what the ice did. The ice outside, however, cracked and flowed in ways that wouldn’t make any sense on the surface.

“Hermione, what’s going on?” George said.

“I don’t know, but—”

Suddenly, a massive, blue head with glowing eyes rose out of the bedrock and seemed to swim through the solid ice, and utter panic set in.

“What the hell is that?!” the muggles cried.

“Crap! It’s the World Serpent!”

“How’s it moving like that?”

“I thought it was supposed to be asleep!”

“It’s the shield! All that magic reflected down into the earth must have woken it up!”

“What do we do now? It could destroy the dome!”
“It could destroy the station!”

Hermione watched in horror as the Greater Elemental surrounded them. This World Serpent was even bigger than Wonambi in Australia—long enough to circle the dome from nose to tail with room to spare. Unlike Wonambi, it was not coloured as a rainbow, but in bands of icy blues and whites. It’s eyes were two blue beacons that burned with cold fire, and the temperature of the dome seemed to drop under its gaze. This must be Jörmungandr itself, encircling the world. But it didn’t try to come in—just kept circling as it swam through the ice, tilting its head in a way that would have been called awkward in a lesser creature in order to gaze into the dome with both eyes.

“Does anyone have experience with another World Serpent?” someone shouted.

Hermione had a little, but she dearly hoped hers wasn’t the greatest of the group. Te Kanawa? No, Maori was a long way from Australian Aboriginal, culturally and geographically. Where were the others? Pakistan, Peru, and…Algeria! Bloody hell, the ridge! It had been right there when the team came down here in February. “Who was doing the Portkey from Algeria?” she called out.

Al-Battuti, the African Master Cursebreaker took charge. He ran to the edge of the dome and shouted, “I need a broom! I will try to communicate with it, but we need to get it to sleep again! It won’t like the cold while it’s awake!”

Someone tossed him a broom, and he flew alongside the World Serpent’s head doing something Hermione didn’t understand, and its swimming began to slow down. It didn’t come to a stop, but the thunder of cracking ice subsided to a low crackling. It didn’t go back underground.

Then, Master Hong, the only practising alchemist on the team, also ran forward. “Everyone! Wands into the earth!” he bellowed. “With enough power, we can attract it back underground.”

Hermione ran forward, with George and Musa beside her, and they jabbed their wands at the ground at the edge of the dome and poured magical energy into the earth. She wasn’t sure what she was doing, but Master Hong seemed to know what to do to shape it into something useful. It was slow and difficult, taking minutes, and her hands cramped by the time she was done, but they kept it up until the World Serpent stopped and began to burrow back into the earth. When its tail disappeared, Al-Battuti came down from his broom and relaxed. “That is it,” he said. “It will grow used to the new pattern of magic and go to sleep again. It will wait for the world to turn and Antarctica to become green once more.”

Hermione wasn’t sure about that last bit. That would take thousands of years, even if he was just talking about the ice age cycle. And how did it get down here in the first place? But those questions could wait. The crowd breathed a collective sigh of relief as the ground settled, and the ice outside became clear and pristine once again, like the World Serpent was never even there.

“Well,” George said. “Lucky we didn’t panic.”

Hermione slapped him in the back of the head.

Chapter End Notes

I can guess that some of you will be wanting more of the adventures at the South Pole, but I really didn’t have anything else that was that interesting. This is a fast-paced story, was originally intended to be even faster, and I just wanted to give a brief overview of
what Hermione is doing. As with Hermione’s and Georgina’s adventures, if someone wants to expand on this, they’re welcome to.
Family Life

Chapter Notes


I had previously meant Hawkehouse Green to be the sort-of poetic-sounding name for where George and Hermione live, like Grimmauld Place. However, on further review, I realised I didn’t fully understand the English tradition of naming individual houses. “The Burrow” sounds weird and magical to American ears (especially since it’s not underground), but it’s actually typical for an English country house. Meanwhile, in America, it’s very rare for a house to have a name, and it’s usually associated with historical significance: the Winchester House, for example.

The official address of George’s and Hermione’s new house is Windrose Field, Hawkhouse Green Lane, Parish of Moss, Borough of Doncaster, County of South Yorkshire, England.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

25 December 2006

The entire Weasley Family were shocked.

Not that Ron had brought home a girlfriend. He did that fairly regularly. Not even that his girlfriend was a Spanish beauty named Juanita who could give Fleur a run for her money. He’d become quite the world traveller in his own right in recent years. He was a respected Auror and runes expert, and he’d led the Chudley Cannons to their first winning season in over a hundred years, so he was a good catch. And she was a scholar of Iberian runes, so it was natural that they’d meet at some point.

No, what shocked the Weasley Family was that they were serious enough that Ron had brought her home for Christmas—partly because that was the only day the whole family would be there. He would be staying with her family for New Year’s, he said.

Hermione felt like she and George had missed a lot while they were in Antarctica. That did look pretty serious. And Molly was so excited it was hard for her to help being nosey about where their relationship is going.

“Juanita’s family is sort of old-fashioned, you know?” Ron finally admitted. “So I want to visit them at New Year’s so I can be traditional and ask her father for her hand.”

Molly squealed at a frequency that shouldn’t be allowed. “Oh, that’s so wonderful, Ron! And Juanita, it’s a pleasure to meet you. I do hope it goes well for you two. That would be everyone in the family.”

“What am I? The next-door neighbour?” Charlie spoke up.

That brought Molly up short: “Oh, no, Charlie. I didn’t mean—” she stammered. “It’s just that—after this long—I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Nah, I understand, Mum,” he assured her. “I know what you meant. Er, since it’s come up, I have a
confession, too. I’m actually asexual. I’m happy for the rest of you, but I’m not really ever expecting to ‘settle down.’”

He looked around, not nervous, exactly, but as if he was expecting some kind of push-back. The response, however, was more of a shrug.

“Eh, I can see that,” Ron said.

“Wait that was a secret—? OW!” Fred said before being smacked in the back of the head by Angelina.

“Um, Dora said she suspected it,” Harry said sheepishly when Charlie looked at him.

Charlie groaned: “Just because the one date I went on with her turned out that badly…”

“Ahem,” Arthur spoke up, giving a stern look to his other children. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of, Charlie. Your Uncle Bilius was the same way…which maybe isn’t the best comparison, but there’s nothing wrong with it either way, and honestly, your mother and I sort of suspected, too.”

“Thanks, Dad,” he said. “And I’m not ashamed. I just felt a little uncomfortable, being in this family with this many kids—”

“Oh, none of that, now,” Molly stopped him. “Your father and I are a special case. We both love kids, and we wanted to keep going until we had a girl—”

“And that’s all I need to hear!” Ginny said loudly. “How about those Cannons?”

Molly rolled her eyes. “Honestly, Ginny, you have two of your own, now,” she said, although she did drop the topic.

Juanita looked around and met the eyes of the other wives at the table. “Are they always like this?” she asked.

“But Ginny had paused with her fork hanging loosely over her plate at Molly’s remark. “Um… Mum?” she said. “I suppose now’s as good a time as any. We’ve actually started another one,” Ginny said.

“What?” everyone gasped, and Molly added, “Oh, Ginny, I’m so happy! This is just the best Christmas! When did you find out?”

“Just this week. We weren’t sure about telling you this early, but with my Weasley genes and how well the first two went, we thought it was fine. We’re hoping for a girl this time—oh, bugger, I had to say it, didn’t I?”

Everyone laughed. That announcement fully restored the mood of the party. Everyone gave a round of congratulations, and they toasted the Potters with sparkling cider—an old family tradition since there always seemed to be at least one pregnant woman around.

A little later, however, Molly couldn’t fully suppress her interest in completing the set. “So, George and Hermione, have you been thinking about starting a family of your own now that you’ll be moving into your own house soon?” she asked with a mirthful look in her eyes that showed she knew she was needling just a bit.
Hermione and George smiled at each other. “We’ve talked about it, yes,” Hermione said. “We’re still not in any hurry, but…maybe not holding back anymore.”

Ginny snorted: “Dangerous words in this family.”

Hermione gave her a look. “Well, we’ll have a house by this summer, so we’re fine either way.”

That evening, the godchildren, Marcus, Sasha, and Morgan, came over for a visit. They always spent most of Christmas with their own families, but they still wanted to spend time with their godparents. As a result, the Burrow was more of a ruckus than it had ever been when Arthur’s and Molly’s own children were young, with three eight-year-olds and five more four and under running around.

Luckily, they were quieted down when Fred and George brought out their surprise, setting up a colourful cardboard stage in the living room.

“Gather ‘round! Gather ‘round!” Fred called.

“Oi, kids! That means get over here!” George said.

The children gathered around the stage, with the adults standing behind them, perplexed. The Twins were in full showman mode as they spoke. “Presenting the first ever Weasley Brothers’ Christmas Play, dramatising the feats of our valiant heroes in war against Voldemort—and their other childhood antics.” They quickly darted out of sight behind the stage.

“What are they doing?” Ginny whispered to Hermione.

“I’m not sure. They wanted it to be a surprise, so I’ve only got an inkling.”

Suddenly, a hand puppet with spiky, black hair and two big, white circles for glasses popped up from behind the stage.

“Daddy!” little James squealed.

“They didn’t,” Harry said.

They did. The Harry puppet flailed comically and said, “I feel cranky and pubescent today and I don’t know why. Grrr! I’m gonna take it out on people I like.”

“What?! When was I ever like that?” Harry said.

“Fifth year,” Hermione, Ginny, and Ron responded, to general laughter, although Hermione added, “Granted, I wasn’t much better.”

A red-haired puppet with a cheerful smile popped up next to Harry. It didn’t look like Ginny, but it spoke with a silly falsetto voice. “Hello, Harry. What sort of tomfoolery shall we get up to today?”

“No tomfoolery today, Ron. I’m sick of your dreadful, speckled mug.”

The Ron puppet stood still, obviously still smiling: “Why must you hurt me in this way, Harry?”

A Hermione puppet appeared next: “Yeah, what’s your problem, Harry?”

“Oi! Why do I sound like a girl?” Ron said.

“Why do I sound like a boy?” Hermione said.
“Why do I sound like an arse?” Harry demanded.

They heard a musical laugh coming from behind them, and they both spun around and were surprised to see Fleur giggling at the show. “But it is commedia dell’arte,” she said. “It is supposed to be silly and satirical. Look, zee children like it.”

They looked down at the floor and saw Sasha and Nadia giggling, and Hermione thought she saw Marcus smirk a little, and she decided to give it a chance. The plot of the sketch seemed to be that Harry was angsty and wanted to quit magic—and the ridiculous consequences that ensued, like Harry trying to send Ron to fight Voldemort.

The Voldemort puppet had big red eyes and that same cheerful grin on its face. Marcus gasped in surprise when he saw it, as did many of the adults that the Twins would actually do that. Two-year-old Billy even panicked and ran back to Ginny. But Voldemort didn’t attack Ron. Instead, he spoke in an exaggerated Bond villain sort of voice, “Hello, little child. You want a piece of me? What?”

Ron trembled and whimpered, and then ran away, to the dismay of the real Ron. Then, he pushed the Hermione puppet toward Voldemort.

“Get him, Hermione!” he said.

Hermione and Voldemort stared each other down for a moment. Then, the Hermione puppet raised a tiny wand.

“Hex in the face!”

“Ahh!” Voldemort said as he fell over.

That time, everyone laughed, even the littlest kids who liked the slapstick. The skit meandered on from there, with more silliness like Ron and Harry getting in a slap fight, Snape showing up and trying to give them detention, and Dumbledore randomly flying up past the top of the stage. None of it made any sense, but by the end of it, even Harry was laughing at the silliness of it.

“Okay, I admit it. That was pretty cool,” Hermione told George afterwards.

6 March 2007

“How are you doing?” Hermione asked, giggling a little.

“Trying to figure out how many voices we need for this skit,” George said. “It’s a complicated one.”

“Let me see that.” She took the script from him and read it over, raising an eyebrow when she reached the bottom. “I found the source of the ticking. It’s a pipe bomb? That’s a little morbid, don’t you think?”

“So? Kids love explosions,” he insisted.

“But Voldemort wins at the end,” she protested.

“Eh, it’s a work in progress.”

“Hmph.” Hermione carelessly tossed the parchment behind her. “Well, here’s some interesting news you’ll want to know.”
“What’s that?” he said.

“I’m pregnant.”

George swooned—actually swooned—so that Hermione had to catch him.

“Pregnant…” he said.

“Yes.”

“We’re gonna have a baby…”

“Well, I certainly hope so,” she said. “It’d be rather embarrassing if we had a kneazle.”

George cracked up. “I love you,” he said, and he pulled her in for a steamy kiss.

25 June 2007

“I’m honestly surprised to see you here again, Mr. Spudmore,” Harry said. The head of the Firebolt Corporation sat down in his parlour while Ginny lounged in the opposite chair. “We didn’t exactly part on the best of terms last time.”

“I apologise for being short with you five years ago, Mr. Potter,” Spudmore said. “Learning just how badly the Millennium was doomed to failure seriously hurt the company—and the broomstick industry in general, to be frank. But don’t think that we didn’t take your advice to heart. We’ve been busy all this time.”

“Really?” Ginny piped up. “With what? The Millennium was already past the limit of what was useful.”

“Past the limit in speed, Mrs. Potter,” Spudmore corrected. “Those weren’t the only changes we could make. In fact, after that report, we split our product line. We’re still working on the ultimate Quidditch broom, fixing the problems of the Firebolt Classic and the Millennium that have cropped up over the years. But our other product line has just turned out our first production model.”

He opened a box and took out a broom that was longer than the box. It was like no broom they’d ever seen before. As different as a Nimbus 2000 looked from an ordinary kitchen broom, this was just as far beyond a Nimbus. It was over seven feet long and looked impossibly sleek, with toe loops on the ironwork and molded hand grips on the shaft, far enough up that it was clear the rider was supposed to lie nearly flat on it. Silver lines like whorls of wind and visible runes were drawn all over the shaft.

“What on Earth?” Harry said.

“Is that even a broom?” said Ginny.

“Wow!” said James.

“This,” Spudmore said proudly, “is the Firebolt Jetstream, probably the only pure racing broom on the market.”

“Pure racing broom?” Harry said.

“By that, I mean it’s only good for racing,” he replied. “If it were the size of a normal broom, it would have about the manoeuvrability of a good Comet. At this size, even less, but the reason is that
we stripped down everything in exchange for pure speed.”

Harry hesitated from touching the “broom.” “How much speed are we talking about?” he asked.

“We’ve tested it at two hundred and fifty miles per hour.”

Harry’s jaw dropped. Two hundred and fifty? That beat the next fastest broom on the market by nearly a hundred miles an hour. It was twice as fast as a top Nimbus. “And you want me to review it?” he asked. When Spudmore nodded, Harry turned to face Ginny, and they communicated mentally for a minute. Then he went to the Floo. “Yeah, no. I’m checking with Hermione to make sure flying at those speeds won’t suck my lungs out or something.”

“Certainly, Mr. Potter,” Spudmore said, “although we did include a Wind Screen Charm in the design.”

Harry and Ginny considered that a moment. “Yeah, still asking Hermione,” he said.

3 July 2007

George and Hermione waved the moving truck into the lane they’d had built up to their house. They’d already accepted several furniture deliveries and the like, but this was the final move, clearing out their increasingly cluttered flat, plus adding a shopping spree’s worth of baby supplies and housewarming gifts from various family members.

They were finally moving into their new house, Windrose Field. The muggle builders had finished on schedule, and they’d discreetly added their own magical touches leading up to today. They had to rent a muggle moving truck to avoid suspicion, but things were looking pretty good.

The house didn’t look like that much from the road, by both necessity and design. Though large, it was set far back and partly concealed by trees. The landscaping was just started, but it should look really nice by next spring. They were also considering whether to grow some proper crops considering how much land they had. Pumpkins especially seemed appropriate.

“Well, that’s the last truckload,” George said. “It feels good to finally have a place of our own, doesn’t it?”

“Definitely,” Hermione said. “But that’s last truckload to move in, you mean. The nursery isn’t finished, or the study, and I’d still like to buy a piano.”

“Ah, details,” he said.

“The nursery certainly isn’t a detail,” she said indignantly, resting a hand on her stomach.

“The nursery’s almost finished,” George insisted, patting her tummy lightly and then kissing her. “It’ll be fine.”

Before they could join the movers, though, another couple came walking up the street to them. They were a few years older than George and Hermione, and the woman was also visibly pregnant. Two of the neighbours, they guessed. Their immediate neighbours, the Lawsons, from whom they’d bought the land, the Schofields, and the Dysons, all lived in farmhouses on the opposite side of the street. (The fifth home in the neighbourhood was about half a mile up the road.) So it was a good bet these two were among them.

“Good morning,” the man called to them, waving as he approached.
George and Hermione waved, and George called “Good morning,” back to them.

When the couple drew closer, the man said, “So you’re the mysterious Weasleys, I take it? We’ve been wondering a lot about you.”

“That’s us,” George said with his winning smile. “George Weasley, at your service, and this is my lovely wife, Hermione Granger.”

The woman quirked an eyebrow at the different last names, but didn’t comment on it.

“Pleasure, Mr. Weasley,” the man said. “I’m Christopher Dyson, and this my wife, Rebecca. We live down at the end of the row. It’s good to finally meet you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Dyson,” Hermione said as they all shook hands. “We’ve wanted to meet the neighbours, but it’s been awfully busy with the move.”

“I can imagine—especially building your own house. That certainly takes commitment,” he said. “We were all surprised when Tom Lawson said you came to him and asked to buy up practically this whole side of the road. We get people from the city coming out here, but not usually this far from civilisation.”

“Eh, it suits us,” George said, taking Hermione’s hand. “When we got married, we agreed we’d build a big place in the country once we were ready. It’s pretty great finally seeing it finished.”

“Yes, it’s really something,” Mr. Dyson replied. “I don’t get why you wanted to build that far back, though.”

Hermione smiled. They’d come up with a better cover story since they started this project. “George grew up in a place a lot like this,” Hermione said, “well back from the road and surrounded by fields.”

“It’s nice and quiet,” he said.

“And when I was a little girl, I dreamed of getting a big country house with gardens on all four sides.”

“Nine acres’ worth?” Mrs. Dyson said.

She shrugged. They were always going to come off a little eccentric and private. She just hoped they wouldn’t cross the line into “sketchy” or “creepy.” As they talked, they briefly went over the rest of their cover story, keeping as close to the truth as possible. Hermione was a researcher at Doncaster College, which was false, and was working on her PhD, which was true. In England, you could actually earn a PhD by publication—solely by getting peer-reviewed papers in the subject published—and she’d been putting out papers on fractal analysis in muggle journals every so often. And George was a successful shop owner in the city, so together, they’d been saving up for the past eight years for a really big move like this.

“We wish you luck moving in,” Mrs. Dyson finally said. “Do give us a call if you have any questions about the area—or if you car breaks down at the worst possible time. That happened to us once.” She glanced at Hermione knowingly.

Hermione snorted. “Thank you, Mrs. Dyson, but we made sure to get the car checked.”

“Good thinking. When are you due?”
“Late October,” she said, smiling. “A girl—and quite a lively one, according to the other women in
the family.” Little Emmy was already doing her best to try to disrupt her sleep, though she was
thankfully being calmer today.

“Hm, good timing, then.”

“Well, that was the plan,” Hermione said. “What about you?”

“End of September,” she replied, “but this is our fourth, and the third boy.”

“Ah, sounds like my family, then,” George grinned. He jerked a thumb at his chest: “Fifth of seven,
and only one girl.”

“Seven! Kudos to your mother, then. I don’t think I could handle three more of these. Good luck,
you two.”

Once the Dysons left, Hermione and George walked up the lane to their new home. It was the length
of a Quidditch pitch, but it worked for them. Soon, the truck was unloaded and left, and they could
start unpacking.

The young couple had spared no expense on the house, Hermione even stepping up Archimedes’
Jewelry’s production to cover some of it. They had everything a well-off magical family with one
foot in the muggle world could need. There was a conservatory with a dedicated section for magical
plants, a swimming pool, and a low-set stone circle outside for scratch runes work. They didn’t have
any animals besides owls and cats, but they could always add some later. There were gardens, and
they’d kept some of the trees from the hedgerows, which they would subtly encourage to grow so
they could potentially build a treehouse there in a few years.

The house itself was four stories, although the third floor was basically just the observatory, with a
two-car garage, even though they’d just now bought their first one. The west wing was a still-large,
but self-contained, simple family dwelling. That section had pretty standard fare: parlour (including
the main Floo), drawing room (including television and stereo), and study (with high-speed internet),
with the addition of a library (because of course), and a private, family dining room. This part of the
house looked close to muggle, and this was for the benefit of muggle visitors. In a hidden panel
beside the front door, there was an oversize knife switch like something out of Frankenstein that
could be flipped to present a “muggle-worthy” appearance. The basement, likewise, held the kitchen
(old-fashioned as it was), pantry, utility room, and storage room; and the first floor held the master
suite, nursery, and eventual children’s bedrooms.

The rest of the house was more elaborate and magical. The main foyer opened onto the stereotypical
twin staircases. They were fairly compact ones, but still the most overtly ostentatious thing they’d
included. (Hermione had drawn the line at the ballroom and the Grecian columns.) Tucked into a
corner behind the stairs was a proper lift in case someone needed one. Straight back from there was a
dining hall as large at the one at Prewett Manor. They would hardly ever use it except for holidays,
but they did want one; the intent was that, if they squeezed tables in close together, it would be able
to hold a Weasley family reunion even when the children had children of their own.

The east wing, only two stories, held the more specialised rooms: a gallery, which held many of both
Hermione’s and George’s creations; a music room, since Hermione played piano a little; and a small
room that they half-jokingly called the armoury, which was mainly storage for anything they might
need in a major fight. George’s workshop was there too, owing to the need for adequate ventilation
for his inventions. The space above was for storage in lieu of an attic, but below it, the rest of the
basement consisted of a small, soundproofed shooting gallery that could catch both spells and bullets,
a warded duelling room, a small gym, and Hermione’s workshop, where she could do arcane
arithmantic experiments and artificing away from prying eyes.

The second floor contained the house elf quarters and more bedrooms; they made sure to have enough to host a sleepover with at least a dozen kids. And above that was the observatory, complete with a rotating dome, darkroom lights, and a state-of-the-art electronic muggle telescope.

George’s hand showed too, of course. There were multiple secret passages in the house, both architectural and magical, and they had created a map to monitor the property. Guests who went snooping where they shouldn’t would be struck by some minor, harmless pranks. A special shed in the back contained a frankly worrying amount of fireworks. And it was his idea for the master bath to include a bathtub large enough for two people, something Hermione wholeheartedly approved.

It sounded like a lot, but it wasn’t much more than what Harry and Ginny had at Grimmauld Place and only half of what Percy and Audrey had at Prewett Manor. And beneath it all, in the subbasement, were the anchor stones: a circle of eight stone columns of pure quartz about eight feet high and two feet wide, carved all over with runes powerful enough to extend wards over the whole nine-acre property, and when pulled back to the house, able to stand up to a siege. There wasn’t a “panic room” per se, but there were strategically-placed passages into the subbasement, which was quite possibly the most magically secure room in the county. Hermione had even considered changing the quartz to diamond or sapphire, but quartz was the alchemically “pure” form of earth, so that was still the best for area wards built on ley lines.

Contrary to the stereotype, they unpacked everything from the truck that day. It was a much easier task with magic, but it still took all day. Nonetheless, it was a tired, but very happy Hermione and George who fell into their new bed that night, and they both agreed it was their best anniversary yet.

---

**25 October 2007**

“Labour and Delivery, straight back,” the Welcome Witch said before Hermione and George even reached the counter. Not that they needed directions; after enough nieces and nephews, they knew the way blindfolded. George led his wife back as she leaned on his arm.

“St. Crispin’s Day,” Hermione muttered. “Mum’s gonna take the mickey when she gets here.”

“No, she’s not,” George said.

“Oh, she will. I’ll bet you a galleon she will.”

“Deal. So…” he said as they reached the entrance to the delivery ward. His voice was trembling a little. “Once more unto the breach?”

“Please don’t use the word breech.”

“Why not? They checked, didn’t they?”

“Yes, and she’s just fine, but it’s the principle of the thing.”

They went inside the ward and were immediately met by a Healer. Cadwallader, her nametag said. She looked like she’d just woken up, but she was already moving, hurriedly getting set up, probably having been buzzed over the intercom when they walked in the building.

“Ah, Professor Granger,” she said cheerfully. “It’s about that time, is it?”

“Yes, Healer,” Hermione said.
“Right this way, then. I’ll put you in Room One. I’ll be your midwife through the whole thing unless you request someone else, but specialists are on call if you need one.”

“Thank you, Healer,” Hermione said.

St. Mungo’s had a grand total of four delivery rooms, since the odds of more than four rooms being needed on the same day were quite long, and they could easily adapt a normal room with magic in case of emergencies. Most of the time, only zero or one were in use at any one time. Hermione strongly suspected there was only a single Healer staffing the ward when no deliveries were going on, probably reading a newspaper or something.

Healer Cadwallader instructed her to change into a gown and then sit upright on the bed. Things weren’t too bad yet, so she did that quickly and leaned back and tried to relax while she waited for the inevitable arrival of the rest of the family. George was also told to change for hygiene’s sake, and he pulled up an armless chair that happened to be at the same height as the bed, allowing him to comfortably put his arm around her shoulders.

Hermione’s parents were first to arrive, mainly because she’d given strict instructions that they be contacted first. The Weasleys were a little much at a time like this. Dan and Emma Granger soon came in to see their daughter and congratulate her. Once they assured that she and Emmy were both doing alright, Emma said, “So, St. Crispin’s Day. You’re continuing the tradition of Shakespearean dates, I see.”

Hermione grinned and held out her hand to George. “Pay up,” she said.

George groaned and summoned his wallet. He pulled out a galleon and handed it to Hermione, only for her to realise she had nowhere to put it. She tossed it on the windowsill.

Emma looked at both of them and said, “Um, I think I missed something here.”

Hermione and George looked at each other and started laughing. “I knew you’d say that,” she said.

“Ah, well, I’m glad to see you’re in good spirits, Hermione.”

Shortly after that, some indeterminate number of Weasleys arrived. Fred somehow managed to slip in first. He hugged George and clapped him on the shoulder and said, “Congratulations, brother. I’d offer you a drink, but I don’t think the missus would appreciate it.”

“And neither would the midwife,” Healer Cadwallader spoke up. “And do try not to disturb Mum.”

Fred chuckled. “Good luck, Georgie,” he said before turning to leave.

“Good luck with yours too, Freddie,” George called after him. “Only two more months, yeah?”

Molly, Arthur, Ron, Harry, and even Ginny all turned up soon after Fred. Baby Lily was presumably being held by yet another family member outside, since Ginny wouldn’t leave a seven-week-old infant alone for long. (The fourth of September, thankfully. They’d been concerned about the girls being born on opposite sides of the Hogwarts cutoff.) At that point, Hermione thanked them all for coming and promptly banished everyone from the delivery room except for George and her mother. Ginny laughed and winked at her on her way out. She’d had to do the same thing all three times.

Once things in the delivery room calmed down, Hermione’s labour proceeded refreshingly normally. Healer Cadwallader said she was progressing fine, maybe a little fast, but not enough to be troublesome. Magic, she said, tended to smooth over the little things (sadly, the pain was not among them, as Hermione soon found), although there was still plenty of room for complications.
In the first few hours, Hermione’s felt like she was mostly just waiting. She tried to sleep, but didn’t have much success with the excitement. She asked George to read to her from a science fiction book she’d picked up in the store not long ago, and her mum later took it up when his voice got tired. Healer Cadwallader was thoroughly confused.

