**Persephone Potter and the Philosopher's Stone**

By **EdytheCullen**

**Summary**

What if the Potter's had a girl?

Persephone Potter is not normal, no matter how hard her family pushes her to be, and there's nothing anyone can do to suppress it. A lively girl with a hobby of reading Greek Mythology and doing ballet, she's whisked away from her world to one that calls her a hero and a savior, a world that calls her The Girl Who Lived. Follow Persephone Potter on her journey and board the Hogwarts—this should be an interesting year...

Let me know any comments or ideas you have for this story in my email!
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**Notes**

A welcome to all readers!

I've been recently obsessed with all female Harry Potter stories, genderbenders, but found I could not find a single decent one, other than Victoria Potter, you all should read: Victoria Potter by Taure. Because I couldn't find any stories, I decided I would write one. I won't stray far from canon but Persephone Potter is her own girl, with her own experiences and
her own personality.

Any characters you don't recognize from canon belong to me--the rest to J.K. Rowling. I hope you all enjoy!
Persephone Lilith Potter was a girl who wanted to live up to her name—once she learned what her name really meant, of course.

In Greek mythology, Persephone was the goddess of spring time, of flowers and of vegetation, while simultaneously being the goddess of the underworld, the queen who ruled by her husband. Many say that Persephone was kidnapped by the god, who imprisoned her in his kingdom and forced her to wed him. Her father, Zeus, relented to her mother, Demeter, and he forced Hades to bring her back, though Persephone had eaten pomegranate seeds which now eternally tied her to the underworld. Instead, however, she would return to her mother’s care every spring, hence the symbolism, and return to her husband as autumn begins.

This is how people believed that the world could change—from season to season, all because Persephone had eaten a fruit of the underworld. As her mother must let her return to the Underworld, the world turns cold. When she and her mother reunite, the world becomes warm and thus springtime has arrived. Persephone (Potter) chose to believe in a different version of the myth, because of how bitter the mother-daughter relationship of Persephone and Demeter struck her. Persephone (Potter) liked to believe her namesake followed a path into the underworld and decided to stay, having heard the cries of despair of the dead and wanting to comfort them. Some even older versions of the myth were that she was the original Ruler of the Underworld. Persephone feared only for her favorite version, the desire to comfort the dead, and she stuck by it. She liked the idea of her being independent rather than being told what to do by her mother and husband.

Her middle name, Lilith, surprised her by having a similar story. Lilith was the first wife of Adam, as in Adam and Eve, and she rebelled against the belief that she was to be his inferior. She was kicked out of the Garden of Eden and cast into biblical Hell, where she was made to be the mother of demons and monsters. Upon further inspection, Persephone learned that she was not cast away but simply left Adam when he acted like her superior and found that she was very dangerous, in some myths. She mothered demons—and some say she was related to the first stories about vampires.

She rather enjoyed her names’ origins, much to the displeasure of her aunt, who thought both female icons were hideous in their markings of the world and should have been forgotten. Persephone didn’t mind—she and her aunt barely agreed on anything. Aunt Petunia always sat Persephone down to teach her to sew and to cook and taught her not to speak unless spoken to. She made her do ballet, which Persephone did not mind much, until she had to pull Persephone’s hair into a tight bun. She didn’t get new clothes and barely had enough actual ballet clothes. The other part of their relationship was saying that she needed a better haircut. Unbeknownst to her aunt, whenever she wanted it to, her hair grew longer after a haircut she didn’t particularly enjoy. It was one way she lived up to her what her namesakes symbolized—rebellion.

It was the one thing her mother had done right, according to the myth of her aunt’s sister.

Persephone thought maybe she looked a fair lot like her mother. She didn’t have a lot of evidence to support her claim, but what she had scratched the surface of biology and human genes and the likes, she must have had her mother’s looks.

There were no pictures of her parents in her uncle and aunt’s, where she lived, and had been living since she was a year old, to help support her claim. Consequently, she did not know what her parents looked like—she did not remember them either. When they dropped her off and left her
here, on the Dursley’s doormat, they didn’t think to leave a picture of them.

Persephone thought that this made sense that they wanted to be rid of her and leave her with not a trace of who they were, but then again, this is what her aunt had told her. She’d learned quick enough that her aunt, from the few words she had ever spoken of her mum and dad, didn’t seem to like them. She was sure there was good reason—they’d abandoned their daughter on the Dursleys’ doorstep, after all—and enough reason for Persephone herself not to like them, but she got a strong sense that her aunt’s intense dislike went deeper than just that, especially when the story changed when she was seven—that her parents had been in a car accident, but that had been completely ignored afterwards.

It was her aunt that provided the sufficient amount of evidence that she’d started looking like her mum. Sometimes, Aunt Petunia would silently stare at Persephone, a sort of sad look in her eye that sometimes appeared in Uncle Vernon’s eyes when he spoke of his days as a schoolboy; nostalgia? Persephone sometimes wondered what had gone wrong before her mother had left her on her sister’s doorstep.

Sometimes she thought she should hate her mother as Aunt Petunia did but whenever she thought of her mom or dad, she found a bitter aching in her chest that made her shoulders drop over. She hated the feeling so she tried not to think of her parents too often, though Aunt Petunia was getting the look in her eye more and more as she grew older.

She and her aunt did not look anything alike. Her aunt always pined her blonde hair up in the same curled to the side do. She was a tall, thin woman with a pearly white complexion that she always applied rouge to. She had a strange obsession over how her skin looked—she was adamant on her skin looking smooth. Persephone noticed how much women wanted the smooth feature, especially as they grew older. One of the neighbors that her aunt spied on with her abnormally long neck had plastic surgery to make her skin smoother—but it didn’t look too smooth any more.

Persephone, on the other hand, had the strangest idea that she was able to change her appearance at will—at a very strong will, that is. Usually, her hair was a dark red, curly and thick and too long for aunt Petunia’s liking. Sometimes, if she concentrated hard enough, she could make her hair darken to a coal black.

It wasn’t just her hair—should she want to, she could make her nails grow longer and arch her eyebrows differently and even sometimes make herself taller. When she was a girl, she believed that her hair became redder and redder because of the exposure to sun and would darken in the shadows of her small bedroom. Now, when she wanted to, she would will for it to turn black and then red. A pretty color, too, her natural hair, though sometimes she does make it turn redder and lighter in the sun. But she liked being natural.

She did have a natural nice little button nose, and plump lips, though they were damaged from how much she bit on them. Her teeth were perfectly straight and her eyes were the prettiest colors. If she didn’t have such a usually messy appearance, perhaps she’d fare better in the Durlsey home.

Her messy appearance always defined the line—there was no resemblance between Petunia Dursley and Persephone Lilith Potter.

And speaking of her aunt,

"Up! Get up! Now!" was what broke her out of her reverie in the tiny cupboard, under the stairs. She’d been awake for hours, a green light taunting her right out of her sleep and was drowsy for most of that time period, just about ready to give into the sleepiness had her aunt not woken her right back up.
“Are you up yet?”

“Nearly.” She mumbled. While her parents seemed awful, what with the way aunt Petunia rarely spoke of them, Persephone didn’t really think her aunt and uncle were any better, other than the fact that they kept her. Up until a year ago, she lived in the cupboard under the stairs. Then, Dudley’s friend had said something to their parents’ about Dudley’s messy little cousin and the Dursley’s ‘moved’ her into the smallest bedroom of the house.

The house the Dursley’s lived in had three bedrooms, which would have been convenient when they received a baby Persephone on their doorstep. Instead of allowing her to occupy the smallest of the three rooms, they shoved her in the cupboard under the stairs. The room had been given to Dudley, her cousin and their only son, to use as a second room, for all the toys he’d collected over the years, though the broken toy pile was much bigger than the actual pile of toys.

The argument over her moving into the bedroom was a long one, but in the end, the Dursleys made her move into the bedroom. It was aunt Petunia’s responsibility to make it seem she had a normal little girl’s life (as she’d thought this was their goal), so instead of bare walls and a bed, her room became all flower themed. Floral wallpaper, with white lace curtains and flower beddings and just a very floral scent that came natural to Persephone (how symbolic). It was rather strange, the obvious floral theme Petunia gathered for her niece, but it wasn’t very uncommon for her to be just the slightest nice to her.

When it was just the two of them in the house, when Dudley went over to his friend’s house and when Uncle Vernon was at work, Aunt Petunia would change. She seated her in front of the mirror and brushed out her hair with the brush that Dudley would later break over Persephone’s head. She would gently part the curls into waves of thick red silk and stroke them carefully, almost hovering above her curls.

Aunt Petunia worked very hard to teach Persephone what she called, “being a proper young lady”, something Persephone had a hard time doing. She would make her sit by her in a certain position when she would sew and she would make her change the flowers in the bedrooms. She made her cook and clean and keep her back straight and her hair perfectly kept. If she didn’t try so hard, Persephone’s hair would be in its natural state of chaos. It was lucky she could tame it with seconds of hard concentration.

Most of the things aunt Petunia made her do bothered her—she enjoyed the ability to do these things, that she could have this tiny piece of independence of being able to cook for herself—but the way she always worded it…

Apparently, girls should be seen and not heard—they should grow up sweet and gentle and obedient. No cursing, no messes, she would be cooking, cleaning and keeping a home. She hated the idea of a woman that her aunt painted in her head, but nonetheless, she appreciated the rare nice moments.

She assumed that her aunt had wanted a daughter and tried to make Persephone into something of a daughter until she started looking like her mum and she tagged her as the wrong sort of girl.

It was nicer than most things that her aunt did, but nonetheless, nice.

But today, on Dudley’s birthday, was not a day she would catch a glimpse of a slightly nice Aunt Petunia.

Persephone heard her walking toward the kitchen, away from her cupboard, and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. She pulled her red hair back into a braid the neighbors’
oldest child, Diana, had shown her how to do. She liked Diana, though she was a few years her senior. She always agreed to watch her when the Durlseys were not in the house, and she would always let her read whatever she wanted and watch whatever she liked.

When she was dressed, she crawled out of her cupboard. There was sun outside, the whole house was flooded in sunlight. She hadn’t been out of her cupboard in two proper days, so the bright light burned her eyes slightly. Persephone much preferred the rain, it helped her take care of the neighbors’ gardens. During the year, she did odd jobs in her neighborhood because she had a strange aptitude at being good at several things; gardening, cleaning and cooking. Her name, after the Greek goddess of flowers, was well fitting. The earth just did as she wanted it to.

She came across as very handy. And she was—she knew how to fix things, not all things, but lots of things. She had once been told in school that she couldn’t help in something because she was a girl and couldn’t keep herself from becoming mad and fixing the thing anyway. She liked proving people wrong—she liked doing things on her own. Why should she have someone do something for her when she could do it herself? Something broken? She could fix it—or she would die trying.

This was something about Persephone Aunt Petunia despised more than even her appearance.

The fixing of things was something the Dursleys’ often bullied her for, how no girl should be able to do the things she could. Everything she learned on the subjects came from her knowledge of all the books she’d read on each task—she could even fix computers and televisions. The Johnsons’ (Diana’s family) were very nice about her reading their textbooks and manuals—they found it a little odd but she didn’t care much. Because Diana’s mother was an engineer herself, she had a good teacher guiding her. They built a laptop—it was mostly Diana’s mother—and she got to keep it, too.

She earned a good fare for each odd job, and planned to save it all up for college, like Diana was doing. She was just very good at fixing most things—solving too. She was good at math, too—she could always solve those tricky math problems when she broke them down into steps. Sciences was also a very good subject, for the teacher favored her. She was tutored during lunches for free, just for the sake of it. She was generally good at school—her severe interest in anything but home life probably factored in greatly.

But school was nearly over and it was now Dudley’s birthday—the most important time of year. Her cousin was usually bullying her in secret, as apparently, boys bullying girls was greatly frowned upon, but today, he could bully her all in all as a gift. She had no math homework of his to complete for him, so it was back to the summer season of physical abuse and maniac taunting from him.

She made her way quietly and tiredly to the kitchen. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley’s birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was a mystery to her, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise—unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley’s favorite punching bag was Persephone, but he couldn’t often catch her.

She didn’t look it, but Persephone was quick, very fast. Perhaps it had something to do with her majority of time living in a dark cupboard, with more than a dangerous amount of meals lost, but Persephone had always been small and skinny for her age. She was built small and fast, and usually looked skinnier because of the donated clothes that Diana Johnson had given to her. Most of her wardrobe was either Dudley’s old clothes that Persephone had cut up and made look more feminine with the needling that she’d been taught by aunt Petunia, or Diana’s childhood clothes.
They were much more fitting to her, because Diana, too, had been skinny, though probably not to the point of Persephone. She did have much more feminine style, which Persephone adored, but could not make her seem any more nourished.

Another thing about Persephone’s appearance was that she had a very thin scar on her forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning. She had had it as long as she could remember, and the first question she could ever remember asking her Aunt Petunia was how she had gotten it. Aunt Petunia had no answer, and set the rule that she was not allowed to ask further questions.

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Persephone was turning over the bacon.

"We ought to cut that girl's hair!" he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Persephone needed a haircut. While aunt Petunia was mostly in charge of how Persephone looked, she must have gotten hundreds of haircuts at Uncle Vernon’s command. In his mind, he thought a haircut to the nape of her neck would make the messy curls vanish.

She'd once gotten her hair cut so short she could barely feel the ghost of it against her shoulders, with horribly cut bangs and straightened out. She’d cried for her long hair but in the morning, it was back and red and seemed to look brushed out into its natural ringlets. This caused a fright in Aunt Petunia that she refused to acknowledge and made Persephone smile at herself in the mirrors she passed all day.

Persephone was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. His face was large and pink and, unlike aunt Petunia, did not have much neck. His eyes were small, watery yes, and his thick blond hair was always brushed to the side smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel —Persephone often thought that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.

Persephone put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was a challenge since there was barely any room. While she pulled off this impossibility, Dudley took on a challenge of his own—counting his presents.

His face fell and Persephone waited for a storm.

"Thirty-six," he said, looking up at his mother and father. "That's two less than last year."

"Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, it's here under this big one from Mommy and Daddy."

"All right, thirty-seven then," said Dudley, going red in the face.

Persephone was well rehearsed in spotting the signs that she may need to take cover in case of one of his surprise tantrums. She was also well rehearsed in never showing any signs of emotion around her family. Should her uncle find any trace of some emotion other than blank, she would have the wind knocked out of her very quickly.

Aunt Petunia was just as good as sensing the danger, too, because she quickly said, “And we'll buy you another two presents while we're out today. How's that, popkin? Two more presents. Is that all right?”

Dudley thought for a moment, before he finally said slowly, "So I'll have thirty ... thirty..." And this was evidence on why she was always bullied into doing his homework—especially his math homework. He could not do even simple math.
"Thirty-nine, sweetums," Aunt Petunia said quickly.

"Oh." Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. "All right then."

Uncle Vernon chuckled. "Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. 'Atta boy, Dudley!" He ruffled his son’s blonde hair.

Persephone resisted the urge to roll her eyes. She nibbled on her toast, watching Dudley unwrap the racing bike, remote control drone camera, sixteen new DVDs, renewable gift cards for his computer that he would flex over Persephone’s old computer. When she finally finished her bland toast, she waited until she could be allowed outside.

She daydreamed, for a moment as she stared at the sun filtering into the kitchen, of floating on the light. She liked the idea of the god Apollo lighting the world up, as Socrates had always said the sun was there to enlighten the truth to the naked eye. Apollo, the god of the sun and the truth…hm.

The phone rang, making Persephone jump out of her reverie. Aunt Petunia rushed around to get it while Dudley opened a golden wrist watch. She returned a few minutes later looking solemn and concerned.

“Oh, Vernon, bad news,” She said, “Mrs. Figg’s broken her leg. She can’t take her.”

Persephone looked up. Whenever the opportunity arose that Persephone could be sent to Mrs. Figg’s house, the Dursleys would send her. They knew how much she hated that house. It always smelled like cabbage and there were dead stuffed cats on the shelves. The mad old woman would always have something for Persephone to fix and Persephone didn’t want to argue with the woman about how nothing was broken and that taking apart a chair to figure out why it squeaked wasn’t worth it. On good days, they spent the day looking at pictures of cats.

She didn’t care how much she loved cats—she hated it there.

Diana was a much preferred babysitter because she didn’t act like a babysitter. She acted like she liked Persephone, like they were friends. Diana often taught her different hairstyles and let her read whatever she wanted—Percy Jackson usually—and they often times watched old movies too. Diana always laid out all sorts of snacks and took her to the library and even the theatres. It was so much fun, though she had to act like she hated it there because the Dursleys would never let her come again if they thought she’d had a good time.

The only reason she was not to be over at her house was because there was an unexpected incident that had kept the Johnsons busy for two weeks.

"Now what?" Aunt Petunia asked. Persephone was not ashamed in hoping that she would be left home alone. While she had very little books to read, all of which being textbooks on school subjects and how to repair things, Aunt Petunia had three bookshelves full of books of stories rather than informative books that she had quite literally forbade Persephone from even looking at. The only books that had stories written in them were the American story books of Percy Jackson that Diana let her read.

Diana started calling her Percy, short of Persephone, of course. She had always been a magnet for trouble and could barely sit still or focus on one thing. She was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD (which made her late teachers think she wasn’t capable, which only made her work harder), despite the fact she loved reading and she always seemed hyper focused. She was forced to take pills every single day to try and control it but it rarely worked. But then, there were times where she could barely sit still. She even had green eyes like Percy Jackson did, though she found out not
everyone had eyes like she had—a rare condition called heterochromia iridium, which meant she had two different eye colors in each eye. Her left eye was emerald green, while the other was blueish-grey.

Both of them were heterochromia iridis, which meant two colors in one eye, also going by hazel. They each had a little bit of the other in each, so the green had specks of blue, while the blue had specks of green. You’d only see them if you paid close attention, though. She knew the terms only from one of Diana’s textbooks on human biology. She was pretty good at that too.

She liked to think of herself like Percy Jackson. Maybe she was a demigod. It would fit—she had a Greek styled name, she had no parents present in her life and weird things always seemed to happen to her. Once, when the Dursleys had gone swimming, Dudley tried to drown Persephone by pushing his weight on her head and all of the water in the pool seemed to have gone through a tsunami, as it all flew out of the pool and onto the sides, wetting her aunt and uncle into a very irritable state.

Another time, she’d been running away from boys who had tried to hold her down to kiss her during break at school and she’d found herself on the roof of the school. She tried desperately to explain she had no idea how she’d gotten up there, but no one believed her. Another time, she was reaching for something up on the tallest shelf in the kitchen and had put her hand down on the hot stove. She didn’t flinch or anything and she came off unscarred and only noticed when Diana’s mother had screamed. Another time, she had quite literally flown off a swing set at the park, floating gently down and Aunt Petunia locked her in the cupboard for a week. She could only come to the conclusion that she was a demigod daughter of a god. It only made sense.

But these reasons were the reasons she was not allowed to stay home alone. "We could phone my sister, Marge," Uncle Vernon suggested.

"Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the girl."

"What about what's-her-name, your friend—Yvonne?"

"On vacation in Majorca," Aunt Petunia said.

Persephone piped up, "I could go to the library."

The library was her very most favorite place. All those books…it had taken weeks to convince her aunt and uncle to allow her to get a card. Usually Aunt Petunia came with her to make sure she didn’t chose modern idea books, so she wouldn’t get any ‘dangerous ideas’. Whenever Diana took her, she’d let her hide the books in Diana’s room.

The Johnsons and the Dursleys never moved passed a neighborly acquaintance. They had moved in when Persephone was about seven years old. They seemed very…like the Dursleys. A very picture perfect family sort—but they seriously were not. She felt ashamed for thinking that of them.

Mrs. Johnson worked in engineering and her husband worked as a language professor—he was mostly in Spanish and French, as they were so similar. The two were very open minded people—that is to say, they are very into the paranormal, the supernatural, the extra-ordinary, the inhuman. She was very proud to say that she learned a whole lot between the two from just a day spent in their home. She was even taught French and Spanish (which she was very happy about because she was pretty sure she was part Spanish, as she’d heard Uncle Vernon talking about her father being a good for nothing Mexican, though she didn’t look Spanish), which was pretty fun, and build things from (almost) scratch.
Besides, they were American, and that was enough for the Dursleys to hate them in seconds. They
sent her off to them without a second thought when they found out they were willing to watch her.

“Unsupervised?” aunt Petunia scolded. Persephone deflated—of course not. She hesitated, "I
suppose we could take her to the zoo," Aunt Petunia said slowly.

"And leave her in the car? That car's new, she's not sitting in it alone...."

Dudley began to cry loudly—okay, no he wasn’t crying. He hadn’t really cried since he’d had to
give up his room for Persephone last year—but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed,
his mother would give him anything he wanted.

"Dinky Duddydums, don't cry, Mummy won't let her spoil your special day!" she cried, flinging her
arms around him.

"I... don't... want... her... t-t-to come!" Dudley yelled between huge, pretend sobs. "She always spo-
spoils everything!" He shot Persephone a nasty grin through the gap in his mother's arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang—"Oh, good Lord, they're here!" said Aunt Petunia frantically—a
moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny
boy with a face like a rat. Persephone was sure he had a violent crush on her, being as he was
always the one who tried to kiss her.

Dudley stopped pretending to cry at once.

Nearly half an hour later, Persephone was sitting in the back of the Dursley's car with Piers and
Dudley, wondering how her unluckiness had gotten her this far, while on the way to the zoo for the
first time in her life. Her aunt and uncle couldn’t not find anywhere to send her and she was to
come along silently, after being threatened, of course, but she didn’t care. She would put up with
anything her cousin and his idiotic friend would do to be outside in the sun, in a social atmosphere.

While he drove, Uncle Vernon complained to Aunt Petunia. He liked to complain about things:
people at work, Persephone, the council, Persephone, the bank, and Persephone were just a few of
his favorite subjects. This morning, it was motorcycles. She’d had several dreams of a flying
motorcycle. She watched Mrs. Johnson build a motorcycle once. She told her about her dream and
she’d told her it was impossible, unless it was by magic, winking.

The day was sunny and warm. She wore a floral, old dress and her hair was re-braided into Dutch
braids. Sometimes, if she tried to push hard enough, she could even style her hair. It took a lot of
concentration and a good amount of an idea of what she wanted to have her hair pushed out,
straightened and twisted into certain braids. She pinned them up with bobby pins and that’s all she
needed to do manually.

The zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice
creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Persephone what
she wanted before they could hurry her away, they bought her a cheap lemon ice pop. It was rather
good, and she didn’t dare complain.

Persephone had the best morning she'd had in a long time. She was careful to walk some space
away from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals
by lunchtime, wouldn't fall back on their favorite hobby of abusing her. They ate in the zoo
restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his Knickerbocker glory didn't have enough
ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Persephone was allowed to finish the
first.
Persephone felt, afterward, that she should have known it was all too good to last.

They took a turn after lunch and decided to visit the reptile house, much to the disgust of Aunt Petunia. It was cool and dark in there, which Persephone told no one in particular was because most of the reptiles were cold blooded and dependent on carefully lit places when in captivity. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and stone.

Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons. They were quick in locating the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a trash can—but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep. Aunt Petunia kept giving Persephone glances of warning after the sixth time she corrected one of the information men working by the glass. He'd taken off with a particularly nasty look to them.

Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.

"Make it move," he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on. Persephone bit back a colorful insistence that he should really not do that.

"This is boring," Dudley moaned. He shuffled away, much to Persephone's pleasure. She moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake, telling it about sorry she was people treated her (him?) like that. The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Persephone's.

It winked.

Persephone stared. Then she looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. She looked back at the snake and winked, too, thinking back to which Greek god was the patron of snakes. And then she thought about how snakes don't even have eyelids.

The snake jerked its head toward Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised its eyes to the ceiling. It gave her a look that said quite plainly:

"I get that all the time.

"I know," She murmured through the glass, though she wasn't sure the snake could hear her. "It must be really annoying."

The snake nodded vigorously. She looked to the plate of information on the snake and sighed sadly. "Bred in captivity. I'm so sorry, I read that Brazil is really nice. Better lighting than here, at least. Have you ever even seen the sun?"

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Persephone made both of them jump.

"DUDLEY! MR. DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT IT'S DOING!"

Dudley came waddling toward them as fast as he could.

"Out of the way, you," he said, elbowing her in the ribs. Caught by surprise, Persephone fell hard on the concrete floor. What came next happened so fast no one saw how it happened—one second,
Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with howls of horror.

Persephone sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor's tank had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering out onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

The snake slithered to her and wrapped its end around her wrist and moved it up and down, as if it were shaking her hand in thanks. She thought for sure she was hallucinating, especially when it hissed, "Gracias chica...Voy a Brasil!"

"De nada..." She muttered after it as it slithered away. She didn’t even know snakes knew how to speak Spanish...

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glass," he kept saying, "where did the glass go?"

The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong, sweet tea while he apologized over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only gibber. As far as Persephone had seen, the snake hadn't done anything except snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were all back in Uncle Vernon's car, Dudley was telling them how it had nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to squeeze him to death. But worst of all, for Persephone at least, was Piers calming down enough to say, "Phoney was talking to it, weren't you, Phoney?"

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before starting on Persephone. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, "Go—cupboard—stay—no meals," before he collapsed into a chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a large brandy.

So Persephone laid in her dark little cupboard, watching the darkness grow darker and listening as the house slowly grew quiet. Her stomach growls were the loudest she’d heard all week, so when the final sound of a door closing upstairs gave her the okay to countdown from a thousand to sneak out of her cupboard. She couldn’t tell what time it was, but when she slowly picked the lock of her cupboard with a stolen bobby pin, she found a plate with a sandwich on it and a glass of cooling milk. Aunt Petunia’s uncommon show of affection was something that was greatly appreciated.

But no show of affection could make living with the Dursleys for almost ten years any better. It had been ten miserable years, for as long as she could remember, ever since she'd been a baby and her parents had dropped her off on the Dursley's doorstep. Ten long years of wondering what she’d done to make them hate her enough to abandon her on her aunt and uncle’s doorstep. Ten long years of trying to hate the people she didn’t even know.

The most she could strain herself to remember was a strange vision: a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain on his forehead. This, he supposed, was something she could not put together, she couldn't imagine where all the green light came from. All she knew was that, in a logical sense, though they starved her, locked in her a closet for nearly ten years, ignored her, verbally put her off, gave her bruises and forced her to do chores, the Dursleys did take her in. Her parents abandoned her. Maybe there was a reason aunt Petunia didn’t seem to like that Persephone started looking a lot like her mother—maybe she shouldn’t like that either. No matter how healthy of a shine the red color gave her hair, or how nice of a nose she had, it wasn’t something to smile at.

She wished desperately as a child, before knowing the truth about her parents that they would come take her away. It was selfish, but she did. It had never happened; the Dursleys were her only family. Yet sometimes she thought (or maybe hoped) that strangers in the street seemed to know
her. Very strange strangers they were, too. A tiny man in a violet top hat had bowed to her once while out shopping with Aunt Petunia and Dudley. After asking her furiously if she knew the man, Aunt Petunia had rushed them out of the shop without buying anything. A wild-looking old woman dressed all in green had waved merrily at her once on a bus. A bald man in a very long purple coat had actually kissed her hand in the street the other day and then walked away without a word. The weirdest thing about all these people was the way they seemed to vanish the second Persephone tried to get a closer, second look.

At school, she tried hard to be noticed—she’d gotten into trouble too many times. Everybody knew that Dudley’s gang hated that odd Persephone Potter, with her odd intelligence and messy hair, nobody liked to disagree with Dudley’s gang. The Johnsons were something of a miracle to her, and she wished she could be adopted by them. But who would want the burden? Obviously not her own parents.
Welcome back! Hopefully you are all enjoying the story so far, even though we have yet to get to the juicy bit. I hope you drop comments, I adore reading them and they simply motivate me to continue to update regularly!
Thank you for reading!

It was officially the start of the summer holidays when aunt Petunia let Persephone out of her cupboard to only be locked into her bedroom. It had been the longest punishment of being locked inside her cupboard and she was happily ready to be allowed outside. By this time, Dudley had already broken his new video camera, crashed his remote control airplane, and, first time out on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Privet Drive on her crutches.

Persephone was glad school was over, but there was no escaping Dudley's gang, who visited the house every single day. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm, and Gordon were all big and stupid, but as Dudley was the biggest and stupidest of the lot, he was the ring leader. The rest of them were all quite happy to join in Dudley's favorite sport: Phoney Hunting.

This was another reason why Persephone spent as much time as possible out of the house, inside the Johnsons’ home and in Diana’s room. A few years ago, she’d attended a boarding school out of London—now she’d been packing up her trunk of old school things in a trunk, some clothes, a little badge with the letter P on it, etc.

Persephone, too, would be attending a school away. From Dudley, at least. For the first time in her life, she wouldn't be in classes with Dudley. Dudley had been accepted at Uncle Vernon's old private school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there too. Persephone, on the other hand, was going to Stonewall High, the local public school. Dudley thought this was very funny, taunting her with the promises of having her head down a toilet faster than she could walk into her first class.

She’d been quick to reply that the toilet would already be flooded with his fat head and she ran away.

One day in mid-July, Aunt Petunia made Persephone sit through a whole two hours of Dudley being adjusted specially into his Smeltings uniforms. His brand-new uniform consisted of maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers, and flat straw hats called boaters. The worst part of the uniform was the knobbly stick, which was useless except to swing at Persephone when no one was looking. She would have to pay closer attention whenever he got ideas—she could not understand why any school would allow this.

Neither Uncle Vernon nor Aunt Petunia seemed concerned about this—Aunt Petunia quite literally burst into tears, saying that she couldn't believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up. Uncle Vernon very gruffly expressed this was the proudest day of his life. Persephone kept her mouth bound shut, unable to think of anything that wouldn’t be perceived as an insult. She was sure she’d cracked two ribs from laughing so hard in secret.

The next day, when she was dressed and prepared for the day (Diana was to be watching her while
the Dursleys were out to buy Dudley a present for some reason) in a yellow sundress and brushed out red curls, she was greeted with a horrible smell in the kitchen. The smell got even worse when she walked into the kitchen. The smell had started to burn her nostrils and she had to cover her nose and mouth before she could pin point where the smell was coming from.

She looked to find it to be coming from a large metal tub in the sink. She peered in and saw the tub was full of what looked like dirty rags swimming in gray water.

She hoped to God she was wrong with her first assumption, and asked anyway, “Aunt Petunia, what’s in the tub?”

"Your new school uniform," she said. Persephone was certain that asking another question would land her back in the closet and she cleared her throat, carefully thinking the question out.

“I…I didn’t know it was supposed to be so…wet?” She tried, cringing.

"Don’t be stupid," snapped Aunt Petunia. "I'm dyeing some of Dudley's old things gray for you. It'll look just like everyone else's when I've finished."

She had higher hopes for this new school—no one knew her past of being a troublemaker and the wrong sort of girl. All they knew was that she had good grades. She was smart and she picked up things fast and didn’t need much help. Maybe this could help her move up a grade—or seven. Maybe she could graduate early. Then she would be able to go away to college and work until she could buy the Dursleys’ house and become their land lord and turn off their electronics randomly during the day. Or forbid any sort of flowers but aunt Petunia’s most hated flower, lilies. That sounded pretty good.

As she planned this story out, Dudley and Uncle Vernon came in, both with wrinkled noses at the smell from Persephone’s new uniform. Uncle Vernon opened his newspaper as usual and Dudley banged his Smelting stick, which he carried everywhere, on the table, which Persephone ducked from. She counted down the minutes until she would make the short walk to the Johnson’s.

They heard the click of the mail slot and flop of letters on the doormat.

"Get the mail, Dudley," said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

"Make Persephone get it."

"Get the mail, Persephone."

"Yes, Uncle Vernon." She said, still lost in her dream like train of thought—maybe she could put the mail slot in the back of the home, so the mailman would need to walk around aunt Petunia’s most cherished garden and destroy it in a week’s time.

She picked the mail up without looking through it until she felt a heavier letter in between two other—between the postcard from Uncle Vernon's sister Marge, who was vacationing on the Isle of Wight and a brown envelope that looked like a bill was a letter—a letter for her. For Persephone.

Was this—was this her parents? Was this her mum and dad writing to her, asking her to meet? Her heart banged in her rib cage outside the kitchen door. Who else would know Persephone’s middle name, as it was written on the front of the letter?

Ms. P. L. Potter
The Cupboard under the Stairs
The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp. Turning the envelope over, her hand trembling, she saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H.

Could this be—her mum and dad with a seal? Were her parents actual gods—why not an O, for Olympus, rather an H?

“Hurry up, girl!” shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. "What are you doing, checking for letter bombs?" He chuckled at his own joke and she spun, taking a wide step to her cupboard, cringing as she opened it with the tiniest of creaks (she’d fixed and oiled the door back in June!) and tucked the letter between the top of the loose doorframe. She let her hand go and it didn’t fall and she closed and open the cupboard door and it still didn’t fall. She prayed it wouldn’t fall should either of the other occupants of the house open the door as she closed it for the final time and took a step into the kitchen, “Finally!” Uncle Vernon grumbled, snatching the letters from her hands.

Uncle Vernon ripped open the bill, snorted in disgust, and flipped over the postcard. "Marge's ill," he informed Aunt Petunia. "Ate a funny whelk—" Persephone started zoning out thinking of the letter. Was this the mother she looked so much like, writing to her? How old was Percy Jackson when he was claimed? Twelve—she was turning eleven in the coming weeks. Maybe Greek gods didn’t want to wait…

Or maybe, they weren’t Greek gods, and they were just from a very important, secret underground society, like perhaps they were spies! Maybe that’s why aunt Petunia hated her mum so much! And that’s why they had to leave Persephone with Aunt Petunia! To protect her! Oh, god, she wanted to read the letter!

When finally, she was banished from the kitchen, she swiftly grabbed the letter from its hiding place and tucked it under her dress as she walked out. Her heart beating against her throat so hard it made her knees weak. She started walking the perimeter of the neighborhood, watching the Dursley’s car drive by. She waited a good few minutes before she started walking back, towards the Johnsons.

She took the letter out, sliding her nail carefully under the sealing wax and unfolding it, her breath baited.

**HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY**

*Headmaster: ALBUS DUMBLEDORE (Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)*

*Dear Ms. Persephone Lilith Potter,*

*We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.*

*Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.*
Term begins on September 1.

We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

She was confused for a long moment, stopping in her tracks in front of their house to stare at the paper and then turning it over. Was this some joke? No, it couldn’t be. How could anyone know her middle name? But—but a school of witchcraft and wizardry? Like—what? Magicians? As in—pointy hats and long blue robes with different sized stars on it? Wands and broomsticks and long hooked noses and warts? Like that American TV show that her aunt Petunia forbid her watch, with Wizards in a Waverly place?

She couldn’t help feel disappointed—and for what? She’d hoped her parents would be writing to her but why did she hope so? For them to take her away? They left her on the doorstep of her aunt’s home. They didn’t want her—she didn’t belong to them. They were strangers to her—just because she looked like her mum didn’t mean there was any connection between them but the name she’d given her. And who names their daughter Persephone? Was her mother’s name Demeter? Was that it? She might as well go by Lilith—or by Lily! Much more of a normal name…but insulting her parents didn’t keep her from letting hot tears trail down her cheeks.

Who was she crying for? Her parents, the ones who wanted nothing to do with her? Of all the stupid things she could—she glared down at the letter and frowned. Did this make her a—what? Witch? A magician? How mediocre—she would much rather be doted to be a demigod.

But then again…the way flowers bent to her will and…the water in the swimming pool….she could fly, for heaven’s sake! She could change the way she looked! She always knew there was something different about her, something deeply unsettling. But—but for her to be—a witch, a…a magician? Those were fictional….yet, should she want to grow a plant just by her foot on the neighbor’s perfectly cut lawn, she could. Without any assistance from any gardening tools, she would probably be able to grow a competition for aunt Petunia’s garden and win by a mile.

And here there was, clutched in her hand, a chance to go to a school for people like her—away from people like Aunt Petunia, who ignored her freakiness and pretended like she didn’t exist for it. People who could do what she can do. Maybe people had color changing hair existed in this Hogwarts—wizards and witches weren’t that far off in the mythical. There had always been people who did things that no scientific textbook could explain. It just happened, with no explanation—maybe this was the explanation.

But she couldn’t see her aunt and uncle allowing her to attend. She had saved her money up—she was always going to use it for school, how was this different? Was this an away school? Could she be out of that house for a full school year? They wouldn’t have to worry about anyone finding out about their most strange niece again if that were the case.

It seemed like an impossible situation—either way, she could never question herself again. But what could she do now?

The neighbors ended up being very concerned about a ten year old girl sitting on the sidewalk
petting their weeds so Persephone had to leave with just one plan in her mind—to sleep on it. She hid the letter from Diana and they hung out with board games. Then, she hid the letter away in her cupboard once more but shivered on the old mattress. She was starting to become claustrophobic.

Next morning at breakfast, everyone was rather quiet. Persephone woke up, giggling to herself at what a strange dream she’d had. Something about witches and letters and whatnot. Her giddiness was probably because she didn’t sleep too well the previous night and she just about stumbled into her chair. Maybe this was the reason that when the mail arrived, Uncle Vernon made Dudley go and get it.

They heard him banging things with his Smelting stick all the way down the hall. When he came back, he was in shock, “Phoney has a letter!”

Uncle Vernon chuckled heartily, “Nonsense! Who’d be writing to her?”

But Persephone had frozen. Had—had it been a dream?

“But it—it says! 'Ms. P. L. Potter, The Cupboard Under the Stairs, 4 Privet Drive—'” He read out for his father, before Uncle Vernon, with a strangled cry, leapt from his seat and yanked the letter out of his hands and cried,

“Petunia!” Aunt Petunia came over to him and gasped at the sight of the letter.

“Vernon what do we do?” Both their eyes flashed to her and she tried hard to avoid their gazes before Uncle Vernon said,

“Not here Petunia!” Uncle Vernon threw another furtive glance at Persephone as he backed away out into the hall with aunt Petunia. Persephone watched them go before streaking to the door immediately, ducking under Dudley to press her ear against the door with a glass.

Surprisingly, she caught half the discussion, “…will not have this rubbish in our house, that’s for sure!”

“But what do we do? They’ll find her—they even knows where she sleeps!”

“We don’t answer, that’ll discourage them!”

Dudley knocked into her side as he too pressed his ear against the key hole to listen. She caught the end, “…my foolish sister’s fault!” And that was about all she could handle before backing away, sitting back into her chair and glaring down at the table.

They knew—they punished her and shamed her and called her a freak and they knew. Her mother—her mother was like her. Her mother caused—she was—she was turning out just like her mother—oh for the love of god! Why—was this really—a witch—her aunt and uncle walked back into the room as her hand flashed hot and suddenly a slime like felt in her hand. She looked down to see she had…melted her…glass…oh no.

She quickly propped the glass under the table cloth, under her legs and did as she was told when Uncle Vernon demanded she go to her room. One stop to sneak her first letter away from the cupboard and then she was pacing her room.

So her mother had been…a magician. Alright. Fine. Persephone saw the proof of that passed right down to her—but she would not go to this school. She would in no way turn out like her mother. No matter if she looked like her, had powers like her that would be it. She was in no way connected to the magician that abandoned her on the Dursley’s front steps. Who does that? Just
leave a baby on a doormat in the middle of the night! What if she had crawled into the street? If someone had taken her?! Honestly.

But still...just because she wasn’t going to go to that school, did that mean they would spy on her until they got the message? How did they know she slept in a cupboard instead of her room? And who was *they*? Minerva McGonagall and Albus Dumbledore? And what did that letter say? Did it say the same thing or did they know she had received it but had not replied? If only she could read that letter....

She hoped they would try again...Just so she could see their second letter.

As always, she woke in the early morning and swiftly dressed herself, as to not make noise. The library opened early in the mornings during summer. She planned on researching the school—she had packed her laptop into a book bag brief case. Maybe there would be a letter—maybe she can meet the postman halfway up the street?

She crept down the stairs, morning light just beginning to flit through the small, rectangular windows at the very top of the front door. She stopped on the last step when she caught sight of something lumpy looking and strangely formed lying on the doormat, blocking the door—something breathing. She squinted at the thing before closing her eyes, and opening them again.

Uncle Vernon had been lying at the foot of the front door in a sleeping bag, clearly making sure that Persephone didn’t do exactly what she'd been trying to do. She stole away from the door and to the back door, slipping out through the door and cutting through the back yards of several neighbors, keeping close to the houses as to not be seen.

She pulled her hair up into a pony tail as she strolled into the air conditioned library, sighing in contentment at her favorite place. It was nearly empty, save for the librarians and herself. She was liked by the old librarians, because when she snuck off here, she always sat to have tea with them. They never were harsh on her about being late with returning books and always kept some aside that they thought she’d be interested in.

She took a seat near the back, where the old computers were, right up against the air conditioners. She unpacked her laptop and set it up, waiting impatiently for it to start up. It wasn’t the fastest but it worked nicely enough.

Finally, she opened up a browser and typed in quickly, “Hogwarts”.

Nothing came up—some suggested of wart diseases and hogs and the sort, but nothing. She then typed in witchcraft and wizardry—she read through the detailed articles on the witch burnings. She came across fantasy wizard groups. TV programs. Movies. Cosplays. Children’s books. Nothing that made any sort of sense, considering the context she was looking into. No schools—one club.

She finally searched up the most general in term word: ‘Magic’.

Lots of things came up—no schools, however. Some magic plays, street magicians, and once more, everything listed above. There was an interesting article posted on November 1st, 1999, about the ‘Magic of Animals’. It was an article about owls suddenly sweeping all through London, all through England. She was starting to lose hope when something from the above windows just next to her flickered. A shadow passed over the window. When she looked up in confusion, looking for what had caused the natural light to flicker, she nearly choked in surprise.

An owl was perched outside, on the lining of the window, staring at her with big eyes. She thought for a moment she was hallucinating, given the article she had just read, but then she noticed something. Clasped between it beaks was a letter—a familiar enveloped letter.
Her first thought was that this was Athena, the Goddess of wisdom, claiming her. She was completely taken off guard but then, seeing that she’d noticed it, it jumped, twitching. Then, making her jump, it pecked the window.

She jumped at the loud sound but then jumped up, trying to shush the owl by hand gestures. She looked around, seeing no was around and when she looked back to the owl she gasped. The one owl had now two companions, all holding the same envelope in the same manner.

As if to make her afraid someone would see this, they all started pecking the window.

She threw her hands up, trying to tell them that she’d be out in a minute. “Okay, hold on! Hold on, ohmygodholdon!!” She whisper shouted.

She wasn’t usually impulsive but then again, she didn’t usually have her mail delivered to her by owl. But then again, she usually didn’t have mail. She slammed her laptop shut, sliding everything back into the bag, before stringing it over her shoulder as securely as possible. She hoped the water bottle inside wouldn’t explode with the sudden weight.

Then, she did the stupidest thing she’d done to date—she took a good look around the library, making sure no one was around to see this, before she climbed up onto the desk and eased the window open. The owl jumped aside but pecked once more, earning it a hush from Persephone. She thought she could fit through the window…and if she got stuck, she was sure the old ladies would no longer invite her to tea.

She hoisted one leg over, moving slowly so she could feel for the loose brick to bring her other leg up. Unfortunately, her foot slipped and her weight tipped her over the sill and she fell over. She fell on her side and arm, and groaned as she registered the pain. It wasn’t bad, but ow.

It took a moment before she propped herself up. When she did, she met the eyes of another owl. Disoriented, she stared back. Then the owl hopped over, and she skirted away, kicking away, gasping.

The owl did not seem fazed, it just kept hopping over to her. “Owls are nocturnal!” She tried to reason out loud. “Whaat.” She panted.

It didn’t seem like reason was useful right now when she finally realized there were at least seven owls surrounding her now. Her voice cracked to a halt as she turned her head slowly to see them all staring at her. She definitely didn’t picture herself dying at the hands of eager owls.

The one who was hopping towards her finally dropped the letter near her ankle. She stared at it incredulously, wondering how owl post worked, before she took the letter.

She slowly pushed herself up, and went around taking the letters. They still just stayed there, one by one all hoping just a step closer. She didn’t know what to do—she didn’t know if they would hunt her down if she ran.

“You owls want a snack?” She asked nervously and then they just hopped at the same time, maybe in interest?

She had taken a little snack from the cupboard in the kitchen, a little one of those bags of very small round cookies. She found it out of her bag, and, without opening it, she made sure she crushed most of them inside. Then she opened it as much as possible so it was now just a shiny little plastic placement with crushed cookies on it. She placed on the ground and hopped away as they hopped towards it.
She watched them peck at them, wondering if she was mentally okay. Did she finally lose her mind? Why were they eating so vigorously?

In a matter of seconds, they finished the crumbs and hopped happily. They flew away all in seconds and Persephone was left in a library back parking lot with, like, seven letters from Hogwarts.

She walked around the building, completely in shock when a man approached her, “Were those owls?”

She blinked, almost awake, and she put on a concerned face, “Owls are nocturnal.”

He was confused, ruffling his tie, squinting up at the sky. “But…miss…I swear….”

She took one a really concerned frown, before offering him some water, “It’s hot out, you’re driving, just to keep safe. No, no, keep the bottle, stay hydrated, okay, haha, thank you.” She walked away backwards, smiling nervously after giving him the water bottle. She was very thorough in her acting normal. She’d been in the school play when she was younger. She played a great Virgin Mary, apparently. She had always been better in the ballet recitals Aunt Petunia had forced her to partake in.

She ended up opening up all the letters and found they were all the same. There was no use in them, so she ended up throwing them into the fireplace later than evening when no one was looking. Apparently, three more letters had come to the house as well. Uncle Vernon didn’t go to work that day. He stayed at home and nailed up the mail slot.

"See," he explained to Aunt Petunia through a mouthful of nails, "if they can't deliver them they'll just give up."

"I'm not sure that'll work, Vernon."

"Oh, these people's minds work in strange ways, Petunia, they're not like you and me," said Uncle Vernon, trying to knock in a nail with the piece of fruitcake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

On Friday, no less than twelve letters arrived for Persephone. As they couldn't go through the mail slot they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides, and a few even forced through the small window in the downstairs bathroom. Persephone was forced to stay in the house all day and in the living room under strict supervision from Uncle Vernon. When in the kitchen, under aunt Petunia’s supervision.

Uncle Vernon stayed at home again, as he forced Persephone to be as well. After burning all the letters, he got out a hammer and nails and boarded up the cracks around the front and back doors so no one could go out. He hummed "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" as he worked, and jumped at small noises. One could say he had lost his mind, but Persephone knew better. He’d always been insane.

On Saturday, things began to get out of hand. The letters—or the owls???—found more creative ways to get the letters inside the house. Aunt Petunia accidently brought at least thirty letters home through the grocery shopping—they were inside the bread, in each of the two dozen eggs, in the cereal—all of which were addressed to P. L. Potter. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone calls to the super market and the dairy trying to find someone to complain to, Aunt Petunia shredded the letters in her food processor.

"Who on earth wants to talk to you this badly?" Dudley asked Persephone in amazement.

“The Nutcracker, Dudley,” She grumbled at him.
She tried to feign her interest but she couldn’t help but wonder why they didn’t give up. Was magician school so very scarce on magicians they needed every magician they could get? Was there a war going on? Was that why her mother and father abandoned her? Because of magician war? She tried not to dwell on these thoughts—they sounded so stupid.

On Sunday morning, Uncle Vernon sat down at the breakfast table looking tired and rather ill, but happy. Persephone thought perhaps she ought to say something about knowing what the letters said and that she had interest (the latter was a lie, she was very interested against her will) but watching Uncle Vernon lose his mind was the best source of entertainment.

"No post on Sundays," he reminded them cheerfully as he spread marmalade on his newspapers, "no damn letters today—"

Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters came pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys ducked until Uncle Vernon seized Persephone by the hair and threw her out into the hall, while screaming, "Out! OUT!"

When Aunt Petunia and Dudley had run out with their arms over their faces, Uncle Vernon slammed the door shut. They could hear the letters still streaming into the room, bouncing off the walls and floor. She wondered idly if that experience is what changed his point of view on everything logical, because ten minutes later, he came out of the kitchen, pulling great tuffs of his mustache out, and calmly said, "That does it. I want you all back here in five minutes ready to leave. We're going away. Just pack some clothes. No arguments!"

No one dared argue with this half-insane, half-mustached man. Another ten minutes found them in the car after wrenching through the boarded up doors, speeding down the highway. Dudley was sniffling in the back seat; his father had hit him round the head for holding them up while he tried to pack his television, DV player, and computer in his sports bag. Where he thought he could use them, Persephone did not know.

Where they were going, no one knew. They just drove and drove. Even Aunt Petunia didn't dare ask where they were going. Every now and then Uncle Vernon would take a sharp turn and drive in the opposite direction for a while. "Shake'em off... shake 'em off," he would mutter whenever he did this. Persephone wondered idly if he really were going mad and if she should just say she knew what was written on the letters but at that moment that seemed like suicide.

They didn't stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall Dudley was howling. He'd never had such a bad day in his life. He was hungry, he'd missed five television programs he'd wanted to see, and he'd never gone so long without refreshing Youtube on some strange, gaming channel.

Uncle Vernon stopped at last outside a gloomy-looking hotel on the outskirts of a big city. Dudley and Persephone shared a room with twin beds and damp, musty sheets. Dudley snored while Persephone stayed awake, sitting on the windowsill, staring down at the lights of passing cars and wondering whether or not she could buy Privet Drive 4 yet.

They ate stale cornflakes and cold tinned tomatoes on toast for breakfast the next day. They had just finished when the owner of the hotel came over to their table.

"Scuse me, but is one of you Ms. P. L. Potter? Only I got about an 'undred of these at the front desk."

She held up a letter so they could read the green ink address:
"I'll take them," Uncle Vernon said, standing up quickly and following her from the dining room before anyone could say anything.

"Wouldn't it be better just to go home, dear?" Aunt Petunia suggested timidly, hours later, but Uncle Vernon didn't seem to hear her. Exactly what he was looking for, none of them knew. He drove them into the middle of a forest, got out, looked around, shook his head, got back in the car, and off they went again. The same thing happened in the middle of a plowed field, halfway across a suspension bridge, and at the top of a multilevel parking garage.

"Daddy's gone mad, hasn't he?" Dudley asked Aunt Petunia dully late that afternoon. Persephone didn't dare nod in answer, as Uncle Vernon had just parked at the coast. He got out, locked them all in, and disappeared. Persephone wondered if she should just make a run for it and swim, praying Poseidon would help. She was feeling eager to take her chances on dying anywhere else but the hands of a maddening uncle—even the owls seemed like a better fate. But then came the moral and ethical thoughts of having to leave two people with a murderer and she had to wonder if he would kill his wife and son to get to his magician niece. As her mood soured, so did the weather.

It started to rain. Great drops beat on the roof of the car. The sun hadn’t been out in forever. Dudley sneezed.

"It's Monday," he told his mother. "The Great Humberto's on tonight. I want to stay somewhere with a television." 

Monday. She snapped her head up to the sky in realization—if Dudley had been counting the days right (and you could usually count on Dudley to know the days the week, because of television) then tomorrow, Tuesday, was her eleventh birthday. Of course, birthdays were never exactly fun for her—last year, the Dursleys had given her a coat hanger and a pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks and exactly four bruises.

Still, you weren't eleven every day. Maybe she could get claimed by Poseidon—it would be rather symbolic to be claimed right by the sea. Would Percy be her brother? That would suck—she had the biggest crush on him. He was born in '93, five years older than Persephone, unfortunately. And in America. Annabeth had been a very good character to her but she treated the only red head in the story awful—Persephone adored Rachel and Percy together. Being as she was a redhead, obviously Persephone felt an emotional connection to Rachel.

Uncle Vernon was back and he was smiling. He was also carrying a long, thin package and didn't answer Aunt Petunia when she asked what he'd bought.

"Found the perfect place!" he said. "Come on! Everyone out!"

It was very cold outside the car. Uncle Vernon was pointing at what looked like a large rock way out at sea. Perched on top of the rock was the most miserable little shack you could imagine. One thing was certain, there was no television in there, which meant not only would Persephone have to put up Dudley’s never ending moans, but she’d be his only source of entertainment—did she see...
him take his Smelting’s stick with him? She did not remember.

"Storm forecast for tonight!" Uncle Vernon said too joyfully to be sane. "And this gentleman's kindly agreed to lend us his boat!"

A toothless old man came ambling up to them, pointing, with a rather wicked grin, at an old rowboat bobbing in the iron-gray water below them. Persephone thought she might just take her chances with Poseidon and start swimming.

"I've already got us some rations," Uncle Vernon said, "so all aboard!"

It was freezing in the boat. Icy sea spray and rain crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped their faces. After what seemed like hours they reached the rock, where Uncle Vernon, slipping and sliding, led the way to the broken-down house.

The inside was horrible; it smelled strongly of rotting seaweed, the wind whistled through the gaps in the wooden walls, and the fireplace was damp and empty. There were only two rooms. Uncle Vernon’s rations turned out to be a big bag of chips and three bananas. He tried to start a fire but the empty chip bags just smoked and shriveled up.

"Could do with some of those letters now, eh?" he said cheerfully.

He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a storm to deliver mail. Persephone privately agreed, wondering if it would have been better to just say she knew so they could go back to Privet Drive, but she cheered herself up with wondering how cool it would be to be Poseidon’s daughter. No better than her actual parents but sort of.

As night finally fell, the promised storm blew up around them. Spray from the high waves splattered the walls of the hut and a fierce wind rattled the filthy windows. While Persephone curled into herself on the floor, trying desperately to find warmth, Aunt Petunia found a few moldy blankets in the second room and made up a bed for Dudley on the moth-eaten sofa. She and Uncle Vernon went off to the lumpy bed next door and Persephone was left to either be resourceful and find herself some way not to freeze to death, or to, well, freeze to death.

She thought back to the glass that she melted and thought, perhaps she could warm herself. A few minutes in the cold passed and started to focus on her hands—they were stiffening up but after a while, she could feel her heart quicken and heat spread through her veins and she could swear that saw smoke from her pinky finger. She shivered once more.

Five minutes before her birthday, she was curled into a ball, rocking back and forth to keep herself from freezing, staring at Dudley’s light up wristwatch. Her stomach rumbled and she felt that she would have severe back pain in the morning, should she find sleep any time soon. Dudley's snores were drowned by the low rolls of thunder that started near midnight and the chattering of her teeth. The lighted dial of Dudley's watch, which was dangling over the edge of the sofa on his fat wrist, told Persephone she'd be eleven in a few minute’s time. She lay and watched his birthday tick nearer, wondering if the Dursleys would remember at all, wondering where Minerva McGonagall was now.

Four minutes to go. Persephone froze, listening. She thought she had heard something creak outside. She hoped the roof wasn't going to fall in, although she might be warmer if it did fall perfectly like a blanket. Three minutes to go. Maybe the house in Privet Drive would be so full of letters when they got back that she’d be forced away to an orphanage. An orphanage would be better than the Durlsey’s.
Was that the sea, slapping hard on the rock like that? And (two minutes to go) what was that funny crunching noise? Was the rock crumbling into the sea? Did that happen with high tide?

One minute to go and she'd be eleven. Thirty seconds... twenty ... ten... nine -- maybe she'd be claimed by Poseidon-- three... two... one...

**BOOM.**

The whole shack shivered and Persephone froze, staring at the door. Someone was outside, knocking to come in.
Orphaned

Chapter Notes

I have a lot of ideas for how to give a lot of depth and variety to Persephone but some of them might be too much? I'd like opinions, if anyone would like to help?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Another booming knocking came. Dudley jerked upright, stupidly asking, "Where's the cannon?"

Persephone’s first thought was that Poseidon was knocking, being polite before he blew the entire shack away with his storm. Uncle Vernon obviously thought it was some sort of magic threat, as he came skidding into the room with a rifle in his hands—probably what was in the long, thin package from earlier.

"Who's there?" he shouted. "I warn you—I'm armed!"

"Are you Poseidon?" Persephone called out, her heartbeat in her throat.

"Hush, girl!" Uncle Vernon snapped.

But there was a pause. Was she correct in her assumption? Was it really—

SMASH!

The door seemed to blow off its hinges with such a brute force that it hit the floor with a loud and deafening crash.

She expected a tall, deeply tanned, strong looking man with black hair, a neatly trimmed black beard. She imagined the man would have sea-green eyes, surrounded by sun crinkles from smiling, really just an overall old-time looking fisherman. Or maybe, maybe he had on a really chill look, something of leather sandals, khaki Bermuda shorts, Bahama shirt with coconuts and parrots, a cap decorated with fishing lures, like from Percy Jackson.

Or—or maybe he wore magnificent flowing green robes made up of the ocean waves, with a crown of seashells on his head, with a glowing blue aura of power, holding a trident.

The man was giant, at least. That much was visible—he looked very tall and very strong, strong enough to lift all the Dursley’s with one hand. He did have a beard, though it was wild and tangled and blended in with his long, shaggy mane of hair on his head. His face was almost completely hidden by his wild hair but she could make out his eyes—black and warm, glinting like black beetles under all the hair. He did not even have a trident—Persephone would have been disappointed if she weren’t terrified.

The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door, and fitted it easily back into its frame. The noise of the storm outside dropped a little. He turned to look at them all.

"Couldn't make us a cup o' tea, could yeh? It's not been an easy journey..." His voice was gruff. He strode over to the sofa where Dudley sat frozen with fear. "Budge up, yeh great lump," said the
Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind his mother, who was crouching, terrified, behind Uncle Vernon.

"An' here's our young Effie!" said the giant. Persephone looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile. She probably should have been scared but no one had ever called her by that sort of variation of her name, so she stared up at him, stunned. "Las' time I saw you, you was only a baby," the giant exclaimed. "Don't mind that I call yeh Effie, do ya'? Could go fer Percy (Persie?), yer already know Persephone's such a mouthful. Yeh look just like yer mum, but you got both yer dad's and mum's eyes too."

Uncle Vernon made a funny rasping noise.

"I demand that you leave at once, sir!" he said. "You are breaking and entering!"

"Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune," the giant said, reaching out and grabbing the gun right out of Uncle Vernon's hands, then he bent it into a knot as easily as if it had been made of rubber, and threw it into a corner of the room.

Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being trodden on.

"Anyway—Sephie," the giant said, turning his back on the Dursleys, "a very happy birthday to yeh. Got summat fer yeh here—I mighta sat on it at some point, but it'll taste all right."

From an inside pocket of his black overcoat he pulled a slightly indented box. Persephone couldn't stop her trembling fingers but she managed to open it. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate cake with Happy Birthday Persephone written on it in with pink icing.

The very first birthday cake she'd ever gotten made her throat tighten and she felt like not even Poseidon could top this. She looked up and smiled, or grimaced, and thanked him. The giant seemed genuinely pleased with her reaction but offered no introductions, so she quietly asked, "Who are you?"

The giant chuckled.

"True, I haven't introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts." Before thinking twice, she choked—the magician's school? Was this what this was—he certainly did not look like a magician… He held out an enormous hand and she checked it for a wand. She raised a brow, offering her own hand and he just about shook her arm out of its socket. "What about that tea then, eh?" he said, rubbing his hands together. "I'd not say no ter summat stronger if yeh've got it, mind."

"We…we were in a hurry, so…" She trailed off, glancing at the pathetic chip bag on the floor. His eyes followed her gaze and he snorted. He went and bent over the fireplace, and she couldn't see what he had done, but when he leaned away, there was a roaring fire now going. It filled the whole damp hut with flickering light and Persephone shivered in the sudden change of temperature, though it was highly welcomed. She looked up at him in amazement.

Rubeus Hagrid fell back down on the sofa, which caused each side of the couch lift off the ground, and the cough sagged under his weight. He started to pile things out of the pockets of his coat: a copper kettle, a squashy package of sausages, a poker, a teapot, several chipped mugs, and a bottle of some amber liquid that he took a swig from before starting to make tea. She glanced at her aunt to see her scolding in disgust.
Rubeus Hagrid handed her a metal rod with six sausages pierced through it. She followed his move of letting it hover over the roaring fire. It was silent, with just the sizzling of the sizzling of the sausage—her stomach grumbled as the smell hit her. She was satisfied when hers came out looking nicely done, and when she slid her six fat, juicy, sausages from the poker, she thought of offering the Durlseys some, but Uncle Vernon said sharply, "Don't touch anything he gives you, Dudley."

The giant chuckled darkly, "Yer great puddin' of a son don' need fattenin' anymore, Dursley, don' worry."

He passed a cut up piece of her cake and passed it to her and she hesitantly took a bite, all the while watching the giant watch her. He didn’t seem at all like any other strange man she’d ever thought of would break into places. He was very relaxed, his eyes filled with tenderness, as if he was watching baby ducklings try to walk.

"So, Mr. Ru—" She tried to start but he cut her off,

"Call me Hagrid," he said, "everyone does." He took a gulp of his tea, and she nodded.

“Well,” She said, “Hagrid…I still don’t understand why it is that you’ve come…” She trailed off awkwardly. “Though I appreciate…your presence?”

“I’m ‘ere to get you yer things, ‘o course! Fer Hogwarts—yeh'll know all about Hogwarts, o' course.”

She shook her head lightly, “It’s some—some school for magicians, no?”

Hagrid’s laughter was booming, nearly as loud as the thunder rolling outside. She saw Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon stare at her incredulously.

"As charmin’ as yer mum, you are! We knew yeh weren't gettin' yer letters but never thought for a second yeh wouldn't know abou' Hogwarts, no, not a doubt!” He seemed to be amused but she was now finding herself coiling in defense.

“Other than being a school for magicians and weird, roman mythology derived names? Not really,” She crossed her arms, “And I am nothing like my mother.”

“Nothing like yer—what have you told her?” He turned in anger to her uncle and aunt. “Fer cryin' out loud! Did yeh never tell her anythin' about her parents?”

While aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon sputtered, Persephone raised a brow, “What is there to know? They were young, foolish and abandoned me on a doorstep as a baby.” This made Hagrid turn to her in shock.

"Now wait jus' one second!” Hagrid thundered, “Tha’ the story yer heard, is it?” He had leapt to his feet. In his anger, he seemed to fill the whole hut. The Dursleys were cowering against the wall. "Do you mean ter tell me,” he growled at the Dursleys, "that this girl—this girl!—knows nothin' abou’—about ANYTHING?"

This was dragging on longer than Persephone could manage and she felt she was probably misunderstanding an important part of this but she couldn’t help but say defensively, “I know plenty! I’m rather above my class’s average! Just because I’m a girl, people underestimate me but I’m smarter than all the boys combined in the school, I can promise you that.” She huffed.

Hagrid simply waved his hand and said, "Of course yer smart, with a mum like yers, but that ain’t what I mean. About our world, your world. Yer parents' world."
"What world? Magician’s world?"

Hagrid looked as if he was about to explode.

"DURSLEY!" he boomed.

Uncle Vernon, who had gone very pale, whispered something that sounded like "Mimblewimble."
Hagrid stared wildly at Persephone.

"Persephone, yer parents did not abandon you—" he said. "I mean, they're famous. Yer famous."

"Excuse me? My parents are famous?" She raised a critical brow, “Is that why they abandoned me?"

"Yeh don' know... yeh don' know..." Hagrid ran his fingers through his hair, fixing Persephone with a bewildered stare. "Yeh don' know what yeh are?" he said finally.

Uncle Vernon suddenly found his voice.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Stop right there, sir! I forbid you to tell the girl anything!"

A braver man than Vernon Dursley would have quailed under the furious look Hagrid now gave him; when Hagrid spoke, his every syllable trembled with rage. "You never told her? Never told her what was in the letter Dumbledore left fer her? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave it, Dursley! An' you've kept it from her all these years?"

"Kept what from me?" Persephone asked in exasperation. “That I’m a magician?”

"STOP! I FORBID YOU!" yelled Uncle Vernon in panic.

Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

"Ah, go boil yer heads, both of y eh," said Hagrid. "Persephone—yer a witch."

She knew this, but hearing it being said out loud... A silence stretched out amongst them, whereas only the sea and the whistling wind could be heard.

“That’s the proper name, then?" She questioned with a huff. “I’m a witch—not a magician? What’s the unisex name for it?"

"A witch, o' course, magicians don’t exist an’ I wouldn’ go around callin’ our folk magicians," Hagrid warned, sitting back down on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, "an’ a thumpin’ good'un, I'd say, once yeh've been trained up a bit. With a mum an’ dad like yours, what else would yeh be? An' I reckon it's abou' time yeh respond to yer letter."

She took the letter he handed her and read it out, finding its content identical to the first letter she’d read from Hogwarts—a real school, she now concluded, because at this point, how could it not be? Her head was swimming with questions like the storm outside and she couldn't decide which to ask first. After a few minutes she stammered, "My owl?"

"Gallopin’ Gorgons, that reminds me," said Hagrid, clapping a hand to his forehead with enough force to knock over a cart horse, and from yet another pocket inside his overcoat he pulled an owl—a real, live, rather ruffled-looking owl—a long quill, and a roll of parchment. Her jaw popped open.

With his tongue between his teeth he scribbled a note that Persephone could read upside down:
Dear Professor Dumbledore,

Given Persephone her letter.

Taking her to buy her things tomorrow.

Weather's horrible. Hope you're well.

Hagrid

Hagrid rolled up the note, gave it to the owl, which clamped it in its beak, went to the door, and threw the owl out into the storm, making Persephone go, “Oooh,” in realization. Then he came back and sat down as though this was as normal as talking on the telephone.

Persephone realized she’d been gawking and she quickly composed herself politely.

"Where was I?" said Hagrid, but at that moment, Uncle Vernon, still ashen-faced but looking very angry, moved into the firelight.

"She’s not going," he said.

Hagrid grunted.

"I'd like ter see a great Muggle like you stop her," he said.

"A what?" Persephone was very familiar to titles by race and gender and religion but she’d never heard of that one.

"A Muggle," said Hagrid, "it's what we call non-magic folk like them. An' it's your bad luck you grew up in a family o' the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on." Before she could ask him not to call them a word that seemed to be pejorative, Uncle Vernon coughed out his own,

"We swore when we took her in we'd put a stop to that rubbish," said Uncle Vernon, "swore we'd stamp it out of her! Witch indeed!"

The same anger surged through her veins as he said this, “So my entire life, you lie to me about my parents and then you know that I’m a witch! How?" She panted, staring at the floor.

“How could we not!!" Aunt Petunia shrieked suddenly. "Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that—that school—and came home every vacation with her pockets full of frog spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was—a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family! And now, you’ve turned out just like here—just as much a freak!" She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went ranting on. It seemed she had been wanting to say all this for years and Persephone stared at her in shock.

"Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd be just the same, just as strange, just as—as—abnormal -- and then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you!"

Persephone felt bile form in her mouth and she swallowed, “You—you said she—they abandoned me on your doorstep! You said they didn’t want me!”

"ABANDON!" roared Hagrid, jumping up so angrily that the Dursleys scuttled back to their
corner. "How could Lily an' James Potter abandon their daughter on the doorstep of Muggles like you!? An outrage! A scandal! Persephone Potter not knowin' her own story—her parents’ story!—when every kid in our world knows her name!"

"But—but I don’t understand! Bl—blown up? What happened?" Persephone asked urgently, feeling a sort of dread fill her as she realized that her parents weren’t alive.

The anger faded from Hagrid’s face. He looked suddenly anxious.

"I never expected this," he said, in a low, worried voice. "I had no idea, when Dumbledore told me there might be trouble gettin' hold of yeh, how much yeh didn't know. Ah, Sephie, I don' know if I'm the right person ter tell yeh -- but someone’s gotta -- yeh can't go off ter Hogwarts not knowin'."

He threw a dirty look at the Dursleys.

"Well, it's best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh—mind, I can't tell yeh everythin', it's a great myst'ry, parts of it...." He sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds, and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with—with a person called—but it's incredible yeh don't know his name, everyone in our world knows—"

"Who?" She asked urgently.

"Well—I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No one does."

"Well, why not?"

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Sephie, people are still scared. Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizard who went... bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was..."

Hagrid gulped, but no words came out.

"Perhaps you could write it down?" She suggested, gesturing to the quill in his hand.

"Nah—can't spell it. All right—Voldemort." Hagrid shuddered.

Persephone stared. Then, she snorted, “Voldemort? Really? What kinda of stupid name—"

“SHHH!! Great Gargoyles, Sephie, don’t say his name!” Hagrid cried out. She put her hands up in apology, waiting for him to continue. “Now, this—this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin’ fer followers. Got ’em, too—some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o’ his power, ’cause he was gettin’ himself power, all right. They were called Death Eaters. Dark days, Sephie. Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches... terrible things happened. He was takin’ over. 'Course, some stood up to him—an’ he killed ’em. Horribly. One o’ the only safe places left was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare try takin' the school, not jus’ then, anyway.

"Now, yer mum an' dad were as good a witch an' wizard as I ever knew. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-Who never tried to get ’em on his side before... probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side.” Her heart thundered at the mention of her parents, a new picture exploding in her head of them.

"Maybe he thought he could persuade ’em... maybe he just wanted ’em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where you was all living, on Halloween ten years ago. You
was just a year old. He came ter yer house an'—an'—"

Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad—knew yer mum an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find—anyway..."

"You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then—an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing—he tried to kill you, too. Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do it. Never wondered how you got that mark on yer forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh—took care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even—but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Effie. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age—the McKinnons, the Bones, the Prewetts—an' you was only a baby, an' you lived."

Something very painful was going on in Persephone’s mind. The picture she painted of her parents, good and kind as Hagrid described them, was overruled by the blinding flash of green light, more clearly than she had ever remembered it before—and she remembered something else, for the first time in her life: a high, cold, cruel laugh. Her eyes stung for just a moment.

Hagrid was watching her sadly as she took this in.

On Dumbledore's orders, I went ter fetch ya. Brought yeh ter this lot..."

"Load of old tosh," said Uncle Vernon. Persephone barely registered his voice as her heart sunk—her parents, just like her, who never abandoned her but only—but were murdered instead. She stared into the air, unable to do much but pull in breaths.

“But, but how did this Dumbledore know I survived—"

Uncle Vernon certainly seemed to have got back his courage. He was glaring at Hagrid and his fists were clenched, interrupting Persephone with no mercy.

"Now, you listen here, girl," he snarled, "I accept there's something strange about you, probably nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured—and as for all this about your parents, well, they were weirdos, no denying it, and the world's better off without them in my opinion—asked for all they got, getting mixed up with these wizarding types—just what I expected, always knew they'd come to a sticky end—"

She choked on her breath and Hagrid leapt from the sofa and drew a battered pink umbrella from inside his coat. Pointing this at Uncle Vernon like a sword, he said, "I'm warning you, Dursley—I'm warning you—one more word..."

In danger of being speared on the end of an umbrella by a bearded giant, Uncle Vernon's courage failed again; he flattened himself against the wall and fell silent.

"That's better," said Hagrid, breathing heavily and sitting back down on the sofa, which this time sagged right down to the floor.

Persephone, meanwhile, still had questions to ask, hundreds of them, and her head nearly spun with them. "But what happened to Vol—You-Know-Who?"

"Good question, Sephie. Disappeared. Vanished. Same night he tried ter kill you. Makes yeh even more famous. That's the biggest myst'ry, see... he was gettin' more an' more powerful—why'd he
"Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die. Some say he's still out there, bidin' his time, like, but I don' believe it. People who was on his side came back ter ours. Some of 'em came outta kinda trances. Don' reckon they could've done if he was comin' back.

"Most of us reckon he's still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. 'Cause somethin' about you finished him, Sephie. There was somethin' goin' on that night he hadn't counted on—I dunno what it was, no one does—but somethin' about you stumped him, all right."

Hagrid looked at Persephone with warmth and respect blazing in his eyes, but Persephone, instead of feeling pleased and proud, felt quite sure there was a feeling of guilt and shame in her chest. A witch, just like her mum and dad? How could her aunt Petunia make her believe that her parents were horrible? That they'd abandoned her? Why would she make her hate them, when all they were—when they were murdered? And someone had left her a letter explaining, too.

All these years, all these years of painting a horrid picture of her parents—they’d been a great pair of magical people, and they’d been murdered. I’m an orphan...she thought.

Persephone finally met Hagrid’s gaze and was shocked out of her reverie to find that Hagrid was positively beaming at her.

"You wait, you'll be right famous at Hogwarts." Hagrid said, but this triggered Uncle Vernon, who wasn't going to give in without a fight.

"Haven't I told you she's not going?" he hissed. "She's going to Stonewall High and she'll be grateful for it. I've read those letters and she needs all sorts of rubbish—spell books and wands and —"

"If she wants ter go, a great Muggle like you won't stop her," growled Hagrid. "Stop Lily an' James Potter's daughter goin' ter Hogwarts! Yer mad. Her name's been down ever since she was born. She's off ter the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. Seven years there and she won't know herself. She'll be with youngsters of her own sort, fer a change, an' she'll be under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had Albus Dumbled—"

"I AM NOT PAYING FOR SOME CRACKPOT OLD FOOL TO TEACH HER MAGIC TRICKS!" yelled Uncle Vernon.

But he had finally gone too far. Hagrid seized his umbrella and whirled it over his head, "NEVER," he thundered, "—INSULT—ALBUS—DUMBLEDORE—IN—FRONT—OF—ME!"

He brought the umbrella swishing down through the air to point at Dudley -- there was a flash of violet light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp squeal, and the next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with his hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in pain. When he turned his back on them, Persephone saw a curly pig's tail poking through a hole in his trousers.

Uncle Vernon roared. Pulling Aunt Petunia and Dudley into the other room, he cast one last terrified look at Hagrid and slammed the door behind them.

Hagrid looked down at his umbrella and stroked his beard.

"Shouldn'ta lost me temper," he said ruefully, "but it didn't work anyway. Meant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn't much left ter do."
He cast a sideways look at Persephone under his bushy eyebrows.

"Be grateful if yeh didn't mention that ter anyone at Hogwarts," he said. "I'm -- er -- not supposed ter do magic, strictly speakin'. I was allowed ter do a bit ter follow yeh an' get yer letters to yeh an' stuff -- one o' the reasons I was so keen ter take on the job."

"Why aren't you supposed to do magic?" Persephone asked dreamily.

"Oh, well -- I was at Hogwarts meself but I -- er -- got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year. They snapped me wand in half an' everything. But Dumbledore let me stay on as gamekeeper. Great man, Dumbledore."

"How come you were expelled?"

"It's gettin' late and we've got lots ter do tomorrow," said Hagrid loudly. "Gotta get up ter town, get all yer books an' that."

He took off his thick black coat and threw it to Persephone, who jumped as she caught it.

"You can kip under that," he said. "Don' mind if it wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o' dormice in one o' the pockets."

Her mind had spun for such a long time—thoughts on her parents, new people that exploded in her mind with different questions—that she was feeling exhausted. It didn't take even a minute to fall asleep.
Persephone felt a draft wake her the next morning, and when she opened her eyes, she found an owl on her chest, flapping in her face. Startled, she sat up, causing the owl to jump and then flutter to the floor next to her. Hagrid's heavy coat fell off her and she blinked. The hut's windows allowed for a stream of sunlight to light the entire room up, the storm apparently over. Hagrid himself was asleep on the collapsed sofa and for a moment it took her to register that an owl had gotten in much less than the events of the previous night.

Her heart thundered but she couldn’t dwell on her being a witch—a witch!—when the owl clawed at her. She yanked her arm back, “Ow!” Why did owls hate her so much!?

She noticed a newspaper held in its beak. The owl waddled its way over to Hagrid and dropped the newspaper on him. The owl then fluttered onto the floor and began to attack Hagrid's coat. "Hey, hey, don't do that." She chastised it drowsily.

Persephone had never been good with animals. She was much better with her computer and technology and the likes. She wondered if most witches had computers. Would she be allowed her computer?

The owl hooted and kept going at it, breaking her reverie and she started to fear for a moment for the mice’s life, but when checking the pocket the owl was paying attention to, she found it filled with coins rather than mice. She took it out into her hand, inspecting the coins, and the owl immediately stuck its claw out, a little pouch tied to it. She realized what it wanted, “Didn’t realize owls had an economy…” She muttered, looking up over to Hagrid.