Still, as the morning wore on, it grew harder for Hermione. It didn’t help that she’d only got a couple hours’ sleep. “You’d think there’d be a faster way to do this with magic,” she grumbled at one point.

The Healer shook her head: “Not a good idea to mix magic with such a delicate process, or an about-to-be-born infant in general. If something goes wrong, there are a number of things we can do, but it’s better to do it naturally if you can.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” Hermione said. “Ugh, I did not get enough sleep for this.”

“Better than losing a full night,” the Healer insisted. “I see that often enough.”

Hermione nodded and thought for a moment. “Thirty point three eight percent.”

“Excuse me?”

“‘Normal’ labour is estimated to run between eleven and eleven twelfths and twenty one and a half hours,” she explained. “Taking sixteen and seventeen twenty-fourths hours as the median and assuming a normal sleep schedule, you’re guaranteed to lose some sleep, and you have a minimum of a thirty point three eight percent chance of losing a full night—realistically closer to fifty-fifty because you won’t go to sleep right after…Although I suppose I don’t know how many mothers nap through the beginning.”

The Healer just stared at Hermione.

George chuckled. “That’s the Hermione I love.” He kissed her on the forehead and turned to the Healer. “Yes, she really is like that. Especially when she’s stressed. If she loses her grip on numbers, that’s when you really need to worry.”

Cadwallader just shook her head, clearly out of her depth.

The pain grew worse over time as the contractions grew stronger. Hermione was offered a pain potion that was certified to be safe for childbirth, then was offered it again when Healer Cadwallader pronounced her in active labour, but she refused both times. ‘Safe’ was a relative term, even with magic…especially with magic, and she didn’t want to take it if she didn’t need to.

Still, the clenched teeth and white-knuckled grip on the bed frame when she started getting close were impossible for George and Mum to ignore. Finally, George just came out and said it:

“Hermione, aren’t you in pain?”

“Yeah. Lots,” she said breathlessly.

He stared at her. “Um…not that I’m complaining, but why aren’t you screaming and threatening to hex my bollocks off?”

“Easy. Occlumency.”

Cadwallader’s eyebrows shot up under her Healer’s cap: “You’re using Occlumency to suppress the pain?”

“Sure. Muggle women do it all the time. It’s called hypnobirthing…not exactly the same, but close
enough.” She hesitated and then added, “Besides, I spent time under the Cruciatus Curse of Bellatrix Lestrange during the war. Compared with that, this is easy.”

“My God, I am so sorry. Well, if you think you can handle it, that’s great, but please don’t try to be a hero.”

“I’ll be fine,” Hermione insisted. “The human brain has an amazing capacity for self-regulation if you know how to train it. Occlumency is just one form and if used with specific knowledge of neurology—” She stopped cold. “Oh! Oh! I need a pen!”

“—Wait, what?”

“A pen and paper! Quickly.”

“Why?”

“I think I just had an idea about how Ravenclaw’s Diadem works. I need to jot it down before I forget.”

“Professor Granger, this is hardly the time!” the Healer said.

“It’ll only take a minute. I just need to make sure I remember it later.”

George grabbed Hermione’s handbag and pulled out a pen and a small notepad and handed them to her. “I’ve got it. It’s best if you don’t argue with her about something like this,” he told the Healer. “Arithmancy is not something she can switch off.”

Hermione did only need about a minute to jot down her thought, and none too soon because the Healer checked her after the next contraction and concluded. “You’re just about there. You’re going to have to start pushing. We’d better get you in position. I’ll just stick you there…” Then, to Hermione’s alarm, she used a Sticking Charm to fix her to the bed.

Hermione jerked, pulling the sheets with her before she noticed her hands and feet were still free. She nearly went for her wand; she could still remember being stuck to the floor at Malfoy Manor. “What’s that for?” she cried. Molly hadn’t used anything like that with Fleur, the one birth she’d personally witnessed (although they hadn’t had much to work with at the time).

“Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot you’re muggle-born; you might not have seen this before. I didn’t mean to scare you. Lying on your back is a terrible position to deliver a baby if you can help it. No gravity, and it tilts your hips in the wrong direction. We prefer half-lying here so you don’t have to support your full weight, but by all means, if another position is more comfortable for you, please let me know, and I’ll help you adjust.

Hermione held up a hand, considering it. “I’ll try it,” she said. “You ought to warn people sooner, though. Brings back some bad memories.”

“Oh, dear. I really am sorry. If your okay with it, though…” The Healer placed her feet in stirrups that were placed lower than she expected, and suddenly, the whole bed titled forward, stopping when she was more upright than not. She’d been nearly squatting if her feet were on the floor. The Sticking Charm was surprisingly comfortable with her weight distributed over her whole back, even more than it would be with just friction.

“Huh,” Mum said. “I learnt plenty about childbirth at university, but I can honestly say I haven’t see that one before.”
“Well, muggles still insist on lying down for this,” the Healer said dismissively.

“No, no, I’ve heard of modern hospitals are using methods like this, but they would never use a contraption like that to do it.”

“It…I think it actually works,” Hermione said. “It’s strange, but I think I could do this a lot longer than I could squat on the floor. It just took me by surprise.”

Healer Cadwallader nodded. “Thank you for understanding, Professor Granger,” she said. Then, she conjured a thick, soft cushion on the floor between Hermione’s legs.

“Do you need that cushion often?” George said in alarm.

“No, not since I’ve been here. No need to worry, Mr. Weasley, but better safe than sorry. Now, please get ready…”

The pushing took over an hour, and it was painful and exhausting and took all of Hermione’s Occlumency strength and George’s support to get through, and she did have to change positions a couple times, but at the end of it, Hermione delivered a healthy baby girl flawlessly in the mid-afternoon. When Emmy’s cries filled the room, Hermione’s mum squealed—actually squealed and George was speechless, looking like he was about to fall over.

The bed tilted back to only a slight incline, and Healer Cadwallader placed the squirming baby girl on Hermione’s chest.

“She looks perfectly healthy, dear,” the Healer said. “Just let me log the time—and do you have a name?”


Emmy was partly for her mother, but was also for Emmy Noether, whose eponymous theorem had indirectly saved all their lives in the war by unlocking ritualcraft for Hermione. (Mum assured her she perfectly understood.) And Septima was for her favourite teacher, of course.

They’d agreed that George got first pick of names for the next one, within reason.

Hermione noted that Emmy already had short, but substantial wisps of red hair covering her head. Those Weasley genes wouldn’t go down without a fight. She was quite wiggly too, but she calmed down with skin-to-skin contact.

“She’s beautiful,” Hermione breathed.

“Both of you are,” George said, kissing them both. “How do you feel?”

“Still not as wiped out as when I fought Bellatrix, so I’m calling it a win.”

He let out a short laugh. “We have a beautiful, perfect new daughter, Hermione. I’m calling it a win either way.”

Hermione sighed happily and stroked Emmy’s head, though as she did, she felt a cramp in her fingers. She pulled back and looked at her hand curiously. She flexed her fingers and then toes.

“Something wrong?” Mum asked.

“My hands and feet ache,” she said. “That’s odd. I can’t see how I could’ve strained all of them.”
Healer Cadwallader came back over. “All of your hands and feet?” she said. She manipulated Hermione’s fingers briefly. “Has that happened before?”


“You said you suffered under the Cruciatus during the war? It could be lingering curse damage. And before you ask, no, it won’t affect your daughter. And it looks very minor, but I’d like to call someone from Spell Damage to take a look.”

Hermione waved her on. “Go ahead.” She, her husband, and her mum all waited in awkward silence for the other Healer to arrive. She reassured herself that it was obviously very minor, but it was still a nasty surprise to discover on such a happy day.

Thankfully, when the Healer from Spell Damage arrived, he needed only a minute to scan her. “Well, I’m afraid that it’s slight nerve damage from Cruciatus exposure,” he concluded, “but luckily it’s a very mild case.” He checked the chart. “You say you feel pain only rarely, associated with stress. Maybe associated with overexertion, instead?”

She considered that: “Yes, it could be.”

“I thought so. I’ve seen this before; there’s a certain amount of nerve damage that your magic can compensate for. It’s automatic; you don’t even know you’re doing it. You got especially lucky there. Much longer under the curse, and victims start to lose functionality fast. But for you, your nerves still work normally. Living a normal life, you’ll probably never even notice it, but when you’re pushed to your limit and need all of your strength, your body can’t keep it up, and you feel the pain come through. I’m afraid we can’t do anything about it, but it also won’t get any worse—not until you’re old enough to get arthritis, at least, and maybe longer.”

He left her with that assurance, but she saw George was still looking at her in worry—worry about how she would feel, maybe, but when his eyes met hers, she smiled, and it was a genuine smile. “I’m fine, George. Really,” she said.

“I know this isn’t what you wanted to learn today of all days—” he said.

“George. I’m truly okay with it,” she insisted. She looked down at her arms—arms that now held their newborn daughter. She could still read clearly on her left arm a scar that read **MUDBLOOD**, and another on her right hand that read, **I must not tell lies**. “It’s just one more scar from the war,” she said. “And we survived that ages ago. We’ve moved past it. We get to live our lives as a family, and not Voldemort nor Umbridge nor Bellatrix nor Barty Crouch can take that away from us. That’s all I need.”

Chapter End Notes

Next generation kids as of 31 December 2007
Bill and Fleur: Nadia (9)
Remus and Tonks: Sasha (9) and Morgan (5)
Percy and Audrey: Molly (4)
Fred and Angelina: Lee (3) and Roxanne (on the way)
George and Hermione: (Marcus, 9) and Emmy (2mo)
Ginny and Harry: James (5), Bill (3), and Lily (3mo)
(Columba Malfoy, 9)
Disclaimer: Hogwarts, Hogwarts, hoggy, warty Hogwarts, teach us about JK Rowling, please.

The joke at the beginning of this chapter is a big part of the reason why Sirius survived the war in this story.

31 July 2008

Harry’s boys sat with rapt attention as Sirius recounted his tale. James, six, and Bill, not quite four, were at that age where tales of heroic (and whitewashed) battles were starting to become fascinating, and they watched him reenacting the scene with wide eyes.

“The Death Eaters had regrouped in the middle of the Department of Mysteries, and they followed your dad and Aunt Hermione into the Hall of Space. I was sneaking along behind them under an invisibility cloak, leading the Order to them. They were hiding behind Jupiter and Saturn, but there was nowhere else to run, and they were outnumbered.

“Some people were being too slow, so I knew it was up to me to save the day. It was time for a distraction. So I took off the cloak and walked up to the leader of the Death Eaters, the evil Lucius Malfoy. Lucius whipped his long, blond hair, trying to show it off to intimidate me, but it still wasn’t as good as mine.”

“Wait, what?” Harry called from across the room. The boys giggled.

“And then,” Sirius continued. “I walked up to him, got right in his face…” Here, he leaned forward so he was almost nose to nose with the little boys. “…and then he said… ‘Why…so…Sirius?’”

“Why so Sirius!” the boys squealed.

“Sirius, I swear if you make that joke one more time…!” Harry called.

“And I said, ‘Do you wanna know how I got these tattoos?’”

Hermione wandered over to the group to intervene, bouncing Emmy in her arms. At nine months, Emmy was still a little ball of energy, but she’d mellowed a bit once she started sleeping through the night. She also had a full head of curly red hair, and Hermione had a suspicion she was going to turn out looking a lot like her mother, except ginger and freckled. She intended to save her a lot of trouble and teach her some hairstyling spells early.

She looked down at Sirius and the Potter boys. “I think the real story is better, Sirius,” she said. “James, Billy,” she got their attention. “You know what your Uncle Sirius really did? He took off the cloak and said, ‘Get away from my godson.’ And then he punched Lucius in the face.”

“I’m not sure you need to tell them that either, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Hey, they need to learn how awesome I am sometime,” Sirius insisted.
Hermione rolled her eyes, but she said, “It was pretty impressive. Not the best night, though.” She went on and sought out Ginny, who turned out to be in the kitchen, feeding Lily. Lily had also inherited Weasley red hair, unlike her brothers, but it was straight hair, so they could still tell her and Emmy apart from behind. The two girls already seemed to get on famously.

“Hi, Hermione. How’s it going?” Ginny said brightly.

“Pretty well,” Hermione said. “Just Sirius being Sirius out there.”

“Ugh. Tell me about it. He’s been like that all month. And I thought his jokes were bad enough before.”

“Hello,” another voice said. “Is this Las Mamás Club in here?” Juanita came into the room and pulled up a seat.

“I suppose it can be if you want,” Ginny said with a chuckle.

Ron and Juanita had married last autumn, and they were already expecting their first child, although Juanita was barely starting to show. George had suggested that if they had a boy, they had to name him Inigo Montoya Weasley. Juanita had not been amused. Ron was even less amused when he learnt the character’s backstory. That may have been the most impressive prank the family had ever seen him pull.

In any case, with six young mothers in the Weasley Family plus Molly, they probably could start a club if they wanted. “My Tía Imelda always used to joke about her sisters having Las Mamás Club, since she was the only one who wasn’t married,” Juanita explained, as she waved and cooed to the babies.

“Mostly, we’re trying to give them the commotion of the party in controlled doses,” Ginny said. “You’ll learn to do that pretty quick, especially if their nap is interrupted.”

Juanita gave them an uneasy smile: “I’ll keep that in mind.”

14 August 2008

Hermione admired the document she’d received in the post, the culmination of many years of hard, if intermittent work. It looked official even by magical standards, all high-quality parchment and calligraphed letters—except the parchment was actually coloured paper, and the fine calligraphy came out of a laser printer. Muggles had quicker and cheaper way of doing things. But it did come in a nice leather folder and was suitable for framing.

She had already chosen a place to frame it: on the wall of the parlour. The study might have been more appropriate, since it was traditional to hang it in one’s office, but anyone who actually came to the house for an arithmancy consultation would meet her in the parlour, so she quickly had it framed and hung it there:

Philosophiae Doctor in Mathematica

11 August 2009

The following year felt like a year of transitions—some completions, and some new beginnings. The Weasley Family celebrated the birth of Julio Rodrigo Weasley just before Christmas. Around the same time, Hermione and Audrey both discovered they were pregnant again. Hermione and George
weren’t exactly planning to have another baby that soon, but they were still overjoyed about it.

Musa completed his apprenticeship in January, and Hermione didn’t put out an ad for another. She probably wouldn’t for at least two years with two infants at home. In the meantime, however, at some prompting from Hermione, Fred and George had taken up a new project for the shop—something she had suggested ages ago, but they’d let lie for the past ten years: magical virtual reality.

Or actually, they already had that from the Patented Daydream Charms. Those were simple to make and could produce some truly amazing scenarios. Even Hermione still used them from time to time. However, this kind of virtual reality was meant as a game. They even called them Ethereal Games. It wasn’t easy. Playing a game of Quidditch, for example, in a daydream with realistic and consistent competition was beyond the capabilities of a normal human imagination, and it turned out to be too complicated to really do it right with a charm bracelet.

In fact, every game or sport needed its own rather complex rune array, and some were outright impossible. In a daydream, you could theoretically have no-holds-barred duelling, but duelling was so complicated that they couldn’t really build anything between “wouldn’t challenge a competent fifth-year” and “instantly killed by dark wizards.” Though on the other hand, it did give Hermione a chance to explore her lingering unease with duelling in a controlled fashion, which had never fully gone away after the war.

Regardless, the Quidditch ones sold very well, though, and even professional teams were interested.

George and Hermione celebrated their tenth anniversary with a bit less gusto than they had originally planned, Hermione being eight months pregnant at the time and also caring for a toddler. It was hard to believe it had been ten years, even though so much had happened. That Marcus (and Nadia and Sasha) would be going off to Hogwarts very soon only underscored the point.

Lucy Weasley, Percy’s and Audrey’s second, was born that same month, and just a few weeks later, it was Hermione’s turn.

This birth was a little easier than the first, which was common for second labours. Though it was still no walk in the park and ran clean through the night, the family was celebrating the birth of a healthy baby boy in the morning.

“He’ll be sharing a birthday with his Aunt Ginny,” George pointed out.

“I bet she’ll love that,” Hermione said.

She did. “Oh, we’re gonna have so much fun,” Ginny said when she found out, with an evil grin.

“So what’s his name?” Charlie asked. “I’ve been out of the loop.”

“Robin Oliver Granger-Weasley,” George said proudly.

“Robin?”

“Wobeen!” Emmy squeaked in George’s arms.

“You know, like Robin Hood?” he said. “There aren’t many famous pranksters in history, so it was the best one I could find. We can’t very well call him Loki, even in the magical world, and I don’t think Ollie would’ve wanted us to stick him with his first name.”

“Hmm, fair,” Charlie said, remember the Quidditch-obsessed little second-year who had barged his way onto the team in Charlie’s fifth. “Good luck to all of you.”
The day had finally arrived. Septima brought young Marcus Aurelius to King’s Cross Station to begin his first year at Hogwarts. Hermione came out for a short time, leaving George to watch the kids, in order to see him off. The day was warm and sunny and about as cheerful as she could ever remember seeing it in the station. There were few people she knew closely, though. She recognised a handful of parents she’d known as older students in school, but that was all. Most of her generation’s children were too young, yet. This would be the first year in which a precious few Hogwarts students had been born after the war ended, making it an especially joyous occasion.

Septima looked considerably greyer than when she’d been a teacher. She was doing well for herself and her son, but she’d never fully recovered from the war. Marcus looked unsettled, a complex mix of emotions playing on his face. He looked very formal in his Hogwarts uniform, reminding Hermione of Percy.

Both of them waved to Hermione when they saw her.

“What? I don’t look that bad, do I?” Hermione said, seeing the look on Septima’s face when she drew close.

Septima shook her head with a sad sort of smile. “As bad as you got sometimes when you were in school, and you got into some pretty dark places back then.”

“I’ll have you know I am sleeping, Septima. Just not at predictable hours.”

She chuckled. “Babies will do that to you. Thank you for coming, Hermione.”

“I wouldn’t miss it. Marcus, are you excited to go?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Marcus said with an expression that showed he was anything but.

Hermione bent down to get a closer look at him. “Is something wrong?” she asked.

“I just…” he said hesitantly. “I don’t want to be like him, you know? What if people figure out who I am?”

Ah, that. Marcus had been cursed with his father’s pale, freckled skin and straw-coloured hair, and he always wanted his hair cut short to minimise the resemblance. He had been accosted a couple of times by people who wanted to take their anger at Barty Crouch out on him. It was never easy for him from the time he first found out, which was very early, given the kidnapping. He’d been traumatised by that incident, and even now, seven years later, the stigma of his father being a Death Eater and a rapist weighed on him.

“You won’t be the only child of Death Eaters there,” Hermione said. “Don’t worry. I don’t think that many people your age know about Crouch being your father, and none of the teachers will bring it up. There aren’t any Snapes at Hogwarts anymore.”

“But what if someone’s parents tell them, and they tell everybody?”

“Then just tell them who raised you,” she said. “And that you’ve got me for a godmother. That should shut them up.”

“You aren’t anything like him, Marcus,” Septima assured him in practised tones. “I knew your father when he was a student, and he was, frankly, crazy from the start. You’re so much kinder and more
thoughtful than he was, even now.”

Marcus hugged her. “Thanks, Mum,” he said. “I still don’t want to be in Slytherin, though—sorry.”

“That’s alright. I understand,” she said. “I just want you to be happy, wherever you go.”

“Marcus,” Hermione spoke up again. “People don’t see Slytherin as such a bad thing anymore. I tried to get rid of that prejudice in my last year, and Georgina after me…but if you really don’t want to go there, you won’t. When you’re Sorted, they take your wishes into account, too. No one ever gets Sorted someplace that will make them unhappy.” That was about the most she could say for sure. People absolutely did get Sorted to houses they didn’t fit well in at first, but only because the Hat was certain they were better suited to it, and it swore it was always right.

They were interrupted by another familiar voice as Sasha Lupin came onto the platform with his mother. “Why do I have to take the train?” the currently angry-red haired boy complained. “We live in Hogsmeade. We live in the castle half the time.”

“Because it’s tradition,” Dora said. She’d brought Sasha alone since Remus was busy preparing for the school year. “You have to do it for at least your first year and your last year. Now have fun; make some friends. I’ll see you tonight at the Feast.”

“Okay, Mum.”

“And don’t try to go into the girls’ dorms tonight—or ever. You can get in as a girl, but they’ll throw you out if you change back—including in your sleep.”

“I know, Mum,” he groaned.

Hermione tried not to laugh while Marcus blushed deep red, overhearing. Sasha was starting to get curious about such things and was starting to try turning into a girl sometimes. Dora said that probably nothing would come of it long-term, but he was sure to cause trouble while he was in school, speaking from her own experience.

Hermione gave another look around the platform. A little farther down, Fleur had Nadia with her, trying not to cry as she let her go. Then she looked the other way and froze when she spotted possibly the most hated person still walking the streets of Britain free.

Narcissa Malfoy.

After all these years, she’d nearly forgotten that young Columba Malfoy would be starting at Hogwarts this year too. And unfortunately for her, Columba took after her parents in looks every bit as much as her brother had. She had a pale, thin face, long, blond hair, and grey eyes. The look on her face was very different, though. Where Draco’s pinched features had carried a perpetual sneer, Lucius’s had always held an air of arrogance, and Narcissa during the war had seemed to exude a constant, faint disgust, Columba’s face merely looked sad and lonely.

It had to be hard for her. Her brother killed Dumbledore; her father was instrumental in Bill’s death, and her mother was at the wrong place at the wrong time and had inadvertently set off that whole disaster.

Narcissa met Hermione’s eyes and she stopped cold. They stared at each other for a long moment, Narcissa clearly worried Hermione would attack. For the past eleven years, they had avoided each other. Hermione had never spoken to Columba at all, and she and Septima had agreed to keep Marcus away from her until now, not because they blamed her for anything, but because they still didn’t fully trust her mother.
Hermione turned around to check on Fleur again. She didn’t seem to have noticed Narcissa. It wouldn’t surprise her if she’d actively told Nadia to keep away from Columba. They might have to discuss that later. Dora and Sasha were the only ones who had occasional contact with the Malfoys, so they at least knew each other.

Hermione bent down and spoke to Marcus again, more quietly this time. “Speaking of people who have to live down their families…That’s Columba Malfoy over there. She’s got as much bad family history as you do, and she still has her birth name. Listen, if you have classes with her, I want you to be nice to her. And make sure Nadia is nice to her, too. You understand?”

Marcus nodded. “Yes, Aunt Hermione.”

“Good. Now have fun up there.”

Marcus got on the train with the other students, and Hermione saw him out of the station before returning home.

The next day, all the families excitedly learnt about their children’s first night at Hogwarts and, of course, the results of the Sorting. Even Hermione, who tried not to put so much stock in the Sorting anymore, was eager to hear it.

Marcus Vector was the son of a Slytherin, the grandson of a Slytherin, was raised by a Slytherin, and had a godmother worthy of Slytherin, but even so, it was no surprise when Hermione learnt he was Sorted into Ravenclaw. Nadia also went to Ravenclaw, while Sasha wound up in Hufflepuff, much to Dora’s delight. Marcus made a note that Columba Malfoy was in Slytherin, but he didn’t describe her reaction. Hermione was a bit surprised when she found herself hoping the girl would be alright there.

24 December 2009

“I’m glad you could make it back for Christmas, Luna,” Hermione said.

“Thank you, Hermione,” Luna replied. With their globe-trotting lifestyle, Neville and Luna often weren’t in England for the holidays, but this year, they had come home and thrown a surprise Christmas Eve party at Longbottom Manor. (It also gave Luna a chance to show off her new dress: a white, blue, and silver thing that looked sort of like a snowflake. Her fashion sense seemed to have improved in the past decade.)

“Of course, I think we’ll be staying in England for a while, now,” Luna added.

“Oh? Why’s that?”

“Because I’m pregnant.”

“What?”

A few people near them stopped and stared. Neville tapped Luna on the arm. “Luna, love, we were supposed to announce that to the whole party,” she said.

“Oh, right. Sorry,” she said. Then, she ran to the front of the ballroom and called out loudly to the guests, “Happy Christmas, everyone! Neville and I have an announcement: I’m pregnant! Oh, and it’s twins!”

Neville smacked his forehead and shook his head with an affectionate smile on his face. “Every
time,” he muttered as the guests burst into applause.

“I feel like there’s a story there,” Hermione said when Luna returned to them. “Honestly, I wasn’t sure if you were planning to—I mean, with all your travel…”

“No, I understand,” Neville said. “We’ve been travelling the world most of this time, so we never thought it was an appropriate time to have kids. But Luna told me she wanted a baby for our tenth anniversary, and I dunno how she did it, but she must’ve caught the very first time. And with twins!”

“Magic,” Luna said cheerfully.

Neville laughed. “If you say so, Luna. Anyway, it certainly beats tinware.”

---

**13 January 2010**

Hermione and George had discussed long into the night whether they should travel to help here. Travelling internationally with a two-year-old and a five-month-old wasn’t easy, even with magic. Even if Emmy could be left with an aunt or uncle or grandparents, Hermione wasn’t going to leave Robin for an extended period, and there was only so much work she could do while taking care of a baby.

Ultimately, some late night conversations with Minister Robards, who was in contact with what was left of the Haitian Ministry, clarified the situation and what they might be able to do. Simply put, the Haitian Ministry was in shambles. The earthquake had struck so close to Port-au-Prince that the city was literally decimated. Estimates were just starting to come in, but people said it looked as bad as the Boxing Day Tsunami five years ago, with possibly as many as a tenth of the muggle population of the city dead.

The Ministry of Magic building, though sturdier than the muggle buildings, was partially buried in the quake. Magical casualties numbered in the dozens, and they were still digging out survivors, which was dangerous in itself given the risk of aftershocks. That gave Hermione pause, and the Minister told her everyone would understand if she decided to stay at home, but she asked if there was anything in the rescue effort that would require her specific skills, and she was told there was: geomancy. And that was something she could do from the relative safety of a hotel room.

So now, Hermione was in Haiti, working with several local wizards, poring over geological and ley line maps spread out over the kitchen table of their suite, with the Geomancer’s Map right in the middle. They were coordinating with surveyors and rescuers through enchanted parchment and communication rings like she’d made from the Order.

The most important task was watching for aftershocks. That was what the geomancy was for. By monitoring the ley lines, not only could they detect an earthquake as fast or faster than a muggle seismograph; if you knew how to read them, you could learn more about the earthquake faster and predict how bad it would be. With good reflexes, given the speed of seismic waves, they could communicate a warning to rescuers as much as thirty seconds in advance.

---

**11 August 2010**

Neville’s and Luna’s twins were born on the summer solstice—a boy and a girl. They named them August and Xenia, which seemed to suit the unconventional family very well.

Meanwhile, George and Hermione received a different kind of surprise. Windrose Field was becoming better and better known, and now, it seemed that other wizarding families were interested
in moving into Hawkehouse Green. There was some talk of buying one of the muggle farms on the other side of the road after “convincing” them to sell, but the Granger-Weasleys shut that down quickly. They liked their neighbours, and Emmy was already friendly with the Dysons’ youngest. But one family was prepared. They bought the one remaining plot of land on Hawkhouse Green Lane, next door to Windrose Field, and built a house of their own there—much smaller and simpler than Windrose Field, but still quite homey. So, by the time Robin turned one, there were two magical families in the neighbourhood: the Granger-Weasleys and the Whitbys. They got on well, and Emmy was happy to have another friend. For the moment, all was well.
Don't Blink

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: JK Rowling is fast. Faster than you can believe. Don’t turn your back, don’t look away, and don’t blink. Good luck.

For a hilarious take on horror movie boggarts, check out Boggarts and Monsters by The madness in me.

People have been asking how much longer this story will go, and the answer is the same as it was early on. The last chapter will be either Chapter 24 or 25, which will be the end of this story and the entire series. (I’ve written up through Chapter 21.) The end is quite close, and then I’ll be back to my other stories full-time.

2 September 2010

It happened in the first second-year Defence Against the Dark Arts class of the year.

The day started out normally enough. Professor Remus Lupin went down to his classroom where he had prepared a fun demonstration to start the year. Okay, maybe “fun” was a bit of an overstatement. These lessons were always a bit tricky and delicate. He tried to make sure students would steer clear of the boggart if their fear was Voldemort or something, but there were always those who slipped through the cracks.

To be fair, it was often the muggle-borns you had to watch out for the most, and that was all the more true now that the war had faded from the younger students’ memories. Since he started teaching full time, Remus had become very acquainted with muggle horror films against his will. But still, he was getting to be an old hand at this, and he wasn’t anticipating any major problems.

It was usual to introduce students to boggarts in third year or even later, but Remus had been experimenting with trying it earlier. The Riddikulus Charm wasn’t that complicated, and younger childrens’ imaginations tended to be better at making things funny. Plus, their fears were less likely to reveal dark secrets, as occasionally happened. As yet, he was only taking volunteers from the second-year classes, but it was going well. He had the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw class today, and he was sure to have plenty of volunteers.

In retrospect, Remus thought, he should have known something was going to go wrong when Matthew, one of the three muggle-borns in the class, stepped in front of the Boggart, and it turned into…something. Remus wasn’t sure what it was, but it was extremely bloody, though he dealt with it admirably—if disturbingly—by turning it into peppermint candy.

“Bloody hell, Matt! What was that from?” demanded Karen, one of the other muggle-borns.

“One of the Saw movies,” Matt said.

“Your parents let you watch Saw?!” she squeaked. Matt just shrugged and got back into line.

Still, things went smoothly again until the third muggle-born, David, decided to take his turn.
“It’s not gonna be another horror movie monster, is it?” Karen demanded.

“I don’t think so,” David said. “I’m actually not sure, but it can’t be worse than Matt’s, can it?” He stepped in front of the boggart, and his face fell as it changed.

“Bugger! It’s worse!”

The boggart transformed into a shape Remus had seen a few times before: a stone statue of an angel, weeping, with its hands hiding its face. How muggles had made that scary, he still didn’t understand. But this time, he frowned. This angel wasn’t weeping. Its face was exposed and twisted into an exaggerated snarl with its mouth wide open and filled with pointed fangs.

All three muggle-borns sucked in a breath, and so did Marcus Vector, he noted, and all four said in perfect unison, “Don’t…blink.”

“Ah, the angel form,” Remus started to say.

“Oh God, oh God, oh God! Why didn’t I think of that?” David cried, near panic.

“Okay, calm down David,” Remus tried to assure him.

“It’s not that bad, is it?” Karen suggested. “It’s still a boggart, right?”

“No!” David shouted. “Did either of you see the new episodes from last spring?”

Matt apparently didn’t watch the show regularly, but Karen let out a flurry of cursing such as Remus had never before heard from the normally well-behaved girl. Before he could chastise her, Marcus Vector shouted, “Crap! Everyone, don’t look it in the eyes!”

At once, all the muggle-borns gasped and looked down at the angel’s stone robes. Even Matt must have heard something about it.

“What?” said Remus.

“Look at it, but don’t look at the eyes!” said David.

“If you look it in the eyes, it can infect you!” added Karen.

By now, Nadia and Sasha and both turned to Marcus in confusion. “Um, Marcus, what’s going on?” Sasha asked.

“It’s a Weeping Angel,” he said. “We have to watch it. If no one’s watching it, even for an instant, it can move. But you can’t look it in the eye, or it’ll get inside your head.”

The rest of the students were starting to get nervous, now, seeing the muggle-born and muggle-raised students among them act so fearfully. Sometimes there would be panic in these lessons, such as if a Voldemort slipped through, but this was an unsettling sort of fear they weren’t used to. The kids shifted on their feet, some following Marcus’s instructions, others looking anywhere but the Angel.

Even in human form, Remus could smell the fear rising in the room. “Everyone! Please calm down!” he assured them. “This isn’t the first time a boggart has turned into one of these angels. It’s true that it will move if it isn’t watched, but a boggart always has weakened powers at most of what it represents.”

“No! You don’t understand, Professor!” Marcus shouted. “They made more episodes this spring and added to the story. Now they say, ‘Whatever holds the image of an Angel becomes an Angel.’ And
the boggart turned into the image of one! I—we need Aunt Hermione, sir. Quick!”

Remus was lost. Image of an Angel? Maybe it was so scary they thought it was real? Somehow. No, it was time to shut this one down. “Look, all I need to do is stand closest to it, and it’ll take on—”

Remus stepped between the angel and David and then stopped. The boggart didn’t change form. “What?” he said. He waved his hands in front of its motionless face, trying to get its attention, but it didn’t move. He tried *Riddikulus*, but it had no effect. “But that shouldn’t be possible. It responds to the closest person. How—?”

“It took on the image of an Angel, Professor,” Karen spoke up. “Dave’s greatest fear was an Angel with all of the powers they have now in the show—which he really should have *known*,” she directed at the boy. “—and that gave the boggart the power to become one. It’s not a boggart anymore. It’s an actual Weeping Angel!”

A creeping sense of dread came over Remus. It sounded like a philosophical question: what would happen if someone’s fear was a boggart that can turn into something worse than a boggart. Would it be able to transform fully into that? Seeing this, he was starting to worry the answer was yes. “And…and the eyes?” he asked.

“* Anything* that holds the image of an angel, sir,” she said. “That includes in your mind.”

“That means if you look it in the eye for too long, it’ll get inside your head. It’ll possess you. And then it’ll kill you,” Marcus said.

“But if you take your eyes *off* it, then it can move. And then it’ll kill you,” David added.

“Is there any way we can kill it?” Remus asked.

Marcus shook his head. “I…I don’t know. We never saw one killed in the show. Just trapped or thrown into another dimension.”

“They regenerate too, remember?” Karen asked.

“That’s right. If it gets hurt, it can grow back—and fast. And with our luck, it can probably feed on magic or something.”

David yelped. “Dammit, Marcus! Don’t make it worse!”

“Sorry! That’s why we need Aunt Hermione. If anyone can solve this, it’s her.”

“Dad, I’m with Marcus,” Sasha said. “Something’s *really* wrong here. I think you should get Hermione.”

“I agree too,” Nadia said.

Remus looked around at the room. There seemed to be enough eyes on the Angel, but it wasn’t looking good. “Okay, I’m going to find Professor Granger,” he said. “You…keep watching the Angel, but not the eyes.” He left and hurried to the Charms classroom, the nearest one in session at the moment, to inform Filius of the problem. Then, he ran up to the Headmistress’s Office, where he explained what was going on to a bemused Minerva, then took the Floo through to Hogsmeade and used the one public telephone in the village to make a call.

Hermione picked up the telephone. “Granger-Weasley residence,” she said.
“Hermione, it’s Remus. I think we have a problem at the school.”

She frowned. “Is something wrong with Marcus?”

“No—maybe. I’m not sure,” Remus said.

“What do you mean.”

“I was doing the boggart lesson with Marcus’s class—and Sasha’s and Nadia’s—but it wasn’t one of them. One of the muggle-borns faced the boggart, and it turned into one of those angel statues.”

“Ahh.” Hermione chuckled a little. “Don’t blink, then. But haven’t you got Weeping Angels before, though?”

“Yes, but it’s different this time. The boggart got stuck in that form, somehow. It won’t change for the Riddikulus Charm or a different person.”

“What? How did that happen?” she asked.

“Marcus said something about there being new episodes of the show,” Remus said. “I didn’t fully understand it—something about what holds the image of an angel—”

Hermione nearly dropped the phone. “Becomes an Angel,” she said in horror.

“You understand, then?” he asked hopefully.

“Keep eyes on it at all times,” she said, slipped into her dangerous “battle mode” voice. “Multiple people. Don’t let it go unobserved even for a blink. But don’t look it in the eyes. If you do, it can possess you, and then it’ll kill you.”

Remus sounded rattled when he answered. “…That’s what Marcus said. Hermione, how bad is this?”

“Very bloody bad, Remus. Approaching dementors bad.”

“Merlin’s beard,” He gasped. “We—we should evacuate the castle.”

“If you want, but don’t let the Angel out of your sight. Don’t trust a cage or something to hold it. I don’t know how strong it is. And…and damn, they regenerate, so we can’t be sure we can kill it. Also, it may be able to use simple magic—extinguishing torches and the like. Don’t let it hide itself in darkness. Knock down the wall if you have to for sunlight. I’m on my way.”

“But—”

She hung up and ran for the door, already summoning her emergency gear and calculating the fastest way to Hogwarts in her mind. Navigate the Floo network or Apparate and go by land? No, the fastest way was unpleasant, but it was the most flexible.

“George!” she shouted. “I’m going to Hogwarts! Have to save the world!”

“Wait, what?” George called back, but she was already out the front door. She immediately summoned a broom from the garage and flew it to the edge of the property line. From there, she was able to Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts and fly across the grounds and straight in the front door. She quickly grabbed Ravenclaw’s diadem from the display case and made a beeline for where the Defence Classroom had been when she was a student.
“This brings back memories,” she muttered as she sat on her broom, flying through in the middle of the corridor. A few students on break jumped out of the way in surprise at someone (an adult no less) flying through the halls. As she flew, she cast a Patronus to the best choice she could think of from the Aurors.

*Ron, emergency at Hogwarts! I think they accidentally created a new Five-X monster. Then, as an afterthought, Bring Unspeakables, too!* 

She was nearly to the classroom when a floating man in a court jester’s outfit appeared in front of her from nowhere. Hermione brought the broom to a halt so fast she nearly fell off it.

“Ooh, Grangee’s back and causing trouble again,” Peeves taunted her.

“Out of my way, Peeves,” she said.

The poltergeist didn’t move. “Naughty, naughty, flying a broom in the hallways. Setting a bad example for the children, you are.”

Ugh. She didn’t have time for this. “Peeves, I swear I will use my Dementor-Killing Ritual on you! I don’t know what’ll happen, but I don’t think you’ll like it!”

She was gratified to see Peeves drift backwards, his eyes widening. He blew a raspberry at her and flew away. *Now* her way was clear.

The Gryffindor-Ravenclaw Defence Against the Dark Arts students stood in the classroom, waiting. Many of them were thoroughly confused. Some were ignoring the statue of the angel, although many had seen how alarmed Marcus, Karen, and David were and took their warning to heart, keeping an eye on the thing. A few had their wands out.

Professor Lupin rushing out of the room on Marcus’s word—to summon Hermione Granger, no less—alarmed them a bit more, but nonetheless, it seemed an absurdity to get this worried over a boggart, even if it was acting in a very un-boggart-like fashion. Professor Flitwick had arrived soon after, but he seemed as flummoxed as Lupin. Suddenly, there was a bang as someone kicked in the door, and a worrying number of students turned away from the Angel to see what it was.

Hermione Granger strode into the room wearing a long, basilisk-skin coat that billowed behind her. Her wavy hair blew wildly in an invisible wind, held down by the Diadem of Ravenclaw sitting on her head. She had a shield strapped to her arm and a sword on her hip and battle scars displayed prominently. She held a wand in each hand, and the expression on her face was one of danger and power.

“You!” she snarled, pointing a wand at the Angel. She walked up to it, her eyes boring holes into it just below its chin. “You will not hurt these children, and you will not hurt this world. Not today. Not ever. I’m the Doctor. The Oncoming Storm. I’ve fought monsters and slain demons. I’ve made the very sky turn to darkness, and I will not suffer you to persist on this planet. You may call yourself an Angel, but I’m the Angel of Death…Fear me.”

For David and Karen, it was possibly the most exciting moment of their young lives, maybe even more than learning about magic. “The Doctor!” Karen cried.

“Thank Merlin,” Marcus said.

“Woo! Go, Aunt Hermione!” Nadia cheered.
“She’s you aunt?” David said in disbelief.

“Professor Granger—” Flitwick’s squeaky voice started to say. She might not have even noticed him, coming in, she was so focused. But just then, Professor McGonagall’s voice sounded loudly overhead: “All students will evacuate the castle immediately and meet at the carriage stand. All teachers not needed for the evacuation will proceed to the Defence Against the Dark Arts Classroom at once. This is not a drill.”

That certainly got the attention of the magical-raised students, and anyone who wasn’t worried before was now. But before they could move or start to panic, Hermione cast her left hand behind her and pointed at them with their wand. “Everyone in here stay put until the teachers arrive,” she ordered. “I need eyes on this thing.”

A few of them started to leave anyway, but Karen spoke up, “Hey! You gotta listen to her. She’s the Doctor!” That didn’t help.

Then Nadia said, “Um…you’ve got to listen to her because she’s Hermione Freaking Granger!”

“Yes, I defer to Professor Granger’s expertise on this matter, students,” Flitwick piped up, “but please, what is happening?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out, Professor Flitwick,” Hermione told him. “I’m worried something very bad may have happened with this boggart.” She began scanning it with various spells, but the results were…nonsense. She was reading residual magic, but the most straightforward detection spells told her the Angel was simply made of stone.

She whispered to herself: “The moment they’re seen by any living creature, they literally turn to stone—and you can’t kill a stone.” It was entirely possible the Angel’s nature was masking itself from magic because in a sense, it didn’t exist while it was being observed. Wibbly-wobbly quantum stuff that shouldn’t work under normal physics, but they were way past that.

Soon, the other teachers began to arrive, including Remus and McGonagall. Most of them were confused—and alarmed. No explanation had been given for the evacuation, and some of them feared an attack, running in with wands drawn, only to see Hermione and Flitwick staring down a grotesque, but harmless-looking stone statue.

“Professor Granger, what is this commotion?” McGonagall demanded when she stormed in with Remus. “And why haven’t these students been evacuated?”

“We needed their eyes, Headmistress,” Hermione said. “They can go now as long as some of us keep watching the statue. And don’t anyone look it in the eyes. Did Remus tell you what’s going on?”

“He told me a story that I frankly find hard to believe,” she replied. “Professor Moonshine, please escort these students to the carriage stand.”

The kids breathed a collective sigh of the relief. Most of them were eager to leave, although Karen tried to stay. “But the Doctor—” she said.

“She’s not really the Doctor, Karen,” Marcus informed her. “C’mon.”

“I took the liberty of summoning the Aurors while I was on my way,” Hermione continued. “I know that probably sounds excessive, but if this is what I fear it is, it can kill anyone who touches it or even looks at it wrong, and I don’t know how to kill it or even contain it permanently.” The trick the Doctor used in that first episode would only work until the light-bulb burnt out.
“Merlin…” McGonagall said, finally realising how serious this was. If even Hermione was this scared of that statue and didn’t know what to do, what hope was there?

“But what is it?” demanded Professor Finch.

Hermione sighed. “This is—or at least was—a boggart. I fear it’s accidentally been transformed into something far worse. Professor Hookum, you lived in the muggle world for a year, didn’t you? Did you ever see any Doctor Who?”

“A little bit. Nothing serious.”

“Oh. Well, it’s a monster from Doctor Who, and yes, I know it’s supposed to be fictional, but a boggart can still replicate fictional monsters. This one’s become stuck in that form, and that is not a good sign.”

“Stuck?” said Professor Toots. “How could it be stuck?”

Hermione shrugged. “Magic?”

It was a few more minutes before the Aurors arrived at the castle, a trio led by Ron along with a trio of Unspeakables following. They came in to see an even stranger sight: half the teachers in Hogwarts defending against a stone statue as if it were Voldemort himself.

“Hermione!” Ron called out. “What the hell is going on? You said there was a five-X creature…did someone release a hallucination potion in here or something? That’s a statue.”

She shook her head without looking at him: “It’s a long story, Ron. And don’t look it in the eyes.”

“Honestly, Professor Granger, if the eyes are such a danger, there’s a simple solution,” McGonagall said, and she conjured a blindfold over the Angel’s eyes. “It matters whether we’re watching it, not whether it’s watching us, correct?”

Hermione’s jaw about hit the floor. Why hadn’t they thought of that in the show?

It took a few minutes, with the wizards watching the Angel in shifts, for her to explain just what the problem was and why it was so dire. Where the Weeping Angels were from, what powers they had, and why she thought a fictional creature should be standing in that classroom. Remus’s boggart had transformed into a monster from muggle stories, she said, but the nature of that monster was such that a faithful reproduction of it stopped being a reproduction—in this case stopped being a boggart—and became the real thing. It was extremely fast and extremely deadly, and possibly unkillable, but it turned to stone whenever it was being watched with human eyes.

The leader of the Unspeakables, Neville’s cousin, Mr. Croaker the younger, came up and scanned the Angel for himself after she finished her explanation. “These Angels,” he said. “In the story, they are intelligent? Purposeful?”

“Yes, they can act with strategy, and they’re implied to be at least as smart as we are.”

“I understand you’ve developed a Soul-Detection Charm, Professor Granger. Have you tried it.”

“No, it wouldn’t show up while—” She stopped. “Yes, it would. In the show, the Angels can perceive and act when they’re frozen…even if they don’t ‘exist.’ Ugh. They just can’t move. They aren’t frozen in time, so if it’s conscious, it should show up. I can’t believe I missed that. Atma Prakata.”
The Angel coloured under the influence of her spell, but it definitely didn’t look sentient. It was the dull, slow pattern of an “animal” soul, and though dark, it had no aura in the usual sense—just the colour, as if its soul were exactly congruent with its physical form. Hermione’s body relaxed. She hadn’t realised how tense she’d been all this time.

“What does that mean?” Croaker asked.

“Er, I’ve never seen an exact match, but it looks like a spirit with a physical manifestation. And it appears to be subsentient.”

“Ah, that’s good isn’t it? That suggests it really is still a boggart.”

“I really hope that’s the case, Mr. Croaker, but…dealing with an alien physiology that doesn’t even obey physics as we understand it, I don’t know that I can be certain of anything.”

“Well, we have a place to start, at least. Come on, let’s take a closer look.”

“Just don’t touch it!” Hermione warned.

The Unspeakables studied the Angel for a long while. At one point, the blindfold seemed to magically remove itself and had to be reapplied, which renewed Hermione’s fears. That was something a real Weeping Angel would do. The second time, it came off even faster, so Professor Flitwick applied a new one with a charmed lock on it.

Finally, Croaker announced his conclusions. “Okay, the good news is, we’re almost certain the Angel is still a boggart…The problem is, we don’t understand how it got stuck in that form. You say this has happened before, and it didn’t get stuck?”

Remus nodded. “So, what do we do now?”

“Well…there is one person in Britain who knows more about every kind of creature there is than we do,” Croaker said. “Newt Scamander.”

It took a good deal longer for the Unspeakables to contact Newt Scamander and bring him to the castle. Hermione considered contacting Neville and Luna to call him faster, but he finally did arrive.

The elder Scamander was old—nearly as old as Dumbledore had been when he’d died—but his mannerisms reminded Hermione more than a little of the original Doctor, William Hartnell, and he was blessedly quick on the uptake when she explained the problem to him. He listened carefully to all of her analysis and then that of the Unspeakables before investigating for himself. At her behest, he didn’t touch the Angel, but he did tap it with his wand and his walking stick a few times.

Finally, after extensive observations that Hermione mostly didn’t understand, he reached his conclusion: “Well, I think the explanation is very simple. The boggart can’t change form while it’s being watched.”


“No, you misunderstand, Professor Granger. You said that one of the powers of these fictional creatures is that their form is locked when they’re observed.”

“Yes.”

“And this problem didn’t happen before the bit about images was added to the story?”
“That’s right,” Remus said.

“That’s the answer. Before, the boggart only took on the outward appearance of an Angel—an affectation of the original pattern. Even though the Angels ostensibly have the power to be form-locked, the children knew that the boggart wasn’t one, so at that time, it was free to come unlocked and change when it latched onto a new target. But now, this boy’s fear was not just of an Angel, but of a replica of an Angel that transforms into a true one. Thus, the boggart is forced to behave as a true Angel, and it can’t transform while it’s being watched.”

Remus started to catch on. “So you’re saying if we all stop watching the boggart, it’ll be able to move again, and it’ll transform into the fear of the nearest person.”

“Exactly. You haven’t taken your eyes off it since it appeared, right?” Scamander said, and they all nodded. “Well, there you have it.”

“Hold on,” Hermione said. “That sounds nice, but if we’re wrong, the Angel will be able to move, and it’ll probably kill the nearest person. They’re extremely fast.”

Scamander looked a little sheepish. “Yes, there is that possibility, Professor Granger,” he said. “This isn’t an exact science. But with that in mind, I’ll be perfectly willing to face the boggart myself.”

Hermione hesitated. She really shouldn’t…

“No,” she said. “I appreciate the offer very much, Professor Scamander, but if you’re wrong, I know the most about these things, and with Ravenclaw’s Diadem, I just might be fast enough to stop it from killing me. I should have point here.”

“Professor Granger—” McGonagall started.

“And yes, I was going to say we should conjure a cage around it, Headmistress,” she added with a wry smile. “And put up a Shield Charm—although I can’t guarantee either one will be enough.”

The rest of the group agreed, some readily, some reluctantly, but they quickly conjured a cage around the Angel, bolted to the floor with conjured bolts, but real holes in the stone. Hermione put up a Shield Charm and took a step ahead of the group.

“Okay,” she said. “I want all of you to turn around, but keep your wands at the ready. I’m going to count to three, and then close my eyes. The boggart should turn into a dementor, and then we can banish it as normal.”

There were some minor objections, but soon enough, they all complied. Hermione stood alone before the Angel, her heart racing. This was a stupid idea. She shouldn’t be doing this. If Professor Scamander was wrong, there was still every chance all these protections would be for nought.

“Alright, here it goes,” she said. “One…two…three…”

She blinked.

And she never in her life had she thought she’d be so relieved to feel the creeping cold and despair of a dementor, reaching her so fast it almost seemed to come before her eyes were fully closed.

Hermione opened her eyes, and she heard the rest of the group spinning around. The boggart drew back from her, hissing and pounding against the bars of its cage. But Hermione started laughing. No Patronus or Riddikulus Charm. She just laughed.
The boggart howled, an uncharacteristic noise for a dementor, pressed against the bars of its cage, and then it simply turned to shadow and vanished.

“What?” Hermione said. “Where’d it go?”

Professor Scamander stepped closer and tapped against the bars. “I think you killed it,” he said. “It normally takes a lot longer than that and the Riddikulus Charm, but...I think it couldn’t bear to be laughed at in its ‘fear’ state, and it couldn’t get away, so it lost contact with the emotion that fuelled it. That was enough.” He looked back at the group. “I suppose that’s problem solved, then.” He considered a moment longer. “Auror Weasley, I think I’m going to recommend the boggart’s Ministry classification be increased from three-X to three-to-four-X, depending on the form it takes. Dementor-boggarts aren’t exactly easy to deal with either, and I expect they’re rather more common than those Angels...”

---

15 June 2011

Hermione’s third trip to CERN came after an announcement that the ALPHA experiment had begun trapping multiple atoms of antihydrogen for many minutes at a time, a degree of stability heretofore unprecedented. The muggles’ own experiments were a boon to her efforts since they were studying the energy levels of the anti-atoms, their electrical charge, and how they were affected by gravity, all of them falling within the admittedly large experimental uncertainties.

Hermione’s task was to measure the antihydrogen’s magical properties to determine once and for all whether it could be transfigured. By piggybacking her spells on top of the instruments, she could finally get a reading she could use. Specifically, she got a limit for the strong CP-violating term in her proof, and, thank God, when she plugged that limit in, it was below the level at which transfiguration was guaranteed to be suppressed, based on the matter analogs.

She’d done it, finally. After nearly seventeen years, she’d finally proved that antimatter could not be transfigured. When she put in the final piece of the puzzle, her proof and the discussion around it comprised an entire monograph. She felt like an entire phase of her career had closed. She still had plenty to do, but there were no longer any projects that she really felt urgently.

Most of the Weasleys were more excited over Ron and Juanita announcing that they were expecting their second child, but Hermione could give them that. It more relatable to anyone who wasn’t an arithmancer. That fact that she’d proved it at last was enough for her, and she slept a good deal easier that night.

Chapter End Notes

Next generation kids as of 31 December 2011
Bill and Fleur: Nadia (13)
Percy and Audrey: Molly (8) and Lucy (2)
Fred and Angelina: Lee (7) and Roxanne (3)
George and Hermione: (Marcus, 13), Emmy (4), and Robin (2)
Ron and Juanita: Julio (3) and Rosalita (on the way)
Ginny and Harry: James (9), Bill (7), and Lily (4)
Remus and Tonks: Sasha (13) and Morgan (9)
Neville and Luna: August (1) and Xenia (1)
(Columba Malfoy, 13)
The Arithmancer's Prophecy

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: JK Rowling may soon be typical at the rate she’s going. But she still owns the franchise.

This chapter has no connection with the Wizards Unite mobile game. I planned this idea long before I heard about the game.

See the end of the chapter for more info on the rules of magic in the Arithmancer-Verse and their relation to the Fantastic Beasts series. This will be relevant in the coming chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

30 June 2012

You may soon be typical.

The words resonated with Hermione as she reached the end of the book, even though she didn’t fully understand why. It was as delightfully vague as any prophecy in literature—much more so than the real prophecies she’d heard, which cloaked their vagueness in information not known to the listener.

The book, Existence, was excellent. In fact, it was so good that it was a candidate for her new favourite science fiction novel. She’d barely been able to put it down since she’d bought it. But that gnawing unease that had grown while she was reading remained. She didn’t know what it meant, but there had been parts of the story that had seemed strange and a little disturbing as she read them. So she did something she almost never did: on reaching the end, she turned the page to the afterword.

George had learnt to like some sci-fi since they’d married, though he didn’t venture much beyond mainstream fare like Star Wars, and she’d even started Emmy on some simple ones—The Little Prince, June 29, 1999, The Magic School Bus, and so forth. They’d read to both kids from birth, of course, but it was different when they could actually engage. (Granted, most of the ones Hermione remembered from her own childhood still went over Emmy’s head.) Hermione, however, read the stuff regularly, and with Existence, she was reading a good deal more in-depth.

The afterword didn’t tell her much besides the notion (reinforced by subsequent reading) that David Brin was a consummate progressive in the most literal sense of the word—passionate to a fault about the idea of human progress—a radical optimist (though he would deny it) and futurist whilst also facing the dangers confronting society head-on, strongly rejecting any romantic (or cynical) notion of a past golden age or that the world, at its core, hasn’t and can’t become better.

While interesting (if a little intense for her taste) this didn’t help Hermione resolve the unease she was feeling. However, the next page contained a list of follow-up resources—uncommon even for science fiction—starting with Brin’s website. So she got up from her chair and took the book into the study.

Most of their muggle neighbours wouldn’t see the need for a study anymore now that laptops and wireless internet had become the norm, but while the Granger-Weasleys kept up with developments
in the muggle world, they were late adopters of technology, and they certainly didn’t follow the “always-on” lifestyle many muggles were developing.

Waking up her computer, she went to Brin’s website and poked around for a few minutes before stumbling upon *The Transparent Society*, a nonfiction book of his from way back in 1998. The publicly available first chapter talked of a world where tiny, almost invisible cameras sat on top of every lightpost and it presented a choice: would these cameras be police or public? Would it be surveillance of the people or by the people?