The owl hopped closer. She didn’t know how to pay him, as she didn’t recognize the coins. “Hold on—I’ll pay you in a moment, but I don’t recognize—” She huffed in frustration. She was failing the magician—sorry, magic—world and it had only been a morning. “Hagrid? I don’t recognize these coins and the owl wants to be paid.”

Hagrid grunted something into the sofa.

"What?"

"Give him five Knuts," said Hagrid sleepy.

This didn’t help her. "Knuts?"

"The little bronze ones."

Persephone counted the little bronze ones out to five and the owl didn’t hesitate as it kept still so she could put the money into a small leather pouch tied to it. She wasn’t sure what to do now. She’d given the other owls cookies—she ended up looking over to the cake, “Do magic owls take tea with their cake?” She muttered to herself, crossing the floor to break a small piece off the cake.
She held it out in the owl’s direction and, staring in interest, the owl flew and fluttered onto her hand. Startled, she watched in fascination as the bird nibbled the piece out of her hands.

Fascinated, she stroked the owl’s feathers and it hooted happily, nibbling her fingers lightly before flying out the window. She watched it go, mesmerized. Like her, it was affectionate with food.

Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up, and stretched, causing her to jump.

"Best be off, Sephie, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter London an' buy all yer stuff fer school."

She looked down at the coins, “Will I be able to convert my money into—Knuts and such?”

“Oh, nonsense, Persephone! Yer won’t be the one payin’—well, not technically.” He chuckled heartily, making Persephone’s head cock to the side.

“I’ve got some money saved up for school—from jobs around the neighborhood, I’m rather good at it, well now that I think of it, most of the garden work must be because of my being a witch, but I’m good at other stuff too, especially computers, oh Hagrid, will I be able to bring my computer to school? Oh, right! School! Uncle Vernon said it last night…he won’t pay for me to go and learn magic and I don’t need anyone else paying.” She said and swayed—she had definitely not slept too well last night.

"Don't worry about that," said Hagrid, standing up and scratching his head. "D'yeh think yer parents didn't leave yeh anything?"

She blinked, "Oh. I'm a minor, will I be able to get it?"

"Course! Just got yer key right here,” He patted his jacket as he held it up. “First stop fer us is Gringotts. Wizards' bank. Have a sausage, they're not bad cold—an' I wouldn' say no teh a bit o' yer birthday cake, neither. An’ ye’ll have to repeat the rest of whatcha said, there,”

She started making a list of questions to ask, and the list just kept getting longer, "So—wizards have banks? They have an economy?” She thought of asking him if owls had an economy too, but thought that best for later.

"Oh, fer sure! Gringotts, the one and only. Run by goblins."

Persephone dropped the bit of sausage she was holding, choking as she gasped, "Goblins?"

"Yeah—so yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it, I'll tell yeh that. Never mess with goblins, Sephie. Gringotts is the safest place in the world fer anything yeh want ter keep safe—'cept maybe Hogwarts. As a matter o' fact, I gotta visit Gringotts anyway. Fer Dumbledore. Hogwarts business.” Hagrid drew himself up proudly. "He usually gets me ter do important stuff fer him. Fetchin' you, gettin' things from Gringotts—knows he can trust me, see.

She smiled, nodding. “So—where is Hogwarts?”

He frowned, “We ‘ought to get goin', now, Sephie, I’ll answer yer questions on the way.”

She nodded, “Just a moment, then.”

She grabbed her bag with her one change of clothes and her old toothbrush and entered the one bathroom to dress and freshen up. Her hair, a complete mess, she quickly concentrated on untangling it, keeping it red. She maneuvered it into a bun, and tucked some loose strands behind her ear, her eyes bright—green and blue, both drinking each other in. She had both her parents’
eyes, after all, she smiled to herself. She threw on one of Dudley’s old t-shirts, the which she’d cut and sewn to fit her as a tank top with bare shoulders, like a halter top. Her pants were rolled messily at the hems, just slightly baggy as she’d sewn it together too loose, and grey, another pair of Dudley’s old pants. She hadn’t packed anything of her preferred, properly donated clothes—but she hardly thought Hagrid, the giant, would care.

She reappeared. Hagrid was waiting by the door. "Got everythin’? Come on, then." She glanced back at the quiet place, and turned to leave, stringing her bag over her shoulder—she’d need to put her school things somewhere.

Persephone followed Hagrid out onto the rock. The sky was quite clear now and the sea gleamed in the sunlight. She breathed in deeply and resisted the urge to fling herself into the ocean. She’d never been close to the ocean—and it was gorgeous now that she could see it properly.

“How is it you got all the way out here, Hagrid?” She asked, squinting in the sunlight as Hagrid approached the boat Uncle Vernon had rented. She watched in amazement as he picked the boat up easily and without hesitation and tipped the water out of it, as if it were a jug full of milk.

"Flew," Hagrid said as he tipped the boat back onto the water. "But we'll go back in this. Not s'pposed ter use magic now I've got yeh."

She was thinking over what a flying Hagrid would be like as they settled into the boat. "Seems a shame ter row, though," said Hagrid, giving her another of his sideways looks. "If I was ter—er -- speed things up a bit, would yeh mind not mentionin' it at Hogwarts?"

"Oh! No, go ahead," She said swiftly, much too tired and lost in her thoughts to know what she had just agreed to. Much to her pleasure, Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again and tapped it twice on the side of the boat. Persephone watched, entranced, and they sped off toward land.

“So—how is it that Minerva McGonagall was able to find me each time I’d moved?” Persephone asked, watching the glimmering sun on the ocean.

“Magic, o’ course,”

“Oh,” She thought about that for a moment, remembering one of her original questions. “So—where is Hogwarts?”

“No exact location—somewhere in Scotland, if yer lookin for a general answer. Bu’ unplotable, should you try.” She nodded, as if this made sense.

“So—Hogwarts is the Wizarding School of just the UK? Or of just Britain and Scotland?” She questioned. “How many students are there usually every year?”

“Oh, lots, of all sorts, all over the UK.” He paused, thinking, “I’d say meself there are probably a thousand students, give ‘er take a hundred.”

She gaped, “T'-that’s a lot.” The number frightened her—what if, in all those kids like just her, she couldn’t make a friend? The thought troubled her so much she thought it best to change the subject. “Must be a big school,” She said faintly.

He chuckled, and she gulped.

“So...so the bank...why’d you be mad to try and rob it?” She asked faintly.

"Spells—enchantments," said Hagrid, unfolding his newspaper as he spoke. "They say there's
dragons guardin’ the high security vaults. And then yeh gotta find yer way—Gringotts is hundreds of miles under London, see. Deep under the Underground. Yeh’d die of hunger tryin’ ter get out, even if yeh did manage ter get yer hands on summat."

She thought she could explode from the amount of questions she still had—what sort of economy did owls have? Was non-magical technology allowed in the school? Could she get an explanation about her being able to change her appearance? Was that normal?—but she learned the hard from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they read their newspaper. In Hagrid’s case, it was the Daily Prophet. She remained silent, thinking of how law worked in the magic world when suddenly,

"Ministry o’ Magic messin’ things up as usual," Hagrid muttered, turning the page.

She thought for a moment he could read her mind, but then she caught sight of the page he’d turn being titled with the same name. "There's a Ministry of Magic?" She asked without thinking.

"Course," said Hagrid. "They wanted Dumbledore fer Minister, 0 ’course, but he'd never leave Hogwarts, so old Cornelius Fudge got the job. Bungler if ever there was one. So he pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning, askin' fer advice."

Hagrid didn’t seem irritated at her question asking, so she asked, "But what does a Ministry of Magic do?"

"Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country." This made sense—Persephone had taken it upon herself to learn as much as she could in her school, for satisfactory purposes, and had learned of the witch hunts that reigned over the fifteen to eighteen hundreds. And besides, it didn’t seem like most other non-magical people knew about the magical world. And those who did, such as the Dursleys, seemed afraid of her—almost disgusted.

At this moment the boat bumped gently into the harbor wall. Hagrid folded up his newspaper, and they clambered up the stone steps onto the street.

She was sure the non-magical people they passed were rather frightened to see Hagrid, a man twice as tall as anyone else, pointing at perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and saying loudly, "See that, Sephie? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?"

She had to jog to keep up with Hagrid, panting as she asked, "Where is Gringotts, Hagrid?"

"Oh, in Diagon Alley, ’course. Goes down qui’ underground—did I mention the rumour abou’ the dragons?" said Hagrid. "Crikey, I’d like a dragon."

"You'd like a dragon?" She gasped. Those did not seem like good pets to keep—unless, like owls, they were trained and used in normal times in the wizarding world.

"Wanted one ever since I was a kid—here we go."

They had reached the station. There was a train to London in five minutes' time. Persephone had never been to London. She hadn’t even been allowed on the school trip to London—the Dursleys had told the school that she would misbehave as she always did when she was to travel too far. She was edging excitedly at this opportunity. She didn’t think Hagrid had ever been to London either, for he handed over his bills, "Muggle money," as he called it, to buy the tickets.

People stared more than ever on the train. Hagrid took up two seats and sat knitting what looked like a canary-yellow circus tent, and she barely took up one.
"Still got yer letter, Sephie?" he asked as he counted stitches. She untucked the parchment from her spacey pocket. "Good," said Hagrid. "There's a list there of everything yeh need."

She re-read the parchment:

**HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY GIRLS UNIFORM**

- One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)
- Five sets of winter inner-robes, white with house color
- Five sets of summer inner-robes, white with house color
- Five sets of dark tights, or knee high socks, (socks lined with house color is optional)
- One set of flying robes
- One set of flying inner robes
- One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear
- One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)
- Black shoes of choice for indoor and classroom uses, a heel of one inch for first years
- Black shoes of choice for outdoor and winter uses, a heel of one inch for first years
- Other clothing suitable for outside classroom uses

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags with the student's name.

**COURSE BOOKS**

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

- The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk
- A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot
- Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling
- A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emetic Switch
- One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore
- Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger
- Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander
- The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection by Quentin Trimble

**EQUIPMENT**
One wand

One cauldron (pewter, standard size 2) set

One set of glass or crystal phials

One telescope set

One set of stirrers.

One brass scales set

Students may also choose bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad. Any and all other pets brought will be handed over to the Gamekeeper.

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

"Can we buy all this in London?" She wondered aloud, thinking of what she thought he had called diagonally. She’d studied maps of the city in school but she’d never heard of such a place. She’d heard it in her maths class but…

"If yeh know where to go," said Hagrid. He seemed confident in where they were going, though he had obviously been used to a different way. He got stuck in the ticket barrier on the Underground, and complained loudly that the seats were too small and the trains moved too slow.

"I don't know how the Muggles manage without magic," he said as they climbed a broken-down escalator that led up to a bustling road lined with shops.

The London crowds were not an issue when Hagrid led the way. He was so huge that he made a path easy; all Persephone had to do was keep close behind him and watch she didn’t topple over with being so invested in taking everything in.

It was so strange, being in London, when she’d been locked in a closet most her life. Everything was so interesting, she probably would never have been sick of it. Book shops and music stores, restaurants and theaters, but not a place caught Persephone eye to hint they might be selling magical wands. Everyone they passed didn’t strike her with the same aura as Hagrid—it seemed like the streets were vacant of any wizard or witch, which was probably normal, but with this new eye open to Persephone, she couldn’t help it.

"This is it," said Hagrid, coming to a halt, causing Persephone to skid to a stop as well, "the Leaky Cauldron. It's a famous place."

It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub for a famous place.

If Hagrid hadn't pointed it out, Persephone wouldn't have noticed it was there. The people hurrying by didn't even glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all. Persephone found herself theorizing only she and Hagrid could see it. Before she could ask it aloud, Hagrid had steered her inside.

For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby. A few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny glasses of what smelled like sherry. One of them was smoking a long pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut. The low buzz of chatter stopped when they walked in. It seemed like they’d walked into the past. No one dressed like anyone who passed by the place—there were top hats, and robes and
Everyone seemed to know Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the bartender reached for a glass, saying, "The usual, Hagrid?"

"Can't, Tom, I'm on Hogwarts business," said Hagrid, clapping his great hand on Persephone's shoulder, nearly causing her to collapse.

"Good Lord," said the bartender, peering down at Persephone, "is this—can this be—?"

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

"Bless my soul," whispered the old bartender, "Persephone Potter... what an honor."

He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed toward Persephone and seized her hand, tears in his eyes, and he took to kissing it.

"Welcome back, Mrs. Potter, welcome back."

Persephone was in shock, realizing the entire room was looking at her. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it without realizing it had gone out. She didn’t know what to say for a moment, as Hagrid was beaming rather than explaining.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and the next moment, Persephone found herself shaking hands with everyone in the Leaky Cauldron, at least twice.

"Doris Crockford, Mrs. Potter, can't believe I'm meeting you at last."

"So proud, Mrs. Potter, I'm just so proud."

"Always wanted to shake your hand—I'm all of a flutter."

"Delighted, Mrs. Potter, just can't tell you, Diggle's the name, Dedalus Diggle." She was overwhelmed of it all for a moment, but as she blinked up at the man, she blinked in recognition.

"Haven’t I already seen you?" Persephone asked finally, as Dedalus Diggle's top hat fell off in his excitement. "You bowed to me once in a shop."

"She remembers!" cried Dedalus Diggle, looking around at everyone. "Did you hear that? She remembers me!" Persephone shook hands again and again, her head spinning nearly all the way off, until a pale young man made his way forward, very nervously and gave her a chance to breathe as he didn’t immediately reach for her hand. One of his eyes was twitching.

"Professor Quirrell!" said Hagrid. "Sephie, Professor Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts."

"P-P-Potter," stammered Professor Quirrell, grasping her hand ever so lightly, bending to kiss it, "c-can't t-tell you how p- pleased I am to meet you."

He seemed as nervous as she was, so she asked in a tone she hoped to be calm, "What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?"

"D-Defense Against the D-D-Dark Arts," muttered Professor Quirrell, as though he'd rather not think about it. "N-not that you n-need it, eh, P-P-Potter?" He laughed nervously. "You'll be g-getting all your equipment, I suppose? I've g-got to p-pick up a new b-book on vampires, m-myself." He looked terrified at the very thought.
But the others wouldn't let Professor Quirrell keep Persephone to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all. At last, Hagrid managed to make himself heard over the babble.

"Must get on—lots ter buy. Come on, Sephie."

Doris Crockford shook Persephone’s hand one last time, and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but a trash can and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned down at Persephone.

"Told yeh, didn't I? Told yeh you was famous. Even Professor Quirrell was tremblin' ter meet yeh—mind you, he's usually tremblin'."

"He seemed…very nervous…" She trailed off, not wanting to sound rude.

"Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine while he was studyin' outta books but then he took a year off ter get some firsthand experience…They say he met vampires in the Black Forest, and there was a nasty bit o’ trouble with a hag—never been the same since. Scared of the students, scared of his own subject now, where's me umbrella?"

It was such casual conversation that it made Persephone’s head spin. Vampires? Hags? What next? Werewolves? Zombies? She’d never been allowed to connect herself to the internet at the Dursleys, never mind they paid the same price and she’d literally built her own computer, so she had vague ideas what these monsters looked like from what Dudley’s conversations with his friends. To have them in this new world seemed insane. "Do demigods exist?" She questioned, hoping for a yes.

Hagrid laughed, as if she’d said something funny. She’d take that as a no.

While she conversed with herself in her head, Hagrid was counting bricks in the wall above the trash can.

"Three up... two across.” he muttered. "Right, stand back, Sephie."

He tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella.

The brick he had touched quivered—it wriggled—in the middle, a small hole appeared—it grew wider and wider—a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight.

"Welcome," said Hagrid, "to Diagon Alley."

Her mouth had already dropped at the amazing architecture feature—how did that even, but the volume must have changed!—and as she stepped through the archway, she gasped as the archway shrink back into a solid wall. She double checked with Hagrid that she was really seeing what she just saw, and was glad she couldn’t find words to express her feeling of amazement because she would have just talked Hagrid’s ear right off. He grinned at Persephone amazement.

Like in London, Persephone wanted to drink everything up.

Everywhere she looked was something she’d thought she was hallucinating—from bended books to cauldrons of all sizes, even the shops themselves offered Persephone amazement. They passed shops that sold robes, others selling telescopes and unfamiliar silver instruments. There was another shop that seemed most interesting, with windows windows stacked with barrels of bat
spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon....

She was so focused on everything, so full of excitement and probably a good amount of adrenaline, she was able to catch part of a conversation had by a few boys about her age in front of what looked like a broom store, "Look! The new Nimbus Two Thousand -- fastest ever --"

Another question to add to her already long list: Did broomsticks here fly or clean? Or both?

"Gringotts," said Hagrid.

They had reached a snowy white building that towered over the other little shops. It reminded her a lot of the Zeus cabin from Percy Jackson, with Greek architecture and burnished bronze doors, “I didn’t realize Greek architecture made its way into wizard culture. And, may I ask, what sort of architecture magic—” She stopped midsentence, seeing something surprising.

"Yeah, that's a goblin," said Hagrid quietly as they walked up the white stone steps toward him. The goblin was about a head shorter than her already short frame.

He had a swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Persephone noticed, very long fingers and feet. He bowed as they walked inside. Now they were facing a second pair of doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon them:

Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.

"Like I said, yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it," said Hagrid. A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver doors and they were in a vast marble hall. Either Washington house, or Olympus, she wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between the aesthetics of it all.

Other than the hundred more goblins sitting on high stools behind a long counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins in brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses, of course. She examined the room, but it was distracting with so many goblins leading people out and in of uncountable amount of doors. Hagrid led Persephone to the counter,

"Morning," said Hagrid to a free goblin. "We've come ter take some money outta Ms. Persephone Potter's safe."

"You have her key, Sir?"

"Got it here somewhere," said Hagrid, and he started emptying his pockets onto the counter, scattering a handful of moldy dog biscuits over the goblin's book of numbers. The goblin wrinkled his nose. Persephone watched the goblin on their right weighing a pile of rubies as big as glowing coals.

"Got it," said Hagrid at last, holding up a tiny golden key.

The goblin looked at it closely.
"That seems to be in order."

"An’ I’ve also got a letter here from Professor Dumbledore," said Hagrid importantly, throwing out his chest. "It's about the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen."

The goblin read the letter carefully, before nodding seriously.

"Very well," he said, handing it back to Hagrid, "I will have someone take you down to both vaults. Griphook!"

Griphook was yet another goblin. Once Hagrid had crammed all the dog biscuits back inside his pockets, he and Persephone followed Griphook toward one of the doors leading off the hall.

"What's the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen?" Persephone asked.


Griphook held the door open for them. Persephone was surprised to find the door opened to a narrow stone passageway. She was sort of expecting a marble themed thing, not a dungeon sort of thing—they even had flaming torches. It sloped steeply downward and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks toward them. It was a hassle, but she was able to squeeze in next to Griphook and Hagrid and they went flying.

Not actually flying—no, at first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting passages. Persephone wondered how Griphook remembered all the turns— left, right, right, left, middle fork, right, left, and then she lost count—but maybe this is what they did for fun. Pick a random number out of a— witch—hat and try to find it by a memory game. But she didn’t think that fit the situation because Griphook wasn’t steering. Maybe the cart knew its way around—either way, she didn’t trust it. Not unless she knew the mechanics of it all.

Persephone’s eyes watered at fist at the contact of the rushing air, but she kept them open—and for good reason. At some point, she thought she saw a burst of fire at the end of a passage and twisted around to see if it was a dragon, but too late—they plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites and stalagmites grew from the ceiling and floor.

"Did you know the difference between stalactites and stalagmites is nothing but that one grows on the ceiling and the other on the floor?" She asked over the noise of the cart.

"The difference is," He said, "Stalagmite's got an 'm' in it," said Hagrid. "An' don' ask me questions just now, I think I'm gonna be sick."

He probably didn’t hear her right but she didn’t blame him. He looked very green, and when the cart stopped at last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his knees from trembling.

Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke came billowing out, and as it cleared, Persephone gasped. Inside were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze Knuts.

"All yours," smiled Hagrid.

All Persephone’s—she couldn’t think straight for a moment. She’d, of course, had her own little hiding spot for her saved up money, somewhere the Dursleys would never be able to find if they took the place down brick by brick. But here—here was a fortune and they didn’t even know.
The only money they’d ever think to give her was for groceries—and Uncle Vernon went over the receipt with a magnifying glass to make sure she didn’t keep any of the change. And this whole time, she’d been worth a small fortune to their pocket change.

Hagrid helped her put a small pile into her bag. She noticed some things in the back of the vault were not money but items—some jewelry, some rolled up pieces of parchment, and even a golden-framed portrait. The portrait painted a handsome couple, a woman and a man, both well into their years, and Persephone could only make out the top of a black hair boy’s hair before something else caught her attention, “I own a house?”

“And a cottage in Godric’s Hollow, though yer’ gonna needta’ renovate it,” He said awkwardly. She tried not to dwell on the house too much—"The gold ones are Galleons," he explained. "Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, it’s easy enough.”

That made no sense, Persephone thought as she did the mental math. And besides—couldn’t someone just sell the wizarding money, as it was gold, silver and copper? They’d make a profit—but Persephone didn’t say this out loud. “Right, that should be enough fer a couple o’ terms, we’ll keep the rest safe for yeh.” He turned to Griphook. "Vault seven hundred and thirteen now, please, and can we go more slowly?"

"One speed only," said Griphook.

They were going even deeper now and gathering speed. The air became colder and colder as they hurtled round tight corners. They went rattling over an underground ravine, and Persephone leaned over the side to try to see what was down at the dark bottom, but Hagrid groaned and pulled her back by the her shoulder.

Vault seven hundred and thirteen had no keyhole.

"Stand back," said Griphook importantly. He stroked the door gently with one of his long fingers and it simply melted away. "If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they’d be sucked through the door and trapped in there," said Griphook.

"How often do you check to see if anyone's inside?" Persephone asked fearfully.

"About once every ten years," said Griphook with a rather nasty grin.

“Oh, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool,” She muttered under her breath, nodding like this was casual.

She figured something very important was being kept inside, by someone very important—but all she saw was darkness. She leaned forward, squinting, but saw nothing—and then she noticed a grubby little package wrapped up in brown paper lying on the floor. Hagrid picked it up and tucked it deep inside his coat. Persephone bit her tongue back from asking him. She knew better than to think he’d tell her after seeing all that high security.

"Come on, back in this infernal cart, and don't talk to me on the way back, it's best if I keep me mouth shut," said Hagrid.

One wild cart ride later they stood blinking in the sunlight outside Gringotts. Persephone felt an odd possessive feel, to not spend the money and to keep it locked away, afraid someone may take it like the Dursleys had when she was six—she’d gotten nearly seven pounds to buy herself a fresh pack of pencils and cried herself to sleep for three nights straight. But she had to remind herself that the Dursleys would move to America, a place they often complained about, if she told them who
protected her money. Perhaps she could take her saved up money to Gringotts as well, but maybe having non magical money currency was good. But then again, she could nick a toothbrush from the cupboard in the bathroom before she left for school.

For school—she was spending money for school, as she’d always planned. This was okay.

"Might as well get yer uniform," said Hagrid, nodding toward Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions. "Listen, Sephie, would yeh mind if I slipped off fer a pick-me-up in the Leaky Cauldron? I hate them Gringotts carts." He did still look a bit sick.

She entered Madam Malkin's shop alone, her nerves back in her hands and knees.

Madam Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed all in mauve.

"Hogwarts, clear?" she said, when Persephone tried to speak. "Got the lot here—this young man is being fitted up just now, in fact."

In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood Persephone on a stool next to him and immediately, a measuring tape took to wrapping itself around her slim waist and took her arm’s measurements, as well as every other measurement. She was so amazed by this—she’d had some sewing experience, always cutting up Dudley’s clothes and sewing it tighter for her own personal fit. In her moment of amazement, she nearly missed the boy’s stare. He was staring, unashamed, with his eyes wide. She eyed him back, and he jumped, nearly off the footstool, when he realized he’d been caught.

The boy cleared his throat, and said, "Hogwarts, too?" His voice cracked.

She gave him a smile, "Yes."

"My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice. "Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first years can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."

Persephone was strongly reminded of Dudley but her interested peaked at the words of racing brooms. She wanted so badly to play a sport, but most teams didn’t allow girls on them. It was merely the least of the sexist things she endured in her school—old school.

"Have you got your own broom?" the boy went on.

"No," Persephone said.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"Er—No," Persephone said again, wondering what on earth Quidditch could be. She was glad he’d asked—this meant girls could play to.

"I do—Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say, I agree. Know what house you'll be in yet?"

"Not yet," She said, not having the faintest idea of what he was talking of.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our
family have been—imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

"Mmm," She said, distracted as the measuring tape took to measuring the distance between her chin and collarbone.

"I say, look at that man!" said the boy suddenly, nodding toward the front window. Hagrid was standing there, grinning at Persephone and pointing at two large ice creams to show he couldn't come in. She was starting to seriously like this man.

"That's Hagrid," Persephone said, pleased to know something the boy didn't. "He works at Hogwarts. He's very kind—brought me a birthday cake yesterday."

"Oh," said the boy, "I've heard of him." He looked as though he wanted to say something mean but looking at her expression of joy—ice cream!—he didn't. "Why is he with you? Where are your parents?"

"They're dead," Persephone said, and for a moment she finally felt the sting of their death. But she didn't know them—she only knew them as completely different people who’d abandoned her. Now, she felt guilty ever thinking such bad things of them. “That’s why Hagrid is taking me shopping.”

"Oh, sorry," He said, not sounding sorry at all. "But they were our kind, weren't they?"

She raised a brow to him, ". . . Er, no, you’re white…” She said, frowning in confusion. “My dad is Spanish, I think.” She felt herself building up unease. Were there prejudices against the ethnicities of the students here too?

“No, no I mean were they a witch and wizard?"

“Oh, yes.”

Whatever tenseness lay on his own shoulders dropped, “I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your name, anyway?”

“Lily,” She said without thinking, surprising herself. Madam Malkin said, "That's it for you, my dear.” She hopped down, and didn’t waste a moment in going down to the front. She found that inner robes were whatever you wore under your outer robes—blouses, skirts, sweater, shirts, jeans, pants. They simply went under the outer robes.

There were some more old-fashioned cuts but she quickly found that there many clothes that were more modern. The school uniform for girls consisted, in winter, a skirt and long sleeved-white blouse with buttons, with a sweaters lined with silver at the hems. There were trousers as well, which she hoped were also for girls. There was a selection of different styled tights—some patterned, some just plain black—and the socks were all the same, with the silver lining. It wasn’t until she found a silver lined tie that had a description under it that the silver changed to match your house color that she understood the silver. The summer inner robes were a short, puffy sleeved shirt with the same skirt and tie. There was also a dress option, a tight fitted, to above the knee robe with a clean cut thick Peter Pan collar with shoulders.

It seemed there were several options for uniforms—the classic black skirt and white blouse, the black cut clean dress for girls, several different sorts of black skirts and white shirts. Just basic posh boarding school uniform in different styles.
She took a moment to pick out some non-wizard outfits as well—she’d still had clothes at the Dursleys from the very most generous neighbors but she found it extremely thrilling, buying some of her own—new and with her own money, along with her tights and even three headbands. She ended up also picking shoes from here too, one pair of flat shoes of shiny black and a pair of lace up, slim boots that went up just below her knees. It was all three galleons, including her flying robes, school robes, shoes and accessories.

She ate her ice cream in a peacefully frustrating thoughtful moment. She’d called herself Lily… that’d been her mother’s name—her middle name.

"What's up?" said Hagrid.

"Nothing," Persephone lied. They stopped to buy parchment and quills. Persephone found herself smiling at the discovery of ink that changed color as you wrote. When they had left the shop, she finally found the courage to ask, "Hagrid, what's Quidditch?"

"Blimey, Sephie, I keep forgettin' how little yeh know—not knowin' about Quidditch!"

"Don't make me feel worse," Persephone. She told Hagrid about the pale boy in Madam Malkin’s.

"—and he said people from Muggle families shouldn't even be allowed in." She vented, throwing her hands up. "Ridiculous—right?" She hoped she was right in her feeling of he’d been prejudice.

"Yer not from a Muggle family, Sephie. If he'd known who yeh were—he's grown up knowin' yer name if his parents are wizardin' folk. You saw what everyone in the Leaky Cauldron was like when they saw yeh. Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' Muggles—look at yer mum! Look what she had fer a sister!"

The talk of her mother stung guiltily, she changed the subject. "So what is Quidditch?"

"It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like—like soccer in the Muggle world—everyone follows Quidditch—played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four balls—sorta hard ter explain the rules."

"And what are Slytherin and Hufflepuff?"

"School houses. There's four. Everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot o' duffers, but --"

"I bet I'm a Hufflepuff…"

"Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin," said Hagrid darkly. "There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one."

"Vol—sorry—You-Know-Who was at Hogwarts?"

"Years an' years ago," said Hagrid.

“Well…I’m sure Slytherin aren’t all bad…” She muttered, looking away and gasping, “Oh Hagrid, can we go in there!” She pointed to what looked like a cosmetics and hair salon.

“We should stick to the list, Sephie.” He said, but she could tell he was flustered by her suggestion.

“Please, I’ll only be a moment,” Or two, she thought.

He didn’t need to stare at her pleading face too long to finally allow her to go, with the promise of
him staying on the spot. She took off happily, into the shop.

She concluded she needed to buy everything—but for the moment, necessities. Hair products—mostly. And a haircut. She didn’t want to depend on her ability of changing her hair—what if it went away?

But another necessities made itself known as she squinted at the label, “Glasses, hun?”

An American voice asked behind her. She turned to find a dark haired beauty, with bouncy short hair smiling to her. The woman was very nice, and told her squinting was not a good sign of eyesight—apparently this shop sold glasses too (?). She needed them—glasses. And she got a pair of round glasses.

She’d wandered to the curly haired products afterwards, trying out her new glasses. Everything was...so *clear*. The glasses she had picked out were supposed to adapt to the first person it wore’s eyesight and it had to hers. Her hand was so...*clear*. She didn’t need to squint—not at all! She ended up nearly a different looking person—still a red head but with freshly cut layers that made her hair *bounce*. A brush that brushed out her curls in any way she needed, or wanted, that came with a cream that erased frizz. She thought to buy bobby pins and normal brush set when back at the Durlseys—shudder—but thought that was no priority. Not yet—she’d braid her hair most days anyway.

Hagrid was very happy to see her, though she didn’t think he’d seen a difference in her hair when he only noted on her glasses. She felt like she could see so clearly that she now looked around with even more awe.

They bought Persephone’s school books in a shop called Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones bound in leather; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few books with nothing in them at all. Even Dudley, who never read anything, would have been wild to get his hands on some of these. Hagrid had to just about drag her away from most of them but she ended up buying two books that looked like fictional stories, and few more (*Modern Magical History, Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century, and Howarts, A History*, for background reading), something she’d never had other than the iconic Percy Jackson.

“I only had science, math and engineering textbooks to read,” She told Hagrid as she inspected the cover. “I’m rather good at those, but nothing too thrilling, especially when you read into it all the way to the university level. Which reminds me—I built a laptop, do you think I’d be able to bring it to school? Does Hogwarts have internet?” She asked, distractedly running her hands over the new pages.

“Muggle technology doesn’t go through the magical barriers, and fer good reason—all too complicatin’.” He told her, making her choke.

First on her witching agenda was to figure out how to sneak laptops into Hogwarts.

As they roamed the shops, checking off each of her requirements, such as a pewter cauldron, a nice set of scales for weighing potion ingredients and a collapsible brass telescope. Then they visited the Apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a supply of some basic potion ingredients for Persephone, Persephone strolled about the shop in fascination—she’d figure she would fair nicely in Potions class. It seemed so…intriguing…
Outside the Apothecary, Hagrid checked Persephone’s list again.

"Just yer wand left—A yeah, an' I still haven't got yeh a birthday present."

Persephone felt herself flush.

“Oh, no, you don’t have to—”

"I know I don’t have to. Tell yeh what, I’ll get yer animal. Not a toad, toads went outta fashion years ago, ‘/yeh'd be laughed at—cats, oh cat’s’ll make yah sneeze—how ‘bout an owl? All the kids want owls, they're dead useful, carry yer mail an' everythin’."

She wanted a cat—she wanted a cat more than she wanted anything ever—but when they walked passed the Owl Emporium she couldn’t help but reconsider—the babies in the windows were so cute! There was one who wasn’t a baby but wasn’t as big as the others, who watched her interestingly. She was a snowy white owl with big round amber eyes. Persephone tried to look at the other owls but she kept looking over at this particular owl, who also watched her. She couldn’t walk too far away, in fear someone else would notice the beauty. Now, Persephone carried a large cage that held the beauty who was fast asleep with her head under her wing. She was absolutely in love with her, unable to stop her stammering of thank you’s.

"Don' mention it," said Hagrid gruffly. "Don' expect you've had a lotta presents from them Dursleys. Just Ollivanders left now—only place fer wands, Ollivanders, and yeh gotta have the best wand."

A magic wand... this was what Persephone had been really looking forward to.

The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single, spindly chair that Hagrid sat on to wait. Persephone felt strangely as though she had entered a very strict library; she swallowed a lot of new questions that had just occurred to her and looked instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling.

Her hands tingled, as if the nerves and cells had just multiplied by a trillion. She felt something pass through her veins, something familiar but unfamiliar at the same time. Her hands tremble and the air became—bendable. Like, she could reach out and bend the air...what a strange feeling.

And strangely enough, when she moved to tuck her hair behind her ear, something out of the corner of her eye moved. She snapped her head to it, but there was no one there. Distracted, she took a step towards what she had thought had moved...

"Good afternoon," said a soft voice. Persephone jumped, freezing on the spot. Hagrid must have jumped, too, because there was a loud crunching noise and he got quickly off the spindly chair.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop. Moving around the counter was a young boy with a thick and wide book in his arms that he set down on the counter. He barely glanced at her, and Persephone noticed how pale the boy was.

"Wandless magic…” The man said. “How peculiar…may I?” he was reaching for her hand, and she thought nothing else but to nod hesitantly. He took her hand and examined it, curling and uncurling her fingers. “A rarity, Miss Potter, and a pleasure.” He nodded to her hand, "Yes, yes. I
thought I'd be seeing you soon, Persephone Potter." It wasn't a question. "Spotting image of your mother, you are—with both their eyes, I see...It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work."

Mr. Ollivander did not blink as he said this, making her suddenly uncomfortable.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it—it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."

And then Mr. Ollivander had come so close that he and Persephone were almost nose to nose. Persephone saw her own eyes reflected in his misty ones.

"And that's where..."

Mr. Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Persephone's forehead with a long, white finger.

"I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it," he said softly. "Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands...well, if I'd known what that wand was going out into the world to do..."

He shook his head and then, to Persephone's relief, spotted Hagrid.

"Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! How nice to see you again.... Oak, sixteen inches, rather bendy, wasn't it?"

"It was, sir, yes," said Hagrid.

"Good wand, that one. But I suppose they snapped it in half when you got expelled?" said Mr. Ollivander, suddenly stern.

"Er—yes, they did, yes," Hagrid said, shuffling his feet. "I've still got the pieces, though," he added brightly.

"But you don't use them?" said Mr. Ollivander sharply.

"Oh, no, sir," Hagrid said quickly. Persephone noticed he gripped his pink umbrella very tightly as he spoke. She entertained a theory of perhaps he'd done something different other than use the pieces...

"Hmmm," said Mr. Ollivander, giving Hagrid a piercing look. "Well, now—Miss Potter, let's see..." He did not turn around when the boy handed him a tape measure with silver markings. When he caught her looking at the boy, he nodded faintly, "My assistant for the summer. Which is your wand arm?"

"My...right?"

"Hold out your arm. That's it." He measured Persephone from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to underarm and round her head. As he measured, he said, "Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Miss. Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."
“What’s the difference between the three?” Persephone questioned as the measuring tape measured between her nostrils.

“That is hard to answer, Miss Potter, as a wand is it not just its core—every wand core reacts differently to every wand wood,” He nodded, “Do you mind?” He pulled at her fingers, cracking them.

“Dragon heartstrings are most powerful, unicorn hairs most consistent and phoenix feathers the most mysterious,” The boy said with an odd tone as he passed by to reach up a shelf behind her. Mr. Ollivander held her hands up and told her to hold them limp, where he examined her cuticles. She glanced at him but he was counting out something out on the front shelf.

Persephone suddenly realized that the tape measure was moving on its accord. Mr. Ollivander now flitted over the shelves, considering the boxes on them. She watched him curiously as the measuring tape measure from her middle section of eyebrows to her hairline. Did that matter when she could change her appearance?

"That will do," he said, and the tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor. "Right then, Miss. Potter. Here we are," He pulled down a box and opened it and offered the inside to her, “Give this a whirl—alderwood and unicorn hair. Six inches. Nice and flexible.”

Persephone took the wand in her hands and found it felt uncomfortable in her hands. She barely started to move it when Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of her hand almost at once. “Stubborn, very stubborn…”

He turned to the boy, who didn’t even need to look at Mr. Ollivander to know what he was requesting—he handed him the box as he passed. “Ash and unicorn hair, seven inches and quite stiff.”

She took the wand and gave it just a swish when he snatched it back quickly. The boy handed him a box, telling him, “Ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy.” She quickly realized what she had found confusion about his voice—it was American.

Persephone tried it—and then another, and then another one. She wasn’t too sure what she was doing wrong—how many possible wand options could there be? What reaction was she waiting for? What reaction was Mr. Ollivander waiting for? At some point, half an hour and sixty three wands later, Mr. Ollivander found something interesting about her, “Tricky customer, eh?”

“Mr. Ollivander, sir?” The boy spoke, “May I suggest that she isn’t fit for any wands in the shop?”

“Nonsense, Nico! There is a perfect match here somewhere…” He thought for a moment and the boy, Nico, spoke again.

“What about this—this old method I found, sir?” He unfolded a paper from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Ollivander. “About a mixed wand wood? The independent scale?”

“Ah yes…” He read quietly the paper, which look rater unofficial, and glanced up at Persephone, who was trying to read the paper upside down. “A rather rare method of wand making but has always worked out…hmm…follow me, if you would, please.”

Persephone, suspicious now, followed Mr. Ollivander and Nico through the rows of tall shelves, boxes of wands stacked up very high. She wondered why everything didn’t fall as they passed—she was sure the simple moving air created by their steps would knock the delicately stacked boxes right over.
In the very back of the shop, there was a room with many books and an open, large blueprint but it looked more...like a 3D wand mold. There was wood chips all over the floor and empty wand boxes. She had to guess this was where wands were made.

“Wand making is a tricky magic and is often inherited from a parent to a child,” He told her while looking through drawers in the walls. “I’ve known much of the Potter family line and am disappointed to say none were of possession of the talent it requires to this peculiar magic but...child does not always take from parent.”

He finally brought out three boxes and placed them next to each, “Will you please raise your wand hand and face down your palm to the box?”

She did as she was told and he gestured for her to move her hand carefully over all the boxes. She did so, once too quickly which he called her out on. She did it once more, not understand what was happening, and then, like her hand was a magnet, the box in the middle had move. Freezing, looking up to Mr. Ollivander to find his eyes alight with excitement, the box’s lid shuttered once more, flying off with a lot of force for a feather to fly up to her palm. Jumping, she withdrew her hand only for the feather to fly right at her and poke her in the eyes.

“Ow...” She rubbed her eyes as Mr. Ollivander laughed with glee.

“How curious!” He muttered as Nico stacked the boxes and put them aside. “Here—here! This is going splendidly.”

Persephone, whose eyes had watered and stung, did not understand why this was going splendidly but opened her eyes. He had placed seeds all along the desk. She looked up at him—what the hell was going on?

“Your wand wood—you must grow it for it to be willing.”

“Willing...to what?” She asked slowly. She was starting to become frustrated. “Are you sure maybe another wand isn’t—”

“The feather has already chosen you so no, no other wand,” Nico said blankly, shrugging.

“Alright then,” She sighed. “Same procedure?”

“Blow, dear—only one will withstand to be your wand wood.” Mr. Ollivander urged, looking eager to see the results. “Go on!”

Deciding to give up, she blew. The seeds moved with her breath. Not one ‘withstood to be her wand wood’. She blew all them and then she noticed one not moving. She blew once more—another two withstood as well.

“Three!” Mr. Ollivander cried, “Merlin, you were right, Nico!” Tittering excitedly around the table, he took both seeds carefully and put them aside. “Willow, Aspen and English Oak...how interesting...It seems that three will be your lucky number here, Miss Potter.”

“I...don’t understand.” She stared at the seeds. “Do I plant them? What about my wand core?”

“You will need two more wand cores to be able to grow the wand wood and unfortunately, the wand cores are not found in my shop. I can offer you advice—they are always simpler than they are complex, easier to find than they are to hide.”

She wondered if he were on drugs.
“It will be a pleasure to see what your cores shall be.” Mr. Ollivander told her when he led her out, her still silent with shock. “You shall find your way to your wand, for everyone who has performed the rare task of making their own wand has…Especially after picking such acquiring wand woods—and your phoenix feather…curious, very curious,” He muttered as he wrapped her seeds and cores (though she did not know how her hair was a core but, go off) in a box with brown paper.

“Sorry but what’s curious?” She finally spoke up.

Mr. Ollivander fixed Persephone with his pale stare.

"I remember every detail of every wand I’ve ever sold, Miss Potter. Every single wand wood to the inches—the feather of which will produce your wand came from a phoenix that only gave one other feather—just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for these cores when its sister why, its sister gave you that scar."

Persephone paled.

"Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious indeed how these things happen. The wand chooses the wizard, remember…and as rare as this may be, I think it is destined…yes, I think we are to expect brilliant things from you, Miss. Potter…After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things—terrible, yes, but great."

She couldn’t understand this—Voldemort had killed her parents, what could he possibly have done to shadow over this fact, what could be so great? Unable to say much but a bidding thank you, she paid seven gold Galleons for her wand, and Mr. Ollivander bowed them from his shop.

She stopped when Nico opened the door for them and she turned to say something—to ask what the hell she was supposed to do with seeds and a feather—when he met her eyes and she stared. Dark eyes, such a dark blue, an ocean hue that she could not recognize—it was so dark…almost like a dying sunset where the sun had gone to sleep and the sky was darkening by the second.

“Good luck,” He told her and she walked out, more confused than ever.

“Actually…Hagrid, can we get a cat? Can I get a cat?” She pleaded when he said they’d finished. “I want to really fulfill the witch aesthetic with finding a black cat.”

And they did—Hagrid was very for Persephone having animals. There were so many cats, of all sorts of colors. Big ones and small ones and then—and then…she found, all the way in the back, a beautiful, incredibly adorable tiny, black kitten. He was all alone in his cage, meowing loudly for attention. The store clerk informed Persephone that someone had just adopted her two sisters.

This kitten was only five weeks old—apparently, magic brought up kittens were more mature than normal kittens. They eat food, use the bathroom by themselves and have most of their teeth, and, most importantly, can be adopted.

Persephone was lectured very sternly about taking care of a young kitten and she was slowly feeling more and more confident in taking care of the kitten—and she then got to hold him and he immediately lightened in color, going from pitch black to brilliant white. She was told that that breed of cat blackened when in certain moods—but she was comfortable in her arms.

She was warm—so warm. And tiny. She fit right in her hands and meowed loudly, looking up at her with blue eyes. The store clerk informed her that she, the kitten, would have green eyes by the age of eight weeks. She could feel her chest moving as she breathed, “Bonjour…”

“You’ll need a few things extra, but less things if you plan on having him be an outdoor cat—” She
was persuaded to buy her some food and a bowl, a little collar that had his name on it and that was enchanted to have him answer her calls. She decided on the name Salem, because it was a black cat usually and witches have black cats and the salem witches trials—get it?

The late afternoon was warming the city once more but nothing too spectacular—not after the day she’d just had. All through the short journey from Diagon Alley through the wall, back through the now empty Leaky Cauldron, she’d been unable to string her thoughts together, something very uncommon in her mind. Her usual observant eyes barely noticed the people gawking at them on the Underground, staring after them with their funny-shaped packages and the snowy owl asleep in its cage on Persephone’s lap, the cat meowing from her cage. Up another escalator, out into Paddington station; Persephone only registered where they were when Hagrid tapped her on the shoulder.

"Got time fer a bite to eat before yer train leaves," he said.

He bought Persephone a hamburger and they sat down on plastic seats to eat them. Persephone kept looking around. Everything looked so strange, somehow.

"You all right, Sephie? Yer very quiet," said Hagrid.

She couldn’t explain the emotion she’d been feeling—she’d had it for years, every time she got less than what she expected to get on a test, or every time she couldn’t figure out a math problem, even after re-reading the instructions. When she forgot a name of the planets, or when she couldn’t for the life of her spell a word. It took a long moment, because she’d just had the best birthday in her life, but she felt it so dearly, that emotion, that sucking feeling.

"Everyone thinks I'm special," She tried. "Those people in the Leaky Cauldron, Professor Quirrell, Mr. Ollivander... I just don’t understand how…” She lost her trail of thought. “I’ve worked for everything—because I’ve had to. Boys in my class always put me down because I’m a girl and I have to prove them wrong but then—I don’t know,” She whined. “I set expectations for myself doing so—I’m smart but it sucks because I’ll never be smart enough. I know how to fix things and I can name most of the scientific names for every dog breed—but if I miss one, I’ve just let everyone down—and myself. And here,” She frowned. “I’ve done something, that I didn’t even know I did, and everyone will expect great things—and, sure yes, I can do wandless magic but there isn’t a textbook on my list required for a wandless class in school—I know nothing of magic. How can they expect great things?"

Hagrid leaned across the table. Behind the wild beard and eyebrows he wore a very kind smile.

"Don' you worry, Sephie. You'll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you'll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it's hard. Yeh've been singled out, an' that's always hard. But yeh'll have a great time at Hogwarts—I did—still do, 'smatter of fact."

Maybe this helped, or maybe he wanted to help, but it did help.

Hagrid helped Persephone on to the train that would take him back to the Dursleys, then handed her an envelope.

"Yer ticket fer Hogwarts, " he said. "First o' September -- King's Cross -- it's all on yer ticket. Any problems with the Dursleys, send me a letter with yer owl, she'll know where to find me.... See yeh soon, Pur’sephenie."

The train pulled out of the station. Persephone wanted to watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; she rose in her seat, on the very tips of her toes, but he was gone in the moment she blinked.
About her uniform: think Chilling Adventures of Sabrina the Teenage Witch, episode nine, what the weird sisters were wearing. That's the inspiration for the dress I'm referring to.

About her wand: It's completely my doing, just because wand making is so interesting to me that I wanted to add it in.

Also: What house should Persephone be in? I'm thinking either Gryffindor, as canon would have it, or Slytherin, as fanon would have it. Ravenclaw, for wishful thinking or Hufflepuff for just wanting to give Puffs a good light and some rep. 

Please comment, I adore reading them!
Persephone spent the next few weeks counting down the days until September 1st.

She’d spend the days in her bedroom, only retreating for meals and using the bathroom. Her room had truly become her haven in the weeks of August. Whenever she came down to the kitchen, no one said a word to her. Initially, she wasn’t sure if anyone would bring up anything—and she wasn’t sure she wanted anyone to.

She was mad—so unbelievably furious at the fact that she’d been lied to. About her heritage, about why she was with the Durlseys, about her parents. She’d spent her entire life with the drowning feeling of not being good enough, because how could she be good enough at anything—if her own parents didn’t want her? Now she was in a bizarre place where she wanted to know her parents, more than ever before, and that she felt guilty for ever believing aunt Petunia.

It wasn’t a perfect façade of pretending she didn’t exist—Dudley was now so scared of Persephone, he’d taken to quite literally exiting the room in record times each time she walked into the room. She didn’t care much for it—she kept herself busy in her bedroom.

She spent her days in the bedroom, shut in by her own will because now that neither her Uncle nor Aunt spoke to her, she was not forced to do anything. It was ridiculous how far they took it—whenever she came down for meals that she wasn’t even allowed to cook, they acted as though any chair with Persephone in it were empty. Although this was an improvement in many ways, it did become a bit depressing after a while.

But she found lots to keep herself entertained—her schoolbooks, for one. She read late into the night, carefully examining each word. Her schoolbooks were so very interesting—she ended up reading a few of them twice. Her potions, mostly. She was sure she would enjoy the class, as she’d already memorized most of the books. She did end up going off to the library to find some more books, mostly on flowers and such that were included in her school books.

She was sure she would also really enjoy Transfiguration. She found a part of the book where it mentioned Human Transfiguration—it was meant to be so advanced that it would not even be mentioned until later years. People who could naturally change their appearance were called metamorphmagus.

She found that she could probably change any part of herself, to look like anyone. She’d tried to change her hair into several other colors and found it just as easy as easy as the red to black and black to red. Her eyes were easy to change, as were her lashes—she decided to leave them alone when she returned to their natural position. Her eye shape was rather pretty and the thick, long curled lashes framed them nicely. She’d tried lengthening her fingers too and found that the changing of her bones was not painful but uncomfortable. She’d avoid it if she could.
While Potions and Transfiguration were the most interesting, Charms looked to be the most fun, only because she understood each spell and charm incantation. Most spells and charm incantations were in Latin, which was very lucky for Persephone, who’d made the connections between Spanish and Latin. She also picked up a book on Latin from the library as well.

When she wasn’t reading, she was trying to make her wand. She had planted the seeds in a little pot, wondering what could possibly grow. She was practicing what Mr. Ollivander had called wandless magic. It turned out the earth easily bent to her will—she could keep the flowers in the vase on her desk perfectly healthy, and even more so, they grew with her speaking to them, in encouragements. The wand seeds did not produce any wands, however. She still had the feather but she was not sure how she was supposed to find other wand cores—were others than the three? She a phoenix feather, what else could there be?

She’d also been able to lift things with the air, if she pretended like the air was solid and she pushed up, concentrating on that bit of air. So, air and Earth. It was thrilling to find this—she wondered if the instances of heat resistance meant that she could also do something with fire. She’d go down and stick her hand in the fireplace if that wouldn’t immediately break the façade the Dursleys were putting on. And besides, she was more interested to see whether or not she could do something with water.

After she was well versed in identifying her potions ingredients and what a bezoar was, she would just sit with her owl. She’d decided to call her Hedwig, a name she had found in *A History of Magic*. She found, with research on the name on her laptop, that the name Hedwig also was a patron of orphans or something. Ironic.

She would lay on her bed reading late into the night, Hedwig swooping in and out of the open window as she pleased. It was lucky that Aunt Petunia didn’t come in to vacuum anymore, because Hedwig kept bringing back dead mice. Every night before she went to sleep, Persephone ticked off another day on the piece of paper she had pinned to the wall, counting down to September the first.

Her Salem was very content with Persephone—being as she was still so small, she required a lot of her attention. She kept her in her bedroom at all times and planned on finding a way to sneak her into Hogwarts, one way or another.

On the very last day before September 1st, she spent the day with the Johnsons, in Diana’s room, where she gave her the most girlish of goodbyes—trimming her eyebrow hair while telling her how to maintain nice skin. Persephone had always took Diana as the most educated girl on the block, that she forgot every pretty dress she owned had come from her. Now, hearing her tell her how to use eyelash curlers was the strangest occurrence.

She told her that she would be heading to a boarding school, and Diana told her she would be finishing school in France.

“Why?” Persephone asked.

Diana paused, “I’m going to spend some time with my biological family,” She said simply. Persephone looked at her in surprise.

“Wait, what do you mean?” Persephone asked.

Diana avoided her gaze, and reached up to tie up her very curly hair. “My mother and sisters, I mean. Half-sisters.”

“Y-your mother? I thought…” Persephone trailed off. Was Mrs. Johnson not Diana’s mother? How
could—what?

“May is my adoptive mom—well, she was my foster mom first but she and Johnathan adopted me when I was ten.” She smiled. “My mother wants me to come and get to know my sisters when I refused to get to know her. She won’t tell me who my biological father is…” She rolled her eyes. “I think there might be another foster kid possibly coming here, so.”

Persephone decided not to ask any more questions and she picked up an old Italian book of Diana’s—it was all marked and written on, next to words to connect to French words, as if to make sense of the texts. “I’ve have some books you maybe interested in.” She offered in her faint accent when she saw Persephone pick it off her desk. There were several boxes littered around the room, but Persephone didn’t want to ask.

“I don’t speak Italian,” Persephone told her, but read over the French words anyway. Diana tilted her head back, smoothing over her eyebrows now.

“Well, then learn Italian, they are very similar languages, with all the verbs. All connected, all just remixes of Latin—which is also very useful, you should learn that too. You have strong eyebrows, you know?” She said, distracted. “Or you could go to Italy—we’re going next summer, my parents wanted me to invite you along.” She smiled. “Adoptive parents, if you’re wondering.”

She blushed, “I don’t think I’ll be allowed.”

Diana shrugged, “I’m allowed to bring one friend, and since you’re interested in Italian…” She trailed off, not finishing her sentence. Persephone found it endearing that Diana considered her a friend but didn’t give an answer.

So, that evening, she added the books and…cosmetics…Diana had given her as a gift. Persephone vows, one day, she’ll name her daughter after Diana, even after causing her such pain in plucking her eyebrows. She’d already packed nearly all her belongings into her trunk—all her clothes (non-magical and magical, as in, school clothing), her shoes (non-magical), her new hair and cosmetics products (non-magical and magical included) and all her books (non-magical and magical). The only things left in the room to acknowledge she’d ever belonged to that room was the beddings, and the floral prints.

As she examined her reflections—her face seemed so strange with sharpened eyebrows—someone walked in, startling her. She jumped as Aunt Petunia walked in, setting fresh, folded sheets on the bed. She stared at her for a moment, not expecting her aunt to linger but surprised to find her lingering, closing the door and standing in the room for a moment before placing something else amongst the sheets. Persephone looked away, “We’re going up to London tomorrow, so we’ll take you to King’s Cross. Here’s the rest of your medication,” She nodded to the bottle she’d dropped on top of the bed.

"Why are you going to London?” Persephone asked, frowning.

"Taking Dudley to the hospital," She said, looking away from Persephone in the low, lamp light. "We must get that tail removed before school begins."

Persephone nodded, and Aunt Petunia looked to whatever she’d put on the sheets. “It was your mother’s.”

At the spoken words of Persephone’s mother, she looked to whatever she’d dropped onto the sheets. Before she could stop herself, she said the words she couldn’t keep herself from saying, words she’d wanted so badly to say for so long, “I’m not a freak,” Persephone said, looking
straight at Aunt Petunia, knowing her eyes were burning. “That’s a horrible thing to say.”

Aunt Petunia said nothing but stared for a moment before leaving, leaving Persephone to her thoughts. She stared at the chain looking thing on the sheets and took a hesitant step towards it. It was a necklace, with a round white studded, the size of maybe a quarter, an oval shaped quarter, hanging from a long, golden chain. *It was your mother’s…*

She picked it up and for a moment, found it hard to swallow. She smiled, and was surprised to see a tear fall from her cheek and fall onto the stud. For a moment, something popped up in the blank, white oval picture and then a stud from a plant appeared….it was magical…and a *plant*!

Persephone woke bright and early the next morning and, unable to go to sleep, made to get herself ready. She put on the witch uniform she’d laid out last night, leaving the robes to put on once she was on the train. It reminded her slightly of a non-magical school uniform—black skirt above her knees, button up blouse and black silver lined neck-tie. She put on her normal school shoes on, a pair of shiny, pointed, black T-strap Mary Janes flats with hidden wedges—it looked normal enough. She had also put on her mother’s locket, of an actively growing flower on it…it was good Aunt Petunia had not realize it was magic, otherwise she’d have thrown it away.

She mused the idea of putting her witch hat on, just to scare the living daylights out of her Uncle and Dudley but then thought that she still needed a ride…she laughed, still, at the thought as she brushed her hair out to be straight with her new brush—the curls were lengthened and her hair was bouncy and voluminous and all around pretty an she couldn’t help swish it around—she’d never seen it straight without the trouble of changing it herself, it was so pretty!

She was sure she had everything—Hedwig was in her cage, which was shut tightly, as to assure her safety, Salem hidden in her pocket, purring as she stroked her head subtly, and she but carried the potted plant, which had not grown at all and all her things were inside her trunk, even her computer, inside a purse/book bag that Hagrid had gotten her that fit anything inside and never changed in weight. You only needed to know what you wanted to get it out, unless you just wanted to empty the bag, item by item. She would figure out a way to rebuild the computer with magic, if she needed to, because she had all her movies and shows downloaded on—she’d finally risked it and took to connecting to the internet. All that was left to do was waiting for the Dursleys to get up. Two hours later, Persephone’s huge, heavy trunk had been loaded into the Dursleys’ car, Aunt Petunia had talked Dudley into sitting next to Persephone, and they had set off.

They reached King’s Cross at half past ten. Uncle Vernon put Persephone’s trunk onto a cart and wheeled it into the station for her, which she found surprisingly nice of him, until Uncle Vernon stopped dead, facing the platforms with a nasty grin on his face.

"Well, there you are, girl. Platform nine—platform ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don’t seem to have built it yet, do they?"

He was quite right, of course. Persephone saw both the big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it. There was nothing in between.

"Have a good term," Uncle Vernon said with an even nastier smile growing on his face. He left without another word, followed by Aunt Petunia and Dudley and they made it a point that they were laughing, loudly. Even as they drove away.

Persephone didn’t panic just yet—she could ask someone for help, but then how would she mention the platform? Or the school? She checked all schedules, no trains left at eleven. And she couldn’t ask anyone, any time she felt she could get up the nerve to, her shoulders shrunk on her and she felt an overwhelming sense of panic in her stomach—she couldn’t do much but scan the
crowd for anyone—anyone at all, that looked like she did, with the uniform and owl.

But, according to the large clock over the arrivals board, she had only ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and she still had no idea how to do it. She could only—she could only….she didn’t know what to do…she had no nerve to ask someone for help, no instructions to get herself onto the platform and she was alone.

Maybe—maybe she had to tap the bricks on the wall, like how Hagrid did to get into Diagon Alley. She wondered, after taping the bricks desperately with her fingers and then giving up and leaning against the brick wall of platform 9, that perhaps she’d need a wand or something—BUT SHE DID NOT HAVE A WAND!

She started to seriously feel her shoulders crumple and unbelieving weight on her chest, as if something had tightened around her heart and made it impossible for her to breathe—she started shaking, biting on her lip, hoping to God she wouldn’t cry when—“Pardon me, dear, are you having trouble getting onto the platform?”

She snapped her head to the speaker, finding a plump woman, with flaming red hair. Behind her were four boys and a smaller boy, who clung to her hand, hidden behind her, all of which with shades of red that made it obvious these were her children, but Persephone barely glanced at them as she gasped, “Yes!”

The woman broke into a kind smile, patting a gentle hand on her shoulder to her elbow, as if sensing her tremble and wanting to subtly soothe her, “Oh, well, not to worry dear, we’ll help you right on, with just a spare minute! Now, tell me, first year at Hogwarts too?” Persephone nodded as the woman led her away from the wall with her cart. “Ron’s new too.”

She pointed at one of her tallest sons. He was tall, thin, and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet, and a long nose. He smiled an awkward smile at her, as if also sensing she was just about near a complete mental breakdown.

"Now, dear, there’s nothing to worry about," she said. "All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don’t stop and don’t be scared you’ll crash into it, that’s very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Here, Percy, you go first and show her.”

She immediately looked to the oldest looking boy, being the tallest, nodded a sort of grimace and smile to her and proceeded to march toward platforms nine and ten. (His name was Percy!) Persephone watched, careful not to blink, still shaking from the strange feeling of adrenaline coursing through her veins. And then, just as he would have crashed into the wall, he disappeared into it.

"Oh,” She breathed, staring in amazement.

"Nothing to it, eh?” One of the older boys said, and she didn’t get a good look at him till he had flung himself into the floor.

“Oh my—are you okay?!” She gasped in horror and confusion, offering her hand, but then as he took it, a sharp light appeared and he jumped and she pulled her hand back sharply, “I’m sorry! I’m so sorry, I have a thing and I can’t really not do that, and I’m sorry!”

He was still grinning, his hair all static and anti-gravity, like he’d been shocked. “Brilliant—that was brilliant.”
"Now, now George," The woman said. "Fred, you next," the plump woman said.

"I'm not Fred, I'm George," said the boy on the other side. They were twins. "Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother? Can’t you tell I'm George?"

"Sorry, George, dear."

"Only joking, I am Fred," said the boy, winking at Persephone and off he went. His twin, the one that had tripped and that had been shocked by Persephone, called after him to hurry up and then the two of them disappeared after one another to the brick wall.

“Go on, go now before Ron.” The woman said, and Persephone felt the adrenaline go back up.

She pushed her trolley around and stared at the barrier. It looked very solid.

She started to walk towards it, feeling her heart in her throat—and then she walked quickly towards it, working up the nerve to start running before she finally felt her last sense of resolve drain away and she started running towards it, knowing very well if she wanted to stop she could not. She kept her eyes closed as the barrier neared and just as she knew the impact would come, it didn’t.

And when she opened her eyes, she was in a completely different platform. A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people who definitely weren’t non-magical. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, eleven O’clock. Persephone glanced behind her and she saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had been, with the words *Platform Nine and Three-Quarters on it*. She smiled to herself, wringing out her clammy hands, she’d done it.

What was there to worry about?

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound here and there between their legs. As much as she loved Hedwig and would literally die for her, she had to seriously control her desire to stop and pet each cat. There were lots owls, too, hooting to one another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks. She stroked Salem’s head without a thought.

As she walked down, she noticed the first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats.

She passed a round-faced boy who was saying, "Gran, I've lost my toad again."

"Oh, Neville," she heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

"Give us a look, Lee, go on."

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms, and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg. She hurried passed.

Persephone kept on until she found an empty compartment near the end of the train. She placed Hedwig inside first before she had to re-evaluate how to move the trunk onto the train. For a moment, she tried to heave it up and felt the air bend around the trunk and she could lift it, but then it slipped out of her hands and landed on her foot. And it was painful.

"Need some help?"
She looked up to see one of the red-haired twins approaching her, smiling goofily in greeting.

"Oh, um, yes please." She smiled gratefully.

"Oy, Fred! C'mere and help!"

Fred, his twin, made it obvious this was George. They were identical, though Persephone saw a slight difference in their hair color, but only the slightest difference in shade. She watched in fascination—she didn’t realize identical twins could be so identical with just the difference of hair color—“There you are!”

They turned up grinning at her, and as she started to thank them, someone jumped behind them and George toppled into her arms, causing her to stumble back. She held George up, staring up in confusion and he stammered his way out of her arms, “Mate!” Fred started laughing as George stumbled and someone was apologizing.

“Sorry, mate, I did not think that move through,” A taller boy said, ruffling his hair into a mess and staring down at the cat that apparently had refused to be picked up and was snarling on the floor, meowing like crazy. It looked like the boy had tried to get the cat but had pushed George accidently. “She’s not usually like this…”

He was frowning at the snarling cat that took a long lingering look at the boy before dashing between George’s legs, straight to Persephone, throwing itself behind her. And then, as she turned around, it jumped her, quite literally. She gasped, hunching with the sudden cat on her back. Climbing quite like an expert, the cat clawed her way over onto her shoulder, around her neck, and Persephone looked at the boy in help. “No! No, Minnie, no!” The boy gasped, “Oh my god, oh my god, okay, hold on—MINERVA!” The cat didn’t seem to care, still being on Persephone’s back.

It took a good few moments before the boy was able to get ‘Minerva’ off Persephone and an intensely long time of him apologizing. She was now able to get a good enough look at the boy, and he definitely looked older than her. He had dark, now messy hair and steel, prominent gray eyes. His cheekbones were so nicely sculpted—and by sculpted, she meant they were so nicely prominent—that she couldn’t help but staring in envy.

“You named your cat Minerva?” One of the twins asked and the boy nodded, too distracted with trying to force a collar on the poor thing. “Like, McGonagall?”

“She was a Roman goddess of wisdom and warfare,” Persephone said on cue. The three boys looked at her while the cat struggled against the collar. “She was an Olympian,”

“I, um, actually named her after Minerva J. Chapman…she was from the early 20th century, um, she was a painter.”

Persephone blinked.

Nervously, he continued, “I was going to name her Atticus—”

“The Greek philosopher?” She asked.

“No, uh, the Atticus like Atticus Finch from To Kill a Mockingbird.” He nodded.

“Never read it.” She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, and the boys followed the movement with wide eyes.
"What is that?" One of the twins asked, while pointing at Persephone’s lightning scar that was clearly visible now.

"Blimey, are you—?"

"She is," said the first twin. "Aren't you?" he added to Persephone.

Persephone raised a brow, "I’m sorry?"

"Persephone Potter?" Her name was spoken in a chorus of amazement that made her uncomfortable.

"Mhm." Awkward. "I go by Lily, though, so…" She nodded absentmindedly, looking away awkwardly. The three boys gawked at her and she couldn’t do much but stand there, flushing in embarrassment.

"Fred? George? Are you there?" A voice called.

"Coming, Mom." She sighed in relief as they hopped off the train, with a last look at Persephone.

It was awkward for a moment before he laughed nervously, "Persephone…like the Greek goddess of flowers…" He nodded.

She smiled, "Of springtime, actually…"

"Ah…" He nodded.

She barely had a moment to really feel the awkwardness before the cat snarled once more and took off in the opposite direction. He muttered a word, "Sorry," or something, before going after the cat, leaving her alone.

She slid onto the seat, sighing in relief—she hated the attention that her name and scar dragged to her. Feeling insecure, she leaned against the window seat, the Italian book propped up on her knees, watching the red-haired family on the platform.

Their mother had just taken out her handkerchief.

"Ron, you've got something on your nose."

The boy tried to jerk out of the way, but she grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose. Persephone bit back an embarrassed smile for him. How sweet.

"Mom—geroff" He wriggled free.

"Aaah, has ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nosie?" said one of the twins.

"Shut up," said Ron.

"Where's Percy?" said their mother.

"He's coming now."

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He was changed into his uniform and was wearing the robes as well, with a shiny, familiar looking badge on his chest with the letter P on it—for Percy? She was still in awe that someone she’d come into contact with was named Percy—like Percy Jackson!
"Can't stay long, Mother," he said. "I'm up front, the prefects have got two compartments to themselves--"

"Oh, are you a prefect, Percy?" said one of the twins, with an air of great surprise. "You should have said something, we had no idea."

"Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it," said the other twin. "Once --"

"Or twice --"

"A minute --"

"All summer --"

"Oh, shut up," said Percy the Prefect not Jackson.

"How come Percy gets new robes, anyway?" said one of the twins.

"Because he's a prefect," said their mother fondly. "All right, dear, well, have a good term—send me an owl when you get there." She kissed Percy on the cheek and he left. Then she turned to the twins. "Now, you two—this year, you behave yourselves. If I get one more owl telling me you've—you've blown up a toilet or—"

"Blown up a toilet? We've never blown up a toilet."

"Great idea though, thanks, Mom."

"It's not funny. And look after Ron."

"Don't worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us."

"Shut up," said Ron again. He was nearly as tall as the twin, George—from her angle, George looked just slightly taller, was it his hair?—already and his nose was still pink where his mother had rubbed it.

"Hey, Mom, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?"

Persephone sunk in her seat, her heart thundering—there was that feeling again.

"You know that girl, with the dark red hair? The one you talked to in the muggle station? Know who she is?"

"Who?"

"Persephone Potter!"

With the sound of her name, another twinge of guilt—why was she feeling this way!? Suddenly, a completely new voice, one that seemed to belong to the youngest boy with the lightest of all their hair, spoke, "Oh, mum, can I go see her, on the train, for just a minute, just to see her, mummy please!"

"You've seen her, Gareth, and the poor girl isn't something you gawk at in a zoo. Was it truly her, Fred, how could you tell?"

"We saw her scar! It's really like lightning, mum! She even said so herself that she was, didn't
"Do you think she remembers what You-Know-Who looks like, Mum?"

"I don’t know and I forbid you from asking the poor dear anything of the sorts. Oh, no wonder she was alone—how scared she looked! She looked just about near ready to pass out—poor thing doesn’t need to be reminded of any sort of that business," She said sternly and for a moment, she felt her chest warm up—such an unfamiliar tone that she only recognized in Diana, at times. Sort of…protective. No one had ever been so protective over her, and not even know her.

"All right, keep your hair on."

A whistle sounded.

"Hurry up!" their mother said, and the three boys clambered onto the train. They leaned out of the window for her to kiss them good-bye, and their younger brother began to cry.

"Don't, Gary, we'll send you loads of owls."

"We'll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat."

"George!"

"Only joking, Mom."

The train began to move. Persephone could still see the boys' mother waving and their brother, half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed then he fell back and waved. Persephone found it so endearing—and so miserably frustrating, because this farewell only put into perspective how utterly cruel her own farewell had been.

But now—she was on her way to school, on her way to a new world, where she could possibly make new friends—friends with cats that weren’t the tall boy, who’s cat’s scratches were now appearing on her legs. A chance to find someone who was interested in her interests, who maybe also could be miserable with her about not having any technology in Hogwarts and would cheer each other up by watching a three hour documentary on the history of France.

Suddenly, the door of the compartment slid open and the youngest redheaded boy came in.

"Mind if I sit there? All the others are full.” He didn’t look her in the eye, instead looking at the seat opposite to her.

Persephone smiled, “Go for it.” The boy flushed and took a seat across from her.

He glanced once at her, caught her looking as well and then he looked away, pretending he hadn’t looked.

Persephone saw he still had a black mark on his nose.

"Hey, Ron."

The twins were back.

"Listen, we're going down the middle of the train—Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula down there." Fred said, leaning in.

"Right," mumbled Ron.
"Persephone," George said, suddenly smiling very goofily, "did we introduce ourselves? Fred," He gestured to his twin brother, “and George Weasley.” He gestured to himself. “And this is Ron, our brother. See you later, then.”

"Bye," Ron and Persephone said in unison. The twins closed the compartment door shut behind them.

"So, you’re really Persephone Potter?” Ron asked. Uncomfortable, Persephone nodded. "Huh—well, sorry, I just thought it was another one of Fred and George's jokes," said Ron. "So, have you really got—you know..."

He pointed awkwardly at Persephone’s forehead.

Persephone pushed her hair back, allowing the lightning scar to showcase itself. Ron stared at it.

"So that's where You-Know-Who…”

"I don’t remember it,” She pursed her lips, the air turning more and more awkward. “But yes, apparently, that’s where he…” She drew a breath in, shrugging. “All I remember is just green light, and that’s pretty much it, so…”

"Wow," said Ron. He said nothing more. He stared for a moment, along moment, before realizing her averting eyes and looking away.

"So…” Persephone trailed off. “So you’re entire family are magic?” How interesting to view the non-magical world as she viewed the magical world!

"Er—Yes, I think so," said Ron. "I think Mom's got a second cousin who's an accountant, or something, but we never talk about him."

“Why not?” Persephone raised a brow, hoping it wasn’t because the accountant was non-magic.

He was thoughtful, “Don’t know, actually. I think they live in England, in a muggle neighborhood, but I’m not too sure.” He looked at her. “I heard you went to live with Muggles, what are they like?”

"Non-magical, for one,” she smiled. “And, well, my family are not too enthusiastic about magic, but I’m sure other non-magical people would be interested in magic, though it doesn’t seem like any of them know of it.” She sighed, “Having three older wizarding brothers must mean you already know tons of magic, huh?”

For some reason, he was looking gloomy when he corrected, "Six brothers and I'm the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. Fred and George make up a lot of spells to prank me and I don’t trust any of those spells, so I know as much as anyone else. And I've got a lot to live up to. Charlie graduated last spring as captain of the Gryffindor Quiditch team and Bill’s been gone for two year’s. He graduated as Head boy. Now Percy's a prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they're really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five older brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand, and Percy's old rat."

Ron reached inside his jacket and pulled out a fat gray rat, which was asleep.

"His name's Scabbers and he's useless, he hardly ever wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being made a prefect, but they couldn't aff—I mean, I got Scabbers instead."
Ron's ears went pink. He seemed to think he'd said too much, because he went back to staring out of the window.

Persephone, in that moment, liked him. Sure, he had the opposite side of a food chain when she’d wanted a friend with a cat, but he understood about meeting expectations that people set—but it sounded like he’d had it worse. She couldn’t imagine having to meet so many expectations only to be told someone else had done it better—never mind that someone would be a sibling. He wasn’t expecting anything out of her, and she decided she wanted to befriend this boy, if he’d let her.

“I used to be given my cousin’s old clothes, even though he’s a boy and, like, seven times bigger than me. I’d have to rip them up and sew them together and roll them just so they could not fall off me. And I think—I think the only present I’d ever gotten was probably…” She had to think for a moment. “Well, one time I was allowed to have my own bedroom, which was rather nice. But any clothes, and books, and anything given to me would be hand-me-downs, if I didn’t build it or sew it myself.” She shrugged. “And now, I mean, coming here, everyone expects me to be great at being a witch, because my parents were good at it but, I had no idea about anything magical, until Hagrid told me. I didn’t have any idea about being a witch or about my parents or even Voldemort.”

Ron gasped.

"What?" Persephone asked in surprise.

"You said You-Know-Who’s name!" said Ron, sounding both shocked and impressed. "I'd have thought you, of all people—"

"I’m not trying to be brave or anything by saying the name,” Persephone said, “I just had no idea about the whole thing—I’m completely new to being a witch that I don’t even know most of the customs in the wizarding world. I just know what happened to my mum and dad and what didn’t happen to me.” She threw her hands up in an awkward motion. “I mean, I hear people, from all wizard families, talking about those non-magical families with magical kids shouldn’t be taught magic!”

“Loads of pureblood families think so—but it’s a load of rubbish—there’s loads of people who come from Muggle families who learn better than most purebloods!” He said and for a moment, she felt that him saying that was the best thing she’d heard all day.

As they’d been talking, the train had carried them out of London. Now they were speeding past fields full of cows and sheep. They were quiet for a time, watching the fields and lanes flick past.

At about half past twelve, there was another person sliding the compartment door open, and it wasn’t the twins like she’d thought it would be. Instead, there was a smiling, dimpled woman, who asked, "Anything off the cart, dears?"

Persephone considered for a moment, before getting up to examine the food on the cart while Ron's ears went pink again and he muttered that he'd brought sandwiches. She didn’t recognize anything—Bettie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Licorice Wands, and an assortment of things that she still did not recognize. She bit her lip for a moment before picking some of everything, just to be safe, and paying the woman eleven silver Sickles and seven bronze Knuts.

She ignored her compartment mate’s stare and tipped the snacks onto the seat next to her, before curling up against the window with the book—she knew enough Spanish to make some connections between some words, why not start learning Italian?—and bitting into what was a pumpkin pasty.
Ron had taken out a lumpy package and unwrapped it, distracting her from her Italian. She glanced up—he had four sandwiches inside the package. He pulled one of them apart and said, bashfully when he saw her staring, "She always forgets I don't like corned beef."

"Have one of these," She gestured to her pasty. "And I’ll take one." She felt exhilaration at trading food—she’d seen kids at school do it and was glad to find some things were the same in all worlds.

"You don't want this, it's all dry," said Ron. "She hasn't got much time," he added quickly, "you know, with five of us."

"Please, I insist—" She took a pasty and held it out to him. It was such a nice feeling, sharing with someone—not having to be forced to give up her limited food during lunch at school, or her homework answers. She felt like she really had a friend, eating happily treats and candy, and she was glad it was mutual, otherwise, she’d be embarrassed when she asked, “What in the world are these?” She asked Ron, holding up a pack of Chocolate Frogs. "These—wait, these aren’t really frogs, right?"

"No," said Ron. "It’s an enchantment—no one wants the frog, it’s the card you’ll want. I'm missing Agrippa."

"Card? Like, collecting cards?" She asked as she unwrapped. “What’s on them?"

"Famous witches and wizards. I’ve got about five hundred, but I haven't got Agrippa or Ptolemy." He leaned in to look at her card. “Who’d you get?”

She squinted at the card, glad she had put in her first pair of contacts. The card showed a man's face, with a long, crooked nose, and flowing silver hair, beard, and mustache. His eyes were hidden behind half-moon glass but they were a piercing blue. Underneath the picture was the name Albus Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore," She told him, “Who is the current headmaster of Hogwarts, and is considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.” She read out loud.