Although sensationalised, that was somewhat familiar. London’s CCTV system was a pain in the arse for wizards to deal with, and they needed the Ministry’s liaison to the Prime Minister to keep things running smoothly. She went on. The Wikipedia article on the book had one line in particular.

*Brin argues that a core level of privacy—protecting our most intimate interactions—may be preserved, despite the rapid proliferation of cameras that become ever-smaller, cheaper and more numerous faster than Moore’s law.*

*Wait, what?*

*Faster than Moore’s law.* Moore’s law said that the number of transistors on a computer chip doubled every eighteen months—or maybe two years. But why should that apply to cameras?

Then it hit her. Digital camera pixels *were* transistors. Suddenly, all her thoughts snapped into focus, no pun intended. With smartphones, high-quality cameras were *everywhere* these days, and they were only going to grow more common. Brin had predicted that privacy could be maintained in private spaces, but that was no help in public, and the problem was growing exponentially worse.

“Oh…oh, God…” Hermione whispered. She slumped back in her chair and sat there for a minute, unsure of what to do. Then, she suddenly grabbed some paper and started figuring. She needed concrete numbers, and she needed them fast. They were over a decade behind.

George and the kids found Hermione hours later in the library poring over magical history books, spellbooks, and computer printouts all scattered across a large table whilst frantically writing something with a quill.

“Oh, boy. Looks like Mummy’s really off to the races today,” George said. “Everything okay, dear?”

She barely glanced up at him, and his face fell when he saw her expression. Hermione getting lost in her work still happened from time to time, but the look on her face—lost in arithmancy and worried about something wasn’t a good sign.

“Mummy!” Robin squealed happily, oblivious to his mother’s mood. He toddled over to her and started hopping up and down by her leg. Hermione bent down and picked the boy up in her arms and brushed his hair out of his eyes. Robin had developed a mop of brown hair that was much curlier than her own, and it seemed too cute to cut short.

“Hello, Robin,” she said, then paused as if trying to figure out an appropriate thing to say. That happened too when she got into one of her episodes and didn’t attention to what was going on, but George was glad that didn’t happened often enough for the kids to notice. She finally decided on, “Did you have fun playing today?”

“Yeah! We ‘splored tha Hund’aker Wood!”
Hermione looked down and quirked an eyebrow at her daughter. She was pretty sure she knew who was behind that since she sincerely doubted Robin knew what an acre was yet, even with her genes. But then, she turned to their supervision.

“Just on the property,” George clarified. “Busy day, then?”

She sighed and said, “That’s good, Robin,” then tapped him on the nose and handed him back to George. “And extremely.”

“What’s wrong, Mummy?” Emmy piped up.

Hermione looked down at her and forced a smile that might still fool their two-year-old, but not their four-year-old daughter and was painfully clear to George. “Nothing, Emmy,” she said. “Mummy’s just very busy today.”

“You certainly look the part,” George said, eyeing the potpourri of papers on the table. “What are you working on?”

“A new paper.”

“Yeah? Looks like you’re pretty well engrossed. You make a big, new discovery?”

Hermione looked him in the eye and said, “George, this may be the most important project of my career.” She wasn’t smiling as she said it.

“Really?” he said in surprise. “Bigger than the antimatter thing, beating Voldemort, and killing dementors?”

“It could be,” she said.

George watched his wife carefully for a moment. He rarely saw her this intense, and he wasn’t sure he’d seen her look this grim at the same time since the fiasco with Barty Crouch. “Hermione, what’s wrong?” he said. “Why aren’t you happy if this is so big?”

She handed him the top page, almost absently. “Read the title.”

He did, and his face fell while his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

_The International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy Cannot Survive Beyond the Year 2030._

“What’s it say, Daddy?” asked Emmy.

George spoke slowly. “Emmy, take Robin up to your room, please.” He set her brother on the floor. “Mummy and I need to talk in private.”

“Wha’s going on?” she said.

“Just…boring grown-up stuff. Go on, you can explore the magic wardrobe-thing.”

“Okay, Daddy,” she said. “Come on, Robin!” she led him by the hand up to the stairs.

“Phew, thank Merlin that still works,” he said when they had gone. “I don’t think it would’ve with
Ginny at that age.”

“Ginny had you to get her in trouble, though,” Hermione observed.

“Fair.” George looked back at the page in his hand. “This isn’t a prank, is it?”

“No, George. Do you think I would prank you about this?”

“No, I just had to check. So this is serious?”

“Deadly.”

“How?”

“Muggle cameras,” she said. “You know how much of a pain all the cameras in London are?” He nodded. Everyone did these days. “Well, they’re getting more and more common every year—better and cheaper, not to mention most muggles have one in their pocket at all times. And the computers that watch them are getting smarter and more decentralized. It’s exponential growth.”

George stiffened and nodded solemnly. While she’d never fully explained the Deplorable Word to him, she’d impressed upon him the importance of understanding exponential growth after that, and again when she’d started on the nuclear weapons problem. She’d quoted to him the saying, attributed to Edward Teller, “The extinction of the human race will come from its inability to emotionally comprehend the exponential function.” It was serious business.

“Anything strange or abnormal is more and more likely not just to be caught on camera, but to be uploaded to a server somewhere before we can respond to it,” she continued. “You can’t Obliviate the internet, and you can’t magically wipe a computer than might be in another country. And even if we can handle that, the computers will notice sooner or later. And with technology still improving exponentially, it’s going to be soon that muggles will notice magic to an extent that we can’t cover it up anymore.”

“In 2030?” George said shakily.

“At the longest. That’s a five-hundred-fold increase in computing power. I’m being optimistic about wizards’ ability to manage that.”

He rubbed his forehead. “Bloody hell. So if 2030 is the maximum, what’s the minimum?”

She just raised an eyebrow and him, and he had a feeling he knew the answer.

“They should’ve found out already, shouldn’t they?”

“No, I don’t think should have—not with us actively maintaining it, but certainly could have.”

He shook his head in disbelief. “I can’t…Hermione, this…this can’t be true!” he exclaimed. “It just can’t! Why hasn’t anyone else thought of this before now if it’s such a problem?”

“Because…because wizards are backwards and hidebound!” she shouted hysterically. “I mean look at us. We should have noticed this fifteen years ago when they started putting up CCTV cameras everywhere, but we have high-speed internet, and even I didn’t notice until now. Your father—I love him to death, but the man doesn’t known an iPhone from an Etch A Sketch. And he’s one of the wizards who’s actually interested in muggles.”

“Oi, I think he’s a little better—”
“Not the point, George,” she cut him off.

“It is the point because he’s smarter than that, Hermione,” he said. “We’re smarter than that.” He pulled her gently close to him. “The magical world has kept itself secret for over three hundred years. I think we’ve got this.”

Hermione took a deep breath and shook her head: “I’m sorry, George, but I don’t think it can be done. I’ve been going over and over it all day. I’ve looked at all the concealing spells in the book and as much information about technological advancement I can.”

“Well, even you don’t know all the magic, you know.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. “Exponential growth. Say my figures are way off. Say we can keep the secret until 2040, or 2050. That’s another thousand-fold increase in computing power. By 2050, there’s every chance that basically every foot of public space will be under constant, real-time surveillance from a remote location. Any magic not performed specifically in our world will be detected. Accidental magic from muggle-borns will derail any attempt to cover it up. And remember, the muggles don’t have to detect all of it—just a few instances that we can’t cover up in time, and that’s what’s going to happen by 2030, if not sooner.”

George looked down at the mess of books, printouts, and figures one more time, and then he sat down. “Okay… I don’t like this, Hermione. If it’s true… Just, walk me through this. The muggles can’t possibly have enough people to watch all this stuff.”

Hermione sat across from him, holding his hands for comfort. “It’s not about the people, George,” she said. “It’s about the computers. Every time magic is done, it shows up as a camera glitch, which is fine for humans. We can cover it up. But when computers start scanning the system, they’re going to notice. It will happen to cameras in specific areas, and in the case of King’s Cross on specific days. They replace the cameras, and it still happens, and eventually, someone goes and investigates King’s Cross on that particular day. We alter their memory, but we can’t wipe their equipment readings without leaving suspicious traces. Not every time. Equipment that breaks or fails when investigating certain places will be suspicious in itself. We can cover it up with the muggle government and major tech companies, but it’s getting easier and easier for muggles with no connections with either to do the same thing.”

She went through the technology in more detail for him: how the cameras worked, how they processed the data, where they physically sent it, what was done with it, how it was stored, how it was accessed by muggles and copied around the internet. George’s heart sank as he followed her relentless logic. It was all pointing one place, and he didn’t like what he was seeing.

“Don’t you see what you’re doing?” he said. “You’re talking about ending the Statute of Secrecy.”

“No, I’m talking about the Statute failing,” she cut in.

“That doesn’t matter! They could—I don’t know, bring you up on sedition charges for this!”

“They might,” she conceded.

“Hermione, what about the kids? What will this do to them?”

Suddenly, Hermione glared at George with one of the most frightening looks he’d ever witnessed from her. For a moment, he thought she would slap him. “You don’t think I’ve thought about that, George Weasley?” she near-shouted. “All day? How this will affect Emmy and Robin if their mother is branded a dissident? I remember what it was like under Fudge and Umbridge and then under
Voldemort. I’ve been trying to find a way out of this bloody mess, but I can’t! I can’t see any way muggle technology stops before it can out-think anything we do to hide. Not without basically destroying the muggle world. And I can’t see any way that doesn’t happen in our lifetimes.”

She waved her papers in his face. “I’m writing this because I believe it’s true, George. The Statute is going to fail whether we act or not. Muggle technology is barrelling toward us at top speed, and the wizarding world is going to be caught unawares unless we start moving now.”

“But does it have to be you?” he pleaded. “Again? Haven’t you done enough?”

“Damn it all, if you think someone else could make the case just as well, I’d be happy to pawn it off on them! I don’t want this job. Not again. I feel like the weight of the world has been on my shoulders since I was sixteen, but do you have a better bloody idea?!”

She was crying now. George quickly got up and pulled her against his chest. “I’m sorry, Hermione,” he murmured. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking. I just freaked out. This is so far past anything…” He stopped speaking and held her for a long time, thinking over everything she’d told him one more time and then two. He couldn’t deny where it was pointing. The trends she showed him. Even if they made it to 2060 or 2070…and realistically, sooner was more likely than later.

“Dammit, I hate this, but you’re right,” he said. “Someone else who’s as savvy as you about muggles and could have come up with the arithmancy? Fat chance…But you don’t deserve this.”

“What else is new?” she groaned.

He tilted her face up to look at him. “Hermione, I’m sorry. I really am with you. You can trust in that. God help me, I don’t know how we’ll pull it off, but I’m with you. But I’m going to do everything I can to keep the kids out of it. I saw too much of that already with Harry…and you.”

“I know,” she said. “I’m going to do the same, George. And thank you. Together?”

“Together,” he agreed.

5 August 2012

By day three, the news headlines blared around the magical world. GRANGER PREDICTS IMMINENT DETECTION BY MUGGLES! Or, GRANGER CALLS FOR END OF STATUTE OF SECRECY! Her last name alone was enough to be recognised the world over, like Einstein a century ago.

George had helped her with her task, working in complete secrecy. They spent a whole month perfecting the paper, and the open letter that they sent to the Daily Prophet and several international newspapers on the day of submission. They had sent the paper itself to both Annals of Arithmancy and Challenges in Charming, as well as copies distributed to the Minister’s office and the Department of Mysteries on the very day the letter was published—not before.

During that month, Hermione and George had prepared for the backlash. They had taken specific steps against the Howlers and cursed letters that began coming in the first day. They warned their wizard neighbours that Hermione was about to publish something very controversial, and they gave their muggle neighbours a cover story about the IRA splinter cell that they had fought in the nineties possibly coming back, so they wouldn’t be caught unawares, either. And finally, they had a long discussion with Emmy and Robin explaining as much as their two young children would understand about the situation. There was a big problem that Mummy and Daddy were trying to fix, they said, and some people would be very mad because people don’t always like it when you point out their
problems. But it was their responsibility to help fix it before someone got hurt, and they would always make sure Emmy and Robin stayed safe.

That was about as much as Robin got, anyway. Emmy understood quite a bit more when Hermione explained it to her. Little kids could be amazingly insightful.

They told their family pretty late in the process. They didn’t think any of them would really try to stop them, but there was sure to be a lot of strife. Harry understood, though. He said it explained a lot of questions he’d thought about over the years, and with Harry and Hermione together, the Weasley family trusted them.

By day three, Hermione’s open letter was estimated to be the most widely read article in Britain since the fall of Voldemort. By day five, it may well have been globally the most widely read news story since the fall of Grindelwald.

That was when the Aurors showed up.

When the door chime sounded, Hermione checked the enchanted mirror she had placed there. Taking a cure from muggle security cameras, she set up a one-way communication mirror on the door to see who was approaching the house. She was a little surprised to see Tonks leading the trio of Aurors. She quickly checked to make sure she looked fully professional and opened the door with a smile.

“Good morning, Aurors,” she said cheerfully. “I was wondering when you’d show up. To be honest, I was expecting you two days ago.”

Tonks didn’t look happy at all, which should have been a red flag. “Hermione, this isn’t funny,” she said. “You’re in real trouble here.”

Her smile faltered a little. “I figured the Ministry would want to question me after that article. I’m prepared for this. I’ll just talk to Minister Robards—”

“Hermione!” Tonks cut her off. “If this were just Minister Robards, we wouldn’t need to do this. I think you could talk him around. This is bigger than that; it’s the ICW that wants you brought in.”

Hermione’s face fell. “The ICW’s getting involved this quickly?”

That was when George stepped in. “Hang on,” he said, “If the ICW wants to talk to her already, why did they send Aurors for us? Is there a threat against us?”

Tonks shook her head vigorously. “I mean, probably yes, but that’s not the point. Do you know what you’ve done, Hermione? You called for abolishing the Statute of Secrecy!”

“I didn’t exactly—” she started.

“Please, you did everything but spell it out. The ICW’s bringing you up on charges.”

Hermione and George were both stunned by that. “Charges?” she said in confusion. “The ICW? On what grounds? On what jurisdiction?”

“International wizarding law. You called for abolishing the Statute, and other people believe you. There are others taking up the call. It’s already become the beginnings of a movement.”

“Oh, crap,” George said he clapped a hand to his forehead, and the blood drained from his face. “They’re charging her under the Statute itself? I didn’t think that applied!”
“It doesn’t,” Hermione said. “I didn’t actually break the Statute. They can’t charge me for supposedly starting a movement.”

“Wha—? Bloody hell!” Tonks shouted. “Yes, they bloody can, Hermione! Ugh, this is why Hogwarts should’ve got rid of Binns when he died. Muggle-borns like you don’t know a damned thing about our history. I’m talking about the Picquery Amendment of 1946. It’s not Breach of Statute; it’s treason. Waging war on the Statute of Secrecy itself.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped. “Treason?” she whispered.

“Yes, it hearkens back to Grindelwald’s War. The last serious movement to abolish the Statute of Secrecy was Gellert Grindelwald’s—besides a few radicals in the sixties. The ICW has a long memory, and there are powerful people who have a problem with this.”

“Oh, my God.”

“I’m sorry, but we have to bring you in, Hermione.”

“What does the Minister say about this?” George said quickly.

Tonks shook her head: “You didn’t hear it from me, but Minister Robards is annoyed because you dropped this right before an election season. He’s eager to wash his hands of you.”

Hermione groaned. “Really?”

“Yes. Sorry. You—I do think you still have a lot of allies, but that just makes things more complicated.”

Hermione nodded. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Okay, I’ll go,” she said.

George put his arm around her protectively. “Are you sure about this, Hermione?” he said

“No. But I’m sure about my maths. The Statute is doomed whether we like it or not. Someone needs to convince the ICW, and if they want me, I might as well do it. Get the kids ready and meet me at the Ministry.” She took out her wands and held them out to Tonks. “Do you need these?”

Tonks considered and then waved her off. “Keep them,” she said. “I don’t want to give those ICW warlocks any more than I have to.” She turned and motioned Hermione to accompany them down the path. Once they were far enough to be out of George’s earshot, she leaned close and said, “I hope you know what you’re doing, Hermione,” Tonks said. “I really do. I don’t know how much pull they have these days, but the Americans still have the death penalty on the books for this.”

12 August 2012

As the days went by, Hermione’s initial optimism began to falter. Day after day she sat in her holding cell at the ICW headquarters in Switzerland. Robin had had to visit his mother in prison for his third birthday. George was considering sending Emmy to Reception rather than homeschooling her if this went much long. And her parents were livid that they hadn’t been allowed in at all for “security reasons.” The ICW had clearly judged she should have no contact with muggles whatsoever, even those who were in the know.

Of course, she received little outside contact or news at all. Her imprisonment had become very controversial in Britain, George told her, with a vocal, but slim majority who were mostly from her generation and the one before supporting her, but the older people who remembered Grindelwald’s
War (and in the long-lived magical world, they were still many), were solidly against her. Robards refused to budge so far, although that might change as the election approached.

Worldwide, the reaction was more negative. MACUSA was entirely against her. The Board of Annals of Arithmancy had officially declared neutrality as a cover for publishing her paper in the first place, but several members had signed an open letter saying they had checked her maths, and she was right. The Ougadou Council had released a strongly-worded statement that the Statute of Secrecy was still necessary in Africa to protect magical lives—something she had noted herself in the paper, but it placed them strongly against her as well. Tonks said she suspected the Nigerian Supreme Mugwump was one of the ones pressing for charges, which was not a good sign.

Haiti was the first nation to openly support her—or at least to support her innocence, not necessarily her ideas. India and New Zealand quickly followed. She had a lot of overseas friends by now. All three countries had more clout than their muggle counterparts, but it was a long way from enough to clear her.

She was sure they were holding her this long partially out of spite, but from what George told her, they really were assembling the delegates. On Friday, they’d told her she would have a hearing before the ICW on Monday. The more sensational writers like Rita Skeeter were calling it “the Trial of the Century,” but the British delegate privately told her that it wasn’t exactly a trial. Some of the delegates believed her, or at least thought she might be right, and they wanted her testimony. That was good because they weren’t wholly against her, but bad because it meant even more suspension of the judicial process. She had no doubt it would become a trial if things went badly.

To Hermione’s knowledge, no one had openly called for her execution, but it was certainly implied that they wanted to lock her up or monitor her activities basically forever, not to mention taking away her jewelry business. But there was nothing for it. If it were any lesser matter, she would have recanted for the sake of her children, truth be damned, but like too many pioneers of science before her, she knew she was right. The Statute would fall within two decades, and the wizarding world needed to be ready. She would just have to convince them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: for a bit more explanation and SPOILERS for The Crimes of Grindelwald.

Based on the canon text of the books, I was one of those people who believed that muggles could curbstomp wizards if it came to it through their sheer numbers advantage. There were certainly people who felt the opposite, but I didn’t see any feats of the magical world that could win against the enormous population and resources of the muggle world. Even the most powerful wizards never showed any sign of being able to affect a whole city, and the few exceptions like Fiendfyre I assumed had limitations because otherwise, they would be story-breaking, and the risk of the wizards incinerating the muggles and/or themselves by accident would be improbably high.

But then, The Crimes of Grindelwald came out. Even in the first Fantastic Beasts film, Newt repaired a whole building on his own in seconds, and a couple dozen Aurors repaired half of New York in a few minutes. That was worrying, but I assumed that was just a quirk of the Repair Charm. In the second film, however, Dumbledore changes the weather for all of London with a casual wave of his wand (and it’s not even the Elder Wand). Grindelwald covers all of Paris with black curtains (invisible to muggles). And
Flamel explicitly says Grindelwald’s blue fire will burn down all of Paris uncontrolled. With power like that, a few powerful wizards could stand against the armies of the muggle world.

However, this is ridiculously overpowered for the story JKR is trying to tell, and it’s implicitly inconsistent with what we see in canon. More importantly, I wrote most of this story before the Fantastic Beasts films came out, and I based the rules of the Arithmancer-Verse on the much lower power levels we see in the books. As such, I can’t really change it now even if I wanted to.

Therefore, the way I’m handling this is that the events of the Fantastic Beasts series did happen in the Arithmancer-Verse in broad strokes, but the feats of extreme power that have been displayed there didn’t. Everything that needed to be done was done with reasonable power, and muggles still have a large numbers advantage over wizards in a fair fight.

This chapter is really coming full circle for me. You see, I own an autographed copy of David Brin’s Existence, and it was a recommendation from Brin’s blog around that time that convinced me to read Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality. And say what you want about that fic, but that was what got me interested in fanfiction in general. A year later, I was in so deep that I started writing it, and here we are. So while some of you may disagree with this plot twist, I just couldn’t leave it out. Now, we’re going into the final arc of the story: five chapters left.
The International Confederation of Wizards

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Come writers and critics and JK Rowling with your pen, and keep your eyes wide; the chance won’t come again.

I was pleasantly surprised to see how positive the reaction was to the previous chapter. And now I’m worried I’ve oversold it. Once again, this story is meant to be a condensed version of events, so things like this will be resolved quickly in terms of word count. If anyone wants to write a longer, more detailed version of this episode, be my guest.

So, I miscalculated how long the last few scenes would run, and it turns out there are only three chapters left. The end of the story is now fully written. While it’s in the queue, I’ll be working on new chapters of my other stories. As always, thanks for reading.

Update: I’ve just put out a new one-shot, Blitz, which offers a different take on a similar topic, and features a young Tom Riddle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

13 August 2012

To Hermione’s surprise, she was not chained to a chair when she testified to the ICW, as she would have been in a trial at the Ministry of Magic. Instead, she stood, wandless, but free, in the middle of the floor while the delegates from around the wizarding world sat around her in something like an indoor amphitheatre. She didn’t know if that was standard or if someone had pulled some strings to arrange it that way.

About a hundred and fifty witches and wizards stared down at her, a few sympathetically, but many more with hostility and many others with curiosity or suspicion. Some of her family sat up in the gallery with some reporters and a lot of other officials. Supreme Mugwump Babajide Akingbade stood on a raised dais at the front of the chamber, wearing traditional African robes that resembled the ones Kingsley Shacklebolt used to wear, though more ornate. He had a sour look about him and didn’t take his eyes off Hermione as he addressed the room, and as much as she thought he believed he was doing the right thing by his country, he made her distinctly uncomfortable.

“On the matter of Hermione Granger, Doctor of Arithmancy, of the British Isles,” Akingbade said, “the ICW has assembled to assess the impact of the disruption caused by Professor Granger’s manifesto, and the appropriate response thereto.”

Manifesto? Hermione thought. Was that what people were saying about her?

“Since 1689, the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy has been the cornerstone of magical society. It is central to the wizarding identity—a unifying force in our world. It has been key to keeping us safe from muggle persecutions, not just in remote centuries, but still today in many parts of the world. My own homeland is but one example; in Nigeria, the greatest number of witch-hunts, whether they find true witches or not, are directed at children, who are too young to defend themselves or control their magic. Yet now, we see a rabble of troublemakers, long suppressed by
Akingbade went on for a long time, extolling the virtues of the Statute of Secrecy, describing its history and why it was put in place, why it was still needed today, and condemning the actions of those who would see it repealed. He said more about the people reacting to Hermione’s paper than about Hermione herself, avoiding casting too many direct aspersions at the outset. She looked around at the room and thought she might have seen some kind of signals between the delegates, but there was nothing clear.

Finally, after a speech that was long enough that she wondered if it was meant to tire her out from the standing, Akingbade reached his conclusion. “…Some of us still remember the terror and slaughter brought about by the Dark Lord Gellert Grindelwald when he mounted his rebellion against the Statute of Secrecy from 1927 to 1945. A wizard who brought half the wizarding world under his boot heel and nearly destroyed us all with his brutal ways. Witches and wizards of the world, we cannot allow this bloody and subversive ideology to take hold once more.

“Hermione Granger, you are the instigator of the present wave of civil unrest. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Hermione took a deep breath and quickly mentally revised her statement in response to Akingbade’s speech: “I say, Supreme Mugwump, categorically, that I am in no way a follower of Gellert Grindelwald or his ideas. Grindelwald wanted wizards to rule over the muggles, and I strongly disagree with that notion. Grindelwald sought to achieve his ends through war. I am making no calls for rebellion, and I condemn anyone who would twist my words for violent ends. This is not a time for violence or civil disobedience. It is most certainly not a time for any member of the magical world to attempt to unilaterally bring down the Statute of Secrecy, for this would do more harm than good.

“This is a time for rational debate,” she said. “I used urgent language in my writing because I believe this is an urgent problem, but it is a problem that will be only be solved by careful discussion and planning. Like all of us, I merely want wizards and muggles both to live in peace. If there were still a way to do that separately, I would accept that, just as I have since I was eleven. But with the way things are now, I believe we cannot do it separately much longer, so soon, it must be together instead.”

She thought Akingbade would continue to question her himself, but those opening statements seemed to be the cue to open the floor for questions. She could see more hints of politicking now—delegates whispering to each other in what looked like little cliques to her, with a few spokeswizards speaking for them.

“So you admit that you are calling for the repeal of the Statute of Secrecy?” one of the other African delegates demanded.

“In the narrowest sense, I have not, sir,” Hermione said. “The point of my paper was that the Statute of Secrecy is unsustainable. I believe that in the not-too-distant future, it will fall whether I or this body act or not.”

Another question: “I’ve read your paper, Professor Granger. It seems to clearly direct the reader to the conclusion that we should abolish the Statute ourselves. Do you deny it?”

Hermione sidestepped the question slightly: “It is my personal belief that the best course of action would be to repeal the Statute of Secrecy before it collapses so that we can plan our exposure to the muggles in advance, including all necessary safety measures. In my paper and my open letter, I did not say that directly, but I listed a number of arguments that, yes, would imply that is preferable. There are still workable alternatives.”
“Such as?”

“Planning contingencies for a mass exposure event that is too large for us to cover up. In fact, we should probably be doing that anyway, and perhaps the ICW already has.”

“We have contingencies for mass exposure events,” Akingbade said dismissively. “Anything else?”

She shrugged. “A slower roll-out. Gradually bring more muggles in—scientists, politicians, journalists—all bound by magical contracts—and have them help us organise the full reveal. We had great success with something like that at the South Pole a few years ago. However, this has the disadvantage of looking like…of actually being a massive, global conspiracy of the muggles’ own leaders. Many of them won’t take that bit well. I’m sure the ICW could think of other ideas.”

“You’ve seemed awfully certain of yourself through all of this,” said a delegate with an American accent. “You make a lot of claims about what muggles are capable of, Professor Granger, but we have learnt to hide ourselves from muggles for three hundred years. We know a lot of tricks. You don’t think we can keep it up?”

Hermione turned to the wizard. “Just because we’ve kept it up for a long time doesn’t mean we can keep going with it, Mister…”

“Samuel Quahog, delegate for MACUSA,” he said curtly.

“Mr. Quahog, simply put, the ability of muggle technology to detect magic, even by accident, is growing faster than our ability to hide it; and that gap will only grow over time. I describe this in more detail in the paper, but the number of cameras in the muggle world is doubling every two years. In England, we are very familiar with these cameras and the trouble they cause. The muggles use them to catch criminals, but they also see magic done in public, and it is becoming harder and harder to cover up what they see.”

“And yet you’re doing it now. Muggles can be Obliviated, and their cameras can be wiped clean. Any inconsistencies can be smoothed over with plausible stories. Even if these methods are a bit more difficult, we aren’t having any trouble keeping the secret.”

“But those methods depend on our responding quickly,” Hermione said. “Before the muggles tell anyone else. Or to know where magic will be taking place, like magical train platforms. But we can’t always predict where magic will take place. Accidental magic by muggle-borns, magical creatures getting loose—it happens. And mobile telephones have made it easier for a muggle to contact a friend at a different location. Phones with cameras made it possible for them to take photos on the spot, copy them, and send them elsewhere before we can reach them. With cloud storage, some of them are automatically copied and uploaded somewhere else instantly. The physical location of those photos can be on another continent by the time an Obliviator gets to them.”

“Do you really believe we’re so powerless against the muggles?” Quahog said. “We can expand our watch over the cities, as we are doing now.”

“Honestly? Yes, I do believe that. And it’s not just the cities. Right now, these cameras are mostly in the major cities, where magic is mostly confined to particular Unplottable areas and thus is not particularly exposed. But in another ten or twenty years, they will work their way down to the small villages, where our people live intermingled with muggles and practice magic more openly, and our usual methods of concealment won’t be enough. Computer monitoring is also becoming able to watch far more cameras than the muggles can themselves and to detect problems automatically. The upshot: muggles won’t need to actually see it happening. They’ll start to notice something’s up from the gaps or glitches in the video.”
“We’ve heard this alarmism about muggles before,” a different delegate spoke up in a stern voice. “We won’t be able to hide ourselves. They will outbreed us. They will turn their weapons on us. Their pollution will kill us. Even your concern about surveillance cameras, Granger. But all of these have been unfounded. In three centuries, the only serious danger has been from those who would deliberately reveal us! People like you!”

“Perhaps you are biased by your muggle heritage,” the Supreme Mugwump took over the conversation again. “Perhaps it makes you believe they are a greater threat than they really are. Or maybe you want us to reveal ourselves because of your loyalty is to them.”

“NO!” she shouted without thinking, and she was surprised to find she meant it. “It would be better if we didn’t have to—if we could stay hidden. I think I’m as afraid of revealing ourselves to the muggles as the rest of you—or even more because I can guess how they’ll react.”

“And how, pray tell, is that?” Akingbade said suspiciously.

“Jealousy. Jealousy and anger.”

“Anger?” a witch who looked to be from Latin America said. “In what way?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Hermione said. “We have magic, and they don’t. We live decades longer. We’re genetically ‘better’ by many people’s standards. That will breed jealousy, and the usual fear, but also resentment. There are certain kinds of muggles for whom it would be a crisis of faith, or a personal insult. And that’s before the accusations begin.”

“Accusations? Accusations of devil worship? The witch-hunts?”

“No. Accusations like, what were we doing during the holocaust?”

“The killings in Grindelwald’s War? We were fighting Grindelwald, of course!”

Hermione nodded. “Fair. And what were we doing while the simple flu bug wiped out a hundred times the population of the entire wizarding world in the span of two years?”

A very old man answered, “In the Great War, Professor Granger? That wasn’t exactly an easy time for us, either, you know.”

“Perhaps not,” she said. “And when earthquakes ravaged Indonesia and Haiti recently, we had our own people to worry about, though some of us did help the muggles. And when tropical cyclones wiped out whole cities—well, even we can’t control the weather. There are always excuses, but do they apply every time? These are the questions the muggles will ask once they get over the shock and actually take the time to think about it. I’d wager plenty of muggle-borns think them already, but the Statute of Secrecy always provides them an answer. If it fails…Where were we when muggles were starving by the tens of millions in China? Could we have helped when five million muggles a year were dying of smallpox? Could we have stopped AIDS from becoming a pandemic if we helped early? Could we—”

“Enough!” Akingbade roared. “This is nonsense! We don’t have the resources to help the muggle world like that!”

“Yes, we know that, but they don’t! Muggles don’t have a clue what magic can and can’t do. Half of them will probably think we’re immortal and can raise the dead. We’ll have to explain ourselves and hope they listen—and when it comes to certain things like medical research, I’m not sure they’ll find our answers adequate.”
The muggle scientists at the South Pole had been understanding, but they did ask those questions. David Brin had asked too and had been significantly harsher.

At this Quahog spoke up again, angrier than before. “And here you are, preaching fear of the muggles! You speak of their power, their numbers, their anger, and the tools they can bring against us. You sound more and more like the doomsayers of the past.”

She shook her head: “I’m only telling the truth as best I can determine it. The muggle internet era has truly been a change of a kind we haven’t seen before.”

“But that’s just what he said about their atom bombs,” and old European witch said. “‘How long will it take before they turn their weapons on us?’ Gellert Grindelwald said those exact words in his Paris rally in 1927.”

“Would you have us conquer them before it’s too late or simply exterminate them?” another said.

“Or do you think as he did that ‘The beast of burden will always be necessary’?”

“Dammit! I don’t want WAR!” Hermione screamed. She spun around, trying to meet the eyes of all the delegates at once. “War is the last thing in the world we want because we’d LOSE!”

There were gasps throughout the hall, which quickly subsided to silence. Hermione was shaking.

“We’d lose,” she repeated softly. She seemed to have the floor, now. “Or at the very least, we’d never be able to win. Not even if we struck first. A million of us against seven billion muggles? We’d never be able to find them all, whatever we actually did with them. And no, they’d never be able to find all of us, either, but is that what we want? Both sides dug into our trenches and afraid to show ourselves in daylight? And what about the very muggle-born children you want to protect, Supreme Mugwump? In your homeland, it may be the worst witch-hunt in history, but in other countries? Cooler heads will prevail, and they’ll think of recruiting them.”

She turned around again, and her eyes met George’s up in the gallery. It had been a long time since she’d seen him look that worried, and as she had a moment to catch her breath, she feared she’d gone too far. “This sounds extreme,” she said. “It is extreme. This won’t happen in twenty years. It might not happen in fifty years. And, God forbid, if a war does happen, I’m not nearly as confident about how it will go. But I am confident about this: we can’t cover up the existence of magic much longer. We probably couldn’t cover up a major incident now.”

“Again you ascribe such power to muggles and such impotence to wizards, Granger,” Quahog said. “We have dealt with mass exposure events in the past, and we have methods to handle them. The solution devised by Newt Scamander in the Barebone Incident of 1926—”

“I know about the Barebone Incident, Mr. Quahog,” she interrupted. “I studied major breaches of the Statute when I was writing the paper. ‘The venom of the Swooping Evil concentrated and dispersed in a thunderstorm. You want to try that in Dubai? Or Cairo? Phoenix? Mecca? Casablanca? Lima? Ulaanbaatar? And even if you did, in the five minutes it took you to do that, there would be photographs on the YouTube servers and the Facebook servers and the Twitter servers, which are distributed across major cities all over the world. If as many muggles saw it today as saw the Barebone incident, it would virtually guarantee it. Already, the best we can do is hide the magical world the best we can and discredit the evidence that leaks out, not erase it. Again, it’s all in the paper.”

The room seemed nervous now, less angry, at least at her. She was sure there was still a lot of tension under the surface, but refuting one of the go-to methods like that, it was starting to get them
thinking. Soon afterwards, a younger delegate from one of the East Asian countries—Indochina, in
the magical world, she thought—stepped forward. “Let’s remain calm, please, and think about this
rationally,” he said. “There may be other mass Obliviation options. What if we use the muggles’ own
media? That would allow us to erase their records as well. Can their television conduct an Obliviate
spell, Professor Granger?”

Hermione sighed. No harm in telling the truth, she supposed: “If you tapped into a major ley line
intersection, you might make it work in principle, but no muggle media is universally consumed.
You’d never get everyone. And the internet doesn’t run in real time. Most of the time, those images
will be nothing but random patterns of magnetisation on a metal disk in a warehouse somewhere.
You can’t embed a spell in that. Sooner or later, someone will notice and get in front of it. I’m telling
you, it’s only a matter of time, and eighteen years is the most optimistic time I can give you.”

“We have the International Portkey Network, if you recall, Professor.” To her surprise, it was Turi
Te Kanawa from New Zealand. “We could piggyback a muggle-specific Obliviation spell on top of
it.”

“And force all in-the-know muggles to wear Anti-Obliviation Charms at all times?”

“If necessary,” Samuel Quahog grunted.

“You’d buy ten years,” she replied. “Maybe twenty at the outside before computers get smart enough
to notice the discontinuities on their own. Then you have all the surveillance systems in the world
consistently throwing the same kinds of errors where muggles can’t figure out what’s going on.
They’ll figure out something’s up eventually, and they’ll be ten times as paranoid in the meantime
because they’ll think it’s spies with invisibility technology or—or space aliens or God knows what.”

“You seem awfully determined to be right for someone who’s afraid of our exposure,” someone
observed shrewdly.

“Because I’ve already thought of as many objections as I could, and none of them worked,” she said.
“I already addressed a lot of this in the paper. I even approached the muggle author whose work
inspired the paper under the guise of a fellow author writing a fantasy novel.” That was a lie. She’d
told Dr. Brin everything. “A muggle who knows their technology better than I ever will. In every
scenario I could imagine, the muggles would still notice something was wrong, and from noticing
something, it’s a much shorter path to figuring out what that something is.

“Face it, this isn’t a secret we can keep anymore. A million of us, only a few percent of whom can
really understand muggle technology enough to keep up with it, against—I say it again—seven
billion muggles? It just. Can’t. Be. Done.”

The questioning continued for hours and into the next day, but Hermione felt that the room had
turned for the better at that point. She was interrogated on every part of the paper, and more and
more scenarios were brought up about how secrecy might be maintained. Each night that week while
the hearings went on, the delegates no doubt Portkeyed home to consult with their governments and
experts in their home countries. The other arithmancers who had signed their support of Hermione
were questioned, as were other experts who had expressed no opinion or were hostile. Some of them
were even more hostile to her than the delegates and outright slandered her, but on balance, the
pressure seemed to be easing. A few of the delegates even came up to her privately, very nervous,
but thanking her for her work because they now felt detection by muggles was a very real possibility.

17 August 2012
The hearings finally ended on Friday, and by then, the tide had clearly turned despite a few holdouts. By the time it was over, even Supreme Mugwump Akingbade had to grudgingly eat his words.

“Professor Granger,” he said. “On behalf of the ICW, I wish to apologise for your poor treatment over the past two weeks. Your allegations were inflammatory, to be sure, but I confess we overreacted. Treating you like a criminal was unwarranted, and we thank you for risking your reputation and your liberty to bring this information to our attention...I must admit, reluctantly, that your claims may have merit...Let it be known that ICW will press no charges against you, and it will appoint a Special Investigative Committee to study the issue of the sustainability of the Statute of Secrecy in light of current muggle technology.”

This caused shouting on both sides. The majority were more or less on her side now, but the decision was still sure to make people angry. Hermione didn’t think it would be too bad until Samuel Quahog from MACUSA stood up. “Supreme Mugwump, MACUSA wishes to formally express its strong disapproval of the ICW’s decision,” he said. “Professor Granger should be censured for fomenting civil unrest if nothing else, and we continue to consider her a serious risk to the security of the magical world. In light of this, under the Rappaport Revision Act of 1966, MACUSA is exercising its authority to ban Professor Granger from entering the country effective immediately.”

This again brought forth shouts of both approval and disapproval from the chamber, but Hermione’s heart sank. This was going to be for the long haul personally as well as politically.

The Americans’ declaration spurred on a scattering of others around the world, including several countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Indonesia, and, weirdly, Poland and Argentina. Apparently, some people were worried she’d stir up trouble or take her little campaign a bit too far and wanted nothing to do with her.

There was clearly some wheeling and dealing going on behind the scenes, and even some delegates who supported the investigative committee were giving her funny looks. It soon emerged that they were also interested in restricting her movements; in the end, they couldn’t exactly ban her from travelling internationally because she could always travel by muggle means, but they strongly implied they wanted her to be chaperoned whenever she travelled just in case she tried to do something rash.

“Of all the bloody, stupid—” she muttered to herself as she walked out. “They just couldn’t leave it be, could they?”

But her anger was short-lived as she walked into the lobby a free witch, and Emmy and Robin both squealed, “Mummy!” and leapt into her arms.

“Oof! I’m glad to see you too, kids,” she said as she adjusted her balance. “I love you, you know that?” She kissed both of them on the tops of their heads.

George managed to stretch his arms around all three of them and kissed Hermione hard.

“Eww!” Emmy said right next to their ears. Everyone around them laughed, and George ruffled her hair until she swatted his hand away.

“George, I’m so sorry about all this,” Hermione said. “If I’d known they’d react like this—”

“You’d’ve done the exact same thing, and you know it,” he cut her off. “You always do the right thing, Hermione. That’s what I love about you.”

“I would’ve done a few things differently,” she muttered.
“Well, it’s alright now,” he said. “We’ll fix the rest of the mess soon enough. Let’s go home.”

31 October 2012

Hermione flexed her fingers and massaged the muscles in her hands, trying to soothe the aches. She hadn’t even fought for that long. It had been a curb-stomp, really. But like a sprint she wasn’t conditioned for, that short frenzy of curses took a lot out of her. Maybe a little more magical conditioning was warranted. She was pretty sure she could still manage a drawn-out running duel like the one she’d fought against Bellatrix Lestrange, but she hadn’t been in a real fight in so long that she was out of practice. And it seemed she still needed to stay in practice.

She was still angry—furious, really. She wanted to go off into the woods and burn off her excess energy tearing apart a grove of trees in dark, eldritch ways. But she suppressed her rage in front of her children, putting on a pleasant face for their sakes. They’d been traumatised enough already tonight.

It had started innocently enough. Emmy wanted to go trick-or-treating, so Hermione put on her most traditional witch’s robes for the occasion. Emmy decided she wanted to be Merida…which was embarrassingly easy to pull off. Robin didn’t really know what was going on except that there were sweets involved, but she put him in a bear costume, then collected Russell Whitby from down the street and drove them up to the village (it was a bit far for the kids to walk), parking at a friend’s house so they could make the rounds.

It went fine for a while. Moss was a quiet little village, only a fraction the size of Hogsmeade, and people rarely expected any trouble there. Unfortunately, Hermione and her family had grown complacent about All Hallows’ Eve over the past decade, and when a curse flew out of the bushes at her at the edge of the village, she was caught unawares.

A wave of clarity not unlike what she felt from Ravenclaw’s Diadem, and she saw what she had to do before it consciously registered. She was carrying Robin, as they were walking back to the car. At that moment, she spun on the spot and half-dove to place herself between the attacker and the three children. She practically tossed Robin into Emmy as she pushed all three of them to the ground, then twisted her body so she wouldn’t fall on them. Screams cut through the night. A jolt shot up her arm as she landed on her elbow, her other hand occupied by reaching for her wand. The first curse exploded behind them, blasting her face with heat and specks of dirt. Another curse flew, and she flicked her wand, barely getting a shield up in time for the spell to explode against it.

And then it was her turn. She rolled to her feet and slashed her wand at the bushes even as she reached for her other one. Twigs snapped in the bushes, clearing some of the brush away.

“Drop your wand!” she ordered.

She was answered by more spellfire, but she responded twice as fiercely. In seconds, the bushes were utterly destroyed, and she could see her attacker, a wizard in a faceless, black robe.

The duel paused just long enough for her to react. “Drop it!” she shouted again.

“Dunglicking mudblood bitch!” The words were slurred. Then, he attacked again. Later, she wasn’t sure if he’d meant to cast at Emmy or if he was so drunk his aim was just that bad, but when she heard her daughter scream, that was when Hermione came down on the dark wizard like an avenging angel.

When the dust cleared, and she had obtained and snapped her attacker’s wand, she quickly checked
on the children. Robin had bumped his head when he fell and was insensible with terror. Emmy wasn’t hurt that badly. The curse had missed, although she had a few cuts and scrapes from the backlash, and Russell had run halfway across the field by the time she spotted him again. Little kids were fast when they wanted to be.

“Mummy?” Emmy said quietly when she approached.

Hermione pulled her into her arms, near tears. “It’s okay, Emmy,” she said. “He’s gone. No one’s going to hurt you.” She raised her wand in the direction of Windrose Field, a mile away, and cast red sparks into the sky as high as she could. She didn’t think she’d be able to manage a Patronus for a few minutes.

Emmy was still scared stiff. “Mummy? Did you do that?”

Hermione pulled back far enough to see her daughter’s wide eyes staring over her shoulder. She turned around and saw the place where the attacker had been was a smoking ruin, and her heart sank. Emmy was scared of her—or maybe not scared, but certainly intimidated.

She quickly turned her away. “It’s okay, Emmy. It’s over. You’re safe. I’ll always protect you and Robin; I promise.”

“Is he dead?” Emmy said.

She groaned. Of course she’d pick up on that. If she’d had to kill in front of her kids, even to protect them…But when the Aurors arrived and checked the body, she was surprised to find he was still alive. He looked like a nightmare, and Hermione made sure the kids couldn’t get a clear look, but he was alive. Probably for the best; they could question him that way. Unlike with Umbridge, the Healers made her lift the curses on him before they treated him. She wasn’t keen to, but she could see why it was necessary.

George and the Whitbys arrived to take them all home, and the incident was over, but they wouldn’t forget it for a long time. Emmy had settled down by then, although her animated attempt to describe the fight to George made both of her parents uneasy. It might not be the best for her to get too excited about how “bad-ass” (George’s word, and not in front of Emmy) her mother was.

It was only to be expected that some people would be unhappy about there being even a chance for the Statute of Secrecy to be repealed—even driven to violence in their anger. Hermione kicked herself for not anticipating it.

Things were already changing in magical Britain. After she was cleared by the ICW, Gawain Robards had lost his bid for reelection and was replaced by Penny Haywood in an upset. Tonks was an old roommate of hers and said that she was a half-blood who spent a lot of time in the muggle world. Anyway, Hermione could only hope the chaos would die down in a few months, but she feared it would continue at least as long as the ICW continued its investigation.

Things were changing for her, too, and not just because of the attack. She was switching gears in her work. Some of her long-term projects, ones she’d dabbled in over the years, but never put serious effort toward, seemed to take on a new sense of urgency, both because if the Statute fell, she had a feeling she wouldn’t have much spare time for a long while, and because some of them might come in handy if there were problems with the repeal. Chief among these was replicating Ravenclaw’s Diadem. When the time came, she’d feel better having her own copy to work with rather than borrowing the original from Hogwarts.

That would be something else that would be good to have in case of emergency, she thought, even if
she wouldn’t have had time to use it tonight. It wouldn’t be easy, though.

---

1 September 2013

Sadly, the civil unrest continued to simmer over the next year, but there were no more serious attempts on Hermione directly. Word got around on what she’d down to the man who’d attacked her family. That wizard, the son of a Death Eater and a habitual drunk, had spent months in St. Mungo’s even with her lifting the most troublesome of the curses on him. Dark magic never came away clean, especially when there were spell interactions.

There had been one attack on Harry in the past year. They caught him when he was alone, trying out his new Firebolt Supreme (which he said was finally good for once). Two wizards dropped down from above him and tried to hex him out of the sky. This didn’t end well for them. Harry and Ginny had so perfected their mental connection over the years that to attack one of them was to get cursed in the back by the other before you knew what hit you.

Hermione had come to King’s Cross again today to see off Marcus for his fifth year, but this year, she was joined by the rest of her family, and by more of her old classmates, notably including Harry and Ginny. James was starting his first year with young Morgan Lupin by his side, and both looked very excited.

In other news, Headmistress McGonagall decided that this was an excellent time to retire. As Hermione recalled, her exact words were, “Two generations of Marauders is enough.”

Sasha Lupin had responded to this with, “Clearly, I haven’t been trying hard enough.”

But they were in good hands. Professor Flitwick had graciously agreed to take McGonagall’s post, saying he “Liked a challenge.”

Marcus was less enthusiastic this year. In addition to the gruelling O.W.L. year before him, he had been the target of ire this past year because of Hermione’s political activism. The debates about the Statute of Secrecy within Hogwarts were just as fierce as without, and Marcus was stuck in the middle. By the time he came home for summer holidays, he was expertly imitating Harry’s “angsty teenager” phase. Harry himself had told him to lighten up, but it only had so much effect.

The one major difference inside Hogwarts, according to the kids, was that there was more uncertainty and fear among the students than among the adults in the world at large (or maybe that was just the loud ones). Sasha had reported that Columba Malfoy was simply afraid, rather than angry like many of the old-family purebloods. Meanwhile, the muggle-borns were much more unreservedly for repeal, too young to understand the troubling implications, which further raised the tensions.

“I hope the ICW gets done ‘investigating’ soon,” Marcus said. “Then we can finally stop debating it all the time.”

Hermione snorted. “If only,” she said. “Once they’re done talking, we still have to actually do it.”

“Ugh…” Marcus groaned.

The ICW was indeed still “investigating” and largely hadn’t consulted her for information or insight. That worried her a little. Just putting it off would eventually see the decision taken away from them, but the insider information said they were making genuine progress and the committee would eventually recommend repealing the Statute of Secrecy. Until then, though, she would be waiting.
“It is the recommendation of the Special Investigative Committee on Global Secrecy that the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy be repealed in a controlled fashion within ten years, or risk forcible and irrevocable exposure by the muggles.”

The uproar in the ICW chamber that week was palpable. A lot of people were embarrassed over having eat crow after their harsh words two years ago, and some of them were still strongly against it. It did, however, mean that Hermione’s travel restrictions should be lifted soon, so that was a plus.

It took them three weeks of debate to actually approve the repeal, during which the arguments for why they couldn’t keep hiding were rehashed again and again more times than even Hermione cared to count. Finally, it went through, with no small help from Percy Weasley, who was by now the British delegate. The wizarding world would come out of the shadows within ten years. All that remained was to pin down an exact date.

It had taken three years to fully implement the Statute when it was first enacted, but everyone said it would take even longer to dismantle it. A minority argued that it couldn’t be done even in ten years, but the Committee was firm on that point. Hermione, through the Percy, had proposed the first of January 2020 as the effective date of repeal as a middle of the road compromise, but there were still detractors.

“Supreme Mugwump,” the American delegate said—not Quahog anymore; he’d been elevated to President. “While MACUSA has, after much deliberation, determined to acquiesce to the ICW’s decision, we cannot countenance any kind of reveal in 2020. The potential chaos caused by revealing the existence of magic during a muggle election year is too great to risk.”

“This is preposterous!” one of the other delegates objected. “There’s always an election somewhere. We can’t accommodate every country. Why should MACUSA get special treatment?”

“Don’t think we made this call lightly, sir,” the American said. “Why should MACUSA get special consideration? Because the United States remains the most influential country in the muggle world, and it’s elections are the most impactful. Indeed, what other elections could be? Russia? Those of you who are familiar with muggle politics, does anyone doubt Vladimir Putin will be reelected in 2018 without struggle? The Chinese President is elected by the legislature. India? Of regional importance, to be sure, but global?

“But in addition to this, the United State is one of the most religious and prejudiced-against-magic muggle countries in the western world. The Second Salemers would never have been able to function in any other western country in the twentieth century. If we were to reveal ourselves in an election year, this prejudice would be used as a political token and could be used to turn far more people against us than at another time. This could have worldwide implications for the revelation to go smoothly.”

Akingbade did seem swayed by that argument. “You make a compelling case,” he said. “Does MACUSA have a proposed date of its own?”

“In the muggle world, the first one hundred days of a President’s term is considered to be a time for actively pursuing his political agenda. Although these efforts often fizzle quickly, we believe it would be prudent to wait until after this period is over to make the revelation. The one hundredth day of a presidency is April twenty-ninth, so we propose April thirtieth, 2021 as the repeal date.”

Percy shot to his feet, improvising on the fly with a fervour Hermione had rarely seen from him: “Supreme Mugwump, the British Isles strongly object to this date. The thirtieth of April and first of
May are a day and night of remembrance for the victims of our civil war. We understand that the ICW cannot accommodate everyone, but I think we can agree that there are few countries with memorials as solemn and recent in mind as ours. A few days either way will make little difference. If MACUSA wishes to propose a date in the spring of 2021, the British Isles will revise our own proposal to—” He checked his calendar. “—Monday, the third of May.”

He looked down at Hermione and the other representatives. She nodded, and the others quickly agreed.

There was a good deal more back and forth over that, but more arguing about the logistics of having the reveal in the spring of 2021 as opposed to later (or earlier, a small minority said). A fair number of holdouts still wanted to wait as long as possible, but gradually, consensus began to build. When the final vote came, Percy’s compromise was approved. The Statute of Secrecy would be officially repealed on the third of May, 2021.

15 April 2014

Hermione looked down and studied the Diadem of Ravenclaw in her hands as she waited outside Minister Haywood’s office. She’d come a long way with this thing, but it was past time she ought to replace it and give it back to Hogwarts permanently. Maybe someday another student would come along who could actually use it.

Rowena Ravenclaw must have taken years or even decades to make this, working through methodical trial and error. When Hermione studied it, the principles seemed surprisingly simple, and she almost worried she was missing something. But Ravenclaw knew neither arithmancy nor neurology, nor did she have the diadem itself to help her along. In fact, she probably had only the barest notion of what a savant was until she actually wore it and learnt to wield it. To modern eyes, the mystery seemed much plainer, and months of work had given way to a breakthrough in understanding the artifact.

The hardest part was magically strengthening the diadem and making the charms permanent. It took a fair amount of alchemy, but changing the more ethereal qualities of the silver rather than the base ones. That was in addition to runes, minor rituals, and, at one point, polishing it with a Memory Potion. That was one of the more minor things she needed to talk to the Minister about today.

The replacement diadem wouldn’t be an exact replica, of course. Rather, it would be an Archimedes Jewellers original, and it was one of her hardest pieces because she had so little guidance for what she wanted to do. Hermione first looked for symbolism tied to memory. An eagle would be too similar to the original. An elephant would look a bit kitschy since it wasn’t African-style art. Ivy could symbolise memory, but more in the funereal sense. No, she needed a different angle.

On crowns they hung the dragon-fire.

Tolkien had rarely steered her wrong. She couldn’t take it as literally as she had with Dragontooth. She was pretty sure that wasn’t what was intended by the poem. A more abstract representation of dragon fire, but even then, she didn’t have much to go on. She looked at a lot of possibilities online and saw only hints of what she had in her mind. Mostly, she was winging it.

Her own diadem, nearly complete now, was made from bands of yellow, white, and red gold braided together, but not in equal measure. Loops and swirls came off of the main band, trying to make it look windswept. It was studded with small diamonds and a type of large gem she hadn’t created before: fire opals. That took a whole new manufacturing process on her part and a lot of experimentation to get those slapdash splashes of colour just right. She considered calling it...
Dragonfire, but eventually decided on The Sidereum, meaning “starry,” for the opals.

“You’ve certainly done a lot with that diadem, haven’t you?” George said beside her, motioning to Ravenclaw’s.

“It’s better to finally put it back where it belongs,” Hermione replied. “Get one more thing wrapped up.”

“I’m sure you’ll think up plenty more,” he teased her.

Yes, he was kind of right. They may not have been planning to repeal the Statute of Secrecy for seven years, but for herself, she had plenty to do in the meantime between homeschooling two kids and her arithmancy work.

Finally, they were let in to see the Minister. Minister Penny Haywood, a cheerful-looking woman with long, blond hair and bright blue eyes, had easily won over the voters, but Hermione was more pleased to see she had grown into the role quickly and had become a strong advocate for the repeal position, not to mention Hermione herself.

“Professor Granger, Mr. Weasley, welcome back,” the Minister said. “And congratulations. This was a hard-won fight for you most of all.”

“Thank you, Minister,” Hermione replied. “And thank you for your support this past year. Incidentally, I take it my travel restrictions are lifted?”

“Yes, of course,” Haywood said with a chuckle. “You have plans?”