“Oh yeah, Dumbledore is pretty common, I’ve got five of him." said Ron. "Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa—thanks."

When she turned her card over once more, she was astonished to find that Dumbledore’s face had disappeared. “He—he’s gone!” She showcased the card to Ron, completely in shock.

Ron was not as amazed, "Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day," He said. "He'll be back. No, I've got Morgana again and I've got about six of her... do you want it? You can start collecting."

Ron's eyes strayed to the pile of Chocolate Frogs waiting to be unwrapped.

"Help yourself," She told him, still tilting the card back and forward. "In the non-magical world, photos are, you know, still and…non-moving. And just a picture."

"How weird! They don’t move at all?“ Ron sounded amazed. "Muggles are so strange."

They went through chocolate frogs, Ron interested in eating the frogs while Persephone examined her cards—she’d now was in possession of not only Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of
Woodcroft, Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus, and Merlin, the latter being the most famous wizard in all of wizard history. She'd read that.

It was a quiet afternoon, where they dared each other to eat the dangerous looking beans out of Bertie’s Every Flavor Beans and laughed when the other started gagging in disgust. Persephone was delighted to find she’d come across a strawberry instead of peppermint flavour—she’d only taken the risk on a dare. Peppermints were usually her dinner on days that she refused to do Dudley’s homework—she was not trying to have those memories on the greatest day of her life, or second to, following her birthday.

“There’s a jelly bean game in the non-magical world that’s sort of like this,” She commented after suffering through an earwax flavoured. “I think it’s called bambi? Boozle?”

“What a weird name,” He said thoughtfully.

She nodded in agreement, “It’s American.”

She had started choking and coughing out laughter after popping a pepper flavoured bean, causing Ron to laugh as well, and it was a merry time as the scene outside the window changed from neat fields to woods, twisting rivers, and dark green hills. At some point, as Persephone patted Ron on the back as he gagged on a sprout flavoured bean, there was a knock on the door of their compartment. The rounded-faced boy with neat blonde hair that she’d passed on platform nine and three-quarters came in, looking tearful, “Sorry,” he said, "but have you seen a toad at all?"

They shook their heads, making him look more tearful then before, “I've lost him! He keeps getting away from me!”

"He'll turn up," Persephone said sympathetically, “Want some help looking?"

"No…” He said miserably, “Just…If you see him…” He left.

"Don't know why he's so bothered,” said Ron. "If I'd brought a toad I'd lose it as quick as I could. Mind you, I brought Scabbers, so I can't talk." The rat was still snoozing on Ron's lap. They both stared down at it, frowning. "He might have died and you wouldn't know the difference," said Ron in disgust. "I tried to turn him yellow yesterday to make him more interesting, but the spell didn't work. I'll show you, look..."

He rummaged around in his trunk and pulled out a very battered-looking wand. It was chipped in places and something white was glinting at the end.

"Unicorn hair's nearly poking out.” She didn’t think that mattered much—she didn’t even have a proper wand. “Anyway,” He was just about to utter some words as he raised his wand when the compartment door slid open again.

The toad-less boy was back once more, this time accompanied with a girl. She, like Persephone, was wearing her uniform, but her robes over it were buttoned all the way up that she could almost not tell. She had lots of bushy brown hair tucked behind her ears and her front teeth were rather large and when she spoke, her voice sounded a little bossy, "Has anyone seen a toad? Neville's lost one.”

"We've already told him we haven't seen it," Ron said, but the girl wasn’t listening, ignoring him when she looked at the wand in his hand.

"Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then." She took a seat next to Persephone, waiting patiently, only looking at Persephone once. Persephone and Ron exchanged a look of surprise.
"Er—all right." He said at once.

He cleared his throat.

"Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow, turn this stupid, fat rat yellow." He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed gray and fast asleep.

"Are you sure that's a real spell?" the girl asked skeptically. "Well, it's not very good, is it? The spells I’ve tried have all worked for me—granted they were simple and just for practice, but it was rather grand, since nobody in my family’s magic at all. It was ever such a big surprise to us when I got my letter—but I’m rather pleased, I’ve heard Hogwarts is the very best school of witchcraft there is, as I've heard—I've learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough—oh, and I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

She said this all in one breath, even making Persephone breathless. Persephone looked at Ron and was glad to see he hadn’t memorized any books either.

"I'm Ron Weasley," Ron muttered.

"I'm—Persephone Potter—but I go by Lily. Lily Potter," She said quickly when she saw her amazed face. She’d decided before leaving the Dursleys’ car that the entire wizarding world knew her as Persephone Potter, the Girl Who Lived and what not, and she didn’t want that. And she already had a name similar enough to hers—well, it was related to flowers (Persephone being the goddess of spring and flowers) and related to hell (Persephone being the goddess of the Underworld and Lilith being the mother of all demons), so why not just Lily?

Ron looked at her in surprise but Hermione was looking at her in more awe.

"Are you really?" said Hermione. "I know all about you, of course—not the Lily name, but I got a few extra books and everyone refers to you as Persephone, which must be irritating if you go by Lily. You're in Modern Magical History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

"Oh, yeah, I—I read about that—about me, I mean," she said, the dizzying feeling fighting its way back into her head. "Haha, yeah, reading, right? Crazy…” She giggled nervously, nodding, not knowing how to respond to this.

"Well, I understand—I would have found out everything I could if it was me," said Hermione. "Do either of you know what house you’ll be in? You don’t know which one you’ll be in until you get there, of course, but I’ve been asking around and Gryffindor sounds by far the best—Dumbledore himself was in it, you know. But Ravenclaw sounds good too—I’ve heard they have the biggest library, other than the actual library—which is the biggest library in the world, rumour says!" She said eagerly to Persephone, nodding enthusiastically. "Anyway, we'd better go and look for Neville's toad. You should probably put your robe on—" She nodded at her uniform. "I expect we'll be there soon."

“Do you want help?” Persephone offered again and Hermione nodded. Persephone told Ron she’d be back later and skipped to keep up with them.

“Sure. We’ve checked most of the compartments down that way. Neville says he lost it once on the train so it could be anywhere—we’re going to look by the first compartments, towards the first cart—hey!"

They’d just crossed into the next cart when someone stopped them. A girl had just come out of her
compartment, looking first in curiosity at the trio before seeing Neville, “Oh, Neville, there you are!”

Neville blushed at being addressed.

“Neville, have you seen the candy lady—oh!” The girl’s eyes finally looked at Persephone and she stopped in her sentence. The girl had perfectly straight hair, cut just below her ears with a distinctly button nose. Her dark eyes lit up in curiosity as she flitted up to Persephone’s forehead. “Hello.”

Persephone smiled, “Hi.”

“Why, come sit with us,” She offered, smiling very sweetly until her eyes went back to Hermione. “You don’t need to be wandering around with magic-stealers.”

“Magic-stealers—no, that’s—” Persephone tried but the girl had grabbed her hand and pulled her in, shoving her onto a seat.

“No, really, it’s no problem.” She turned to Hermione and Neville. “You can go now.”

Persephone, now having just been trapped into a stranger girl’s compartment, tried to say something but the girl had closed the compartment door.

Persephone looked at her incredulously. Who did this girl think she was?

“This is Susan Bones,” She gestured to a girl with red hair, who smiled bashfully at Persephone. “And Daphne Greengrass,” A very pretty girl with blonde hair and a perfectly symmetrical face smiled at her in a friendly, though curious, manner. “Theodore Nott,” A skinny boy with neatly trimmed, “And this is Draco Malfoy.”

She gestured to the boy she’d just been pushed next to. He was the same pale, blond boy from Madame Walkins. “And I’m Pansy Parkinson.” She offered her hand and Persephone awkwardly shook it. “This is—”

“Persephone Potter.” Draco answered for her. Pansy looked surprised. “We’ve met, though you told me your name was Lily, no?”

Persephone nodded, “I go by Lily.”

“Your name isn’t Lily,” Pansy said suddenly, staring down at her in confusion.

Persephone raised a brow, “No, my name is Persephone Lilith Potter, Lilith is capable of being shortened to Lily, which is what I go by.” She explained slowly. Was this girl alright? She was awful insistent.

“That’s pretty,” Susan complimented and Persephone smiled, still completely confused by the situation.

“Right,” Pansy said. She didn’t seem to like the fact that she didn’t know her nickname. “Shall I sit next to you, Draco?” Pansy, decidedly ignoring the window seat, sat right in between Draco and Persephone, as if to make it a point that Draco was hers to corner by the window. “So, Lily,” She tried the name out in her mouth. “What were you doing with Neville and that girl with the awful hair?”

Persephone bit back a defensive comment and smiled, “Neville lost his pet—I was helping them look for it.” She emphasized the ‘was’, as to ask her what the hell she was doing now.
“Hm,” She considered her for a moment. “Well, Neville does come from a good family, though I wouldn’t be caught dead in his grandmother’s hat. Did you see it?” Pansy asked Daphne, who nodded seriously.

“You know he was nearly pronounced a Squib?” Daphne asked. “What a terrible fate, don’t you agree?”

“Oh, I’ve heard,” Pansy nodded, “I dearly hope we don’t have to share a common room with him.”

“I’m glad we have not had much contact,” Draco sighed. “He does not seem the Slytherin type. Pureblooded, yes, but worthy of Salazar Slytherin’s acceptance into his house? Absolutely not.”

“Wait…Slytherin? That’s a Hogwarts house?” Persephone asked.

“The greatest and noblest house of the four, yes.” Pansy said. “I’m very really looking forward to lessons,” Pansy smiled at Draco before turning to Persephone. “You were raised in the Muggle world, weren’t you?”

When she nodded, Daphne gasped, “How horrid! Not knowing magic at all!”

“We all had a tutor—” Pansy said. “Mrs. Malfoy is the best teacher, of course. I’m so very grateful for her.” Susan and Persephone met eyes and she looked away, biting a smile. Pansy kissed such arse… “She taught us French, you know, such a romantic language, don’t you think, Draco?”

Draco shrugged, “I prefer Italian.”

Pansy suddenly turned to Persephone. “Do you know any languages?”

Persephone could tell she was baiting her on, to tease her behind her back probably, but Persephone smiled kindly, “I know English, obviously, and Spanish, French, Latin, Greek, though more Ancient than modern and I’m learning Italian right now.”

The girls seemed stunned before Daphne asked, “Did you have a tutor?”

Persephone hesitated, “Not a tutor—he was a family friend. He taught me Spanish, and from Spanish I taught myself French, as they as so similar, and I picked up Latin some time ago, along with Ancient Greek, though I’m not yet fluent. Now I’m teaching myself Italian,” She smiled. Ancient Greek from Percy Jackson, of course.

“Wow,” Susan said. “You’re so smart to have taught yourself all that.”

Persephone blushed, smiling at Susan. She was being genuine—she definitely liked Susan, especially as she didn’t zero in on Persephone being the Girl Who Lived, and whatnot.

“Well, you’ll have to learn tons in school now, and I’m afraid languages won’t help you,” Pansy sighed before smiling. “We can help you.”

Persephone studied her for a moment—Pansy was obviously not a nice girl. Persephone could see right through her attempts at friendship, all of which being faux. “Actually, all magical incantations are derived from Greek and Latin, so I think I’m alright.” She trusted what Ron had told her—they probably hadn’t learned much more magic than she had. “If you want, I can teach you the languages.”

“That’s okay.” Pansy said sharply. Maybe Persephone was better off not having said that but she wouldn’t be treated like an idiot. “Kind of you to offer though.”
Persephone hummed, seeing this as a great opportunity to leave, “Well, it’s been nice meeting you, but I should go find my friend.”

She slipped out of the compartment, overjoyed with being freed of that. Was that how all students would treat her? Just trying to be her friend for the sake of being Persephone Potter’s friend? She would stick with Ron.

“Hey Ron—oh my god!” She’d only walked into her compartment to see three boys shirtless. She screeched, turning and slapped both her palms over her eyes. “I’M SO SORRY I DID NOT KNOCK OH MY GOD—SO SORRY I’M GOING TO GO!”

She slammed the compartment door shut behind her, staring out at the next compartment, her face hot and flushed. Thank god they were only changing their shirts—thank god, oh thank god she hadn’t see anything else—“Heyyyy, Lily?”

“Yes?” She turned to see Susan Bones, who’d looked flushed and smiled sheepishly at her. “Oh, hey.”

“Look, I’m sorry for—for Pansy. She’s…she’s really forward. She’s always been sort of like that, but she means well…enough,” She winced and Persephone smiled, turning straight towards.

“That’s kind of you but you shouldn’t apologize for her, Susan.” She paused. “So…oh, do you know the difference between the houses?” She’d been thinking about this since Hermione had mentioned them.

“Oh,” She was thoughtful for a moment. “Hufflepuff, I think, values, um, well, being humble, benevolence, dedication, patience, loyalty…being fair, uuhh, friendliness? Ravenclaw, um, values intelligence, creativity, knowledge, and—and wit, I think; Slytherin values ambition, cunning and resourcefulness and, though the cunning and ambition sort of mix up their morals. They are very loyal, too, but usually to a cause rather than people, so…and, well there’s Gryffindor. They value bravery, being daring, or stupid, whichever way you look at it,” She chuckled. “having nerve, which could be seen by being impulsive, very loyal and protective, really into justice, so standing up for what they think is right. My father says they are very clever and ambitious, but for their own reasons. Um, also, chivalry and just generally being bold. Doing what’s right, all that.” She nodded. “My father was in Ravenclaw. My mum was in Gryffindor. And I have no idea where I’ll be going.”

Persephone nodded, “Me neither.”

They all seemed amazing—but she didn’t know exactly where she’d fit in. She valued knowledge, intelligence and wit, and was creative enough in finding ways to be resourceful and she was clever, but she was also hard working and dedicated—she’d like to say she was patient, but that would be a lie in itself—but fair play was something she greatly honored too. But then came being resourceful and she had a great deal of ambition—only Gryffindor was one she didn’t truly relate to—she didn’t feel brave, or daring. She was chivalrous, always trying to do what was right…but who did that serve?

The compartment door slid open. George and Fred were now dressed, both in red lined uniforms. They were both laughing loudly. “Oh, sorry about earlier, should have locked the door.”

“I’m really sorry—” But they’d already taken off down the train hall. Susan raised a brow but didn’t ask.

“Well, I’ll—I’ll see you laaater…” Susan said and Persephone nodded awkwardly.
She walked into her compartment, where Ron was also changed and staring out the window. “So what house are your brothers in?” She asked, taking her seat once more. Ron looked up at her sudden entrance and was blushing.

“So….red for Gryffindor?” She said awkwardly.

"Fred and George are in Gryffindor," he said, probably glad she didn’t mention what had just happened. Gloom seemed to be settling on him again, and she was glad he left the situation alone. "Mom and Dad were in Gryffindor, too, see. I don't know what they'll say if I'm not. I don't suppose Ravenclaw would be too bad, but I don’t think I’d want to be in Slytherin."

She pursed her lips, not knowing how to tread with this subject, “I don’t know if it matters whether or not you’re in your parent’s house. I mean, you’re not your parents, right? And besides, every house seems good on its own.”

She wanted to ask him what was so wrong with Slytherin—it didn’t seem like it had any negative attributes other than being Voldemort’s house. And why judge a whole house on one person? She was sure not all Gryffindors were cool just because Dumbledore was in it.

“So. Your older brothers—what do they do now?” She asked. “What did wizards even do after school? Is there a school after Hogwarts? University? Could wizards major in things? Get bachelors? What are politics like?” She asked in one breath and then blushed. “You can answer one of those.”

Ron looked bewildered, “Well, all my brothers are bachelors, I guess…” She blinked and realizing he probably didn’t know what a bachelor degree was. “Charlie's in Romania studying dragons, and Bill's in Africa doing something for Gringotts," Ron said. "Did you hear about Gringotts? It's been all over the Daily Prophet, but I don't suppose you get that with the Muggles—someone tried to rob a high security vault."

Persephone blinked.

"But—you’d been mad to try and rob Gringotts."

"Exactly, that's why it's such big news. They haven't been caught. My dad says it must've been a powerful Dark wizard to get round Gringotts, but they don't think they took anything, that's what's odd. 'Course, everyone gets scared when something like this happens in case You-Know-Who's behind it."

Persephone thought of this for a moment—contrary to literally every other witch and wizard, she only found herself fearing the man who’d given her the scar on her forehead when he was referred to as You-Know-Who. Calling him “Voldemort” was better, a lot more comforting. It made him so much less ominous.

"So, what's your Quidditch team?” Ron asked.

He offered a perfect change of subject and an opportunity to answer her question, “Not too sure what Quidditch is, to be quite honest.”

"What!” Ron looked dumbfounded. "Oh, you wait, it's the best game in the world—” And he was off, explaining all about the four balls and the positions of the seven players, describing famous games he'd been to with his brothers and the broomstick he'd like to get if he had the money.

Persephone decided the game was brilliant, though she barely understood it.
Just as he was guiding her through the finer points of the game, the compartment door slid open yet again. This time it wasn't Neville, the toadless boy, or Hermione Granger.

Three boys entered with an air of confidence—Persephone recognized the ring leaders as Draco Malfoy. The boys that accompanied him were thickset and looking extremely like the boys that pursued her on the playgrounds in her old school, the ones that dared each other to try and hold her down for a kiss. She tried not to dislike them on sight but she ended up disliking them on sight.

He was now looking at Persephone with a lot more interest than he'd shown back in Diagon Alley.

"I did not have a proper opportunity," he said, raising his chin, his gray eyes on her, "To introduce myself."

She glanced between the three boys, raising her brow. For a moment, she thought they would hold her down—and she didn’t exactly have much room in the compartment to climb up a tree away from them.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle," The pale boy said carelessly, misinterpreting her glancing at his entourage. "And my name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy." So he’d taken the James Bond way of things?

Ron gave a slight cough, which might have been hiding a snigger, as she offered her hand.

Draco Malfoy looked at him.

"Think my name's funny, do you? No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford." He turned back to Persephone, who’d raised a skeptical brow at him, "You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."

And he took her hand, which had been frozen mid-air as she stared at Ron, in shock at the boy’s sudden insulting voice, and shook it.

Before she could say anything, a commotion in the hall behind them echoed into the compartment and something caused Draco Malfoy to spasm, turning in a circle—and she recognized the fluffy thing that had attacked his unprotected back.

For a moment, it was strange to watch the dance of the three mice being attacked by one small cat, as the two bodyguards tried to help their king mouse but he just kept trying to reach behind him to rip the cat off him—until he fell against the wall and before he could try and slam the poor cat against the wall, she stole the black cat off him, holding her close to her body as Draco Malfoy gasped, staring daggers at the cat, “That vile beast—”

“What’s going on in here?” Just as though they sensed the tense air, the twins were back, looking over Goyle and Crabe’s heads. They took in the situation, and perhaps they misread it, but they took in Malfoy glaring in her direction and stepped in, “Hey, what are you picking on girls for?”

Before anyone could say anything, someone else’s voice echoed into the very crowded compartment, “Hey, you found my cat!” And then the boy from earlier slipped into the compartment gracefully, though knocking Malfoy down ungracefully, and smiled down at Persephone. “Oh geez, that’s twice now.”

She was still glaring at Malfoy, who’d stared around the compartment—his friends were puffing their chests out, ready for when he’d make a call for them to throw a punch, and the tall boy
followed her gaze, “Oh, hey, yeah sorry ‘bout that, mate.” He grinned, offering Malfoy his hand but Malfoy ignored it, getting up and glaring at Persephone.

"These the pathetic friends you mentioned?” He sneered. “You ought to take my offer into consideration, Persephone Potter.”

“Her name is Lily,” Ron said quite bravely, staring down Malfoy. Persephone felt a swell of courage fill her at the protective tone Ron had taken on and glared at Malfoy.

“I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks,” she said coolly.

Draco Malfoy didn't go red, but a pink tinge appeared in his pale cheeks. "I'd be careful if I were you, Potter,” he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either. You hang around with riffraff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid, and it'll rub off on you,” And he took a step toward her, causing everyone to react.

“Woah, woah, back off, kid,” the tall boy said as the twins took to moving in front of her and Ron, as if standing as their own bodyguards.

Draco puffed out his chest as well, taking in the scene of three older boys standing against him, before doing the right smart thing and signalling for his large friends to move out.

As soon as they were gone, everyone relaxed, moving out and away from the tight compartment. Persephone felt the cat purr in her arms, untouched by any of this drama.

“So…I take it you've met Malfoy before?” The tall boy asked, turning once more to look down at her with dark grey eyes.

She scoffed, “Unfortunately,” She shook her head, “Twice, just earlier. And a few girls too. I’ll be lucky I don’t ever meet him again—whatever house he’s in, I won’t be happy to be in it.”

“Slytherin, probably.” Ron said darkly. "I've heard of his family. They were some of the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they'd been bewitched. My dad doesn't believe it. He says Malfoy's father didn't need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side.” He shook his head, “His entire family were in Slytherin, the whole lot of them.”

“You say that like it's a bad thing,” Persephone noted, raising a brow.

“Hey!” Someone—Hermione Granger—called from behind everyone. “What are you all doing? You’d all better hurry up and put your robes on. I’ve just asked the conductor and he says we're nearly there!” With that, she was gone.

“Um, here’s your cat,” She smiled sheepishly at the tall boy. The cat meowed unhappily but let him take her out of her arms. He was blushing, smiling a crooked smile. Persephone felt her own cat purr against her side.

“Thanks for finding her—she doesn’t seem like she likes me but it’s been a long day.” He smiled apologetically, in a way that was sweet and hopeful but a low-key hopeful and she couldn’t help smiling back—he was charismatic without trying.

“Sure, yeah,” She nodded and it was silent and she looked awkward around, still nodding her head before he said,

“I’m—yea, I’m gonna go.” He nodded away and took off, and she stared after him—okayyy…..
The train was slowing, and outside the window, it was darkening, coloring mountains and forests with a deep purple.

Now, with both their robes and uniforms on—Ron’s pants and robes just a tad short on him at the heels—a voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately."

She was bouncing her feet up and down, overwhelmed with nerves—now her thoughts were all subjected to which house she’d belong to. She feared she wouldn’t be in the same house as Ron, fearing perhaps she would be put in Slytherin and he would think her evil, but tried to keep herself as positive as possible as they joined the crowd thronging the corridor.

The train slowed right down and finally stopped. People pushed their way toward the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Persephone shivered in the cold night air, or in her nerves, and crossed her arms to keep warm. A lamp was bobbing over the heads of the students, and Persephone was thrilled to hear a familiar voice: "Firs' years! Firs' years over here! All right there, Sephie?"

Hagrid's big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

"C'mon, follow me—any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so dark on either side of them that Persephone thought there must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice.

"Ye' all get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid called over his shoulder, "jus' round this bend here."

There was a loud "Oooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black take. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers. Persephone’s mouth fell open.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Persephone and Ron were followed into their boat by Neville and Hermione. "Everyone in?" shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to himself. "Right then—FORWARD!"

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, all amazed by the view of the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood and she couldn’t help herself from swooning—this was an architectural beauty!

"Heads down!" yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out onto rocks and pebbles.

"Oi, you there! Is this here your toad?" said Hagrid, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

"Trevor!" cried Neville blissfully, holding out his hands. Persephone shivered through a smile—what a nice ending to that twist of a story.

They started stumbling up a passageway in the rock on the Hagrid's heels, coming out at last onto
smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?"

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

Chapter End Notes

Again: Not sure which house Persephone will be in just yet. I'm playing around with different possibilities right now so it'll be easier to figure it out. What do you guys think? Please do comment your ideas or thoughts.
The Sorting

Chapter Summary

Persephone is deeply disappointed with her sorting but everyone else seems very relieved.

As if someone was waiting for them, the door swung open to reveal…no one?

“Go on, no pushin’” Hagrid urged them in. The first years stumbled in, gazing around. Persephone’s breath was quite literally taken away and she was one of many who gasped.

The entrance hall into the castle was huge—bigger than any house in Privet Drive. The stone walls were lit with flaming torches like the one at Gringotts. There was a grand staircase decorated with frames of what looked like moving pictures filling up the walls all the way up to the ceiling Persephone could not even make out, it was so high.

“First years,” Someone spoke in a polished Scottish accent, gaining their attention immediately. A tall woman with stern facial structure and robes of emerald green was waiting by the staircase. She gave off a very immediate vibe that she should not be trifled with. “If you would follow me, please.”

She turned, her pointed witch’s hat on full display, and started to walk farther into the castle. The first years made no mistake in immediately following, obviously having acquired the same vibe off her as Persephone had.

Persephone had to watch her step as she walked, for she was so taken by the spacious halls and moving pictures, some of which waved at them as they passed. There were elaborate suits of armour she was sure could move but did not try to find out—she’d seen Scooby-Doo enough times to know the end to that fatal story. Persephone, not truly in her right of mind at the moment, raised a weak hand and waved back at a nearby portrait only to bump into a tall, black boy as the entire group stopped. She blushed as he glanced back at her but she did not dare apologize as the woman spoke,

“Welcome, first years, to Hogwarts. I am Professor McGonagall, deputy headmistress and head of the Transfiguration department. In just a few shorts moments, the start-of-term banquet will begin. As is custom to every year’s banquet, all first years will be sorted into one of the four houses. Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff. While you are here, your house will be like your family. You will eat with the rest of your house every day, sleep in your house dorm rooms and spend free time in your house common room.”

Now that she was paying attention to sound, she could make out the sounds of hundreds of voices echoing into the entrance hall, and she pin pointed it to be coming from a doorway to the right—she thought that must be where the rest of the students were but they were being led away from the door and into a small, empty chamber off to the side of the hall. The first years crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, and peering about nervously—the lack of space caused shivers to travel up Persephone spine.
There were about a two hundred students in the chamber that was not meant to hold even a hundred.

"Each house," She continued, gazing at them all sternly, "Has its own history, starting at the very beginning with the house founders. Of this history you will become very acquainted with and, in time, will add to. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your house points, while any rule-breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours."

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville's cloak, which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron's smudged nose. Persephone was still conscious of how her hair hung to her waist, and she hoped to whatever entities out there that it was still as she'd had it—not messy, please.

"I shall return when we are ready for you," Professor McGonagall said. "Please wait quietly."

She left the chamber, with Persephone’s final shred of sanity on the subject of houses—she knew she would never be able to fit into Gryffindor with Ron because she wasn’t brave enough, but maybe she could go into Hufflepuff, or Ravenclaw. She was perfectly fine with being sorted into Slytherin, but she’d have to deal with Malfoy on a day-to-day basis and she was not willing to do that just because she was ambitious and resourceful.

"Fred says the sorting hurts a lot," Ron whispered to Persephone. "I think he was joking but I’m not sure."

Persephone’s panic only grew.

It seemed like no one else knew of how the sorting worked. Even Hermione Granger, the girl who’d asked around about houses and decided which one was best didn’t think to ask how the sorting ceremony proceeded—she was whispering very fast about all the spells she’d learned and wondering which one she’d need, as if the school would make them do magic right as they entered through the doors.

Several people screamed as the temperature suddenly dropped, "What the—?"

People around her gasped in near unison as pearly-white and slightly transparent people glided into the room through the wall. They weren’t paying mind to the first years, even as the first years stumbled away from them in surprise—Hermione Granger bumped right into Persephone—while the people talked.

It took Persephone a moment to look at their costumes (?) to realize these were probably not the same kind of ghosts she sometimes saw on Scooby-Doo. They seemed to be arguing. What looked like a fat little monk was saying: "Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give him a second chance--"

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know, he's not really even a ghost—I say, we ought to give him a second chance--"

"New students!" said the Fat Friar, smiling around at them. "About to be Sorted, I suppose?"

A few people nodded mutely.

"Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!" said the Friar. "My old house, you know."
"Move along now," said a sharp voice. "The Sorting Ceremony's about to start."

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the ghosts floated away through the opposite wall.

"Now, form a line," Professor McGonagall told the first years, "and follow me."

Feeling oddly almost like her legs had stopped responding to her brain, Persephone stood right behind a boy with sandy hair, with Ron behind her, and they walked out of the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Persephone had always loved old architecture and had always wanted to see some of it in person, but she’d never been able to dream of seeing a place as spectacular as it was strange. It was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting.

Professor McGonagall led the first years up here, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. She could make out the difference in colors at each table, where the one at the far left end (left from the teacher’s side of the long room) were students with red lined uniforms (Gryffindors, as she supposed the red meant on Ron’s brothers’ uniform), next to them were blue, next to the blue were yellow and then the last table was green. She supposed that maybe each house had their own colors, which made sense.

She couldn’t help meeting several staring eyes, so to avoid the eyes, Persephone looked upward and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. She sighed in amazement, leaning to the side to say to Ron, “It really does look—” But she was cut off by someone saying, "It’s bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in Hogwarts, A History."

It was Hermione and she was just as captivated by the sky as well. Ron rolled his eyes and Persephone looked back up at the ceiling, having a hard time remembering what she had read about there actually being a ceiling there. She wouldn’t put it passed wizards to have a school whose Great Hall opened right into the heavens.

Her eyes were dragged away at the movement of Professor McGonagall silently placing a four-legged stool in front of the first years. She plopped a pointed wizard’s hat, all patched and frayed and extremely dirty, right onto the stool. She couldn’t help moving from one foot to the other.

The rest of the first years looked to the hat now too, as did the rest of the Great Hall. There was a few moments of complete silence when the hat twitched. A rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth—and the hat began to sing:

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,  
But don't judge on what you see,  
I'll eat myself if you can find  
A smarter hat than me.  
You can keep your bowlers black,  
Your top hats sleek and tall,  
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat  
And I can cap them all.  
There's nothing hidden in your head  
The Sorting Hat can't see,  
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw, if you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then became quite still again. Persephone did not shy away from the applause, though her heart was doing its own rounds of applause, beating rapidly against her rib cage.

"So we've just got to try on the hat!" Ron whispered to Persephone. "I'll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll."

She could barely smile back, having lost all control of her thoughts—Gryffindor wasn’t well suited for her, Hufflepuff wouldn’t take her impatience and she definitely did not want to be in Slytherin and have to deal with having something in common with Malfoy. So Ravenclaw…?

Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," she said.
"Abbott, Hannah!"

A pink-faced girl with blonde pigtails stumbled out of line, put on the hat, which fell right down over her eyes, and sat down. A moment’s pause—

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat.

The table on the right with the yellow themed uniforms cheered and clapped as Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table. So Hufflepuff was yellow…wasn’t yellow the color of friendship in flower tones? Huh—how ironic the girl named after the goddess of flowers would know her flower codes.

"Bones, Susan!"

Susan had to sit longer than Hannah but eventually, the hat called out, "HUFFLEPUFF!" Susan scuttled merrily off to sit next to Hannah, smiling at Persephone as she passed.

"Boot, Terry!"
"RAVENCLAW!"

The table second from the left clapped this time; several Ravenclaws stood up in blue theme uniforms to shake hands with Terry as he joined them. Ravenclaw is blue—blue for intelligence and wisdom, no doubt.

Now that she could tell which table belonged to Hufflepuff and which belonged to Ravenclaw, and Gryffindor was easy enough to spot (she saw the twins’ red hair bobbing at that table with red themed uniforms), she could now see over to the Slytherin table—green. Maybe it was her imagination but she thought they did not look too pleased—no, it was probably just her imagination.

She would not take into consideration what others had said about Slytherin—she would take what they acted as a first-hand experience….she might as well be in Slytherin in a few minutes anyway. She might as well say goodbye to Ron now…

While she went to war with her thoughts, "Brocklehurst, Mandy" was sorted into Ravenclaw and “Brown, Lavender” became the first new Gryffindor. The table she assumed to be the Gryffindors exploded with cheers; Persephone could see Ron's (twin) brothers catcalling.

‘Red for energy, passion and action—I think,’ She thought to herself when she saw the Gryffindor table themed red. She couldn’t quite remember what red stood for exactly. Green, for Slytherin, stood for life, nature, jealousy and money. Something of revival, always full of energy.

Speaking of Slytherin associated with energy, "Bulstrode, Millicent" became a Slytherin and she definitely had the energy of those girls that bullied other, smaller girls. (Maybe it was her imagination, but she swore she could hear ‘boos’ from the Gryffindor table).

Maybe, she thought wildly, maybe she didn’t fit into any of the house—maybe there had been some mistake and she just did not belong in Hogwarts at all. Maybe this was one terrible mistake—but how would that explain her weird powers? Her scar? Her….parents?

She was very near tears—all the anxiety pulling inside of her made her feel sick.

"Finch-Fletchley, Justin!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

The more and more students that were sorted, the more Persephone noticed a sort of pattern—the hat never took its time for each student. Some students were pronounced into their house immediately, while others had to sit on the stool for a moment, while others even had to sit for a whole while for the hat to decide.

"Finnigan, Seamus," the sandy-haired boy next to Persephone in the line, sat on the stool for almost a whole minute before the hat declared him a Gryffindor.

"Granger, Hermione!"

Hermione almost ran to the stool and jammed the hat eagerly on her head.

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the hat. Ron groaned next to her.

Next it was, “Greengrass, Daphne!” Persephone watched curiously, waiting for which house she would go to. She seemed alright, though she didn’t really know what to think of her.
“SLYTLERIN!” The Hat finally shouted. Persephone did not think her a Slytherin type but nonetheless, Daphne ran to join the students wearing robes trimmed with green.

When Neville Longbottom, the boy who kept losing his toad, was called, he fell over on his way to the stool. The hat took a long time to decide with Neville. When it finally shouted, "GRYFFINDOR," Neville ran off still wearing it, and had to jog back amid gales of laughter to give it to "MacDougal, Morag."

Draco Malfoy made a great deal of walking up to the stool, in great faux style, when his name was called. The hat barely touched his head when it screamed, "SLYTLERIN!"

Malfoy followed Daphne, and went to join his friends Crabbe and Goyle, looking pleased with himself as Persephone was ready to hurl. Now she was damned to go to Slytherin—if she was in Slytherin, she’d have to deal with Pansy and Draco but she would also have Daphne and she didn’t have a problem with her…

Persephone was growing more and more anxious as the names grew closer and closer to hers. "Moon"..., "Nott"..., Pansy ended up following Malfoy into Slytherin"..., then a pair of twin girls, "Patil" and "Patil"..., then "Perks, Sally-Anne"..., and then, at last –

"Potter, Persephone!"

Persephone heard a wave of hushed chatter as she stepped forward.

"Potter, did she say?"

"The Persephone Potter?"

She only got a glimpse of the people craning their necks to get a good look at her before the hat dropped over her eyes. She waited with baited breath.

"Hmm…interesting," A sudden voice whispered in her ear. “Very interesting. Plenty of courage, I see, and talents the like I rarely see. A powerful thirst for knowledge and a powerful urge to prove yourself…yes the ambition is clear…” She hoped Ron would change his views on Slytherin, the way her sorting seemed to be going. “And gifts that I have not yet seen of such quality, it seems….all very favorable to all the Founders…oh they would have fought over you….but who would win you over…hmm…”

Another pause of silence, “You would do great in Slytherin, it’s all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that…”

She let out a shaky breath, quickly readying herself. She thought of Daphne. She could be friends with her. She would have to deal with Malfoy, it seemed and she would never let him ridicule anyone. She would stand up to him and she wouldn’t be another Crabbe and Goyle—she didn’t care who he was, she would stand up for herself and for others—she would hope that he could come to his senses or she would at some point threaten to kill him if necessary but—but she wouldn’t be like everything she’d heard about Slytherin from Ron.

“Quarrels with your housemates already?” The hat mused and her heart skipped a beat—her housemates? Was she in Slytherin then? “Oh, not yet—how trifling…”

She thought of herself having to deal with Malfoy and Pansy—maybe if she got to know them, then they wouldn’t be so bad? No that didn’t seem likely…

“Oh how very puzzling…” It seemed another minute passed as the Hat deliberated. She was
growing more and more anxious.

“Ambitious and clever yet a flare for justice…” At that second, her kitten meowed loudly. The Hat almost laughed, “And a disregard to the rules, it seems…”

She waited, and waited and waited, chanting to herself that if she were in Slytherin, she would be the one to set a new example of what a Slytherin was—and she would punch Draco in the face.

“Better be Gryffindor!”

The hat interrupted her muted planning and she sat stunned. Her arms were shaking as she took the hat off and found herself walking to the Gryffindor table in absolute shock. Her heart was beating harder than before and she was glad that she could sit. She barely noticed that she was being given the loudest round of cheer yet. The Gryffindor students had given her a standing ovation and she shook hands with several people.

Percy (Not Jackson) the Prefect got up and shook her hand vigorously, while Fred yelled, "We got Potter! We got Potter!" By his side was George Weasley, clapping as well, clad in the same uniform.

She was able to sit before she could faint and the ghost she sat opposite to patted her arm, and finally made her take a big breath at the sudden, horrible feeling she'd just plunged it into a bucket of ice-cold water.

She was just about to be put into Slytherin—she wasn’t brave, she was ambitious, and this much she knew about herself. Why would the Sorting Hat…why would it change its opinion so quickly? Just before she’d been put into the most logical house, she’d been put in the house that made the least amount of sense.

She glanced up at the High Table. She examined the table closely, and gave a shaking smile to Hagrid when she caught his eye and gave her the thumbs up. And there, in the center of the High Table, in a large gold chair, sat the real Albus Dumbledore. She recognized him easily from the card she’d gotten in the Chocolate Frog on the train. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing in the whole hall that shone as brightly as the ghosts.

Some chairs down the table, Persephone could also recognize Professor Quirrell, too, the nervous young man from the Leaky Cauldron. He was looking very peculiar in a large purple turban.

There were only two people before Ron’s turn. She watched a tall, dark skinned boy that she had bumped into named “Thomas, Dean,” be sorted into Gryffindor as well. He joined the Gryffindor table as "Turpin, Lisa," became a Ravenclaw. She watched in eagerness, leaning forward with baited breath as Ron took the hat onto his head. He looked pale green by now but it was only for a moment before the hat had shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Persephone clapped with the rest of the Gryffindors as Ron came around the table to collapse into the space she’d saved for him, right next to her. She smiled at him as Percy Weasley congratulated him pompously, "Well done, Ron, excellent."

Persephone watched the very last student, "Zabini, Blaise," be sorted into Slytherin in envy.

Professor McGonagall rolled up her scroll and took the Sorting Hat away. She looked to her table, looking down the table. She scanned the Ravenclaw table and caught the eye of someone on the other side of the table—it was a girl with slightly caramel hair, who caught her eye just as she noticed her. She smiled at her but before Persephone could smile back, Albus Dumbledore had
gotten to his feet.

He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all there.

"Welcome," he said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you!"

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Persephone stared around in concern and confusion. Was he—was he mad?

Without taking her eyes off the headmaster, she leaned over and asked, “Is he mad?” to Percy.

"Mad?" said Percy airily. "He's a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes. Potatoes, Persephone?"

Even more confused, she looked at him in question but then glanced down to find the dishes in front of her were now piled with food. She had never seen so many things to eat on one table: roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, mashed potatoes, roast potatoes, fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup, and, for some strange reason, peppermint humbugs.

She’d never been outright starved by the Dursleys. She was given bread instead of actual meals during punishments. Peppermints, on occasions. She was sometimes not allowed to eat until chores were done and even then, meals were never more than to sustain herself. Dudley had made it his job to take anything she’d wanted to eat—and if it were anything healthier than he liked, he’d throw it into the trash right in front of her. She was cautious, out of practice, when she reached for the gravy.

"That does look good," said the ghost in the ruff sadly, watching Persephone spill gravy onto her mashed potatoes.

She frowned, “Do you want—"

"Oh, I would love some, but I haven't eaten for nearly five hundred years," said the ghost. "I don't need to, of course, but one does miss it. I don't think I've introduced myself? Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service. Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower."

"I know who you are!" said Ron suddenly. "My brothers told me about you—you're Nearly Headless Nick!"

"I would prefer you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy—" the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus Finnigan interrupted.

"Nearly Headless? How can you be nearly headless?"

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little chat wasn't going at all the way he wanted.

"Like this," he said irritably. He seized his left ear and pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it properly.

Looking pleased at the stunned looks on their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head back onto his neck. Before she could drown herself in the words of how being ghost defied several laws of anatomy, he coughed, and said, "So—new Gryffindors! I hope you're going to help us win the
house championship this year? Gryffindors have never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have got the cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron's becoming almost unbearable—he's the Slytherin ghost."

She followed his stare to see, sitting at the Slytherin table, a horrible looking ghost, staring with blank eyes at nothing, with a gaunt face and blood stained robes, though the blood was silver. He was right next to Malfoy who, Persephone was pleased to see, didn't look too pleased with the seating arrangements.

“How did he get covered in blood?” asked Seamus with great interest.

"I've never asked," said Nearly Headless Nick delicately.

“I’d rather not ask,” Ron said and Persephone thought she definitely agreed.

After a while, when everyone had finished eating, the remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving them sparkling clean as before. A moment later the desserts appeared. Blocks of ice cream in every flavor you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate eclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, Jell-O, rice pudding, grapes, cut oranges, apple slices…

The discussion turned to everyone’s family as she popped a grape into her mouth. It was the harder type, the one that made that satisfying tearing sound when you bit into it.

"I'm half-and-half," said Seamus. "Me dad's a Muggle. Mom didn't tell him she was a witch 'til after they were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him."

The others laughed.

"What about you, Neville?" said Ron.

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch," said Neville, "but the family thought I was all-Muggle for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off my guard and force some magic out of me—he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned—”

Persephone stared at him in horror, “but nothing happened until I was eight. Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles—”

Persephone gasped in surprise “when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go.”

Was Neville okay? She couldn’t ask, as she’d covered her mouth with her hand. “But I bounced—all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here—they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me my toad."

“That—that doesn’t seem all that good—that’s actually considered child abuse, I’m sure.” She told him. He shrugged, but he was blushing.

Her mind drifted to the conversation Percy Weasley and Hermione were having on lessons, ("I do hope they start right away, there's so much to learn, I'm particularly interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it's supposed to be very difficult -- "; "You'll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing—").

She thought she would ask Percy about Potions and Charms—those seemed to be the most interesting—when her eyes started drifting towards the High Table again. Hagrid was drinking deeply from his goblet. Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and
sallow skin.

It seemed like the second she saw him, he saw her. He stared right past Quirrell’s turban to catch Persephone staring. In the few seconds it took for her to realize he’d caught her, to see his eyes widen in the slightest as horror (?) before she registered the sharp, hot pain across her forehead, right through her scar.

She jumped, hissing in pain, instinctively reaching a hand up to her forehead.

"What is it?" asked Percy.

"No, um, nothing." She stammered, finding that the pain had disappeared just as she registered it. When she looked back at the teacher but he paid her no more attention. She’d gotten the feeling that he had not expected something he’d just seen.

"Who's that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?" he asked Percy.

"Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to—everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape."

Persephone kept an eye on the man but Snape didn't look at her again.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

"Ahem—just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you.

"First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well."

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors.

"Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch.

"And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

She widened her eyes, seriously wonder what the hell was wrong with the school’s headmaster. She thought nothing of this however—she did not want to even think closely to what her Uncle Vernon had.

"And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!" cried Dumbledore. Persephone noticed that the other teachers' smiles had become rather fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself, snakelike, into words.

"Everyone pick their favorite tune," said Dumbledore, "and off we go!"
And the school bellowed:

"Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,
Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they're bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we've forgot, just do your best, we'll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot."

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!"

The Gryffindor first years followed Percy and the female prefect, a brown haired girl with severe acne, whose name was Audrey through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase.

Persephone was drowsy, tired of the day already, but she didn’t miss it when she, again, saw the people in the portraits along the corridors whisper and point as they passed by. She listened to Hermione talk about everything they passed and she couldn’t blame her for that—she was sure she’d be if she wasn’t so tired. Percy and Audrey led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Persephone was just wondering how much farther they had to go when they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," Percy whispered to the first years. "A poltergeist." He raised his voice, "Peeves—show yourself."

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

"Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron?"

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

"Ooooooooh!" he said, with an evil cackle. "Ickle Firsties! What fun!"

He swooped suddenly at them. Persephone wasn’t concentration enough to duck—she was starting to doubt again her studies in science and wondering how magic like this could just be right under non-magical people’s noses.

"Go away, Peeves, or the Baron'll hear about this, I mean it!" barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks on Neville's head. They
heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

"You want to watch out for Peeves," said Percy, as they set off again. "The Bloody Baron's the only one who can control him, he won't even listen to us prefects. Here we are."

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

"Password?" she said.

"Caput Draconis," said Percy, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled through it—Neville needed a leg up—and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squishy armchairs. It was very warm and a violent red, obviously very prideful.

Audrey and Percy split here, Percy directing the boys up one of the spiral staircases. Persephone bid Ron goodnight, and Ron mumbled something about a goodnight.

The girls followed Audrey up the spiral staircase of one of the towers, until they reached the dorm rooms. “Here we have the dorms. There are several dorms for each year, and each dorm has usually five or six people in them. You will have the same dorm for the rest of the year and any changes made should be passed by your prefect, so me. Ah, here we are. You girls will be the top dorm, as the seventh years have now graduated.” She muttered, pulling on a paper, “And this will be the dorm of.” She read off a list. “Lavender Brown, Hermione Granger, Parvati Patil, Persephone Potter, Amanda Steindberg and Renetta Vander Woodsen.”

The six girls walked forward. Persephone chose her bed quickly, moving straight to it. Her trunk appeared at the end of her four-poster bed as she hopped on it. Amanda of the choppy brown hair took the bed right next to her, the one right in the middle, opposite to the door, and Hermione of the bushy brown curls was on her other side. On Hermione’s other side was Parvati, who had the shiniest, most perfectly straight sheets of black hair Persephone had ever seen, and on Persephone’s other side was Lavender, of the curly blonde.

She felt she would get along splendidly with Lavender, as Lavender started to unpack her trunk, dropping all her cosmetics and hair products onto her dresser, all near identical to Persephone’s. Parvati did too, as the two instantly hit it off, talking about their hair struggles. Persephone felt she was a cheater in the struggle, as she could easily manipulate her hair into doing her bidding, so she was quiet during the whole thing as she quickly organized her little collection of cosmetics.

Each bed came with a dresser and desk with a chair. The bed was in the middle by a set of tall, curved windows, with the same red velvet drapes imprinted with gold detailing that their bed curtains had. She felt like they were in medieval royalty, with the thick atmosphere of it all, what with stone walls and wooden floors. There was a centrally located fire roaring that she was sure they could roast marshmallows over, if wizards knew what marshmallows are.

While Hermione unloaded her books and such onto her desk, Persephone unpacked her trunk. She organized the dresser into categories and found all her clothes fit snugly. It was probably magic, she smiled to herself. She quickly unfolded the little bed for her kitten by her bed, though she was sure she would sleep with Persephone until she was big—then she took her carefully out, welcoming the purse she gifted Persephone with.

She took out her books and such, laid out her parchment and such (and a box of pens she’d bought at the drugstore that she would certainly need, or sell, whichever) on her desk before putting out her clothes for the coming morning onto her chair. She made sure to put her head band on the desk with her pill for the next day. Nerves were certainly keeping her up, if she hadn’t been so tired, so
she decided to stretch out.

She stood, flipping her hair over to put in a high pony tail before taking a deep breath and stretching down to touch her toes. Then she slid into the splits and one of the girls cried out. Persephone looked up in alarm to find two of the girls staring at her in shock, “What?!”

“Holy crap!” Parvati cried. “Doesn’t that hurt?!”

Persephone smiled, “Not at all.”

“God, I’ve been trying so hard to perfect my split!” Lavender whined. “Look, I can get up…till here…”

“Hey,” Lavender suddenly called to her as she took out her shoes, “Nice brush.”

Persephone looked and saw they both had the same brush. The girls laughed and Persephone felt strangely at home.

The girls were much too tired to talk any more. No sooner had Hermione exclaimed, “I can’t wait until classes start!” had Persephone fallen asleep.
Hogwarts for Persephone was incredibly unlike any school she’d ever gone to.

She had gotten up early and showered, and took her time drying her hair as it was still too early to be in a rush. She used the gel on her hair to make her curls more prominent and placed a green headband on her head to keep her hair from falling into her eyes. She dressed in her summer uniform and smiled—the tie was now red and gold. How did it know what house she’d gotten sorted as?

Next of the girls up was Hermione, who woke with crazy hair, retreated to the bathroom and came back with still messy hair, only this time she was dressed for the day. She immediately pulled out her textbook and started reading. She did not say a word of good morning to Persephone so Persephone said, “Good morning,” while she did her hair.

Hermione looked up from her textbook and analyzed her desk, “How long have you been doing your hair for?” She asked in almost a ridiculed voice.

Persephone shrugged, “Not as long as usual, why?”

Hermione gave her a look of great distaste and looked back down to her textbook. Persephone blinked and looked back at her reflection in the mirror—alright. Fine. It wasn’t like Hermione couldn’t use a spare minute to tame her own hair but to each their own, she supposed.

She entertained herself with packing her books in her book bag, and adding in the usual essentials—brush, hair accessories and, of course, pads. She’d gotten her period some time ago, earlier than most girls and it still had not regulated. Then she simply kept Salem entertained, which the rest of the girls, save for Hermione, found to be the most adorable and amazing kitten ever.

Finally, when she pried herself away from Lavender, who kept talking baby talk to Salem, she went down to the common room. She stared around in amazement—she could see it more properly now that sunlight was pouring into the common room.

The few conversations that had been going on by the students that were occupying the common room halted and instead, whisperings took their places as everyone stared up at her. Blushing, she looked away, hoping to make a quick getaway, when, “Lily!”

Ron was up and he bounded to meet her at the bottom of the girls’ staircase, “I’m starved,” He told her. “Do you remember the way to the Great Hall because I don’t fancy getting lost while this hungry.”

She snorted and they made their way towards the portrait hole, only for someone to make a, ‘hmp’
sound behind them and to bump Persephone’s shoulder as she marched by—“Oi! Watch where you’re going!” Ron called after Hermione.

Persephone scowled, “Suppose she’s hungrier than you?”

The two made their way down to the Great Hall, or where they thought the Great Hall was, when Ron insisted they passed by a portrait twice. It didn’t help when the portraits could move from frame to frame. When they did find their way to the Great Hall, half the students had already been seated and chatting animatedly at all house tables. She caught Daphne’s eye and returned the blonde girl’s wave and smile.

She ignored the stares and took a seat with Ron and picked out an apple while Ron got himself some eggs. She was nervous for the day—first day of lessons as a witch and she had no proper wand. Only dirt and seeds. No seedling, however.

Worse than that, first day of lessons also meant first time navigating the castle. It was rumoured that Hogwarts had a hundred and forty-two staircases. Not only were they tricky to navigate—some had a vanishing step halfway up and others you had to climb two at a time—but they moved. The staircases moved very often and this would prove very annoying, as Seamus Finnigan was its first victim of the day, nearly making him late to Charms.

Finding your class was disastrous—the students did not seem to have a map of Hogwarts and so were left to their own devices to figure out how to get to their lessons. The ghosts were no help, either, unless it was Nearly Headless Nick. He was happy to point new Gryffindors in the right direction and always warned them when a staircase would move suddenly. The Bloody Baron stared both Ron and Persephone down when she suggested asking his help.

Then there was the very opposite of helpful, Peeves the Poltergeist. It was as if he could sniff out when you would be late to class and made sure to see this dreadful fate through. He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, "GOT YOUR CONK!"

Persephone learned quicker than others that the caretaker hated the students of Hogwarts. Ron and Persephone had been late to meet a staircase and had to find an alternative and apparently had accidently wandered near the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor that the Headmaster had warned them about. He did not hear a word of their reasoning and they just barely made it out alive when Professor Quirrell happened to be passing by. It was a welcome relief, as Filch was just threatening to lock them in the dungeons.

Even when Filch wasn’t around, he was around, through his cat. Mrs. Norris was a scrawny, dust-colored creature with bulging, lamp like eyes just like Filch’s and Persephone was sure that Filch made her patrol the corridors alone, just to catch a rule being broken. It was the only reason Persephone could think a cat was so mean. Break a rule in front of her, put just one toe out of line, and she’d whisk off for Filch, who’d appear, wheezing, two seconds later. The caretaker knew every single passageway in the school and knew them better than anyone. (Persephone would later correct herself when she and Ron were complaining about the man when the Weasley twins overheard and made sure Persephone knew that they were the ones who knew every single passageway better than Filch).

It was with great effort that none of the students gave Mrs. Norris a good kick.

As intricate as the castle was, even more intricate was the classes she attended in the castle. She found, with great interest, that magic was a lot more complex than just spell incantations and she was thrilled with it all.
Astronomy was ever so interesting—as the night skies were very present in the philosophy that Persephone read of, it was a wild interest of hers to truly see the stars. She was able to draw her map out accordingly to her basic knowledge of the stars from just using what she had read from Giordano Bruno. She earned Gryffindor their first ‘ten points’ for her ‘impressive interpretation of the solar system’, or so Professor Sinistra says.

Herbology classes were held out in the greenhouses, behind the castle. They were taught by the Head of Hufflepuff, Professor Sprout. This class they had with Professor Sprout’s house, where Susan immediately reached out and made sure to be seated right by Persephone’s other side, whereas Ron was on her right. The class called for a good amount of manual labor to take care of all sorts of strange plants and fungi. While the plants held still for her to care for them, Susan had to wrestle the violent plant down so that Hannah Abbot could water the right leaves.

Between the interesting classes, Persephone could only assume one class would be not as fun as the others and that was History of Magic, which was taught by a ghost. That later fact should have made the class cool but it only made it more boring. Apparently, the story goes that Professor Binns had been very old when he had fallen asleep in front of the staff room fire and got up next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him. His voice was dead, literally, and just so monotonous that nothing he taught them was anything interesting. The only fun thing about the class is when she let Salem wander on her desk and amuse several Gryffindors around—well, except for one.

Hermione Granger was very…similar to Persephone.

Both girls were very smart, in Gryffindor, very enthusiastic about magic and they shared a dorm. Both girls went over notes every night and always read and had bumped into each other more than once in the library. That—that was about it. Hermione always scoffed at Persephone’s use of her free time—apparently, practicing her ballet steps in the dorm was a distraction from Hermione’s studying and the other girls fawning over her kitten was irritating and induced migraines.

Hermione was also very competitive, as the two girls were the only two from the non-magic communities in their dorm.

She first noticed it in Charms. Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. At the start of their first class he took the roll call, and when he reached Persephone’s name he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight.

Charms was different than the other classes so far. They studied the theory of magic and asked basic questions any student could find in the book. This was good for Persephone, as she had no wand. It happened to have been a rather easy question that Professor Flitwick had asked and Hermione had raised her hand and answered correctly. As she earned a point for Gryffindor, she smiled smugly at Persephone, who frowned in confusion. There was no competition between them, was there?

Something similar happened in Transfiguration.

Transfiguration, among Potions and Charms, was one of the class she was most looking forward to. It was taught by Professor McGonagall and she had a right mind to not ever cross this teacher.

Strict and clever, she gave them a talking-to the moment they sat down in her first class.

“Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts,” she said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned." Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again. This was some of the first examples
of magic any of the first years had seen, so it was normal that everyone sat up in their desks and eagerly inclined their heads to learn.

What followed, however, was not anything close to as exciting as that example. They were to take long and complicated notes as Professor McGonagall lectured them on the basics of Transfiguration, the very building blocks of the class. They were warned on the rules of Transfiguration and again, Persephone learned how advanced Human Transfiguration was.

Eventually, they were told to put their quills down and they were each given a match. Their first task was to transfigure the match into a steel needle. They had the bare minimum of the spell, and they were to put together their theory to try the incantation.

Persephone stared at the match and felt herself get uncomfortable. Would she get in trouble for not having a wand yet? She sat, slumped in her chair, staring at the match—she poked it with her finger, imagining it turning into a needle.

Lavender, who sat behind her, noticed her silence. Persephone, flushing, told her, “I forgot my wand.”

“Oh! You can use mine, if you want to!” She offered up her wand. “I’m not really getting anywhere with this anyway.”

Persephone reached for the wand, “Aren’t we supposed to not use other people’s wands?”

Lavender shrugged, “What’s the worst that can happen?”

Lavender’s wand felt wrong in her hands. The weight was off and it made her uncomfortably itchy but nonetheless, she didn’t waste time in saying the incantation, holding the wand a good distance away.

She watched it jerk and tremble, turning a metallic grey but then it faded as she pulled her wand away. Persephone, disappointed, stared at it as it faded back to its wooden tips.

“An impressive attempt, Ms. Potter.” Professor McGonagall commented, suddenly hovering in front of her. “Do tell me what you believe you did wrong.”

Persephone stared up at her, glancing down at the match, thinking for a moment. It must have been because this was not her wand but would she get in trouble for that?

“The match…it’s made of wood and wood is a natural resource, and…and I’m trying to turn into a needle, a metal. So…so I’m turning a living material into a dead material…so I have to…to really want to change it?” She tried her best, smiling sheepishly at her poor wording.

Professor McGonagall seemed pleased with her answer and gestured for her to attempt again. She let Lavender’s wand hover above the match and repeated the incantation, now keeping the wand above the match as it tremble once more. Slowly, it turned into a needle and she broke into a smile, looking up to McGonagall, who was nodding approvingly.

“Very well done, Ms. Potter.” She was thoughtful for a moment. “You have your father’s talents.”

She was so pleased with herself, she barely gave any thought to Hermione’s sour frown directed at her. Lavender high fived her and Persephone promised to fix her hair the way Lavender had complemented hers the next morning in payment.

Defence Against the Darks Arts was a class everyone looked forward to. As quickly as the class
started was as quickly as everyone was simultaneously disappointed with the class.

Professor Quirrell stammered every second word, talking nervously about the different kinds of dangers they might encounter. She had a hard time listening to him, as he wasn’t someone she would trust. At the beginning of the lesson, Seamus asked eagerly how Quirrell had once fought a zombie off, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather. The classroom smelled so strongly of garlic that most students had rolled their sleeves over their hands to cover their noses. Persephone’s eyes watered as she slowly speculated that the smell was coming from Professor Quirrell’s turban.

His turban, he told them, had been given to him by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of a troublesome zombie but she sure did not believe him, especially when she heard the story of why it smelled so heavily of garlic: to ward off a vampire he’d met in Romania and was afraid would be coming back to get him one of these days.

The Weasley twins later insisted to her that the turban was stuffed with garlic and she believed them, already having speculated the same thing.

Persephone was surprised to find that she was excelling in her classes, even without a wand. She was sure she’d be behind but here she was, doing great and understanding her classes. She earned house points, too, and usually was the one to help Neville understand what he didn’t in the common room.

On Friday, Ron and Persephone made their way to the Great Hall for breakfast without getting lost once, elated by that fact as they took their seats, Persephone reading her schedule, “We’ve got Double-Potions today!” She smiled widely, showing Ron the paper.

Ron groaned.

"Double Potions with the Slytherins," he said. "Snape's Head of Slytherin House. My brothers say he always favors them—we'll be able to see if it's true."

"McGonagall doesn’t favor us, that’s for sure," Persephone mumbled. Just as she took a bite of her eggs on toast, the mail arrived.

Persephone had gotten used to this by now but the first time a hundred owls had suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast, she was shocked. They circled until they saw their owners and would drop their letters and packages onto their laps.

Hedwig unsurprisingly hadn't brought Persephone any letters or packages. She flew in enough times right onto her shoulder and let Persephone feed her some bread that Persephone would always bring her hair off her shoulders, or bring all her hair onto one shoulder if it weren’t up, just to give her space to come down on. She would nibble onto her ear affectionately before flying off and away to the owlery with the other school owls.

This morning, however, when she fluttered down onto her shoulder, she had something in between her beak, which she dropped into Persephone’s lap.

Persephone tore it open at once, reading through it too quickly to understand it before reading it slower. It said, in a very untidy scrawl:

_Dear Effie,_

_I know you get Friday afternoons off, so would you like to come and have a cup of tea with me around three? I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an answer back with Hedwig._
Persephone borrowed Ron’s quill, scribbled a quick reply of, *Yes, please, see you later,* on the back of the note, and sent Hedwig off again with a big smile.

She had lots to look forward to—Potions, for one. Ron didn’t seem as excited but she definitely was. It was the only interesting class that required wandless magic. Persephone definitely had lots of wandless magic at her hands—and at her hands would not be a wand, because that’s how wandless magic works, gosh she was so funny.

The classroom Potions was held in was in the dungeons. It was colder down there but Persephone had planned ahead for this class. She brought her uniform sweater to wear under her robes and she brought out her mother’s locket to wear over it. She had combed her hair into perfect waviness, even making sure it was wavy by concentrating on it in the mirror. She’d placed an emerald green headband on her head for the first time, to make sure her hair didn’t get into her eyes. It made her green eye pop and her red hair look redder.

She really wanted to make sure she made a good impression to the Potions teacher. He didn’t seem too happy to see her that first day during the feast and she was sure Potions would be her favorite class. She wanted her favorite class’s teacher to like her and like her he shall. Even if she were a Gryffindor. And even if his classroom was cold and creepy with pickled animals floating in glass jars all around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the roll call, and, like Flitwick, he paused at Persephone’s name.

"Ah, yes," he said softly, "Persephone Potter. Our new—*celebrity.*"

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands. Persephone found it awkward when she said quietly, "Lily, sir."

Professor Snape stared at her for a moment too long before asking, "What?" Through his teeth.

She blushed a deep red, "I go by my middle name, Lilith, but shortened to—to Lily," She was growing smaller under his cold glare. "Like…the flower?"

"I will call you as it is written on the papers, Potter." He paused. "Five points from Gryffindor for interrupting."

She stared away in completely confusion, looking to Ron, wondering if he saw that as well. Ron, wide-eyed, shook his head and shrugged.

Snape finished calling the names as Persephone went over what just happened and wondered what she had done wrong. She didn’t raise her hand—yea, maybe that was it. She could apologize after class? Yes, she’ll do that. That would ease the bubbling feeling of shame in her stomach.

Snape looked up, his eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but Persephone was captivated by every word. Much like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses...I
can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death—if you aren't as big a bunch of
dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

Heavy silence followed and Persephone leaned forward in waiting for more. Hermione Granger
was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to start proving that she wasn't a dunderhead.
Neville was looking nervous.

"Potter!" Snape said so suddenly that she jumped in her seat. He was not looking at her. "What
would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?" Behind her, she
could hear some of the Slytherins sniggering.

She had read over her textbooks and pre-written notes the night before so she barely had to think
about her answer, "Draught of the Living Dead."

Snape, surprised, looked her in the eye.

"Correct…" He narrowed his eyes as he drew the word out. "Where, Potter, would you look if I
told you to find me a bezoar?"

Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it would go without her leaving her seat, but
Persephone answered accordingly, "In a basic potions kit, as it cures most poisons, but it is
originally found in the stomach of a goat, sir." She’d remembered that because it sounded
disgusting.

Another air of surprise washed over Snape’s face and she could hear the Slytherins start to
whisper, their laughter long over.

Snape was still ignoring Hermione's quivering hand when he asked, "What is the difference, Potter,
between monkshood and wolfsbane?" Persephone glanced at Daphne, would smiled
encouragingly.

At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching toward the dungeon ceiling.

Persephone took pleasure in answering, "There is no difference between the two. Trick question."
She smiled just a tad. "It also goes by the name of aconite?"

Snape said nothing, only lifting his chin just an inch higher, staring down at her in…approval?
Suspicion? Whatever the look was, she didn’t have enough time to figure it out, as he turned and
called to the rest of the class, "Why is no one copying this down?"

There was a sudden rummaging for quills and parchment. She bit back a smile as she complied.
Ron muttered, "If you were in Slytherin, he’d give you fifty points, probably." She nodded
seriously.

She’d given Gryffindor a good start but it quickly went downhill when Snape put them all into
pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to cure boils.

He swept around in his long black cloak, watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs,
criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. Persephone did everything
with a delicate hand, very sure she was doing everything right, but when he hovered near, his eyes
passed over her as if she was invisible. Had she offended him?

She found brewing potions to be so…calming? Like, she truly could find some peace and
tranquility in potion making. It was as if it was automatic—she added her six snake fangs to the
mortar and crushed it into a fine powder before adding them into her cauldron. She waited out the
ten seconds at 250 degrees, without even needing to count the seconds out as she could tell in herself when it was good to go. It was incredible—it was the most she’d ever trusted herself in doing.

She found it a little ironic—she did need to wave a wand, which she borrowed from Neville—though it was more of a passing through the air in a line then a wave. She saw Snape watching her and she could almost make out a nod of approval. While she waited out the minutes before continuing into the second part, she glanced around the room—Hermione’s hair had frizzed up into a worse mess. Everyone was hard at work—she was first done the first part.

While she started the second part (adding four horned slugs to her cauldron, taking it off the fire to add two porcupine quills and stirring five times clockwise, which she could tell made a huge difference in how the quill simmered and mixed with her potion) she finished it in no time, waving Neville’s wand for the final time to finish the potion. Again, she was done before everyone else. She made a quick note to herself to do some research into how to grow her stupid wand.

She watched, again, at the students around her. It was when she glanced at Neville, who was on her desk, that she gasped—he was dropping the porcupine quills into his cauldron while it was still over the fire, “Neville no—!” She tried but it was too late.

Professor Snape looked up at her cry, because she had interrupted him telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs. Just as he did so, clouds of acid green smoke, accompanied with a dangerous sounding loud hissing noise filled the dungeon. “Get away from the cauldron before it—” Persephone cried as the worst happened.

The potion sputtered upwards, burning the cauldron and seeping to the floor. Persephone tugged Ron up onto his chair as the potion swept quickly across the floor, burning people’s shoes. Neville had been drenched in the potion and, as Persephone expected, he was covered in angry red boils, all up his arms and face, down to his neck.

"Idiot boy!” snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?" Persephone frowned in contemplation—it seemed like a simple mistake, as it was solved so quick with just a wave of his wand. Shouldn’t he be concerned for Neville?

Neville whimpered as more boils started to pop up all over his nose.

"Take him up to the hospital wing," Snape spat at Seamus. Then he rounded on Ron, who had been working next to Neville.

"You—Weasley—why didn’t you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he’d make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That’s another five points you’ve lost for Gryffindor."

This was so unfair, Persephone wanted to say something but knew better. Ron didn’t seem like he did, so when he opened his mouth to argue, she kicked him under the table, silencing him with a look.

She decided not to apologize after all, having seen what sort of teacher he was. He ignored her for the remainder of the class and only looked at her as she packed up her things, trying to be quick to follow Ron’s angry leaving. Just as she left her table, Snape looked at her.

“I would be careful, Miss Potter,” He said lowly, making her look at him in surprise. “Who you make such loyal ties with.” He said nothing more, sweeping away into his classroom.
Confused and disappointed by the teacher, she left the class to catch up with Ron on the stairs.
"Hey, cheer up," she said, "Snape doesn’t seem like any Gryffindors, I mean, blaming you for something he should have warned us about? Poor Neville, though.” She smiled. “Wanna come to Hagrid’s with me?”

They made their way across the grounds around five to three, to where Hagrid lived. Hagrid lived in a small wooden house on the edge of the forbidden forest. A crossbow and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Persephone knocked, there was a frantic scrabbling that sounded suspiciously like an animal running. Then there were several booming barks—Ron and Persephone exchanged a look. Then Hagrid's voice rang out, saying, "Back, Fang—back."

Hagrid's big, hairy face appeared in the crack as he pulled the door open.

"Hang on," he said. "Back, Fang."

He let them in while struggling to keep control of an enormous black boarhound. By the collar. How he managed to put a collar on that thing—beyond Persephone.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

"Make yerselves at home," Hagrid said as he let go of his very large dog. Persephone jumped up on the chair as Fang immediately bounded straight for Ron and jumped him, knocking him down and licking his face. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as fierce as he looked.

"This is Ron Weasley," Persephone said as she folded her legs under her to sit. Hagrid poured boiling water into a large teapot and putting rock cakes onto a plate.

"Another Weasley, eh?" Hagrid chuckled, glancing at Ron's freckles. “I spent half me life chasin' yer twin brothers away from the forest.” Ron and Persephone nearly broke their teeth pretending they enjoyed the shapeless lumps with raisins. They told him about their first week of lessons as Persephone kept inching away from Fang’s drooling. Eventually, he rested on the chair she wasn’t occupying and she rubbed his big head.

Hagrid gave both Persephone and Ron a delightful shock to hear when he called Fitch "that old git."

"An' as fer that cat, Mrs. Norris, I'd like ter introduce her to Fang sometime. D'yeh know, every time I go up ter the school, she follows me everywhere? Can't get rid of her—Fitch puts her up to it."

Persephone then recounted what had happened in Potions and remarked how unfairly he treated all the Gryffindors. “I think—is it possible that Snape knew my mum?” She knew how everyone saw Lily Potter—okay no that didn’t work if Persephone went by Lily, okay, she knew how everyone saw her mum when they looked at Persephone, but could it be Snape saw her too?

Ron looked at her in surprise, as did Hagrid. “Well, maybe,” She nodded. “They were in the same year, I think, Sephie.”

“He looked really— weird when I told him I go by Lily, just like her.” She said briefly. They were silent for a moment as she stared at Fangs, until Hagrid said.
“I wouldn’t worry too much ‘bout it, Effie, that Snape doesn’t like too many students anyway,” She nodded. “How’s yer brother Charlie? I liked him a lot—great with animals, he was.” He told Ron.

Persephone wondered if Hagrid had changed the subject on purpose. While Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie's work with dragons, she picked up a piece of paper that was lying on the table under the tea cozy. It was a cutting from the Daily Prophet:

**GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST**

*Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringotts on 31 July, widely believed to be the work of Dark wizards or witches unknown. Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing had been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied the same day.*

“But we’re not telling you what was in there, so keep your noses out if you know what's good for you,” said a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

Persephone recalled suddenly Ron mentioning something about someone trying to rob Gringotts, but Ron never mentioned the date.

“Oh my god! Hagrid!” Persephone gasped as she made the connection. “Whoever tried to rob Gringotts did it on my birthday! It might've been happening while we were there!”

It was so strange—Hagrid seemed to avoid her eyes. He grunted and offered her another rock cake. Persephone re-read the story with closer inspection.

The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied earlier that *same* day. Hagrid had emptied vault seven hundred and thirteen, if you could call it emptying, taking out that grubby little package. Had that been what the thieves were looking for?

Persephone and Ron walked back to the castle for dinner, their pockets a lot heavier than when they came—they were filled with the rock cakes they’d been too polite to refuse. Her train of thought was unraveling in a strange direction—had Hagrid collected that package knowing that someone was after it? Had he gone just in time? Where was it now? And it didn’t seemed like Hagrid had said everything he could about what Snape had against Persephone—or maybe something against her mum. What did Hagrid know something about Snape that he didn't want to tell her?

Chapter End Notes

Lemme know what you think?
Okay, bear with me. This chapter is all over the place but it sticks to the original plot with some tweaks. Also, where do you guys hope I go with the wand situation? I’d love to hear your ideas! Comment down below!

The weekend was a welcome relief. Even though it was the first week of classes, Persephone was exhausted. She had never exercised her brain so much.

Saturday morning, Persephone woke up early just out of habit. Unable to go back to sleep, she got out of bed and dressed quickly. It wasn’t cold enough for a sweater or jacket but she put on a sleeved, orange floral dress with a white pullover just in case she did get cold.

She pulled her hair up into a high ponytail and took her little pot of wand seeds. She was planning on heading down to the Herbology greenhouse—there was a pretty garden of color changing roses that she wanted a closer look at. And perhaps she could run into Professor Spout and ask her if she’d ever heard of wand seed growing.

When she came down to the common room, she was surprised to find Professor McGonagall pinning up several notices on the board on the wall. She jumped and immediately retreated back up the stairs and hidden from plain sight. She did not want to be awkward with her Head of House. So much for a brave Gryffindor.

“Miss Potter?”

Heart hammering, she peeked out from the stairs to see that McGonagall looking up from over her shoulder, raising a brow.

“Yes?” Persephone smiled a shakily smile, stepping out.

“Is there something I can help you with?” Persephone shook her head a little too vigorously—anxiety ran through her veins so violently she felt dizzy. “And so explain why you are lurking?”

Her hands shook as she twirled her hair nervously, “I-I was heading down to, uh, the Herbology gardens—to see the flowers,” She stammered.

McGonagall seemed to pick up on her anxiety and softened her stern stare, “Well, hurry along now.”

She jogged by very quickly and felt such violent relief that she nearly passed out. Holy god she hated anxiety.

It was still pretty early so the air was nippy but warming. Her pony tail swung with every one of her strides across the grounds. No one was out in the foggy morning and the fresh air was incredible to Persephone.

She entered the greenhouse and almost immediately caused a whole ton of chaos. Something crashed to the floor at her feet and down went a boy as well, who cursed a very dirty curse. She
cried out as soon as all this happened, not expecting this much chaos in the morning.

The boy dropped to his knees and started to pile the dirt that had spread around the broken pot. She stared and blinked, “Um.”

“Oh my god I’m so so—” She didn’t know what she should do so she dropped down too and hesitated, her heart hammering in anxiety. Guilt flooded through her head.

“No, that’s okay, it’s not like I needed this pot specifically,” He ranted, throwing a camera bag over his shoulder to get it out of his way causing her to hold her hands back. “Not like I worked on enchanting it specifically all week long, that’s fine,” He told her, laughing sarcastically.

“I’m sorry?” She tried again but cringed into herself—she felt her face heat up.

“Right,” He sighed and looked up at her and suddenly she recognized the accent.

It was that boy from Ollivander’s. His hair was the same dark and curly and his face was still pale—he had intense colors of gold that she didn’t quite remember. What was his name? Nicolas?

“You’re the boy from Ollivanders,” She tells him without thinking about it.

He raised a brow, “Alright?”

“You go to Hogwarts?”

“Obviously,” He said. “Why are you here?”

His tone sounded rude enough to make her cross her arms, “I could ask you the same question.” Her guilt was replaced with irritation.

“None of your business is why I’m here,” He told her, standing up to stare her down, eyes narrowed.

She stood as well, “Well then it’s none of your business why I’m here,” She told him, raising both her brows. He stared at her for a moment longer before shaking his head expectedly.

“Okay seriously can you do whatever you need to do? I’m sort of in the middle of something,” he said impatiently.

She thought for a moment and smiled, “Actually, you can help me with what I need.” He raised a brow in interest. “About the wand I need to grow—or make, or whatever. Remember?”

His face fell, “You still haven’t grown your wand?”

“Would I be holding a pot of soil if I have?” She asked sarcastically. He glanced at the pot and nodded in recognition. “So…are you able to help? Just a hint as to what I’m supposed to do would be really helpful.”

“Why would I help you?” He asked, quirking a brow. His face in general was now becoming annoying but Persephone tried not to pay too much mind to it—if he could help, it would certainly ease the irritating face.

She blanked for a minute, and it looked obvious on her face, “Uuuuuuh….”

“Right,” He nodded, and turned away.
She panicked—him wanting something in return meant he knew how to help her and she wouldn’t lose her literal only chance at progress with her wand.

“What do you want?” She asked.

He was prepared, “A favor.”

“What…kind of favor?” She narrowed her eyes.

“Just a favor.”

She pursed her lips. On the one hand, this was a literal stranger she was asking for help from, and owing a favor to. She did not trust him but…but he worked at Ollivanders and was the one to suggest the wand making thing. He must know what to do, right?

What was there to lose?

“Fine,” She told him. “Now, can you help?”

“I can,” He told her, “But not now. I’ll send you a note.”

Her face fell, “Wait why not now?”

“It’s not the right time—and besides, I’m already doing something, as you can see.” He gestured to the mess on the floor. “So if that’s the only thing—”

“Yeah okay never mind,” She said in frustration.

She marched out and yelled out in frustration. Never mind that boy—she could find a different way to grow her stupid wand. Maybe she could just ask Hagrid about it—she was very sure that his umbrella is a wand rebuilt so why not?

She headed off to the library instead and spent her morning looking through different wand encyclopaedias. Nowhere did it state she could grow a freaking wand. Literally—was she being pranked?

As annoying this wand situation was, there were more annoying things currently agitating her. Persephone had never once believed any one person could be such an annoying nuisance in her life.

She was right—it was not just one person. Pansy Parkinson and Draco Malfoy had teamed up with each other indirectly to make Persephone feel like hell.

Persephone only had Potions with them and usually had to suffer through those in silence—they just laughed and snickered at her, and she could only guess what they were saying.