She held up the diadem. “Yes, I need to make a trip to Africa to find some natural mortality ivory for the ritual to duplicate this thing. It’s impossible to source in Britain these days.” For good reason, but still, it was inconvenient. There weren’t any replacements for ivory with similar alchemical properties. In fact, it was a bit surprising that Ravenclaw hadn’t used any ivory in the diadem itself.

“You know, you still amaze me sometimes, Professor. So, what is this about? You said it was important in your note.”

Hermione glanced at George. “Something that should be kept secret,” she said. “Some of it extremely secret. I want to start a program that will anticipate potential threats from the Repeal and work to prevent them.”

“The ICW’s already looking at that,” Haywood said. “MACUSA has been complaining that they still have Scourer descendants to worry about—modern-day witch hunters who will come out of the woodwork if they have proof magic really exists.”

“That…could be a problem, but that’s not what I’m talking about, ma’am. You know what I can do with magic. But consider: the muggles could easily have a hundred scholars who are my equal in mathematics, and still more in other fields.”

She gave that a moment to sink in, and Haywood’s smile vanished. “Oh, God…” she breathed.

“Yeah. That’s the real problem. Have you read about that project I did a while back to prevent wizards from building nuclear weapons? It’s that kind of thing, but now we need to get ahead of the muggle curve.” She looked to her husband again. “George, I haven’t even told you all of this, and I can’t tell you how much I appreciate you not pushing me on it…It’s time I told you what I really did to Bellatrix Lestrange.”
I didn’t have a good place to put this in the chapter, but I wanted to address one more argument I’ve seen on Reddit a lot, which is that wizards could easily beat muggles even without ridiculous magical power levels because they could Imperius the muggles to use all the nukes on themselves.

This will not work.

They did studies back in the Cold War, and the main finding was that 20% of people would survive a nuclear war even in the United States and Russia. And this was back when we had a lot more bombs. Yes, you would wipe out the technology that was in danger of discovering magic, but enough of humanity and its knowledge would survive, including EMP-shielded military databases, to rebuild some of it in a few decades. You might beat back the muggles enough to take them over by force, but even then, I think their numbers advantage would be too great to manage.

In my opinion, saying wizards would win because they could nuke muggles is just as silly as saying muggles would win because they could nuke wizards, even though I think muggles would win for other reasons.
The Golden Age of Flight

Disclaimer: And don’t speak too soon, for the wheel’s still in spin, and there’s no tellin’ who that it’s namin’. (Although it might be JK Rowling.)

Part of this chapter is quoted from the 2014 Quidditch World Cup Pottermore series.

So, I’ve tried to capture major events in the Granger-Weasleys’ lives since the end of the war in this story, but I can’t believe I missed a major one that should have happened way back in Chapter 8: the 1999 total solar eclipse, which was visible from Cornwall, within driving distance of the Burrow. There’s no way Hermione would have missed that. I might go back and add a scene, but for now, you can just assume they went to see it.

On an unrelated note, I cleared one more item from my to-do list and published a new story idea in Scribble Pad.

9 July 2014

“Welcome to the third place match of the 2014 Quidditch World Cup,” Ginny announced over the Patagonian stadium. It had been an incredible opportunity (if probably facilitated by her husband’s fame) when she was asked to be the English-language announcer for the Tournament, and the whole family were excited. Most of the old crowd from Dumbledore’s Army had come to Argentina to see the two final games, too.

“Early favourite Japan was knocked out by Bulgaria in a ten-hour battle in the semifinals when the Bulgarians staged a miraculous comeback from two hundred and fifty points behind. My friend and personal arithmancy guru, Hermione Granger, puts very good odds on Japan winning today if the Snitch is caught in the first two hours.

“The United States, on the other hand, have been breakout contenders this year, putting up a stunning show before being knocked out by Brazil in a twenty-hour defensive grind. Today, these two heavy hitters will be facing off for third place…”

In contrast to the long, possibly multi-day grinds that Hermione feared and much of her family were a little too excited about, this match lasted only an hour—and a fast-paced hour at that, with thirty goals scored between the two teams. And consistent with her prediction, Japan caught the Snitch and won the game.

It was Ginny’s comments in one of the time-outs, however, that got Hermione’s attention.

“You know, for all I’ve talked up our hometown Firebolt Supreme, which is ridden by the Bulgarian team, this had really been a year for innovative new brooms all around the world, with the market finally recovering after the crash in ‘02. In fact, specialised and experimental broomsticks have undergone a renaissance since the Firebolt Jetstream debuted in ‘07. For example, the Yajirushi Company, which manufactures the Japanese team’s broomsticks, has become a world leader in high-altitude broom flight, achieving stable flight far into the stratosphere. And the American Starsweeper
Company has taken the Jetstream’s high-speed design and run with it…”

Hermione whirled on Harry on hearing that: “Harry, can they really fly in the stratosphere? I thought the technical challenges of flying in air that thin made it impossible.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. “You mean you don’t know, Hermione?” he said. “They’ve been doing that for ages in China and Japan. There just aren’t any production models that can go that high. They really have been doing a lot of great stuff the past few years.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize,” she said.

“Have you at least heard of the new games they’ve come up with?”

“Not much. I haven’t been following innovations in broomsticks, Harry. That’s more George’s thing—and yours, obviously.”

Suddenly, Harry showed a manic grin that made her a little nervous. “Hermione, you don’t know what you’re missing,” he said. “You know, you deserve a holiday after all the work you’ve done with the Statute of Secrecy. When this is finished, we’re taking your family on a tour.”

Somehow, that didn’t make her any less nervous.

11 July 2014

“The opening ceremony concludes with an interesting Veela/Curupira pyramid formation,” Ginny said. “If several back to front feet found themselves in the Veela’s eyes, the latter have resisted the temptation to transform into the terrifying Harpy-like form that gave many children—myself included—nightmares after their 1994 display.

“And here come the two teams – Brazil in green, Bulgaria in red!”

This commentary, however, was followed by an obnoxious, nosey-sounding voice that had given Hermione and her family far too much trouble over the years.

“Almost all of the Weasley family are supporting Brazil, but Hermione Granger is not wearing anything to indicate which team she is supporting. Both her children—Emmy, who appears to have inherited her father’s unfortunate hair, and Robin, who has his mother’s bushy locks—are decked out in green. Does she secretly hope to see her old friend Krum take the trophy at last? Or is this the kind of diplomatic neutrality one might expect of a ruthless careerist who has thrown our world into chaos over the past two years with her reckless and aggressive campaign to repeal the Statute of Secrecy and whose long-term ambition is undoubtedly to become Supreme Mugwump with the help of muggle allies.”

“Oh, Merlin, who invited her?” Hermione said. “This was supposed to be Ginny’s big day.”

“She had ‘connections’,” Percy said.

“She had blackmail material,” Harry grumbled. “Ginny’s livid. I’ll bet you ten galleons she hexes Skeeter before the match is over.”

“I’m not taking that bet,” she told him. “That’s fixed betting; you’re in her head. Besides, I have half a mind to hex Skeeter myself. ‘Ruthless careerist’ indeed. I’ve never even had a full-time job.”

“Just try and enjoy the game, dear,” George said.
The game lasted a little less than three hours, and it was an exercise in patience for the Weasley Clan. Hermione was pretty sure Rita Skeeter didn’t make a single comment that was actually about Quidditch and directed all of her attention to what Dumbledore’s Army was doing. She was far too interested in their personal lives, and Ginny had to stop her several times when her speculation started to cross a line.

At least the kids had fun that day. Emmy and Robin were too young to really be bothered. Harry’s boys were too absorbed in the Quidditch, and Sasha and Nadia…she hated to admit it, but Skeeter was right that they spent an inordinate amount of time snogging. Hermione did remember being sixteen, but she had been a little preoccupied with the war and Umbridge that year.

In the end, Viktor, who had come out of retirement at thirty-eight to try to win one more time, caught the Snitch to win the match one-seventy to sixty in a victory that would surely go down in history.

Unfortunately, Skeeter was still at it.

“Ah, that’s better—people are calming down, I can now see the VIP boxes—well, Dumbledore’s Army seems to approve of the victory, Harry Potter in particular seems emotional—with a determined grin on his face, George Weasley conceals his inevitable annoyance—young Bill is applauding, doubtless at the prompting of his publicity hungry father—my colleague, Ginny Potter, is approaching me, no doubt with another tedious correc—”

There was a yelp and a thud over the microphone and a simultaneous guffaw from Harry, and then Ginny’s voice came back on: “Rita Skeeter has been taken unaccountably ill with what some are calling a jinx to the solar plexus.” That drew laughs from pretty much the entire British audience.

“As celebrations continue here in the Patagonian Desert, we at the Daily Prophet sincerely hope that you have enjoyed our World Cup coverage from Argentina. Next week, the National Gobstones League comes to Birmingham! But in all honesty…don’t bother.”

28 July 2014

“It is an honour to meet you, Potter-san and Granger-sensei,” the wizard from the Yajirushi Company greeted Harry. “We hope your stay in Japan has been pleasant for you and your families.”

“Excellent, as always—er, Yajirushi-san, thank you,” Harry said. “I wanted to show my family around after we saw your brooms perform in the Quidditch World Cup. Hermione’s really interested in your ultra-high-altitude flying.”

“We would be delighted for you to witness our next test flight of the Iteza,” he replied. “Come and see.”

If the Firebolt Jetstream looked like a parody of a broom, the Yajirushi Iteza looked like something Hermione’s six-year-old daughter might have drawn and called a “super broom.” It had a brush cap like some muggle brooms, though it bore only the barest resemblance even before it flared out into long stabilising fins. It had handlebars at the front, though they were more like the grips of a scythe than those of a bicycle. And the ironwork was designed to run all the way along the rider’s legs for support, not just their feet. It also had a visibly shimmering air shell that completely enclosed it except for the fins.

“Wow, that looks really cool!” Emmy squealed, confirming Hermione’s suspicions. “How high does it go?”

The broom maker chuckled. “Our last test flight reached ninety-nine thousand feet. We’re hoping to
improve on that.”

George whistled, impressed. Harry seemed to be trying to count up to make sense of how high that was. “Whoa, that’s gotta be close to space!” Bill exclaimed.

“Not really. Outer space is defined as three hundred and twenty-eight thousand feet,” Hermione said. “It’s still up there with the highest aeroplanes, though.”

“It looks weird,” James said, voicing what several had been thinking.

“James!” Ginny scolded.

“I mean it’s cool, and all!” the boy tried to save it. “It’s just…it doesn’t look much like a broom anymore.”

“Oh, I don’t know, I think it does,” Harry said. “Maybe it’s like calling a Ferrari a…”

“A ‘horseless carriage,’” Hermione suggested.

“Yeah, that. It’s technically correct, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so. So, I’m not familiar with this ultra-high-altitude broom technology,” she said. “How does it work?”

“They work much like normal brooms, in principle, Granger-sensei,” the broommaker said. “Much of the work has historically been done by China. They were the first to fly a broom to the summit of Mount Everest in 1948. But in recent years, we have put more effort into it here. This broom looks so different because we had to keep adding features as we pushed to higher altitudes.

“For example, above thirty thousand feet, the broom requires special materials to work properly because the air is so cold and dry. But that has been known for a long time. We had to add the air shell at about forty thousand feet because even a pure oxygen Bubble-Head Charm is too thin to breathe. That stopped us for many years. We had to add the fins at sixty thousand feet because the air is so thin that it can’t keep the broom from rolling at speed. The fins extend farther as the broom goes up, but we’re struggling to get them to work above ninety thousand feet.”

Harry looked confused, though. “Don’t muggle rockets have fins that work higher up, though?” he said. He tried to think. “I mean, what about the Space Shuttle?”

Hermione shook her head. “The Space Shuttle went a lot faster than any broomstick, Harry. When the air’s that thin, wings will only stabilise you at very high speeds. In fact, I don’t think muggles have any data on low-speed flight at those altitudes. Muggle craft can’t really be good at both hovering and forward motion.”

“Can’t you get up to really high speeds in air that thin, though?”

“Not as much as you think. Power in level flight is proportional to speed cubed, so even very thin air puts up a lot of resistance as you go faster. At a hundred thousand feet, a medium performance broom won’t be able to get above…two hundred, two-fifty miles an hour? Even a Jetstream wouldn’t get much past five hundred if it could fly that high.”

“The Iteza is rated at two hundred and fifteen miles per hour,” broommaker confirmed. “That is an additional challenge. But now, if you like, you can watch our next test flight.”

The test pilot, in stark contrast with Hermione’s muggle biases, was a small witch named Noriko
Sato, the Seeker for the Japanese Quidditch team, who was joined by a ground controller, Kayano. The British visitors were surprised when she put on a muggle headset and something like a flight suit with a small oxygen bottle attached to her back.

“Muggle radios,” Kayano explained. “The only thing that really works for communication under these conditions.”

A large telescope was brought out to track Sato in the air, and they saw she was attaching a magical flare at a strategic point on the broomstick. The company even had a dedicated translator come out to explain to the visitors and a handful of reporters what was happening. By the time everything was set up, Sato was already in the air, but that was no matter. The flight would take a while anyway.

“Final check at fifteen thousand feet,” Sato relayed through the translator. “All spells are working normally. I’m beginning my ascent.”

It took half an hour for Noriko Sato to ascend to ninety thousand feet. The broom was theoretically capable of climbing much faster, but they didn’t want to push it. It was mostly uneventful, though they could track her through the telescope with the help of her flare. She also reported when the oxygenated air shell began registering a pressure difference and when she extended the stabilisers.

“It’s beautiful up here,” she said when she reached the hold point. “Every time. I can see nearly all of Honshu from here…Everything looks good here, Kayano-san. The broom is stable. I’m ready for my final ascent run.”

“Roger, Sato-san,” Kayano replied. “We still have you in view here. You are cleared for final ascent.”

They watched in the telescope as she began climbing again, moving faster and steeper than before. She would have been invisible were it not for the flare, trailing smoke behind her in the thin air, blurred and wavering to the eye from the turbulence. The magical telescope kept her in view as she flew higher, and Kayano patiently called out the numbers. “Ninety-five thousand feet…ninety-eight thousand…ninety-nine thousand…one hundred thousand feet.”

The Japanese spectators cheered even as the translator relayed the number. The first broom flight over a hundred thousand feet. This was an historic event, and she was still going.

“Controlling the broom is getting harder,” Sato reported as she passed a hundred and two thousand feet. “I can keep it pointing forward, but it keeps wobbling.”

“Okay, take it easy, Sato-san. We don’t want to lose the broom.”

“I won’t lose the broom, Kayano-san, but—Ahh! I’m losing stability! …I’m rolling…I’m in ballistic flight!”

The view through the telescope showed Sato spinning and then tumbling on the broom as she arced through the air, completely out of control with the air too thin to slow her down.

“Do something!” the kids yelled as they watched. “Can’t we help her?”

“Pull in the stabilisers!” Kayano shouted. “They’ll snap off in a spin like that!”

“I did!” she shouted. “I’m trying to stabilise the broom before we lose the twigs. Ventus isn’t steady enough.”

“Ventus is no good in a near-vacuum. Not enough control. Try Aguamenti.”
“A Smokescreen Charm!” Hermione exclaimed. Something in the air to produce drag without blowing all around. “Or no, a—”

“Fog Charm!” Kayano made the connection. “Try Nebulus!”

A pause. “It’s working!” Sato reported. “I’m level, but falling…I think the broom’s in one piece, though.”

The spectators cheered again. That was one of the more harrowing things Hermione had seen in a long time, and she could tell the Potters were all on the edges of their seats, too. As Sato spiralled down, Kayano reported the results: “Your peak height for controlled flight was one hundred and three thousand, two hundred feet. Your peak overall was one hundred and five thousand, seven hundred.”

Hermione was duly impressed. That was over twenty miles, nearly all of it controlled, and in many ways better than muggle craft could perform. The Yajirushi Company was definitely going places.

“That was a close one,” Kayano said, however, then added to the visitors, “We’re trying to outdo muggle balloons, but I fear that will take entirely new techniques.”

“What’s the muggles’ record?” asked James.

“One hundred and twenty-eight thousand feet for manned balloons, one hundred and seventy-four thousand feet for unmanned.”

“It was very impressive all the same,” Hermione said. “It was almost like a SpaceX rocket launch, watching it like that.”


“Into space?” she said. “I don’t know, Emmy. With the right spells you could probably get to space, but getting into orbit so you’ll stay there is a lot harder.”

“I bet you could do it Mummy!”

“Yeah! You can go space!” Robin agreed with her.

Hermione chuckled and ruffled Emmy’s hair. “If I ever have a spare decade to work on it like Elon Musk, maybe. And…actually, I have no idea if magic works the same in space.”

Everyone stopped and stared at her. “Wait, what?” Ginny said.

“Why wouldn’t it?” George asked.

“I mean, we’d have access to our own magic, I’m pretty sure,” she clarified, “but—well, it’s not proved, but the consensus is that magic is generated by life, and once you leave Earth’s biosphere, you might lose access to the ley lines. Anything that’s powered by them—and you’d probably need ley line power to get to space with magic…”

“Blimey,” George said. “To think there could be places where magic just doesn’t work. D’you think you could test that?”

She shrugged. “Once the Statute of Secrecy is repealed, I’m sure we could send someone up to test it.”
“Are you gonna be an astronaut, Mummy?” Emmy said excitedly.

She shook her head. “No, I don’t think so. I’m happy enough keeping my feet on the ground for now.”

“I wanna be an astronaut!”

“Don’t worry, Emmy,” George said, laughing. “Once you’re old enough, we won’t have a Statute of Secrecy, and I’m sure they’ll love to have you.”

---

9 August 2014

The Potters and Granger-Weasleys made another trip to Australia on their tour, but this time, they were in the northern part of the country—far enough north that the land was green, though still nearly uninhabited. They were joined by two dozen Australian witches and wizards on a large, grassy field. They hadn’t made a revolutionary new broom here. Rather, this was the home of a new broomstick game Harry wanted to try out. The two teams were kitted out with an alarming number of *Firebolt Jetstreams* and other similar new racing brooms.

“This is Kakadu,” Harry said. “The place and the game.”

“And what is Kakadu?” Hermione said.

One of the Australian wizards stepped forward to explain. “After you two wrote your paper saying that new brooms are too fast to be useful for Quidditch, we decided to try to create our own variant of Quidditch that would work at higher speeds. This is what came out of it. He motioned around at the field.

The pitch marked out for Kakadu was four times as long as a normal Quidditch pitch and over six times as wide—two thousand feet by one thousand. It was large enough that a good player could fly as fast as they could tolerate the wind speeds if they had a powerful enough broom. They’d done some things to make the game more like rugby; notably, the Quidditch hoops were replaced by a large goal net. But other things were completely alien, like how all of the players seemed to be armed with something like lacrosse poles.

“The pitch is too big to throw a Quaffle around,” they explained. “It’d be faster to fly with it. So we added the poles to throw it faster. All the balls are six inches across to make them easier to handle. And we upped the team size to eleven to get better coverage of the pitch, even though it makes it hard to get enough people together.”

As they went into the details, Hermione saw how complex the game had become. The “Quaffle” was still scarlet red, but much smaller. So were the “Bludgers,” and the “Snitch,” wingless, was enlarged to the same size. Even so, all the positions had different types of poles. The Seeker’s pole was the most like a lacrosse pole, but bigger, with a net sized for the larger Snitch on the end. The Chasers’ poles had large scoops on the ends for slinging the Quaffle around at high speeds, like in jai alai. To get the Quaffle off a Chaser who had it scooped up required a sort of mid-air jousting that looked more dangerous than the “Bludgers” at those speeds. As such, there were strict rules about contact with another player, even more so than in Quidditch; only pole-to-pole contact was allowed.

As for the Bludgers themselves, they weren’t iron (even hollow) like in Quidditch. Instead, they were made of rubber because even that was dangerous enough at those speeds. There were also three of them since two just wasn’t enough for eleven-a-side. (At least with the toe loops, it was much harder to knock someone off of the newest-generation brooms.) The Beaters also had scoops on their
poles, but with bat-like counterweights on the other ends. The Keeper had something that looked like a double-ended tennis racket.

They’d changed the offside rule for Kakadu, too, or George said it was the anti-Stooging rule, but it was basically an offside rule. Quidditch had a very simple rule: only one Chaser may enter the scoring area at a time. But with a larger pitch and six Chasers, they changed it to say that the offence may not have more players in the scoring area than the defence.

But the most innovative change (and the one Hermione most wholeheartedly approved despite Harry’s objections) was to radically change the Snitch game. The larger Snitch was easier to catch in Kakadu, even with the larger pitch, so catching it was only worth thirty points. But to end the game, the Seeker had to score a goal with the Snitch. They could pass it to the Chasers, but the Seeker had to make the shot. If the team lost control of the Snitch, it was released to be caught again, not turned over, and the Snitch-goal was worth seventy-five points, which had the effect of eliminating draws.

“The league’s still too small to be dealing with draws,” they said. “We might change it later.”

“So, now that you know the rules, do you want to try joining us for a pick-up game?” The Darwin captain said.

“Yes, please!” most of Hermione’s family exclaimed.

“Ugh, no thanks,” Hermione said. “I can barely stand Quidditch at normal speeds. This is way too fast for me.”

“Aw, come on, Hermione,” Ginny said. “You could play Keeper.”

“No, no. Besides, I need to keep an eye on the kids.”

“Can’t we play, Mummy?” Emmy said.

“You have to be taller to ride those Jetstreams, Emmy.”

“But I can ride a Comet,” she pleaded.

“Absolutely not. This is a more dangerous game than Quidditch, I’m not letting you near it until we make sure your father doesn’t get himself killed.”

George laughed. “Thanks for vote of confidence, love,” he said, but he was still smiling.

“Anytime, dear,” she told him, smiling back.

After much begging, it was decided that twelve-year-old James could play Keeper on his own Nimbus broom, since he was sure he could make the house team at Hogwarts this year and wanted the practice. Lily was only Emmy’s age and was sidelined, but Bill was feeling the most left out, so Harry and Ginny ultimately told him he could play Keeper next if James came out of it okay.

Hermione and the remaining four children watched on Comets from the sidelines as the two teams squared off. The pitch was so large that she needed binoculars to follow the game properly, but it was surprisingly entertaining. The larger teams and the improved Snitch game made for a more dynamic and interesting sport by her muggle standards compared with the frankly lopsided Quidditch. Bill was eventually switched in, and one of the Australian players offered to watch the kids for a while so Hermione could try her hand at playing Keeper. It was less terrifying than she expected, even though she got flattened by Ginny. Emmy and Robin thought it was pretty cool anyway.
In the deserts of New Mexico, in region that was once a muggle bombing range (at least, Hermione hoped it was a former bombing range), the American broomwrights were testing their own latest creation.

“The Starsweeper Special,” a Texan witch said proudly.

This broom wasn’t as alien-looking as the Iteza had been, but it still looked pretty over-engineered. It had a brush cap that extended all the way down the bristles to protect them and was flared at the end in such a way as to cut down on turbulence. It had a nose cone, of sorts—a double-cone-shaped bulge at the front that anchored a very pointed Air Shell Charm. And most interestingly, it had ankle straps rather than toe loops to support the rider’s legs, making it necessary to ride completely prone as opposed to halfway like on a Jetstream.

This time, the setup looked like something out of that muggle show, MythBusters. They were in a shielded shed near the test course in case the broom went off course, with a pair of Omnioculurs set up to take a high-speed recording of the broom to measure its top speed. The rider was suited up much the same as Noriko Sato, but without a radio headset. Not a Quidditch player this time either, at least not nationally. They said his experience was in riding thestrals.

The test flight was less dramatic than Sato climbing up to a hundred and five thousand feet, but it was bloody fast. The Starsweeper Special flashed by in a blink, pulling an impressive wake behind it and kicking up a lot of dust.

“Looking good out there, Fontaine,” the Texan witch said when the rider returned. “That was three hundred forty.”

Fontaine was a bit disappointed, though. “Phew, needs a bit more oomph, then,” he said, also in a Texan accent as he took off his 1920s aviator hat and scarf. “We’re shooting for three-seventy, or Mach point-five. Still needs some work.”

“Unfortunately, we’re nearing the limits of what can be done with fixed charms,” his ground controller said. “We’re actually considering runic batteries that can be swapped out. Might be the only way we can go supersonic.”

“Oh, like a muggle fuel tank?” Hermione said interestedly.

“More like an afterburner with the amount of energy they consume.”

“We’ll get it yet, though!” Fontaine insisted. “Good of you all to come,” he told the visitors. “Mr. and Mrs. Potter, I saw you back in your stunt flying days. Made me want to try my hand at it.”

Harry’s face lit up, as it always did when someone recognised him for his achievements outside of the war. “Glad to hear it, Mr. Fontaine,” he said. “You looked pretty good out there.”

“Thanks. So, you must have heard about the Quodrangle game against California on Saturday. You guys interested in joining in?”

“Oh?” Harry said in surprise. “I mean, if it’s alright, if it’s state versus state.”

“No need to worry about that, Mr. Potter. The team sizes aren’t nailed down yet anyway. We’ve just been going with whoever shows up.”
The reason the team sizes weren’t nailed down yet in Quodrangle was because the game was huge. So huge that it wasn’t possible to have a league in the traditional sense—not enough full-time players. Hermione thought it resembled a military exercise more than a sport, and indeed, it bore a strong resemblance to a huge game of Capture-the-Flag.

The field of play was a full mile square. The prize was a large golden ball called the MacGuffin. And the goal was to take the other team’s MacGuffin and bring it back to your base. The teams were about forty apiece, disproportionately teenagers who were into that kind of thing. In scale, it was as if everyone fourth year and up at Hogwarts from Gryffindor and Slytherin all got together for one giant scrimmage, and according to Fontaine, teams were usually formed *ad hoc* except for the largest states, since the game was still in its infancy.

It only got wilder from there. The American broom game of Quodpot used a Quod, which was a Quaffle that was charmed to explode after a set period of time. In Quodrangle, however, each team had a ten Quods that would release a small explosion on impact an unlimited number of times. (Helmets and ear protection spells were mandatory.) A fixed number of defenders were tasked with tagging the Quods with small balls with Neutralising Charms on them, which would knock them out of the game.

From what she’d heard, they’d been experimenting with other oddities too, like not being allowed to touch the MacGuffin with your hands or even allowing certain limited spells on the field. Hermione was glad they didn’t do any of that today, since it was already complete chaos. Yet from the chaos emerged a pretty good military-style strategy. Fontaine would have done well in the war, she thought. In the end, Texas won with the help of the Potters and Granger-Weasleys, and after a long, rough day, they were ready to head back home.
Disclaimer: For the loser now will be later to win, for the times they are a changin’.
Thus speaks JK Rowling (or maybe Bob Dylan).

26 December 2014

Harry Potter looked up from the bar as his cousin sat down beside him. “Thanks for coming, Big D,” he said.

Dudley Dursley rolled his eyes. “It’s just Dudley, Harry. You know that.”

“I could always go with ‘Dinky Diddydums,’” he said with a grin.

Dudley groaned and rubbed his forehead: “That stopped being funny when it stopped annoying you—and it shouldn’t’ve even taken that long.” He lowered his voice and added, “Having that wife of yours in your head is a bad influence on you.” And wasn’t that the weirdest thing ever to him. Dudley loved his own wife, but he couldn’t imagine dealing with that all the time.

Harry snorted: “Ginny says flattery will get you nowhere.” He ordered Dudley a drink, then showed him the tip of his wand and cast a *Muffliato* around them.

It was to Dudley’s credit that he no longer flinched around magic. Harry thought he’d really improved a lot over the years. He was in better shape than his father had been at his age, too—still a heavyweight, but also still somewhat muscular. Harry privately thought Dudley would make a good bouncer, but Vernon had helped him get his foot in the door of the business world (though he now worked nowhere near Grunnings).