Pansy made it her very best duty to make sure Persephone knew they were not friends but she did so by treating her friendly. Every time Persephone walked into the Great Hall, Pansy would make a big deal to get up out of her seat and wave, calling ‘Lily! Oh, Lily, hi!’ before turning to her friends and laughing. It was rather an old sketch of something that would have been mean, if it hadn’t been several times a day.

She tried her best to be very secretive when walking into breakfast, lunch and dinner at the Great Hall, always hiding behind Ron, grabbing the Weasley twins to walk in a way to hide her—she even at some point crawled, but accidently bumped into Susan, who also toppled over and then just
two ginger girls were laughing on the floor.

She hopped she could avoid the two Slytherins until Potions but then she spotted a notice pinned up in the Gryffindor common room that made quite literally all first years groan.

Flying classes would be starting this Thursday. It would be the one class they would have consistently for the next five years. It was the equivalent to physical education in non-magical schools, and would be the one class that would have the same students in it—half the Gryffindors were put into the class with half the Slytherins. The other half of the Gryffindors were with half of the Hufflepuffs.

“I hope we get put in the same class,” Ron said when they saw the notice.

Persephone nodded, “I just hope I’m not in the class with the Slytherins.” She grimaced. “Humiliating myself, being sweaty and clumsy in one class for the next five years with either Draco or Pansy—or worse, both—would be the worst case scenario.”

She’d been looking forward to flying lessons—she couldn’t ask anyone older for what she should expect. Both the Weasley twins were on the Gryffindor Quidditch team and were thus excused from the class for as long as they remained on the team, something they adored rubbing in her face when they, too, had seen the notice. George spoke to her about how great flying is, which will greatly make up for it, but warned her that they wouldn’t be flying right away.

"You don't know that you'll be bad," Ron tried to reason, "I hope Malfoy is bad, though. He’s always going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet that's all talk."

It was true—Malfoy was the biggest talked of all the first years. He often complained loudly about first years never getting on the house Quidditch teams and told long, boastful stories that always seemed to end with him narrowly escaping non-magical people in helicopters. He was very disappointed with the rule placed that no first years were allowed their own broomsticks—apparently the rule was fairly new, barely three decades old. But, then again, he wasn't the only one who thought the rule was unfair: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd spent most of his childhood zooming around the countryside on his broomstick. Even Ron would tell anyone who'd listen about the time he'd almost hit a hang glider on Charlie's old broom.

It seemed like anyone from a magical family had a lot of Quidditch experience. Persephone bumped into Dean Thomas as he stormed out of the dorm he shared with Ron, Neville, Seamus and some kid named Gordon. When she asked Ron about it, she didn’t really understand it through the ranting. She sat on Ron’s bed, watching him prod Dean’s poster of West Ham soccer team, trying to make the players move, listening to him recount the argument. From what she understood, Dean Thomas had said something about soccer being more exciting than Quidditch, which totally ticked Ron off. He couldn't see what was exciting about a game with only one ball where no one was allowed to fly.

The only student that came from a wizarding family that had no flying experience that Persephone could tell of was Neville. The boy had never been on a broomstick in his life, because his grandmother had never let him be even near one. Persephone thought perhaps it was for the best, as she’d watched him trip over clear, flat grounds before—sometimes over his own two feet when they were clearly both planted to the even floor.

Hermione Granger spent her nights in their dorm studying through literally every piece of information she could get her hands on about flying. Flying wasn’t something you could memorize out of a book or by going over notes—Persephone had tried to tell her this one night, but she only refused to listen by telling Persephone that ‘not everyone can get by with sheer luck’. Persephone
chose to ignore this—and to ignore when she came to breakfast on Thursday bearing every little
detail to the Gryffindors she could find out of a library book called Quidditch Through the Ages.
Neville was hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything that might help him hang on to
his broomstick later, but everybody else was very pleased when Hermione’s lecture was interrupted
by the arrival of the mail.

Persephone did not receive any mail since Hagrid’s note—this was something that Malfoy had been
quick to notice, of course, because he was hyperactively aware of her every move, apparently. It
wasn’t any better that Malfoy’s eagle owl was always bringing him packages of sweets from home,
which he opened gloatingly at the Slytherin table.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his grandmother. He opened it excitedly and
showed them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which seemed to be full of white smoke.

"It’s a Remembrall!" he explained. "Gran knows I forget things—this tells you if there's something
you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red—oh..." His face fell,
because his Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, "You've forgotten something..."

Neville was trying to remember what he’d forgotten when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the
Gryffindor table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Ron jumped up to his feet while Persephone sighed, “Ron, it’s too early in the morning to waste
your time on this.”

“But—but Malfoy!” Ron protested, looking at her with completely shock.

“I’m sure if he’s so dedicated to house unity between Gryffindor and Slytherin, then he’ll stick
around until after breakfast.” Persephone turned to look Malfoy in the eye as Ron slouched back
into his seat next to her, “Or is it house-bickering that’s brought you here? Still celebrating ancient
house feuds that have long been outlived, are we, Draco? Or is it Neville’s Remembrall? Too shiny
to ignore?”

“Only losers need Remembralls, they went out of fashion when my grandfather was in school,” He
emphasized the word grandfather.

Persephone smiled, “Well then I’m sure your grandfather will be pleased for your participation in
celebrating the past and being so interested with your heritage.” She cocked her head to the side. “I
do adore the vintage aesthetic of it. Oh wait—unless you’re…oh, what’s the word for it?” She
snapped her fingers in a dramatic attempt to show she was thinking for the word.

“Vintage aesthetic?” Malfoy tasted the words in his mouth as if it had a bitter taste. “What the
bloody hell—”

“Well, then, let’s see.” In his moment of confusion, she’d been able to jump up and pluck the thing
out of his hands. It turned red as she held it. “Ah, yes, I do recall now—these are really helpful,”
She smiled once more. “Kleptomaniac. Are you a kleptomaniac, Draco? Oh, or are you very
forgetful?”

She was slowly and subtly insulting him with everything she had told him. Ron snickered behind
her, as did some of the nearest Ravenclaw first years, watching with interest. Draco looked at her
as if she were insane, slowly turning into a pink color. “Forget it—keep it!”

He started walking quickly back towards his table and she followed at a distant, “Oh, are you sure?
You seemed desperate to get your hands on it, you must seriously need one! Oh, no? Alright
then…” She herself was smiling, pleased to have driven the violent solution back with a more amusing resolution.

As she turned, she caught the eye of Susan, who smiled at her. But then a boy some ways down also appeared to have witnessed the entire scene transpire. He was smiling, and flushed when he caught her eye. She turned away, smile still intact, slightly confused, but that weird boy didn’t put a damper on her mood. Where had she seen him before?

She returned the Remembrall to Neville, and caught McGonagall’s approving eyes. Even Percy had noticed the scene and told her if she were to keep it up, she’d be on her way to being a prefect. This made Hermione jump violently and stare up at them in shock. She’d been one of the ones who thought loudly in the girl’s dorm how ridiculous it was to edge a bully on. Yikes.

Ron and Persephone did end up being put in the same group—unfortunately that group was paired with the Slytherins. She could only hope that Draco and Pansy had been put in the other Slytherin group that was paired with Ravenclaw.

At three-thirty that afternoon, Persephone, Ron and the other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps onto the grounds for their first flying lesson, dressed for the first time in their flying robes. It was a clear, breezy day, and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns toward a smooth, flat lawn on the opposite side of the grounds to the forbidden forest, whose trees were swaying darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were the broomsticks they were to hopefully fly on, lying in neat lines on the ground. Persephone had heard George and Fred Weasley complain about the school brooms, saying that some of them started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short, gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

"Well, now, welcome to your first flying lesson.” She barked out to them. “I know well enough you have all high hopes of being on a broom today. Well, I am sorry to be the one to bring you the news but no one will be riding a broom today.”

Half the class groaned and Hermione let out a wheeze like sigh. Persephone docked George a point of trust—he had not been lying, then.

“No, not in the shapes you are in.” She looked around, starting to walk up the aisle. “Weak, unused to the broom—I promise you that your weak thighs will cramp up not even five minutes on a broom. I guarantee none of you have gotten over the childish fear of heights—what will you do if you get up there, at just the skyline and have that fear climb up your throat? I dare say some of you won’t be able to handle it—I won’t be surprised to see half of you choose a different physical education class—dance won’t take any weak ankles either so it’s best you all pay attention!” She chuckled loudly. “No, I’m going to train you up. I’d like to see one of you even dare try lifting your brooms—well, then why don’t you? Try it! All of you.”

No one knew if they were to take her seriously or not until she said, “Well, what are you all waiting for?” she barked. "Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

Persephone glanced down at her broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles.

"Stick out your right hand over your broom,” called Madam Hooch at the front, "and say 'Up!'"

"UP,” everyone shouted.
Persephone’s broom jumped into her hand immediately. Madame Hooch watched, nodding pleased, “A couple years, girl, and we’ll make a Seeker out of you.”

It was the only broom that had done anything or the sort of spectacular. Hermione Granger’s had simply rolled over on the ground, and Neville’s hadn’t moved at all. Perhaps brooms, like horses, could tell when you were afraid; there was a quaver in Neville’s voice that said only too clearly that he wanted to keep his feet on the ground.

“A challenge, isn’t it, just to have a broom listen to you?” Madame Hooch said, fifteen minutes later, when everyone’s brooms were finally in their hands, either manually or automatically. “Now, how about we see where we are working from? You, boy!”

She’d pointed to Neville. Neville nearly swayed by her intense stare. Madam Hooch then showed him how to mount his brooms without sliding off the end. Malfoy had tried to do so behind her back and fell off his broom when she suddenly snapped to behind him. Not only had he just lost ten points for attempting something dangerous without supervision, but apparently, he’d done it wrong.

"How about a demonstration, boy? When I blow my whistle, you will kick off from the ground, hard," Madam Hooch said, nodding at him. He trembled—in fear? “Keep your broom steady, boy, you hear me? You will rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle—three—two—"

But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of being the center of attention while being off the ground, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch’s lips.

"No, come back, boy!" she shouted, but Neville was rising straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle—twelve feet—twenty feet. Persephone and the others watched with wide eyes as his scared face turned pale white look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp, slip sideways off the broom and—WHAM—a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay face-down on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was still rising higher and higher, and started to drift lazily toward the forbidden forest and out of sight.

Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, her face as white as his, obviously not expecting this to have happened.

"Broken wrist," Persephone heard her mutter. "Come on, boy—it's all right, up you get."

She turned to the rest of the class.

"None of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say 'Quidditch.' Come on, dear."

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter.

"Did you see his face, the great lump?"

Some of the other Slytherins joined in.

"Shut up, Malfoy," Parvati snapped, her face hard and determined.

"Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?" Pansy said, grimacing at her. "Never thought you'd like fat
little crybabies, Parvati."

“He wasn’t even crying,” Persephone said but was cut off short by Malfoy calling out, “Look!” He darted quickly forward and snatched something out of the grass. "It's that stupid thing Longbottom's gran sent him."

The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

"Seriously, what is it with you and that thing,” Persephone asked, stepping forward to try and snatch it out of his hands. He was a lot quicker this time, holding it out of her reach. “If you want one so badly, just ask your father for one. Would you give it?” She tried once more but he stepped out of reach, just by his broom.

He smiled nastily.

"Hm, interesting offer—let me think about that—no.” He said with a deadpan voice. “I think instead I’ll leave it out somewhere for Longbottom to find—how about—up a tree?"

"Oh you wouldn’t—oh you would,” She muttered the latter part as Malfoy had leapt onto his broomstick and taken off. Apparently, he had not been lying. Unfortunately, he was a good flyer. Hovering level with the topmost branches of an oak he called, "Come and get it, Potter!"

Persephone wasn’t usually so impulsive, so she wasn’t about to be so stupid as to risk being expelled just to push Malfoy on. That is, until Pansy said, “Oh, she won’t do it. Don’t know why she was sorted into Gryffindor.”

She felt herself flush in so much anger that she couldn’t really think—being pushed on by Pansy was just about her breaking point. This was a terrible idea—but she grabbed her broom.

"No!” Hermione Granger shouted. "Madam Hooch told us not to move—you'll get us all into trouble. Besides, you don’t even know how to fly! You saw what happened to Neville, you won’t last five seconds!"

The cherry on top, she felt anger surge through her. She had had enough of people telling what she was and wasn’t able to do—who and what she was and she was done with it. Had any boy suffered through it like a girl did? Probably not—she didn’t care. She mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up she soared; air rushed through her hair, and her flying robes whipped out about her.

She understood why the need for robes. While she felt so rebelliously amazing up in the air, a fierce and energetic joy coursed through her veins, she couldn’t imagine immediately being able to stabilize herself on the broom without the robes whipping around her to keep her balanced.

But it was easy—she was sure it would be easy without the robes, but it was liberating to be up in the air, on the broom. She could feel her hair move with her, as if it were floating too. As she rose higher, higher than even Malfoy, she could hear the gasps and screams from the girls below and one long whoop from Ron.

She spun sharply to face Malfoy in the air, staring him down. Her green-blue eyes met his cold grey, stunned eyes.

"Give it here, Malfoy," Persephone called, "or so help me God, I will knock you off that broom!"

"Oh, yeah?” he tried to sneer but he was quickly losing confidence.
Persephone felt it natural to lean forward, her hands tightly grasping the broom handle and she shot towards him like raindrop—feeling light but sure of her direction.

Malfoy only just got out of the way in time; Persephone made a sharp turn without wavering. A few people below were clapping.

"No backup up here, Malfoy." She smiled brightly. "So let me save you the humiliation and offer you a chance to hand it here!"

His worry shifted and his face twisted into his nasty smile. "If you want it so bad," He lowered his arm like a catapult, "Catch!"

He launched the ball in the air and Persephone watched it streak back down.

She leaned forward and pointed her broom handle down—next second she was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball—wind whistled passed her ears, her hair tugged on by the wind, and mingled with the screams of the people watching. She stretched her hand just as the ball was to touch the ground, pulling her broom up as she did so.

She skidded to a stop, her feet touching the ground into a run and then a walk, her hand still clutching the Remebrall tightly.

"PERSEPHONE POTTER!"

Her heart sank faster than she'd just dived. Professor McGonagall was running toward them. She turned to face her, trembling from either the sudden nerves of the dive or being caught by McGonagall.

"Never—in all my time at Hogwarts—"

Professor McGonagall looked speechless as she came close, her glasses fogged (in shock?) and her mouth trembling, "—how dare you—might have broken your neck—"

"It wasn't her fault, Professor—" Parvati was quick to defend her.

"Be quiet, Miss Patil,"

As was Ron, "But Malfoy—"

"That's enough, Mr. Weasley. Potter, follow me, now."

Persephone’s last glance of the group was of Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, looking rather pleased with themselves.

She walked stiffly behind Professor’s McGonagall’s march, nearly struggling to keep up with her as she strode up to the castle.

She was going to be expelled—she could feel it in her bones. What could she say to defend herself? There would be witnesses to back her up but she knew was sort of kid Malfoy was—his expulsion would lead him to get his family to bribe the school to take him back. She would be sent back to the Durlsey’s, of course. She couldn’t even defend herself—she couldn’t find her voice.

Professor McGonagall started to quicken—she was sweeping along without even looking at her. She had to now jog to keep up, up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside, without either of them saying a thing. She wrenched open doors and marched along corridors with Persephone
trotting miserably behind her.

Persephone skidded to a stop when Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?" Persephone didn’t know what ‘Wood’ was, but she wasn’t sure she could dodge something named ‘Wood’.

Apparently, Wood was a person. A burly, fifth-year boy who came out of Flitwick’s class looking confused. Was…was this going to be a person who was going to punish her?

"Follow me, you two," said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking curiously at Persephone.

"In here."

Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom that was empty except for Peeves, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard.

"Out, Peeves!" she barked. Peeves threw the chalk into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out cursing. Professor McGonagall slammed the door behind him and turned to face the two students.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood—I've found you a Seeker."

Wood's expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

Persephone’s shifted from despair to confusion.

"Are you serious, Professor?"

"Absolutely," said Professor McGonagall crisply. "Miss Potter is a right well natural. I've never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on a broomstick, Potter?"

Persephone nodded silently, eyeing her, completely clueless. Not…expelled but…put on the Quidditch team? How—what…??(?)

"She caught that thing in her hand so easily, after a fifty-foot dive," Professor McGonagall told Wood. "A perfect dive, not a scratch. I dare say that Charlie Weasley couldn't have done it, especially not as a first year."

Wood now looked down at Persephone like she’d just answered all his prayers. "Ever seen a game of Quidditch, Potter?" he asked excitedly.

"Wood's captain of the Gryffindor team," Professor McGonagall explained.

"She’s small, too," Wood said, completely distracted and staring at her. “Light and easy on a broom, speed shouldn’t an issue,” He suddenly reached out and she flinched back, “And sharp, too.” He turned to McGonagall, “We'll have to get her a decent broom, Professor—a Nimbus Two Thousand or a Cleansweep Seven, I'd say."

“I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need a better team than last year. Flattened in that last match by Slytherin, I couldn't look Severus Snape in the face for weeks...." She paused, “You’ll need to be transferred into a different physical education class and be warned, and you’ll be in a class with older students.”
Persephone’s heart skipped a beat, “Like—like dance class?”

“Indeed,” Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses at Persephone, "I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you. You will be giving up your flying classes to be on the team, and be going along with Wood’s training procedures, heaven knows it’ll be harder than any flying class.” She muttered the last part, glancing at Wood. Then, suddenly, she smiled at Persephone.

"Your father would have been proud," she said. "He was an excellent Quidditch player himself. He was the one who asserted the need for the rule of first years being banned from bringing their own broomsticks and playing for their respective house teams."

“You’re kidding!”

Persephone had waited until classes had finished and that Ron had come into the common room. Now having heard, he had dropped his bag and his mouth popped open.

Persephone had thrown her hands up, waiting for something more.

"But—seeker!?” he cried. Persephone threw her hands up, gesturing for him to keep his voice down. “But—but first years never—you must be the youngest house player—”

“In over a century!” She just about wheezed. “I know! Oliver told me!” She grabbed his bag and his arm and dragged him up to his dorm. “And I’m supposed to start training next week, only, I think that I would have rather being punished—me? A seeker?”

“You!” Ron said excitedly. “A seeker!”

“Lily,” Two voices behind them said. “A seeker!”

George and Fred had popped up the stairs behind them, following them into Ron’s dorm.

“Best not tell anyone, Ron,” Fred warned, smiling widely. Persephone shook her head.

"But well done, Lily" George said, grinning. "Wood’s just told us.”

“We’re on the team too—”

“Beaters.”

"I tell you, Gryffindor will definitely win that Quidditch cup for sure this year," Fred said, leaning against the door.

“We haven't won since Charlie left, but this year's team is going to be brilliant. You must be good, Lily, Wood was almost skipping when he told us.” George grinned. “I have never seen him this happy, it’s like he's been saved by his heroin.” His grinned widened when Persephone grimaced and he bumped her shoulder, "Anyway, I reckon it’s almost dinner time and we’re meeting Lee Jordan afterwards. Reckons he's found a new secret passageway out of the school."

"Bet it's that one behind the statue of Gregory the Smarmy that we found in our first week. See
you.” Fred and George ducked out. Ron dropped his bag messily onto his bed before joining Persephone at the door and they headed to dinner. 

“Can’t believe it!” Ron said once again. 

Persephone pulled at her hands nervously, “I just—how can—okay, I am, I am not qualified to be —I’ve never even played Quidditch, how can Oliver—or anyone expect I won’t mess this up? That I won’t literally lose so badly—” 

“Lily, that dive you pulled in flying class was better than any of the other House’s seekers, I’m sure of it!” Ron assured her. “And you’re only a first year at that!” 

“I guess…” Persephone pursed her lips. “I guess the best part is I get to go to dance class.” 

“Who cares about dance class when you’re a seeker!” 

Almost immediately upon taking their seats at the Gryffindor table, Malfoy popped up, flanked by both his goon friends. "Having a last meal, Potter? When are you getting the train back to the Muggles?" 

"Oh for the love of—what, Malfoy? Feeling braver being on the ground? Or is your two idiot friends that boost your confidence up to an unbearably annoying amount?" She breathed out, exasperated. 

"Oh please," He sneered. "I’d take you on anytime on my own," said Malfoy. "But I won’t fight a little girl."

It seemed he had perceived her trigger—that being a girl was a weakness and an excuse for what she can and cannot do. Her jaw clenched in anger. “Little girl?”

Malfoy smirked, “Unless you can prove you aren’t—tonight, if you want. Wizard’s duel. Wands only—no contact. What’s the matter? Never heard of a wizard’s duel before, I suppose? I suppose only wizards know of them—and you’re just a little—” 

“I’m a witch, Malfoy, and we know, like, three, harmless spells—unless your father has been teaching you hexes and jinxes,” She could not ever face Malfoy without a wand—and problem was, she didn’t have a wand. 

“Probably has,” Ron added and Persephone almost smiled at the sneer that appeared on Malfoy’s face. 

“What do you suggest then?” Malfoy asked, now very seriously competitive. 

Persephone thought for a moment on what she knew to be the worst and most stressful competition, the competition that made most people break; she stood, leaning over the table to stare into his eyes, “Bake off.” 

“Bake off?” He sneered, “Are you kidding?” 

“Not at all—what? Can’t bake?” She pouted. “Mommy and Daddy cook for you? Do they spoon feed you too?”

His face reddened, “For your information, we have a house-elf.” 

“Oh, so your house-elf feeds you then?” She didn’t know what a house elf was but she could tell he
had gotten very angry when he spat out,

“When and where?”

She thought for a moment, and then she smiled. “How about…hm…midnight? Kitchens?”

He looked determined but then his eyes narrowed, “Who’s the judge?”

An evil smile spread through her face as she caught sight of the most qualified candidate and she looked at Draco. She gestured for him to lean in with two fingers and he did so she could whisper in his ear. His eyes grew off and he jerked up, “No—no way.”

“Why? Scared?”

“No! I just don’t want a detention!” Draco sneered. She shrugged.

“Your call, Malfoy.”

He stood there as she turned back to face Ron, who was watching Malfoy in a strange way. She was very giddy—either Draco would not accept her challenge or someone was going to get seriously pranked tonight.

“Fine,” Draco said stiffly. “We get caught, I tell everyone you put me under the Imperius Curse.”

She snorted, “An Unforgivable. Always the nicest touch, Malfoy.”

When he left, Ron finally looked at her. She simply smiled and took a bite of her dinner. He stared at her and finally said, “Malfoy fancies you.”

She choked on her mashed potatoes, “What?!”

“It finally makes sense—why he’s always like that! He fancies you!” He laughed.

“He does not—he’s just a git and if you haven’t notice, he always acts like that.”

“You should have seen his face when you whispered in his ear—he got so red!” Ron insisted. “He fancies you!”

“Who fancies Lily?” George asked, sliding in to sit next to Persephone

“Besides Longbottom, I hear,” Fred grinned, sitting across from his twin on Ron’s side.

“What?” Persephone asked, dumbfounded.

“Malfoy fancies Lily,” Ron informed them and she groaned loudly.

“He does not!”

“Oh, no it’s obvious,” Fred nodded.

George nodded wisely, “Ever wonder why he keeps coming over here, insulting you?”

“He fancies you,” They said together.

She rolled her eyes, “Well, a good luck to him. I will not accept abuse as a form of flirting.”

“You know, I would have been your second if you decided to duel him,” Ron told her casually as
the twins leaned over to talk to Lee.

“I trust you would be,” She nodded, not knowing what that meant. “What is a wizard’s duel anyway?” She asked absentmindedly. “Sounds stupid.”

“It is stupid for first years, ‘cause we don’t know any spells, but in proper duels its apparently much more fun.” He chewed on his kidney pie. “A second would take your place if you die, but, again, the only people who die in these are actual wizards in actual, proper duels.”

She snorted, sipping her water, “What did he think would happen if I had accepted? That I’d throw sparks at him? Maybe throw in some buzzes?”

“That or you could punch him in the nose.” He suggested, shrugging. “So, what are you going to make?”

“Oh, nothing.” Persephone smiled. “I figure I’ll let him panic about how he has no idea how to bake, or so I presume, he doesn’t strike you as the type who bakes, does he?” She shrugs.

“You’re just going to let him bake a cake and bring it to the trophy room at midnight?” Ron asked, eating some steak.

Persephone shrugged, “Let Filch catch him. It’s what he deserves after today,” Persephone stared over to the pursed her lips, thinking suddenly of the Weasley twins. “Hm…actually, I do feel in the mood to bake…And wouldn’t it be nice to team up with my arch nemesis to assert some justice to someone who actually deserves it?”

“Who?”

"Excuse me."

They both looked up. It was Hermione Granger.

"Can't a person eat in peace in this place?” Ron said, throwing her an exasperated eye roll. Persephone rolled her eyes at his theatrics.

Hermione ignored him and spoke directly to Persephone.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you and Malfoy were saying—"

"Bet you could," Ron muttered.

"—and you mustn't go wandering around the school at night, think of the points you'll lose Gryffindor if you're caught, and you're bound to be. It's really very selfish of you."

Persephone stared coldly up at her—she couldn’t help feeling tired of being bullied.

"Well hello to you too, Herman.” She waved. “And it’s really, very none of your business what I do with my free time now if you’ll excuse us.”

"Good-bye," said Ron.

Hermione huffed, looking Persephone over in frustration before striding away. She’d have that to deal with in the dorms later.

Persephone never actively looked for the Weasley twins. They always just seemed to find her. Whether in the halls or the common room or even the grounds, they were very good at tracking her
down and only simply for George to say something stupid before they disappeared. Whatever it
was, they could find her anywhere.

It took less than an hour for them to be in her peripheral after dinner and she skidded over to them,
“Hello boys,” She smiled a brilliant smile she hoped would soften them up before asking her favor.

George immediately got suspicious, narrowing his eyes, “What?”

“What? Can’t I say hi to my best friends?” She shrugged, turning to lean against the wall opposite
to them.

“Yeah right,” Fred crossed his arms, smirking in amusement. “What can we help with, young Lily
pad?”

She chose to ignore that nickname and shrugged, “I noticed you know most of the castle incredibly
well—how is that?”

They shared a look. She waited and George said, “I don’t know think she’s ready just yet Freddie.”

“No, you’re right Georgie.” Fred looked down at her and she watched in confusion. “Not just yet.
She needs to prove her talents.”

“Excuse me?” She raised a brow.

“What is it you need, young grasshopper?” George asked, “We haven’t got all day, now.”

She sighed, “If I ask you to get a few things from the kitchens, would you?”

She explained briefly her plan and they grinned in identical mischievous ways that she was sure
she’d made the right choice in going to them. They had a lot of colorful suggestions as to what she
could pull off but she knew for sure what she wanted to do. She turned them down when they
offered to come along—somehow, she knew this was between her and Malfoy. And Ron, who was
naturally going to accompany her because he was her best friend. But mainly between her and
Malfoy.

Ron was very here for this plan and he even asserted his own ideas, which she greatly appreciated.
She had taken a book out on baking in magical homes some time ago, just for fun, and put her
talents to use—she made a pretty cake with a borrowed ingredient. A bottle of dye that she mixed
into the proper formula that, instead of putting on your hair, you only would need to consume.

They made three of these cakes, laughing as they thought of the results.

“I think green is too obvious—green for Slytherin? Nah, make it as red as possible,” Ron
suggested cheerfully as she mixed the product in a bowl in the boy’s bathroom in Ron’s dorm. She
quickly found that the boys could not come up the girl’s dorms—George Weasley found it very
funny to wait until Persephone climbed up all the way to the top step before jumping on the stairs.
When a boy touched the stairs, the stairs immediately turned into a slide. She had dropped many
books this way. They were charmed as such because the founder’s thought that girls were more
trustworthy than the boys.

It seriously wasn’t funny—especially when George wasn’t anywhere to be seen and then suddenly
popped up.

In the long run, it probably didn’t matter. But—she’d just narrowly escaped serious trouble by her
head of house, and was now going full into another set of trouble with possible another head of
house that didn’t seem to clearly like her (?). She could get caught by Filch or Mrs. Norris and while she didn’t want to push her luck, she desperately wanted to see Malfoy as a red head, as would be the end results of Ron’s play.

Persephone ‘fell asleep’ in the common room, the cakes hidden from sight. Ron was supposed to be nearby, and she had strategically planted several textbooks on her, to make it look like she’d been reviewing something. This was all a show for just Hermione, who had tried to wake her up, but Persephone remained stiffly ‘asleep’.

“I know you’re faking it so sneak away easier and it’s not happening,” Hermione hissed in her ear a few minutes after ‘walking away’, in hopes of seeing her break character.

“Oh, leave her be, Hermione, she’s had quite the day, you just wouldn’t believe!” George said dramatically, coming into earshot. She could assume the footsteps accompanying him was Fred. She felt something soft being laid over her and realized he’d laid a blanket over her, moving the textbooks onto the floor next to the couch she’d been draped over. “Good luck, Lils’.” She smiled into her arm, not moving.

Yeah, let her sleep.” Now with her eyes closed, she could clearly make out the difference between George’s voice compared to Fred’s. She couldn’t quite place it but it was very much there. “Good luck, mate!” Fred whispered in her ear.

She must have actually dozed off at some point, as it was much too warm and homey not to, because at some point, Ron shook her shoulder to wake her, "Nearly half-past eleven," Ron muttered, "we'd better go."

She threw the blanket off her—did George put on his bed’s blanket over her (??)—and they retrieved the cakes.

They’d only made it to the portrait hole when Hermione’s voice—offfff course—interrupted their spy movements, “I cannot believe you're actually going through with this, Lily!” A light flickered on and there stood Hermione Granger, wearing a pink bathrobe and a disapproving frown.

"You!" Ron said furiously. "Go back to bed!"

"I nearly told your brother," Hermione snapped, "Percy—he's a prefect, he'd put a stop to this."

Persephone couldn’t believe the level of a snitch Hermione could be—and Persephone was the seeker here!

While reframing from calling out ‘snitches get stiches’, she pushed open the portrait of the Fat lady and climbed through the hole.

Hermione wasn't going to give up that easily. She followed Ron through the portrait hole, hissing at them like an angry goose.

"Don't you care about Gryffindor, do you only care about yourselves, I don't want Slytherin to win the house cup, and you'll lose all the points I got from Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching Spells."

Persephone snapped angrily, “Our points, Herman. We both won those points and you know that very well.”

“Those points don’t count when you’re the teacher’s favorite!” Hermione crossed her arms angrily. “Some of us have to at least try!”
“At least try? Are you kidding? I’m up just as late as you are at night studying and writing my own notes. Don’t be so full of yourself over there,” She huffed.

Hermione dropped her hands in shock, “I’m full of myself? As if you—”

"Go away." Ron snapped, pulling Persephone further along the hall.

"Fine, but I warned you, I hope you remember how I was right while you ride the train home tomorrow—hey!

Herman never finished her sentence as when she turned around to the portrait of the Fat Lady to get back inside, she found herself facing an empty painting. The Fat Lady had gone on a nighttime visit and Hermione was locked out of Gryffindor tower.

"Now what am I going to do?" she asked shrilly.

"That's your problem," Ron shrugged. "We've got to go, we're going to."

They walked down the hall quietly, until a set of running footsteps followed them, "I'm coming with you," she said.

“You've got to be kidding,” Persephone sighed.

"You are not," Ron protested.

"D'you think I'm going to stand out here and wait for Filch to catch me? If he finds all three of us I'll tell him the truth, that I was trying to stop you, and you can back me up."

"What makes you think—" Ron started loudly before Persephone started.

"Both of you, shhh!" She whispered, "I heard something."

Was that—sniffing?

"Mrs. Norris?" Ron breathed, squinting through the dark.

It did not turn out to be Mrs. Norris. It was the exact opposite—it was Neville. He was curled up on the floor, fast asleep, but jerked suddenly awake as they crept nearer.

"Thank goodness you found me! I've been out here for hours, I couldn't remember the new password to get in to bed."

"Keep your voice down, Neville. The password's 'Pig snout' but it won't help you now, the Fat Lady's gone off somewhere."

"How's your arm?" Persephone asked.

"Fine," said Neville, showing them. "Madam Pomfrey mended it in about a minute."

"That's good," Persephone hesitated, "We need to be somewhere, Neville so we'll see you—"

"Don't leave me!" said Neville, scrambling to his feet, "I don't want to stay here alone, the Bloody Baron's been past twice already."

Ron looked at his watch and then glared furiously at Hermione and Neville.
"If either of you get us caught, I'll never rest until I've learned that Curse of the Bogies Quirrell told us about, and used it on you." Hermione opened her mouth, perhaps to seal her fate and tell him exactly how to use the curse, but Persephone shushed her and beckoned them all forward.

They flitted along corridors striped with bars of moonlight from the high windows. At every turn Persephone expected to run into Filch or Mrs. Norris, but they were lucky. They sped up a staircase to the third floor and tiptoed toward the trophy room.

Malfoy was there. The crystal trophy cases glimmered where the moonlight caught them. Cups, shields, plates, and statues winked silver and gold in the darkness. They edged along the walls, keeping their eyes on the doors at either end of the room. Persephone scanned the room, “Morning, Malfoy.”

“It’s not midnight yet,” He grumbled. He was holding two cakes that looked rather good with very nicely made up icing. “How long?”

“Shouldn’t be too long,” She told him. “They do rounds.”

“Who?”

“You’ll see,” She smiled at Neville and he flushed. Uh oh. Was what George and Fred saying true? Yikes.

“Why’d you bring those two?” Malfoy nodded his head to Herman and Neville.

“It wasn’t our choice.” Just then, a whooshing sound outside the door made her nearly drop the cakes. She turned, her heart racing, and found the boy from Ollivanders entering the room rather confidently. “What the hell?”

“Mind being a little quieter?” The boy asked sarcastically. She glared and looked back at Malfoy. "Did you bring him?"

He nodded in a most obvious way, “Did you think I’d be stupid enough not to bring someone? And he has a camera—I wanted a picture.”

“Would you all be quiet! Someone could hear us!” Hermione hissed at them. The boy looked down at her and tilted his head.

“Unlikely,” He said casually.

“And why is that?”

“Because there’s no one close enough.”

“How would you kno—”

He held his hand up, “Wait!” He was silent for a moment and just as Persephone was going to ask what he was listening for, he nodded, “They’re coming. Hurry up.”

Malfoy and Persephone set up their prank in the hall outside the room and waited. Ron was itching to use his concealed little cupcake to shove down Malfoy’s face, but Persephone shook her head—not just yet.

Filch was accompanied by his cat, luckily. It took a few moments for them both to notice the cakes—muttering happily to himself, he picked up the cakes. The six listened as he said, “Lucky night,
And then he dipped his two, dirty fingers—ew!—through the icing and stuck it in his mouth. Immediately, boils erupted all through his face and his hair turned an oily red color. Persephone clamped a hand over her mouth to stop from giggling.

“Impressive!” She complimented Malfoy, who was looking smug.

The cat meowed as it also helped itself to the cakes on the floor. Neville laughed out loud and they all turned to him in horror as the boy snapped a picture. “Might as well document your demise.” He muttered.

“Students out of bed….” Filch whispered, a greedy look in his eyes. "Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a corner."

Horror-struck, Persephone waved madly at the others to follow her as quickly as possible; they scurried silently toward the door, Persephone warning them silently not to move the door by even a wind sweep. Neville's robes had barely whipped round the corner when they heard Filch enter the trophy room.

"They're in here somewhere," they heard him mutter, "probably hiding."

Persephone gestured for them to the hall with her head, and, petrified, they began to creep down a long gallery full of suits of armor. They could hear Filch getting nearer. Someone turned a corner and Neville suddenly let out a frightened squeak and broke into a run—he tripped, grabbed Ron around the waist, and the pair of them toppled right into a suit of armor.

The clanging and crashing were enough to wake the whole castle.

“Dammit Longbottom!” Malfoy took off. Completely impulsively, Persephone chucked the dye straight at him before yelling for them run. Malfoy had disappeared, looking more red haired by the time he was gone.

The four Gryffindors sprinted down the gallery, not looking back to see whether Filch was following or if he’d caught Malfoy—they didn’t care for the latter, anyway. They swung around the doorpost and galloped down one corridor then another, Persephone in the lead, without any idea where they were or where they were going—they ripped through a tapestry and found themselves in a hidden passageway, hurtled along it and came out near their Charms classroom, which they knew was miles from the trophy room.

"Alright, I—think we—lost him," Persephone panted, leaning on her knees, feeling the cold wall behind her. Neville was bent double, wheezing and spluttering.

"I—told—you," Hermione gasped, clutching at the stitch in her chest, "I—told—you."

"We've got to get back to Gryffindor tower," Ron said, "quickly as possible."

"I—I cannot believe! Malfoy is going to tell on us and we’re going to get in worse trouble!" Hermione wheezed, staring away in horror. “I didn’t even do anything!”

“There’s no proof, no evidence—no case,” Persephone told her. "Let's go."

“Where’s that guy with the camera?” Ron asked suddenly. They looked around—he was gone.

“Do you think he got caught?” Neville asked, frightened.
“Doesn’t matter—”

“Yes it does!” Ron said suddenly. “He took a picture!”

“Not of us!” Persephone said.

“We can’t be sure of that!”

“Let’s just go!” Hermione snapped.

It wasn’t going to be that simple. Persephone let Ron lead them, but he barely led them more than a dozen paces when a doorknob rattled and something came shooting out of a classroom in front of them.

It was Peeves. He caught sight of them and gave a squeal of delight.

"Shut up, Peeves—please—you'll get us thrown out!” Persephone begged.

Peeves cackled.

"Wandering around at midnight, Ickle Firsties? Tut, tut, tut. Naughty, naughty, you'll get caughty.”

"Not if you don't give us away, Peeves, please."

"Should tell Filch, I should,” said Peeves in a saintly voice, but his eyes glittered wickedly. "It's for your own good, you know."

Before Persephone could reason with him, Ron interrupted her, "Get out of the way," he snapped, taking a swipe at Peeves—and so their fate was sealed.

"STUDENTS OUT OF BED!” Peeves bellowed, "STUDENTS OUT OF BED DOWN THE CHARMS CORRIDOR"

Ducking under Peeves, they ran for their lives, right to the end of the corridor where they slammed into a door—and it was locked.

"This is it!” Ron moaned, as they pushed helplessly at the door, "We're done for! This is the end!”

They could hear footsteps, Filch running as fast as he could toward Peeves's shouts.

"Oh, move over," Hermione snarled. She grabbed Ron’s wand, tapped the lock, and whispered, 'Alohomora!"

Nothing happened.

“There must be a blocking spell!” Hermione whined desperately.

“Yeah, can’t be because you messed the spell up!”

As Ron and Hermione bickered, Persephone thought—magical school expects a magical unlocking technic….or does it? She bent down to the lock and pulled her bobby pins out of her hair, carefully trying to unlock the door with the stress of Filch’s footsteps in the distance.

The lock clicked and the door swung open—they jumped in, shut the door behind them and pressed their ears against it, listening.

"Which way did they go, Peeves?" Filch was saying. "Quick, tell me."
“Say 'please.'"

"Don't mess with me, Peeves, now where did they go?"

"Shan't say nothing if you don't say please," said Peeves in his annoying sing-song voice.

"All right -please."

"NOTHING! Ha haaa! Told you I wouldn't say nothing if you didn't say please! Ha ha! Haaaaaa!"
And they heard the sound of Peeves whooshing away and Filch cursing in rage.

"He must think this door is locked," Persephone whispered. "Wonder why he doesn’t just try and open—ow! Neville!" Neville had been tugging on her sleeve and then finally tugged really hard, hard enough to pull her wrist out of its socket. “What is it?"

Persephone turned—and quickly regretted ever unlocking this door.

They weren't in a room, as she had originally thought. They were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor on the third floor. And now they knew why it was forbidden with the looming threat of a most painful death.

They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.

“Cerberus?” Persephone asked in shock.

It was standing quite still, all six eyes staring at them, and Persephone knew that the only reason they weren't already dead was that their sudden appearance had taken it by surprise, but it was quickly getting over that, there was no mistaking what those thunderous growls meant.

Persephone knew that being named Persephone did not qualify her to calm down the dog guarding hell—or just what looked like a trap door—under its feet. She groped around the doorknob, not truly caring if Filch awaited them on the other side.

They fell backward—Persephone slammed the door behind them and they took off running, just about tripping all the way back down the corridor. They didn’t run into Filch and they hardly cared, as they flew up the stairs—their goal was to put as much space between them and Cerberus.

They only stopped running when they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady on the seventh floor.

"Where on earth have you all been?" she asked, looking at their pajamas hanging off their shoulders and their flushed, sweaty faces.

"Never mind that—pig snout, pig snout," Persephone wheezed and the portrait swung open forward. They messily climbed in and collapsed into the common room armchairs—Persephone finally tripping over her textbooks and onto George’s blanket.

It was a while before any of them said anything. Neville looked as if he'd never speak again.

"What do they think they're doing, keeping a thing like that locked up in a school?" said Ron finally. "If any dog needs exercise, that one does."

“My best guess,” Persephone pondered quietly, “Guarding something important.”
Hermione had got both her breath and her bad temper back again at the same time. "You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you?" she snapped. " Didn't you see what it was standing on?

"I'm not too sure, Herman, I was much too preoccupied with its heads." Persephone said sarcastically. "I'd have to take a wild guess and say the floor?"

"No, not the floor. It was standing on a trapdoor. It's obviously guarding something."

"Is that not what I just said, Herman?!" Persephone gasped. "Oh, go to bed already!"

She stood up, glaring at them. "I hope you're pleased with yourselves. We could all have been killed—or worse, expelled. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to bed."

"Again, what I just said," Persephone said, earning herself a glare from Hermione.

Ron stared after her, his mouth open.

"You'd think we dragged her along, wouldn't you?"

Persephone gathered George's blanket off from the couch and followed Ron up the stairs, intent on giving the blanket it back. She bid Ron goodnight and headed up still, until she reached the third year door that read two Weasley names. She knocked—no answer. She would slip in and out, no big deal.

She slipped in quietly, and spotted the twins quickly.

How strange it was, that she could tell them apart so easily given how identical they were. He had a thin sheet laying over him, curled into a ball, proving that it was his blanket, not Fred's. Rolling her eyes, she threw the blanket over him. She thought about putting his hand in the glass of water by his window sill but thought she owed him—anyway, he looked too cute to prank so harshly.

And there it was—the difference between the two. His lashes were thicker than Fred's. Hm.

Her face flushing, she retreated from the dorm and down to the common room. She gathered all her textbooks and went up to her own dorm, dropping her books and plopping onto bed.

Persephone hated that she found herself agreeing with Hermione—even though she had said it first. The dog was guarding something...What had Hagrid said? Gringotts was the safest place in the world for something you wanted to hide—except perhaps Hogwarts.

It looked as though Persephone had found out where the grubby little package from vault seven hundred and thirteen was.
Chapter Summary

Okay. I know. It's a long chapter. I know. It's a lot to read. I know, Nicolas will be a cliche mysterious boy. But I like where I'm going with the story so far. WHat would you guys like to see more of? What do you think of the musical choice? I thought it would be most appropriate with the fact that Persephone is only 11 in this book. Enjoy :)

“Amazing,” George said to a very tired Persephone and Ron at breakfast.

Malfoy—Draco Malfoy, of Slytherin house, of the platinum blonde—was a violent shade of redhead.

Persephone had to give it to him, it was incredibly brave of him to even come out of his dorm and face the rest of the Slytherin table, who teased him most violently. Maybe she should have felt bad—but she did not. She felt like he deserved to be teased and ridiculed, as a lesson. Maybe he’d lay off the bullying.

She was sure their camaraderie would not last, but she was perfectly okay with this fact.

George and Fred were hysterical upon seeing him and decided they owed Persephone a huge favor for making them laugh harder than they had ever. Ron was happy—they high fived under the table. Hermione looked disapprovingly but kept her mouth shut. Even Neville got a kick out of seeing his bully humiliated. Most of the first years of all the houses did, and Persephone was left an anonymous savior.

Yesterday had been the messiest day at Hogwarts yet, and Persephone recounted the craziest part of it all to Ron; she explained about her theory about the package Hagrid had taken for Dumbledore. She was sure it was under the trapdoor, guarded by Cerberus. (She decided that they would name the dog Cerberus for now).

They spent majority of their morning theorizing what was given so much protection. "It's either really valuable or really dangerous," said Ron.

Whatever it was, they concluded that it was mysterious object was that it was about two inches long and that’s it. It could have been a lot of things in the appearance frames but they didn’t have any clue. Neither Neville nor Hermione showed the slightest interest in what lay underneath Cerberus and whatever he/she was protecting. Neville’s sole goal for the rest of the year was to stay as far away from Cerberus as he possible could.

It was a godsend that Hermione wasn’t interested in Cerberus or Persephone and Ron. Now in the dorm, Hermione didn’t even look at Persephone, which was perfect because she did not want to put up with the girl’s bossy know-it-all attitude. Now, all they needed to worry about was to watch out for when Malfoy would surely get them back.

As the morning mail owls flooded into the Great Hall as usual, everyone's attention was caught at once by a long, thin package carried by six large screech owls. Everyone watched to see where it
would land and watch the person unwrap it to see what was in it and then she blushed furiously in amazement as it came right in front of her. A letter was dropped right on top of it.

Persephone tore the letter open on instinct and had to read through it twice, the first time worthless as she was too excited to actually register the words.

DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.

*It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got a broomstick or they'll all want one. Oliver Wood will meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session.*

*Professor McGonagall*

Unable to hold her smile away, she passed the note over to Ron, whose jaw dropped to the floor in amazement, before eying the package almost enviously.

"A Nimbus Two Thousand!" Ron moaned enviously. "I've never even touched one."

They left quickly, wanting to open the package as soon as possible, but halfway out of the hall, Crabbe and Goyle nearly jumped Persephone and Ron. It seemed they'd calculated their steps perfectly, as they were out of sight of the teachers.

"You'll pay for this, Potter!" Malfoy sneered at Persephone as Crabbed seized her around the arms. Malfoy snatched the package away from her. "Oh, you’re in trouble now, Potter, and I’ll make sure of it! This is a broomstick. First years aren’t allowed them."

"Leave her alone, you oversized tosser!" Ron, who’d elbowed Crabbe as Persephone kicked him in between the legs, couldn’t resist. "And it isn’t just some old broom—it’s a Nimbus Two Thousand! What did you say you've got at home, Malfoy, a Comet Two Sixty?" Ron grinned at Persephone. "Comets look flashy, but they're not in the same league as the Nimbus."

"What would you know about it, Weasley, you couldn't afford the tip of the handle," Malfoy snapped back. "I suppose you and your brothers have to save up twig by twig.” He grinned nastily at Persephone. “Why don’t I turn you in for this? Being famous won’t save you from being expelled, and it won’t help you for when my father hears about what you’ve done to me."

Before anyone could say anything, Professor Flitwick appeared at Malfoy's elbow.

"Well, now, Mr. Malfoy, that is no way to speak to a young lady!” He squeaked. “Apologize this instant or I shall be seeing you in detention!”

“But Potter’s been sent a broomstick, Professor!” Malfoy said quickly.

"Yes, yes, that's right," Professor Flitwick said, beaming at Persephone. "Professor McGonagall told me all about the special circumstances, Mrs. Potter. And what model is it?"

"It’s a Nimbus Two Thousand, sir," Persephone smiled at her favorite professor, ignoring the look of horror on Malfoy's face. "And it’s really Draco’s fault that I’ve landed myself so lucky,” Her smile turned to Draco, who stared at her in a colder sense.

“I did not hear an apology from you, Mr. Malfoy,” Professor Flitwick said in a tone of waiting.

Persephone and Ron held back fits of laughter as Malfoy, almost the color of his new hair, apologized to Persephone. “Well, then, I hope you’ll leave these two alone from now on, Mr.
Malfroy. Off you go.” Flitwick turned to smile at Persephone and Ron. “Do let me know if they bother you again, Ms. Potter, no student shall be intimidated in my classroom.”

Persephone smiled wider, “Thank you, professor that means a lot.”

Flitwick considered her for a moment, before saying, “Ms. Potter, what are your opinions on theatre?”

Grinning, she said, “I adore it.”

“I’ve been trying to execute some muggle culture in school for some time now—theatre is a good way of introducing our young purebloods to muggle culture. I am to be conducting a musical this year and being as you will be joining the dance classes from now on—how would you like to try out?”

So the day was turning around for the good. Malfoy was humiliated, she found out there was a drama club (and dance club and choir club that would cooperating for a play) and she was going to audition for a musical. The day got really sweet when Ron and Persephone walked up the stairs, only to be stopped by Persephone, who nearly fell into Ron from laughing at the sight of Mrs. Norris, a violent shade of red dye covering her body. When she pointed this out to him, Ron also doubled over in fits of hysterical laughter.

“Wait ‘till Fred and George find out!” Ron said, another high five shared between the two. “Better than any prank they’ve ever pulled!”

"So I suppose you think breaking the rules is working out for you, then?” Came an angry voice from just behind them.

Hermione was stomping up the stairs, looking disapprovingly at the package in Persephone’s hand.

"I suppose you not talking to us has an expiration date, then?” Persephone sighed in contentment, still the thought of Mrs. Norris on her mind. “It’s been, what, twelve hours?”

"Don’t tell me there is,” Ron said, "You not talking to us is doing us so much good."

Hermione marched away with her nose in the air.

Persephone had to take the extra length to keep her mind on her lessons. If she didn’t focus, her mind would wander to the new broomstick that was lying under her bed, or to the Quidditch field where she’d be learning to play that night. She sped through her dinner very quickly that evening, and then bolted upstairs with Ron to unwrap her Nimbus Two Thousand at last.

"Wow," Ron sighed, as the broomstick rolled onto Ron’s bedspread.

She had to agree—it was beautiful. Sleek and shiny, with a mahogany handle, it had a long tail of neat, straight twigs and Nimbus Two Thousand written in gold near the top.

Finally, dressed in a sweater and one of her new jeans, she left the castle alone, walking towards the Quidditch field, her broom tucked under her arm.

She’d never dreamed of such a stadium before—hundreds of seats were raised in stands around the field so that the spectators were high enough to see what was going on. At either end of the field were three golden poles with hoops on the end. They reminded Persephone of the little plastic sticks children blew bubbles through, except that they were fifty feet high.
Persephone couldn’t wait, so she mounted her broomstick and kicked off the ground and felt her spirits lift with her. She was impossibly happy flying, feeling so weightless. The broomstick also flew amazingly—any time she wanted to turn, it turned with the slightest touch. She flew around, in and out of the goal posts, laughing.

"Hey, Potter, come down!"

Oliver Wood had arrived. He was carrying a large wooden crate under his arm. Persephone came and landed next to him.

"Very nice," Wood said, his eyes glinting excitedly. "I see what McGonagall meant... you really are a natural. I'm just going to teach you the rules this evening, then you'll be joining team practice three times a week."

He opened the crate. Inside were four different-sized balls.

"Right," said Wood. "Now, Quidditch is easy enough to understand, even if it's not too easy to play. There are seven players on each side. Three of them are called Chasers."

"Three Chaser," Persephone repeated as Wood took out a bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball.

"This ball’s called the Quaffle," said Wood. "The Chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try and get it through one of the hoops to score a goal. Ten points every time the Quaffle goes through one of the hoops. Follow me?"

She repeated what he said, nodding to herself. "So—basketball on broomsticks then? With six hoops? Do the hoops have the same point or are different points given for different hoops?"

"Same point administration," He looked at her. "What's basketball?" Wood asked curiously.

"Uh, never mind," Persephone said quickly.

"Now, there's another player on each side who's called the Keeper—I'm Keeper for Gryffindor. I have to fly around our hoops and stop the other team from scoring."

"Three Chasers, one Keeper," Persephone recited, nodding again. She would borrow Ron’s Quidditch book. Or cash in that favor from George and Fred. "Chasers score and Keepers guard the team’s hoops. Right." She nodded. "What are those for?"

"I'll show you now," said Wood. "Take this."

He handed Persephone a small club, a bit like a short baseball bat but heavier. Her arm nearly fell out of its socket from the weight but she balanced it out as he explained, "Here, these are the Bludgers. I’ll show you what they do."

He showed Persephone two identical balls, jet black and slightly smaller than the red Quaffle. Persephone noticed that they seemed to be restraint with straps, as if they wanted to escape.

"Stand back," Wood warned Persephone. He bent down and freed one of the Bludgers.

At once, the black ball rose high in the air and then pelted straight at Persephone’s face. Persephone swung at it to avoid having her nose broken—though, question, could she fix a broken nose, being a metamorphmagus?—It went flying in a zigzag pattern before it zoomed around their heads and then shot at Wood, who dived on top of it and managed to pin it to the ground.
"See?" Wood panted, forcing the struggling Bludger back into the crate and strapping it down safely. "The Bludgers rocket around, trying to knock players off their brooms. That's why you have two Beaters on each team—Fred and George Weasley are ours—it's their job to protect their side from the Bludgers and try and knock them toward the other team. So—think you've got all that?"

"Yes, Chasers make the goal, Keepers keep the hoops from being scored on and the Beaters beat the wild shi—I mean, they, uh, they keep the team from being hit by Bludgers.” She said, glancing away bashfully.

"Very good," said Wood.

"This seems—well, this seems dangerous. Especially those Bludgers.” She eyed them cautiously.

“Oh, don’t worry about them. No one here in school has ever died from them. The worst records of injuries we have from them are a couple of broken jaws, broken ribs, sometimes inverted noses, but nothing that won’t allow a game to keep being played.” Persephone stared at him, half in horror and confusion, hoping he was kidding. “Now, unless they crack your head open, don’t think about them too much. The Weasley twins are more than a match for the Bludgers, so there really isn’t nothing for you to worry about.” Persephone was getting the idea that he had caught her horror, and was trying to soothe her nerves by multiplying them and then setting them on fire. “Now, for the last position—the Seeker.”

Wood reached into the crate and pulled out the smallest ball yet—it was tiny, compared to the other balls, about the size of a large walnut. It had little fluttering and was the color of bright gold.

"This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgers, and Quaffle to get it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever Seeker catches the Snitch wins his team an extra hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win. That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of Quidditch only ends when the Snitch is caught, so it can go on for ages—I think the record here is three months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep. So that's it—any questions?"

Persephone shook her head. She understood the game but now only could hope she could understand it on the field.

Wood practiced with her—he hit gold clubs her way and she didn’t miss a single one, much to his pleasure.

"That Quidditch cup'll have our name on it this year," Wood said happily as they trudged back up to the castle. "I wouldn't be surprised if you turn out better than Charlie Weasley, and he could have played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons."

As she walked back to the castle, smiling widely, she suddenly stopped—the boy from the wand shop was there, waving her. She frowned, “Hi?” She called to him. He jogged to her, seeming a lot brighter than she’d seen him.

“Are you free tonight?” He asked. She raised a brow.

“Why?” She asked suspiciously.

“So we can get your wand!” He said in a ‘duh’ voice. “Can you meet me back here at ten?”

“I don’t think sneaking around after last night—"
“Well, unless you want to wait another month!” He cried out, jogging backwards. “Remember! Bring the seeds and cores!”

She supposed she could try her luck once more—after all, everything was going her way, why waste an opportunity? She was on the Quidditch team, she was getting a good reputation, she was going to audition for the school play, she had awesome friends and she was academically brilliant—could it hurt to try and finally get her proper wand?

She did as she was instructed, sneaking down to the spot at ten. It was hard to not be freaked out about meeting a stranger in the dark outside of the warm castle. Wind was hurtling through her hair and she shivered—it was finally getting cold. What day was it?

“Got the seeds and cores?” Someone suddenly asked.

She jumped a mile into the sky and turned, stumbling backwards. “Jeez—how do you keep doing that!?”

The boy, Nicolas, frowned, “Doing what?”

“Popping out of nowhere!”

He stared and then laughed, “You’re hilarious, Potter. Come on.” He marched passed her confidently, as if he were not afraid of being caught. Questioning his sanity, she glanced around before groaning and following after him.

“How come you said I would have to wait another month if not tonight?” She asked to fill the silence.

“Moon phases matter in wand making—well, for specific wand woods, I mean.” He said. They were headed to the Forbidden Forest. Did she trust him not to kill her? She was not sure yet. “It’s a new moon tonight.”

“Oookay…” She hummed for a moment, an instinct when reacting to the cold. “Alright—why the forest?”

“Needs the soil.” He said.

That didn’t really clear things up but she getting cold and she didn’t care. “Alright sure.”

They walked a few more minutes before she asked, “What do I have to do in return?”

He hummed, glancing back at her. His eyes glinted darkly and she couldn’t quite make out the color. “I’m not sure.”

She nodded—she was barely listening. It was cold tonight—she should have worn a bigger sweater. Too bad she didn’t have one, yikes.

“Here we go,” He muttered and got to his knees. “Seeds?” She handed him the pot with the seeds in it. He snorted at the sight and she raised a brow.

“What’s funny?”

“No-maj soil doesn’t work for wand making.” He told her. He shifted through the dirt, pulling out the seeds.

“No-maj?” She questioned.
“American version of muggle. Sounds better—less insulting,” He told her, “Soil to actually grow a wand needs to be fertilized with enchanted water and proper nutrients that you can’t find anywhere but somewhere magical.”

“Oh…” She nodded. That made enough sense. “Wait, didn’t you say something about enchanting some soil when we met? What were you trying to grow?”

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business,” He commented, not lifting his head to look at her. She huffed, “You can be nicer, you know,”

“I am nice—I don’t have to help you with your wand,” He told her, again without meeting her eyes. “Hand me your core?”

“Here.” She handed him the feather. “What are the other cores?”

He buried the seeds and grabbed a few nearby twigs that he stabbed into the ground, as a way to mark the ground. They were not far enough in the forest for it to be scary but it was certainly ominous looking. She looked around and shuddered, not from the cold though.

“We can go get one right now, but the other one will be harder to get and I’ll get it,” He told her. “Come on.”

And then he turned to go deeper into the forest. She cried out in shock, “What are you doing!?” He turned, raising a brow, as if it were obvious, “Getting one of the cores? What do you think I’m doing?”

“We can’t go into the Forbidden Forest!” She informed him. Was he nuts?!

He stared and then snorted, “What? Are you scared?”

“Of everything that lurks in there, which includes werewolves and giant spiders?” Or so she was told, “Yes! I am! Breaking a huge school rule? Even more so!”

“Oh please, how many rules have you broken just this week?” He smirked, “Having a broom as a first year? Being on the Quidditch team?”

She crossed her arms, “I have special permission!”

“Is that how it started? No rule breaking involved, then?” He raised both his brows. “Unless you’d rather go in in the middle of the day, where anyone can see you, it’s your call. I just thought,” He was mocking her now, “It would be convenient, since we’re already here…” He shrugged.

She had a strange feeling this wouldn’t be the worse rule she’d be breaking but she marched in further and joined him, refusing to meet his eye. “Let’s just hurry up, please.”

“As you wish, Red,” He muttered, following easily.

“Do not call me Red—unless you want me to call you—Black!” She fumed. She was seriously not liking this boy.

“First off, that would be slightly offensive if I weren’t white and my name wasn’t actually Black, second off, I don’t care.” He shrugged. She glanced over to him to see him looking too relaxed for her irritation.
“Well, Red is not mine,” She told him.

“Whatever, Red,” He said. He sounded so unbothered—it bothered her!

She seethed to herself, fuming. She was sure there was steam coming out of her ears she was so annoyed.

But the darker and more thick the woods became, her anger faded and fear replaced it. Nico had placed a large space between them and she tried to edge closer but he was too fast.

“How far!?” She gasped, nearly jogging after him.

“Just a little more,” He told her, glancing back. Were his eyes…glowing? She couldn’t make it out, for he turned back to stare ahead.

“What about the werewolves and spiders?” She muttered, glancing around in fear.

He laughed loudly, making her jump, “I wouldn’t worry about spiders—werewolves wouldn’t come close to us either.”

“How do you know?"

“Because they aren’t real werewolves—they’re just wolf cubs produced from werewolves during full moons.” He informed her. His voice was annoying.

“Huh?”

“Wait,” He suddenly paused and she did too.

Amongst the dense, dark trees, she could make out the shape of something…something strange. It was like a horse, but…more dead. More skeletal. Its eyes shone in the dark, expressionless and white. Persephone could make out what looked like bat-like wings. They looked more leathery, with no feathers of any sort. It was completely black.

She held in a scream, as she was without air at the moment and stared up at the thing, and she stumbled back, her feet snapping a few twigs. The small noise proceeding made the thing jump and back up.

“Don’t scare her away!” Nico hissed at her, not daring to look away from the horse.

She froze, staring at the creature until her eyes fully adjusted and she could see a slightly smaller one a few feet behind it. She almost smiled—a baby and mother. How…strangely fascinating.

She took a step forward, something that was characteristically stupid, and found that they did not move away. If anything, it leaned forward.

“What is it?” She reached her hand out towards the mother. Nicolas had gone towards the baby and tossed it something—food?

“They’re called thestrals,” He told her. She glanced to see his peculiar eyes captivated by the little one. “Only certain people can see them.”

“What people?”

“People who’ve seen death,” He told her casually and she dropped her hand in surprise. He looked up at her, “I’m not surprised you can see them…with your parents and all…”
And awkwardness filled the space as she looked back at the thestral closest to her. It had come
closer to her and she almost smiled…it was rather pretty, in a twisted way. She raised her hand
hesitantly but she thought better of it, when Nico said, “They’re gentle. They don’t get many
visitors.”

“You visit them?” She asked.

“When I can…it’s calm in the forest,” He told her. “Not many interesting things in the woods at
Illvermorny.”

“Ilvermorny?” She asked. She didn’t recognize the word. The thestral bumped her head against
her palm.

“American magical academy,” he told her, stroking the smaller one’s head, “Western Boston, in
Massachusetts.”

“Oh,” She frowned. He was American, obviously but she didn’t think of schools outside of
Hogwarts, “Why are you here, then? Why did you transfer?”

He seemed to remember himself and straightened, “Family stuff.”

A loud, strange bird like scream started and made Persephone jump, only to find it was another
baby, coming forth for attention as well. This time she smiled.

“How…disturbingly pretty you are…” She whispered. It turned its head slightly and she could feel
its black mane—as she stroked it, one came loose and stuck to her nails. She looked at it for a
moment, staring in amazement as it glowed faintly of a dark substance in her hand.

“Got one?” Nico asked and she looked up in surprise, “Here—put it in here until we need it.”

She carefully put the hair in a small pocket of his bag with the feather and watched him zip it shut,
“The last core shouldn’t be too hard to get.”

“What’s the last core?” She asked as she shivered. The cold was making her fingers numb.
Checking her watch, she found it was very well past curfew.

He fidgeted, “Siren hair.”

“Siren?” she sputtered, “Like mermaid?”

“Okay, first off—no. Sirens and mermaids are completely different; mermaids always have tails
and sirens don’t.”

“Okay, sorry—but are we talking about the ones with tails? The ones that are rumored to live in the
Black Lake?”

“Unless you can name some that walk around with legs, then yes,” He told her in a dulled voice.
“But that can wait until after you do me a favor.”

Thunder rolled above, followed closely by lightning and for half a horrifying moment, his black
eyes became golden under the light, like how cat’s eyes flash under flash photography. She jumped
back, surprised but quickly found he had taken a step forward, “Are you wearing contacts?”

“Uuum?” She took another step back and he took one aswell.

“We have about thirty days until we can harvest the wand—October thirteenth, think it’s a Friday.
I’ll send you instructions from there on,"

Suddenly on edge, she nodded. She didn’t dare say anything for the sake that she believed she’d just lost her voice to fright.

“I’ll bring you back—"

“That’s okay—I’ll find my way," She told him.

“Don’t be stubborn, you’ll get lost,” He told her before giving her an almost smile, “Wouldn’t want to run into those spiders, would you?”

Persephone barely slept that night, or every sound made her jump out of her skin. When she did end up drifting off to sleep, she hallucinated shadows drifting past her curtains and she would be quickly awakened.

Something simply did not sit right with Persephone for the rest of the week. She passed it off as anxiety to Ron and Susan but she had to admit, it felt worse than anxiety. Not even cuddling up to Salem did the trick. Simply put, something was deeply disturbed in her.

During classes, she couldn’t concentrate for the life of her. Everything around her became louder and unnecessary and annoying. While Dean Thomas had a cold, she wanted to strangle him every time he coughed. The amount of points she got for a correct answer weren’t a fair amount and she wanted to kick a desk over every time she got something wrong. She felt the strongest of urges to kick and destroy everything in her path.

She found herself grinding her teeth in frustration whenever Ron spoke and every time she knocked something over, the urge to cry and break things overwhelmed her and she threw a fit. And she had checked her calendar—her period wasn’t due for another three weeks so there wasn’t any hormonal explanation for this sudden emotional switch.

She got into a row with Hermione which was completely unfair on her part being as she was only practicing out loud the laws of potion stirring. Quite irritating in the moment.

It was in Astronomy where she fully reached her peak. The moon was full and she was supposed to be listing the effects of the full moon when she got a paper cut. Such a small, stupid thing but it was this small and stupid thing that caused her to excuse herself from the class.

She had no intention of going to her dorm room but she did. It was a quick process that she doesn’t remember—all she remembered was the feeling that shook deep in her chest that climbed up her throat in desperation to be known. She couldn’t feel anything but the sheer panic that sliced through her veins.

She wasn’t sure what she was doing but she remembered screaming and tearing curtains off the beds and throwing books around. The violence coursed through her veins so powerfully that every part of her hurt—hurt so bad. She felt like she was on fire and no matter how hard she threw things or kicked chests over, nothing lamented the desire for violence. It was only when she turned her attention to Salem, who had streaked across the room to the bathroom that she broke down—truly and really broke down.

She screamed and pulled at her hair and could barely breathe as she sobbed. She stumbled to the bathroom when her legs gave out she screamed—every terrible thought she’d ever had printed itself behind her eyelids and she couldn’t stop sobbing.

None of the girls slept that night—Lavender had thought to bring Persephone’s things from class
and it was a sudden, shocking thing to walk in on. A trashed dorm room? Very scary—even scarier to find their dorm mate sobbing in the bathroom, screaming and screaming about how her legs were gone and that she couldn’t stand.

The very idea of getting McGonagall had Persephone in worse hysterics so Lavender and Parvati sat with her, hugging her and calming her down best they could. Amanda got a wet towel to place on her legs as she moaned and screamed about how they were on fire and she couldn’t stand. Renee was indirectly most helpful, cleaning up the room and getting Persephone a change of clothes and some of her stash of chocolate frogs.

Hermione kept her distance, hovering anxiously and giving tips to the other girls on how to help. Persephone doesn’t remember much but she does remember Lavender holding her to her chest and stroking her hair while Parvati held her hands. The two girls insisted on staying with her and they all somehow squeezed onto Persephone’s bed for the night—or morning, given how late into the night it was.

Amanda was first up the next morning and she woke the other girls up as well. Persephone was exhausted the next morning but she insisted on going to class. The girls left the dorm together, Hermione awkwardly being quiet. Persephone felt humiliated but the girls were acting like nothing had happened—save for when Amanda had pulled her aside and told her that it was okay to breakdown and be emotional and cry.

All of Gryffindor house was curious to know what the whole commotion was about the night before but the girls were loyal and said nothing of the incident.

A letter arrived for her the second time that week. Curious, she opened it to find a paper that look like it had been ripped from a notebook and written in ink. The handwriting was slanted and interesting.

\[Thought\ of\ a\ favor—it’s\ not\ a\ lot\ so\ don’t\ get\ dramatic.\ Familiar\ with\ Damocles?\ I\ need\ a\ book\ of\ his\ from\ the\ restricted\ section\ of\ the\ library.\ Get\ permission\ from\ Snape\ and\ get\ the\ book\ before\ the\ thirteenth\ of\ next\ month.\ Good\ luck.\]

She stared at the letter before she folded it up and finished her orange juice, stood and bid her friends goodbye. She made her way out of the Great Hall and started for her class. She barely made it up the first flight of stairs when her name was called, “Lily?”

She looked down, surprised to find Hermione. Her cheeks flaming, she bit the embarrassment down and faced her, “Yes?”

Hermione hesitated for a moment, pursing her lips, before asking, “Are you alright?”

The question took her off guard and her façade dropped, “What?”

Hermione hesitated and asked, “I was just wondering—because last night…you weren’t?”

Persephone felt shame and humiliation fill her and she nodded, “Perfectly fine, thank you.”

“Are you su—”

“Herman, this is none of your business!” She snapped, glaring own at Hermione. “I’d greatly
appreciate it if you left me alone!”

Hermione’s face flushed in anger and she made a ‘hmph!’ sound before turning around and stalking past Ron, who had come out to follow Persephone. He watched Herman for a moment before turning and grimacing up at Persephone. Persephone shrugged.

As they walked to class, Persephone filled in Ron about her wand situation. “I honestly don’t know how he expects me to get a permission slip from Snape, of all teacher. Has he not noticed that Snape hates all students? Especially Gryffindors?!”

“Wait the same guy who was there that night with the camera?” Ron asked.

She nodded, “Same guy.”

Ron thought for a moment, “Snape doesn’t seem to hate you, he’s never taken points from you.” He told her. “Why can’t you just make a permission form yourself?”

She snorted, “Yeah, right, and get caught immediately because of how terribly obvious it is.”

“Ask Dean,” He said. She raised a brow, “He’s really good at art and drawing—he could probably help.”

She decided Dean would be a last resort. During lunch, she visited the library, intent on finding out what other possible wand cores there were. She found a promising book—unicorns, phoenixes, dragons, she knew about. Then, there was siren hair, siren scale, thestral hair, giant hair, veela hair, acromantula web, fairy wings, hippogriff feather, thunderbird feather, vampire fangs, most DNA samples of werewolves and even Basilisk skin.

This led to a completely different thought process—she didn’t know any giants, no veels, she wasn’t about to go close to acromantulas, she refused to go near werewolves and vampires, thunderbirds were found primarily in the USA and she didn’t even know what a hippogriff even was. She thought seriously about the Basilisk—a quick research on it found that she could probably hatch a basilisk and because she could talk to snakes, it would be pretty easy to control. Hagrid had chickens and Neville had a toad. And having a pet basilisk would be great. It wards off spiders—that would be useful.

She decided that would be another last resort, only because its stare killed.

She checked out a few books on wandmaking and the art of wandmaking and all the works and decided she had a long night ahead of her.

Ron believed her crazy when she told him she was skipping dinner to go back to the library that evening. He simply could not understand how someone could bare to be in such a quiet environment for so long.

She settled in a secluded spot and perched the first book on her knees and started reading.

A wand is a quasi-sentient magical instrument through which a witch or wizard channels her or his magical powers to centralise the effects for more complex results. Most spells are done with the aid of wands, but spells can be cast without the use of wands. Wandless magic is, however, very difficult and requires much concentration and incredible skill; advanced wizards and some magical creatures such as house elves are known to perform such magic.

Oh merlin she was ready to fall asleep.
From what she read on, she found that wands had to be grown and then carved. Then the cores had to be forged into the wand by manners that were listed with not much detailing other than; the use of venom, the use of fire seed bush, and the use of mars.

Mars. The planet—the *planet*. Not the chocolate bar but the planet.

Brilliant—absolutely brilliant. What even was a fire seed bush?

And here’s what really kicked her—apparently, when the wand wood has been planted, if the wand isn’t harvested by the next new moon, the wand cores become useless.

She slammed the book shut and stood. That was enough for her. Nico had set her up—he hadn’t told her the process and only given her a time sensitive instruction for the impossible.

The week passed too fast for her liking—every potions class was very quick and she didn’t have a chance at asking Snape for permission. She knew it had to be him of all teachers because Damocles was a potion’s master. She took her time packing up her things but never built up the courage to ask and ended up leaving.

Ron was very well fed up with her not doing it and ended up speaking very loudly one class, “I’ll wait for you, Lily, I know you have to talk to Snape about something.” And then he gave her a look and walked out of class with the rest of the class.

She took extra-long to pack her things as she waited for the class to finally clear out before she cleared her throat, “Professor?”

She had to be careful with how she treaded these waters. He did not turn, “What is it?”

She pursed her lips, “Professor I was wondering…if you could, possibly, tell me something?”

“Well then, out with it.”

Her heart was thundering—how was she supposed to…oh, of course!

“I was wondering if you taught my mother.” She said without stuttering once. He froze and she winced. Maybe this wasn’t the best way to do this…

“No, I did not.” He told her icily but strangely. Was his voice…softening? She waited a beat and he glided to his desk. “I went to school with her—I was in her year.”

Surprised, she forgot about her original intent. “Oh?” He seemed too old to be as young as her mother was.

He nodded, “Yes. We were…friends…”

He suddenly looked up at her and she had no doubt he was seeing, not Persephone, but Lily. He was seeing her mother. And from the looks of it, he was pained by what he saw. She felt herself weaken…did he…*miss* her?

“Oh.”

They stared at each other for a long moment before he looked sharply away, “If that is all.”

She could not find the willpower to bring up the permission slip so she slipped out of the classroom quietly.
“Did you get it?” Ron asked. He had waited for her outside of the classroom. She shook her head and huffed. “Plan B?”

Plan B was Dean.

Dean Thomas was a godsend when it came to copying handwritings. She repaid him with help on the Transfiguration essay they had due—it was a fair enough trade, as he had a lot of mistakes.

Persephone skipped from the Great Hall that evening after nearly inhaling her dinner in less than five minutes. She headed to the library, nervously looking behind her back. She suddenly felt like this wasn’t such a good idea. How many times had she gotten out of trouble this week alone? She was most definitely pushing her luck.

She thought Madame Pince could sniff out her anxiety when she entered the library. She examined the note from ‘Snape’ and seemed satisfied with it, though her thin lips only thinned further as Persephone avoided her eyes as she made her way to the Restricted Section.

“Damocles, Damocles,” She muttered to herself. She recognized the name, of course. What potioneer wouldn’t? He invented one of the most complex and advances potions, a potion that blocked a person’s natural instincts—the Wolfsbane Potion.

She had no real reason to know of the potion—not really. She was simply intrigued by potion making—the perfumes of the possible outcomes intoxicated Persephone in a way no other magic could. It was so fascinating—perhaps it was because there was barely any wand magic involved, which served her purpose well, but it was fascinating. The simplest of mistakes could cause fatal results. The idea excited her.

While she waited in line to check the book out, she flipped through the book. She found it a little suspicious that Nicolas wanted to brew any potion as advanced as this one. And for what? She pondered it for a moment—she amused the thought that he was a werewolf but would werewolves be allowed in Hogwarts? Aren’t they very really dangerous?

She was so lost in thought, Madame Pince had to clear her throat very loudly to get her attention. She stepped forward, blushing and apologizing, only to earn a loud, “SH!”

She waited and presented the note to her once again. She narrowed her eyes over the paper, as if she hadn’t already analyzed it thoroughly. Finally, lifting her eyes to meet Persephone’s, she grinned almost evilly and held a bony finger up, indicating for her to wait.

Filled with anxiety, she watched her disappear behind the office door behind the large desk. It took a few minutes for her to return and when she did, she seemed more than smug—like she had just won something Persephone did know was taking place.

And then, with her heart literally shattering with anxiety, she watched Snape stride in like an overgrown bat, what with his black robes billowing behind him. He came to tower over the desk, not even batting a glance at Persephone. He stared at Madame Pince.

“What,” His voice sounded like he was carefully controlling his anger, “Can I do for you, Madame Pince?”

She indicated at Persephone and he finally turned, only his head, to look down upon her. “This student has presented me with a note she claims was written by you. As I know you do not write notes for first years, I thought it appropriate to bring it to your attention that a student is forging your signature.”
Persephone didn’t dare breathe, wishing with her entire being that Snape would go easy on her, that he wouldn’t expel her on the spot.

“You thought wrong,” Snape said a few moments later, “I gave Miss Potter permission, as is written on this form. I do not see the reason as to why you pulled me out of my business for this.”

Persephone fought against every instinct to gawk at him and kept a straight face—but what? Did he just…cover for her? Like—save her from being expelled for literally forging a signature, something that was very much illegal??

The pure joy and smugness was wiped clean off Madame Pince’s and she took the book with a sharp and dangerous look in her eye. Snape left without another look at Persephone and she knew very well he would be waiting for her outside of the library.

Madame Pince handed the book to Persephone but when she tried to take it, she did not let go. She stared her down while saying, “Any damages and you will be expelled from the library for the next seven years of your academic life.”

Then she let go of the book and Persephone wasted no time in scurrying out of the library. With her heart in her throat, she looked cautiously around down the halls only to turn and find Snape standing right in front of her, towering over her.

“Follow me,” His voice had not changed from the dangerous edge and she gulped. He turned and marched away silently and she had no choice but to follow.

She was such an idiot! Why hadn’t she changed into another person to do this!? She had the ability to do that and she didn’t do it—she could avoid so much trouble right now if she had just became someone else. If she was such a smart girl why the hell didn’t she think of this?!

Snape led her to his office, all the way down to the dungeon. She couldn’t think of any excuse—she was in trouble this time. So much trouble—she was an idiot for thinking she could get out of trouble so many times in the span of two week. Dammit to hell she was going to strangle Nicolas when she found him—only, this was technically her fault. Why drag him into this too?

He let her in and she shuffled in, and felt her heart about to implode as he shut the door.

“Explain to me,” He said, holding the permission form between his fingers, “Now.”

Her mind blanked and she spoke before thinking, “I didn’t want to bother you after asking about my mother and I wanted to read up on Damocles because of his workings on aconitum and its healing nature.” This much was true—aconitum did have some healing natures in reducing fevers. “I didn’t think—”

“That is certainly right,” He said harshly. “You did not think.”

She looked down, half relieved and half terrified.

“Explain to me,” He said, holding the permission form between his fingers, “Now.”

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“That is certainly right,” He said harshly. “You did not think.”

She looked down, half relieved and half terrified.

“If you were in my house, you’d have detention for the rest of the semester for pulling a stunt like that. You are acting as your father did and he was a good for nothing troublemaker!” She winced, shocked. She didn’t dare look up at him. “It is bad enough you’ve taken a spot on the Quidditch team when nothing good comes out of such a ridiculous sport,” She was sure that somewhere in the castle, Oliver Wood was vibrating at a frequency that could shatter glass at the feeling of someone insulting Quidditch like Snape had just done. “I’d advise you to not ever pull a stunt like this again, do you hear me? Otherwise, I’ll send you straight to the Headmaster. Now go.”
She could not believe her luck.

She walked in almost a trance like state to the Gryffindor common room, with the book in hand, trying to understand what had just occurred and how. She climbed the stairs up to the portrait of the Fat Lady.

“Treacle Tart,” She said and the portrait swung open. She walked in and headed up to her dorm where she spent a hot minute crying her anxiety out. She started doing her homework but the crying just kept interrupting her. It even woke Salem up from her deep sleep at the head of the bed.

Persephone came over and carefully laid on the bed, in a manner she was sure was overdramatic but she couldn’t help it—she’d been caught breaking rules and somehow, the speech Snape gave her made her feel worse than if she’d been punished.

Soon enough, Lavender and Parvati came in and Persephone straightened herself out, bending her head over a random book. She would be glad to get this wand business over with.

At some point, after feeding Salem and letting her purr herself to sleep very close to her chest, Persephone fell asleep only to wake up sweating a few hours later. She felt disoriented for a long moment and then she felt the full swing of her sudden nausea.

It felt like her entire body was on fire and she had to wonder if it was her period—it was rumoured that they hurt a whole lot. She hadn’t heard anything about throwing up and migraines. Her start to the day was terrible—she looked terrible too. And worse of all—she had forgotten to take her pill.

It was halfway through her first lesson that she realized this. When it was obvious she had not taken it, she simply could not focus. She couldn’t take proper notes and she kept looping out of the lesson to random thoughts, staring out of the window. She still felt sick and hot with fever. Her entire mouth ached and every step she took was like a rush of hot iron up her legs.

Basically, she wanted to die on the spot.

She couldn’t even get lunch as she was told auditions for the school play would be held at this time. She rushed out of her class to the Charms classroom. She ducked passed people hanging around in the halls and nearly tripped over some of the trick stairs. She skidded into the classroom with a loud squeak of her shoes, drawing several annoyed glances. Blushing, she avoided the eyes and got in line to sign her name on the sign-up sheet and take a form.

She found herself a spot on the floor to sit on and filled the form out—it asked for her name, age, school year, birthdate, dancing experience, theatre experience, vocal experience and such. She was happy to find that her dancing experience far outweighed her vocal and theatre experience. She wasn’t sure if she should note that she had a decent singing voice. She decided she would.

“Fancy meeting you here,” Susan nudged Persephone’s knee with her foot and Persephone looked up. Susan caught her mood immediately, “What’s wrong?”

Persephone immediately felt bad for not returning Susan’s good mood. She explained that she was sick and she had to rush to get to the room because she didn’t know that the auditions were held today. She was also very hungry.

“Wasn’t there a notice in the Gryffindor common room?” She asked, cocking her head to the side, letting her red braid fall over her side.

Persephone thought, you know what? There probably was. But did she pay attention? Noooooo! That was probably what Professor McGonagall was putting up in the common room last week.
“Want to come sit with me and my friends?” Susan asked and Persephone bit her lip.

“Would they mind?” She frowned.

Susan laughed, “Course not! Come on!”

Her friends had claimed two desks and consisted of Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott and Ernie MacMillan. Only Justin and Hannah had forms in their hands.

Justin beamed down at her, “Justin Finch-Fletchley,” He said brightly. “You’re Persephone Potter, of course,” He shook her hand enthusiastically and her smile was a tad uncomfortable.

“Oh, I go by Lily,” She said to them, jumping up to sit on the desk with Susan. “What part are you auditioning for?”

“Tin Man,” Justin said boastfully, grinning.

“I’m trying out for the good witch,” Hannah said, flushing.

“You would definitely get the part! You look so much like her!” Susan gushed. “And I’m trying out for the part of Dorothy,” She smiled.

“And what, pray tell, will the Girl Who Lived be doing here?” A voice asked. Persephone looked up to find a camera instead of a face. “Trying out for Dorothy, no doubt?”

It was Nicolas. Nausea climbed back up her throat and she crossed her arms.

“For your information, I will be trying out for Dorothy,” She told him in a manner of fact, “And who would you be trying out for? You know you’d make a good flying monkey, hm?” She thought she could see a hint of a smile when he responded, “You’re not wrong.”

“You think that’s that cute?” Her mood suddenly flared up in anger as she glared up at him—he had such an annoying voice.

“Do you think it’s cute?” He was definitely smirking now but then dropped the camera lens. She rolled her eyes.

“What are you doing here?” Persephone asked coldly.

“Old Filly has asked me to be the official documenter for the process of putting together this little shindig—the more no-maj touches, the better, in his words,” He cocked an eyebrow in thought and raised the camera again. “Anything our young, ambitious actors would like to say?”

“Go. Away.” Persephone worded out for him in annoyance.

He nodded, “I’ll edit that out, sunshine.”

When he moved on, Susan giggled, “How weird…”

“Very weird,” Ernie said, “How can someone be so pale?”

“How do you know him, Lily?” Hannah asked, looking at Persephone.

“Er—”
“Welcome, children, to The Wizard of Oz, the Musical!” Professor Flitwick called the students to attention. “Please pass your forms to the front and we can begin!”

When the forms were passed to the front, Professor Flitwick clapped his hands, “How wonderful to see such young faces in this room! As you well know, the play we are putting on has very mature themes so I am thrilled to see so many mature actors and actresses in the room! Should anyone not take their part seriously, I am not afraid of making cuts! Now, shall we begin?”

Someone raised their hand and Flitwick called on him, “We get credits from this, right?”

Flitwick’s shoulders fell but he nodded, “Yes, Mr. Keller.”

Everyone was put into different groups and played out a scene and then was picked out of each group. Persephone was the Dorothy to Cedric Diggory’s incredible Hickory/Tin Man. Both Persephone and Cedric made it to the next round of the auditions. She was put with Cho Chang and this time she played Miss Gulch against Cho’s Glinda. First of all—Persephone was completely thrown off with how beautiful Cho Chang is. Long dark hair and beautiful facial structure. She was thrown off so much that Flitwick called on her and told them to switch roles.

The crowds lessened by the end of it and Persephone was one of the ones that could move on after dinner. She was amongst Justin and Susan, unfortunately Hannah had not passed. Cedric Diggory complimented her acting and wished her luck in the vocal portion. She thought he was very nice.

She noted how Nicolas lurked at the back, concentrated on his camera and only glancing up periodically. She thought he looked worse than usual…was he sick? Was he the one who’d gotten her sick?

“So…official videographer?” She asked as she collected her things. He looked up and when he saw it was her, he looked back down at his camera screen.

“Documenter,” He corrected her. “You got my note?”

“Mhm,” She looked up, slamming her hand on the table. “You know, you could have told me that the seeds wouldn’t work after a month before burying them.”

He almost smiled, “We both know you wouldn’t have done it. And besides—what’s a little motivation hurt?”

“Says the guy that has nothing to lose,” She told him, crossing her arms. “I’m the one who needs a wand.”

“You’ll get your wand, Potter,” He told her, “And who says I have nothing to lose? If you recall—I need the book. Where are you in that process?”

“Working on it,” She narrowed her eyes. “Where are you in the other core process?”

“Working on it,” He gave her a nod, before passing by her with several feet between them.

Annoying tosser.

By the time dinner rolled around, she was exhausted, completely sick to the stomach but the Weasley twins passed her a sandwich they nicked from the kitchens between break in the hall when she complained about being hungry.

When she showed up to the second portion of the audition, she immediately noticed a new group of
girls talking loudly. And, tallest of the group, was Pansy Parkinson.

Of course.

She identified Daphne amongst the four, and another girl as Millicent Bulstrode, a mean looking girl. Another girl she thought could be Tracey Davis.

As she entered the room, Susan called, “Lily!”

Pansy turned, a very fake smile playing on her face. As always, she was wearing her uniform in perfect condition, with the tie perfectly straight and not a piece of lint seen on her skirt. Even after a long day, Pansy always found a way to keep her hair perfectly straight and combed and Persephone hated it.

“Oh, Lily, dear,” She waved with two fingers, “I didn’t know you could sing.”

It was a mock and Persephone did not miss it.

“Pansy, what are you doing here?” She asked, narrowing her eyes. “You can’t show up if you didn’t come to the first part of the auditions.”

Pansy’s smile only grew, “Oh, that’s for any ordinary person—I explained to that bumbling elf that I have enough experience in both dance and theatre and that I can sing that he simply couldn’t say no.”

Persephone found this hard to believe, “You can sing?”

“Like a nightingale,” She smirked.

“That’s a surprise, given how your speaking voice is so nasally I want to slice my ears off,” She told her. “Hi Daphne,” She turned to smile at Daphne, who gave an awkward smile.

She passed them and joined Susan and Justin. The auditions continued immediately and one by one, everyone went up to sing a part of a song of their choice, as long as they sang low to high notes. Some were impressive—Cho Chang, Cedric Diggory, Justin—and others were passable. Some were terrible and she would not name names.

And then Pansy Parkinson was called and, though Persephone hated to admit it, she sang beautifully. There was a strange tune to it but it was bearably beautiful. She hated it.

“Persephone Potter?” Professor Flitwick called when Pansy was finished and Persephone’s heart soared.

She jumped up and handled the spotlight with comfort instead of discomfort—she knew how to handle audition spotlight. She’d grown up doing it. Ballet was worse than singing.

She smiled widely and responded well with Professor Flitwick’s encouraging nod.

She started singing. She’d always thought her voice was soft and subtle, not very powerful but sweet instead. It had an effect on people—she usually looked up as she sang, so to avoid onlookers. When she finished the very short song, she looked back to the crowd.

The boys all stared in absolute desperate admiration, some having dropped to their knees. She stared in surprise, seeing Susan also looking captivated.

“Uuuhhh….” She frowned and caught Nicolas’ eye. He looked panicked, and cleared his throat.
“Mate…she’s kinda hot…” A guy in the front that Persephone did recognize said in a dazed voice.

Nicolas kicked the guy in the back hard enough to knock him down hard against the floor, “She’s eleven! That’s fucking gross!”

Another boy fell to his knees in front of her, grabbing her hand and kissing it profusely. She yanked her arm back, crying out a disgusted noise.

“Professor! Potter’s cheating!” Pansy screeched suddenly and her nasally voice seemed to break everyone out of their strange trance while Nicolas strode forward and pulled the boy who had knelt by Persephone away from her as he made another try for her arm.

“Miss Parkinson, please,” Professor Flitwick cleared his throat and he seemed to have tears in his eyes (?). “Miss Potter, how absolutely incredible—your voice is—”

She didn’t listen as Nicolas again had to push the boy away from her. His eyes looked glassy and unfocused—his pupils had dilated almost the size of his actual eye. She stared in shock and stumbled away—he looked possessed.

“Er, excuse me,” She grabbed her bag and rushed from the room. She didn’t make it far when her legs started to throb painfully. It was as if each step was a stab up her heels. She took her shoes off but this did not help.

Almost like trouble followed her, a bat came up from behind her, scaring her out of her wits as it soared above her. She dropped her bag and yelped out, her heart soaring. She stared up at the bat, perching up on a window frame down the hall.

She reached down to pick up her bag just as water flooded down the hall up ahead and two twin boys with flaming red hair came running from that direction.

“Fred? George?” She called in surprise.

“RUN!” They both called to her, and when they got close enough, George grabbed her hand and pulled her forward. Barefoot, they skidded around the corner as water pulsed behind them and George pulled her into a closet with Fred close behind them.

“What are—”

“Sh! Filch!” Fred whispered and she understood the need to be quiet.

Water surged past them and they heard splashing, as if someone was running through ankle deep water. They heard hissing and yowling and they only had to guess that Filch was carrying Mrs. Norris. They bit back their laughter and finally, when it was quiet for a few moments, Fred opened the door and peeked out.

He opened the door wider and they stepped into the river of what could only be bathroom water rushing past them. It was a lot of water flooding the floor and again, George pulled her forward.

“Potter?”

Nicolas had followed her and was standing in knee deep water. He slipped, throwing his hands out and for a moment, Persephone thought he would fall in. Instead, he laughed. His laugh was loud and piercing and boyish. For a moment he looked like any other boy.

“You know him?”
“Barely,” She told the twins, holding onto Fred to shove her shoes in her bag. No point in putting them on.

“I tutor her,” Nicolas said laughing. She scoffed at him.

“Lily?” Fred asked.

“Needing a tutor?” George continued.

“Nah,” They both shook their heads, laughing.

“Down this way, Professor Snape,” They all heard coming from where Filch had disappeared to, from where the twins and Persephone were about to head down. The three shared a look and ran down the hall where Nicolas was, laughing and screaming as they did.

Rushing through water, it was harder for Persephone to keep up with the boys. They splashed through the cold water, George pulling her along. At some point she slipped and fell into to knee deep water and giggling, she took Nicolas’ offered hand and he pulled her up easily. He pulled her along easily and they ran, soaking wet and with thunderous laughter they didn’t try to conceal.

Finally, three floors down and on the opposite side of the school, all out of breath, the four slowed to a stop. Breathing heavy and laughing hard, they leant on the walls and exhausted their lungs.

“So—” Nicolas wheezed, “You must be the Weasley twins.”

“Famous enough to be recognized, eh Georgie?” Fred slapped his brother’s arm.

“By the American no less,” George grinned back.

“American?” Nicolas laughed, “Is that what I’m known for?”

“Only American in Hogwarts, mate,” George sighed, leaning against the wall, his hands on his knees as he recovered. “Haven’t seen you in class though.”

“I’m not in your year,” He explained briefly, finally able to speak properly. “Name’s Nico Di Angelo.” Persephone froze, staring up at him in shock. “Is it likely we’ll get in trouble?”

“We will,” Fred and George in unison.

“For one thing,” George said.

“Or another,” Fred said.

“But you,” George said.

“And Lily,” Fred said.

“Are safe,” They said together, grinning.

Nicolas turned to Persephone, raising a brow, “Lily?”

She flushed, “It was my mother’s name.”

He nodded, knowing simply not to ask anything more and sighed, “I better go—I have things to do.”
“Mind escorting our dear Lily to the Gryffindor common room then?” Fred asked and George shot him a look that Persephone missed. “We would but we’re meeting Lee and we’re already late.”

“Oh, I can—”

“Nonsense, it’s passed curfew and you’ve already gotten in enough trouble on your own, Lils,” Freddie said, booping her nose. “Anything happens to her, I’ll make your murder look like an accident, ay, mate?” He grinned a perfectly at ease grin and clapped Nicolas on the back.

“Interesting friends you’ve got,” Nicolas commented a moment into the silent walk.

“Aren’t they, though?” She smiled. “They’re great.”

He hummed, glancing at her, “So…Lily?” She didn’t look anywhere but straight upfront when she nodded. “Not Persephone?” She shook her head. “Okay.”

She finally glanced at him but he was looking away. “So…Nico Di Angelo?” He nodded, raising a brow. “Any relation to the Ghost King?”

He froze in his walk but recovered quickly, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She couldn’t hide her smile, “Oh you don’t, do you? So you just happen to be a pale, dark-haired introvert who pops in and out of places, almost coming out of the shadows, with no relation to the son of Ha—”

“Alright, okay—I read the book when I was young and I got attached to his character.” She raised a brow and he mirrored her, “What? We have a lot in common.”

“Oh, I’m sure—son of Hades?”

“Dead mom.”

She faltered and stopped walking, “Oh…” Her voice broke. “Oh—oh Nic—”

“Don’t worry about it,” He said, not stopping.

Catching herself, she jogged to keep up with him, “So…so when you said you came here because of family stuff—?”

“Good guess, Persephone,” He stared down at her. “But no. Not that. She died a long time ago.”

His eyes weren’t dark—they were golden. No—one was golden. The other was silver.

“Your eyes—”

“You can make it on your own from here, right?” They stopped in an empty corridor near the Fat Lady’s portrait. “Don’t forget the book.”

She stared after him for a long moment, watching him stride down the hall quickly, almost floating, and then he turned a corner and then he was gone.

“What’s up?” Ron asked when he noticed how hyper vigilant she had become as they walked in the halls the next morning.

“Looking for someone—oh!” She had spotted Malfoy. The tips of his hair were still red but now he looked like a punk instead of the usual rich white boy, “Wait here.”
“You were looking for Malfoy?” Ron asked incredulously but she had already marched off.

“Malfoy!” She called to him and he turned on instinct and immediately regretted it when he saw it was her.

“What is it, Potter? Finally come to your senses about your friend choice?” He smirked. “Too late—the offer has expired—”

She crossed her arms, “Okay, let’s skip all the dramatics so you can tell me where you found Nicolas.”

He narrowed his eyes, “Who?”

She exhaled sharply, “The boy with the camera!”

“Oh. Him,” His eyes analyzed her in suspicion, “Why?”

“I’d like to keep the details private, just tell me where I can find him.”

“Why should I do that?” He asked, crossing his arms in a similar manner, as if he were mocking her.

“You know what? Never mind,” She turned on her heel. “You’re not worth another minute of my time.”

She had made it halfway to Ron, who was watching with confusion, when Draco called, “He was lurking in the dungeons.”

She turned, raising a brow, “What?”

“He was lurking around outside the Slytherin common room in the dungeons. I’ve never seen him inside the common room and I know about everyone. If not lurking like a weirdo in the dungeons than anywhere dark and hard to see in, probably.”

She stared at him, surprised, before catching herself and remembering her manners, “Thank you?”

He snaps, “Whatever, Potter,” Before turning and marching away.

Ron came up, “What was that about?”

She felt giddy, “I believe that Malfoy has a heart.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.” He paused, thinking, “And maybe not even then.”

She had his full name—if she needed to, she would send him a letter. But something kept her from doing so—what was the point? She had nothing to say to him, really, nothing at all. Did she feel bad? Bad that he was an orphan just like her?

Maybe.

She flipped through the book she’d gotten from the library, the one Nicolas wanted. Damocles Belby was a very brilliant potioneer—he’d invented the Wolfsbane Potion not too long ago, a very complex potion that relieves the symptoms of lycanthropy. It was made up of Wolfsbane, hence the title, which was a poisonous substance.

She suddenly slammed the book shut—werewolves. Nicolas had said werewolves lived in the
Forbidden Forest. He had told her this while they were both in the Forbidden Forest, where he seemed confident in knowing where they were going, where his eyes glowed. She was sure his eye color changed, as was obvious with how quickly he cut her off this evening.

Was it possible that he needed this book quickly, not because he was impatient, but because he would suffer the consequences of the full moon as a...a...

She tossed the book aside. No. No it was *not* possible.
Persephone felt strangely on edge the next couple weeks.

She had run out of her medication and she felt like sending a letter back to the Dursleys would be an immediate way of getting herself kicked out. Because of this, her ADHD was acting up so severely, she could not focus for the life of her. Time either passed very quickly or insanely slowly and she was losing points to her suddenly being late to class. The simple instructions from the professors were impossible to remember and her understanding of the concepts of magic were slipping.

It was only when she got to move around that she mellowed out—she had dance class and Quidditch practice to get all her frustrations out.

Quidditch practice consisted of very early mornings and very late nights, sometimes both in the same day. Oliver Wood had somehow found a way to get past the charm that banned boys from getting up the girl’s stairs and had more than once stood over Persephone’s bed with a Beater’s bat, looking like the very scariest thing she’d ever seen before he would lean down and whisper, “And the snitch has been spotted!”

Persephone is a relatively light sleeper—Salem moving around on her bed was enough to stir her. Oliver Wood standing above her with a beater’s bat and whispering things that haunt her at night was enough to have her jostled and traumatized and, for the first time he did that, screaming.

From this most explicit way of waking up, Persephone would be dressed for Quidditch practice in five minutes and in the common room in one, otherwise she’d be running extra suicides and laps. Dressing, first off in the dark, second off having just woken up and still asleep, was impossible. She usually was very organized but finding her things in these circumstances? And then having to run down a tower of stairs?? In a minute?? Even more impossible.

“It’s about being fast! Especially for a seeker!” He would tell her but this did not help her.

Oliver would march his troops out of the castle and down to the yards where they’d start off with doing laps around the lake. It didn’t matter the conditions—rain, wind, sunshine, early morning chill. They would be running. Persephone enjoyed the run—it made her breath easier later on in class.

Then they had a stretch. The entire Gryffindor team were all very flexible, and being as Persephone had done years of ballet, she had to problem with this. She was able to kick her leg up into the air and hold it there, impressing the girls and sending a flare of competitiveness over to the Weasley twins. Next, they would do push-ups. Whoever lasted the longest had pick of the best school broom. Persephone was allowed to fall down because she already had a broom.

Then they moved onto an ab workout—thirty second sit ups, thirty second knee touch crunches,
thirty second heel touches, thirty second bicycle crunches, thirty second Russian twists, thirty second reach through crunches, thirty second toe tap leg lifts, thirty second flutter kicks, thirty second scissor kicks, thirty second leg lifts, thirty second leg up alternating toe crunch, thirty second crunch kicks, thirty second mountain climbers, thirty second plank, thirty second both side plank, thirty second plank twist, thirty second spider climbers—merlin, just listing the workout made her abs hurt.

Then it was pullups and lunges and squats and then, finally, once everyone was very tired and sweaty and yearning for a big gulp of water, Oliver let them on brooms. It was a wonder of how Persephone didn’t catch a cold. Getting on her broom and soaring up high into the cold air while being sweaty should have gotten her a bad cold by now. They did laps on the broom and then finally, it was each their own. The Chasers, Beaters and Keeper played games while Persephone, the seeker, was left to fly around in search for a practice snitch. Oliver warned her that no matter how quickly she was able to find and capture the snitch, it would be ten times as hard in an actual game of Quidditch, because the Snitch in those games are never been used before.

By the time it was over, the sun was up and they had thirty minutes until breakfast. Persephone showered and got dressed, sore and tired, but quite awake. She was happy for the morning practices—they helped her concentrate in classes. Oliver bombarded Persephone with reflex exercises in the halls when she least expected it. She had on more than one account dropped all her books at the very sight of Oliver Wood, expecting him to throw something at him.

Dance class—oh how could she begin on dance class.

They were held by the Astronomy Professor and were more relaxed than Quidditch practice. They started off with meditation and stretching and just a very calming atmosphere. Persephone didn’t know what she ought to wear so she went with the classic black tights and tank top.

She was relieved to find some familiar faces—she was put in the third year dance classes with the other third years.

Cedric Diggory was a life saver.

“Oh, hey!” He said suddenly, seeing Persephone in that first dance class. “You’re that girl!”

“Persephone Potter, yes, I know,” She said, flushing. She’d gotten used to the sudden eyes on her by that time but it never ceased the blush and embarrassment.

“No, not her—well, yes her, but not her—I mean, the girl that my cat attacked.” He said, flushing suddenly. “On the train, remember?”

She blinked and then smiled, “Right.” Her smile fell a tad, “We both auditioned for the play, though.”

His face fell, “Oh, god, sorry—I was so nervous, I barely remember anything from that day,” He smiled and chuckled and she smiled but thought to herself, his nervousness looked terribly smooth.

He welcomed her into his group of third year friends on the spot—two other boys and two girls. Ash Dawson, Louis Donald, Marilyn Maurison and Laura Brianne. They were very nice to her but she thought it was because they now had even numbers for duets. Louis was a Gryffindor and so naturally, they gravitated towards each other. He was very nice to her and complimented her for her getting on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

She stared at him and his smile fell, “Oh—sorry, I thought that was—I mean, isn’t that why you’re
not in Quidditch practice? Because you got on the team? Sorry, my mistake,” She smiled sheepishly but kept her mouth shut. No one was supposed to know about that.

Dance class proceeded like so; everyone got into a big circle, sitting with the legs crossed Indian style and they all closed their eyes and meditated. Persephone was one of four who could not do so properly and kept opening her eyes and shifting her legs.

Then, Professor Sinastra welcome Persephone very directly to the class and had her detail her dance experience.

“I’ve done about eight years of ballet, starting from when I was two years old. Ballet is my main sort of dance but I’m also very good with lifts and flips and…yeah.”

She nodded awkwardly while the professor smiled at her, “Well, we’re all very happy you are here with us.”

Because it was a good few weeks into September, a routine had been established but it was rather fresh. Persephone followed along with the warm ups and caught on to the vibe. Everyone was very friendly and jokes were cracked here and there. It was nothing like her old, non-magical dance classes where everyone had to learn different choreo each class.

It wasn’t just ballet—it was an assortment of different dances. Hip-hop, contemporary, ballroom, waltz, swing—it was a lot of fun. It was a class Persephone greatly looked forward to, though unfortunately it only came every second day.

Her frustrations were very well still present because she was still lacking a very, very important magical instrument—her wand.

She did not know where to look for Nicolas. He never wore a house color and he did not sit with the rest of whatever his house was for any meals. She could not spot him in the halls or wandering the library and she wasn’t too sure if she were relieved by this. She was more or less suspecting him to be a werewolf and could you truly blame her? He was planning on brewing a potion meant for werewolves, he appeared usually out of nowhere, he had color changing eyes—it just creeped her out.

Maybe she was being bigoted. Maybe werewolves were not people to be scared of and simply to be pitied. They were simply people with lycanthropy—Princess Diana was cherished because she recognized people with Aids as people who had a disease not just AIDS. Shouldn’t she do the same?

Because of her usual early mornings, she woke early one Saturday morning and dressed quickly. She set out to out of the castle, regularly looking for a quiet place where she would not be disturbed. The classrooms were often hijacked by Peeves, the librarian was awfully suspicious of Persephone and the grounds were getting colder and windier. She found this out when she went out and just about froze. Perhaps it was because it was five in the morning on Saturday morning. She liked wandering around in the early morning just because there was no one around and she liked not having to worry about people staring at her.

As cold as it was this morning, she still wandered around. The grounds surrounding Hogwarts were very beautiful, especially in the morning. Today she started for the Black Lake. She knew Nicolas was supposed to get a siren hair as a core and that could only mean that Nicolas had to pay a visit to the lake. Perhaps, she mused on the unlikely possibility, she might run into him there.

The Black Lake was to the south of the castle and sparkled in the morning sun. She had seen some
students in early September swim in it while the weather was still fresh from summer but no one ventured too far out. Apparently, there was a Giant Squid inhabiting the deep waters. Daphne had spoken a lot of it and how in the Slytherin common room, the giant squid passed by the large windows underwater. Another reason Persephone wanted to be Slytherin: really cool common room.

Persephone found a spot near the lake, under a tree. Its leaves had fallen and surrounded the nearby area. She sat under it, her back right up against the trunk. She was facing the lake, where the tree’s roots met the water. Her legs were frozen but she refused to move—something made them prickle, like they were asleep. She stared at the lake in fascination.

She wondered idly if the Percy Jackson world was real—if it weren’t fiction at all. Who was to say if a magical world like this existed, that a Greek mythological one didn’t exist too?

Percy would be seventeen now—he was born in ’93—and he’d be in school now. With Annabeth? She never did like that relationship. Sure, Annabeth was an amazing character and she related to her in many ways but Annabeth with Percy? He’d said so many times that he wanted to be normal—the first sentence of the entire series was “I didn’t want to be a half-blood”.

She thought Annabeth was too confusing—how many times had he been afraid to tell her something, that she would judge him or whatnot? She thought Rachel was much better suited—or perhaps this was Persephone’s redhead instinct speaking. But still—she wished there was more Rachel and Percy in the series.

She’d been deep in thought when she realized someone was staring at her. It took her a moment to realize that she’d been staring back at the girl in the water.

Without her glasses, it looked like a girl. She didn’t wear her glasses often, only after classes. She’d forgotten them this morning and regretted it—she couldn’t tell what the person was.

It was so shocking that she jumped, recoiling into herself. The girl (?) had green hair and yellow eyes, and her skin was unnaturally grey. Persephone stared at her and she stared back before Persephone felt something move her feet.

She pulled her shoes off as she moved, unusually losing sync with her body and gaining sync with the water, while staring at the mermaid. She felt something strange charge the water, like the air that brushed her hair back was nothing she could breathe in, that she wanted so desperately to breathe in the water, how cool and delicious it looked.

She reached her hand out, feeling something pulling at her and tugging, the feeling emitting from the water, like she was a part of it, only to be rained back in. Persephone’s red hair began to shine a silver blonde, her nails sharpening and her teeth becoming lethal, her eyes becoming sharper and clearer when someone called her name, “Hey!”

She jumped up, standing and staring over to whoever had called to her.

He was closer than she had thought and he looked worried and winded—how long had he been standing there? Not long, surely.

“Hey…” He said again, “What…how are you?”

Nicolas glanced at her bare feet and then looked back at her. She suddenly didn’t feel too well.
“Fine,” She took a step back, “And you? How are you Nicolas?”

He frowned, “So you’re the one who started the Nicolas rumour?”

She stood straighter, “What rumour? I didn’t start anything.”

“Have you been asking around for me?” She had been. “Everyone is calling me Nicolas—my name is Nico.”

She suddenly realized that he had been Nico, not Nicolas. He’d never told her that Nico was short for anything—she had just assumed. She cringed, “Sorry—I thought…”

He nodded and an awkward silence followed. He stood, and put his hands in his pockets. She crossed her arms, shivering. From nerves or from the sudden chilly wind that passed low on the ground. She crossed her foot behind the either and wondered if she should say anything about the fact that she thought he was a werewolf and for good reason.

“So…why have you been asking about me?” He finally asked.

She blinked and had to remember why before smiling nervously, “I wanted to…check up on…”

He cocked his head to the side, “Why?”

“To see how the wand business is going—I actually thought I might find you here…because you said…you know, about sirens.” He narrowed his eyes and again glanced at her feet.

“Well—I have been looking for you actually,” He said. “You’re impossible to find, you know.”

She snorted, “Me? It seems like you were the one avoiding me.”

“Oh please, don’t be self-centered,” He said but she could tell there was a nervous edge to his tone.

She nodded, “Right…” She said sardonically.

He rephrased it, “You’re always with someone. You’re never alone—whenever did you find the time to be popular, Potter?”

She snorted, “I’m not popular, I’m just—”

“Famous?” He suggested and a smile tugged at his lips.

She glared, “I was going to say friendly.” She crossed her arms, bouncing slightly on her feet. “Why are you looking for me?”

“For obvious reasons,” Her heart skipped a beat. She stared at him and he said, “The book? Did you get it?”

She wasn’t sure what she was expecting him to say but her hopes fell either way, “Oh. Yes, I’ve got it.” She turned and grabbed her bag. She pulled the book out and held it out for him. He reached out, taking it from her. His fingers brushed up against hers and without realizing it, she hissed an unfamiliar sound. She covered her mouth quickly and coughed. He stared at her.

“Did you just—”

“Are you a werewolf?”
He suddenly looked at her, looked at her properly, all emotion gone. What confidence that had come to her to suddenly say that out loud was gone but she refused to look away from him. His eyes were very piercing, a greyish blue. Striking.

“Did you hit your head?” He asked her. “I’m not a werewolf.”

“Sure you’re not—you’re just brewing a Wolfsbane Potion for fun?”

“Sure.”

“And you seem to know the Forbidden Forest very well—almost as if you like lurking about in the woods like, say, a werewolf would?”

“I hang around Hagrid and he takes me in there sometimes, is that a crime?” He was becoming defensive, glaring at her.

She crossed her arms, “I hang around Hagrid too but he’s never taken me out in the woods.”

“Probably because he thinks you’re too young and fragile,” He said in a matter-of-fact voice. She gritted her teeth. He knew where to strike her to get a reaction.

“Does Dumbledore know?”

“There’s nothing to know,” He said through his teeth.

She remembered the eyes and refused to let it go, “Is that why you transferred to Hogwarts? Because you’re old school found out?”

“If you don’t mind your business, I’d say you’ll get yourself in a lot of trouble,” He told her. After a long second of staring at each other, he looked away, “And no, it’s not.”

“It’s not what?”

“Not why I came here,” He looked back at her to glare. “And it’s also not why I came here either,” He looked to the ground separating them. “Were you planning to go for a swim?”

She was taken off guard, “What?”

He glanced at the water, “You looked ready to dive in and being as it’s almost less than sixty degrees out.”

She stared at him, “I’m pretty sure this isn’t sixty degrees.”

He rolled his eyes so hard she thought he was having a seizure, “Fahrenheit, Potter. Sixty degree Fahrenheit.”

She had to laugh at this, “I forgot you’re American—why is it that Americans refuse to use the more normal temperature scale?”

“Someone a long time ago was going to pass a law to make Americans use Celcius but the demography spoke against it,” He informed her. “And I’m not American. I was born here.”

She dropped her crossed arms, “Wait really? Why’d you go to America?”

“Family stuff,” he shrugged.
“That’s what you said for being here,” She informed him.

He almost smiled, “Complicated family stuff—and you didn’t answer my question. Were you going to dive into the lake in under sixty—sorry, under ten degree weather?”

“No, I’m wasn’t,” She told him but again, he glanced at her bare feet. She blushed. “I wanted to put my feet in.” She bent to grab her socks and shoes. She’d been standing barefoot for too long and she couldn’t feel her feet.

“Right…” He paused, watching her. “You hissed at me, Potter.”

“I did not.”

“Does anything…weird happen to you…in the water, I mean?”

“Excuse me?” She raised a brow. “Weird how?” She stood straight once more and grabbed her bag. She was tired of the cold. She started walking towards him and he gave her a wide berth of space as she did. She cast him a weird look but he walked alongside her, a good six feet away.

“Weird like…like you feel different?”

“I feel wet?” She offered. What is with this guy? “Wait, how did our conversation go from werewolf to degrees to swimming?”

“You have a gift of distracting—have you ever swam in the ocean?”

“No—distracting?”

“Yes, like you are good at distracting, have you not noticed?” He asked. He wasn’t looking at her, “What about any lake or natural body of water?”

“I’ve only ever swum in a pool,” And nearly drowned in one. “Why are you asking me this?”

He thought for a moment before finally looking at her, “No reason.”

She stopped, narrowing her eyes at him, “You think I’m a siren.”

“I never said that.”

He did not deny it, though.

“You were thinking it.”

“So you’re a legilimens now?” He asked sarcastically, flipping through the book.

“I’m pretty sure my parents were married when they had me, thank you very much,” She snapped.

Suddenly, he laughed, like he had that day they had run through the halls with the twins, “Not illegitimate! Legilimens! No-majs call them mind-readers?”

“Oh,” She felt stupid for mishearing the word. “Stop avoiding the question.”

“Do I think you’re a mermaid—hm,” He snapped the book shut. “You sang and hypnotised a room full of people, and all the boys, you looked ready to dive into the lake, you’re a linguistic genius by what I’ve heard—five languages is it?”
She crossed her arms, uncomfortably, “Six.”

“Right—” He smirked, “You’ve got a number of admirers, you’re what’s considered very pretty, you’re observant, and your eyes are considered somewhat ocean like.”

She had flushed a deep red by this point and she huffed, “Just because someone—someone can sing and happens to look nice—doesn’t mean they’re a, a mermaid!” She nearly shrieked.

“Shrill shriek,” He pointed out with a smile. “Who’s to say I can’t pick a hair from your head and have it work as a third core, hm?”

“Aren’t mermaids—I don’t know, genetic? Don’t they pass those things down?”

He shrugged, “It’s a maternal gene.”

She beamed, “Well, my mother came from a non-magical family, so I find it hard to believe she was a mermaid.” She smiled. “That potion is hard to brew—let me know if you need help—” She shrugged and started for the east end of the castle.

“I’m not a werewolf,” He called after her.

She turned and said, “Sure,” Before spinning back and continuing.

Not a werewolf my arse.

She returned the common room to a brilliant surprise.

“I got the part!” She exclaimed to herself when she saw the new list on the board in the common room. “I got the part!” At breakfast that same morning, a school owl swept down to her with the script, character profiles and rehearsal meetings. She was very, very relieved to find that no rehearsal interrupted her Quidditch practice. Susan stood from the Hufflepuff table and came around to the Gryffindor table to exclaim she’d gotten the part of the Aunty Em. The girls chatted excitedly about upcoming rehearsals. They talked about costumes all through into their first class —there were several costume sheets along with the script. It was set in the 40s with the costumes and makeup and hair reflecting that.

Rehearsals was added onto her busy schedules. Amongst dance classes, magic classes, quidditch practice and studying in general, she was very busy and tired. She had nearly forgotten about Los Dios de los Muertos. Almost.

September turned into October very quickly and she had much to think about—mostly about her father. She’d nearly forgotten than her father was Mexican (as she had heard Uncle Vernon talking about), or at least of Spanish heritage. She didn’t know who to ask about it but she thought it best to assume he was Mexican, making her Mexican, though she didn’t have the olive skin. She reminded herself that skin tone didn’t make you a race.

She knew of an upcoming Mexican holiday, Los Dias de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead. She knew that it was to celebrate those who were no longer with us. She didn’t quite remember the time line, but she knew that on All Hallows Eve was All Souls Day, where families come back to visit their loved ones. She planned on celebrating it, for it was the least she could do for the parents that died for her that she believed the lies that they abandoned her.

She didn’t know where her parents’ tombs were, or if they even had any, but she was sure that they could probably find her in Hogwarts. In the meantime, she had to find a good, secluded place to do it—not the dorm, as no boys allowed and she was sure spirits included, and the common room
would be good, as both her parents were Gryffindor, but the common room would likely not be empty.

She’d found a place, during her Potions class. She asked to use the laboratory, and found the bathroom in the dungeons—it was cold but clean and there was a space in the very back that was lit by a torch, a little space that wasn’t needed. She thought she could find someplace better but it was secluded and quiet here.

As she washed her hands, she was staring at the spot through the mirror, inattentive to what she was doing in the sink, until suddenly the water no longer came down on her hands. Smiling, she said, “I am the daughter of Poseidon, and Sally Jackson!” She made an opening palm movement with her hand and then the water stretched with her.

She gasped—did the water—did the water just move with her hands? It had looked like it had followed her fingers. When she gasped, she threw her hands away and let out a small screech—and then the water followed suite, spraying upwards in a loop fashion. For a second, she thought of Percy Jackson, but then the water hit her and she thought maybe she wasn’t Percy.

But as the water hit her and started spraying the bathroom floor, she looked to the faucet and point her palm at it, thinking of that mermaid show from Australia, and then she made a fist. It made a squeaking sound but then stopped and Persephone stared at it, cold and wet but absolutely astonished.

Earth and water—she had some control over earth and water. Brilliant.

She rushed back to Potions class, swiftly telling Snape she was wet from sweat from the hot cauldrons, which he replied to, in great disinterest, “At least that means you are doing something correctly.” (As if she hadn’t been doing something correctly this entire time.)

She didn’t get a chance to tell Ron but when Potions ended, she dragged him down the corridor, to where the bathroom was. He was embarrassed when she pulled him in, but she promised it would be worth it. She opened the faucet and reached her hand out, waiting. The water did nothing.

“Why is the floor all wet?” Ron asked, looking down at his shoes. “What did you do?”

“I—just look, I did this,” She waved her palm at the water but nothing happened. “Ugh, it’s not working!”

“What’s not working?” Ron insisted but Persephone had lost her happy tone.

“Of for the love of Poseidon!”

So she knew she could control some aspect of water, just not in front of her best friend. Brilliant. It worked when she was alone in the bathroom in the dorms, but then Hermione Granger walked in and the water sprayed her in the face. Brilliant—thanks Herman. It was only when she remembered her little chat with Nico that she thought she would be sick to her stomach—she was not a mermaid.

She could not find a better place than that bathroom in the dungeon and she felt like this was very bad because she was really about to honor her parents in a girl’s bathroom. She could have asked a teacher to use their classroom, if she explained the whole plan, and she was sure they’d let her use it, but she wanted this to be done alone, just her and her parents.

She needed to get some food that she made herself but she had no idea where the kitchens were. She asked Ron, who shrugged, and she decided against asking the twins. She didn’t want to cash in
her favor just yet. She sought out Susan Bones, her Hufflepuff friend, and Susan was happy to help.

“Our common room is very near the kitchens, in the basement, but I have no idea where,” Susan told her as they strolled the basement, passed some barrels. They’d just come from a lunch time rehearsal. “Some older students won’t let us know—apparently its initiation to find out where the kitchens are.”

“In Gryffindor, initiation is standing on fire coals and whoever stands longest gets the best seats in the common room,” Persephone said casually. When Susan’s pretty face contorted into horror, Persephone had to laugh. “Kidding.”

“I would have believed it. Gryffindors sound crazy,” Persephone shrugged then nodded in half-agreement.

“So what do you need the kitchens for?” Susan asked. “It’s rather cold for a picnic out on the grounds.”

“No, I have a…personal project I’m working on,” Persephone said, though she thought about a picnic on the beautiful grounds of Hogwarts with Susan, “Though we must have a picnic together near the lake at least once.” The lake reminded her about the stupid mermaid thing she had started to believe.

Susan nodded in agreement. They were examining the basement in great details, looking for any indication that there was a secret passageway hidden somewhere.

Suddenly, a footsteps behind them interrupted them. They spun around to see an older looking, tall Hufflepuff boy, looking just as surprised to see them. The boy from dance class and from rehearsal, she immediately recognized. He had come out of nowhere—nowhere. Probably from the kitchens passageway!

“Oh, hey!” He said suddenly, seeing Persephone. “Lily!”

“Tinman!” She smiled awkwardly at the use of his character name—he’d been cast as the Tinman. She may or may not have forgotten his name. Susan raised a brow at this. “Mind telling us where you just came from?” She looked to the wall where he looked to have just come from—it was a painting with a bowl of fruit. She looked back to the boy, who was rubbing the back of his neck, hesitating.

“Um, nowhere?”

“Oh, come on!” Susan urged. “One Hufflepuff to another?”

The boy looked at Persephone’s red lined robes. Persephone rolled her eyes, “I can turn around if you want,”

“No, no I’m just…not supposed to tell,” He pursed his lips, looking very indecisive. He looked at Persephone and finally gave in, “Tickle the pear.”

“Excuse me?” Persephone raised a brow, taking a step back.

He blushed furiously, “The pear!” He nodded his head towards the wall without looking at it. “I can’t tell you anymore—and I need to go find my cat, sorry.” And with the he took off.

Susan and Persephone exchanged looks before looking to the painting, “Tickle the pear?” Susan repeated, flabbergasted. “Of all the things…”
But they did end up tickling the pear. The pear giggled and turned into a large green door handle, revealing the entrance to the kitchens. The girls smiled at each other.

Amazingly to both girls, it was empty. They both wondered idly who cooked before Persephone brushed it off, “Magic school, probably magic.”

She found some ingredients before she gave Susan some instructions on ingredients to find. She would make some sugar skulls, calaveras, while looking for some fruits. She found a picnic basket under a shelf, among about fifty others, probably for picnicking, and put the fruits in. She and Susan made sugar skulls, the ingredients appearing in cupboards as they needed them—it took them a good hour of their free time to finish. They laughed about what a mess their hair became in the heat, and packed the food into the picnic basket.

“These turned out really pretty,” Susan commented. It was true—their calaveras had turned out to be messily pretty and more put together then expected from a girl who knew barely the steps and ingredients. “Whoever you made these for are going to love them.”

She gave one to Susan, now only needing something of a distinctive feature, to personalize and make it for her parents. She would encircle the private alter with her Gyrffindor scarf, lily flowers from a Herbology greenhouse that she would grow herself and whatever else that she could think of that made sense for them. She’d find some candles and she’d put her locket down with the memorabilia, to make up for not having any photographs of them. She’d hope the locket would guide her mum to her. She’d made a little snitch sugar skull, in hopes it will guide her father to her.

She’d nearly forgotten about her wand situation—just nearly.

Breakfast one morning brought it all back. An owl swooped by in front of her, dropping a longish, rectangular package. Curious, she unwrapped it and picked up the letter inside, tearing it open and reading;

11¾ long, nice and flexible

Phoenix Feather:

Rarest core type. Greatest range of magic and often pick those independent witches. Very loyal

Siren Hair:

Very loyal and outdoorsy witches often have wands with siren hair. Usually a family heirloom, as mermaids don’t associate with the magical communities. Siren hair does very well with Astronomy and Potions. The witch capable of handling the wand with a siren core is often times knowledgeable but not greedy.

Thestral Tail Hair:

Chooses those who know themselves well. Works well for Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts and Transfiguration. The wielder should take time to themselves to work any problems they are avoiding as ignorance against oneself is very dangerous when wielding a wand with a thestral tail hair core.

Aspen Wood:
Outstanding in charmwork. Very accomplished duellists, or to be duellists. Wielders are strong-minded and determined.

English Oak:

Loyal, strength, courage and fidelity are often values found in these wand wood wielders. These witches have strong intuition and are very talented in raw magic.

Willow:

Very talented at healing magic and the wielder has a lot of potential.

She knew immediately what it was and subtly pulled her wand out—and gasped.

It felt like all her concentration was fueled into the wand and she felt like it gave her better balance. All her power felt like it was put into this wand and it gave her a sense of ease—it also made her feel good about having a handsome wand wood, finely brown with a handle carved in.

She felt eyes on her but she couldn’t peel her eyes off her wand. When she did look up to look around, the feeling disappeared.

As strange of a boy that Nicolas was, he had come through for her. Persephone felt euphoria erupt inside of her—she had a wand. A beautiful, gorgeous wand! Her very own wand! Agh!

The day turned out great—she’d woken up to a delicious smell wafting through the corridors, she had her picnic basket full of her things for later safely under her bed and she had her wand! She’d need to find Nicolas—in the mean time, she tried to prepare herself emotionally, for what she would say to her parents, should she feel their presence with her. The looming presence of her parents’ death really hit her, as it had now been ten years. Or it would be ten years that evening.

It was hard to not get distracted, especially in Charms, when Professor Flitwick announced that he thought they were ready to start making objects fly, something they had all been dying to try since they’d seen him make Neville’s toad zoom around the classroom.

Professor Flitwick put the class into pairs to practice. Neville had caught Persephone’s eye and she nodded in agreement while Ron, unfortunately, was put with Hermione Granger. It was hard to tell whether Ron or Hermione was angrier about this. She hadn’t spoken to her in a long time, despite them sharing a dorm room.

"Now, don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important, too—never forget Wizard Baruffio, who said 's' instead of 'f' and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest."

Neville flicked and swished but nothing happened. Persephone was encouraging either way, and clapped when she saw it wobble. “That was so close! A few more tries and you’ll have it!”

“If you’re so sure…” He said, but he was a lot happier with not being embarrassed. “Your turn.”

Persephone pulled her wand into her hand and thought about it, before lightning her grip. She felt that an incantation like this was to be light, because the feather was no dead metal. She treated it like her wand would lead a fish out of water, she had to be slow and light, to give it a will, “Wingardium Leviosa,”
Before she could even finish the incantation, the feather began to move, floating ever so softly. A smile spread on her face and she watched it float, as Neville watched in amazement, “Wow…”

For a moment, she wondered if she could make it move without her wand, but thought against it. The whole point of school is to use her magic through a wand. But still—the spell surely did not have such a strict limit of just going up?

Frowning, she pulled her wand back, but the feather did not compensate with her wishes. “A fine example, Ms. Potter!”

She was still frowning when she said, “Can’t I move it?”

“Well, now, we are just experimenting with the spell of levitation,” Flitwick squeaked. Persephone thought for a moment.

“So, so if I were to want it to move, it would need something more than just an incantation?” She guessed, raised her brows at him. He nodded, encouraging her to continue. “Flying is more fit to moving it, especially on a broomstick, because there’s a will behind it. So—so I would need to give it a will?” She thought out loud, thinking to her reading. “No—no that wouldn’t be enough—it needs some help—it needs a sense of control, so, while you are very light with your wand, you must also be sure to be aware of the air around—you must find not only your own will for it, but for the air’s will, as well? So, wind would be harder to operate the charm but easier to master?”

“Well, there is no doubt that you have inherited your mother’s talents in charmwork.” He said, raising his bushy eyebrows. “You are, in your theoretical terms, correct, though you would need to invoke the permission of the winds to give it a sense of control, but I daresay your theory is brilliant on its own, considering your age. I daresay you will turn out to be her equal in these academics, for I taught no brighter student than Lily Evans!”

“Evans?” Persephone asked suddenly. “Her maiden name was Evans?”

Perhaps Flitwick favored her mother, and knew of the importance of the date, but he nodded to Persephone, “I have not a doubt in my mind that she would be proud to see you today, Ms. Potter.” He said quietly to her, as if not to raise any attention to his praise. “You would make them both very proud, my dear, don’t you forget it.”

He awarded her ten points for Gryffindor and offered her some books for further reading, but his words were better than any amount of house points. She was smiling, looking at her lap, trying desperately to fight the sting in her eyes, when she noticed someone staring at her.

Hermione looked away when she caught her eye, looking irritated. It didn’t seem like Ron was having much luck.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.

"You're saying it wrong," Hermione snapped. "It's Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the 'gar' nice and long."

"You do it, then, if you're so clever," Ron snarled.

Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked her wand, and said, "Wingardium Leviosa!"

Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads.

"Oh, well done!" cried Professor Flitwick, clapping. "Everyone see here, Miss Granger's done it!"
Ron was in a very bad mood by the end of the class. "It's no wonder no one can stand her," he said to Persephone as they pushed their way into the crowded corridor, "she's a nightmare, honestly."

"Well, Ron," She hesitated before someone knocked right into Persephone and hurried past. As every cliché played out, it was Hermione.

Persephone was startled to find she had tears streaming down her face—guilt immediately coiled in her stomach. "She heard you."

"So?" said Ron, but he looked a bit uncomfortable. "She must've noticed she's got no friends."

Hermione was not in their next class, and wasn’t in the dorm, or bathroom or common room. Persephone did not think of her when she got back to her dorm to grab her basket of things. She grabbed her Gryffindor scarf and pushed her glasses up her nose. If wearing her glasses had a time to peak it was now.

She told Ron she had some plans tonight, that she would be in the dungeons, near the bathroom, and they parted on their way to the Great Hall, she heading for the cold dungeons, dunking under some bats that flew by.

In the bathroom, it was quiet. She set her things up in the unused space in the corner. She placed her calaveras down on the plate, the lilies against the basket and she lit some candles in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Finally, she reached behind her neck and unclasped her locket, setting it down against the basket.

A sudden bang made her jump and she quickly wiped her first tear away, looking back wildly—she was sure she’d locked the door. Irritation flooded her when she saw Hermione and she got up, “What in biblical hell are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?” She paused.

Persephone strode passed her, to unlock the door and open it, “Get out.”

Hermione ignored her, “What is that?”

“None of your business, Herman,” Persephone snapped, pointing to out of the bathroom. “Would you please care to leave, I’m doing something?”

“What are you doing?” She asked, turning to her. For the first time, Persephone noticed her eyes were puffy and tearful and her lips were all pink.

Persephone could not find it in herself to be cruel to her, so she sighed and let go of the door. She returned to her alter and made sure to move slightly so Hermione could see, “It’s a Spanish holiday. It’s called Los Dias de Los Muertos. The Day of the Dead. Today we honor those who are no longer with us, by setting out their favorite things and pictures. It’s the day the dead can cross the border of life and the afterlife to join their loved ones, to visit.” She pursed her lips, staring down at the wavering candle fire. “It’s also the day my parents died. It’s been ten years since and I wanted to…I don’t know, meet them halfway through the border?”

Persephone shrugged, tears slipping out and dropping onto her lashes and down her cheeks.

“Oh,” Hermione said quietly. She didn’t move. Persephone looked over her shoulder.

“If you want, you can stay. If there’s someone you want to meet, just write their name down and put it here,” She gestured to her little alter. “I’m sure Mum and Dad won’t mind.” More tears
slipped as the words registered with her—it was the first time she had referred to anyone as ‘mum and dad’.

Hermione hesitated, before she stepped forward, crouching with Persephone. She tore a piece of parchment from her roll and, using a pen, she wrote down the name, Marie. “We’re not supposed to have pens,” Persephone commented.

“I didn’t want to be completely assimilated into wizard culture,” Hermione said, holding the piece of parchment out to her. Persephone gestured for her to put it with the rest. She did.

Together, they stared at the candles and sugar skulls, and Persephone brought her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them.

“I’m jealous of you,” Hermione said suddenly, not looking at her. Persephone glanced at her. More tears were streaming out of her eyes.

“What?”

“I’m jealous of you,” Hermione said, glancing at her quickly. “That’s why it seems like I have it out for you.”

Persephone was quiet for a moment, “But…why?”

Hermione sighed, dropping her shoulders, “I’m not entirely sure of the reason…I mean, you and I are the only girls from the muggle world in our dorm and yet everything…everything comes so easy to you. You…you come to Hogwarts not knowing much of the wizarding world, like me, and yet, you’re everyone’s favorite student, people want to be your friend and you don’t even seem to struggle a bit!” She looked down. “And, I know it’s vain, trust me, I know, but I’m a smart girl, I know this, but I don’t care about being pretty. I really don’t—but then, you’re smart and pretty! It’s just…it’s not fair.” She shook her head, “You get in trouble, and then you’re out of it, then you sneak around, and no trouble. All teachers seem to trust you have the answer and that you’re brilliant and you know what’s going on, they praise you and favor you and want to pick on you for an answer. You even got a lead in the school play so easily and it’s just…It just…doesn’t seem fair.”

Persephone thought about this, a really long moment, before replying, “I understand that, as girls, we need to work harder than any boys do, and because in this school, we’re from a non-magical world, you and me, which makes us need to work even harder. And I get that it may seem like I’m not struggling, but, trust me, I am.” She looked at her, “I mean, I’m famous for doing something I don’t remember or know how to do, so naturally people expect me to be brilliant and have all these expectations. And trust me, I try very hard to learn everything I can, because I don’t want to disappoint the people with expectations. I hate disappointing people, or letting people down. I want to be good enough, as selfish as it sounds.”

She sighed. “My entire life, I’ve always been known as the pretty girl, poor orphan girl is too pretty to be an orphan,” She scolded. “Or, that girl is too much of a troublemaker, she’s the wrong type of girl, you’d never expect it out of her…I don’t want to have to only be one thing—boys can be smart and handsome, why can’t girls? Girls have to either be really pretty or really smart. There’s no in-between—I study things that are considered ‘a man’s subject’,” She made air quotations, “And yet I’m just the ‘pretty, orphan girl,’” She bit her lip, “Sometimes, I think I’ll never be good enough, for anything—and I’m so stupid and selfish for thinking this, but I sometimes think I wasn’t worth my parents dying for me.”

Tears were hot down her cheeks and she buried her face into her arms. Hermione was silent for a
long time, before she felt a hand on her arm, rubbing soothingly. “You’re right.” Hermione said, making Persephone look up, “You are stupid for thinking that.”

Persephone chortled an ugly laugh.

Hermione smiled, almost kindly, “I’m really sorry for acting the way I did out of jealousy. And I’m sorry that I thought you were too perfect.”

Persephone nodded before smiling, “You are very pretty, Hermione. You don’t need to conform to the patriarch’s world definition of pretty to be pretty—but if you ever want to, you can borrow my hair stuff. I know how annoying curly hair can be, and I can’t imagine how long it takes for your hair to dry,” She said. While Persephone was Spanish and had curls, Hermione did not have the same type of curl she did. “If it helps any bit, I may always look pretty because I’m a metamorphmagus.”

Hermione giggled but then stopped, “Wait, you’re serious?”

Persephone nodded. “I’ve never changed the way I look—I like the way I look a lot, mainly because I look like my mum. And I know it sounds like I’m lying, but my eyes are naturally like that as well. I usually only just play around with my hair,” She turned her hair black, then blonde, then its natural red while Hermione watched, her mouth opened. “And my friend once tweezed my eyebrows, and I’ve kept them like that since…what is it?”

“Lily, those are really rare—like, very really rare…usually, one or both of your parents have to be very, very skilled at Transfiguration to have a child that is one…wow….” She blinked and Persephone shrugged.

“Just…don’t tell anyone? Please?”

Hermione nodded, very serious, “Never.”

Persephone smiled before offering, “So…maybe I can do your eyebrows?”

Hermione hesitated, “Sure…but I’ve actually always wanted to try mascara but was afraid people would call me a ‘girly girl’.” She admitted. Persephone straighten.

“The oppression of women and girls is a tough sea to navigate but I’m sure we can find some books on feminism in Hogwarts to fight the internalized misogyny I have no doubt I probably have.” She pursed her lips. “And Hermione? Could you please not refer to traditionally feminine practices as ‘girly’. It makes it sound like it’s only for girls.”

Hermione looked at her with wide eyes and Persephone smiled, “I read that. I never realized how much stereotypes bothered me.”

Hermione nodded in agreement, before looking back down to the little alter. “What sort of shape is that sugar cookie?” She meant the snitch shaped sugar cookie.

Before Persephone could reply an answer, she sniffed and recoiled in disgust, “What’s that smell?”

“Did Moaning Myrtle flood a toilet again?”

And then they heard it—it was a low grunting sound, with the sound of shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. They both froze, Hermione’s soothing hand now clutching her arm. They stared at each in horror.
“I—I locked the door, I’m sure of it!” Persephone whispered to her, moving silently, to be right next to her, turned around to stare at the door.

“You unlocked it…” Hermione said, and Persephone felt her heart drop, staring, frozen on the cold floor, at the door, hoping it would not open to whatever was on the other side of it.

And then, as if in a horror flick, the door creaked open slowly.

The creature that stood on the other side of the door offered a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, thorny feet. The smell coming from it was incredibly revolting, it waivered into the bathroom so quickly she couldn’t keep from gagging. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped, peering inside and Persephone noticed it was slowly looking at the wall—it hadn’t noticed them. Persephone pushed Hermione slowly, as not to move too fast, but then it saw them. They froze. The troll looked at them in surprise.

It recovered before they could and it raised its cub—Persephone was frozen, an instinct reaction to the sudden fear, but Hermione screamed, loud and ringing and very high-pitched.

Suddenly, some people yelled her name, in the midst of the panic. Without thinking, she came to her senses and screamed, “We’re here! We’re here! Help! Help us!”

Hermione and Persephone watched in horror, wandless, and defenseless as the troll advanced on them, knocking the sinks off the wall as it approached.

Suddenly, three boys ran in—it was Ron, George and Fred!

They took in the situation, and George yelled, “Confuse it!” He picked up the knocked down sink and threw it, as hard as he could at the wall.

The troll stopped a few feet away from them, lumbering around in confusion, giving the girls their opportunity. Persephone pulled Hermione with her, knocking the basket over, pulling her against the wall.

From what she could see, the troll had seen Fred and raised its club for him instead, when Ron yelled, "Oy, pea-brain!” from the other side of the chamber, and he threw a metal pipe at it.

The troll didn't even seem to notice the pipe hitting its shoulder, but it heard the yell and paused again, turning its ugly snout toward Ron instead, giving Fred time to run around it.

"Come on, run, run!" Fred yelled at them, grabbing Persephone’s hand to drag them but the girls were frozen, staring at the troll as it started for Ron.

“Ron!” Persephone yelled, her scream echoing with the other shouts. It seemed like the echoes seemed to be driving the troll berserk. It roared again and started toward Ron, who was nearest and had no way to escape.

Persephone did something very stupid and very brave—but mostly stupid. Driven by the thought of the troll hurting Ron, she took a great running jump and managed to fasten her arms around the troll's neck from behind. The troll couldn't feel Persephone hanging there, but even a troll will notice if you stick a long bit of wood up its nose, and she’d accidently taken Fred’s wand out of his hand and it had gone straight up one of the troll's nostrils.
Howling in pain, it turned and twisted, flailing its cub around her and finally hit her hands as she let go. She landed with all her weight onto one leg, surely breaking something, and her hands were completely numb from adrenaline, or else she was sure she’d be faint with the pain of having them crushed. She couldn’t use her leg or hands to push herself away when she landed at the troll’s feet.

It stopped to look down at her and Persephone screamed, staring up at it. A rumbling sounded under her and suddenly, a pipe burst behind them, sprinkling them all with water.

Hermione had sunk to the floor in fright; Fred ran to the door to scream for help and George was picking up another sink, to throw at the troll. Ron, seeing his best friend about to be struck by the ugly troll’s cub, pulled out his wand and cried the first spell that came into mind: "Wingardium Leviosa!"

The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose high, high up into the air, turned slowly over—and dropped, with a sickening crack, onto its owner's head. The troll swayed on the spot and before it could fall on Persephone, George was there, his hands hooked under her arms and he dragged her away, tripping but dragging her along, away from the spot she would have been killed upon. She’d fallen onto him, watching in horror as the troll fell flat on its face, with a thud that made the whole room tremble.

The only sound that followed was the sprinkling of the water. George was breathing heavily under Persephone, his arms still tight around hers. Ron was there with his wand still raised, staring at what he had done.

It was Hermione who spoke first.

"Is it—dead?"

"I don't think so," Fred said, “I think it's just been knocked out."

He bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray glue.

"Urgh—troll boogers."

“Sorry,” Persephone muttered.

He wiped it on the troll's trousers.

A sudden slamming and loud footsteps made the five of them look up.

It only seemed logical that someone might hear the racket they’d made. A moment later, Professor McGonagall had come bursting into the room, closely followed by Snape, with Quirrell bringing up the rear. Quirrell took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

Snape bent over the troll. Professor McGonagall was looking at Ron first, then Fred, and then Hermione, and lastly George and Persephone, still on the floor, Persephone still trembling.

"What on earth were you thinking of?” said Professor McGonagall, with cold fury in her voice. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you all in your dormitories?"

Persephone felt a blinding light over her, a ringing in her ears, “It’s not their fault!” Her voice was trembling. She pushed herself away and off George, to push herself into a sitting position against the wall. “We were…” Her breathing became restraint as pain filtered through her vision. She
couldn’t tell as to what hurt.

A dark silhouette brushed to her, crouching by her, “She’s been injured—broken leg and what looks like a terrible force trauma to both hands.”

“Oh!” McGonagall gasped, and someone was helping her up, allowing her to lean more comfortably on the wall. George came to her side, and she lent on him, hopping on one leg. “We must take her immediately to Poppy!”

Persephone was able to get a clear vision finally, and saw Hermione standing next to a flame, “Watch out!” She cried, and without thinking it through, she thrust her hand to the fire that was her little alter, and it was put out, the water from the broken pipes following her movement.

Silence followed before McGonagall asked, “What is this mess?”

“My calaveras, Professor,” Persephone mumbled nearly incoherently. “For the Day of the Dead—for my mum and dad…” She didn’t realize she was crying at the thought of it having been destroyed. “Spanish holiday…to visit…and is my parenssss anniversary death…” Her words were becoming slurred as her vision tumbled in and out. “Oh—oh my necklace!” She gasped. “My necklace!”

She couldn’t see who did it but suddenly, very swiftly, someone clasped the necklace back around her neck. “This girl needs medical attention, now.” Snape’s voice was close now, just by her as her eyes fluttered nearly close. “What did you four do?”

“Mione and I,” Persephone spoke and it sounded like she was underwater. “Los Dias de Los Muertos n then the troll—troll n then Ron n Gred saved us—ow,” She whimpered the last part, finding herself in more pain. She gasped once more as she wobbled, her hands brushing against something, “Just wanted…to my parents…they died…today…m’ sorry professor,” Her words were slurring, was she really the one talking.

Another silence, or maybe her just passing in and out, but then, “…and Lily told us she’d be in the dungeons, near the bathroom, and she didn’t know about the troll,”

“We couldn’t let her die professor!”

“Yea!”

“That’s enough!” McGonagall said. “One of you Weasleys, please escort Ms. Potter to the hospital wing, I will come with you to make sure. Ms. Potter? Can you hear me?” Persephone nodded her head against someone’s shoulder. “Would you like Ms. Granger to take your calaveras?”

“Thrrr…ruined….” She frowned.

“We can…we can set them back up,” Hermione’s small voice rung in her head. “See, the snitch is fine—and look, the lilies aren’t damaged at all! It just your…scarf….Look, I’ll come with you, and we’ll put it back together, okay?”

Persephone was numb but tried to nod.

“Alright, get on my back, and I’ll carry you,” someone whispered next to her ear. She didn’t resist when they shrunk against her and then her unharmed leg was pulled, and she felt herself being lifted onto someone, her hands held out numbly, head heavy, like she was underwater.

The last thing she heard before she fell under the water was, “…poor girl, and on the day her
parents….” And then she was out like a light on George’s back.
The weather was very cold on November first.

She’d been kept in the hospital wing overnight, though Madame Pomfrey had healed her broken bones in minutes, apparently. She was unconscious for it. Oliver Wood had been her very first visitor, coming into the hospital wing in hystericis, asking if she was still able to play right on a broom. It was much like how the student director of the play had come up and checked out if she could still dance.

He wasn’t the only worried person—Hermione, Ron, George and Fred were in the hospital wing a few hours after, while she was being questioned by Madame Pomfrey to determine if she had had any head trauma. Hermione had brought her the sugar skulls, some burnt and watered on but the snitch was, as promised, still okay. The lilies, too, survived, and her mum’s necklace hung around her neck completely undamaged, now growing a rose. Persephone had the strangest feeling that of all the things that weren’t ruined, these should have been most ruined. She entertained the idea that James and Lily Potter had been there—maybe it was because she hadn’t been in any pain despite the injuries she’d gotten. The lilies were undamaged—maybe her parents were there.

Unsurprisingly of the whole situation, Hermione was now their friend—she was the most outwardly concerned, other than Wood.

In a funny way, she was sure the boy cared deeply.

But, she didn’t blame him for his worries—the Quidditch season had begun.

The mountains around the school became cooled with fog and the lake was cold and bitter. The grounds were covered in frost every morning and Hagrid could be seen from the upstairs window, defrosting broomsticks on the Quidditch field, bundled up in a long moleskin overcoat, rabbit fur gloves and a pair of enormous beaver skin boots. While regular flying class proceeded, Persephone was training for the team.

The first game of the season would be on a Saturday later that month in November, in a few weeks. It was Gryffindor against Slytherin, as chaotic as could be. Should Gryffindor win, they would move up into second place in the house championship.

No one but the Gryffindor team and Ron, Hermione and Susan knew of Persephone being on the team. She was kept a secret weapon of sorts—and she trusted those who knew not to say anything but as the boy from her dance class had figured it out, so did the entire student body. People would now regularly come up to her to congratulate her and wish her not to die. And the latter had several different extensions—not to die by being hit too hard, not to die from falling, etc.

She was ever so appreciative of Hermione being her friend—they spent time in the library together,
looking for any books that could be of help. She usually spent her time in the library alone but now having someone referring her to books she had not read that were useful was very good. Persephone spent a lot of her time in the library, checking books in and out, making notes of them—so it was natural that she and Hermione spent lots of time together. Not to mention they shared a dorm. The other girls could not understand how they went from blatantly ignoring each other to being attached at the hip and Hermione allowing Persephone to introduce her to the basics of cosmetics and hair treatment.

She was also a great help with her schoolwork—she barely had time to spell-check her homework, what with the last minute Quidditch practices Wood had the team doing. Her musical table reads ran rather late as well. She trusted Hermione to correct anything or let her know of anything wrong. Hermione was also thoughtful of Persephone’s new busy schedule and often left water bottles on her bed before Persephone could forget hers before leaving for practice.

She even lent her Quidditch Through the Ages, where Persephone learned that there were seven hundred ways of committing a Quidditch foul and that all of them had happened during a World Cup match in 1473; that Seekers were usually the smallest and fastest players, and that most serious Quidditch accidents seemed to happen to them; that although people rarely died playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert.

It wasn’t just the Quidditch practice that kept her busy—it was play rehearsals. And, more specifically, it was Pansy Parkinson.

Pansy Parkinson, bless her, was trying to kill Persephone. Why? Oh—because she was cast as Persephone’s understudy. This being, should anything drastic enough happen to Persephone that not even Madame Pomfrey be able to fix, Pansy would presume the role of Dorothy.

Rehearsal times varied—sometimes they were in the morning, sometimes they were at lunch, and most often, after classes had finished. Everyone met up and ran through lines—they had not yet begun to act the lines out. The student teacher, Rhys Hansenn, was very proactive. He was a fifth year and had been in the theatre productions for a few years. He had an eye for finding the talented students anywhere and he was responsible for a good fifty percent of the set decorators and hair and makeup department.

But those rehearsals that took place after classes were the ones where Persephone had to look out for Pansy.

They had just been introduced to the auditorium for the first time on that day. It was under the Great Hall, unconnected to the dungeons. It was very drafty, dark and dusty. It was on a slope so walking in was a hill down to the stage, where there were hundreds of seats.

On this evening, they were all sat on the floor of the stage, eating their dinners and chatting excitedly about being in the auditorium. She sat with a big group of people who were both apart of the cast and crew. She sat by Susan, who had finished her soup and was going through her lines while Persephone was finishing her croissant sandwich.

She and Susan were the youngest actresses—and Susan was now put as one of the little people. She had no proof of it but when she heard of Susan demotion, she knew it was Pansy’s doing. That wicked witch—literally. She should have been cast as the wicked witch of the east.

Pansy forced Daphne and Tracey to come to rehearsals with her, being as she knew no one else in the production that would put up with her nagging.

When Persephone finished, she stood and had started to cross the stage to grab her book-bag.
Quirrell was speaking with Flitwick on the other side and she had thought curiously of what they could be talking of. She had reached the end of the stage and grabbed her bag and turned around.

She and Nicolas—hmp, Nico— were not technically friends. No—they definitely were not. They spent an awful lot of time staring at each other at great distances but never properly spoke. Of course, Persephone always raised a hand to wave and he nodded back but that was it. Despite being in close quarters, that was how their relationship would probably proceed for the entirety of it, if there even was a relationship.

Still, when she caught his eye from where he stood with his camera by the window, she smiled. He offered a salute of a two fingered wave.

She started to make her way back across the stage to where she was sitting with Susan, still staring at Nico when all of a sudden, a harsh swoosh and high pitched reeling sounded pierced the air. Suddenly, Nico was before her, pushing her away from the spot where a sandbag had landed, loudly and violently, followed by the long winding rope.

Everyone stared and then Persephone realized she was going to be sick.

It was an honest to god cliché move of hers, but Pansy had gotten the message clear—she was willing to hurt Persephone to outshine her.

She had informed Hermione of this. Granted, Hermione, too, was influenced by Persephone’s friendship—even Ron’s, too, as the three were now a known trio. She was more relaxed about rule breaking since the incident and a lot nicer, too. When she had told her of the incident, Hermione had jumped the gun and loudly told her to quit the play. Persephone outright refused.

“I’d be giving her what she wants,” She’d said.

On Friday, during their ten minute break, she, Hermione and Ron took an impulsively regrettable walk out on in the courtyard. It was freezing and she yet to get herself a new scarf, as her original scarf had been burnt in the bathroom. Persephone held up an empty jar jam and Hermione conjured some blue fire in it. They shuddered in relief at the warmth.

They must have looked very suspicious, all huddled up in a little circle around it, because Ron, the tallest of the trio, spotted Snape crossing the yard. They reorganized themselves, Persephone choosing a random subject to talk loudly about as Ron shoved the jar into her hands.

“He won’t punish you for it!” He hissed at her and she shoved it into her robes, tucking it under her arm. She glanced at Snape and at once noticed he was limping.

"And what's that you've got there, Potter?"

She had Quidditch Through the Ages open against her stomach as she shivered and moved from side to side. She showed it to him while fidgeting, hoping to get any warmer.

“Library books are not to be taken out of the school without special permission—do you have special permission?” It was a tense silence that followed as she remembered the last time she had improvised that she had special permission. Being smart this time, she shook her head. He looked solemn. “I will let you off with a warning. Do not let this happen again. Give it here to me and you can come pick it up at the end of the day.”

She handed it over, “I’m so sorry Professor Snape, it won’t happen again.”

He stared at her for a few seconds before nodding once. He turned and limped away and Ron
leaned down to whisper bitterly, “That’s not a real rule, I’m sure he made that up!” He stared after him. “Wonder why he likes you so much?”

“That’s what he’s like when he likes a student?” Hermione asked skeptically, raising a (freshly neatly trimmed) eyebrow. “No, that’s how he treats a Gryffindor student he likes.”

“Wonder what’s wrong with his leg?” Persephone asked, changing the subject quickly. She’d rather not divulge all the details just there of her Professor’s friendship with her late mother.

"Not sure but I hope it permanently pains him," Ron said bitterly.

The Gryffindor common room was noisy that evening—many were hyping up for the game tomorrow. The trio sat together by a window—Hermione was checking Ron’s Charms homework for him, while Persephone was hyping herself up to go get her book back. It wasn’t that she was afraid of her potions teacher—she was just…just….

“I’m going—I’m going to go do it.” She said finally, getting up. If she made out the portrait hole then she would make it all the way because she did not currently remember the password.

"Better you than me,” They said in creepy unison. Persephone looked at them—they didn’t seem concerned that she was about to probably possibly not return with all her courage. And she needed that courage for the game tomorrow.

No, she needed to make it out of the common room.

And then she was outside of the common room, locked out until she could recall the password.

She made her way down to the staffroom, and paused. She hyped herself up, “Alright, okay, knock!” She whispered. She raised her fist and readied herself to knock.

She did not knock.

‘Okay!’ She said, jumping up and down, pacing back and forth in front of the door. Pointing at the door, it was her target—she would knock and she would knock thoroughly (how do you even knock thoroughly!?).

“Alright!” She raised her fist just as the door opened. Filch was standing on the other side and behind him, Snape was flinching, holding his robes over his knees. One of his legs was bloody and mangled. Snape had bandages in his hands, muttering something about, “…you supposed to keep your eyes on all three heads…”

She ran before Filch could turn and see her and was well out of sight before she could stop running.

"Did you get it?” Ron asked when Persephone finally remembered the password and got in. "What's the matter?"

In a low whisper, Persephone explained what she had heard and seen.

"You do know what this means, don’t you?” Ron asked when she finished. “Snape must have tried to get passed that dog—I remember! That night of the troll, I saw Snape head up to the third floor! He must have been going to the three headed dog—he’s after whatever it’s guarding! And I’d bet all my Chudley Cannons posters that he let that troll in, to make a diversion!"

Persephone and Hermione exchanged wide eyed looks.
"No—no way, he wouldn’t!" Hermione insisted. "I know he’s not very nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe."

"Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints or something," Ron snapped. "Any other teacher, sure, Quirrell, absolutely, poor loser, he passed out when he told everyone about the troll, maybe I would see your point of view if it was him, but Snape? No, I would not put anything past Snape. Real question is what's he after? What's that dog guarding?"