They briefly caught up on family; they didn’t get together often. Harry told Dudle about James’s exploits at Hogwarts, and Dudley told how his own kids were doing. If they were honest, neither of them really cared much beyond common courtesy. Neither of their children had met their father’s mysterious cousin, and they cared even less about the happenings in each others’ worlds, but they still tried to talk once a year. Only, this year was more complicated than most.

“Listen, I didn’t want to worry you about this until it was for sure, but we’ve been working the past two years on something,” Harry said.

Dudley furrowed his brow. “Something with magic?” he said. “What’s that got to do with me?”

“Well, here’s the thing. You know how things are in the muggle world today—better than I do, probably. Smartphones, satellites, cameras everywhere.”

“Yeah?”

“All the ways we have to hide magic? They’re not going to work for much longer—not with computers and drones and robots recording everything. So…the International Confederation of Wizards took a vote last spring, and we’re going to repeal the Statute of Secrecy.”
Dudley’s beer slopped all over his hand as he nearly dropped it. He made a funny choking sound and set it back on the bar. “Are you bloody serious, Harry?” he squeaked.

“Yeah. Sorry. Hermione did the maths. There’s simply no way we can keep hiding from muggles long-term. We’re going to be found out.”

“Christ,” Dudley muttered, pressing his fists against the sides of his head. “That’s going to be a mess. Everyone knowing about magic…Oh, God…I don’t even know…”

“I know how you feel, Dudley,” Harry said. “Most of us felt that way too, believe it or not.”

“I think I just might build a bunker in the woods,” he decided. “Is this happening right away?”

“Oh, hell no. This’ll take years to pull off. We’re making the announcement on the third of May, 2021. I just thought you had the right to know now.”

Dudley seemed to deflate as he sagged with relief. “2021! At least I have time to prepare…Still, I think the shock might finally finish off Dad.”

Harry refrained from saying what he thought about that.

“Is it gonna be all at once, or are you doing stuff before then, or…what?”

“Some. Probably not anything you’ll notice, but Hermione’s been telling just about any muggle she thinks needs to be involved in the transition. And we’re thinking about telling families with muggle-born kids about magic as soon as we find them so they can get acclimated. We can identify them with the Hogwarts registry from about age five. We probably will. I mean, we did that during the war to protect them, but that was technically illegal.”

Dudley suddenly grew very nervous and began stammering. “My kids aren’t—? I mean…I don’t have a problem, but…if they were…”

Harry chuckled. “No, Dudley, your kids aren’t magical, as far as we can tell. You don’t need to worry,” he said.

“I don’t want you to think I’m…” Dudley said quickly before getting stuck again.

“Racist?” Harry said, and Dudley flinched and nodded awkwardly. “No, you’re fine. Knowing how you were brought up…if we’re being honest, looking back, your parents screwed you up as much as they did me.”

His cousin frowned. “I still love them and all, but…yeah…they kinda did. After that demented attack —”

“Dementor,” Harry said automatically.

“—I took a look at myself and started to realise what an utter bastard I was. I had to unlearn most of what they taught me before Michelle would even look at me. I dunno why it didn’t do more to Mum and Dad.”

Harry shrugged uncomfortably: “Some people react to trauma like that by sinking deeper into themselves. That you made it as far as you have is kind of a miracle.”

“Yeah, I know…Thanks for telling me, Harry.”

“No problem, Dudley.”
The Chalice of Helga Hufflepuff was rumoured to have healing powers—not like the Holy Grail or the Elixir of Life, but better than most Healing that was available in her day. Others said it was supposed to turn water into wine. Others that it would lift curses. Still others said it was supposed to do all of those things and more.

The Chalice was the last and most mysterious of the four Founders’ artifacts at Hogwarts. Hermione wasn’t expecting that to be the case. Hardly anyone was. But the Locket of Salazar Slytherin had been solved two years ago, when Slytherin House got together and decided to bring a Parselmouth up from India to speak to it in Parseltongue. With the horcrux removed, the original spells reasserted themselves. They were custom spells, so it took trial and error to determine what they actually did, but they teased them out.

The first set of spells were detection spells that could be activated by any Parselmouth and once active would work for anyone wearing the locket, Parselmouth or not. They would detect poisons, traps, and hidden weapons that were set before the user, even those that were normally undetectable. A very Slytherin thing to do, they all thought.

The second set of spells required a code that would presumably have been known only to Slytherin’s descendants. It was only thanks to their escapade in the Chamber of Secrets that Harry knew the code, translated to English: “Speak to me Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.” Which wasn’t much of a code, but it was the eleventh century. This code caused the Locket to play a Parseltongue message apparently recorded by Slytherin himself, telling the wearer about the Chamber of Secrets and how to get in. Upon entering the Chamber, they found that it also played a message ordering the basilisk not to harm the wearer, and it further directed the wearer to a hidden compartment wherein several ancient scrolls of Slytherin’s notes were stored—undoubtedly the most valuable historical find of the four artifacts.

As for the Chalice, however, the Hogwarts staff with Hermione advising groped toward an answer for a long time until they hit on calling an alchemist. Hufflepuff wasn’t known for elemental alchemy, but she was known for Healing, and Healing included spagyric—alchemical medicine. Upon new analysis, the Cup proved to be a powerful alchemical implement that could transmute many kinds of liquids, especially those related to life and healing. It didn’t just conjure water, but mineral-fortified water. It could make rehydration saltwater for dysentery long before the principles of treating dysentery were understood. It could transmute milk for babes, spirits for disinfection, oil, wine, vinegar, quinine, willow bark infusion, and to cap it off, a truly magical fortifying elixir that promoted general wellness and would cure minor ailments—longer-lasting than Wiggenweld Potion, more well-rounded than Girding Potion.

It was impressive, but even so, it was pretty hopeless to use the Chalice for general Healing. It couldn’t produce enough elixir for widespread use, and specific cures were better for almost any ailment one might have. But there were a small number of people with unusual problems for whom it might be a godsend. Thus, Professor Hookum had allowed Hermione to borrow the artifact and take it to someone who needed it. She entered the manor, welcomed in by a house elf, and she called out, “Hello, Astoria.”

“Hi, Hermione.”

Astoria Greengrass sat on a lounge chair in the drawing room reading the Prophet. She wasn’t wearing her oxygen cannula. She didn’t need it all the time so far, but she looked pale and thin, as always, the blood curse slowly taking its toll.
“How are you feeling?” Hermione asked.

“About the same,” Astoria said. “What’s up?”

“I brought a new treatment I thought you should try. Did you hear we finally figured out what Hufflepuff’s Cup does?”

“Uh, yeah, I think I heard something about that.”

Hermione began explaining what the cup did and how it might be able to help her. As she did, Daphne and her husband joined them and listened with interest.

Life hadn’t been kind to Astoria. First the blood curse, striking her young with a progressive, terminal anaemia all because some wizard had had a quarrel with her great-grandmother. Then the war, then a string of failed relationships, one of whom had been a rehabilitated (and underage during the war) Death Eater, only to go off and join Barty Crouch in his fool’s errand. Finally, as her health declined, she stopped trying; then she moved in with her sister and brother-in-law for support.

Astoria would say she wasn’t sure she’d be alive now without Hermione’s help. She remembered that night when Dumbledore’s Army was discovered, and they’d fled that castle. That was first time she’d ever considered muggle options. More recently, Hermione had helped rig up an oxygen concentrator that could run in a magical household, and it allowed her to live much closer to a normal life for a while, though the curse was still working.

“It can do a lot of things okay, but it seems tailor-made to help with a chronic, curse-induced illness like yours,” Hermione finished explaining.

Astoria looked very interested, although Daphne was a little more reserved. “And Tori will have unrestricted use of this thing?” Daphne asked. “Such a valuable and useful artifact?”

“We don’t know exactly what the elixir will do,” Hermione replied. “How much good it will do, how often she’ll need it, or if it needs to be drunk fresh or directly from the cup. We’ll have to test it to figure that out. But if the limitations are reasonable, I’ll make sure she gets full treatment.”

Astoria smiled. “Thanks, Hermione. Let’s go ahead and try it out.”

Once they figured it out, it was pretty simple to make the elixir, so they gave some to her right away. The effect was immediate. She jumped up from her seat and said, “Oh, Merlin’s beard! I haven’t felt this good in ages!” Hermione wasn’t sure at first. She still looked like a stiff wind would blow her over, but it was a marked improvement, when she hugged her in thanks, Hermione could feel her improved strength. It looked like this would be an effective treatment after all.

“It’s no trouble, Astoria,” she replied. “I’m glad it works. And I also have something else for you to see.” She held up a folder with a stack of magazine and newspaper articles in it. They all seemed to be of a muggle scientific bent, and Astoria and her family looked over them in confusion.

“What is this?” Daphne asked.

“This is something called CRISPR-Cas9. It’s a new invention that allows fast and efficient gene editing. One that looks to be usable for humans.”

Daphne’s eyebrows shot up: “You mean all that stuff you keep going on about heritability? That’s true? Muggles can really control how things are inherited?”

“I’ve told you, muggles have been dabbling in this for years,” Hermione said. “But this is the
breakthrough that could really make it feasible. They’re already talking about using it to cure genetic diseases. Basically, there’s a relatively simple method to change a section of DNA that makes a person’s body not work properly.”

At that, Astoria cut in: “This looks really brilliant, Hermione, but this is all still assuming my blood curse is genetic.”

“Yes, it is,” she conceded, “but I still think that’s the most logical way for a curse to work its way into the bloodline—especially being able to skip generations, although those genetics are more complicated. Just like magic itself.”

“You don’t know if the magic gene is real, either,” Astoria said. “It would be nice for me, but I don’t think magic likes to be pinned down and defined like that. Not to mention that meddling with the fundamental nature of the self like this is breaking Waffling’s First Law. This is dangerous magic.”

Hermione shook her head: “Astoria, I’ve made a career out of bending Waffling’s First Law. I know that kind of dangerous magic. And besides, genes aren’t the fundamental nature of the self anyway. Genes are like…like a blueprint for a library. It’s what’s in the books that’s important. Maybe finding a magic gene or a blood curse in there won’t pan out, but I think it has a pretty good chance. In fact, I’m going to go to Berlin soon to talk to Emmanuelle Charpentier. She’s one of the muggle scientists leading the CRISPR-Cas9 research. I’ll tell her about magic and ask her about your case, if you’re willing.”

“Okay, okay, I get it, Hermione. And yes, sure. It can’t hurt. It would be great if you did find a cure. Would it happen soon?”

“No. This kind of research takes a long time, and we don’t even know where to look yet. But once the Statute of Secrecy is repealed, we’ll be able to help it along.”

Astoria’s face fell. “That’s six years from now,” she said slowly. “My five-year prognosis isn’t very good.”

Hermione sighed: “The elixir should help. And the oxygen…and maybe you should start seeing muggle doctors. With no magic and a much larger population, they’ve invented a lot of techniques that Healers have never needed. They might have more for you.”

She thought about this for a minute. No matter what Hermione said, witches and wizards were always going to have a bias against muggle doctors. “Yeah, maybe I’ll do that,” she said. “Thank you again.”

Hermione hoped her friend would be okay. It was becoming more difficult than she’d first hoped to keep her going long enough to benefit from future gene therapies, but she was still optimistic.

She kept pondering the new discovery as she left. What Hermione hadn’t mentioned to Astoria, but which she could probably figure out, was that this had far greater implications than her illness. If magic were really genetic, then it might be possible to copy it over to a muggle, and that could radically change the upcoming transition process. Although she didn’t know what it would do to the magical ecosystem on a large scale. Hm, come to think of it, she’d never even investigated the effects of muggle-to-magical blood transfusions. It might be worth looking into, both for Astoria’s sake and to document the general effects.

---

5 September 2015

Hermione was put in mind of some unpleasant memories as she walked up to the muggle house
outside Manchester. The last time she’d done something like this, many years ago, they were fleeing from Death Eaters, and some good people had died. This would no doubt go much better than that, but it was still nerve-wracking trying to introduce muggles to phenomena that only appeared in films and storybooks.

Freya Murphy. She was the nearest muggle-born to Doncaster who would be going to Hogwarts with Emmy’s in four years’ time. When did Freya become a common name, she wondered? Well, she’d certainly fit in with the magical world.

It seemed an ideal time to find Emmy a new friend now that many of her older cousins had gone off to Hogwarts this week. Bill, Lee, and Molly were all starting this year, and meanwhile, Marcus, Sasha, and Nadia had returned for their final year. Hawkhouse Green was still growing; there were now three magical families in neighbourhood with a fourth thinking about moving in, but Russell Whitby was still the only magical child Emmy’s age. And since the Ministry had unofficially cleared reaching out to younger muggle-borns, it was high time they got to it.

She wondered idly whether it was getting to be time to tell their muggle neighbours about magic.

It was unfortunate that the Hogwarts Register only gave the child’s name and an address, but this time, Hermione was able to consult a phone book (once she found one), so she knew that the house was occupied by a Danny and Naomi Murphy. She had debated how to introduce herself, since she had the opportunity to plan it out this time. She could guess that it would be much easier if Freya’s parents had seen her doing accidental magic, but that wasn’t certain. The fact that she was in the Registry proved that she had done some, but that didn’t guarantee her parents knew about it.

In the end, though, she decided to throw caution to the wind. She went up and knocked on the door, and a man opened it.

“Are you Danny Murphy?” she asked.

“Yes,” he nodded.

“Pleasure. My name is Hermione Granger, and this may sound completely mental, but I know about your daughter’s special abilities, and I want to help.”

The look on his face was priceless.

25 June 2016

Marcus Aurelius Vector stepped off the Hogwarts express for the last time and took a deep breath. He was done with school, though not with his education. There had been some serious ups and downs for him at Hogwarts over the years. All in all, he’d enjoyed it, but he was ready to move on.

“Hi, Mum. Hi, Aunt Hermione,” he greeted his family.

“Hello, Marcus,” Aunt Hermione said. “All done with school—how does it feel?”

“It’s nice,” he said. “I can definitely do without exams every term.”

His mum hugged him and kissed him on the cheek. “I’m so proud of you, Marcus,” she said. “You’ve grown up so much. And top marks, of course, especially in Arithmancy.”

“Well, I had to work hard to be Aunt Hermione’s apprentice, didn’t I?”
Aunt Hermione chuckled. “You really didn’t need to worry about that,” she said. “You know, in the old days, it was traditional to always apprentice your mentor’s children. If you had the aptitude, I would’ve been happy to take you on regardless.”

“Thanks, Aunt Hermione,” he said. “So what’s the big arithmancy project these days?”

“Well, there are a few active areas of research, but personally, I think it’s past time to lay some more groundwork for magical computers. I’ve dabbled with it over the years, but never seriously done since I was in school myself…”

They walked through the barrier into the muggle world, being careful as always to make sure no cameras were newly placed in an inopportune spot. It wouldn’t do any good to reveal themselves early.

“Emmy and Robin are with George, but they’re excited to meet you,” Aunt Hermione was saying, but he was only half-listening. The muggle world seemed different this year. Angrier, at least some of them. Some of the muggles were quietly brooding, but others were having animated debates, and he caught a few words like “referendum” and “Brexit.”

“Hang on, did I miss something?” he said. “What are they all talking about?”

“Ugh—the referendum on Thursday,” Aunt Hermione grumbled. “It’s all anyone’s talking about this weekend.”

Marcus did a double-take: “Wait a minute, you mean Leave won?”

“That’s what we said. It was quite the shock. I would’ve written you, but you were coming home today anyway, so…”

“Bloody hell. Will this cause trouble? Leaving the EU and stuff?”

“Not for us, Marcus,” Mum assured him. “It’ll be a bit more inconvenient travelling in Europe, I suppose, but our economy isn’t dependent enough on the muggle economy for it to make a difference.”

“What about the repeal of the Statute of Secrecy? Will it be a problem for that?”

“No, the Repeal won’t matter whether Britain is in the EU or not.”

Aunt Hermione wasn’t quite as sanguine, though: “Getting the muggles to accept an independent government and economy within their borders will be far more difficult. And vice versa, a bit. The goblins are already complaining about the possibility that muggles will go cashless. It would throw off their entire currency exchange.”

Marcus shook his head: “Can’t ever be easy, can it?”

9 November 2016

Hermione woke the morning after the American muggle election to a parliament of owls delivering frantic letters from the Repeal Committee. She found out before she even saw a newspaper what had happened: Donald Trump had won. She hurried to the study to check the online news sites to find out the details. Trump had won, narrowly, and without a popular vote majority, thanks to the arcane system they used over there. He’d apparently pulled off an upset by turning out an unexpected number of voters in several economically depressed Midwestern states, or something like that.
There was nothing for it. She’d have to jump back in. She got dressed, kissed George goodbye, and met Percy at the Ministry.

“Well, this is a right mess,” Percy said, holding up a newspaper.

“How bad is it?” Hermione asked.

“MACUSA’s screaming bloody murder,” he said. “They’re talking like they’re afraid to even tell Trump about magic, even though they’ll have to before he takes office.”

“I can imagine he wouldn’t take another President operating on American soil very well,” Hermione offered.

“That’s…part of it, I suppose. But it’s not even about Trump for them, really. They’re saying he’s a rallying point for the kind of—quote, radical conservatism that will start up the witch-hunts again. They’re worried if he’s still President when we do the Repeal, he’ll condemn wizards on camera or be influenced to condemn us, and it’ll cause a lot more trouble, especially with the way he runs his mouth.”

Hermione had to admit that in part. She could very much see Trump badmouthing the magical world without thinking about it and stirring up trouble. And he probably had more ability to do that than anyone else, at least in the Western world. But still, what could they do? “So they want to delay to 2025?” she asked.

“Some of them, it looks like.”

She shook her head: “We’re already getting sloppy now. People aren’t trying as hard to keep the Statute. I don’t know if we can manage another four years now that we’ve committed to repeal. Besides, what are the odds he wins a second term at all?”

Percy gave her a scathing look. “That’s what they said about this election. And about Brexit before that. I don’t even they can make that call. I was talking to the Muggle Liaison Office just now, and they say muggle election polls simply aren’t reliable anymore.”

“Hm, yes, I’ve heard that on the muggle news. But I don’t think there’s anything we can do but face it head-on.”

“I’d appreciate it if you could tell them that, Hermione. MACUSA’s getting everyone riled up. The ICW’s called an emergency meeting.”

Hermione sighed. It was absurd, in a way. A few days ago, her biggest worthy was trying to imitate the magic in Doctor Strange for her nieces and nephews (which hadn’t borne much fruit). Now she was getting dragged back into international politics again. “You know, I sold Donald Trump a necklace and some cuff links once,” she tried to say lightheartedly.

“Really?”

“Yes. I was still in school at the time—well, in tutoring, anyway. He seemed a little eccentric, but I never expected this…”

31 July 2017

Luckily, things settled down after a few days, and they didn’t change the Repeal date. It was proceeding smoothly again, even if the Americans were a little antsy about their preparations. Life
for the extended Weasley Clan went on normally, and before they knew it, another year at Hogwarts had passed, and the, some.

Now, the biggest worry was North Korea, not the United States. The ICW had already put some well-warded agents in there to make sure Kim Jong-Un didn’t fly off the handle when magic was revealed (or before), but even that had started to calm down.

“So I saw this online…thing,” Hermione told Harry at his party. “I don’t think there’s a proper word for it. It’s a sci-fi story, I guess. Danny Murphy sent me a link since he knows I like science fiction. It’s called 17776. It’s a story about a surreal future where everyone plays absurd versions of American football. It’s not my usual fare, but it got me thinking: there’s Kakadu and Quodrangle now. Have you ever thought about designing a broom game on a really big scale once the Statute is repealed?”

Harry tilted his head, looking thoughtful. He probably never would have considered it when they were younger, but with the innovations of the past few years, it was interesting idea. “How big are we talking about?” he said.

“Like the entire US state of Nebraska kind of big.”

Harry’s eyebrows disappeared under his hair. “That’s ridiculous!” he blurted. “That’s not a game. You’d need Tracking Charms just to find the balls.”

Hermione shrugged. “It was just a thought. I can send you the link if you want. They had a lot of other weird variations.” The Potters had taken longer to get internet access, but once there was serious talk about repealing the Statute, they’d gone ahead with it.

“Eh, sure. Why not? It should be good for a laugh, anyway.”

“Alright. And I did some tests on your cloak, too.”

She had finally convinced Harry to loan her his invisibility cloak for study. He’d always hesitated, citing what had happened when his father had loaned it to Dumbledore, but he’d finally given her a chance.

“Oh? What did you find?” he said.

“Harry, I can say conclusively…that there’s something very weird about your invisibility cloak.”

Harry cocked an eyebrow at her. “Like we haven’t known that for the past twenty years?”

“Honestely, Harry. My first thought was to study a normal invisibility cloak to find out why its magic fades and what’s different about yours. But that got complicated. For starters, your cloak isn’t demiguise fur.”

“What?”

“It’s not the same stuff. It’s very similar, but your cloak is noticeably lighter and smoother than a normal one. I put them under a microscope, and yours has smaller fibres. I thought it might be sea silk—an especially fine silk that comes from a kind of oyster—but I called Luna to take a look, and she insisted it was thestral hair, which I’m almost certain it’s not since they hardly have any hair on them. But she had another theory, and this one’s eerily plausible.”

Harry, thoroughly confused by now, asked, “What is it?”
“Luna believes that your cloak is the invisibility cloak of Ignotus Peverell.”

“…Who?”

“As far as we can tell, which isn’t much, to be honest, Ignotus Peverell was a powerful thirteenth century artificer—and maybe an alchemist; the records aren’t clear on what century he was born in. But he also had two brothers named Antioch and Cadmus, and they’re believed by many, Luna included, to be the inspiration for Beedle’s Tale of the Three Brothers.”

“The Deathly Hallows?” Harry said, thinking of the magical “fairy tales” he used to read his children at night. “You think the Deathly Hallows are real, and that my cloak is one of them?”

“I don’t think they were created by Death, no, but I do believe there could be powerful ancient artifacts that inspired fantastic stories like that one. There’s a lot of old magic out there we don’t understand. Mind, I didn’t put much stock in it myself, until I looked up the Peverell family. You see, was is certain is that Ignotus Peverell had a granddaughter, Iolanthe. And Iolanthe Peverell married one Hardwin Potterer, the second of the Potter line.”

Harry’s eyes grew very wide. “Then…it really could be?”

“Yes, if there was a cloak that could last forever made by Ignotus Peverell, then it most likely would have been passed down the male Potter line until it eventually came to you.”

“Bloody hell, and I never would have known.”

“It’s possible your father didn’t know, although I’d bet good money Dumbledore suspected something. Of course, it still doesn’t give me any clue how Peverell made it. Right now, I’m thinking some kind of obscure alchemical process like spinning moonlight into thread or something.”

“Wow,” said Harry. “Wait…so if the cloak is real, then the other two Hallows…?”

“Most likely, yes,” Hermione confirmed. “According to Luna, there are historically-supported tales of a uniquely powerful wand that was passed down the centuries from dark wizard to dark wizard by murder and trickery. I found some of them myself in the Hogwarts library. But the thread is lost in the 1700s. As for the Stone of Resurrection…” She looked around and pulled Harry to the side of the room, lowering her voice so no one could hear them (besides Ginny, of course). “Not much is known about it, but I checked with the Sidereum just to be sure, and I remembered something. Do you remember the ring horcrux in the shack?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“When Dumbledore died, he told us in his messages that the stone in the ring was a powerful and dangerous artifact. There’s a symbol for the Deathly Hallows. It’s not used much any more because Grindelwald used it for his own mark.” She sketched it out on a napkin: a circle inside a triangle, bisected by a line. “I got a good look at that ring when I cut Dumbledore’s finger off—enough for the Sidereum to call it up. It had that symbol on it, Harry. And what’s more, in the memories Dumbledore showed us in fifth year, Voldemort’s grandfather said it had the Peverell Coat of Arms on it.”

“Merlin’s beard, you think that’s the Resurrection Stone?”

“If such a thing exists…maybe. Do you have any idea where it might be?”

“Dunno. Probably put away with the rest of Dumbledore’s stuff. A lot of it just went into storage after the war—Hang on…” He stopped, expressions flitting across his face as happened when he
was in intense conversation with Ginny. After a minute, he frowned. “Yeah, you’re probably right…
Okay, listen, Hermione. We think if there really is any truth to that story, it sounds like that Stone is bad news. This is me and Ginny saying that. We don’t know if we want to start down that path. It might be better to let sleeping crups lie. At least unless we ever get a lead on the Wand.”

Hermione considered that, remembering the story. She’d read it to her own children, too. She’d always thought the Stone was the most dangerous of the Hallows in Beedle’s tale—the most corrupting, the most self-destructive. The Cloak was naturally the wisest choice, and there were those who could wield power responsibly, but what could the Stone do in the long run but slowly consume and destroy? “No, you’re right,” she said. “That’s probably for the best.”
Twenty-One Years Later

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: “Hogwarts will always be there to welcome you home.” —JK Rowling.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. It’s been a long, wild ride. I never expected to put five years into this story, but all good things much come to an end. I encourage anyone who wants it to write a continuation of the Arithmancer-Verse, but for me, it’s finally time to let it go. Next week, I’m going to try to have another chapter ready for Animagus at War.

1 September 2019

“You’re all ready?” Hermione asked her daughter on the platform at King’s Cross.

“Yes, Mum,” Emmy said.

“You have your handbag,” she took stock. “I expect you to use those things only in an emergency.” Hermione had kitted out Emmy with an array of supplies that might have made her look like a doomsday prepper in 1991. Yet call her paranoid, but with the number of times she’d nearly died at Hogwarts, she had good reason. “Your trunk… jumper… wand.” Emmy rolled her eyes and held up her wand—maple and dragon heartstring. Gerald Ollivander had said that maple was a wand for travellers and explorers, and especially when paired with dragon heartstring favoured an active, energetic personality, which certainly described Emmy. It was still a chore to get her to sit still.

“Okay, Emmy. Now, I have one more thing to give you. I didn’t do it before because both of your grandmothers would’ve had a fit if they knew, but I think you deserve to have it.” She handed over a large, folded piece of parchment, which looked blank.

Emmy’s eyes grew wide. “Mum, is this what I think it is?”

“Mm hm. This is the Mathemagician’s Map. You know how to open it: Archimedes’ password. This will show you everything that goes on in Hogwarts. I’m trusting you to use this power for good, okay?”

“Yes! You’re the best, Mum!” She jumped up and hugged Hermione and kissed her on the cheek.

Hermione hugged her back and kissed her on the forehead. Then, George pulled her in for a hug, and Hermione nudged Robin to hug his sister goodbye, too.

“Have fun up there, Emmy,” George said.

“We love you,” Hermione said.

“Love you too, Mum and Dad.” She hopped up onto the train with George helping her push her trunk up.

“Call us on your mirror once in a while,” said George. Enchanted mirrors were becoming more common and more in vogue, especially among wizards with muggle connections who knew was a
smartphone was.

“And say hello to the elves for me,” Hermione added.

“Good luck,” George said. “Don’t do anything we wouldn’t do.”

“George!” Hermione said. “Bad example, Emmy. Don’t you anything your Uncle…Aunt…Just
don’t get in trouble, okay?”

“Don’t worry, Mum, I won’t get caught!”

“Emmy!” But she darted inside the train and vanished from sight. “We’ve created a monster, haven’t we?” Hermione said.

“Yep,” George replied.

They passed the Greengrasses as they left the station. Astoria waved to them happily, her baby on her hip.

God, what a difference four years made.