"Wait, Quirrell?" Persephone asked suddenly, something making a click sound in her head. "Quirrell was the one who informed everyone about the troll? That was the first notice?"

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing, just didn’t know…"

Persephone and Hermione went up to their dorm, Persephone lost in thought.

She was quiet, working her thoughts out in her head, and glancing at the Percy Jackson books on her desk, thinking of Luke Castellan…It made sense…

“Oh, no, what is it?” Hermione asked when she came out of the shower and found Persephone on Hermione’s bed, waiting. “Lily, what?”

“Oh—okay so Snape is a harsh character, right? He’s your number one pick of sketchy, is he not?” Persephone asked, raising her brow.

Hermione sighed, “What are you talking about—”

“Answer the question!” Persephone insisted. “Is he not?”

Hermione hesitated before shrugging, nodding her head, “Yes, he seems like the most likely to be up to no good, which is not his fault.”

She crossed her legs and undid her knot of hair on the top of her head. Wet curls fell to her shoulders in knots.

“Debatable,” Persephone commented before continuing. “Now, which professor seems least likely to be up to no good?” She waited.

Hermione didn’t even need to think about her answer, “Professor Quirrell.”

“Exactly!” Persephone cried. She was glad Lavender and Parvati were occupied in Lavender’s bed, farthest from Hermione’s. Hermione took a seat across from her. Persephone reached around to untie the ties holding the curtains away. Now as privately as they could be, Persephone whispered. “Quirrell also was the first person to notify the teachers’ about the troll in the dungeons.”

“So…?”

“So, don’t you see Hermione?” Persephone said excitedly. “Quirrell is a Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, don’t you think he would know how to tame a troll enough to lead it into a castle?”

“Now that’s debatable but what sort of motive would he have? He’s a professor, Lily, and he’s scared of everything! I highly doubt he would do something so crazy.”

“But that’s the thing—no one would suspect he would be behind it!” Persephone urged. “You can’t believe, why should anyone else? ‘Mione, I’ve read so many books with this plottwist, the
innocent, helping man always turns out to be the bad guy.”

“What books? The only stories I’ve seen you read are those Greek Mythology ones,” Hermione gasped knowingly, “Lily, please tell me this is not another scheme to try and get me to read those, you know I have no interest in the greek myths.”

“Okay, first of all, ‘greek mythology’, Hermione? Really?” Persephone raised a brow. “Those books are iconic. Second of all, a third hand character helps the protagonist but is actually working for the main antagonist. And Quirrell, a professor, who helps us learn…” She waved her hands, “Don’t you get it?”

Hermione thought for a moment. “Who’s the main antagonist?”

Persephone faltered, “Not too sure, yet.”

Hermione nodded, “Well then who’s the protagonist?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“Really? You seem to fit the protagonist requirements—you’ve got a rather interesting and complex background—”

“Hermione, you are missing the point!” Persephone insisted. “Quirrell seems all nervous and innocent and Snape is all sketchy and mysterious! Snape tried to get passed that dog, but failed because maybe it was already agitated from someone else trying? Quirrell could have had time to go up to the third floor but saw Snape going and then retreated! This is Luke Castellan! This a Luke Castellan story line, Hermione!”

“Okay, wait. You’re saying Snape and Quirrell both went up to the third floor but what? They ran into each other?” She raised a skeptical brow. “If Snape had seen Quirrell, I’m sure he would have said something to Dumbledore and he wouldn’t be here anymore, would he? Besides, even pondering this out loud is preposterous. You’re all wound up from nerves for tomorrow. Go and try to get some sleep, Lily, seriously. You’ll drive yourself mad in this state.”

“I do not trust that turban.” Persephone said crossly.

Hermione hit her with a pillow, “Oh, go!”

Persephone went but then knew Hermione did not mean it because she had just gotten out of her shower and would need help with her hair. She returned a minute later with her magical brush and sat behind Hermione to brush it out.

She was sure Hermione did not believe her, but Persephone knew she was onto something. She was almost always right—and it made perfect sense. If this were a badly written fiction novel, wouldn’t Quirrell be the perfect secret antagonist? Wouldn’t Snape be the perfect cover up?

Snape, all moody and mean, and Quirrell, all innocent and nervous. It seemed so obvious that Quirrell would never be thought of a bad guy! It’s always the least person you’d expect to stab you in the back—always!

She didn’t remember falling asleep but she did remember waking up several times during the night. She ended up getting up before anyone else and getting ready—she showered, in an attempt to calm her nerves, and took the time to use her hands to braid her hair. Her hair was curling in a cute way—how cute would her hair be when it was caked with blood from being hit by any one of those balls in the air?
She tried not to think of it.

The Great Hall was full of the delicious smell of fried sausages and the cheer full chatter of everyone looking forward to a good Quidditch match.

"You've got to eat some breakfast."

"I'm really not hungry, 'Mione."

"Oh, come on Lily! Just a bit of toast," wheedled Hermione.

"I really don't want any."

Persephone’s stomach could say differently but it was better if she didn’t eat—she’d rather not risk the chances of vomiting it all up.

"Lily, you need your strength," Seamus Finnigan said. "Seekers are always the ones who get clobbered by the other team."

"Thank you, Seamus," Persephone said, watching in disgust as he marinated his sausages in ketchup.

“Hey, Lils,” She turned to find Susan, pretty Susan, her brilliant red hair pulled back half up in a way that made her face look more mature, though her round cheeks gave her away. She wore Gryffindor’s colors. “Most of Hufflepuff will be supporting Slytherin, but look out for me, will you? I’ll be the one in, quite literally, all red,” Susan smiled and bent down to kiss her cheek.

“Never seen her around the common room,” George said as Susan skipped away. If anything, Susan’s kiss made Persephone’s nerves worse. George slid onto Gryffindor table’s seat.

“And we would remember her—"

“We know all redheads."

“Speaking of redheads—"

“What’s up?” Fred asked.

“She won’t eat anything, I’ve been trying all morning,” Hermione said miserably. Persephone cast her a dark look of betrayal.

“Trust me, Lils, you’ll feel better once you do,” George said. “Chewing helps with nerves.”

Persephone looked at him in surprise, “Because anxiety is caused by a sense of fear and when your body believes it is eating, it believes it is safe enough to eat and there is no danger, thus no fear, and lesser anxiety, yes, how did you know that?” She asked quickly.

Flushing, he said, “Mum says it.” He put a slice of toast in her hand and guided it to her mouth.

George’s voice was breezier and had a bit of a permanent amused tone to it. Fred’s had a different tone. George was easier to tell.

“Wood will kill you if you faint from hunger—and then kill himself,” Fred told her, “You wouldn’t want that on your conscious, would you?”

George gave her a piercing look—and she got distracted by what a pretty color his eyes were and
instantly took a bite of the toast covered in jam.

George grinned, “Thanks, you just saved us a bloody mess.”

By eleven o'clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many students had binoculars. The seats might be raised high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what was going on sometimes.

Ron and Hermione joined Neville, Seamus, and Dean the West Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for Lily, they had painted a large banner on one of the sheets Scabbers had ruined. It said *Potter for President,* and Dean, who was good at drawing, had done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Then Hermione had performed a tricky little charm so that the paint flashed different colors.

Amongst the supporters of the green team on the Hufflepuff stands, there was a sharp juxtaposition of red. A red-haired Susan Bones was proudly going to cheer on her friend. But some rows up from her front row, a taller, older boy was also clad in Gryffindor pride. He was merely cheering on the team because they were better—and it had nothing to do with the pretty new seeker, who had such a cute nose and the most breathtaking eyes. No, it was strictly political.

Farther up the stands, away from most of the crowds, Nico sat, his camera in hand. He had up his hood in a suspicious manner—should anyone look back and see him, they’d surely be afraid. He didn’t care much—anything to keep the sun away from his skin.

Meanwhile, in the Gryffindor locker room, the Gryffindor team were changing into their scarlet Quidditch robes. Slytherin would be playing in green.

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

"Okay, men," he said.

"And women," Chaser Angelina Johnson inserted. Persephone found a weak smile for that.

"And women," Wood agreed. "This is it."

"The big one," said Fred Weasley.

"The one we've all been waiting for," George continued.

Fred caught Persephone’s eye. "We know Oliver's speech by heart." He told her.

George leaned down to her to whisper, "We were on the team last year."

"Shut up, you two," said Wood. "This is the best team Gryffindor's had in years. We're going to win. I know it."

He glared at them all as if to say, "Or else."

"Right. It's time. Good luck, all of you."

“Knock on wood, team!” Fred and George called out and almost immediately, everyone knocked on Wood—the person, Wood. Wood was scowling when Persephone hesitated, “Oh go on!” She knocked gently and followed the twins out of the locker room.

She was nearly overwhelmed by the loud cheers as they grew louder when they walked out onto the field.
Madame Hooch was refereeing—Persephone reminded herself that if she wasn’t on the Quidditch team, she would be doing laps around the school’s grounds.

She waited in the middle of the field, her broom ready in hand, a whistle around her neck.

"Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you," she said, once they were all gathered around her. Persephone couldn’t help noticing that she spoke mainly to the Slytherin captain, a sixth year boy with the nastiest of teeth that would make Hermione would freak—her parents were dentists and she brought it up a lot.

A brilliant sign caught her peripheral eye and when she glanced at it, her heart skipped a beat and she could feel her legs once more. Potter for President, the sign read.

"Mount your brooms, please."

Persephone clambered onto her Nimbus Two Thousand.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They were off.

"And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor—what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too—"

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor."

She recognized the commenter—he was the best friend of the Weasley twins' friend. Persephone had to bet that he was chosen because no one else could tell the twins apart.

"And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve—back to Johnson and—no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes—Flint flying like an eagle up there—he's going to sc—no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood and the Gryffindors take the Quaffle—that's Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and—OUCH—that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger—Quaffle taken by the Slytherins—that's Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goal posts, but he's blocked by a second Bludger—sent his way by Fred Weasley,—nice play by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes —she's really flying—dodges a speeding bludger—the goal posts are ahead—come on, now, Angelina—Keeper Bletchley dives—misses—GRYFFINDORS SCORE!"

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Slytherins.

"Budge up there, move along."

"Hagrid!"

Ron and Hermione squeezed together to give Hagrid enough space to join them.

"Bin watchin' from me hut," said Hagrid, patting a large pair of binoculars around his neck, "But it isn't the same as bein' in the crowd. No sign of the Snitch yet, eh?"

"Nope," said Ron. "Lily hasn't had much to do yet."
"Kept outta trouble, though, that's somethin'," said Hagrid, raising his binoculars and peering skyward at the speck that was Lily.

Persephone was following Wood’s plan, keeping up above the game, squinting down. She was wearing her glasses—she barely ever wore her glasses. She’d rather not give Pansy another reason to make fun of her. She only ever wore them while alone, in private in her dorm or in the library. She’d rather squint in class than suffer through the embarrassment. She had no choice up here, however, but it didn’t help—to try and see such a small thing from up there? She kept herself up there, nonetheless, keeping to Wood’s plan.

"Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the Snitch," Wood had said. "We don't want you attacked before you have to be."

When Angelina had scored, Persephone had done a couple of loop-the-loops to let off her feelings. Being up on a broomstick was a perfect anti-anxiety remedy. She was hyper focused now on finding the Snitch—the ADHD was kicking in.

Her eyes seemed to have blocked off anything that wasn’t shiny and golden, and she could tell she was hyperaware of everything, as she caught the flash of gold of sunlight on the watch of Fred and the golden earrings of Angelina and even down below in the stands, she caught sight of a golden pairs of hoops, worn as earrings. At some point, she had been so distracted by needing to find the Snitch that she didn’t even notice until last minute that a Bludger had come pelting her away.

"All right there, Lily?" Fred yelled as he chased and beat the Bludger furiously toward Marcus Flint.

"Slytherin in possession," Lee Jordan was saying, "Chaser Pucey ducks two Bludgers, two Weasleys, and Chaser Bell, and speeds toward the—wait a moment—was that the Snitch?"

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey dropped the Quaffle, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left ear.

She’d seen it as Jordan commented and in the moment of distraction of the team’s excitement, she dove immediately. She felt as if though she was given into the hands of gravity, she sped so quickly to the ground. Unfortunately for her, Terence Higgs, who’d been closer, saw just a second after she had raced down as well.

Persephone was faster than Higgs, even if he had an advantage of distance. She could see the little round ball, she was so close she could make out the detailing in the fluttering wings, and she had just about had it when—WHAM!

A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors below—Marcus Flint had blocked Persephone off on purpose, and Persephone had to hold onto her broom for dear life, for fear she would fly right off it.

"Foul!" screamed the Gryffindors.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint and then ordered a free shot at the goal posts for Gryffindor, but Persephone could hardly care, as now, she’d just lost the snitch.

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, "Send him off, ref! Red card!"

"What are you talking about, Dean?" said Ron.

"Red card!" said Dean furiously. "In soccer you get shown the red card and you're out of the
"But this isn't soccer, Dean," Ron reminded him.

Hagrid, however, was on Dean's side.

"They oughta change the rules. Flint coulda knocked poor Lily outta the air."

Lee Jordan was finding it difficult not to take sides.

"So—after that obvious and disgusting bit of cheating—"

"Jordan!" growled Professor McGonagall.

"I mean, after that open and revolting foul—"

'Jordan, I'm warning you—"

"All right, all right. Flint nearly kills the Gryffindor Seeker, which could happen to anyone, I'm sure, so a penalty to Gryffindor, taken by Spinner, who puts it away, no trouble, and we continue play, Gryffindor still in possession."

She dodged another Bludger, which spun over her head, and in the moment that she did, her broom gave a sudden, frightening lurch. She thought for a moment she was going to fall right off and with this in mind, her hands tightened and she crossed her ankles underneath the broom, as to keep a hold on it. She definitely never felt that before.

Before she could realize what had gone wrong—it happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to buck her right off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off.

Persephone attempted a turn, to get the attention of Wood, who was by the goal posts and that was probably when she realized her broom was no longer in her control. She couldn’t turn it and, in horror, she realized she wasn’t going to be able to stay on it much longer, should it keep zigzagging through the air, adding in a swishing movement.

Lee was still commentating.

"Slytherin in possession—Flint with the Quaffle—passes Spinnet—passes Bell—hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose—only joking, Professor—Slytherins score—And now..."

The Slytherin supporters kept cheering on. No one noticed that Persephone’s broom was randomly swishing in awkward, dangerous movements. It kept carrying her higher, slowly, away from the game below, every jerk and twitch rendering her a good meter or so higher.

"Dunno what Lily thinks she's doing," Hagrid mumbled. He stared through his binoculars. "If I didn' know better, I'd say she'd lost control of her broom... but she can't have...."

Suddenly, finally, people were pointing up at Persephone as it rolled, over and over. She could barely understand what was going on when suddenly, it jerked her unprepared self and she swung off, barely able to catch herself with one hand.

She was dangling, over fifty feet up in the air, with only one small, weak hand to hold her up.

"Did something happen to it when Flint blocked her?" Seamus whispered.
"Can't have," Hagrid said, his voice shaking. "Can't nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark magic—no kid could do that to a Nimbus Two Thousand."

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid's binoculars, but instead of looking up at Lily, she started looking frantically at the crowd.

"What are you doing?" Ron moaned, gray-faced.

"I knew it," Hermione gasped, "Snape—look."

Ron took a hold of the binoculars and saw for himself, the greasy weasel in the middle of the stands opposite to him. And big surprise, his eyes were fixated on Lily and he was muttering.

"He must be jinxing her broom!" Hermione said anxiously.

"What do we do?"

"Leave it to me."

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had slipped away. Ron turned the binoculars back on Lily. Her broomstick was bent on having her thrown off, it was vibrating so harshly. Every time she tried to reach her other hand to grab it for a better grip, the broom would move away, keeping her dangling dangerously.

The whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as Fred and George both abandoned their posts on to fly up to try and pull Persephone safely onto one of their brooms, but it was no good—any time they got so much as a foot closer to her, the broom would jump higher, with her swinging like a possessed chandelier. The best thing they could do was drop lower and circle under her, ready to catch her when she inevitably fell. Should she just take her chances and let go? No—no she needed to stay in the game.

Marcus Flint seized the Quaffle and scored five times without anyone noticing—or caring.

"Come on, Hermione," Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape stood, and was now racing along the row behind him; she didn't even stop to say sorry as she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the row in front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen words. Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto the hem of Snape's robes.

It took less than thirty seconds for Snape to realize that he was on fire.

A sudden yelp told her she had done her job. Scooping the fire off him into a little jar in her pocket, she scrambled back along the row—Snape would never know what had happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Persephone's broom had suddenly stopped. It hung in midair and no longer moved. It waited for her to clamber up but her arms had weakened. She either would fall or she could try and get the attention of George or Fred.

Suddenly, she remember something that she had said in her Charms class, what felt like a long time ago. "….be sure to be aware of the air around—you must find not only your own will for it, but for the air’s will, as well? So, wind would be harder to operate the charm but easier to master?"

She suddenly understood something, understood why she could fly right off a swingset, in slow motion—the air around her had a will. She had a will.
She concentrated hard on the wind, on the air around her feet—she wanted to feel it push her up. She was asking permission, begging for the air to not let her die.

And then suddenly, underneath her foot, the air seemed to solidify in a sense, like she was balancing on air pockets. The solidified air suddenly pushed and she was able to swing a leg over the broom, clambering back up and a sigh of relief seemed to pass through the entire stadium.

"Neville, you can look!" Ron said. Neville had been sobbing into Hagrid's jacket for the last five minutes.

Lily was suddenly speeding towards the ground and, Ron and Neville watched in horror as she fell to all fours, clapping a hand over her mouth. Was she going to be sick?

But then, when she coughed, something golden and shiny landed in her mouth.

"I've got the Snitch!" She screamed in joy, waving it over her head and the game ended in completely confusion, though not to Oliver Wood, who raced down to pick the small girl up and hold her up as she waved the snitch over their heads.

The crowds broke into cheers, loud and echoing cheers. She couldn’t help feeling like she’d just done something better than incredible.

"She didn't catch it, she nearly swallowed it!" Flint was howling, but no one seemed to care. Gryffindor was second in the house cup, as Lee Jordan kept shouting happily—Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy points to sixty.

Twenty minutes later, Persephone was sitting in Hagrid’s hut, sharing a large armchair with both her friends, listening to what Ron was saying but not quite grasping it.

"It was Snape," Ron was explaining, "Hermione and I saw him. He was cursing your broomstick, muttering, he wouldn't take his eyes off you."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid, who hadn't heard a word of what had gone on next to him in the stands. "Why would Snape do somethin' like that?"

Persephone sighed, “Snape is sort of ominous and sketchy. I overheard him saying he tried to get past that three-headed dog, Cerberus, on Halloween. It bit him, that I’m sure, and we—well, they—think that he was trying to steal whatever it's guarding."

Hagrid dropped the teapot.

"How do you know about Fluffy?" he said.

"Fluffy?" The three of them asked in unison.

"Yeah—he's mine—bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year—I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the—"

“A person sold you a three headed dog and you named it Fluffy—wait, a Greek person? Like, wait, was it...was it Hades?” Persephone started to get up before Hermione pulled her down.

“Oh forget the greek gods, Lily, what’s it guarding, Hagrid?!” Hermione cried

"Now, don't ask me anymore," said Hagrid gruffly. "That's top secret, that is."

"But Snape's trying to steal it!" Ron said.
"Rubbish," said Hagrid again. "Snape's a Hogwarts teacher, he'd do nothin' of the sort."

"So why did he just try and kill Lily?" Hermione cried.

Persephone was disbelieving that Snape had been the one to jinx her broom—but she had to believe them because they had seen him, staring at her and mumbling. It seemed the girls were finally finding the same page about Snape, though Persephone was hesitant while Hermione was full force into Snape being the bad guy.

“I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I've read all about them! You've got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn't blinking at all, I saw him!"

“You need to do the same to block a jinx, ‘Mione.” Persephone pointed out.

“That doesn’t explain why it randomly stopped when I conjured the flames, though,” Hermione said in a tone of as a matter fact.

“Did you, oh I don’t know, bump into a lot of people while trying to get to Snape?” Persephone asked. Hermione finally gave in, nodding. Persephone shrugged, “There you have it. It could have been any one there—it could have been…” She raised her eyebrows and gave her a look that she knew she would understand—Quirrell. “But what we know is that someone, most likely a teacher, is trying to get passed Cerberus.”

"No, no, I'm tellin' yeh, yer wrong!” said Hagrid hotly. "I don' know why Sephie’s broom acted like that, but Snape wouldn' try an' kill a student! Now, listen to me, all three of yeh—yer meddlin' in things that don' concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel—"

"Nicolas Flamel?" Persephone asked. “Who’s Nicolas Flamel?"

Hagrid looked furious with himself.

“Well, if you won’t tell us then fine, we’ll stay out of it.” She began again before Ron could protest. “Now, Hagrid, tell me once again why, when a Greek person sells you a three headed dog, you not only question if there are Greek Gods around, but you name the dog Fluffy—instead of Cerberus!”
Sirens and Sights

Chapter Notes

Almost a month wait! I'm so sorry for the late update! This chapter is very long to make up for it and has a lot of extra content I worked hard on researching. Also, any guesses on Nico? I want to really flesh his character out because he's becoming my favorite! Who's your favorite character and why? I'll try and get some Ravenclaw characters out soon, I noticed a lack of them. We have Cedric and Susan in Hufflepuff, Daphne and Pansy and Draco from Slytherin, the main cast from Gryffindor but no one but Cho Chang from Ravenclaw....

What house do you believe Nico is most likely in?

Enjoy!

She would never say it out loud for fear that Oliver Wood would feel someone saying something remotely negative about Quidditch and hunt her down, foaming at the mouth—but she was almost glad Quidditch for the Gryffindor team was done for the year. They would play after the winter holidays and for this, Oliver let them off. She had to assume it was because he had OWLS to study for.

After the final Quidditch match of the season, which was Ravenclaw against Hufflepuff, training ceased and it was definitely not to Oliver’s liking. He chased each team member down and gave them a list of training he needed them doing—exercises and dietary plans, mostly. It was mostly to keep them healthy but Persephone had a strange feeling that Oliver Wood did not want Persephone growing any taller.

Now with all Quidditch season training done, it left room for many more rehearsals for the play. Rehearsal was booked nearly every night of the week and lasted a good portion of the day during the weekend. Everything suddenly felt a lot more real as she became more and more invested in the play.

The stage director, Ryn, was slowly going mad. Persephone never saw him outside of the rehearsal room and when she did see him inside the rehearsal room, he looked more disheveled than the last time she’d seen him. She tried to remember he was more stressed than anyone but it was hard to do so when he kept snapping at her for being in the wrong place on stage. She hated and loved him.

Flitwick had her excused from half of Charms class to practice her vocals. She felt everyday she went to bed, her vocals had been torn to shreds for how badly they hurt. She had to visit the hospital wing thrice now for it but there was nothing Madame Pomphrey could do but give her a throat relaxer. It was an endless and cruel cycle.

She’d been on stage once, and was told to start her first solo—Somewhere Over the Rainbow. It was a singing exercise—“Sing it with happiness.” Flitwick instructed her. How was she supposed to sing a song like this with happiness? It was about longing.

“Er, alright?” She cleared her throat and started, only to be immediately interrupted,

“With happiness, dear, happiness!” He squeaked. “Happiness is reflected in the face,” He made a
smiling face and gestured to it. She restarted with a smile on her face, to the point of it hurting her face when, “I do not believe you are happy!”

She certainly did not feel happy, “How am I supposed to sound happy while singing?” She finally asked.

“You are an actress! Act happy!” He told her. “Don’t make the audience believe it! Make yourself believe it! Deep breath and restart.”

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She can be happy—despite her vocal cords being torn apart and the pain in her throat growing and growing—she could be happy. She had to think of things that made her happy.

For a moment she came up blank. Then she thought of Ron and Hermione and it helped.

She restarted and it didn’t last—her vocals were straining now and she felt it in her heart that she wanted to die it hurt so bad. She didn’t realize it in the minute but she did when someone stopped her, “Alright, bring out the understudy!”

She stopped and looked at Ryn in shock. Pansy strutted out on stage, passing her a smug look. Persephone, still in shock, made her way off stage to let Pansy sing when Ryn stopped her, “No, stay—watch how she does it.”

So Persephone had to stand next to Pansy and listen to her sing her part flawlessly. She was basically being told by her stage director to take notes from Pansy freaking Parkinson. She stood and tried to remain pleasant and nodded politely when Pansy told her how she should practice her octaves more.

“Move along to the next scene—we need Potter and Diggory in costumes!” Said Armand from costumes. Persephone followed Cedric around to the backstage and through a hall to the costume vault. Mirrors and racks of clothing filled the room and much like Ollivander’s, a measuring tape took to measuring out both actors.

“Don’t get too down on Ryn, Lily,” Cedric suddenly said when he noticed her glum mood. “It’s his weird way of motivating you.”

“By telling me my understudy is better than me?” She sniffled, looking away. She would not cry in front of anyone in this production. It was embarrassing enough to be told off by the stage director every few minutes.

“He knows you’re best fit for the role,” He told her. Armand was ignoring them both, scribbling stuff down as he waved his wand to the measuring tape. “And he wants you to know it too—and by bringing out your understudy, he’s making you compete but not against her—against yourself. He wants you to fight for the role you already have not because he’ll replace you but because he wants you to want it just as badly as Pansy does.”

“Ha!” She snorted. “Pansy does not want the role—she just wants to upset me.”

Cedric offered her a weak smile, “Then don’t give her what she wants.”

“Shirt off, arms up.” Armand suddenly said to them and she did as told. With the amount of times she’d changed in front of her teammates, she didn’t mind changing in front of her cast mates. If Cedric didn’t mind, neither would she.

Over her head came Dorothy’s main costume—a white blouse underneath an old fashioned plaid
dress. The dress fit her perfectly though the blouse was too puffy.

“I’m going to put a charm on all the costumes to give them the retro beige color like it’s in the movie until after the hurricane scene. Then it’ll be more colorful like the originals,” He told her as he circled her, putting pins where they needed to be.

“Sounds brilliant,” She said as the door creaked open. She glanced in the mirror only to roll her eyes.

“First fitting?” Nico asked as he walked in, eyes on his camera. “How’s the lead actress doing?”

“Swell,” She answered sarcastically. “And you, Jughead Jones?”

“Are you calling me a smug moody serial killer fanboy freak?” He questioned and she raised a brow.

“I don’t remember that description for him,” She said.

He almost smiled, “I’ve very good at Divination—you wouldn’t believe what happens to the Archie gang.” He turned to Cedric. “And how’s our leading man?”

Cedric gave a signature smile, “Swell.” Persephone smiled at his copycat.

“Shouldn’t you be following the other actors?” Persephone asked.

“If you must know, Elizabeth Cooper,” He flipped the camera off, “I did have some inquiries to make to you.”

She raised a brow in curiosity, “What is it?”

He stared pointedly at Cedric and he shifted uncomfortably, “Uummm….”

“After,” He told her quickly, “I’m going to go track down that snack bar.”

“Alright,” Armand, who was a very quiet guy, suddenly spoke to her. “I need you to not lost or gain any weight until after the play. The material I’m using doesn’t rip but also cannot be readjusted. Do not, under any circumstances, grow, understand?” He looked very serious and she had no other instinct but to nod. “I need both you and your understudy to be the same measurements.”

It suddenly hit her—holy Moses! That’s why she was chosen as her understudy! Sure, she had a nice voice but she had the same body type as Persephone, albeit just slightly taller! It made sense! Enough sense to calm her down, at least.

“Lily, great,” Ryn called across from the bottom of the stage to her. “Vocal exercise for you—gives us a heartbreaking performance. I need you to cry.”

“Oh—um I don’t think—”

“Perfect, Vic will start you up in a few minutes,” He pointed to the play’s official piano guy. She smiled awkwardly. There were more people around, more people had arrived for the rehearsal. Strangely enough, the past few rehearsals Snape had come to watch. She had her suspicions as to why Quirrell always was there but Snape?

“You know Dancing Queen, right?” Ryn asked. “Happy song—I need you to cry while singing. Can you do it?” He asked.
She knew better than to answer honestly, so she said, “Yes!” With a big smile.

There was a good ten-minute interval to get Vic through the songs needed. Persephone paced anxiously, wringing her hands.

“Hey—you’ll do great!” Cedric smiled at her from the side-lines.

She shot him a confused grimace, “How am I supposed to cry to Dancing Queen? That’s impossible!”

“Just think of some really sad things!” He suggested, “Titanic ending? Lost puppies? Imagine—imagine you come to school one day—and everyone doesn’t know it’s your birthday. That happened to me twice.”

“Aren’t you a third year?” She asked.

“Yes—it was rather surprising when everyone remembered this year.” He deadpanned. “Okay—maybe you should poke your eyes and start singing.” He suggested.

“Creative, thank you,” She said.

“Wait—I have an idea.” He disappeared backstage for a moment. She stood confused until suddenly most of the vocal party came out to the same spot where he’d been.

All at once and so suddenly, they all started to harmonize together. She stared, dumbfounded, and everyone stopped what they were doing around her to stare as well. Then she laughed, “Oh my god!” It was so beautiful! They were all singing with each other, no words just a beautiful and lonely tune. And there were only about fourteen of them singing, making this beautiful song.

Cedric held a higher note, an impressively higher note, a faster one, and she stared at him with her mouth dropped open.

“Oh suddenly, we can harmonize?” Ryn asked, crossing his arms. “When we practice, you can’t handle a harmony but now, you can? Interesting.”

“We’re helping her cry!” a girl cried as they finished, “And it worked?”

Persephone hadn’t realized it but she had tears in her eyes—happy tears, but tears nonetheless.

“What was that?” She asked.

“Titanic theme song, duh!” Cedric said as they broke apart.

She sniffled, “I’ve never seen it.”

“You’ve never seen it!?!” There was a chorus of chaotic screaming and people absolutely going mad at this information.

When Ryn has calmed everyone down, he has her sing. And by god, does she sing. She thinks of Pansy and the glorious singing of no words from Titanic and how the adrenaline pumped through her veins as she realized it was a beautiful song. And she cries—she cries as she sings Abba’s famous song and she cries good.

Everyone stares at her and several people have cried with her. She sniffles, happy as more tears run down her face. Ryn sniffs, wipes his eyes and tells her, “We need to work on your projecting, alright?”
This is what we call a compliment from the stage director.

"I seriously haven’t slept in so long,” Susan said. “And I’m barely in the play. It’s so stressful.”


“That was in the year 2008, mate,” He told him, patting him on the back.

Nico sort of laughed, “That rhymed.” He muttered.

They were all sat in a circle, waiting for the next cue call. Nico was going through some footage, leaning against a table near Persephone. He glanced at her periodically, as if making sure she was still there. Topics varied as the time passed.

“I really wanted to be a mermaid this year—but apparently, since we have mermaids in the Black Lake, it would be,” Alexandra said, “Controversial.” She made air quotations. She looked at Persephone, “What were you for Halloween?”

She answered before properly thinking of an appropriate response, “An orphan.”

Everyone quieted down immediately and stared at her, some people’s mouths dropping open. There was an audible gasp. Suddenly, Nico doubled over in laughter and his laughter was infectious—to Persephone at least.

“That was terribly inappropriate!” She giggled.

“Holy shit, Potter, are you okay!?” He wheezed.

“Anyway,” Patrick says, sharing a startled look with Cedric. “Lily—you and Susan are new to theatre club and as is tradition, you have to tell us who you like.”

“Oh lord, Patrick,” Alexandra rolled her eyes. “We’re not first years anymore—”

“Everyone has a theatre crush! A crush which only exists in this room!” Patrick berated. “Let’s hear it girls.”

Both girls had turned beet red and Susan stammered, “No one!” She squeaked.

Eyes turned to Persephone. She giggled, “I definitely have a crush on Suzie!” She nudged her and Susan giggled.

A chorus of ‘aaaw’s passed over the group until it was time for their next cue.

“Ugh, dancing in heels,” Persephone moaned as Cedric offered her his hand.

He pulled her up, “Not as bad it is when you first start it. You’re a ballet dancer right? I do jazz and ballet too.” He’s thoughtful for a moment, “Are you and the camera guy—”

“Nico?” She interjected on instinct.

He nodded, without meeting her eyes, “Are you two…like…boyfriend and girlfriend?”

She immediately laughed, “NO!”

He straightened, “Oh—oh okay, sorry—I just…he said he wanted to talk to you alone and I just thought…since you were joking when Patrick asked about who you like…”
“I definitely do not like him,” She said, looking across the stage as Nico’s head. He was wearing a black beanie today, as if to hide the messy thick dark hair. “We’re barely friends.”

“Yeah it’s just… I mean, Patrick has asked people that question before—about having theatre crushes. A lot of people have said you and…well, they always ended up in the hospital wing the same day and avoid Nico religiously…”

“Wait what?” She stopped walking. She suddenly had a sick feeling in her stomach that Nico could hear her.

“I’m not saying it’s him but…” He shrugged, “He’s a little…weird, isn’t he?”

“Coincidences, I’m sure,” Her eyes lingered on his head as he looked down at his camera. Suddenly, he met her eyes and she looked away.

She was exhausted by the time they were dismissed. It was well past the curfew and everyone was given a permission slip should they be stopped by Filch. She packed up her things and then she flipped her head down to gather all her curls into a bun. When she flipped back up, Nico was standing before her.

“Ah!” She cried, dropping all her hair. Her view was quickly obscured and her nerves jumped and she stumbled backwards and giggled nervously. Cedric had made her nervous about Nico, despite her suspicions of his lycanthropy state.

“I’m beginning to believe this little theatre production is haunted,” He told her.

She cleared her throat, nervously, “Well, I’m rather certain ghosts inhabit the castle and it isn’t a secret.”

“Hm,” He nodded, “I guess you’re right.” He looked at her, watching her sling her book bag over her shoulder, stacking her script and extra papers in the other hand. “So…”

She looked up at him, “So?”

They were alone—and he was standing closer than usual. And the hammering in her chest wasn’t all due to fear, she didn’t think. She didn’t like the feeling.

He suddenly handed her something and moved away. She looked down and saw he’d given the book back to her—the one she’d gotten for him from the library. “I know you probably should get this book back before that librarian kills you so…”

“Oh,” She nodded, not really paying attention. She looked back at him and suddenly remembered, “Is that what you wanted before?”

He suddenly shifted, uncomfortably rubbing the back of his neck. She flushed hard, unable to stop it. Did being a metamorphmagus allow her to stop these random reactions? She sure hoped so.

“Well…” He coughed, “Well I was wondering how the wand was working.”

“Fine…” She narrowed her eyes at him.

He nodded, not meeting her eyes, “Then I should probably tell you… about the siren hair core…”

She stared at him, wondering what he was on about.

He cleared his throat once more, “Yeah—okay—well, I’m not sure if you know this but… the
merfolk in the Great Lake do not…I mean, they aren’t sirens.” He told her, finally meeting her eye. She stared at him and wondered why he seemed so nervous. “So the core isn’t from…the Great Lake…”

Something clicked in the back of her mind and her mind blanked. She wondered what her face betrayed as her mind reeled backwards in time, remembering all the times he’d ever commented on sirens and her similarities, on every time she’d tried to brush these things off—because she wasn’t a siren. Because she was just an ordinary girl, an ordinary witch. She did not—she did not grow a tail!

“You didn’t.”

“It’s a huge invasion of privacy—but I was one hundred percent sure!” He told her, or pleaded with her, “And what better way to prove it then use it as a wand core—and you said yourself, the wand works perfectly!”

She closed her eyes, “Why?”

“Why—why what?” He paused. “I did it to prove it to you—”

Her eyes flew open, “Why did you prove it to me!?” She shrieked. “Why does it matter to you!?”

He faltered, but his voice came more sure, “Because sirens are dangerous—and you said you’ve never been in the ocean or any natural body of water, which makes you more dangerous because you’ve been isolated.”

“Isolated?” She said through clenched teeth.

“Sirens have…short tempers…if they don’t blow it off in the water, then the chances are pretty high that you’ll end up hurting someone…or worse.” He told her, obviously choosing his words correctly. “And with the full moon coming up—”

“What does the moon have to do with any of this?” She spat out. “You’re the werewolf, not me,” She told him.

“I’m not a werewolf,” he told her, “And because the water and the moon have a bond and because sirens are affected by water, they are just as affected by the moon—haven’t you ever experienced it?” He asked her, “A truly, horrible day where you were absolutely enraged by everything and everyone? Maybe a violent outburst or two occurred?”

And then her anger vanished, as soon as it came. Because yes—yes she had experienced it. Thinking back—it was in Astronomy class and they’d been looking up at the sky. And she remembered it clearly—so clearly…she’d seen the full moon…

“I’m off my medication,” She informed him. “That’s why. I’m ADHD—and I was just off my medications. That’s why.”

He frowned, “How long?”

“I ran out in October.”

“October when?” He persisted.

She shrugged, suddenly exhausted, “The last week, maybe?”
“So after the twenty-second?” He pushed.

She thought and suddenly remembered, “No—no a few days before then—I remembered because someone had said something about it being two weeks before Halloween.”

He stared at her openly, “And your worst day was the twenty-second, right? The night of the full moon.”

She stared at him without really seeing him, “How would you know the moon phases unless you’re a werewolf?”

“For the love of god, just admit it! You went berserk on the night of the twenty second because it was a full moon—and it was the very first time because those pills aren’t for your ADHD but for your fishy problem!” He exclaimed. “It ties in perfectly!”

“It does not!” She told him while thinking that it really did. “It’s just…a coincidence.”

He cocked a brow, “All sirens have ADHD. Did you know that?”

“How do you know that?” She asked, feeling her sanity undoing.

He pursed his lips, “Instincts—you can’t keep still because in the water, keeping still will end with you drowning.”

She faltered. That made sense.

“Sirens can drown?”

He raised both his brows.

She bit her lip—this was making way too much sense.

“Look, I know it’s confusing but if you let me, I want to help.” He told her and for a moment, his dark and sardonic mask came off. He looked genuine, like he had the day of the water flood with the twins. “No one should go through this alone.”

“Or worse,” She suddenly said. “You said I could hurt someone…or worse. What’s worse?” She asked and upon seeing the look on his face, she knew it wasn’t being expelled. “Oh.”

“Full moon is the twenty-first.” He informed her. “It’s a Sunday. We have rehearsals that day—or you do—and I’ll be there. When it’s over, we can go to the library and talk, if you’d like?”

“I’m not a siren,” She told him point blank and turned to walk out.

It was all coincidences. Simple as that. He was looking for connections—and he found simple ones. And who was to say he wasn’t lying about the wand core story? When would he have even gotten a strand of her hair anyway? It was completely insane. It made no sense to even entertain the thought.

However insane it was, she didn’t dare ask Hermione for her knowledge on sirens. She knew Hermione to well to not know her to put two and two together and jump to the same conclusions Nico had. She kept it to herself because what was the point? It, again, made no sense.

This is what she told herself every time she saw Nico—she knew he wouldn’t talk to her about this around others so she made it her goal to keep herself around Cedric. He didn’t mind, more so he seemed relieved she wasn’t upset over his assumptions.
She wasn’t sure what house he was in—after knowing him for what felt like a good portion of time, she still had no idea. He never had his house colors on him. She’d never seen him in uniform or in robes. It made her feel as if though he didn’t really belong to the school, that he was a figment of her imagination. She didn’t spend much time on that conspiracy as several people she knew made contact with him—the Weasleys twins, the teachers…

She wanted the situation far from her but unfortunately, she came with the situation. A short day after her…conversation…with Nico, she began to feel familiar feelings.

She didn’t sleep the first time she felt it—a distant noise outside her window in her dorm made her jerk awake. She felt her eyes sting like they did when she opened her eyes in chlorine water and for a moment a darkness infiltrated her vision. She was half-asleep so she didn’t panic and when her vision came back, she barely noticed it had been absent.

She flung her bedding off her and found herself all too hot. She peeled her joggers off and slid on some shorts. She went and sat next to the window, behind her desk. She leant against the window pane and stared out into the darkness. It was dark out and up above, the moon was a first quarter. She thought briefly about Nico’s knowledge of the moon.

Something seemed to be lacking in Persephone chest. It felt like a rather large hole in her chest and the inside was deep and plunging, where something important seemingly should be. It stung at the edges.

She wasn’t going to have a good week.

Hermione and Ron came with her to the library as usual—they were on a hunt for the name Nicolas Flamel and the library was a large hunting ground. While they visited the library the next day, she went and returned the book she’d taken out for Nico. Then, she went off on her own in search of some answers.

She flipped through several books on sirens, stacking them up in one hand. She just wanted to be sure of something—this was the excuse she gave herself. She just wanted to prove a point. And who said knowledge was a sin? Well, she didn’t know if it was or not so don’t quote her.

The further she travelled into the library, the more magical books she found on the subject at hand. She had a piece of parchment paper in her hand to write down the titles of books she would pick up to read later. She wondered if books misplaced themselves, as to make the journey harder than it should be. Some shelves had runes engraved into them, as if written in a different language. She decided she would most definitely take Study of Ancient Runes as soon as possible. Hermione agreed most enthusiastically.

She had to admit—even she knew she was paranoid. She jumped at every sound and couldn’t keep herself in one place. Suddenly, everything Nico had told her was very prominent in her everyday life. Her breaking point came a lot quicker than the last time.

It was raining—she was in Potions class but she could hear it. The patter of the rain, of water. It was distant but her ears picked it up and wouldn’t let her ignore it. She found herself transfixed by the sound and Ron had to kick her under the table several times.

“What’s wrong with her?” She heard Ron question Hermione.

Hermione, who stood on the desk over, was staring at Persephone, “Lily?” She whispered.

“It’s raining.” She told them.
Hermione and Ron exchanged a look.

“W-what?” Hermione asked.

“We’re underground, Lily,” Ron told her slowly.

She looked at Ron and said, “I know.” She felt like she was deep underwater and her friends’ voices were faraway, up above the surface.

She was very well out of it—the patter of rain would not cease and her full, undivided attention was given to it now. She only came to when suddenly, she was doused in water.

Sputtering water and gasping, she blinked harshly. Everything was out of focus and no matter how many times she blinked, she wasn’t able to focus properly.

“Oh my god, her eyes!” Hermione gasped. “Are you in pain, Lily?”

“No, I just can’t see,” She muttered and rubbed her eyes. She blinked once more. “Why am I all wet?”

“You weren’t saying anything!” Ron exclaimed. “You were pale like a ghost and staring off—we thought you’d died sitting up!”

“You were catatonic—don’t you remember?” Hermione asked gently. Persephone shrugged. “We were in Potions and you said something about rain and then you just stared off into space. You didn’t say anything. I wanted to get Snape’s attention—” Hermione’s tone suddenly became bitter.

“Yeah right—he’s probably the reason she froze up like that. Poisoned the fumes or something,” Ron countered.

“Then why did no one else react like that?” Hermione questioned, a scowl on her face.

Because no one else was a siren.

She jerked upwards—they were outside of the potions classroom in the dungeons, alone. She was sat on the floor, Hermione crouched in front of her and Ron standing by them. She accepted Hermione’s help and they stood. Persephone still couldn’t focus her eyes and it was much blurrier than usual. Was this the consequence of straining her eyes so much?

“I just—ugh, my eyes!” She whined.

Hermione and Ron were looking at her from then on, as if afraid she would go catatonic again as they walked out of the dungeons. She couldn’t pay them much attention with her sudden disability. She made it out of the dungeon use pure memory and decided to find her way to her dorm to grab her glasses. She would suffer through Pansy’s taunts to be able to see. She refused their help and went off on her own.

Unfortunately as she continued to blink, her eyes continued to worsen and then she was seeing blurs and blurs and she must have taken a wrong turn because she didn’t recognize the corridor she’d gotten in.

“Lily?” Someone called.

She turned instinctively but couldn’t see that far. She still smiled in the direction she thought the person had called for. It was a sort of familiar voice but she couldn’t place it.
Someone started coming towards her, and she could make their colorful, yellow silhouette out. Tall, mop of brown hair and yellow house colors.

“Cedric,” She smiled. “Hello.”

He stood by her, close enough that she could make out only the more obviously more prominent parts of his face but not close enough where she could see his face.

“Woah,” He breathed. “Your…your eyes!”

She blinked and looked down, “Oh, yes—observant,” She noted. “I haven’t been wearing my glasses and I suppose I’ve damaged my eyes further, hm?” She tried to pass it off as a joke but she was starting to panic—she couldn’t even properly see the outlines of their legs!

“No—no I mean…” He trailed off, “You’re pupils are…I mean your eyes—your entire eye is…” He was rummaging for the right word.

Instead of standing there in front of him in humiliation at the situation, she coughed and started to stumble towards where she thought the right direction was. Instead she bumped into a knight and it came clattering down. She jumped, crying out and stumbled into Cedric.

“How did you do that?” He asked in amazement.

“Do…what?” She asked hesitantly. What was wrong with her eyes?

“Your eyes!” He exclaimed. He seemed to bend over her, to stare into her eyes. “They’re bloody brilliant!”

“Er…”

“Persephone?”

This voice she recognized immediately—and she was mad to be very relieved that she did. “Nico! I can’t see!”

She bounded to where she thought he ought to be but ended up being a foot off and he caught her by the elbows to turn her around. “Sorry what?”

“My eyes—something happened in potions and now I can’t see.” She informed him, “My eyes—”

“What are your next classes?” He demanded suddenly very serious.

“Er, lunch and then I have a free period but it’s only an hour,” She told him.

He nodded, “I can help you, if you let me.”

A sting in her eyes forced her to snap them shut and she cried out in pain, “Ah!” A burning sensation hit the back of her head. It caused her to have a sharp intake of breath that suddenly didn’t satisfy her lungs.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow,” She whined, “Okay, yes, fine,”
“Are you okay?” Cedric said somewhere very far away.

“Very!” She called, probably too loudly but she couldn’t freaking see! “Thank you!”

“Closest natural body of water—the lake,” He said, mostly to himself she had to guess. “I can’t get you out into the lake right now—you’ll freeze or someone might see,” he was muttering now, taking her bag in his hands. “Okay, I know what to do—get you into the lake and find out if you’re immune to water temperature.”

“I don’t care!” She whined, “I can’t see!”

The pain worsened and it felt very realistically like her eyeballs were being tugged out of her head. They felt so hot right now—she would start crying if she could. It was dark—black. She couldn’t open her eyes, everything stung her eyes. Even the air!

She felt somebody wrap something around her head and there was pressure on her eyelids. She reached up instinctively but he grabbed her hands, “It’ll protect against the light—just keep it on.”

She felt dizzy but let her hands grab his arms in steadying herself. He shifted and let straps of bags fall off his shoulders. “I think getting on my back is fastest and seems less weird so do you know what a piggy back ride is? Do the English call it something weird like sausage back?” He tried to joke and she wanted to kick him.

“I know how to,” She told him, trying to find his shoulders amidst the pain. She found them after a few seconds and found they were too high, “Crouch down.”

It took three attempts, two curse words Persephone had never used and one moment where she truly wanted to kill them both, he was trotting stairs with her on his back and two book bags in hand. She didn’t get it—she knew she was skinny but she’d gained weight since she’d come to Hogwarts and was able to eat properly. She’d gone from seventy five pounds to an average eighty three. He was carrying an eighty-pound girl plus however heavy both their book bags were.

“Werewolf strength,” She muttered.

She could hear the eye roll in his response, “I’m not a werewolf.”

“I can’t see right now and I know you’re a werewolf,” She muttered into his shoulder. “Where are we going?”

“Take a look,” He asked sarcastically. She bit his shoulder lightly and he jumped, stopping, “Jesus, did you just bite me? Aren’t vampires the one with the biting kink?”

“Kink?” She questioned in confusion.

“Never mind,” He told her. “And we’re here.”

She frowned into his shoulder, “That was fast—werewolf speed?”

“Close proximity to our destination,” He told her. She slid off his back as soon as he stopped and he let her go. The drop to the ground was farther than she’d anticipated and she let out a gasp.

“Welcome to the Room of Requirement,” He told her.

“I can’t see Nico,” She told him.

“Underwhelming,” He muttered, removing whatever was covering her eyes. “Room of
Requirement only appears when someone really needs it—hence the creative title. And right now, I really need to help you—I just need to figure out how…” He muttered the last phrase.

She opened her eyes cautiously.

The room before her was a smaller version of the library but also of the Gryffindor common room. Shelves lined the walls and in between, from bottom to top. Though the room did not seem too big (much, much tinier than the library), there were a ton of shelves and a ton of books. A fire roared to life somewhere against a wall. By the sole window right next to the fire place was a desk with two chairs, ink and parchment ready for whoever’s use. She had to squint to see it.

The little area around the fireplace reminded her of the Gryffindor common room—warmth.

“What…?”

“I asked specifically to figure out how to help you,” He pondered aloud. “Not with your eyes but in general. I guess I should have prioritized needs huh?—the lighting’s better I think. Windows are much more tainted,” He said, pushing his glasses up onto his forehead. “It’s private—I guess that was the point.”

She noticed a tall jug by the window and made her way to it immediately. Without thinking it through, she pulled a Percy Jackson and doused herself head first with the water in the jug. She didn’t even close her eyes—all she knew was that her body was thirsty.

“Alright Percy Jackson,” Nico snorted, dropping their bags on the chairs. “Feel better?”

“My eyesight is slightly better, yes,” She told him. “No stinging—it’s still blurry however.”

“Hm,” He examined the wet floor. “Your eyes must be made for water, not for above.”

“You sound as though you’re guessing,” She noted.

He looked up at her in surprise, “You sound as though you’ve accepted the fact that you’re a—”

“I didn’t say that,” She coughed. She wanted more water. “Where did you say we were?”

“Room of—”

“Hey!” She gasped, interrupting him. She surged forward to the window, “It looks like we’re on the seventh floor! I don’t remember you climbing any stairs…”

He shuffled his feet, scratching his neck, “I, uh, know some passageways.”

“How?” She narrowed her eyes.

“Er, you know Fred and George?” He asked. She nodded. “We…talk.”

She snorted. “You can say your friends, it won’t ruin your little reputation,” She told him. “How come your friends?”

He stared at her, “What?”

“They’re in a grade above you—I’m not sure you’re not a Gryffindor—they’re popular and fun and loud and funny and you’re…” She cut herself off, knowing whatever came next would slightly insult him.
“Not?” He asked, rolling his eyes. “Depends on whose definition you go to for popular and fun and loud and funny.” He turned and picked up several books from the nearest shelf, “Come on Red, let’s get to work.”

“Don’t call me ‘red’” She snapped. “And work?”

He tapped the book as he came to sit at the table, in the shadowed part next to the window, “These books are here for a reason—and it’s not a coincidence they happen to all have the subjects of sirens and such, now is it?”

She checked her watch—he’d gotten them here in less than ten minutes.

Werewolf.

Despite the blurriness, she picked out several books and sat opposite to him. She followed his lead and took notes on whatever she deemed important. He had the manners to conjure water into the jug every ten minutes. She dipped her hand in the water to rub her eyes in every few minutes. The seventh time he cast the charm, she looked up and stared at him. Her vision was returning.

“That’s an advanced spell,” She said. He looked up from his parchment and shrugged. “You were barely concentrating on conjuring the charm—and you did it. Several times.”

“Okay…?”

“What year are you really in?” She narrowed her eyes.

He raised a brow, “Hogwarts and Ilvermorny don’t match in curriculum so I’m not really in a year,” He informed her.

Excitement surged through her veins. That was one of the first bits of information she’d gotten properly out of him without any meanness in his voice.

“And your house?” She asked nonchalantly. She was hoping to finally have an answer.

“I was in Wampus house,” He told her cheerfully, with a tone of mocking her.

“What kind of a name is wampus?” She snorted.

He raised a brow, “What kind of a name is Gryffindor?”

“Hey! It’s better than wampus!” She told him. “And if I could have chosen my house, I’d have chosen Slytherin.”

He looked startled, “Really?” She nodded. “Huh.” He returned to his reading.

She waited before asking, “Why the huh?”

He looked back up at her, “Nothing…it’s just, I don’t know. You’re on the Gryffindor team. You earn house points from what I hear. You’re called a Gryffindor at heart. I just thought you really just loved being a Gryffindor—you most certainly are one.”

“Am not!” She exclaimed. “I’m in no way brave!”

Perhaps it was counterproductive to call herself a coward but it was true.

He snorted, “Right, you’re not brave for continuously hanging around a werewolf.”
She gasped, “Did you just admit—”

“a supposed werewolf,” He corrected himself quickly. “That’s not brave. And standing up to anyone you don’t like, including but not limited to the supposed werewolf, that’s not brave either?”

“No,” She told him straight out. “No it’s not.”

“Right, okay,” He nodded. “Gryffindors are rule-breakers, you know.”

“Oh please,” She rolled her eyes. “I don’t break rules.”

“Right, sure you don’t;” he nodded. “Why do you think you belong in Slytherin, then? You don’t seem like the snake type.”

“Because I’m very goal-oriented, I think.” She said.

“She thinks,” He mutters. She glared at him. “Sorry, go on.”

“I want to think I’m ambitious—I mean, I am able to balance schoolwork, being in a play, being on the Quidditch team, and studying ahead,” She told herself more than she told him. “And its working.”

“What is?”

“Being the perfect student.” She thought so, at least.

“So let me get this straight,” He said, leaning his book back onto the table, “You’re an all-around perfect student—you’re on a team, you have extra-curriculurs and you study and have friends and all of that so you can what? Become prefect? Head-girl? Feel fulfilled when you graduate? Then what?” He questioned. “What about some real goals—goals that matter?”

“My goals matter a lot to me, thank you very much.” She snapped. “And I don’t see you having any goals. All you do is lurk around and pluck strands of hair off people’s heads.”

“I managed to be rather fluent in wand making—that was a goal of mine,” he said. She snorted.

“And wand-making is your passion, is it? You going to become a wand maker?” She asked.

He leaned forward, “My goals are practical—they set me up for the future in the real world. All yours do is prove you don’t like having a social life.”

“Oh! As if you should talk about a social life, you have no friends!” She nearly yelled. “You brood and isolate yourself from everyone so don’t tell me I’m the one with no social life.”

“There’s a reason for my not being around other people, Persephone,” He hissed. “And it’s a damn good reason that has probably benefited everyone around me.”

She understood immediately—no, he’d never said he was a werewolf but he certainly wasn’t normal. Was he dangerous like he claimed she could be? They sat in silence, neither speaking. He finally broke the silence. “Look, I’m sorry for saying your goals weren’t practical…I meant to say that they don’t do much but secure your background.”

“My background?” She raised a brow.

“You come from a pure-blooded family, your name is well recognized, your rich, you’re white—”
“My father is Spanish.” She told him through gritted teeth.

“Well, *my* father was a shitty person and my mother was a psychopath. The woman who actually raised me is dead and my family name raises the worst suspicions on me.” He told her rather forcefully. “Not everyone has the privileges you do.”

“Privileges!?” She raised a brow. “Not everyone has been orphaned like I have been. Not everyone has literally had their parents murdered and then had the same man try and murder them only to be murdered instead by god knows what.” She fumed. “Just because we haven’t suffered through the same things doesn’t mean we haven’t suffered.”

He silently stared at her. She stared right back. She thought it was much easier to stare someone down when you couldn’t see them or their eyes. She didn’t dare back down either way.

He gave up first, “Sure you aren’t Ravenclaw?”

She knew a white flag and she would take it when she saw it. She smiled, “That was my second choice. I think Flitwick is disappointed I’m not in his house.”

“You’re definitely his favorite student,” He tapped his finger against the spine of the book. “If we’re done arguing, I’ve got a good list of stuff we should go through.” She waited and he coughed, “From what I’ve read, sirens are closely related to banshees and veelas because originally, sirens were half mortal, half-bird—”

“Bird?” She gasped, suddenly looking down at her legs.

“Several different types of birds—and veelas do transform into partial birds. Veelas and sirens are equal in their whole turning into half something else. Sirens and banshees share the whole voice thing, however sirens sing beautiful to lure people to their deaths and banshees scream to predict death. Close relation to death,” he muttered the latter. “But mostly between veela and sirens—actually in Slavic mythology, veela live in bodies of water and have the power over storms.”

“So sirens and veela have the whole beautiful thing going, banshees and sirens have the voice things—and all three are dangerous and hideous when provoked in their respective manners?” She cut him off.

“Well, no…” He said, flipping through his long parts of parchment, “You’re probably a siren from the Mediterranean—warmer water equate to more beautiful sirens and you’re obviously not a selkie of Scotland or…a Merrow of Ireland.” He flipped to pages in the books and she stared at the ugly fish being.

“Oh,” She said, trying to tame her vain disgust.

“Yeah,” He said, flipping to a different page, “These are selkies. They are the type of merfolk that live in the Black Lake.”

“Hm,” She nodded, looking at them. The image depicted had what looked like green skin—definititly what she had seen in the lake that day. “So…why Mediterranean? The warmest ocean is in fact the Indian, isn’t it?”

“Well you said your father is Spanish?” He said absent-mindedly.

She grew warm in the face. “Look, all I know is that he’s…Spanish. I don’t know from which Spanish country—could be Latin America…or European Spain…really, I have no idea.”
“Well either or, you definitely come from warm waters,” He told her. “Are you familiar with Plato?”

She nodded, “Only a little, though.”

“Well, sirens are mentioned in it so I’ll give you the book by the end of the day.” He said, “Do you know mermish?”

“Mermish?” She raised a brow.

“Native language to merpeople, you familiar with it?” She shook her head. “Hm. Maybe it’s like demigods with Greek—maybe it comes naturally? Maybe there’s some Dylan Marwood somewhere here…”

“Who?” She asked, blinking heavily.


She blinked heavily, yawning, “Right.”

He stopped and looked at her. He looked different now. His hair was a mess and his face was still pale but there was something different about him. She looked him up and down and realized—it was the first time she’d seen him in the uniform. He was wearing the white-button down, no tie.

“How are your eyes?”

“I’m just tired,” She sighed, rubbing her eyes.

He obviously wanted to say something but was looking for the right words. Instead of speaking, he took his camera out.

He snapped a quick picture of her and she blinked. She was a little disoriented.

When he did speak, he spoke with a surprisingly gentle tone, “Look I get how confusing it is to be told all of this and expect to be okay with any of it. Trust me, I’m well aware of how unfair it is… but I wasn’t lying when I said I want to help you.” He said. She met his eye. “And I know it sucks when someone seems to know more about you then you know about them so…I just want you to know that I’m helping you because it sucks being alone in this mess. If you were wondering why I’m helping you…it’s because I don’t want to be alone anymore in this than you do.”

She thought about that for a long moment. They were far beyond the denying of being whatever they were—they were almost friends. It felt unfamiliar, to think of him as a friend. He was so unlike any of her other friends.

“How long have you been alone in what this is?” She asked quietly before immediately realizing that that was rude to ask. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” He leaned into his hair and he looked just as tired as she felt. “I was born the way I am—so it feels longer than it probably is.”

“Will…will you tell me what you are?” She asked after a minute.

And like that, the mood lifted. A cheerful smirk painted his lips, “Probably not today—you’re gonna be late.”
That night, she found a copy of Plato’s Odyssey on her pillow. She didn’t really dwell on how he got up to the girls’ dorm—she mostly dwelled on what his real name was. Nico Di Angelo was certainly not it—so what was it?

She propped the book open and started reading.
Persephone found she spent a whole ton of time in the Room of Requirement, more than she cared to admit. Nico was there half the time but other than that, it was just her.

“I found this place in August,” He told her one late afternoon. “My foster mom brought me to meet Dumbledore for the official school transfer and he let me roam around. I spend full moons here—and since I couldn’t properly brew the Wolfs bane potion since someone destroyed my planting pot—”

“At an accident,” She muttered, knowing he would hear her.

He grumbled, “I just wait it out.”

“You keep mentioning full moons,” She said, sitting up from the couches that appeared a week ago in front of the fire place—maybe because she wanted it to be more like the Gryffindor common room?—and faced him, “But never mention the werewolf part.”

“There is no werewolf part, Seph,” He groaned, not lifting his head from where it had slammed onto the desk about half an hour ago. “It’d be great if you stopped asking about it.”

“I didn’t ask this time,” She said quickly, and he lifted his head to stare at her. “Merely noted. Really. It’s fine if you stopped asking about it.”

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“I didn’t ask this time,” She said quickly, and he lifted his head to stare at her. “Merely noted. Really. It’s fine if you don’t want to say it,” She pulled her robes up from the couch and took herself to the desk. She sat opposite to him, wrapping the robe around her and propping the book open in front of her. “I was just curious as to what will happen during the full moon.”

“We’ve been through this,” He put his head back down, “We steal Filch’s shackles,”

“You said borrow,” She said, raising her brows.

He threw one arm up, “Borrow, we borrow Filch’s shackles, come here and tie ourselves up. The door will lock and we spend the night writhing in pain.” He sent her a sarcastic smile.

She returned a mocking smile, “No thank you—there has to be something better. If I’m a siren, I need water.”

“Actually, not according to Dylan Marwood,” He said into the table. Without looking up, he pulled his bag forward and shifted through it before pulling out a seal envelope, address to Nico Di Angelo at Hogwarts, from Dylan Marwood in New York City.

“You wrote to him?” She gasped, taking the letter from him. “When did this come?”

“This morning—I forgot to mention it, sorry,” He leaned back on his chair and for the first time
she saw him properly.

Her mouth popped open, “Nico you…you look…”

“Breath taking?” He tried to joke, making a delicate gesture with his hands. It dropped halfway through it, as if he were too weak to go through with whatever stupid thing he had tried. “Thank you.”

“Not exactly—you look awful,” She told him. “Are you okay?”

“Fine—it happens with the full-moon so close,” He said, wrapping his arms around his stomach and leaning his head on the table. “Read the letter.”

She read it through and said, “Well, he says I won’t grow a tail unless I’m in my native body of water—which we don’t know—and that to soothe during full moons would to be just to be in a body of water.” She looked up, “Soothe?”

“What happened during the first full moon?” He asked. She thought back and grimaced. “Okay it was bad. We’ll get you into the lake before…”

She zoned out as she read the rest to herself, should a mermaid of any subcategory sing any time close to the fullest moon, it would be great trouble for any listening. Young mermaids do not have as high a chance to lure people to their deaths, unless they’ve gone through a full moon in the water. Water heightens the dangers severely.

She cleared, folding the letter back up and placing it in her textbook. “So I swim beforehand, let the steam off and we come back for the full moon. What are we supposed to do all night?”

“I stay shackled and you hope I don’t get loose and kill you,” He said, now holding his head.

She made a face, “Can’t it be better with a siren there? I mean, why don’t I use my voice to, I don’t know, lull you to sleep?” She suggested.

He looked up, “Lull me to sleep’? Really?”

She shrugged, “Could work,” She bit her lip, “Did you read through this entire thing or can I keep it?”

“I barely read the first part—my head’s killing me.” He groaned. “Do what you want with it.”

She was quick to shove the book and letter into her book bag. Normally, she would act more nonchalant about it because Nico was the most observant and suspicious person she’d ever met and something as small as her shoving her things in her bag would make him suspicious.

“I’m starving,” She said. “Rehearsals are in ten minutes. You think we can make it to the kitchens beforehand?”

“Not going,” He grumbled.

She stopped walking and turned to find him still sat, looking like he was half-dead at the table. “Why?”

“Dying, Potter. I’m dying.” He told her. “Go on.”

She checked her watch, “Maybe I can help you to the hospital wing?”
“You’ll be late and I’ll be fine, now go away,” He didn’t glance at her but only secured an arm around his head.

She bit her lip and started walking. Nico had survived this long without her—he would survive a night.

Rehearsals dragged on—she bumped into Quirrell and Snape, which earned her a stammering apology and dark look from them respectively. She still had no idea what either of them did there but she had thoroughly been able to ignore them. She found her regular spot with Cedric and Susan, the former studying lines and the latter re-braiding her hair. Cedric gave her a wave while she and Susan gave each other kisses on the cheek. She loved Susan and all her formal greetings.

She couldn’t help thinking about what the letter had said about her voice and what would happen to it after she were in the water. A full moon through the water—didn’t specify what water. Any natural body of water or her origin water? Nico was sure of her being a warm watered mermaid—Indian or Mediterranean then. She’d never been in either—so it should be fine.

She tried to convince herself of this anyway because if she weren’t right…she’d have to quit the musical.

Worst of all—the musical was in two full moons. Three days before Christmas Eve.

The full moon was in three days. This is what was on her mind.

“What are you doing?” Hermione asked when Persephone returned to their dorm. She hadn’t been doing anything so she froze and stared at Hermione. “Your legs!”

Persephone looked down at her legs. She’d taken her socks off and her tights off so she was only wearing her skirt and her legs were bare. She saw immediately what Hermione meant. Up along both legs was what looked like a rash growing.

“Oh!” She winced. “Yikes. Not good.”

She walked to her bed and examined her legs. “You should go see Madame Pomfrey about this.” Hermione said, coming and sitting next to her.

“No, I—I’ll be fine.” She winced, touching her knees. How had she not noticed this? Hermione pursed her lips, looking at Persephone. She glanced from her legs to her face, obviously wanting to say something. “What?”

“It’s just…you’ve been acting weird,” She said. “I mean, that day in Potions with your weird eyes and catatonic episode—”

“It was barely an episode,” She countered.

“Yeah and now you’ve got more rash than leg!” She gestured to her legs. “What’s going on?”

She pursed her lips, “I swam in the lake on a dare. I didn’t know that a section of the water is very anti-witch—it’s just lake water.”

“Why didn’t you just say that? Who dared you?” Hermione asked and Persephone had to hold in her sigh of relief.

“It’s embarrassing—stupid Pansy Parkinson got to me in front of everyone. I thought for sure they would steal my clothes or something—this is definitely worse.” She crossed her arms. “God I hate
“You should still go to the hospital wing.” She said. “Isn’t it painful?”

“If I don’t touch it,” She told her. She admired Hermione’s concern but if Hermione paid her any more attention, she could figure out her fishy problem and that wasn’t something she wanted.

It was hard to resist the temptation to scratch her skin right off but she had to—it would hurt more if she did. She wore thick tights and then pants over the tights to keep herself from scratching the next few days but it didn’t work—while she and Ron were in the library, listening to Hermione say something about whatever she was on about now, she tore her tights.

And she hadn’t even realized she’d been scratching.

“Ugh, I need a shower,” She grumbled, collecting her things. “I’ll see you later.”

She felt like her legs were being stabbed by miniature little knives every two seconds—it made it impossible to walk. She would be glad to get this stupid full moon business over and done with.

Someone caught up with her in the corridor, “Oi!”

She was thrown onto someone shoulder and there was a chorus of laughter as she screeched in surprise, “George! Put me down!” She screeched.

“Nice to see you too, Lils!” He said, twisting her in his arms and then finally setting her on her feet. She glared up at him and then to his twin and then to Nico, who seemed to hang around them a lot.

“Always a cheer to see your pretty face!”

“Dude,” Nico slapped him in the chest. “She’s eleven.”

She rolled her eyes and George laughed, “She is the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen, nonetheless,” He said. “You have to agree.”

“Feeling alright, Lils?” Fred asked as she twitched, her legs becoming a certain bane of her existence.

She nodded, “Just itchy,” She emphasized the word and Nico seemed to catch on. “You?”

“Planning on making it snow,” George said with a mischievous grin.

“In the Great Hall tonight,” Fred finished.

“Cole’s been helping us out, eh, Cole?” George thumped ‘Cole’ on the back.

“Cole has, has he?” She raised her brows, biting a smile back. “Hm, how nice of ‘Cole’ to do so.”

He glared a heavy glare at her and she smiled widely at him, “Glad to get the Christmas spirits up and running early. Won’t you sing us a few carols?”

“Har, har,” She snarled. “Can we talk a minute?”

“Ouuhu,” Fred and George both made kissy sounds and Nico shoved them.

“What’s up?”

She pulled him back and let the twins tease them from a distance, “How long until I can jump into
the lake because I am dying,” She whined up at him. “Do you think we can skip dinner and just grab something from the kitchens instead?”

He thought for a moment and then grinned a strange smile, “Way ahead of you.”

She watched him tell the twins something and they rolled their eyes, but trotted off with a wave to Persephone. She waved back impatiently.

“You can walk?” He asked.

She made a dark noise, “I’ve made it this far, haven’t I?”

“Then to the Lake we head.”

She was starting to feel a headache come on and it was harder to resist her violent emotions. Considering it was past curfew hours, the corridors were rather empty and she was good and relieved about this. Nico followed her along as she suddenly was a compass and north was the water. She navigated them down into the dungeons and up a set of winding stairs that led them into the boathouse by the lake.

Without a second thought, the young witch abandoned her cloak and shoes and threw herself into the water.

Her body responded immediately and heavenly to the water—her itching was gone, the headache that had started was well off and she felt completely tranquil and at ease. She free her hair from its braid and let it swirl around her in white masses.

“Nice,” Nico felt dripping as he waved his arms down to fling the water off him. He watched Persephone surface back up and she stared at him, eyes up. “Your hair’s white. Interesting.”

Persephone watched him bring out a pen and pad of parchment and he scribbled down something. “Your eyes are the same as they were when you couldn’t see—how’s your vision now?”

She smiled a slow smile, “Perfect,” She drawled.

It was true—her eyesight had never been better. She could see everything in perfect HD definition—better than when she wore her glasses. When she looked up, she could make out the constellations in the sky. She squealed—god she felt amazing!

“Hair, eyes,” Nico whispered from the dock. He sat himself by the end, scribbling on his paper. She swam closer to the dock so she was directly below him. “Are you at all affected by the water?”

“He shot her a strange look but scribbled another few words down.

“There’s never been, not ever before,” He sang mockingly under his breath, “A child born of sea and shore.”

“Oh don’t bring on the Disney songs just yet,” She laughed, lifting herself up by her arms. “What are you writing?”

He leaned away, “Uh, you’re all wet.”

She huffed but leaned down and crossed her arms on the edge of the dock to lay her head on and gaze up at him, “Tell me?”
“Just some observations,” He told her. She frowned. He sighed, “About you? To help you in the future?”

“Oh,” She nodded. An idea formed in her head as she stared up at the sky and the stars. “Wanna…” She grabbed his ankle, “Come for a swim with me?”

She yanked ever dearly and he caught himself at the edge. A mean growl caught at the end of her throat and she yanked harder, “I have no interest in being drowned, so no,” He said, slipping from her hold and scurrying up. “Jeez, you’ve got claws.”

“Oh come for a swim.” She smiled up at him, her silvery hair drifting around her. “The water’s ever so warm!”

“You know what?” He tried to humor her. “I believe I left my swimming trunks back in the castle. Would you join me in retrieving them?”

She pouted for half a second but didn’t want to lose prey so she pulled herself out of the waters, and stood.

As soon as she was out of the water, she snapped into reality. She immediately started shivering and she snapped down to pick her robes up and throw them over her. She tossed her hair over the robes as for it not to touch her—and, “Woah! My hair!”

“You didn’t realize?” Nico questioned from a considerable distance away.

“I didn’t notice,” She muttered, examining her silver hair. It was pretty—it glowed like the moon. The moon. Right! “We should head back inside before the moon comes out.”

“Moon won’t be out for a few hours,” He said, staring at her warily. She blinked. “You don’t want to drown me?”

“It was just a joke!” She didn’t know what possessed her to try and pull him in.

“It wasn’t a joke then,” He noted. “I’m a boy and you are a siren—I guess it’s only natural you’d wanna drown me.”

“I didn’t!” She argued.

Back in the Room of Requirement, Persephone was sat in front of the fireplace with a heavy blanket over her shoulders and her hair over her blanket, red and curly again.

“Are you still dying of hypothermia or…?” Nico asked from the desk. He was staring out the window anxiously and periodicially checking on her and his watch.

“Not really,” She sniffed. “So…what does happen to you? During the full moon, I mean?”

He glanced at her with a dark, sardonic look, “I turn into the abominable snowman.” She narrowed her eyes, giving him a look. He rolled his eyes, “Usually? I don’t know because I don’t remember. Violence isn’t completely off but I don’t wolf out if that’s what you’re asking. Not completely—fangs are a thing, I think, claws are optional. Other than that…” He shrugged.

“You…you don’t know?” she gasped.

“In my defense,” He said, “The moon was full and I was left unsupervised.”

She snorted, “Right, okay—so I’m the first person you’ve spent a full moon with.” He shrugged
and then nodded, still looking outside. “I feel honored.” She yawned.

“Tired?” He was suddenly sat at the couch, staring at her with brilliant golden eyes. She jumped up and yelped.

“Mate! Give a girl a warning?”

“Right, sorry.” He looked down to his arms and then he was gone. He was back before she could blink and she took a step backwards at what she saw in his hands. “I’ll help you put the shackles on.”

“You’re sure?” She asked. “What... I mean, what if something bad happens?”

He shrugged, “We both die?”

She blanked and he grinned, “Kidding.”

“No you aren’t,” She accused.

He paused, “No I’m not.”

Her shackles were connected to the metal tongs sticking near the fireplace while his were by the window. She winced at how tight they were and pulled a tad—it was painful to her.

“Full moon is out in an hour,” He said, staring out the window. She stared at him before it properly hit her. She was locked in a tower with a werewolf. The door would not open until sunrise. No one knew where she was or who she was with.

Fred and George! Oh the twins were the last to see her alive! Would they report on their friend? She didn’t think so—after all, did they really like her? She was only their little brother’s best friend —“They’re making a Percy Jackson movie, have you heard?”

She snapped her head to him, staring him down, “What?”

“They’re making a Percy Jackson movie, it’s coming out in February.” He told her without looking at her. “February twelfth I think.”

She didn’t really register what he was saying as something inside her chest was making it harder to breath, “Okay.”

Suddenly, he writhed against the chains and sucking in air as if he were in pain. “Agh! God, holy moly of god!” He hissed. “Okay—so your name is Persephone. What’s up with that?”

“There’s a flower theme in my mother’s family—my aunt’s name is Petunia. My mother’s name is Lily,” She told him. She was relatively calm but there was a strange feeling of cold which was strange as she was sat right by the fireplace.

“Is that why you go by Lily?” He suddenly winced. “Because of your mom?”

“Mhm!” She jumped at the coldness around her. Why was it so cold? “My middle name’s Lilith—demon mother. I think I have a hell theme with my name.”

“No kidding,” He gasped. He lolled his head to the side to look at her. “I do too.”

“Nico Di Angelo.” She echoed.
He almost smiled, “My name is Hades Inferno Black actually.”

She blanked, “You’re not serious are you—AGH!” She suddenly gasped at the coolness striking her legs numb. “Aaaaaah! Oh my…oh god, oh god—” She started to want to seriously want to die. She understood the need to be in the water. The cold was unbearable!

“You read the book yet?” Nico—Hades?—gasped.

She nodded, “I don’t think I was paying enough attention the first time—I need to read it again probably,” She hissed. “Does it usually hurt this much oH MY GOD!” She cried. “Oh my god,” She squeaked.

“That’s cool—let me know when you’re done, I have a list of books you’d be interested in,” He said.

“Mhm…” She nodded, closing her eyes. “Have you heard of Nicolas Flamel?”

“Famous alchemist, worked with Dumbledore on the—” She cut him off with a shrill scream.

“My legs!” She writhed against the shackles, grasping them with her sudden claws.

“You miscalculated,” Was her first words of the morning.

She was exhausted. The fire had died out and her arms were exhausted from being held by shackles. She thought the blood had probably been half cut off from circulation. Bruises were forming on her wrists and she had unbelievably bad back pain. She was covered in sweat despite it being cool in the room and she desperately wanted to shower.

“Hm?” Nico looked just as bad as she felt.

“The moon came out early.”

“We survived,” He pointed out. He was paler than usual, clammy and looking terribly ill. There were dark bags under his eyes and his bruising was more prominent. There was scars over his body more so his arms than anywhere else. “Survived your first full moon, Potter.”

“Barely,” She moved her numb legs, afraid of triggering the pain that the legs hosted through the night. She was relieved to find it was just soreness. She pulled herself up and tried to stretch her stiff limbs out as best as she could while shackled. “Could you…?”

“On it,” He was gradually undoing his shackles and then he blew air towards her, as if he were whispering. The shackles undid themselves and released her. She looked surprised for a moment as she rubbed her wrists. “Magic.”