Astoria Greengrass had undergone a miraculous change since she’d begun her current treatment regimen—a wife and mother now, rather than slowly becoming a shut-in. As Hermione predicted, the muggle doctors had a few tricks up their proverbial sleeves; her curse bore many resemblances to sickle cell anaemia (though it was progressive rather than congenital), and similar treatments helped her. With exchange transfusions of blood and regular doses of Hufflepuff’s fortifying elixir, she was back to a nearly normal lifestyle for the time being.

Her magic didn’t seem to be significantly affected either, which pleased Hermione almost as much as Astoria herself. Astoria was much more relaxed after that first transfusion went well. Even as a non-blood purist, she’d needed a Calming Draught to handle taking muggle blood into her body, but it didn’t weaken her at all.

The doctors said Astoria seemed to have something wrong with her bone marrow as well, but she’d refused a transplant thus far. That was a bridge too far for her, even though Hermione said she suspected magical ability came primarily from the nervous system. The Unspeakables were a long way from demonstrating that, so she wasn’t taking that step unless she had to.

It was still hard to believe. Astoria was here today to see off her niece, but in another decade, she’d be seeing off her own son. Four years ago, she wasn’t sure if she’d be alive today. Now, the muggle doctors said she was likely to see fifty, and Hermione’s confidence seemed to have rubbed off on her. Her friend insisted that was plenty of time to find a cure if one was to be had.

And if her recovery was miraculous, Astoria had thought the idea of having children with her condition was delusional. But when the muggles told her what they could do—muggle prenatal care was miles ahead of the magical version except in preventing early labour, which Healers could basically just force to stop. If there was nothing physically wrong with the child, magic usually took care of the rest except in cases like hers, but muggles had had to figure it out the hard way. It was difficult, but she’d got through it. And who knew? Maybe the future had one more miracle in store for her.

---

Emmy’s cousins, Lily Potter and Roxanne Weasley were joining her this year. (Mum was a little worried how Uncle Harry and Aunt Ginny, and Uncle Fred and Aunt Angie would fare now that they had empty nests.) But also, Emmy’s friends, Russell Whitby and Freya Murphy would be there,
too. As the three of them were the oldest siblings in their respective families, they didn’t have to deal with older brothers and got a compartment for themselves. Freya, though she had plenty of experience with magic around the Granger-Weasleys, still looked around in awe at the magical train and seemed to be as excited as any muggle-born (and magical-born too) to be going to Hogwarts for the first time.

They were joined in their compartment by another first-year, a couple of second-years, and a fourth-year they didn’t know. They enjoyed their ride up to the castle, talking about classes and houses and general goings-on in the magical world. The Repeal of the Statute of Secrecy was always a hot topic, now less than two years away, and Emmy and Freya could tell the others a lot about muggle technology and culture.

The older students were especially interested in Emmy given her mum’s involvement. She also received a few token complaints from purebloods who didn’t like her mum, but the only real spot of trouble came when a couple of rowdy upper-year boys bowled her over while she was walking back from the lavatory.

“Hey, watch where you’re going!” she shouted at them as she pushed herself up again.

“You watch where you’re going, Firstie,” one of the boys said.

“Yeah,” his friend said. “Better learn your place at Hogwarts, or you’ll get run over more than that!”

Emmy brushed off her clothes primly. “I think I’ll find my place at Hogwarts just fine, thank you,” she said.

“Ha, we’ll see about that,” the first boy said.

She tilted her head in thought. “You do know my Mum is the one who knocked down the old Astronomy Tower, right?” she asked.

Both boys’ eyes widened as they recognised her. “You’re…you’re Hermione Granger’s kid?”

“That’s me: Emmy Septima Granger-Weasley, at your service.”

“Right…Okay, uh…sorry about that,” he said, and they both high-tailed it out of there.

Emmy saw Russell and Freya leaning out the door of their compartment. She followed them back inside.

“What was that about?” Freya asked.

“Just a couple jerks.”

“You sure showed them,” Russell said excitedly and laughed. “If anyone give us trouble, we can sic your Mum on them.”

Emmy grinned: “Oh, yes—within reason, of course.”

Freya looked at her in confusion. “But your Mum is so nice, though,” she said.

Everyone else in the compartment looked at each other and snickered. Finally, Emmy told her, “You’ve never seen her angry.” Freya flinched a bit at her tone.

“She fought in the war, you know,” said one of the older students.
“I heard she beat Bellatrix Lestrange in a duel to the death.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” Emmy agreed. “That’s when they destroyed the Astronomy Tower.”

“And she discovered the way to kill dementors—those are soul-sucking demons from beyond the Veil,” one of them explained to Freya.

“I heard she killed a dementor once just by looking at it,” another one said.

“What? No, that was a boggart,” Emmy corrected.

“Oh. Well…did your mum really set an eldritch horror on the Death Eaters in the Battle of Hogwarts?”

Emmy frowned and tried to remember her parents’ stories. “Er…she called down a flood of living dust down from the top of the Great Tower. Does that count? Or do you mean when she angered the Giant Squid, and it smashed the greenhouses to get to her?”

“The Giant Squid attacked her?” Freya squeaked.

“Yeah. She got away, though.”

“The point is, Emmy’s mum is a really scary witch,” Russell said. “She’s probably the most powerful witch in Britain. Some drunk wizard tried to attack us when we were trick-or-treating one year, and Emmy’s mum…” He shuddered.

“She killed him?” Freya gasped.

Emmy shook her head: “No. But he didn’t look human anymore after she was done with him. She’s terrifying when she needs to be. Right after the war, they called Mum the Angel of Death.”

Freya flinched again. This was nothing like the nice Mrs. Granger she knew. She knew Emmy’s parents had fought in the war, but not like this. The stories kept coming: “I heard Hermione Granger cut off Fenrir Greyback’s head with a sword.”

“She cut someone’s head off?” Freya said weakly.

“Uh huh,” said Emmy, “but he was the most evil werewolf in Europe, so he deserved it.”

“I heard she’s the reason Dolores Umbridge and Barty Crouch are in the permanent ward in St. Mungo’s.”

“Well, I heard she broke into Gringotts, stole a dragon, and rode it into battle!”

This last came from the other first-year in the compartment. Everyone stopped and turned toward him. Then, Emmy said, “Who told you that?”

“My older brother—aw, dang it!”

Emmy was the first of her group of friends and cousins to walk up to the Sorting Hat. She was a little annoyed because she couldn’t ask to be Sorted with any of them, but she walked forward with confidence and sat on the stool for Professor Moonshine to put the Hat on her head.

“Well, well, well,” the Hat spoke in her mind, “Emmy Septima Granger-Weasley. It’s a pleasure to meet you. Your mother was quite the interesting character. First child in a long time I changed my
mind about on the stool, and the first one since the days of the witch hunts I Sorted three times.”

“So I’ve heard,” Emmy whispered back. “Things were pretty messed up back then.”

“Yes, and I had some very interesting conversations with her when she sat here.”

“You kept trying to put her in Slytherin, she told me.”

“Not at first. Your mother was a Ravenclaw when she first sat here, but I sent her to Gryffindor because I saw courage in her that needed developing. Later, of course, I said she would do well in Slytherin, and I stand by that.”

“On what feet?” Emmy said before she could stop herself.

“Ha ha. I can see your father in you, too, Miss Granger-Weasley. Now, he was an obvious Gryffindor, simple as that. But you are blessed to live in peacetime, so your needs are different from either of theirs. So where to put you? You’re not the focused, arithmantic force of nature your mother was, but you still have the intellect to excel in Ravenclaw. You’re bold enough for Gryffindor, and it might help you burn off some of that excess energy.”

“Hey! I already get that enough from Mum and Dad, Mr. Hat.”

The Hat chuckled. “Your mother called me that, too. Now, this is interesting. You seem very sure of your place in the wizarding world. Most children would be intimidated in your shoes, afraid of not being able to live up to the expectations of having such brilliant parents.”

Emmy gave the Hat a mental shrug. “It still bothers me a little,” she said. “I know I’ll never be able to match Mum in Arithmancy, but she always says that’s okay, and I need to pursue my own strengths…And Dad says the world couldn’t survive someone with Mum’s skills and Weasley blood anyway.”

The Hat shuddered. “No, Merlin help us,” it said. “So what is your place, Miss Granger-Weasley?”

“Honestly…? Something bigger. Mum thinks too small. She has all these ideas about combining magic with technology—making magical computers, going to space. She loves science fiction, but she never does anything with them. I mean, Killing dementors, saving magical creatures, and tearing down the Statute of Secrecy are all important, but she could’ve been the first witch on the Moon by now if she wanted.”

“Oh ho ho, now this is interesting. With ambition like that, I know just where to put you. Your mother refused, but thanks to her and her friends, I can send you there without fear: SLYTHERIN!”

It was the last thing anyone expected. With as long as the conversation had gone, it had built up the anticipation, and when the Hat shouted the last word, some people actually screamed in fear. The allusions she’d made to Mum’s great duel on the train probably had something to do with that. Professor Sinistra looked ashen. It was her tower Mum had destroyed, after all. But as she made her way to the Slytherin table, Emmy realised that she was happy about it.

“Letter from Hogwarts,” Hermione said as she took the envelope from the owl.

“Already?” George said in surprise. “Emmy didn’t get in trouble her first night, did she?”

“She’d better not have. Hm, it’s from Professor Toots.” She opened the note and read aloud: “Dear Mr. and Mrs. Granger-Weasley. I thought you might like to know that your daughter, Emmy, has
been Sorted into my house, Slytherin. We are happy to have her, and we are confident she will go far with our help. Best regards, Tilden Toots, Professor of Herbology.”

George and Hermione just stared at each other for a minute, but the silence was broken by Robin: “She’s a Slytherin?!”

“Apparently so,” she answered.

“Bloody—” George started, then stopped himself.

“I suppose I can see it,” Hermione said. “You don’t have a problem with it, do you?”

“No! Of course not! I’m just surprised. I thought she’d be Ravenclaw for sure. And…maybe a little nervous.”

“I don’t think anyone will give her a hard time in Slytherin, George.”

“Not that. I’m just thinking, the daughter of Britain’s greatest prankster and the woman who kills dementors for fun is in Slytherin.”

Hermione’s eyes grew wide: “Merlin help us all…”

“We’re doomed,” Robin quipped.

17 March 2020

It took six months before Hermione was called up to the school for something her daughter did. Longer than it would have taken for her if Dumbledore had been following Professor Flitwick’s standards, but that wasn’t her fault.

It was telling that Flitwick had specifically requested her and not George. She wasn’t sure if that was because he still didn’t believe George was sufficiently responsible, or because Emmy had done something that defied explanation. With her luck, it was probably both. So she told George to keep an eye on Robin and Apparated up to Hogwarts, walking inside in a more dignified way than the last time she was here. Several students gasped and ducked out of sight when they saw her. She wasn’t sure if that was related to the incident, but it wasn’t a good sign.

“Ah, good evening, Professor Granger,” called Nearly-Headless Nick as he passed her in the corridors.

“Good evening, Sir Nicholas,” she replied. “It’s been an eventful day here, I take it.”

“Indeed. Your daughter and her friends have certainly made their mark on the school.”

“So I’ve heard,” she groaned. “I’m going up to talk to Professor Flitwick about her now.”

“Oh? Do try not to be too hard on her, Professor Granger. Emmy is quite a friendly and engaging girl. I don’t think she meant to hurt anyone. And I don’t remember ever seeing another first-year who was able to scare Peeves.”

“Peeves?”

“Yes, something about a ritual she threatened him with.”

Hermione thought back. A decade ago, she had threatened to use the Dementor-Killing Ritual on
Peeves. It figured Emmy would pick up on that. She wondered for a moment what that would actually do and shuddered. A thousand years’ worth of chaotic energy? It might turn the entire Hogwarts grounds into something out of Dr. Seuss.

“I’ll be sure to be fair with her, Sir Nicholas,” she assured him. But the exchange had got her thinking about spirits in general. She was at the point of walking away when she stopped and turned back to him. “Nick,” she said. “I’ve just thought—I’ve never done much with soul magic as it pertains to actual ghosts. Do you think you could make a visit to the Department of Mysteries sometime? I know they don’t have a good reputation with ghosts, but if we act more cautiously…I think we might be able to find a way to finish cutting your head off.” And that was one for the list of sentences she’d never thought she’d say.

“Oh!” said Nick, looking very touched. “That’s…that’s very thoughtful of you, Hermione. If you could do that…I think perhaps I could make a visit to London. You know where to find me if anything comes of it.” He saluted her, then continued on his way.

Hermione also continued on until she came to the tall gargoyle, and she walked into the Headmaster’s Office.

“Slytherin!” the Sorting Hat shouted.

“Oh, shut up!” she said.

Emmy jumped in her seat when she heard her and spun around. When she saw Hermione, she smiled awkwardly and gave her a timid wave. “Hi, Mum,” she said.

“You, Emmy,” Hermione said coolly. “Hello, Professor Flitwick.”

“Thank you for coming, Professor Granger. Please have a seat.”

“Thank you.” She sat down. “So, I suppose this was coming sooner or later. What mischief has Emmy been causing?”

“It seems,” Flitwick said, “that a small group of Slytherin students including Miss Granger-Weasley decided that St. Patrick’s Day should be celebrated with a reenactment of St. Patrick driving the snakes from Ireland—with the snakes as the heroes.”

Hermione closed her eyes and took a deep breath, then turned to her daughter. “What did you do?”

“I swear I didn’t know about the Ashwinders!” Emmy said.

“I’m sure you didn’t. What did you do, Emmy?”

“It was just a bit of fun, Mum.”

“The students released live snakes in the school, Professor Granger,” Flitwick said. “Snakes with Engorgement Charms on them to, and I quote, ‘make it more dramatic.’”

Emmy folded her arms. “None of them were poisonous,” she grumbled. “They were just garden snakes.”

“Garden snakes large enough to attack students, Miss Granger-Weasley,” he said sharply. “There were injuries.”

At that, Hermione gave Emmy her best “Mummy’s very cross” stare—not as good as Molly’s, but
her reputation counted for a lot—and said, “I think you’d better tell me the whole story, Emmy.”

Emmy started talking. She certainly hadn’t been acting alone. There were three others—older students—plus some informal advice from James Potter and Morgan Lupin. They were planning on releasing some snakes in the school—big, but “Harmless…er, mostly harmless?” she said. Then, “St. Patrick” would come and try to fight them off, and aside from a few other supposedly-minor things, that was it.

Hermione shook her head. “So you wanted the snakes to win? That sounds…culturally insensitive.”

“Hey, there are Irish people in Slytherin, too,” she said indignantly. “And anyway, they weren’t going to win. They were just going to retreat and say, ‘We’ll be back!’ C’mon, Mum, it was fun.”

“Until the Ashwinders,” Hermione said shrewdly.

“That was Brendan Byrne! I didn’t know what he was planning. I think he came up with it on the spot.”

“Mr. Byrne was their St. Patrick,” Flitwick explained. “He attempted to use a pair of Engorged Ashwinders to stage a final battle against fire-breathing serpents—not knowing that when you use an Engorgement Charm on an Ashwinder, it’s more likely to simply explode. He burnt down half the Great Hall and Dungeon Two and is currently in the Hospital Wing.”

“And you think he was acting alone on that?” Hermione said.

“He’s never done anything that extreme before, but he’s always been a bit of a troublemaker. It’s plausible.”

“Alright. You’re off the hook for that part, Emmy. Was there anything else?”

“The reason I called you is that we’re still trying to collect all the snakes,” Flitwick replied. “Something strange is going on with that, Your daughter numbered them to tell them apart, and we’re still looking for Numbers Four and Seven. I don’t see how she could have made them disappear—”

“There are no four and seven. It’s a standard muggle trick,” Hermione said without missing a beat.

“Um…Mum?” Emmy said. “I only left one number out. There is supposed to be a Four. It must have slunk off while we were trying to deal with the Ashwinders.”

“Oh, no—”

“Don’t worry, Mum! I can find it.” She quickly pulled out the Mathemagician’s Map.

“Merlin’s beard!” Flitwick cried faintly. “You gave her that map, Hermione?”

“Yes, and I told her to use that power for good.”

“It was for good! We wouldn’t want to release snakes in the castle without being able to track them!” Emmy tapped her wand to the Map. “Dos moi pa sto, kai tan gan kinaso.”

Hermione gave her a look that said she wasn’t fooled for a second, but Emmy ignored her. With surprising deftness, she tapped through the icons on the map, isolating one symbol and zeroing in on its location. “There it is!” she said cheerfully. Then she frowned and squinted at the Map. No, that can’t be right. It looks like it’s in the wall.
Flitwick groaned: “The basilisk’s tunnels. It got into the plumbing. I’ll ask Professor Toots if he can do anything with Slytherin’s Locket to draw it out. The last thing we need is it popping up in one of the toilets.” He studied the Map to ascertain its location and then rushed over to his Floo to tell Professor Toots where it was.

When he returned, Hermione was still trying to work out what her daughter had done. “Emmy, tracking animals isn’t one of the Map’s functions,” she said. “How did you do this?”

“Easy. I dug into the code and found the part you used to tag Argus Filch’s cat when he was here. Then I just wrote in new tags for the snakes.”

Hermione stared at Emmy in shock, and then she put her head in her hands: “Oh, God. I’ve become the muggle parent whose kids know more about computers than I do.”

Emmy grinned: “You’re the one who gave me root access, Mum.”

“Yes, and I have half a mind to revoke your privileges and make you a regular user, young lady. And don’t get any ideas about hacking it. I may not be as tech-savvy as you, but I can implement RSA on this thing in the space of an afternoon.”

Professor Flitwick cut in: “Forgive me, Professor Granger. Are you two still speaking arithmancy?”

Hermione and Emmy stopped and stared at Professor Flitwick. Then, they both laughed.

17 July 2020

“I don’t see why I need to be here for this, Mr. President,” Hermione said.

Samuel Quahog spoke curtly to her as they walked. They still didn’t get along that well. “This whole thing was your idea, Granger. You probably know the most personally about bridging the gap between the muggle and magical worlds; you’re ideally suited to talk to major figures like her.”

Hermione was pretty sure she wasn’t the only one, especially with MACUSA’s great resources, but she went along anyway. It couldn’t hurt to take a personal hand in the transition as long as she knew what she was talking about.

They passed through layers of security, men in black suits with sunglasses and earpieces, among others, and check-ins and appointment-wrangling that had to be carefully set up in advance by MACUSA agents. Finally, they were led to a well-furnished, but temporary office where a poised Caribbean-Asian woman rose to meet them.

“Senator Harris,” Quahog said. “Congratulations on winning the nomination. My name is Samuel Quahog, and this is my associate from Britain, Hermione Granger. We’re here to speak with you about a matter of global importance that will occur early in the next Presidential term…”

1 September 2020

Robin Granger-Weasley was Sorted into Hufflepuff House, to the relief of a number of the denizens of Hogwarts who had feared what might happen if the two Granger-Weasley children could team up in the same house. Hufflepuff was a bit of a surprise, too; he could have made Ravenclaw if he’d wanted, but George and Hermione could agree that it suited him. He was always the quieter and more reserved of their children, but he’d worked hard, played well with others, and he was a truly reliable friend, as much as you could tell with an eleven year old. They were confident he’d do well
there, even if Hermione still had to wonder if the Sorting Hat was messing with her a little since her two children were now in the two houses she wasn’t.

---

5 November 2020

Bonfire Night could be raucous, but from the aftermath here, it looked like this one really got out of hand.

“It was a giant flamin’ lizard, I tell you! One second, the bonfire’s goin’ nice. The next, the logs start movin’, an’ then I blink, an’ there’s a twenty-foot lizard crawlin’ outta the fire! All glowin’ red like hot coals!”

Ron Weasley noted the witness’s testimony and told him to wait with the others before he joined Hermione in inspecting the scene.

“Salamander?” she asked him.

“Must’ve been. I’ve never heard of one that big, though.”

“It can happen,” she said. “Engorgement Charm or some other spell. How many people were hurt?”

“A couple dozen. None seriously. Lucky the Fire Department was here. They blasted it with water, and that killed it pretty quick. There was an explosion of steam, though. That hurt some more people. We’ve already collected the body. It was ‘only’ twelve feet long, but still…I reckoned you’d want to take a look before we decide what to do,” Ron said. “The Office of Misinformation wants us to start Obliviating people.”

“Ugh. Let me check if it’s up…” Hermione pulled out her phone and went to Twitter. That should be the fastest to update, although even it often took a few minutes when minutes counted. But with a few keywords, she found the video of the beast erupting from the heart of the fire. “No good. It’s already online,” she said. “There’s no way we can cover this up by now. We’ll have to pass it to the Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee. Say it was an art piece or a publicity stunt gone wrong. Maybe try to claim it was a fake, but that’s tricky.”

“Gotcha,” Ron said. “Honestly, it’s kinda better this way. I feel really awkward doing Memory Charms on muggles now we’re getting so close to Repeal.”

“Which is precisely our problem,” she replied. “It’s only going to get harder as we get closer to it, but some people won’t be diverted by anything less.”

With only six months before Repeal, so many people were uncomfortable using Memory Charms on muggles that they couldn’t keep up the policy anymore, in or out of the Ministry. They’d already eliminated the Obliviator Office through attrition and transfers. The Office of Misinformation was set to go too, but they’d still need it up until the announcement. In fact, it seemed like the whole Ministry was atrophying in these last months, given that half its mandate was maintaining the Statute of Secrecy in the first place. One of the less anticipated consequences of the Repeal, although there would surely be a glut of new jobs once muggles were told of the possibilities.

Of course, a few offices were booming. Arthur had been promoted to the head of a whole new division of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement: the Division of Muggle Protection. That was sure to need a lot of support once wizards only had to mask their identities if they wanted to harm muggles, not the existence of magic. Not to mention minor, casual uses of magic on muggles, like a Confundus Charm to pass a driver’s test or something.
“Professor Granger,” another Auror called her over. He showed her a sample of some kind of residue. “We found something magical in the fire. Do you recognise it, by any chance?”

Hermione did a few diagnostic spells. She couldn’t identify exactly what the substance was, but she could see the general shape. “Yes, a little,” she said. “It looks like someone added some kind of dry-base potion to the fire along with an awful lot of calcined ash. My alchemy’s a bit rusty, but I think that’s a procedure designed to cause the elementals to grow to enormous size. Very unstable, of course. We’re lucky the explosion wasn’t worse.”

“Bugger. This is bad,” Ron said.

“I know. This was a targeted act, trying to get us to reveal ourselves early. And I’m sure it’s only going to get worse. No one would’ve dared pull a stunt like this ten years ago, but now they know we’re going there anyway, and that we’ll be reluctant to cover it up. I’d bet a lot of money whoever did this will keep trying.”

“It’s gonna be a long six months,” Ron said.

2 May 2021

By the ruling of the Repeal Committee, the Revelation of the Magical World would occur at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in order to project a neutral position and get as large an international audience as possible. The ICW’s arrangements with the UN delegates and staff had been in the works for over a year. Miraculously, they’d held it all together despite troublemakers trying to derail it or blow their cover. They’d finally had to tell ordinary witches and wizards to police each other for those last few weeks—to wait for the announcement and not to let anyone get away with anything.

Everything was planned out for tomorrow. They would go live at eleven o’clock in the morning—eight in the morning in California, eleven at night in Japan. Some people had suggested they delay to Tuesday, but they’d declined; it wasn’t like anything would preempt them. Now, representatives from all over the magical world had gathered in New York, under layers of both magical and muggle security such as even Hermione had never seen before.

With input from her and others, the Committee had brought representatives from many (though not all) of the non-human sapient races of the magical world. Goblins, Pukwudgies, house elves, vampires, Sasquatch, and merfolk were all represented, and a couple others with which she was less familiar. A sampling of magical animals were also brought in, including a unicorn, and they’d somehow called in Robert Irwin from Australia to help out. Apparently, the Australian Ministry had been talking to him for months.

Hermione was still going over sections of her speech. As the instigator of the Repeal, she was expected to take an active role in the announcement. Part of it was a summary of her personal story of how she had determined the Statute needed to be repealed and how she had fought for the change. Another part was to try to start bridging the knowledge gap between magic and muggle science and technology, since she was well versed in both.

Good morning. My name is Dr. Hermione Granger, and I am the original sponsor of the motion to repeal the Statute of Secrecy.

That was about as far as she was willing to go. She wanted to downplay her role in the transition and avoid the most awkward questions about it.
By trade, I am an Arithmancer. In non-magic terms, the closest equivalent is probably an applied physicist. I also happen to be the founder and sole proprietor of Archimedes Jewellers.

Only getting it out of the way there so she wouldn’t have to worry about it later. She’d have to consult with the Committee on that. She skipped down to the meat of her speech. This was where, even now, she was anticipating the potential problems and trying to address them early.

I know many people will be angry that we kept ourselves hidden for so long. The fact is, we were afraid. The last time wizards went amongst non-magicals openly, we were being hanged and burnt at the stake. In more recent centuries, the growing population and the even faster growth of technology of the non-magical world frightened us. Also, the ripple effects of the Second World War caused us to label all would remove the walls between us a danger. But with time and patience, we have healed; we have learnt, and we have gained the courage to step out of the shadows.

Too much? She wasn’t sure. Of course, she’d have to run all of it by the Committee again before she committed to the final version. She looked at another section—something many of the muggles she’d talked to had raised especially loudly once they thought about it.

To those who are wondering why we haven’t helped in the larger world: we haven’t been entirely idle, but we can’t solve all the world’s problems with magic. The world never has been nor will it ever be as neat as that. To give you a bit of a perspective, if you’re looking for a cure for cancer, we don’t have one. Wizards…don’t get cancer. We don’t know why, and we don’t get off easily, either. We have magical diseases that are just as horrifying and deadly, although we have admittedly made more progress in curing them. I will be the first to push for a search for a magical cure for cancer, but at present, we know very little about it.

On the other hand, if you want a cure for the common cold, we do have one, but we can’t make enough of it for the general population. We don’t have the magical resources, being so small in number, and we don’t know what all the effects would be if we tried to multiply them greatly and farm magical plants and animals on an industrial scale.

There was more—a lot more when it came to specific questions that might be asked after, but she hoped that would get the basic perspective across.

If you’re wondering whether we can give magic to those who don’t have it, personally, I believe it will be possible with modern gene therapy techniques like CRISPR, but that’s far from proved.

She really didn’t know how much detail to go into here. Should she mention how such a drastic increase in magic in the ecosystem could have unpredictable and dangerous side effects? Should she say how unleashing the huge number of mathematicians in the world on magic could lead to horrible, possibly world-devastating consequences if it fell into the wrong hands? Should she mention that a lot of people were more interested in a way to take magic away before they could give it out for the magical world’s own political reasons? For now, she stuck to the basics.

But if we work together, with magic and technology combined, I know we can do amazing things that we could never do separately. What we did at the South Pole was only a sample…My thirteen-year-old daughter wants to be the first witch on the Moon. I don’t even know if that’s possible; we don’t know if magic works the same in space, but at the rate she’s going, you might want to tell Elon Musk to hurry it up.

Yeah, it needed a bit of work, but that was what she wanted—something aspirational—something that could give people hope and a reason to look to the future in the chaotic mess that was sure to follow the announcement. She hoped that would make a difference when she knew there would be unrest.
In the end, she was pleased with how far they’d come. After all this time, they were probably as ready as they were ever going to be. Now, it was time for the final phase. The Committee was starting twenty-four hours of controlled leaks to ensure every media platform on the planet would tune in. That had been the hardest part: getting things just right to ensure everyone knew to watch without the story getting away from them, but she was confident they had it pinned down.

The next morning, they walked out onto the stage, and the world changed.

*THE END*

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!