“God now I know why you’re so annoying,” She stretched out on the floor. “You go through hell and back every month.”

“Don’t all girls?” He muttered in a joking manner. Or attempted joking manner. His voice was hoarse.

“Funny.”

They sat in silence, each trying to find the strength to stand. When they did, they didn’t say anything. Persephone headed off to the Gryffindor tower and Nico headed off to wherever he went.
She died halfway up the stairs to her dorm. However, once she showered and had the water hit her, she felt good enough to dress for the day. But then she was all dry and she felt terrible.

She sat at the Gryffindor table, her chin in her palm and her book open in front of her. Her other hand was halfway to her mouth with a spoon of hot oatmeal but she was yawning and her eye closed for half a second and then Hermione was shaking her awake, “We’re going to be late!”

It was like everyone knew something was up with her. People stared at her and whispered in the hall. It was like the first day of classes all over again except she wasn’t fueled by energy and excitement but by sheer sleep deprivation and not wanting to get a detention by falling asleep in class.

When she saw Nico again, she had an epiphany.

“Holy god,” She said when she saw him on sight. “Hades Inferno Black!”

“Shh!” He hissed. “Are you trying to out me?”

“Your name is—”

“Terribly hell theme, much like yours,” He reminded her. She crossed her arms, biting back her first smile of the few days.

“You call me Persephone, can I call you—” She dropped the subject in case for her laughter and he stared off, blank face.

“Nice, real nice, thanks Potter,” He nodded. He looked at her and his ill-stricken face finally lifted as he too tried to bite back a smile.

She dropped her bag on the table backstage, so not in the mood for being snapped at and for being told Pansy Parkinson was better than her at something sirens were known for. Her book fell out and she reached quickly to grab it. She didn’t notice a letter slide out of the book she’d dropped as she’d turned around too quickly.

“Uuh, Seph?” Nico said—Hades said? “Is it an accident that you didn’t tell me that singing after a first full moon could have fatal consequences?”

She froze as she flipped through her script. Oh gods…She turned around slowly, and cleared her throat, “Yes?”

“Right,” He nodded, not believing her. “So you’re here to go tell Flitwick you’re quitting, right?”

“Quitting?” She snorted, “Why would I quit. The letter says,” She made a grab for it but he held it out of her reach.

“I read the letter—I know what it says,” He said.

“No it didn’t,” He said.

“Yes it did—”

He flipped the paper, “I’m holding the letter in my hand, Persephone, I’m well aware of what it says.”
She crossed her arms, “Well, I’ve never grown a tail so it doesn’t matter!” She exclaimed and then looked around.

Nico did too, “Announce it a little louder, why don’t you?” He looked back down to her. “And you don’t know that so why not call it safe and quit now?”

“You don’t know that any more than I do!” She exclaimed. “And I’m not doing that!” She shouldn’t have gotten so mad but then again he shouldn’t have tried telling her what to do.

She ignored him through the duration of the rehearsal, which mainly was running through lines and placements. Her only troubles were with one stupid line that she simply couldn’t get right—it wasn’t even a hard line! It was just one word she messed up over and over again!

“I’m starving,” She complained to Cedric while they were on break while Flitwick talked to the stage manager about the background lights.

Almost on instinct, he reached into his bag and pulled out a wrapped pastry. He handed it to her without taking his eyes off the stage production. When she stared in surprise, he looked at her and smiled, “You can have it. I’m actually feeling a little nauseous.”

She took it, surprised at his generosity and waited for him to snatch it from her. She felt wrong eating it, almost guilty, which made no sense being as he offered it to her. She shouldn’t have said anything about being hungry. How long had it been since she’d eaten? Since…lunch? She’d gone longer than a few hours without food—she shouldn’t have said anything.

He walked off towards his Hufflepuff friend and she stared at the pastry. Gently, she rewrapped it and placed it in his bag.

Later, when she had made it to the Gryffindor common room, she felt ready to collapse. The twins were by the fire, discussing what looked like something very serious. When George spotted her, he nodded to her and tossed something over to her.

“Hungry?”

It was a sandwich. She nodded, grateful, and unwrapped the food. She sat on the one-cushioned chair by them, her legs by George’s shoulder. “What are you guys doing up?”

George and Fred seemed to share a look and Fred nodded, “You think it’s time?”

Persephone furrowed her brows, “Time…”?

“I’m not sure she’s ready,” George said most seriously, which was strange to hear from George. “She’s ill prepared.”

“Wait, what are you talking about?” Persephone asked, her curiosity peaked. “What am I not prepared for? I’m prepared!”

They stared at each other for a long time and shook their heads. Then they looked to her, “Prepared for what?”

“Goodnight Persephone!” They cheered at the same time, getting up and ruffling her hair.

She watched them go, unable to say anything but, “What the hell?”

She took a bite of her sandwich and got up, trying to make sense of what just occurred. When she
walked into her dorm, she was surprised to find every girl inside awake and talking excitedly.

Lavender ran to her, “We’re staying up all night—”

“But it’s only Monday!” Persephone said in surprise. “We’ve got class!”

“Who cares?! Renee’s birthday is tomorrow, at exactly eleven am, and we are staying up!” Parvati exclaimed.

“It is?” Persephone looked to Renee. “Oh my gosh, I had no idea! I’m sorry!”

“I don’t tell many people but I wanted to have a slumber gathering with some friends—thank god, we thought you were McGonagall or one of the prefects,” She giggled, turning towards the shared bathroom of the dorm. “Girls, it’s all clear!”

To Persephone’s surprise, Daphne Greengrass, Tracey Davis, Pansy Parkinson (EW) and several older girls, one she knew to be Blaise Zabini’s older sister.

“Good thing, I was not in the mood for that old witch,” Pansy sighed, flopping down on Persephone bed. “Hi there, Lily.” She smirked with her pignose.

Persephone maintained her composure as Renee introduced all the girls to Persephone and then Persephone realized they were all pure-blooded girls. She saw the way the older girls, including Renee’s older sister, sized Persephone up.

“Well, change into your nightie, Persephone and join in our games—we were just about to play a game of Secrets and Sins,” Mindi Vander Woodsen said.

Persephone edged to her bed, staring at Pansy who hadn’t gotten up. She raised a brow and Pansy stared right back before giggling, “Oh dear, is this your bed?” When Persephone nodded, she shrugged, “I won’t look. Go on, don’t be shy.”

Flushing harshly, Persephone grabbed her clean clothes and made for the bathroom. She stared herself in the mirror when she dressed in her Muggle pajamas. The other girls, save for Hermione and Amanda, were dressed in frills and silks and laces that looked old-fashioned. She decided against braiding her hair, instead of concentrating and making them look pretty.

She exited the bathroom and found all the girls piled on Lavender and Renee’s bed. Hermione, who looked uncomfortable for being forced to be there, pleaded with Persephone through her eyes.

Persephone took the seat in between Lavender and Hermione.

“Here you are,” Mindi passed her a bottle of something that looked rather golden. “A specialty from Hogsmeaded—you won’t go there until third year so count yourself lucky. It’s butterbeer.”

Persephone took the bottle and sniffed—it smelt very sweetly and tempting but the word beer in the title chased her temptation away. She was in no way interested or legally allowed to drink alcohol. Hermione watched her with a raised brow as she lowered the bottle before she sighed in relief.

“Oh, at least try it!” Mindi urged. “There’s no fun in rejecting to even try things.”

“Er, I’d rather not—”

“Oh come on!” Sophia, another older girl, said. “It’s rude to reject free beverages, you know.”
With everyone staring at her, she decided to put inhibitions away. She twisted the cap and found it was already open—that was weird. She allowed the drink to touch her tongue and found it was much too sweet for her. When she lowered the drink without having drunk any of it, the girls cheered.

“There we go,” Mindi smirked. “You ought to finish it quickly before it gets warm.”

“Okay, let’s start already!” Lavender squealed.

Hermione came close, “Did you actually drink any of it?”

“Just a little—it tastes horrible.” She whispered back. Hermione nodded in agreement.

“Now, Secrets and Sins is simple—its in the title,” She smiled. “We go around the circle, telling our deepest and darkest secrets or we can instead choose to commit a sin—or just a dare.”

Hermione and Persephone shared a look. It was just truth or dare?

“Birthday girl chooses who goes first,” Renee exclaimed, “Persephone?”

She was so not choosing dare—er, sin, so she said, “Secret,”

“Divulge us in that boy you always seem to be hanging around.” Her older sister spoke before she could.

Persephone raised a brow, “Which boy?”

“Oh!” The girls giggled, save for Hermione and Amanda, the latter rolling her eyes. “More than one!”

“The weird one, the one with dark hair—the American,” Tracey filled in the blanks for Persephone.

“Oh,” She flushed, “We’re barely friends…he’s tutoring me.”

“Tutoring you?” Pansy suddenly asked. “In what?”

Persephone thought quickly on her feet, “Alchemy.”

“Alchemy? Why on earth would you want to learn alchemy?” Mindi asked, scolding. “It’s barely a moving subject, much less taught at any school in Europe.”

“Actually, it’s taught in American schools,” Amanda piped up. “I read about it.”

“Hm,” Mindi narrowed her eyes at Persephone, who pretended to take a sip from her bottle. “What about the Weasley twins?”

“What about them?”

She huffed, “They’re third years and they seem to love being around you—what did you do? Give them a love potion?”

“You think I drugged them into wanting to be around me?” Persephone gaped before laughing, “That’s ridiculous!”

She suddenly knew better than to sip her drink—drugging people with potions seemed a subtle
poison. Who said Mindi wasn’t trying to drug her into dishing all about her non-existant boyfriends? The word in her mind made her recoil in disgust—ew.

“Well, I for one am jealous,” Daphne said, staring dreamily up at the ceiling. “You’ve got boys just about eating out of your hand—and older boys!” She sighed. “I’ve got to wait until I find a nice pureblooded boy…otherwise my parents will freak out.”

“Oh, Oliver Wood is so much cuter than those Weasley twins!” Renee supplemented. “I don’t know how you stay on your broom anywhere near him, Lily! I would swoon so hard that I’d fall right out of the air.”

Pansy smirked. “She nearly did last game,” Pansy said, “Distracted, were we?”

“Not because of Oliver—” She frowned. “And besides, I don’t fancy anyone.”

The girls exchanged looks. “Oh, not even…Cedric Diggory?” Sophia asked. “You two seem chummy.”

“Not really…we just happen to be in the same places sometimes—”

Pansy laughed a high pitch laugh. “That’s not what I see when you two are in rehearsal…” Pansy chipped in, “Always around him, hanging on his every word. I’m sure I’ve seen you blush at least ten times while around him.”

“Aaaawww!” The girls all harmonized. “Lily’s got a crush!”

“No I haven’t!” She squeaked. “We’re just friends!”

“Leave her alone!” Amanda said. “She says she isn’t, then she isn’t!”

“Oh, what would you know about boys?” Renee rolled her eyes, “You’re barely a girl you’re practically a boy!”

Amanda flushed red and stood suddenly, saying two words that McGonagall would definitely take fifty points from Gryffindor for, before stomping away into the bathroom, and slamming the door.

Persephone, who had slid off the bed to sit between Hermione’s legs instead for extra leg room, looked up at Hermione in surprise. Hermione looked down and shrugged at her.

“Oh, poor girl…” Daphne bit her lip, staring after her.

“Don’t feel sorry for her,” Renee said. “She’s barely a girl—always hanging around Dean and Seamus, she thinks she’s too good for us.” She turned to Lavender, “And speaking of Dean, Lavender…do dish.”

Lavender turned a bright color.

Persephone slipped away, walking quietly to the bathroom. She grabbed a blanket and a pillow and a bowl of candy on the way, knowing this wouldn’t be easy. There was no lock, for safety reasons, and so she knocked gently.

“Oh lord, here goes Lily,” Mindi rolled her eyes. Persephone ignored her and opened the door and slipped inside.

“Amanda?” She said, finding the bathroom empty at first. The Gryffindor girl’s dorm bathroom was simple—showers, sinks, mirrors and toilets. Every week, Audrey the prefect came to inspect
their bathrooms were clean and usually they were, thanks to Hermione’s insistence that they keep a clean space.

“Lily?” She heard a sniffing coming from the very corner of the long room, the one part of the bathroom she couldn’t see—the showers.

“Are you planning on drowning in there?” Persephone tried joking. “Because I’m not sure I know CPR.”

She didn’t get an answer but instead she heard the curtain rip close. Persephone pursed her lips and walked towards her stall. She slid the blanket and pillow under the curtain, knowing well from her usual crying session that the floor wasn’t comfortable. She heard more sniffing.

“I brought snacks?” Persephone offered.

There was a moment of silence and then the curtains opened.

Persephone and Amanda had to shift a lot but ended up being able to huddled in the corner with their sole pillow and blanket, munching on snacks. Persephone let Amanda cry for a long few minutes, nestled onto her shoulder. She didn’t know what to say but she simply kept to her side. If she wanted to talk, Persephone would listen.

“I’m sorry,” She cried a few more minutes later.

“Don’t be,” Persephone told her. “You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“I’m—I’m sorry you’re here and not there…I know you’d rather be with the, the others girls,” She blubbered, more tears falling from her eyes. “You can…can go,” Her breathing grew unsteady.

“I’m here because I want to be,” She told her without moving. “And it’s okay to cry.”

A long moment of more tears before Persephone said, “What Renee said was mean.”

“But it wasn’t!” She cried, “She was right…” She sobbed.

Persephone wasn’t sure of what she meant but she stroked her hair, keeping the bowl of candy from tipping over.

At some point, Amanda grabbed a piece of candy and Persephone dared to ask, “Are you feeling better?”

She chewed the candy, and then spoke, “She’s right.”

“Who is?” Persephone asked, confused.

Amanda sighed, looking absolutely exhausted, “Renee.”

‘Renee?’ Persephone mouthed to herself. What had she said? Something about not knowing about boys. And then she had said something about being barely a girl and Persephone understood. “Listen, girls are allowed to be friends with boys. There’s no rules—people who think with gender norms instead of reality are idiots.”

“What?” Amanda sniffed, eating another piece of candy.

Persephone huffed, “There are too many stereotypes surrounding girls. Some girls hate skirts and dresses and that’s fine. Some girls like being friends with boys and that’s fine too. It’s fine either
way—other girls bullying girls for that is not fine. Girls should support girls—"

“But that’s the thing!” Amanda cut her off. “I’m not…not a…”

Persephone waited, not sure what Amanda meant. She raised a brow and Amanda took a big breath, “I’m not a girl.”

Persephone blinked, letting that register with her. Then she was even more confused. “Oh.”

“I’m not a girl,” Amanda said, more steadily.

“You’re not…a girl…” Persephone repeated. She suddenly looked at her, very, very confused. She looked like a girl—a very pretty girl at that. She had the long hair, the voice…she even had…well, *boobs*. How could she not be a girl? “I don’t think I understand.”

Amanda said, “I don’t feel like a girl.”

“So you feel…like a boy?” She raised a brow. Amanda shrugged, looking down. “But…how’s that possible?”

“I don’t know,” Amanda said, her voice laced with misery. “I just…I don’t know.”

Persephone shook her head, “I…Is it possible you just don’t…I don’t know, you’re just a tomboy? That you don’t like things that are usually feminine?”

“Yes! I mean, no! I’m not—I’m not a girl, Lily,” She said, suddenly more angry than sad. “I thought you would understand! You’re always so supportive of girls—here I was thinking you could help me…”

“Wait!”

“You said what?” Nico—Hades exclaimed, stopping their walk. She was explaining the conversation to him and his sudden outburst made her look at him in surprise. “Say that again?”

“I asked her if she just didn’t like normally girlish things—what!?” She cried at him. He was now rubbing his eyes.

“You—you idiot!” He exclaimed. “Why would you say that?”

She sputtered, “Because—because I thought,” She looked for words but was unable to find them. He laced his hands together in front of his eyes, “You clearly didn’t think—a girl feels like a boy and you ask her if she’s just a tomboy? What the hell is the matter with you?”

She felt shame now instead of anger at his choice of words and she looked down, “I just…”

“A girl came to you for support and you reacted with ignorance and brushing off her feelings. From the sound of it, she sounded like she was reaching out for help. She’s unsure, you should have told her that you understand her confusion and that you support her, not berate her and degrade her with questions and ignorance!” He waved his hands. “God sometimes I think you’re so mature and then—”

“I didn’t know, okay?” She snapped, blinking away the sting in her eyes. She felt horrible. “I didn’t know how to react!”

“Yes you do!” He said. “You support girls, don’t you? You’re all about feminism and supporting
girls and understanding each other and love and all that—if a girl came to you and told you she’s confused, you would have comforted her. This girl came to you and you were also confused, you drop the support? Seriously? Even if you don’t know, you can’t make her feel like shit because you don’t understand the problem and that’s obviously how you made her feel!”

“I…I…” She was at a loss of words because he was right. Now looking at it, she had made her feel worse with her ignorance. “Oh my gods.” He waited, crossing his arms. “I don’t know how to support her with this. I don’t know anything about this…her feelings…”

His face softened an inch, “You can support her by being there for her,” His voice had softened too. “You can support her by offering to help her talk through it, or by accepting her and her feelings. You can support her, first off, by apologizing.”

“She didn’t look at me at all this morning,” Persephone mumbled, crossing her arms and inching into herself.

Hades pursed his lips, “I…I think it could help to know the word—transgender. It means when someone is born into a body that they feel is the wrong gender. It might be that or it might be something else—don’t overwhelm her with terms. Non-binary means not feeling association to any gender.”

“You say any gender as if there are more than…” She faltered. “Oh. Okay.” She nodded. “Acceptance. Support. I need to apologize to her.”

“Well, go on,” He said, gesturing the other direction of the hall. She was down the other side of the hall when she realized she had rehearsals. “Nice try,” She said as she turned but he was gone. She rolled her eyes. Still mad that she wouldn’t quit.

She thought about the conversation for a long moment as she walked to rehearsals—she wasn’t surprised. He seemed very accepting of everything and everyone—he was accepting of her being a siren, at least. The only thing he’d ever had a problem with, a serious problem with, was with older boys having a crush on a younger girls. She’d talked to him about the punching boys rumor and he’d told her not to flatter herself and that he wasn’t only interested in hospitalizing boys that had crushes on her.

She was starting to think about the night before, about having crushes on older boys and about how Hades was against older boys crushing on girls…or just about him and crushes…when she walked into a crowd of people.

“What’s going on?” She asked the group she recognized as the theatre club.

Cedric answered her, “Someone completely trashed our production.”

Chapter End Notes

As you may have noticed, Persephone's doesn't say say much on her full moon experience. I imagine that, unlike werewolves, sirens don't retain their memory unless going through legs-to-tail transformation. All she remembers is that it was very, very painful. That's why she won't remember a very important piece of information that Hades--Nico--gives her.
And someone in the comments (Atousa) said something about Hades names should be Pluto since the Black Family loves names taken from astrology. As this makes a lot of sense, there is a reason that he goes by Hades instead of Pluto which will be revealed later on.

Hope you all enjoyed! Leave a suggestion in the comments :)

Christmas

Chapter Notes

Super, suuuper long chapter, I know. I was wondering what you guys thought of my slight AU with the whole sirens and Nico thing. Also what house does Nico belong to? I'm having trouble placing him...enjoy!

Gradually, November chilled into December and quickly enough Christmas was coming.

Despite spending all her time in the library, she was hyperaware of the shortening of the days. Snow fell steadily throughout the end of November, but it wasn’t cold enough for it to stick. It was only in early December that snow had finally stuck to the ground at several feet. The twins were punished for bewitching several snowballs so that they would follow Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban. Owls that bested the snow storms were nursed back to health by Hagrid before they could fly again. With the snow storm came a frozen lake, allowing for skating lessons and for Persephone’s sudden panic.

She hadn’t spoken to Nico—Hades?—since she’d found out about the trashing of the play production. It was an obvious crime—he hadn’t wanted her to perform so he trashed it. What really sealed the deal? The amount of hexes and jinxes placed on the entire room. Should anyone stay in there too long, their vision would become blurry and their voices would dissipate with an awful flu. It wasn’t terrible dark magic but if anyone was capable of dark magic, it was him. She glared at him when she caught his eye when she was with Cedric and a few other Hufflepuffs. He was walking over, waving to her but when he’d seen her glare, he stopped. He did well in avoiding her from then on. She wasn’t sure she wouldn’t smack him for his crimes.

But worse—the full moon would be three days after Christmas. She wasn’t all too sure how to go about it alone but she planned on finding a way into the lake and escape to the room of requirement. If he were there—than she would allow for herself to kill him and blame the moon.

Okay, well no. She wouldn’t. But she’d like to.

She was now spending all her free time in the library now that she had no rehearsals to get to. Flitwick was visibly glum and depressed and no matter how many of his theatre students sent him gift baskets, he would no cheer up. She was hoping with the approaching holidays, some happiness would come about. Hermione and Ron joined her in the library most times, in search of Flamel. Usually, however, Persephone got distracted and accidently got into reading something with no correlation to Flamel.

She read and read, barely noticing the natural light become scarce and the torches and candle lit lamps being their only source of light. She would have to repack her trunk, so she would instinctively turn to her winter clothing rather than summer. Her shoes were switched to her classy, lace up boots and she wouldn’t resist when Susan told her that they should go outside.

The Weasley twins were back in the action of it and quickly declared snow war on the other students in the lawns who were enjoying the fresh snow. They quickly found Persephone while Susan ran for Hannah, as it seemed that the teams were separated by house. Persephone had to remove her mittens to make snowballs as the Weasley twins started digging, creating a little nook
for them to take cover in as the Slytherin started firing at the Ravenclaws. Several older Gryffindor came to their assistance, taking cover and massacring more of the Slytherins than any other house.

It came to a point where the remaining Hufflepuffs made an alliance with the Slytherins and were at equal numbers to the Gryffindors. Both sides were waiting for the other to make a move while Fred and George were arguing silently on which twin would be the bait. Finally having had enough of it, Persephone pushed Fred out.

“Duck!” Persephone screamed as Fred was too distracted by giving her a look of betrayal. He ducked just in time and George popped up,

“Oi! That’s my brother!” Before launching three balls at once, hitting two second year girls. Fred remained flat against the ground, crawling, until he was hit.

“Avenge me!” He cried dramatically.

“With my last, dying breath!” Persephone cried in just a theatrical voice as he did before standing to chuck a snowball that landed over their protective wall.

Now having stood, she saw a clear point of the lake. Something small was sliding on it. She squinted, moving to the side to see before suddenly, George tackled her to the floor as several snowballs passed over their shelter.

“They are all bent out of shape to be the one to take out the Girl Who Lived!” He hissed at her and she rolled her eyes before she had an idea. “What? What’s that look?”

She explained the plan and he nodded, an exciting look in his eye, “I’m so glad you’re in our lives, you brilliant girl!” He told her before whispering the plans to the Gryffindors and several Ravenclaws who had joined their side.

A Gryffindor was ready to propel himself out, to run to the side and have all the attention of the opposite side on him while several Gryffindors and Ravenclaws would crouch and run right up against the opposite team’s wall. They would wait until they got the signal from their home side that all the opposite side had gone back under and then they would push the wall of snow onto them, besting them and winning.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, Persephone’s plan worked out perfectly—nearly—and the Gryffindor claimed victory over the Slytherins. Susan rejoined Persephone, looking rosy from the cold and huffed at the perfect sight of Persephone, “You haven’t got a runny nose, not a hair out of place— I’m starting to think you’re just perfect!” Or just a metamorphmagus, but whatever, Persephone thought to herself.

Persephone laughed and thought of something—what had been on the ice? It had been a weird shape. “I want to go see something.”

She tumbled down the hill that led to the frozen lake, looking for the weird blob before she found it. She pointed it out to Susan, who followed her finger. “What is that?”

“Not too sure,” Persephone replied, starting to approach it before she finally could make out its shape and she gasped. “Oh my gosh!”

It was a cat, slipping on the freshly ensued ice. As she approached, Susan gasped, “Its leg! Look at that leg!”
It had been partially stuck inside the ice and Persephone and Susan went quickly to work in inspecting the situation. The cat tried to attach itself to Persephone but could not get too far before snarling in pain. Persephone pushed her hand against its leg, trying to break the ice when finally, a warm sensation made her hand harsher to the ice and the cat was free. It jumped Persephone immediately, just as a skating second year, Cho Chang, approached on skates. “Everything alright?”

Persephone was stunned for a moment—the girl was insanely pretty, with wispy black hair and a pretty, round face. She looked concerned as to why both Susan and Persephone were sat on the ice.

“Yes, we just found a cat, he was stuck in the ice,” Susan answered, stroking the cat’s head.

“Thank you.”

The cat, poor baby, would not let go of Persephone so she put her (him?) inside her winter robes cloak, where it poked its head out at the base of Persephone’s neck. She nearly forgot about it, only reminded of its presence by the occasional, soft meow and the purring against her chest as she went skating. She didn’t have skates but Professor McGonagall happily transfigured her boots into skates.

Nearly the entire school was out to enjoy the snow. She spotted Hermione teaching Ron how to skate properly, a very amusing thing to watch as Ron was so tall and Hermione was not. Hagrid, too, pulled a sled along across the ice with Fangs on it, who was enjoying seeing so many students. Persephone offered Susan a warming charm as it started getting colder and just as they decided to go back inside, they were joined by Daphne Greengrass.

Daphne Greengrass was a very funny girl when she wasn’t around Pansy. She didn’t think she’d get along so nicely with that annoying girl’s best friend but here she was. She was surprised Pansy hadn’t set Daphne completely against Persephone, but after her win in Quidditch, it didn’t even matter than she was Slytherin and Persephone Gryffindor—she wanted to talk about Quidditch. She did, however, comment on the cat that was peeping out of Persephone’s cloak.

It seemed that it was only when the snow had finally started mounting on the ground that everyone truly felt the Christmas spirit. Persephone’s classmates all spoke excitedly about their plans for the holidays—Susan was telling her and Daphne excitedly about how her father was planning to take her down south to visit the Egyptian pyramids (apparently, only seen to the magical eyes, the pyramids were decorated with miles and miles of beautiful lights, going all around) when Pansy appeared.

Daphne bid them goodbye, smiling at them before joining her best friend. How she put up with that girl, Persephone would never understand.

Pansy didn’t lead her out of the library—instead, she led a confused Daphne to another table, just a few feet away from Susan and Persephone, and then she started to talk to Daphne, loudly, about how lucky she was that her father had reserved some lodge up in some mountains. It would luxurious, Pansy assured Daphne (and Susan and Persephone, who couldn’t help hearing every word).

It was only when Pansy was kicked out of the library for being too loud did she turn to acknowledge Susan. “Come on, Susan.”

Persephone noticed that Susan was in some ways like Neville—terrified of a specific Slytherin. Susan was not so much terrified as she was unwilling to put Pansy in her place. Persephone knew it was wrong to do so, but she stood with Susan.
“Susan, you don’t need to do as she says.”

Persephone gave Pansy a look.

Susan smiled thankfully at Persephone, “You don’t need to do that, I have to start packing now or I’ll leave it until last minute.”

Persephone expected her to lean in and kiss her cheek like she always did when they parted but this time she only blushed and followed Pansy out. Persephone realized she’d been leaning in, to kiss her cheek as well, as she learned to do.

Persephone did not want to leave the library—it was one of the only places the cold could not come into. When she could no longer focus on any book, she packed her things.

“Hey Red,” Someone’s voice whispered, making her jump. It took her about two seconds to recognize the person, not by voice but by nickname.

She refused to look at him, simply putting her things in her bag, “Hades.”

“You…remember my name,” He said dully. “I do prefer Nico.”

“I don’t care,” She told him simply, turning and continuing to pack her things. He watched silently as she strung her bag over her shoulder and turned to leave. Unfortunately, he followed.

For a moment, she simply stalked in anger. He caught up easily and walked by her side, glancing at her periodically. Then she turned, “What do you want?”

“To know why you’re mad.” He said without missing a beat.

“Oh don’t act as if you don’t know!” She hissed.

He blinked, “I’m not acting. You’ve been avoiding me, again, and you expect me to know why?” He asked. She didn’t like the tone he said this in—as if he were in the right and she were in the wrong.

“Yes, I do!” She snapped, turning and continuing. Thankfully, he thought better than to follow.

She was disappointed he didn’t. She wished he would confess and apologize already. She missed him, and to this she’d admit to no one. He looked as he usually had—dark messy curls, pale skin, stupid, tatter book bag he carried everywhere with him. He was wearing his glasses today as well. He, like her, had recovered from the horror of the full moon. She could barely remember it now. All she knew of it was that it was painful. But, she looked better. Her skin wasn’t sulky and she felt better too.

Only thing about the full moon was that it happened every month. This much scared her. With them not talking, she was scared she would go through the full moon alone. She was terrified, actually.

She returned to the Gryffindor common room with relief—the entire castle, save for the library and Great Hall, were drafty and cold. The roaring fire made it so very comfortable, knowing the bitter window rammed against the windows outside.

Worse than the corridors was Professor Snape’s classroom down in the dungeons, where their breath rose in a mist before them and they kept as close as possible to their hot cauldrons.
"I do feel so sorry," Draco Malfoy said one Potions class, his confidence back with his platinum blonde hair, "for all those people who have to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas because they're not wanted at home."

He was looking over at Persephone as he spoke as Crabbe and Goyle chuckled.

Persephone, who had been measuring out her powdered spine of lionfish, ignored them. She knew he was acting miserably jealous and unpleasant because of the lost Quidditch match. He had been so out rightly disgusted that Persephone had turned out to not be a completely failure of a player, he had tried to get everyone laughing at how a wide-mouthed tree frog would be replacing Persephone as Seeker next.

When he realized everyone was still very much impressed by Persephone’s ability to stay on the broom, he took to taunting Persephone about having no proper family and that she was an orphan. It took everything in her not to clock him in the nose.

Somehow, Malfoy had found out that she would not be going back to Privet Drive for Christmas and was exploiting that fact as often as he could, trying to make her feel bad about herself. On the contrary, when Professor McGonagall had passed around a paper for the students staying to sign, she had taken great joy in signing her name. She was sure this would be the best Christmas she would ever remember.

While Susan, Daphne and Hermione were leaving for the holidays, Ron and his brothers were staying, because Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were going to Romania to visit Charlie.

While it didn’t really bother her, when she thought of it, it did. She overthought things and they made her sad—yes, she wished desperately to be going home to Lily and James Potter, to even have the chance to see them, but she had the next best thing—Ron and George and Fred. While she’d never been so outright unhappy with her living situation in Privet Drive, being around other kids her age and talent made her realize how bad of a situation it really was.

So Persephone ignored Malfoy as a simmer caught her attention—she smiled. Her potion had been the first to simmer. Malfoy then said something about her parents, and if they had been alive, and he was then almost immediately reprimanded by Snape.

While Snape ignored her, he was always very aware of what Malfoy would say to her. He was quick in giving him detention when he said a word about her parents, she’d noticed. She still refused to believe him to be the bad guy, unless Persephone was Percy and Snape was Luke, trying to get on her good side and then make her join Kronos’ side.

When Potions ended, Persephone started rushing, “The Head Girl and Boy choose the decorations usually and I promised Professor Flitwick I would help with enchantments,” She told Ron as everyone rushed out.

Unfortunately, a large fir tree was blocking the corridor ahead. Two enormous feet sticking out at the bottom and a loud puffing sound told them that Hagrid was behind it.

"Hi, Hagrid, want any help?" Ron asked, sticking his head through the branches.

"Nah, I'm all right, thanks, Ron."

"Would you mind moving out of the way?" Malfoys’ cold drawl came from behind them. "Are you trying to earn some extra money, Weasley? Hoping to be gamekeeper yourself when you leave Hogwarts, I suppose—that hut of Hagrid's must seem like a palace compared to what your family's
used to."

Ron dived at Malfoy just as Snape came up the stairs.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron let go of the front of Malfoy's robes.

"He was provoked, Professor Snape," said Hagrid, sticking his huge hairy face out from behind the tree. "Malfoy was insultin' his family."

"Be that as it may, fighting is against Hogwarts rules, Hagrid," said Snape silkily. "Five points from Gryffindor, Weasley, and be grateful it isn't more. Move along, all of you."

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle pushed roughly past the tree, scattering needles everywhere and smirking. Persephone rolled her eyes at them and took a great leap over the tree, using her newfound powers. When Ron caught up to her, not in the slightest surprised at her talent, he was still mad.

"I'll get him," said Ron, grinding his teeth at Malfoy's back, "one of these days, I'll get him—"

"Get him where you know who's around, then," Persephone said, crossing her arms and staring after them in disgust before she started dragging him along faster.

The Great Hall was not yet done. Persephone walked off to find Flitwick, who quickly tasked her with following the Heads decoration plans for each of the trees. She took her wand out and started to enchant the trees, first off to keep them from making a mess.

"Ah, Hagrid, the last tree—put it in the far corner, would you?"

Persephone was also tasked with growing the festoons of holly and mistletoe all around the halls, to grow the reefs as well, after she finished with decorating the trees. The trees looked magnificent—some, had tiny, pretty and detailed icicles on them, while others had hundreds of candles, while others she had enchanted the ornaments to have a sort of lightshow, as if snow was falling around the Great Hall. Persephone could agree with herself—Hogwarts was best during Christmas time.

While she did this, Hermione and Ron had gone to the library. The three had taken it upon themselves to find out who Flamel was, a Hagrid refused to even give them a hint. They'd been spending every free moment they could looking but had found nothing. He wasn’t in Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century, or Notable Magical Names of Our Time; no in Important Modern Magical Discoveries, and A Study of Recent Developments in Wizardry. And then, of course, there was the sheer size of the library; tens of thousands of books; thousands of shelves; hundreds of narrow rows.

Persephone could swear she had heard the name somewhere, just couldn’t remember where. She cautiously shifted her bag as she finished the last of the decorations, which was heavier than usual. She had found a very interesting charm through a book Flitwick had lent her that could add space in a bag—she had done so to her trunk, making it handier. She had styled it like a suitcase sort, with different storage options—there were shoes, robes, books, clothes, accessories, school equipment, hair and cosmetics. It never weighed more than she could carry easily and to get different storage parts, there was a switch on the side clasp. Best of all, it matched her school bag! And her school bag was more of a briefcase than anything, but she had also enchanted it with the same things, though she usually carried her books, ink and parchment, extra quills, hairbrush and hair accessories and snacks. It could also change to look more like a brief case or actual, non-magic

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backpack. She still needed time for the latter enchantment—it was more of a transfiguration crossover with charms but she was sure she’d get it.

But today, her bag was slightly heavier, and that was because she had Salem in it. Today, he had hopped right into her bag and she wasn’t about to disturb him. Hermione, ambassador of rules as if they were gods, often times reached into her bag to pet the cat. Whenever Salem would meow, someone who knew of his existence in her bag would cough. She took him out during History of Magic and let him wander over the desks, being as him was the most interesting thing in that class.

Classes were finished, however. Today was the last day of classes and last day of term. Everyone was rushing to hand in essays and potion projects. The dance students had just yesterday presented their finals routine. Persephone believed she had done well with her ballet performance to the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. She only worried about the one instance during her performance where her hair had come undone from the ballet bun and bobby pins flew out as her hair untwisted from the twist. By the time she had done her first pirouette, her hair was down in its full length. She tried her best to smile through the mishap but she was sure it would cost her points.

She finished up her tasks of decorating and beamed under her teacher’s praise. She hoped Hermione and Ron had found something.

Five minutes later, when she met Ron and Hermione outside of the library, they both shook their heads. Persephone sighed, stroking Salem’s head as they went off to lunch.

"You will keep looking while I'm away, won't you?" Hermione asked. "And send me an owl if you find anything."

"And you could ask your parents if they know who Flamel is," Ron suggested. "It'd be safe to ask them."

"Very safe, as they're both dentists," Hermione rolled her eyes.

Persephone snorted, leaning her chin against her hand, looking around the Great Hall. And then, she suddenly saw a tall Hufflepuff taking a seat, laughing with some boys. She smiled—Cedric had done wonderfully in his own performance. She was in awe of how light he could seem when doing spins. She smiled at him when he met her eye and he waved.

“I swear I’ve heard his name before,” She sighed. Salem purred in her lap as the twins suddenly popped up from nowhere as usually. Fred took a seat next to Ron across from Hermione while George sat by Persephone to pet her cat.

“Who’s name?” The twin’s asked at the same time.

“Hey,” A breathless voice said, approaching the table. The Gryffindors looked up and found Cedric Diggory smiling goofily down at Persephone. “Hey,” He offered the others as he slid onto the bench between Ron and Fred. “You did great yesterday.”

She smiled, “Thank you—you too.” She sat upright, straightening her back. “I’m still upset about the play being cancelled.”

“You did play an incredible Dorothy. It’s a shame no one will get to see you perform it,” His smile turned apologetic.

“Oh! Thank you, that’s sweet,” Cedric was the definition of nice boy. “I bet Flitwick’s the most disappointed, eh? He was really looking forward to it...”
“Right, right…I’m sure there’s next year…”

“Mm,” She nodded. It became awkward for a moment. Everyone in their group was exchanging
looks. She pursed her lips, “Staying or going?”

“Ah, going…spending it with my dad.” He coughed. “You?”

“Staying—”

“As are we and we’re going to shake the castle with our plans, eh, Lils?” George nudged her,
without taking his eyes off Cedric.

“Right,” Cedric said, tapping his fingers almost nervously. “Actually, I was wondering if anyone
had told you about the dance program this summer?”

“Dance program?” Her interest was piqued, “What dance program?”

“It’s for witches and wizards—Sinistra is supposed to have us all sign permission forms to be
allowed to audition here at school in January. Did Cho not give you the permission form?”

Cho. Cho Chang. She’d performed beautifully—when Sinistra had applauded her, Cho turned and
beamed at Cedric. Cedric had beamed back and hugged her back when she launched herself at him.
Cho—perfect straight hair, perfect grades, perfect flying routine…She shook her head, “No but I’d
love to audition! Where can I get the form?”

“Oh you can ask your head of house for one,” He informed her and she grinned.

“Brilliant!” She positively beamed and he reacted appropriately.

“I ought to be going now—” He said after another awkward moment. He started to get up.

“Happy Holidays! And thanks!”

He turned clumsily but she had already joined back into the conversation that Ron and Fred had
picked up. He coughed and walked away.

“Have a crush, do we?” Fred grinned at her.

She felt her face heat up, “Ew—for Cedric? Not possible.” He continued grinning. “Besides he’s
older than me.”

She didn’t notice the falter in George’s expression. All she could think of was what Cedric had
said. A wizarding dance program—that would surely keep her out of the Dursleys house for a
portion of the summer.

Later that day, Hermione hugged Persephone goodbye and waved at Ron. The minute Hermione
had left, Persephone and Ron were greeted by George and Fred, who had nicked a bag of
marshmallows. They got good armchairs by the fire and while Persephone kept herself with
marshmallows, the three boys pierced bread, English muffins, a croissant, and anything else they
could find. They plotted jokingly about ways to get Malfoy expelled—jokingly because there was
no way any of those plans would work.

Persephone asked Ron to teach her to play wizard chess—it was a lot like non-magical chess, if it
had not been for the fact that the figures had minds of their own. They looked like they were alive
and moved on their own, with their own small limbs. It looked like they were directing troops into
Ron's set was very old and battered. Like everything else he owned, it had once belonged to someone else in his family—in this case, his grandfather. However, old chessmen weren't a drawback at all. Ron knew them so well he never had trouble getting them to do what he wanted.

Renee let Persephone borrow hers—they did not trust her one bit. She thought she would be good at chess, as it took strategy, but turns out you cannot be good at everything. They kept shouting out advice to her that always contradicted her strategy. "Don't send me there, can't you see his knight? Send him, we can afford to lose him."

The first few days alone in the dorm were peaceful—she would listen to the roaring fire in the middle of the room, doing her homework with free leisure. She found some catalogues in the common room that you could order out of by owl and she got some presents for her friends.

Now, on Christmas Eve, with most urgent things out of the way, she could simply lay in bed, alone in the dorm, waiting for morning to come. Christmas at the Dursleys had never been a fun time. She had the hardest time remembering what exactly Christmas was at the Dursleys, probably because she was good at supressing those memories, but it usually was good food (or it would be, if she got enough to enjoy) and second-hand clothes. Maybe, if she were lucky, she’d get new shoes. Aunt Marge would be there, and she would get drunk and that’s usually when Persephone’s memory would cut off.

She didn’t expect presents, but she expected a fun day. She cherished the moments alone, in her dorm, basked in the firelight, watching snow whistle outside the windows. It was such a peaceful scene that she fell asleep in her clothing.

She woke up at six o’clock, to the soft nudges from the familiar cat. Salem often times woke her up early for food—not that the cat couldn’t venture out and find food from the cat’s care facility down somewhere in the basement. It seemed she had purchased some very good food and Salem would simply prefer it to the food they had down there. He would sit on her chest and nudge her, nipping lightly at her nose, waiting for her wake to feed him.

He did this very thing to wake her up. When she opened her eyes, she found her cat on her chest, pressing her paws against her face. She reached up to stroke her little head, and listened to her purr. Persephone leaned up to stretch before her head hit something that definitely did not feel like the bed. She looked down towards her pillow, towards the head of the bed where her feet were and gasped.

There was a small pile of presents at her pillow. How had they gotten here? Oh, who cares?

She jumped up picking Minnie up and placing her in between her legs as she crossed them. She sorted through them, surprised to find some presents from some of the Slytherin girls she was friends with—she was glad she thought to get them presents as well, though she wasn’t surprised to find no present from Pansy.

Renetta had gotten her a beautiful makeup set, with the tag of,

Lily

Happy holidays! Hope you like the colors, I just know you’ll look lovely in them! The brushes clean themselves every five minutes, be warned if you take a break from applying.
She examined the matching, folded out wrap of brushes—they were a beautiful, shiny rose gold color, with auburn tipped white brush. She’d gotten more of a fall to winter color scheme but they were beautiful, matte colors. She simply adored the colors and couldn’t stop looking over them, though knowing she definitely was not old enough to be wearing makeup. Renetta didn’t seem to care, she she’d gotten an impressive set, from lip to eye. She blushed, and put them gently aside.

From Lavender, she’d gotten some pretty skirts meant for winter and from Parvati, who obviously bought them with Lavender, she’d received tops to coordinate with the skirts.

From Daphne, she got what felt like clothes but when she opened it up, she found it was not just clothes but a witch outfit! Like, actual robes—robes of an emerald green, though modern, for it ended just below her knees. Along with it were a black, over cloak, soft velvet that went to her elbows. She was glad she did not skimp her gift to Daphne.

Surprisingly, Amanda had gotten her something as well. Amanda had gotten her some shoes, white converse obviously meant for later in spring. The two hadn’t properly spoken but she hoped Amanda like the trinkets she’d gotten her.

From Susan, she opened the paper carefully, afraid she might damage what was inside. It was a strange shape and only when it was uncovered did she realize why—it was a set of books on potions. It was written in Latin and looked to belong to theRestricted Section of the library. She smiled to herself—Susan was so sweet. She hoped she liked her gift.

The last few she could guess whom they were from. One she unwrapped and found it was a chess set of her very own from the secret Santa exchange the Gryffindor tower had done—from Audrey, the prefect.

A very small parcel contained a note.

_We received your message and enclose your Christmas present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia._ Taped to the note was a fifty-pence piece. Hm.

"Friendly of them," She murmured. She’d thought maybe Ron would like it—he probably never had seen non-magical money. Or paper money, period.

From Hermione, she got a book on human transfiguration, a book on metamorphmaguses. She had just nearly forgotten that she’d told Hermione about her abilities—with everything that had happened that day, she had forgotten. She flipped through the book, knowing she would find it interesting. Along with the book, the ever so responsible Hermione Granger gave her the most useful of things: a collection of chocolate frogs, socks, pantyhose and hair elastics, bobby pins and, embarrassingly, underwear. She was embarrassed to say she needed those.

Hagrid’s was wrapped in a thick brown bag, with messy scrawling on it that read, “To Persephone-Lilith”. She’d never been addressed to with both names and found she quite liked it. Inside was a roughly cut wooden flute. Hagrid had obviously whittled it himself. Persephone blew it and found it sounded just like an owl. Salem meowed loudly, coming to climb up onto her legs and sniff at her face.

She took a break from opening presents to deliver hers to her kitten. She poured him some food and tapped her wand on the other bowl for water. As he ate greedily, purring even louder, she placed a little bed by her own bed. She’d enchanted it to remain warm for a whole day—she’d just need to remember to re-enchant it every day. Salem would find it comfortable.
Now, that left three more, two of which she could not think of where they came from. One of them were from Fred and George and she nearly cried out of joy—a Gryffindor scarf! Ugh, yes!(!!!!)

The second to last was two sweaters, one in burgundy with the letter ‘P’ on it, and another green one, with the letter ‘L’ on it. With it came a large box of fudge. Confused, but overjoyed, she took the sweaters and fudge and the last gift, a very light one, to go to Ron. She wanted to be there when he opened her gift from her. She was sure he was not up yet, and she was right.

“Merry Christmas,” She smiled into the room. He was groaning awake and blinked at her.

“Merry Christmas.” He mumbled, getting up.

She sat on the end of his bed as he sat forward. He looked at his own pile of gifts before he noticed the sweaters, “Oh no.”

“What?”

“My mom’s sent you a Weasley sweater. I told her you didn’t expect any presents,” He blushed. “And I told her you have two names.”

Persephone snorted, looking at the sweaters in new fondness, a soft of new affection in her chest blooming for Ron. “That’s so kind of her.”

"Every year she makes us all a sweater," said Ron, unwrapping his own, "and mine's always maroon. One of yours is at least a nice burgundy.” He held his own sweater up and compared the colors. There was a difference, though probably because they were definitely not the same shade of redhead.

She offered him the fifty pence. “From my aunt and uncle. You can have it.”

Ron was fascinated by the fifty pence.

"Weird!" he said, “What a shape! This is money?"

"Wonder who this is from?” She said, nodding to the last present. “I’ve got a present from each of my other friends, but don’t know who this is from. Do George and Fred give a second, prank gift?” She asked suspiciously.

Ron shrugged. She decided that Ron was no help and that she would just open it. If something happened, she at least had a witness. She unwrapped the light package and something fluid and silvery gray went slithering to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Ron gasped.

"I've heard of those," he said in a hushed voice, dropping the box of Every Flavor Beans he'd gotten from Hermione. "If that's what I think it is—they're really rare, and really valuable."

"What is it?"

Persephone bent to pick the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material, and it looked like it could fit all the Wealsey family—every brother, even if they were all six foot. Was it...a sheet of some sort? It looked like it could fit on a king sized bed—maybe larger. It felt nice to the touch.

"It's an invisibility cloak," said Ron, a look of awe on his face. "I'm sure it is—try it on."

Persephone threw the cloak around her shoulders as she stood and Ron gave a yell.
"It is! Look down!"

Persephone did as she was told but she was gone. She dashed to the closest mirror and, surely enough, her reflection was made up of only her head, half her hair gone under the cloak. She readjusted the cloak, so it fell over her completely equal. She was gone—she could see everything, like it was a two way mirror.

"There's a note!" said Ron suddenly. "A note fell out of it!"

She turned and silently approached Ron. He looked up, seeing right through her, until she pushed him and he gave a yell.

“Don’t do that!” He cried, laughing.

She pulled the cloak off, laughing as well, and took the letter.

It was written in narrow, loopy handwriting that she did not recognize. It read:

_Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well._

_A Very Merry Christmas to you._

There was no signature. Persephone stared at the note, then turned it over. No signature. She turned it over to the writing and stared at it. Ron was admiring the cloak.

"I'd give anything for one of these," he said. "Anything. What's the matter?"

"Hm, nothing," Persephone said. She felt…strange. Who had sent the cloak? Had it really once belonged to her father?

She remembered why she was there, and put the cloak aside, back in its packaging. She’d return it to her dorm later.

Persephone was just about bursting in excitement—Ron was taking too long to even acknowledge her present. She finally dragged the long box up onto the bed and pointed at it. Ron, still being half-asleep, barely looked at it as he opened it but then had to blink several times in shock before he could properly see it. Then his jaw fell open and she smiled, “Lily what is this?”

“You like it?” She asked, unable to hold back her excitement. “I thought you would. You know what it is, right?” She looked concerned as he stared at her in shock.

“Of—of course I know what this is—A complete set of the Chudley Cannons trilogy, with their books and posters and—ooooh! Signed jerseys!” He was shocked. “But…but how…But Lily I can’t…."

He seemed at a loss of words.

She waved her hand down, “Oh, don’t worry about it,” She told him. “Your mum made me two sweaters just because I go by two names because you told her I didn’t expect gifts. And besides, you aren’t a real fan without some sort of merch source.”

Ron was torn between accepting the gift and being embarrassed because he had always been against what he considered ‘charity’. Finally, quietly, he said, “Thank you.”

She smiled, but said nothing.
Just then, the dormitory door swung open and George and Fred strolled in.

"A Merry Christmas to you, my lady!" George said, bounding right up to Persephone to pull her up and kiss her cheek. Fred kissed her other cheek and she screamed in surprise, laughing, turning a deep red color. ‘And a heartily thank you for our gifts—’

“Muggle Magician sets will be very useful for our—”

“Pranks of the New Year!”

“We must step up our game!”

“Hey, look—Persephone’s gotten two Weasley sweaters—”

“Lucky duck, she is!” Fred ruffled her hair and she swatted his hand away playfully.

She didn’t fail to notice them wearing sweaters as well. Fred’s had a yellow F on it and George’s was yellow with a blue G.

"Both of hers are better than ours, though," Fred said, examining the sweaters. "She obviously makes more of an effort if you're not family."

"Why aren't you wearing yours, Ron?" George demanded. "Come on, get it on, they're lovely and warm."

"I hate maroon," Ron moaned half-heartedly as he pulled it over his head.

"You haven't got a letter on yours," George observed. "I suppose she thinks you don't forget your name. But we're not stupid—we know we're called Gred and Forge."

"What's all this noise?"

Percy Weasley stuck his head through the door, looking disapproving. He had clearly gotten halfway through unwrapping his presents as he, too, carried a lumpy sweater over his arm, which Fred seized.

"P for prefect!" Fred glanced at Persephone. “You two match!”

“P is for Persephone, Fred, or, better yet, P for piss off, Freddie!” She cried while laughing. “P for prank goddess. P for perfect!”

“Be sure to always wear the green one, with the L, then, for lovely lily," George whispered to her and she rolled her eyes before he jumped up as well, crying, “Get it on, Percy, come on, we're all wearing ours, even Lily got one."

"I—don't—want—" Percy tried to say thickly, but the twins forced the sweater over his head, knocking his glasses askew.

"And you're not sitting with the prefects today, either," George said. "Christmas is a time for family."

And with that, the five of them headed down together.

After putting on her green sweater and dropping off her fudge and weirder present under pillow, she quickly pulled hair up into a fashionably messy pony tail, before joining the Weasleys.
Ron held her back before they could follow his older brothers, “Can I talk to you for a second?”

She nodded, stopping and letting the older boys trot on without them. “What’s up?”

Ron didn’t meet her eyes, looking wildly uncomfortable. “Listen, I know you spent a lot of money on my present and I didn’t even think to get you anything—even my brothers got you something and I didn’t and I feel bad about, Lily, I really do, it’s just…I don’t have any money.” He sighed in a miserable attitude. “Malfoy is right—we don’t have any sort of wealth. All our presents from mum are made from scratch and even then it’s just a measly sweater.”

“Ron,” Persephone smiled gently, putting her hand on his arm. “You’re my best friend.” She didn’t realize how much the words meant to her until she said them out loud. “You really are—and you’re much better a best friend than I could have ever hoped to have. You were never required to look passed my scar and history but you did and I will be forever grateful—and it means a lot more than you might think.” She coughed, trying not to get choked up. Gosh, when had she become such an emotional person? “And besides, I’m started to get very invested in the team and would like for you to help me master one of theirs moves—George is getting too big a head at practice so I need to beat him in that move.” She smiled before shaking him playfully, “Seriously Ron, your friendship means more to me than some present!”

“You seriously mean it?” He sounded so hopeful that she couldn’t help smiling.

“Course.” She rolled her eyes.

He paused, “You know, I never expected to be best friends with a girl but I’m glad I never believed George and Fred when they say all girls have got cooties.”

“Oh, dear lord,” She rolled her eyes as she started walking. They laughed as they went, feeling light.

Persephone could say with confidence that she had never and would never have a Christmas dinner like the one in Hogwarts. A hundred fat, roast turkeys; mountains of roast and boiled potatoes; platters of chipolatas; tureens of buttered peas, silver boats of thick, rich gravy and cranberry sauce—and stacks of wizard crackers every few feet along the table.

These fantastic party favors were nothing like the feeble Muggle ones the Dursleys usually bought, with their little plastic toys and their flimsy paper hats inside.

Persephone pulled one with Fred and it didn’t just bang, it went off with a blast like a cannon and engulfed them all in a cloud of blue smoke, while from the inside exploded fake witch’s hat and several live, white mice. She placed the hat on Fred, who faked gasped dramatically and looked like he had been honored by the Queen, or the Minister of Magic—he put it all out on the table, gasping, squealing and pulling his hands to his chest, shaking her hands as she tried hard not to cry of laughter.

Up at the High Table, Dumbledore had swapped his pointed wizard’s hat for a flowered bonnet, and was chuckling merrily at a joke Professor Flitwick had just read him.

Flaming Christmas puddings followed the turkey. Percy nearly broke his teeth on a silver sickle embedded in his slice. Persephone watched Hagrid getting redder and redder in the face as he called for more wine, finally kissing Professor McGonagall on the cheek, who, to Persephone’s amazement, giggled and blushed, her top hat lopsided.

Persephone left the table with a Grow Your Own Warts kit and her very own wizard chess set that
she would play Ron with. She noticed too late that the white mice had disappeared, and she could only hope they would not end up Mrs. Norris’s Christmas dinner. Minnie followed her loyally and she ended up feeding her some safe food off the table, letting her sleep against her feet, her tail wrapped around her ankle.

Persephone declared winter war on the Weasleys and it was George, Fred and Persephone against Percy (who surprisingly joined) and Ron. While she did think it was unfair that the three best fighters were on one team, her sense of moral faded when Ron got her in the ear and she fully unleashed all hell. She really gave into her namesakes, even at some point screaming across the grounds, “My name literally means hell, Ronald! Queen of Hell, Mother of demons and…well, Potter is pretty much hell in Hogwarts—watch your back Weasley!” She shrieked.

Finally, exhausted, cold and wet, they returned to the common room, in front of the fire, where Persephone broke in her new chess set. She was sure she could have had a chance at winning if Percy hadn’t imputed his suggestions.

Persephone brought out her laptop and started playing a non-magical movie, while the Weasleys were all entranced by the device. They kept asking questions, pointing at things on it, asking again how it could work, followed by more questions. It wasn’t until George whispered in her ear to keep Percy occupied that he and Fred ended up stealing his prefect’s badge.

The rest of the time before dinner was spent watching Fred and George being chased by Percy, until Fred threw the badge to Ron and then to George. George signaled for her to climb the stairs of the girl’s dorm and then it was tossed to her, at the top of the stairs.

“Percy you are a prefect!” She said when he hesitated on the first step. “You are a prefect and you know the rules!”

His jaw set, “I’m not a prefect without that badge!”

And then he stepped on the step, causing the steps to turn into a slide.

She anticipated his ambition to bring him to this point, as did George and Fred. She jumped over the stairs and landed in their waiting arms, passing them the badge. Fred took it while George pretended he had it and they ran in different directions.

After a meal of turkey sandwiches, crumpets, trifle, and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy to do much but lie around, telling stupid stories. Persephone and George ended up sharing a couch, Persephone’s feet in his lap as he eyed the portrait.

“Too tired, not happening,” Persephone moaned when she realized what he was thinking of.

It had been the best Christmas imaginable. The boys bid her goodnight as she went up the stairs, and she knew they were tired because George didn’t try and run up to make the stairs into a slide.

She sorted her gifts out, repacking her trunk accordingly so they fit easier. She was glad that she’d placed a spell on it to enlarge the trunk, but keep the weight balanced.

She picked up the final gift, the Invisibility cloak, and stood by the bed staring at it. She was ready to pack it away but she couldn’t stop thinking…this had been her father’s. Had her father been so tall, was that why it was so large, and so long? What had the note read?

_Use it well_, the note had said.

It was a split, moment of impulsiveness, but she decided that she had to try it, tonight.
She pulled her hair up into a tight ponytail. She slipped on her shoes and took a deep breath before grabbing the cloak and throwing it around her. She was short enough that it fell all the way to the floor around her. She would have to try not to trip.

Something about this woke her right up—all of the castle was unlocked. She was free to roam the darkened halls as she pleased, explore every nook and cranny. No one who could get her in trouble would ever know.

She thought about waking Ron and the twins up—who better than to share this first planned act of breaking rules than her best friend and the best rule-breakers in all of Hogwarts?—but then again, she was under her father’s cloak for the first time. She should do this alone. At least, this first time.

She walked cautiously out of her dorm, quietly climbing down the stairs, across the dark common room and then out through the portrait hole. She did all this without tripping, thankfully and only the Fat Lady noticed anything, "Who's there?"

She kept quiet and strolled down the hall—where was the rush? No one would see her.

Where to go? She stopped, thinking. Where could she go now that she couldn’t in the daylight, without the cloak? Hmm…

Oh! Of course! The Restricted Section of the library! She checked her watch—it was barely midnight. She could read for hours…first priority was Flamel but she had a key to the kingdom, she could take her time.

It was slightly strange, having the cloak over her, dragging on the floor behind her. She had to double-check every minute that she was still completely covered, as her anxiety rose. She walked, keeping her eyes on her feet to make sure she would trip. If only she were taller…but then again, if she studied Hermione’s book, she could probably learn to make herself taller…

The library was pitch-black and very eerie. She thought it a bad idea to grab a lamp so she pulled her wand out and cast lumos—and aha! Light worked through the robe and, checking her reflection in a window, she could see no one would see the light through the cloak. Amazing!

She only had to whisper lumos several times, though she knew her way around the library very well. The Restricted Section was right at the back of the library. She stepped over the rope carefully, picking up the cloak so it wouldn’t disturb the rope, before dropping it once more. She didn’t understand—if the teachers didn’t want underage students to cross into the section, why not just put an age line over it? It wasn’t so hard…

She read through the book titles, though some did not have any. While some were written in Greek and Latin, languages she could recognize, some were written in alphabets she didn’t even recognize. One of them had a title written backwards, even. Another had a horrible stain that looked suspiciously like dried blood.

It was definitely creepy being there—something about being in a room full of knowledge that could possibly traumatize her for her life time really shook her.

One book had a dark stain on it that looked horribly like blood. The hairs on the back of Persephone's neck pricked. Maybe he was imagining it, maybe not, but he thought a faint whispering was coming from the books, as though they knew someone was there who shouldn't be.

She had to start at some place—she let her wand hover, using the light to read through titles. Finally, she decided on an interesting looking volume, large, black and silver linings. It looked old
—she tucked her wand behind her ear and carefully pulled the book out.

She let her nails find a place between the pages before she cracked it open, just slightly—and then she shut it just as quick because, she swears, she just heard it scream. Okay, nope—she slid it back into its place, glad she had opened it just a crack, or else the scream would have awakened the entire castle. No point in being invisible if you make noise—unless you’re driving someone mad.

But just as she turned away, she heard the scream build. It kept screaming, and it was getting louder! No—no! The shriek went on and on, one high, unbroken, ear-splitting, growing louder and louder—she started to back out of the shelves when she heard footsteps coming down the corridor outside.

She passed Filch in the doorway, trying not to look into his pale, wild eyes, and quickly slipped by him. She took off, as quietly as she could, the scream still heard in the distant.

She finally slowed, her heart beating wildly. Where had she gone? She could no longer hear the screaming—but the large suit of armor in front of her didn’t make sense. She recognized it immediately as the one near the kitchens, but it didn’t look like the basement. No pear painting in sight.

"You asked me to come directly to you, Professor, if anyone was wandering around at night, and somebody's been in the library Restricted Section."

Persephone felt herself freeze in horror—wherever he had come from, he was near. Filch, of course, knew the shortcuts in the castle and of course could appear anywhere—and very quickly too, because his soft, greasy voice was getting nearer, and to add to this horrifying moment, it was Snape who replied, "The Restricted Section? Well, they can't be far, we'll catch them."

She looked around wildly—the corridor was too narrow to simply shrink against the wall. She could either wait here to be trampled or…or could she possible hide behind the suit of armor…or…or—oh! A chance!

A door stood ajar to her left, and she was thanking her lucky stars she was thin enough to slip through it without moving. She listened to them walk straight past, and Persephone waited for them to turn the corner. Finally, it was silent. She let out a breath, calling that one a close call.

She took in her surroundings, concluding she’d just walked into an unused classroom—the desks and chairs piled against one side and the upturned wastepaper basket could only mean that.

But then, there was something that did not belong in the setting and she stared up at it.

It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

Maybe it was her strange eagerness to languages, but she had to blink several times before she could read the words—she felt like Percy, with his dyslexia. The words popped out at her, looking very wrong, as if she were reading them wrong.

She took a step towards it, to look into it and almost immediately spun around in a new settled panic.

She swore—she wasn’t alone in the mirror, but she was alone in the classroom. A whole crowd of people had been surrounding her, but before her, the room was empty. No ghosts. No poltergeists. She was alone.
Slowly, she turned back to the mirror.

There she stood, in front of what looked like at least ten others. She glanced over her shoulder, and was assured that she was alone, still. Were there other invisible people, too? Was she in fact in a room full of invisible people and this mirror's trick was that it reflected them, invisible or not? It reflected her perfectly fine.

She looked into the mirror once more—and then met an older looking version of herself. Persephone was sure this woman was older than Persephone. She was not skinny like Persephone, but curved, and taller, and intensely beautiful. Her hair was the same shade, if not a red shade darker. Her nose was the same, but longer to accommodate the mature face. The contour of her cheeks were sharpened, but soft, still round somehow. Her perfectly round, plump lips were turned into a smile and she realized her older version was crying—crying out of... green eyes... two green eyes.

Standing by the woman's side was a tall, thin man, built healthy and lanky and he, too, was crying. He had hazel eyes, eyes of different colors, behind a pair of glasses. His hair was untidy and black, his skin tanned, olive complexion. But his eyes... but her own eyes...

His arm came around the woman and she leaned into him, so affectionately...

She took a step closer, letting the cloak fall behind her, suddenly realizing who the couple was.

"Mom?" she whispered, her voice hoarse. "Dad?"

They just looked at her, smiling with such adoration, she'd never felt, or even seen, such adoration. Anywhere.

Slowly, with close inspection of the faces of the other people, she came to see that some of them had green eyes too, and black hair, and olive skin. She couldn't help the tingling sensation that spread through her body as she looked at her family for the very first time, couldn't help the twitch of her lips in absolute wonder.

The Potters smiled and waved at Persephone and she drank them in, pressing her hands right against the mirror, hoping someone—god or not—would hear her pleas and let her fall right through, to meet them. A powerful kind of ache ate at her, half joy, half terrible sadness.

She couldn't help, in that moment, pick everything out of her parents—she looked nearly exactly like her mum. She understood why Flitwick had immediately taken to her—he seemed to have favored her mother and she looked like almost a complete replica—her eyes... her eyes were her fathers... but then they were also her mother’s green... her hair, though longer than her mother’s, was her red and the black she always liked to change to was her fathers... the curls she inherited from her father, the dimples she had from her mother. She understood the pain that aunt Petunia felt looking at her because she was sure, from now on, she’d never see herself in a mirror—she’d always see her mother.

Her hairline belonged to her mother, her high cheekbones, and rounded face, her hidden angles— but her eyebrows were longer than her mother’s—she had her father’s long brow while maintaining her mother’s arch, it seemed. And his eyes—and her eyes. Her lips were rounded, round and full, just like her mother’s... the splash of freckles, exactly nine freckles on her nose were from her father... but the slope of a button nose was her mother’s. But when he smiled... her perfectly straight, even teeth came from him...

She was a perfect, perfect piece of both of them—beautiful like her mother but with hints of her
father. Persephone looked so childlike now, despite her beauty, but her mother had a sense of mature beauty, with the way her eyes and brows arched. She was sure she would grow to be such a mature beauty like her mother—but the resemblance presently was hurting, aching, eating at her.

She wasn’t too sure how long she was standing there, completely mesmerized by the vision of her parents, but they never faded away and so she stayed. It was only when a distant noise brought her back to her surroundings and she remembered that she was sneaking around. She couldn’t stay here for fear of getting caught.

She picked up the cloak from the floor, without looking away from her father. She glanced at both their faces and had to force herself to turn away, whispering, “I’ll come back,” before she hurried from the room.

“George!” She whispered into the older boy’s ear. It was not surprise that he was sleeping in the spare bed in the dorm room again. He groaned. She frowned. “George!” She nudged him and finally he started blinking awake.

“Lily?” He squinted up at her. “What are you—what time is it?”

“Ron and I are sneaking out, do you and Fred care to join?”

This woke him up thoroughly, “Brilliant.”

It took a few seconds to wake Fred, who immediately grinned at the prospect of sneaking out. “Do you even need to ask?”

Ron was waiting for them to wake up before the two of them told the twins the loophole that Persephone was planning on using. The twins looked very near hugging Persephone, looking well near tears too, until Fred mustered up, “What did we do to deserve this blessing?”

“I’m not sure, Freddie, but I definitely won’t take her for granted.”

So the four of them threw George’s blanket off the bed and slid the mattress off the bed. As quietly as they could, they pushed the mattress down out the door and then, before she could stop them, Fred and George had the brilliant plan of taking it for a toboggan ride.

So, Percy Weasley found them at the top of the boys’ stairway, all sitting on George’s mattress, ready to shoot down the stairs. It seemed like Percy had mental alarms that went off in his head whenever someone broke rules. “What is the meaning of this? It’s passed midnight!”

“Oh, yes!” Persephone whispered shouted, being at the front of the mattress, which was only fair, as she was smallest and the best navigator, probably. “Now Santa won’t know if I’m naughty,” She laughed at her own joke but everyone looked at her in confusion, half from sleep and half from being purebloods who did not know who Santa was, Persephone quickly realized. “Oh, sorry! I’ll explain later.”

“Later?” Percy questioned. “I will assume ‘later’ means at a reasonable hour, as you are all going back to bed.”

“What does reasonable hour even mean?” Persephone asked him. “I mean, the prospect of reasonable was created by who, exactly? I mean, reasonably, someone must have decided long ago that reasonable hours would mean the hours the sun was out—but what are reasonable hours to the people who live in places where the sun is out for six months straight? What are they to do in those unreasonable hours? Wait for the reasonable? No—no we must never be limited in the name of reasonable hours because really, some people work better in the night—does that make their hours
unreasonable? And what about nocturnal animals—what are reasonable hours to them? Owls?”

“Wh—wha—?” Percy looked thoroughly confused.

“Time is a human construct, Percival,” She told him most seriously.

George nodded in approval, directing behind her, his hands looped under her arms as to make room, “I’m so glad Ron never believed girls had cooties.”

“We don’t have any classes later, and it’s still the holidays.” She looked around, before looking at the couch and remembering how big the cloak was. “And we won’t be sneaking out of bed, technically, so…” She smiled up at him. “You wanna get on?”

“Get on!?” He was scandalized. “And what? Break the rules? Break my neck? No, that would be terribly irresponsible behavior from a prefect!”

“You’re not a prefect to us, Percy, you’re our brother!” Fred said from the back.

Persephone moved up, sitting in between George’s legs, right up against his front, “You can be in front?”

“Are we ready, folks?” Fred called from the back, his wand steadily held out to cast the spell that would send them flying down the stairs. Percy didn’t admit it and no one saw his smile, being as he was in the very front, but Persephone could feel his excitement, as he was sitting between her legs. “Three…two…” She leaned back against George, feeling his arms tighten in anticipation. She brought his arms up around her, as to hold them in anxiety before Fred called, “One!”

And off they sped, down the long spiral staircase. Persephone was glad she’d grabbed George’s hands because she screamed into them as they shot down. The laughter they let slip made echoes in the tower but no one seemed to care as this was much too fun. Besides, who would rat them out? Nearly headless Nick? Sure.

When they finally surfaced into the common room, Percy and Persephone went flying forward, landing against the couch. For the first time since she’d met him, Percy was laughing hysterically, not bothering to keep etiquette.

They all were laughing hysterically, no longer bother being quiet, Persephone breathlessly asking Percy, “Are you okay?”

Finally, when they all calmed down, George and Fred re-adjusted the sheets on the mattress. “Where is it you’ll be sneaking off to, exactly?” Percy asked skeptically. He didn’t seem as harsh now.

“Find a magic mirror.” Persephone said, picking herself up from the floor.

“Aren’t all mirrors here magical?” Ron questioned. Persephone shrugged.

“This one showed my parents—and all my dead family. It ought to be more magical than any other mirrors around.”

“Oh—I’d like to see your parents,” Ron said. “And you can see our family, too.”

“She can see them any time, Ronnie,” George rolled his eyes, “Come around our house this summer, if you’d like, it’ll surely make Gary happy. You’re all he talks about in letters.”
Percy straightened, “Well, as prefect—and your brother—I’m coming with you to make sure nothing stupider happens tonight.”

“Stupider isn’t a word, but you’re welcome to join.” Persephone said. “The more the merrier.”

Persephone had Ron cast Wingardium Leviosa, as she knew he was very skilled in the spell (which he flushed at, but did so cheerfully) while she cast the spell she’d freshly taught herself. “Mobiliarbus!”

“Where did you learn that?” Percy asked, impressed, as the mattress floated forward.

Persephone shrugged, “Flitwick gave me a book and offered extra lessons.”

“But that spell is several years too complicated for a first year.” Percy noted.

Again, she shrugged, “Not too hard to learn—especially being as I know Latin and am a downright genius in charms.”

“Well, nobody didn’t say you were humble,” he mumbled. “You know, if you weren’t so keen on breaking rules, you would make a brilliant prefect—”

“Oh, Lily, be strong—” George said.

“He’s going to recruit you and—” Fred said.

“We’ll lose you forever!” George finished.

She snorted, “I’ll think about it, Percy, and thank you.”

They floated on the mattress, invisible, through the corridors, Ron keeping the spell steady and Persephone getting the hang of the charm quickly. At some point, they passed by Filch, who sniffed as if though he could smell them. Before Percy could panic, Persephone lifted them right above Filch. They had to reign in Fred and George, who thought maybe casting a quick prank on Filch was worth it, and would be a missed opportunity if they didn’t—very well, he couldn’t see them.

Soon enough, she was able to retrace her steps from the library, since they were so fresh in her memory, and finally, she recognized the narrow hallway. “Aha!” She whispered.

“Is that it there?” Ron gestured to the door and she nodded.

Percy, who sat next to her, nudged the door open and they levitated in. Finally, Ron let the spell waver before they landed on the floor. Persephone dropped the cloak off them and smiled. The mirror was where I had been before. She jumped off the bed and beamed, going for the mirror.

There they were, once more. Her mother and father beamed at the sight of her and her face broke into a brilliant smile.

“What does that mean?” Ron asked, pointing to the writing on top of the mirror. Persephone shrugged, not taking her eyes off her father.

A moment of silence, before Percy said slowly, “I show not your face but your heart’s desire.” Persephone tore her eyes from her father to look at him skeptically.

“Oh, pardon moi?” George offered.
Percy rolled his eyes, “It’s written backwards, obviously!”

“Obviously.” Fred mimicked.

“Naturally.” George nodded.

Persephone read the inscription and had to nod, “He’s right. That’s amazing…”

Percy looked pleased, but kept his voice casual as he said, “It wasn’t that hard.”

After another moment of silence, Persephone asked them, “What do you think of them?”

“Of who, Lily?” George asked.

She pointed to the mirror, to her parents. “My parents—you see them, don’t you?”

"I can’t see anything." They all said in unison. “There’s only you,” George explained.

She thought, “Maybe it works for one person at a time?” She grabbed Ron’s arm and pulled him up next to her. With Ron in front of the mirror, she could not see her family. Now it was only Ron in his checkered pajamas in the mirror.

Ron, though, was staring transfixed at his image.

"Look at me!" he said.

"Can you see all your family standing around you?" Obviously he did, with his brothers standing behind him.

"No—I'm alone—but I'm different—I look older—and I'm head boy!"

"Wait, what?"

“Oh no,” Fred said.

“Not another one!”

"I am—I’m wearing the badge like Bill used to—and I'm holding the house cup and the Quidditch cup—I'm Quidditch captain, too.” Ron tore his eyes away from this splendid sight to look excitedly at Persephone. "Do you think this mirror shows the future?"

“Wait, lemme see!” George said. He took Ron’s place and his face fell in amazement—“It’s—it’s us, Freddie, and we’ve…woah! We’ve got our own joke shop! And—” His face suddenly reddened and he glanced at Persephone in the mirror, “You sure you can’t see this?” When Persephone shook her head, he looked at his heart’s desire once more.

Fred saw the same, though he was quieter. “I see the joke shop, too…you don’t think this shows the future?”

"That wouldn’t make much sense, seeing as my parents are dead,” Persephone said in a deadpanned voice. “What else do you see?”

“I see Lee with us, though and—” He suddenly stopped speaking.

“And what?”
“Nothing.” He said quickly. Persephone narrowed her eyes. “Here, Perce, you try.”

Percy took a step in front and he gasped.

“Minister of Magic?” George guessed.

Percy shook his head distantly. Persephone thought for a moment—what could the brothers had been not saying? First George, then Fred, and now Percy, completely silent? She knew Ron had said the whole just of it—and she could understand. He had older brothers who had done it all—and he stood alone, doing all the things he had. He had all the attention and praise. Growing up in such a large family, being one of the youngest, she could understand why he desired this.

She couldn’t guess what George had seen, nor what Percy had seen (or maybe was it a lot like Ron’s), but when Fred had said Lee—Lee Jordan, the best friend of the twins, she couldn’t help thinking…could Fred and Lee…could Fred be….

She cleared her throat, “Well, then, not all dreams are impossible.”

Four ginger boys looked at her in equal amounts of surprise before George suddenly cocked his head to the side, shared a look with Fred and suddenly threw the cloak over them again.

A sudden noise outside in the corridor made them both freeze, staring at each before Percy panicked, “The mattress—!”

Fred had slapped a hand over Percy’s mouth, Persephone had slapped a hand over Fred’s mouth, George over Persephone, Ron’s over George and Persephone’s other hand on Ron, Ron’s hand on her, Percy’s on George and Fred’s on Ron’s—basically, everyone had just covered at least two people’s mouth. Except for Percy, who had slapped his own hand over his own mouth over Fred’s hand.

Now there were five gingers, all staring at the luminous eyes of Mrs. Norris, which had come around the door. They stared at her, frozen, all thinking the same: Did cats see through invisibility cloaks? They did not know. Maybe she did not see them but she could probably hear them—smell them too.

After what seemed like ages, she turned and left, not looking to be in any sort of rush. They waited a few minutes before walking quietly to the door to peer around—she could be hiding, waiting for them speak.

Finally, when it seemed they were safe, Percy whispered, "We should go—now."

“Aw, Perce—”

“I won’t hesitate to tell McGonagall on you,” Percy threatened.

“But that’ll get you in trouble, too,” Ron pointed out. Percy said nothing. “But yes, I agree, this isn’t safe—she might have gone for Filch, I bet she heard us. Come on.”

The snow hadn’t melted the next morning, but it held no interest to her.

"Want to play chess, Lily?" Ron asked.

"No."
"Why don't we go down and visit Hagrid?"

"No, I'm tired...you go ahead..."

"Lily, I know you're thinking about going back to that mirror but don't."

"Don't go back? Why?"

"Dunno, just got a bad feeling about it—and anyway, you've had too many close saves already. Filch, Snape, and Mrs. Norris are wandering around. So what if they can't see you? What if they walk into you? What if you knock something over? You've gotten lucky, but luck runs out."

"I think Hermione influenced you," She said jokingly.

"I'm serious, Lily, don't go."

Maybe Ron had some sense but then, he didn't know how she felt seeing her parents after years of thinking they had abandoned her and then learning they'd been murdered. Ron wasn't going to stop her.

She spent that night back in front of the mirror, in front of her parents. She thought she could remember exactly what they looked like, down to the freckles on her father's nose and the thickness of his lashes—it's so unfair when boys have such nice lashes, but she couldn't complain about hers.

She returned anyway on the third night, and her mother and father smiled at her all the same, and one of her grandfather's nodded happily. She sunk to the floor, curling up, her knees up to her chin. She wasn't even tired anymore—she could stay here all night, with her parents.

She would have, had someone not just said, "So—back again, Persephone?"

Persephone felt her insides turn into ice, and she knew from just the name the voice called her by that this wasn't a student. She turned to look behind her, and was shocked to see it wasn't even a teacher—it was Albus Dumbledore. She must have walked right past him, so desperate to see her parents that she didn't even notice him.

She should have brought the bed, dammit it.

"I didn't...see you there, sir."

"Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make you," Dumbledore smiled, much to her relief. "Not wearing our glasses, are we?"

She blinked. She wasn't. "How—?" Her glasses had been in her pocket during Christmas dinner—perhaps he'd seen them sticking out...did she take them out of her pocket? She couldn't remember.

"So," said Dumbledore, slipping off the desk to sit on the floor with Persephone. She watched him with wide eyes—was he truly mad? "you, like hundreds before you, have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

Slowly, she nodded, "Mirror of Desire."

He nodded, "And so I expect you and your friends know what it does, then?"

She paused, surprised at this—he had known she and her friends had snuck out but he wasn't punishing them? "It...shows us our hearts greatest desires."
He nodded.

“It showed Ron achieving the greatest titles in school, but he stood alone so he wanted to be praised instead of compared to his brothers...George and Fred saw their future, both similar, because they obviously can’t imagine a future without each other,” She paused. “And...and Percy probably saw himself as the minister of magic or something,” She breathed a nervous laugh.

He was thoughtful, “Do you truly believe that?” She was silent. She shrugged. He nodded thoughtfully. “Now, the happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is.”

Persephone couldn’t believe that, “Well—everyone wants something.” She said. “Even...even if they get their deepest desire.”

“It’s the beauty of the human species—we can never be satisfied.” He said.

Persephone frowned, “Is that truly something beautiful...?” That seemed rather selfish, didn’t it? Always wanting more, never being satisfied?

Dumbledore stared at her, “There is beauty in all things, Persephone. The never ending ambition in ourselves is something that keeps us evolving. Once they’ve reached a limit, once they truly find themselves at a happy place, they will look back to the person they once were and call themselves foolish.”

She thought about this, “So...so I’ve seen my parents, but I’ll never have them back....” She hesitated, “Will I ever want anything else?”

"Yes and no," Dumbledore said quietly. "You, who have never known your family, will today see them standing around you. And Ronald Weasley, who has always been overshadowed by his brothers, sees himself standing alone, the best of all of them. And then, Fred and George Weasley will seem themselves standing, successful with their shared dreams that they’ve been discouraged for, being fully accepted. Perhaps, in some years, or even months, your desire can change. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible, completely taken by the one image when it could have changed in the time they’ve wasted.”

“So...I must...” She was quiet for a moment, trying to process and make sense of her words. “I must accept the fact that my parents will never be with me, to see something different?” She thought this made sense.

Her entire life was spent thinking they abandoned her, with the hope in the back of her mind that maybe one day she would get to see them, to be with them. But then, nearly six months ago, she was thrown into a world where she was an orphan instead of an abandoned girl. It made...a strange amount of sense.

She blinked and was surprised to find tears slipping down her cheeks. She looked away, wiping her wet cheeks with her sleeve. "The Mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow, Persephone, and I ask you not to go looking for it again.”

He handed her a handkerchief and she took it, “That’s...probably for the best. It’s not healthy to...it’s just I have nothing of their...I don’t know them and I wish....” She breathed out heavily, frustrated with her inability to speak.

“I see them both in your, Persephone, without the use of your mother’s name as yours.”
Dumbledore told her. “In everything you do or say, you are James and Lily Potter’s daughter, even if you do not see it yourself.”

She thought maybe he was right—she could see her mom anytime she looked in the mirror. Her father’s face was sketched in her mind, their smiles painted behind her eyelids.

“If you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that. Now, why don't you put that admirable cloak back on and get off to bed?”

She stood, pausing. “Professor Dumbledore? May I ask you a question?”

"Obviously, you've just done so,” Dumbledore smiled. "You may ask me one more thing, however."

"What do you see when you look in the mirror?"

"I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woolen socks."

Persephone stared.

"One can never have enough socks," Dumbledore said. "Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn't get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books."

It was only when she suffered a shock of glancing in the mirror and seeing her mother instead of her, did she think that maybe Dumbledore wasn’t being all too truthful.

She thought perhaps he was right in doing so—it had been a personal question.
The Elixir of Life

Chapter Notes

Holy god! I am so sorry for such a long wait and for coming with such a short chapter! School is hectic as its my last year and I’ve been involved in all sorts of plannings for the school events and such. I hope you enjoy! Leave a thought in the comments!

Persephone was not in a good mood the rest of the break.

Ron and the twins assumed her bad mood came from not going back to the mirror when in reality, she had to get into the lake while it was snowing, had to come out of the lake while it was snowing and overall want to die during the full moon. She was in such a sour mood that she couldn’t hide it enough to be around anyone. She kept to her dorm and tried reading but then ended up sleeping the day away. She was feeling terribly sick due to the full moon’s effects on her and couldn’t do anything.

True to her word, she did not seek out the action of breaking the rules anymore that break. She kept the invisibility cloak folded at the very bottom of her trunk, much to the disappointment of the twins. She hated to admit it, but nothing good had come from looking into the Mirror of Erised.

She wished she never had seen inside the mirror—instead of wondering about her parents, questioning the very people that the names Lily and James belonged to, she saw them in her dreams, in nightmares. They always disappeared in flashes of green lights that had her waking up suddenly in the dead of night, always with a high voice cackling in laughter at her fear.

She wasn’t sure if she ought to be sad that George and Fred stopped asking her to sneak out with them but now they brought her back snacks from the kitchens, dumping them in her lap in the common room as she told Ron about the dreams.

"You see, Dumbledore was right, that mirror could drive you mad," Ron told her, sneaking a biscuit from the pile.

Hermione had come back the day before term had started and Persephone finally felt better about being in the dorms. When she recounted the holidays to her in great detail, Hermione was torn between horror at the idea of Persephone being out of bed, roaming the school three nights in a row ("If Filch had caught you!"), and disappointment that she hadn't at least found out who Nicolas Flamel was.

As much as she was sure she’d read that name somewhere, she couldn’t focus on Flamel. Once the term started back up, Quidditch practice had started right back up. She had nothing else to think of —she’d auditioned for the summer dance program alright but not even that hogged her thoughts.

Wood took the practices as seriously as he took the games—if not more seriously. They trained through the rain, something that had seemed to fuel his spirits rather than lessen. Fred complained that Wood was becoming a fanatic, but Persephone couldn’t help siding with Wood. If they were to win the next match against Hufflepuff, it would be it for Slytherin in the house championship. She wanted so badly to win against Slytherin, so, so badly, that not even Susan or Daphne could lessen her ambition.
It was only during one wet and muddy practice that Oliver finally snapped. He’d gotten rather angry with Fred when he pretended to fall off his broom the third time after dive-bombing his twin.

"Will you stop messing around!" he yelled. "That's exactly the sort of thing that'll lose us the match! Snape's refereeing this time, and he'll be looking for any excuse to knock points off Gryffindor!"

Fred Weasley really did fall off his broom at these words, to the amusement of Persephone.

"Snape's refereeing?" he spluttered through a mouthful of mud. "When's he ever refereed a Quidditch match? He's not going to be fair if we might overtake Slytherin."

The rest of the team landed next to Fred to complain, too.

"It's not my fault," Wood said. "We've just got to make sure we play a clean game, so Snape hasn't got an excuse to pick on us."

Persephone thought Snape would pick on them if there was a reason or not, but she kept her mouth shut. Wood was scary when he looked hysterical, wet and covered in mud.

Persephone rushed back to the Gryffindor common room after getting changed into her clothes. She found Ron and Hermione playing chess—well, she found Ron playing chess and Hermione losing chess. It was probably good for her ego to lose at something.

"Don't talk to me for a moment," Ron said when Persephone took a seat next to him, "I need to concen—" He caught sight of her face. "What's the matter with you? You look terrible."

Speaking quietly so that no one else would hear, Persephone informed them both of the news of Snape’s sudden desire to be the Quidditch referee.

"Don't play," said Hermione at once.

"Say you're ill," said Ron.

"Pretend to break your leg," Hermione suggested.

"Really break your leg," said Ron.

"As tempting as that sounds, I have to play," Persephone said. “I’m the only Seeker for Gryffindor and he’ll be looking for any reason to pick on Gryffindor. Maybe if the only Gryffindor he’s ever tolerated to an extent is playing, we might have a better chance.”

“Or a chance at all,” Ron said miserably. Persephone sighed and pulled her books out of her bag—non-magical books, mostly just science. She was going to focus on something non-magical for a while, to calm her nerves. Chemistry seemed distracting enough.

They were then interrupted by someone toppling into the common room. It was Neville, and his legs were stuck together, as if banded together by invisible rope if Persephone didn’t know better—she knew a Leg-Locker Curse when she saw one. And from the look on his face, it seemed he had to hop all the way up the tower.

Everyone fell over laughing except Hermione and Persephone. Both girls leapt up, Persephone pulling him up so Hermione could perform the counter curse. Neville’s legs sprang apart and he just about collapsed again had it not been for Persephone holding him upright by the arm.
“Neville, what happened?” Hermione asked.

“Malfoy,” he responded shakily. "I met him outside the library. He said he'd been looking for someone to practice that on."

“Looks like Malfoy’s got his nerve back,” Persephone grumbled. “We have to do something!”

“Yes, Neville, go to Professor McGonagall!” Hermione urged Neville. "Report him!"

Neville shook his head and Persephone had to agree, “Not what I was thinking, ‘Mione.”

"No, no I don't want more trouble,” he tripped over his words, as if the thought of some trouble occurring to Malfoy would be the worst thing.

"You've got to stand up to him, Neville!” said Ron. "He's used to walking all over people, but that's no reason to lie down in front of him and make it easier."

"There's no need to tell me I'm not brave enough to be in Gryffindor, Malfoy's already done that,” Neville choked out.

Persephone’s anger flared up, “Don’t say that! Don’t let some hat, or some blonde git tell you who and what you are, Neville. I, for one, think you are very brave—braver than Malfoy, and kinder too. I’ve never heard you say a single bad thing about anyone and you have great reason to do so—there are more valuable things to be than brave, Neville, and you are definitely more valuable than Draco Malfoy, that’s for certain.” She smiled widely at him, his lips twitching up and he looked just almost like he could cry.

“Thanks, Lily… I think I'll go to bed…” Neville started to walk away but he bumped into the table, his legs still seeming asleep to some degree.

When he knocked into the table, one of the books set on the edge of it dropped to the floor. “Oh, sorry,” He picked it up and examined the book before handing it to Persephone. “Oh, chemistry. Isn’t that the muggle alchemy?”

Persephone’s mind went blank and her mouth dropped open as she suddenly made a connection between two important things—she dropped the book again and threw her arms around Neville. “Oh, Neville you’re a genius!”

“I am?” He asked in surprise, blushing.

“He is?” Ron and Hermione asked in unison.

She spun, picking the book up and staring at it in wonder—it was right in front of her! “I know who Flamel is!” She spun, running past Neville and up the girl’s dorm stairs. She heard Hermione tell Ron to wait a moment, and then Ron’s, “I can’t follow there, you know!” before she heard Hermione following up the stairs.

She threw the door open and made a beeline for her bed, looking into her trunk. Hermione came up behind her, peering over her shoulder and asking her what she was looking for. Persephone ignored her until she found her chocolate frogs. She tossed a few onto the bed and ordered Hermione to find Dumbledore’s card.

A few minutes later, after opening about ten of them, Hermione resurfaced with Dumbledore’s card. “Read it!” Persephone shrieked in excitement. Hermione’s eyes quickly read through the words and her eyes widened when she looked back up at Persephone. Persephone nodded
“Wait!” Hermione cried, running to her own bed. She pulled a thick, ancient-looking book out from under her pillow and threw it onto Persephone’s bed, bouncing next to it, pushing the chocolate frogs away.

“That can’t possibly be good for your back,” Persephone commented as she flipped open the book.

"I never thought to look in here!” she whispered excitedly. "I got this out of the library weeks ago for a bit of light reading."

"How long does it take for you to read a book that small?” Persephone questioned—sure it looked big, but a few weeks to read it? Pathetic.

Hermione shushed her and started flicking frantically through the pages, muttering to herself.

At last she found what she was looking for.

"I knew it! I knew it!” She pointed to a page as Persephone slid onto her bed next to her. "Nicolas Flamel,” she whispered dramatically, "is the only known maker of the Philosopher’s Stone!"

Persephone gasped, “You mean the Elixir of Life?”

Hermione nodded enthusiastically. “It says here that the ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher’s Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.” Persephone gasped, encouraging Hermione. “There have been many reports of the Philosopher’s Stone over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year, enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-eight).

"Wow…” Persephone said. “Come on—we have to tell Ron!"

He wasn’t amused by being excluded but he seemed okay after Persephone offered him the opened chocolate frogs. He listened as the girls explained to him and his mouth dropped open.

“A stone that makes gold and stops you from ever dying—no wonder Snape’s after it!”

“Well we don’t know its Snape—"

Hermione interrupted her, "The dog must be guarding Flamel's Philosopher’s Stone! I bet he asked Dumbledore to keep it safe for him, because they’re friends and he knew someone was after it, that’s why he wanted the Stone moved out of Gringotts!"

"Makes sense why we couldn’t find him in any of the books,” Persephone commented when their high faltered. “He isn’t recent, being six hundred and sixty five, is he?”

The evening was spent with Ron and Persephone discussing what they’d do with a Philosopher’s Stone of their own. Persephone opted to fund better libraries and school programs while Ron said he would fund a program to allow people of all classes to play on a Quidditch team. It wasn’t until Ron had said that that Persephone suddenly remembered about Snape and the coming match.

"I’m definitely going to play,” She told them. “I’m going to make sure Gryffindor wins this game—that’ll definitely wipe that stupid grin off Malfoy’s face,” she told Ron and Hermione. He was excitedly.
acting out again—he had been pulling on Persephone’s pony tail just earlier in class, baiting her to slap him.

"Just as long as we're not wiping you off the field," Hermione said.

She was reminded of something the next morning while sitting in Defence Against the Dark Arts. They were copying down different ways to treat a werewolf bite—and unfortunately, there were not many—when she remembered suddenly about Nico.

She hadn’t seen him at all since the start of classes again. She’d asked Fred and George but they hadn’t seen him either and she grew anxious once more after not seeing him for a good week. Despite her previous animosity, she was still not willing to spend a full moon alone. Unfortunately, no one had seen him. She was hoping she could bump into him as she always did and so she tried to find herself alone more often. Unfortunately, the more she wandered off on her own, the more she noticed how much she ran into Professor Snape.

She wondered if he were trying to find her breaking rules. Perhaps he thought he’d been too nice to her and needed to show her he would abuse her just as he did everyone else. Strangely enough, it was the opposite in Potions class. He seemed to avoid her in the class, his eyes avoiding her general direction. She’d do her work, phenomenally at that, and he would ignore her. He wouldn’t praise her work but she had one of the highest marks in the class, tied with Hermione and, ugh, Draco. She’d thought of seeking the slimy, pale git out to ask about Nico but thought better of it—Nico was not worth talking to Draco.

Draco was readily irritating her every chance he got, nonetheless. Pulling her hair, throwing things at her, talking about her behind her back. It seemed he knew Snape was referring and thought this was a sure sign that Gryffindor would not be winning. Her team shared similar views but tried their best to keep their hopes up. Everyone was nervous and trying their best not to think of the worst, being so close to overthrowing the Slytherins in the house championship for the first time. But these hopes were tainted by the fact that they had a biased referee that hated the Gryffindors and favored to death the opposite team.

She felt better about this game however, because she had enough reason to believe Snape wouldn’t let her be killed. She thought maybe he did favor her, even though it was in a very confusing manner. She had to keep herself positive that she would be okay, especially when Hermione and Ron bid her good luck outside the locker rooms the next afternoon while looking like they doubted they would see her alive.

Wood barely gave a pep talk, so it was Fred who took over, “Fuck shit up out there.” He paused, “But don’t die.”

“So inspiring…” Persephone told him, wiping away a tear. George nodded, looking dramatically solemn.

Ron and Hermione, meanwhile, had found a place in the stands next to Neville, who couldn't understand why they looked so grim and worried, or why they had both brought their wands to the match. Little did Persephone know that Ron and Hermione had been secretly practicing the Leg-Locker Curse. They'd gotten the idea from Malfoy using it on Neville, and were ready to use it on Snape if he showed any sign of wanting to hurt their friend.

"Now, don't forget, it's Locomotor Mortis," Hermione muttered as Ron slipped his wand up his sleeve.

"I know," Ron snapped. "Don't nag."
Back in the locker room, Wood had taken Persephone aside.

"Don't want to pressure you, Potter, but if we ever need an early capture of the Snitch it's now. Finish the game before Snape can favor Hufflepuff too much."

She nodded most seriously.

"The whole school's out there!" Fred Weasley said, peering out of the door. "Even—blimey—Dumbledore's come to watch!"

Persephone’s hysterics rose a little higher. “Really?” Fred was right. There was no mistaking that iconic silver beard.

She was sure, now, that she was safe. Who would hurt her in front of the Headmaster? But then her face grew paler than before…had the Headmaster thought someone would hurt her and thought his presence necessary?

Perhaps that was why Snape was looking so angry as the teams marched onto the field, something that Ron noticed, too.

"I've never seen Snape look so mean," he told Hermione. "Look—they're off—Ouch!"

Someone had poked Ron in the back of the head. It was Malfoy.

"Oh, sorry, Weasley, didn't see you there."

Malfoy grinned broadly at Crabbe and Goyle.

"Wonder how long Potter's going to stay on his broom this time? Anyone want a bet? What about you, Weasley?"

Ron didn't answer; Snape had just awarded Hufflepuff a penalty because Fred Weasley had hit a Bludger at him. Hermione, who had all her fingers crossed in her lap, was squinting fixedly at Lily, who was circling the game like a hawk, looking for the Snitch.

"You know how I think they choose people for the Gryffindor team?" said Malfoy loudly a few minutes later, as Snape awarded Hufflepuff another penalty for no reason at all. "It's people they feel sorry for. See, there's Potter, who's got no parents, then there's that Weasley brother, who's got no money—you should be on the team, Longbottom, you've got no brains." Malfoy pointedly ignored the fact that George Weasley was also on his house’s team.

Neville went bright red but turned in his seat to face Malfoy.

"I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy," he stammered.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle howled with laughter, but Ron, still not daring to take his eyes from the game, said, "You tell him, Neville."

"Longbottom, if brains were gold you'd be poorer than Weasley, and that's saying something."

Ron's nerves were already stretched to the breaking point with anxiety about Lily.

"I'm warning you, Malfoy—one more word—"

"Ron!" said Hermione suddenly, "Lily—!"
"What? Where?"

Persephone suddenly rooted herself into a spectacular dive, drawing out gasps and cheers from the crowds. Hermione stood up, her crossed fingers in her mouth, as Persephone streaked toward the ground like a bullet.

"You're in luck, Weasley, Potter's obviously spotted some money on the ground!" said Malfoy.

Ron snapped. Before Malfoy knew what was happening, Ron was on top of him, wrestling him to the ground. Neville hesitated, then clambered over the back of his seat to help.

"Come on, Lily!" Hermione screamed, leaping onto her seat to watch as Lily sped straight at Snape—she didn't even notice Malfoy and Ron rolling around under her seat, or the scuffles and yelps coming from the whirl of fists that was Neville, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Up in the air, Snape turned on his broomstick just in time to see something scarlet shoot past him, missing him by inches—the next second, Persephone had pulled out of the dive, her arm raised in triumph, the Snitch clasped in her hand.

The stands erupted; it had to be a record, no one could ever remember the Snitch being caught so quickly.

"Ron! Ron! Where are you? The game's over! Lily’s won! We've won! Gryffindor is in the lead!" Hermione shrieked, dancing up and down on her seat and hugging Parvati Patil in the row in front.

Persephone jumped off her broom just as the Gryffindors spilled into the field. Much like last game, she was engulfed in a hug from her team members, and Fred, who’d picked her right up and spun her around, her arm still raised with the snitch. As he let her down, she glanced back to see Snape landing some place nearby, seeming white-faced and tight-lipped.

Then suddenly, a hand on her shoulder made her jump—it was so cold. She looked back to see Dumbledore’s smiling face.

"Well done," Dumbledore told her quietly, so that only she could hear. "Nice to see you haven't been brooding about that mirror... been keeping busy... excellent..."

Snape spat bitterly on the ground.

Sometime later, after being told by Fred that there was to be a celebration party in the common room that made all the other team mates leave faster than usual, she left the locker room alone. She’d used her rare abilities to braid her hair back into a complicated, long red braid and was now only taking her broom back to the broom shed. She’d never felt happier. She finally had something other than the name—and even better, it was *Quidditch*.

The sweet evening air had never felt better. She felt the high of the past hour lift her spirits quickly—Gryffindor’s lifting her up, her friends cheering in the distance, jumping up and down, Ron with a nosebleed for some reason…

She glanced up at the castle, enjoying the view of the glowing red sunset reflection. She felt absolutely and completely satisfied with everything—Gryffindor was in the lead, for the first time in years thanks to her, she was excelling in most to all her classes, she had amazing friends and the teachers all saw her talent. It was unlike everything she’d ever experienced…

She stopped dead in her tracks when she noticed someone waiting for her. He was standing leaning against the shed, wearing a dark coat with a mauve scarf, staring over at her. When he caught her
eye, he lifted his hand and waved a little Gryffindor flag. When she finally snickered, he smiled.

“Good game,” He said and she crossed her arms.

“You watched?” She asked as he came to stand a good distance away in front of her. She tucked her baby curls behind her ears as he nodded.

“‘Course I did,” He said, crossing his arms. “I watched your first game too, you know.”

She flushed suddenly, “But we were barely friends.”

He shrugged, “You’re a phenomenal flyer.” He said and she looked away, tapping against the ground. “And I think I know why you’re mad at me.” She raised a brow but didn’t look at him. She stared at the dying sun. “You think I trashed the play set, right? Because I asked you to quit and then it was trashed and it…I mean, it makes sense.”

She looked at him, “You did?” She hadn’t expected him to admit it.

“It makes sense that you would think I did it,” He explained quickly. “But it doesn’t make sense that I would actually do it—I mean, not from my point of view. I know I’m not a crazy theatre kid like you—”

“I—” She tried to interrupt but he continued.

“But I know you are and I wouldn’t have done that. I knew how important it was to you and I respect what you think is important, of course…I mean, I’ve spent a good portion of the year watching you, to make sure you are a siren—and I mean, what I mean is…” He huffed, and she looked at him. She realized he probably wasn’t blushing from the cold air. “What I mean is that I consider you a friend and…and I wouldn’t have done that to you and you thinking that…sucked bad…so…”

She tried to swallow her nerves, “So…so you’re saying you didn’t…” She felt her anger make no sense. She wasn’t sure she was angry at all anymore, being how much she had missed him. “Oh.” She looked at him for a long time and he looked at her for just as long.

He shifted uncomfortably and broke her gaze, “Well, that’s all I wanted to say…so…I’m going to—”

She had wanted to say something—to apologize, because that made the most sense—but she didn’t really want to say, “Snape?”

He stared at her, quirking an eyebrow, “No—I’m Nico—”

“No!” She suddenly hissed. She pointed to the side and he turned to stare in the direction. They watched a hooded figure marching swiftly down the front steps of the castle and, to her great surprise, right towards the Forbidden Forest. There was no doubt in her mind that the figure was Snape—she knew that prowling, dramatic walk. He was always passing right by her in class, walking away from her in every given circumstance.

“What is he doing?” She asked.

“Don’t know…?” Nico said. “Why don’t you get on your broom and follow him?” He said, smirking. She was halfway doing this already and he blinked in surprise, “I didn’t mean that—no wait, I seriously was kidding.”
She stared at him, “Since when are you opposed to sneaking around?”

“I—” He made several attempts to a comeback but only threw his hands up. “Since I met you?”

“Ha, nice try,” She said, lowering her broom, “Get on.”

He stared at her for a long moment, “Sorry what?”

“Get on?” She repeated. “Get on the broom?”

“Uh, I was expecting an apology, not a broom ride to my death.” He said, inching away.

“To your death?” She snickered. “You’ll be fine. You said it yourself, that I’m a phenomenal flyer.”

“Yes, but your broom has a history of trying to throw passengers off.”

She snickered, “Actually, that’s a long story—I want to follow him so hurry up!”

He was hesitating, stepping forward, and surveying her extended hand. “I don’t—” She grabbed his hesitating hand and pulled him to her and he stumbled against the broom, inhaling sharply before stumbling backwards, “Meet you there?”

“Right, without being seen?” She rolled her eyes. “I’ll be right back.”

She pulled away and started up towards the sky to glide over the castle quietly, watching as Snape disappeared into the forest. She followed quickly, but it was no use—she lost Snape in the thick trees. She flew in the direction she thought he would have been going through but stopped short when she heard voices. She lowered herself close enough into a tree branch, her weight barely moving the thick branch.

She silently moved up the tree, squinting through the leaves. Below her was a dark clearing, where the silhouette of Snape was evident in his tall and towering figure. Quirrell was there, much to her own surprise.

She tried to listen in and as she leaned forward, suddenly a hand wrapped around her and covered her mouth. She reacted immediately, jumping away from the person and nearly off the branch but then she saw Nico hanging upside down over her on the branch above her. He steadied her, widening his eyes in warning, lifting his other hand to make a shushing face. She slapped his hand away and he mouthed an ‘ow’. She motioned to him with her hands in confusion and he pointed down to the people she was spying on, as if telling her to shut up and listen.

"...d-don't know why you wanted t-t-to meet here of all p-places, Severus..."

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private,” Snape’s voice was icy and cold, as if he were playing at his words. “Students aren't supposed to know about the Philosopher’s Stone, after all.”

Persephone’s intrigue skyrocketed and she leaned forward to hear better, exchanging a look with Nico—he only looked confused.

"Have you found out how to get past that beast of Hagrid's yet?"

"B-b-but Severus, I—"

"You don't want me as your enemy, Quirrell," said Snape, taking a step toward him.
"I-I don't know what you—"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

Somewhere to her right, a bird screeching, making Persephone nearly jump out of the tree. Nico reached out and caught her by the arm and she situated herself better. She caught only the last bit of Snape’s next sentence, "—your little bit of hocus-pocus. I'm waiting."

"B-but I d-d-don't --"

"Very well," Snape cut in. "We’ll have another little chat soon, when you've had time to think things over and decided where your loyalties lie."

And then, throwing his cloak over his head, he glided away silently, leaving Quirrel and Persephone both petrified.

When Quirrell finally took his leave, Persephone backed herself up against the trunk of the tree, making room for Nico, who was still upside down. “You look like a bat.”

“Ha,” He laughed nervously, probably from being upside down. “A bat. Right.” She watched him do a complicated looking thing with his leg and then he unlatched himself from the above tree and crouched with both feet on her branch. “Care to fill me in on what they were speaking of?”

She thought about whether or not she could trust him and he seemed to catch her train of thought, “Is it a secret?”

“Well, we aren’t supposed to know,” She shrugged.

“We?”

She had to remind herself he did not know her friends, “My friends I mean.”

“Ah—which ones?” He said.

She gave him a look, “Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger? Who else?”

“Who else? Oh, I don’t know—of the thirteen friends you have of your year and the addition of the older students, I wouldn’t be so sure.” He smirked. “Haven’t you noticed your popularity?”

“You only think I’m popular because you have no friends,” She shot back.

He smirked, “Ouch.” He asked once more, “So what was it about or will I have to pick apart your brain?”

She wasn’t too sure what that meant so she opted to change the subject, “How did you get here with no broom?”

He was quick to answer, “Apparated, of course.”

“Oh.” She had no idea what that was so she nodded. “Of course. My mistake.”

He nodded, paused and asked, “You’re not going to tell me, are you?”

She smiled, “Nope.”

“I’ll figure it out,” He promised, sitting with his legs strung casually, his elbow propped against his
knee, as if he were perfectly at ease up on an unstable branch.

“Why do you care?”

“Because whatever it is, you care about it and you care enough about it that’s you’re worried about it—and annoying you is an entertaining pastime, of course.” He smirked.

“Of course,” She rolled her eyes. “I hope you fall out of this tree and break your back.”

He whistled, amused, “Ouch, Potter, who knew you were so violent.”

She mumbled something she was sure was too low for him to hear but he laughed as if he heard it, and he laughed loudly. So loudly that he leant backwards and fell. She cried out but he only swung from his legs, still laughing.

“Since when are you a gymnast!”? She cried, shakenly looking down to him. She got on her broom, floating gently down to be eye to eye with him. He seemed perfectly at ease hanging upside down as he was.

He reached up and grabbed the branch and let his legs swing down, landing lightly on the branch. She stared, horrified and impressed, saying the first thing that came to mind, “You’d be a terrific dancer.”

Now he was really laughing, laughing as he jumped down from the branch down to the ground—which was a good twenty feet down. He landed easily as she cried out and grumbled when she realized he was perfectly fine and a freaking werewolf.

“Show off.”

“Says the youngest Quidditch player in over a century,” He tossed back up to her, looking perfectly content and smiling a genuine smile again.

"Lily, where have you been?” Hermione squeaked.

"We won! You won! We won!” Ron shouted upon seeing Persephone. "And I gave Malfoy a black eye, and Neville tried to take on Crabbe and Goyle single-handed! He’s still out cold but Madam Pomfey says he’ll be all right—talk about showing Slytherin! Everyone's waiting for you in the common room, we're having a party, Fred and George stole some cakes and stuff from the kitchens.”

“I need to tell you two something and it can’t wait.” Persephone told them. Despite the weird encounter she’d had Nico, she had not forgotten a vry important revelation of the day.

She led them away, to an empty classroom. After making sure no one was lingering, especially not Peeves, she turned and told them what she’d seen.

"So we were right, it is the Philosopher’s Stone…” Ron muttered.

“So…so wait, does this mean that—” Hermione started but her thought cut off. “But…which…”

“This is so confusing.” Persephone whined. “But I think…no, I’m very sure that Snape is onto Quirrell and trying to force him not to steal the stone.”

“Or,” Ron interlude, “Snap’s trying to force Quirrell to help him get it. He asked if he knew how to get past Fluffy—and he said something about Quirrell’s hocus pocus—I reckon there are other
things guarding the stone apart from Fluffy, loads of enchantments, probably, and Quirrell would have done some anti-Dark Arts spell that Snape needs to break through --"

"Either way," Persephone interrupted. "Someone is after the stone."

"And the stone is only safe as long as one of those teachers don’t figure out how to get passed each other." She said anxiously, "And if it is Snape trying to get passed Quirrell’s protection that means the only thing keeping the stone safe is Quirrell standing up to Snape."

"Or its Quirrell, running out of time because he can’t figure out how to get passed the protections."

"Either way," Ron said, "I’ll be gone by next Tuesday."
When Tuesday did arrive, it was not marked in most people’s calendars as the day the stone would probably disappear. It was marked as Valentines’ Day. February 14th had come around and the entire school seemed to celebrate this holiday religiously.

She hadn’t realized it was valentine’s until she had spoken to Nico.

As always, she exited the Gryffindor common room early to head to the library and return a book. Nico had been waiting by another painting, staring off into space when she had passed him. She hadn’t even realized she’d passed him until he suddenly jumped to life, calling her name. She turned in surprise.

“Good morning,” He told her, and before he allowed her to respond he handed her something. “Late Christmas present.”

She flushed immediately, “You didn’t have to…I didn’t get you anything.”

He shrugged, “Wasn’t expecting anything. Open it.”

She opened the box. It was a necklace, but instead of a charm, there was a rain drop shaped vial with a round end filled with shimmering substance in it. She stared at it, enamored by it, “It’s beautiful, thank you!”

“Well—actually, it’s for your eyes,” He said. “Like eye drops—its Mediterranean water, just off the coast of France. The pearls too—from France,” She touched the pearls that hung from either side of the vial. “A drop into each of your eyes will make you see much better, and they last for a long time too, so no chance of running out—and I thought this was cool, so if you look into the water you can see the ocean and like if you move the vial, it’ll be like you’re in the water looking around and you can see the sky—I thought it was cool and now that I’m explaining it, it isn’t that cool—” He had rambled and now waited for her response.

Her responded smile was brilliant, “I adore it—thank you, seriously, this means so—”

“Hey, I got to go—see you around,” He said suddenly and rushed away, leaving her flabbergasted.

Her stared after him, wondering what had gotten into him. She ignored his sudden mood change and pulled her necklace out of the box and put it on, smiling. Another few minutes to put eye drops in and she could see—really, beautifully see!

The first things she set her eyes on was a painting of a blonde couple sharing a kiss, the man holding up roses and chocolate and she realized—“Oh!”

She blushed furiously as she realized Nico had probably been rushing off because he’d given her a gift on Valentine’s Day.

Up and down the Gryffindor table, people got singing letters and candy from secret admirers and
boyfriends and girlfriends. Most notably of the Gryffindors was a very grand proposal of courting. A boy had flowers and floating chocolate hearts for another boy, and Persephone had to admit, even she awed with the crowd when the boy kissed the proposing boy. It was adorable.

“Finally,” George suddenly said from next to her. “Thought they’d never get together.”

Persephone rolled her eyes and Fred backed him up, “Trust us, Lils, there’s been four years of sexual tension between the two.”

“Well they are cute,” Persephone said, taking a bite of her apple. George turned to her looking offended and Fred raised both his eyebrows at her.

“Am I not cute?” George asked her, seeming genuinely offended and hurt. Persephone snorted.

“No, no, I’m cute, I’m the cute twin!” Fred argued, his voice growing louder. Persephone stared up at them as they now turned their stares at each other.

“We are twins!” George cried. “We are identical!”

“What is going on?” Hermione mouthed to Persephone. She shrugged, biting into her apple and watching.

“Well Lily definitely thinks I’m cuter,” Fred said accusingly, turning to Persephone. “Right?”

“Uuuuhm,” Persephone took a bigger bite of her apple to avoid having to answer this ridiculous answer.

“See!” George said. “See?! She knows I’m the superior twin!” He grinned in triumph. “She’s the only person who can tell us apart, it figures she would know best!”

“I’m sorry but what’s going on again?”

“Do you not find me cute?” Fred asked dramatically. “Oh, this is it! This is as much as my poor heart can take!” He announced. Persephone blushed deeply as she found people had started to look.

“I trusted you!”

“Nah mate, she never loved you!” George edged on. “I’m the love of her life, after all.”

“Bested by my own brother! My twin! My partner in crime! My left lung!” He cried. Persephone frowned.

“That’s not a saying—” Persephone was cut off.

“You’re not a saying!” Fred pointed at her.

People had started laughing but then suddenly, an owl swooped in front of her, dropping a letter on her place. It had hearts drawn all over them that she couldn’t possibly believe it could be from Hagrid. George and Fred both gawked at her. “Is there another?”

“Lily I thought we were soulmates!” George cried before turning to his brother. “I can’t believe this!”

“I can’t either but I know what must be done, Georgie…” He cast a long, faux glance filled with heartbreak that quickly turned into determination before they trotted off, leaving a lot of people confused.
“Wonder what that was about?” Lavender raised a brow at Persephone. She shrugged. “Is that a letter from a secret admirer, Lily?”

She checked the letter—there was nothing written on it other than her name. She blushed at the thought of it being from a ‘secret admirer’ and carefully tore the letter open. Almost instantaneously, the letter tore itself apart and suddenly a whirl of something green attacked Persephone.

There were several gasps and Persephone coughed up the thick liquid out of her mouth, a bitter taste now resurfacing and registering on her tongue.

“Oh, Lily!” Someone cried from behind her. She blinked several times and glanced back—it seemed like her contacts had been touched by the dye because everything had gone blurry. From what she could make out, Susan had been standing behind her and now, her beautiful red hair had been turned green.

A sudden realization had hit her—her hair!

She touched her hair but found the dye was gone and that surely meant her hair…her hair would be….she stared up at Susan and Susan stared down at her before she started giggling, “We match!”

As shocking as the situation was, it was comical after the initial shock. She and Susan went off to the girls’ laboratory to wash off and she fell into a fit of giggles—they looked ridiculous! Her red hair had been thoroughly touched by the green dye and her perfectly dark red hair had been turned an emerald green, nearly matching her eye.

Susan did match with her, as she had been standing right behind her to give her a Valentines gift. After the original fit of laughter, she and Susan washed off and shared some chocolate that Susan was to give her. “Those Weasley twins are quite the pranksters, aren’t they?” Susan asked.

“They’ve never pranked me,” She twirled a strand of green hair. “Weird prank, but efficient.” She sighed. “I think I gave them the idea back in first term.”

“Was it you who dyed Draco Malfoy’s hair, then?” Susan asked. “I promise I won’t tell.”

Persephone pursed her lips before smiling sheepishly, “My finest hour.”

The girls made plans to meet up during dinner to go to Professor Snape and ask for some ingredients to a potion to wash out the green. Persephone knew which potion to make but she needed the ingredients. From Professor Snape. Of course…

After lunch, while the Persephone, Hermione and Ron were walking out of the Great Hall, they had just entered the corridor when Persephone froze immediately upon seeing who waited for them.

“LILY!” George cried. He was in the middle of the hall, standing right under an arch of red roses. “Pick me over Fred!”

“What the bloody hell…” Ron muttered. Persephone’s mouth dropped open and she nearly dropped her books.

“Nope. No, sorry, I have to go.”

She turned but then Fred was there too, with a whole sort of lilies. “Don’t go with that clumsy twin! You and I both know I’m the better looking one!”
“Why…?!” Persephone gasped, flushing immediately, her cheeks burning. “Boys!”

“Be my Valentine, Persephone!” It was the first time anyone had used her first name in such a long time—someone who had known her personally, at least—and she nearly had a heart attack. She stared at George for a very long time and he betrayed a sentiment of a grin and she pursed her lips.

“I’ll get you back, Weasleys!”

“Get us back?” Fred raised a brow.

“We’re the best pranksters—”

“Hogwarts has ever seen!”

*Debatable.*

She did end up getting them back—later in the common room, when she knew for certain that both twins would be strolling into the Gryffindor common room, she positioned herself perfectly at the bottom of the girls’ stairway. When she saw them walk into the common room, she started climbing the stairs.

George took the bait immediately and leapt forward to jump on the stair. Persephone knew this would happen and was prepared—Lavender was waiting at the top of the stairs to catch her by the hand so she wouldn’t slide down.

“Wh—”

She grabbed the bucket from just behind Lavender and emptied it quickly down the slide behind her. It slid down quickly and entrapped the boys. She smirked and allowed Lavender to pull her up. She turned around to smile down at the boys—they could not walk away now. Instead of brewing a solution to the dye, she brewed a quick ever glue, with a solution.

She smiled down at them, leaning on her hand against the railing. “Well then, boys, seems you two are stuck in quite a sticky situation, hm?”

“Lily how did you—?”

“Well, now, I said I would get you back, didn’t I?” She sighed. “And I do remember you two saying you were the best pranksters Hogwarts has ever seen…”

Their faces fell, “Oh, Lily…”

“Don’t do this…”

“But I have to,” She smiled. “It would only be right.” She held up the vial with the antidote in it. “You understand.”

Fred started nodding, “Yeaaa…”

“Say the words I want to hear and the antidote is yours.”

“Not happening,” George said. Ah, there was that Gryffindor pride.

She shrugged, “Fine. Have a goodnight there boys. I hope McGonagall doesn’t catch you.”

She started to go up behind the door to the stairs leading up to the other dorms until Fred yelled,
“Wait, okay, we’ll say it!”

She turned expectedly. Fred and George shared a look before sighing. “You’re the very best prankster Hogwarts has ever seen.”

She grinned, “Thank you, boys! Catch!” She tossed the vial lightly and George caught it carefully, falling quite literally over his feet. He glared up at her and she grinned. “You know, even if you hadn’t just announced that to all of Gryffindor house, I’m sure I would still be superior. I pranked you guys and that’s all the proof I need.”

“We’re so getting you back for this!” George called up to her.

“I would expect you would. It wouldn’t be fun if you didn’t.”

It was the only fun she could find for miles in the next coming weeks.

Persephone spent time in the library with Susan and Daphne, each girl writing out test questions that could be on their exams at the end of the semester. They tested each other and made flash cards that they picked out at random from Persephone’s bag. Persephone had started writing up her review notes. She mostly needed to review for History of Magic and Herbology. She was sure she would do very, very well in her Charms, Transfiguration and Potions but she did more than the bare minimum, ignoring her ego.

She dove in deeper into those three, favored subjects. With the extra reading and lessons she was allowed by Flitwick, she was quickly finding a rhythm with using her wand. It took her little to no time to become in sync with her wand—it was like riding a broom in a way. She could only but give a will to her way and the wand followed through. Flitwick also awarded her a nice amount of points, which boosted her confidence up with her wand. It felt like…like all her energy was focused on the tips of her fingers, moving into the wand. She felt….powerful.

She read through the book Hermione had gotten her several times and even went as far into researching through many library books, though she did not find too many outside of the Restricted Section. As tempting as it was to put on her invisibility cloak, she didn’t want to risk it once more. Besides, there was plenty on Human Transfiguration—not enough to saturate her curiosity but enough to teach her how to use her powers. She could change herself effectively into anyone, though she always looked like her natural self.

Potions was always interesting—she was still being secretly praised by Professor Snape and was clearly becoming his most valued student. It wasn’t uncommon for him to use her potion or essay as an example to the class and she beamed under his praise, though he never named her name when doing so.

Speaking of Snape, Ron and Hermione were growing suspicious of his favoring of Persephone. They still believed that he was the one after the stone, as ridiculous as it was. They believed he was trying to lure her into a trap by making her trust him but never could explain for what reason.

The stone wasn’t gone, however. If it either Snape or Quirrell, they both had yet to make a move. The latter, however, seem to be getting paler and thinner. It seemed almost like he had a disease that was sucking the life out of him—this made her suspicious. She started looking into vampires.

She found only the generic stuff—paled skin, color changing eye, fangs, aversion to sunlight, drinking blood of course. Maybe Quirrell was becoming a vampire.

The three friends checked on the stone every chance they got when they passed the third floor
corridor. Hermione and Ron were so adamant that Snape was the bad guy that Ron had started telling people off for laughing at Quirrell’s stutter while Hermione praised him in class. It was ridiculous.

Eventually, come as they may, Hermione started descending into studying as well. She drew up color coded study guides for Persephone and Ron, which was insulting to Persephone. Persephone refused to study in the common room, as to disrupt the usual peace and comfort she could find there with studying, so she listened to Ron and Hermione nag.

"Hermione, the exams are ages away," Ron said.

"Ten weeks," Hermione snapped. "That's not ages, that's like a second to Nicolas Flamel."

"But we're not six hundred years old," Ron reminded her. "Anyway, what are you studying for, you already know it all."

"What am I studying for? Are you crazy? You realize we need to pass these exams to get into the second year? They're very important, I should have started studying a month ago, I don't know what's gotten into me...."

The teachers must have smelled blood in the water because the homework they suddenly needed to complete took much longer. At some point during a long homework session, Persephone had switched her contacts for her glasses, for it made her eyes droop less. This must be comical to Ron, who demanded he try her glasses on.

“Hagrid?” Ron asked with her glasses on, enlarging and zooming in on his blue eyes like a bug. “What are you doing in the library?”

Persephone looked up from her Percy Jackson book—she had started becoming curious on how to get passed the three headed dog protecting the stone and kept re-reading the passages that Cerberus was in the book—to see Hagrid shuffle into view from one of the aisles. He seemed very out of place with his moleskin overcoat, even though it was one of the finer days of spring. Still cool but warmer than it had been in ages.

Persephone noticed that his arms were behind his back, as if he were hiding something. It was not often that she could be taken away from the current apple of her eye—finding out as much about Cerberus as possible. She had actually started remembering the myth of Orpheus when Ron had spoken.

"Jus' lookin'," He said in a tone that immediately caught their attention—no one sounded that nervous without having to hide something. "An' what're you lot up ter?" He looked suddenly suspicious. "Yer not still lookin' fer Nicolas Flamel, are yeh?"

"Oh, we found out who he is ages ago," said Ron impressively. "And we know what that dog's guarding, it's a Philosopher's St—"

"Shhhh!" Hagrid looked around quickly to see if anyone was listening. "Don' go shoutin' about it, what's the matter with yeh?"

"Now that we're on the topic," Persephone said casually, "We were actually wondering about something—other than Cerberus, what's there protecting the Philoso——"

"SHHHHH!" Hagrid urged them once more again. "Listen—come an' see me later, I'm not promisin' I'll tell yeh anythin', mind, but don' go rabbitin' about it in here, students aren' s'posed ter know. They'll think I've told yeh --"
"Then we shall see you later," Persephone sighed.

At some point, they would figure it out, wouldn’t they? Hagrid shuffled off, though Ron was still thinking of his presence. “What was he hiding behind his back?”

Persephone shrugged, “We’re in a library. A book, maybe?” Ron gave her a look and she snickered.

“Maybe it has something to do with the stone?” Hermione said thoughtfully.

"Hold on, I’ll be right back," Ron said, eager to ditch his post on studying. He strode over to the aisle where Hagrid had emerged from. A minute later, he came back with a pile of books in arms that he slammed down onto the table.

"Dragons!" he whispered loudly.

“Shh!” Persephone hissed. “Any louder, I don’t think the librarian heard you!”

Ron ignored her, “Hagrid was looking up stuff about dragons! See these: Dragon Species of Great Britain and Ireland; From Egg to Inferno, A Dragon Keeper's Guide."

“That’s not surprising,” Persephone said, flipping through one of the books. “Hagrid loves dragons. He said he wanted one when we first met.”

"Keeping dragons is illegal.” Ron informed them. "Dragon breeding was outlawed by the Warlocks' Convention of 1709, everyone knows that."

“I didn’t know that,” Persephone said, yawning. There was a good amount of time before the full moon so there was no real reason for her to be so exhausted.

“My brother is obsessed with them, it’s impossible not to know the basics of dragons.” He said. “And it would be pretty hard to keep the Muggles from noticing us if we’re keeping dragons in the back garden - anyway, you can't tame dragons, it's dangerous. You should see the burns Charlie's got off wild ones in Romania."

"But there aren't wild dragons in Britain?"

"Of course there are," said Ron. "Common Welsh Green and Hebridean Blacks. The Ministry of Magic has a job hushing them up, I can tell you. Our kind have to keep putting spells on Muggles who've spotted them, to make them forget."

“That’s terrible! Are there no dragon abuse laws?" Persephone inquired. Ron gave her a side glance.

“You’re starting to sound like Charlie.”

"That doesn’t explain what Hagrid would be doing here, though…” Hermione muttered.

They got an answer nearly an hour later when they knocked on the gamekeeper’s hut’s door. They had to wait a good few minutes, exchanging confused looks while someone shuffled heavily around inside, making a racket of noise. Finally, Hagrid peeked out of the window, through the closed curtains to ask, "Who is it?"

When they were let in, he shut the door quickly behind them and they were immediately hit with the heat wave of the inside. It was a nice warm day outside so it made no sense for there to be a
blazing fire in the grate or to accept the tea. It was too hot.

“Can we open a window, or something?” Persephone asked, tying her hair up into a messy bun of curls.

“No can do, Sephie,” Hagrid grunted suspiciously. "So—yeh wanted to ask me somethin’?” He changed the subject.

"Yes, we did," Persephone said. “What can you tell us about what’s protecting the stone other than Cerberus?”

Hagrid frowned at her—for the topic of question or the fact that she referred to the three headed dog as Cerberus, she wasn’t sure.

"Nothing!,” he said. "Number one, I don' know meself. Number two, yeh know too much already, so I wouldn' tell yeh if I could. That Stone's here fer a good reason. It was almost stolen outta Gringotts— I s'ppose yeh've worked that out an' all? Beats me how yeh even know abou' Fluffy."

"Oh, come on, Hagrid, you might not want to tell us, but you do know, you know everything that goes on round here," Hermione said in a warm, flattering voice. Hagrid's beard twitched and they could tell he was smiling. "We only wondered who had done the guarding, really." Hermione went on. "We wondered who Dumbledore had trusted enough to help him, apart from you."

Hagrid's chest swelled at these last words. Persephone and Ron beamed at Hermione.

"Well, I don' s'pose it could hurt ter tell yeh that...let's see...he borrowed Fluffy from me...then some o' the teachers did enchantments...Professor Sprout—Professor Flitwick—Professor McGonagall—" he ticked them off on his fingers, "Professor Quirrell—” Persephone perked up and shot Ron a look. “an' Dumbledore himself did somethin', o' course. Hang on, I've forgotten someone. Oh yeah, Professor Snape."

"Snape?” Ron asked.

She narrowed her eyes, “Does anyone know how to get passed the dog?”

"Not a soul knows except me an' Dumbledore," Hagrid said proudly. She nodded distantly.

“And neither of you would tell another teacher, right?” She urged. Hagrid nodded, suspicious once more. Persephone exhaled in relief.

“Well that’s something,” Persephone muttered to her friends. “So, each teacher is protecting the stone with something of their specialized brand of magic, no doubt...Herbology, Potions, Transfiguration, Charms and something of the Dark Arts…” She thought there was no way Quirrell could possibly find out each brand of protection and get passed it—but he probably couldn’t even get passed the dog.

“What’s that?” She suddenly asked. She’d been talking mostly out loud to herself and her gaze had drifted around the room when she had noticed something strange. Underneath the tea kettle in the fire place was a huge, black egg.

She thought about Hagrid’s presence in the dragon section f the library and put two and two together.

“Hagrid, please tell me that’s not a dragon egg.”
“Er…” Hagrid said, fiddling nervously with his beard. “Well…”

"Where did you get it, Hagrid?” Ron asked, crouching over the fire to get a closer look at the egg. “It must have cost you a fortune.”

"Won it,” Hagrid said. "Las' night. I was down in the village havin’ a few drinks an' got into a game o' cards with a stranger. Think he was quite glad ter get rid of it, ter be honest."

"Aren’t dragons illegal in Britain?” Persephone inquired. “Why would someone be walking around with a dragon egg in their pocket?”

Hermione was on the same page as Persephone. “And what will you do with it when it’s hatched?”

"Well, I've bin doin' some readin',” Hagrid said, pulling a large book from under his pillow. ‘Got this outta the library—Dragon Breeding for Pleasure and Profit—it's a bit outta date, o' course, but it's all in here. Keep the egg in the fire, 'cause their mothers breathe on I em, see, an' when it hatches, feed it on a bucket o' brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour. An' see here—how ter recognize diff'rent eggs—what I got there's a Norwegian Ridgeback. They're rare, them.”

He looked very pleased with himself, but Hermione didn't.

"Hagrid, you live in a wooden house,” she said.

But Hagrid wasn't listening. He was humming merrily as he stoked the fire.

So now they had something else to worry about: what might happen to Hagrid if anyone found out he was hiding an illegal dragon in his hut.

"Wonder what it's like to have a peaceful life," Ron sighed. Persephone was half asleep over her books, her glasses pushed up into her hair. She should not be so vulnerable around a common area for George and Fred to sneak up on her but she was so tired.

Hermione was interrupted one breakfast time by a note from Hagrid that read: *It's hatching.*

Ron was out of his chair and intent on skipping Herbology, which Persephone anxiously agreed to but Hermione came to her savior—“We can’t skip class! Especially not for something that will get us in trouble if we're caught!”

They had just reached the doors to the Great Hall and Ron had turned to argue with Hermione, “Hermione, how many times in our lives are we going to see a dragon hatching?”

"We've got lessons, we'll get into trouble, and that's nothing to what Hagrid's going to be in when someone finds out what he's doing—"

Persephone noticed someone suddenly pause as they came out of the Great Hall and quickly scuttle back. She nudged Hermione and Ron, “Shhh!”

It was Malfoy—he seemed interested in what they were talking about and was probably still listening. She dragged them away to Herbology.

She listened to Hermione and Ron argue with boredom, only just relieved she wouldn’t have to skip class—she really did like Ron and she considered him one of her best friends but she didn’t want to seem like a party pooper by her anxieties in skipping a lesson.

To her relief, Hermione agreed only to run down to Hagrid’s during morning break. When the class
ended, the three were out the door very quickly, running across the grounds to the edge of the forest.

Hagrid greeted them, looking flushed and excited.

"It's nearly out." He ushered them inside.

The egg was lying in an odd fashion on the table, cracks popping out of it. There were some deep cracks still forming as the egg popped. It was rocking back and forth, a funny clicking sound coming out of it.

Persephone watched in disgusted amazement as the egg cracked open in half and something flopped onto the table with an icky splat.

Persephone grimaced at the slimy, crumpled, black umbrella looking thing. It looked distinctly like what a dragon should look like but then again, not? The wings were huge and near skeletal contrasted oddly with the small, dark body. It had a long snout with wide nostrils, the stubs of horns and bulging, orange eyes.

It sneezed. A couple of sparks flew out of its snout.

"Isn't he beautiful?" Hagrid murmured. The first thing Persephone could think of was how Hagrid knew the slimy thing was a boy. But then, when he reached out a huge hand to stroke the dragon’s head, he near just about started weeping when it snapped at his fingers, “Bless him, he knows his mommy!”

Persephone looked to Hermione and the girls exchanged a glance. Ron was still grimacing with an open mouth at this, probably thinking his brother Charlie was mad for working with dragons when they looked like this.

"Hagrid," Hermione interrupted the tender and weird moment between Hagrid and the dragon, "how fast do Norwegian Ridgebacks grow, exactly?"

Whatever Hagrid would have said next was cut short with a sudden look of horror passing over his expression as he jumped up. "What? What is it?" Persephone asked, startled at the sudden movement.

"Someone was lookin' through the gap in the curtains—it's a kid—he's runnin' back up ter the school." Persephone had a good idea as to who might be lurking around here and her theory was proved right when she ran to the door and looked out—the platinum blonde was unmistakable.

Malfoy had seen the dragon.

The pestering git.

While Persephone knew she ought to keep herself tame around Malfoy, the smile that now always seemed to be lurking on the git’s face during the next week made her blood boil. This was such a perfect opportunity for him—he could at any time go to Dumbledore and not spare a detail of what he’d seen and surely get Hagrid escorted off the grounds even.

Meanwhile, Hagrid didn’t seem to be able to be reasoned with. The mere suggestion of setting him free made Hagrid sentimental. “I can’t do that!” He said. “He’s too little. He’d die without his mommy!”

“But you’re not his—!” Persephone was cut short from Hermione giving her a good kick under the
table. She gave her a look and Persephone muffled her cries of pain, glaring at her but letting her

take her the conversation.

“Hagrid, you understand how much the dragon has grown, don’t you?” She started hesitantly.

They looked at the dragon. It had grown three times in length in just a week. Smoke kept furling
out of its nostrils. Hagrid hadn’t been doing his game keeping duties because the dragon was
keeping him busy. There were empty brandy bottles and chicken feathers all over the floor.

“Oh, I’ve decided to call him Norbert,” Hagrid said, not catching the tone in Hermione’s voice.
“An’ he really knows me, now, watch. Norbert! Norbert! Where’s Mommy?”

"He's lost his marbles," Ron muttered to Persephone.

Hermione continued as if not having heard him. “Well, you’ve seen how much, er, Norbert has
grown. Soon enough, he won’t be able to fit in here and then what?”

Hagrid bit his lip.

"I—I know I can’t keep him forever, but I can’t jus’ dump him, I can't."

“It’ll be worse for both of you if Malfoy tells so the best thing to do is set him free,” She said as
sympathetically as she could. “Ron’s got a brother whose studying dragons in Romania, haven’t
you Ron?”

Ron blinked, “Oh, yeah, I could ask him to take Norbert off your hands, Hagrid.”

“He’ll be able to take care of him and then set him off back into the wild.” Persephone assured
him.

And in the end, Hagrid agreed that they could send an owl to Charlie to ask him.

The following week dragged by as the three tried hard to be completely nonchalant. Ron sent a
letter and now, they waited. Hermione was sometimes shaking her leg nervously, which only
seemed to amplify the situation. Persephone tried to keep as calm as possible, though Susan seemed
to be able to see right through her when they were sitting in the library.

“What’s up?” Susan raised a brow, lowering her book and quill. Persephone had zoned out in
anxiety for a good minute so when Susan spoke up, she jumped.

“Hm?” She nearly dropped her book. “Oh, nothing, I’m fine.”

Susan didn’t look convinced and told her so through a look on her face. Persephone sighed. “It’s
nothing, I’m just waiting for a letter.”

“Ooh, from who?” Susan asked, intrigued. She flipped her plait of her shoulder and leaned forward
across the table.

Persephone bit her lip and Susan gasped, “Is it from a secret admirer? You must tell me!”

“Who’s got a secret admirer?” Daphne asked, appearing suddenly from the shelves, carrying a
stack of books on Herbology. “Mind if I join?” She sat at their nods. “Who’s got a secret admirer?”
She asked once more.

Susan looked at Persephone immediately and Daphne caught on, “Oh, Lily, do tell!”
“I do not have a secret admirer, Susan,” She raised her brows at the girl. “I told her I’m waiting for a letter and she assumed.” She said accusingly.

Daphne exchanged a glance between the two and raised a brow, “Well who else would you be writing if not someone special? I mean, those Muggles you lived with don’t communicate the normal way do they?” She smiled at her joke and sighed. “So, who is it?”

“Oh! Is it that boy with the cat?” Susan asked enthusiastically. Persephone ignored her with shushing her. “He’s tall, third year? What is his name—the one in the play…!”

She knew who she was talking about—the boy with the cat that hated him. She couldn’t remember his name for the life of her.

“Third year? He’s older? Lily!” Daphne whispered, scandalised and excited. “Do tell, my dear!”

“Who are you talking about, Susan? I don’t know any third year boys with cats—unless you mean the Weasley twins?”

“No, Cedric Diggory, of course!” Susan smiled dreamily. “Unless there is something going on with one of the twins?”

“Oh, Merlin, you made it sound like it was someone worthwhile,” Daphne sighed, turning to open one of her textbooks. “Cedric Diggory is pretty, sure, but he’s a Hufflepuff.”

Susan and Persephone glanced at each other before turning to look at their Slytherin friend.

“Daphne, I’m a Hufflepuff.”

“Oh, no, you’ve misunderstood me,” Daphne rushed. “I mean, we can all be friends from different houses—”

“Oh, good,” Persephone muttered.

“But engaging with someone from a different house gets…well, ugly. All the older Slytherin girls says Quidditch rivals get between couples and the distance all houses naturally have just makes it complicated.” She said matter-of-factly.

“I guess…” Susan frowned. “I don’t think there are any cute Hufflepuffs this year. I think Ernie’s got a crush on me though…” Persephone knew Susan’s good friends in Hufflepuff consisted of Hannah Abbott, Justin F-something and Ernie MacMillan. She’d met them only once.

“I think I’d like to wait until fifth or sixth year, you know? The boys now are so…short. I’d like a tall boy.” She nodded to herself. “Pureblooded, naturally, and smart, without a doubt. And handsome, of course,” She smiled at the two. “What about you, Susan?”

Susan blushed, “I don’t know…”

“Oh come on, you must have some sort of an idea of the type of boy you’d like,” She edged her on.

Susan continued blushing, pursing her lips, “Well…Draco Malfoy seems cute….and he’s taller than most of the boys.”

Persephone choked on her tongue laughing and had to bite on her knuckles to stop from making noise. Daphne snorted at the joke, obviously catching the joke. What she said, however, made no sense, “You should know Pansy has already bookmarked him for herself. You ought to choose someone else, Susie,” She smirked.
Susan continued to blush, and Persephone thought it best she not get her hopes on Malfoy. She would much rather not have her friend exposed to scum like that.

“So, Lily, if you don’t have a secret admirer, what would he be like?” Daphne turned her attention to Persephone, who was dreading this conversation.

Her experience with boys was rather damaged—with the boys from her school before Hogwarts always chasing her down and humiliating her and getting her in trouble when she’d punch them in defence, not to mention the entire existence of Dudley…no, she definitely did not like boys…but then, she thought of if she didn’t like boys, who did she like?

Girls?

She thought of the girl on the frozen lake, Cho Chang. She was the prettiest girl, and the thought of her silk hair swishing around her made Persephone’s chest tingle in a different sort of anxiety. And then, there was Lavender, who’s curly blonde hair made her face look so much prettier than usual when it was tied up messily. And Padma, who always leaned in super close to brush some mascara onto her lashes that always made Persephone breath hitch. And she couldn’t even act properly when it was just she and Amanda in the dorm, despite the fact that the girl hadn’t spoken to her in a long time.

“No.” She answered without remembering the question.

“What?”

“What?”

“Oh, you do have a secret admirer!” Daphne gasped. “Look how she’s blushing, Susie!” When she looked at Daphne, she couldn’t help noticing how perfect her face was when she became flushed with excitement. Oh no, oh no—Susan’s complexion suddenly glowed with the contrast of her red hair, making her look so—so...

“I have to go.” Persephone said quickly. She ignored both of her friend’s pretty faces that were guessing that she had to go to get out of the question.

“Mhm,” Daphne smirked at her blushing and near about ran out of the library, ducking away from the librarian.

She was still full of dilemma that Wednesday night with Hermione. She’d suffered through several full moons and still was more stressed about the upcoming holiday. It had been a stressful month already—she had to worry about April first, not only April fools but the twin’s birthday which obviously gave them more motivation to get her back finally, and she had to worry about studying and lessons and she had to worry about this godforsaken dragon situation and Malfoy, every two seconds. And now—now she might be…what? What was the word for liking girls?

And what if she did like girls? What did that mean? Could girls marry girls? What if all her friends who were girls found out and were disgusted by it? Was this normal? She knew of the two boys on Valentines but…but could girls…? All girls talked about were boys not girls—could boys like boys just like how girls liked boy? What was going on?

She might have been grimacing in confusion at the floor because Hermione asked, “What is it?”

She thought about telling Hermione. The common room was empty now, as it was just about midnight, and the two had no homework to complete for the night.
She was about to tell her where her thoughts had been when suddenly, the portrait hole burst open. Persephone decided she would hold on to this thought for another time. Ron appeared out of nowhere as he pulled off Persephone’s invisibility cloak. He had been down at Hagrid's hut, helping him feed Norbert, who was now eating dead rats by the crate.

"It bit me!" he said, showing them his hand, which was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief. "I'm not going to be able to hold a quill for a week. I tell you, that dragon's the most horrible animal I've ever met, but the way Hagrid goes on about it, you'd think it was a fluffy little bunny rabbit. When it bit me he told me off for frightening it. And when I left, he was singing it a lullaby."

“Well, they say mothers have a sixth sense for protecting their children. Did you in any way threat the child?” Persephone asked, smirking.

Ron threw his un-damaged hand up in the air, “It's a dragon!”

“Sh!” Hermione hissed.

“Mama Hagrid,” Persephone muttered.

There was a tap on the dark window.

“Didn’t know owl post came at night,” Persephone said, hurrying over to let her in. “Good, too, she probably has Charlie’s answer.”

She handed the note to Ron.

Dear Ron,

*How are you? Thanks for the letter—I'd be glad to take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won't be easy getting him here. I think the best thing will be to send him over with some friends of mine who are coming to visit me next week. Trouble is, they mustn't be seen carrying an illegal dragon.*

*Could you get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and take him away while it's still dark.*

*Send me an answer as soon as possible.*

*Love,*

*Charlie*

They looked up at each other, and Persephone nodded, “We could go under the invisibility cloak.”

“Only two of us could fit under it with Norbert.” Hermione noted. The fact that Hermione was okay with breaking countless school rules showed how desperate they were to be rid of the situation.

The only hitch in the plan was that the next morning, Ron’s bitten hand had swollen to twice its usual size. Persephone promised to look into dragon bites and how to heal them but by that afternoon, he had no choice but to go to Madame Pomfrey when the cut turned an unhealthy looking shade of green.

There was no time to wonder if Madame Pomfrey would recognize a dragon bite. He nearly fainted in the middle of Transfiguration.

Ron was in a terrible state by the end of the day when Persephone and Hermione came to see him.
"It's not just my hand," he whispered, "although that feels like it's about to fall off. Malfoy told Madam Pomfrey he wanted to borrow one of my books so he could come and have a good laugh at me. He kept threatening to tell her what really bit me—I've told her it was a dog, but I don't think she believes me -I shouldn't have hit him at the Quidditch match, that's why he's doing this."

"Well it'll all be over at midnight on Saturday," Hermione said, but this didn't soothe Ron at all. On the contrary, he sat bolt upright and broke into a sweat.

"Midnight on Saturday!" he said in a hoarse voice. "Oh no oh no—I've just remembered! Charlie’s letter was in that book Malfoy took, he's going to know we're getting rid of Norbert!"

Persephone and Hermione didn't get a chance to answer. Madam Pomfrey came over at that moment and made them leave, saying Ron needed sleep.

"It's too late to change the plan now," Persephone told Hermione. "There isn’t any time. This is our only chance to get rid of Norbert. We have the cloak and that’s an advantage.” She said. “We haven't got time to send Charlie another owl, and this could be our only chance to get rid of Norbert. We'll have to risk it. And we have got the invisibility cloak, Malfoy doesn't know about that."

They found Fang, the boarhound, sitting outside with a bandaged tail when they went to tell Hagrid, who opened a window to talk to them.

"I won't let you in," he puffed. "Norbert's at a tricky stage—nothin' I can't handle."

When they told him about Charlie's letter, his eyes filled with tears, although that might have been because Norbert had just bitten him on the leg.

"Aargh! It's all right, he only got my boot—jus' playin'—he's only a baby, after all." The baby banged its tail on the wall, making the windows rattle. Persephone and Hermione walked back to the castle, both thinking the same thing: they couldn’t wait until Saturday night to be done with this ordeal.

Hermione made it a lot worse by pacing in their dorm.

“Would you stop that? You’re make me more nervous than I already am,” Persephone snapped.

Hermione paused only to shoot her a look of distress, “Don’t you think if I could, I would?” She glanced around the common room. Lavender had looked up at the sudden rise of her voice.

Hermione came around and folded her legs under her as she sat in front of Persephone, drawing the curtains closed. This was a ritual when the two talked privately. Persephone drew her wand, casting a quick but sufficient lumos while Hermione cast a sound proofing spell on the bed. No one would hear them.

“I’m worried about Malfoy.” Hermione whispered, even though no one could hear them. “And I’ve been thinking. What’s stopping him from giving that letter to Snape, or McGonagall, or even Dumbledore?” She paused nervously.

“Me too,” Persephone admitted gratefully. She liked having someone to talk to like this. She couldn’t recall a friendship like this. “I thought I could probably swipe it from him during lessons but I think he might be suspicious as to why I get close to him. The invisibility cloak is too risky in a classroom full of people so…” She shrugged worriedly.
Hermione pursed her lips, looking at her pleadingly, “Malfoy wouldn’t keep the letter on him…no, he would keep it in the Slytherin common room.”

“Well, that’s worse, because we aren’t Slytherin, ‘Mione.” Persephone exclaimed, throwing up her hands.

“Yes, we aren’t Slytherin…” She trailed off, raising her brows. Persephone understood at once.

“I don’t think I’d like to abuse my friendship with Daphne like this.” She told her. Hermione exhaled impatiently.

“Not her! Her friend, that horrid girl, Pansy Parkinson, is it? She’s close to Malfoy, isn’t she?” She said and Persephone interrupted.

“I am not befriending that pigheaded bitch just for the sake of getting a letter from Malfoy.” She crossed her arms. “I’d be better off by just sneaking into the common room as a Slytherin—” Hermione gave her a look. “Oooh, I understand…” She nodded but stopped short. “No, no I don’t.”

“You become Pansy Parkinson and sneak into Malfoy’s dorm to find the letter. If you’re caught, you can say that you were leaving a love note or something. She clings to him like the type to do something like that.”

“’Mione, you are simply brilliant. When shall we do this?”

The next day was spent staring at Pansy Parkinson as quietly as possibly. They hoped no one noticed the two straight up stalkers staring at the girl so they could nail every detail of the girl. Twice, Persephone had gone to bump into Pansy to get a close up of her face to see any freckle details. She got so many nasty stares from Pansy and even some classier threats.

The plan was risky, but then again, they’d come this far. So, right before dinner, the two girls ran to one of the janitor’s closet close to the Great Hall. Persephone changed quickly into the Slytherin uniform she borrowed from George (he had a pair of uniforms from all the houses for reasons she did not want to know) and finally stood straight in front of Hermione.

Hermione had pulled out the hand mirror from Persephone’ bag and Persephone stared into her eyes in the mirror, concentrating hard. Slowly, at first, but quick in the end, she began to feel her skin burn then crackle and cool and Pansy Parkinson was staring back at her. Her usual blue and green eyes were a dark brown and her nose was flatted and more of a slope, her nostrils big and wide. Her skin lost its pink tinge and was now pale white.

“Woooah!” She gasped at her hair. It was a solid dark brown, short above her shoulders and…so strange—she’d never had short hair voluntarily. And bangs.

“Your voice, Lily!” Hermione chastised. “You sound like yourself.”

“Sorry,” Persephone coughed and tried to rough her voice up to a higher pitch. “How’s this?” She tried her best at the refined posh accent that Pansy’s nasally voice cut with. Hermione nodded.

“Almost.” She said. “I’d say we have thirty minutes. What did Fred and George tell you?”

They’d told her where exactly the Slytherin common room was—in the dungeon. How fun. “Yes.” She coughed, trying to make her voice sound more annoying. “Yes.”

“Better,” Hermione noted. “Okay, almost done.” She said seriously, staring up at her—or at Pansy. Pansy was one of the tallest girls in their year, which was so weird for Persephone, who had grown
several inches for this scheme.

Persephone waited while Hermione ran Persephone’s magic brush through her hair to straighten it completely, then she smoothed down her uniform some more and then she took a deep breath and tried her best scowl. Hermione nodded in approval and then bid her good luck.

She tried her best to keep that strut Pansy always pulled off, trying not to trip over her own feet. No one found this out of order, though she was the only person moving against the crowds of students walking into the Great Hall.

Fred and George had given her strict instructions on a secret passageway into the Slytherin common room other than the one through the dungeons.

She waited until no one was looking so she could slip into the closet that the first years had waited in before being sorted. She closed the door quietly behind her and breathed in the cool air. Good—no ghosts.

It was easier than she thought it would be, to navigate with a foreign body. Pansy was taller so it was easier to reach up to the highest brick to her right and then to reach her leg to the one immediately to the opposite wall but lower. She was glad that Pansy was so tall.

A little passageway opened up at the bottom of the room, just in the corner where the two walls met. The bricks move and opened and Persephone held her breath and started counting the seconds when she let go of the right bricks and made a run for it. She slid into the passage and darkness enveloped her.

It was a tight space that she would find herself stuck in if any smaller. How the hell did Fred and George fit into this? And how did they find the damned thing?

She slid down the passageway as it started to become steeper and steeper, hoping this wasn’t the twins’ way of getting her back finally, when it then offered a drop. She was so startled by the sudden fall that she had no time to scream and then she was sliding again, gasping. It was becoming colder until finally, her feet hit the wall and crumpled, allowing for her knees to pop onto the stone wall. She hissed a curse under her breath before catching her breath. Those twins didn’t even warn her…

She felt her way in the complete darkness and found a softer fabric that was definitely not apart of the stone wall. She stood on her toes to reach to the ceiling and found the frame part of the picture and traced it from corner to corner, jogging to side and down then up, trailing her nails to the entire frame.

The back painting evaporated slowly and she could see into the Slytherin common room. She gazed down, fascinated with the detail.

It was a long room of granite, decorated with leather couches and low set tables. The room glowed faintly in green from the lamps, and there were currently three fires going. She could tell why—it was freezing.

There was no one sitting in the tall leather chairs, nor anyone she could see from where she was hiding behind the painting up high. She pushed against the one way picture and fell ever so gracefully—face first and loudly.

She got to her feet quickly and brushed herself off. It was colder now in the actual common room. She looked up—she had fallen out of the painting of Salazar Slytherin—it stared down at her as if
it knew what sort of mission she was on. She scurried off, up the boys’ dormitory stairs, bent on the mission she knew the painting could smell out.

“And we have one less thing to worry about,” Persephone said about an hour later in her own dorm, Hermione standing next to her. She threw the letter into the fire that was lit in the middle of the room and they watched it burn with satisfaction.

“Now all we need to worry about is Saturday,” Hermione muttered, exhaling shakily before retiring to her only happy place—studying. Persephone, starving because she missed dinner for the little mission, decided to head down to the common room to find the twins. They usually always accompanied her to the kitchens and it wasn’t that late yet.

“Headed to the kitchens, care to join?” She asked to the twins lounging around, attempting homework, it looked like. Fred was sitting on the floor and George was sprawled upside down on an arm chair behind him. They both perked up eagerly and George nearly toppled over his twin to get himself standing.

“Brilliant thinking, Lils,” Fred commented and they snuck out the portrait hole.

“So?” George started.

“How’d it go?”

Persephone grinned, “Beautifully. Thanks for not asking questions, boys.” She seated herself next to Fred, who was lying upside down on the couch. George was sprawled awkwardly on the armchair. He straightened as Persephone sat. “I wonder why you guys didn’t. Should I be watching my back still?”

“Well, dear Persephone, we’ve decided that as eloquent as pranksters as we are—” Fred said.

“We would simply give up the task and instead—”

“Offer you a truce.”

Persephone raised her eyebrow, wondering if she could trust their words, but she asked, “Why?”

“Well, as all the greats that have come before us have proven—” George started.

“No one can succeed without a mentor—” Fred continued.

“And you have a lot of potential, dear firstie,” George finished with a cheeky grin.

Persephone crossed her arms. “Who mentored you?”

They exchanged glances and grinned, “All secrets will be shared if you accept, Lils.”

She sighed, rolling her eyes—what the honest hell? “I think I’ll sleep on it,” She smiled sweetly.

“Wait, what secrets?”

George grinned, “Let’s just say, that little passageway into the Slytherin common room was a twig compared to the woods of things we could teach you,” Persephone snorted.

“How poetic,” She grinned. “Now that’s its safe to ask, how come no pranks for your birthday?”
“Everyone expects a prank—”

“So not pranking was the prank—”

“Puts everyone on edge—”

“Poor Gryffindors on edge is quite funny—six people spilled ink on themselves from shaking so much.”

“You’re nightmares,” Persephone laughed, her laugh echoing down to the entrance hall as they turned onto the grand staircase. Her laughter was interrupted with louder laughter that sounded too cynical for her not to recognize. She looked down and found an all too familiar blood head attached to a pale, green trimmed robed boy—his wand was raised against something small that his dumb goons were laughing at.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” She cried, a surge of anger moving quick through her veins as she stormed down the rest of the stairs at the sound of the familiar sounding cries of their victim. “Malfoy!” She just about screamed.

The heads turned, becoming quiet for a moment, giving the poor cat a chance to make a quick escape—smoke followed right behind, as if he’d been hexed. Her anger boiled. “Now look what you’ve done, Potter! Now I’ll have to catch him again!” Malfoy said in an irritated manner.

She stormed right up to him, “What is your problem, Malfoy? Picking on a defenseless kitten? Really? I didn’t think even you could sink so low.”

“Defenseless? That miserable nightmare scratched me up enough to deserve a hex—or two,” He laughed into her face. She scowled.

“Have you no sense of morality?” She hissed. “And what hex, Malfoy? We haven’t learned any hexes!”

His lips curved into a sneering smirk, “I don’t think anyone bothers teaching girls hexes—all girls —” She cut him off with a straight fist to the nose, hoping she would cut his lip open over her knuckles. For a moment, he swayed back, surprised and shocked, for the first time speechless. She heard a chorus of ‘ooooh’s around her but at the moment she could only hear the buzz in her ears.

She could barely register the sting on her hand and she was sure she had just bruised the knuckle—ugh—so when she turned around, she was raising her hand up for damage control when she felt a harsh and painful tug on her ponytail. It was so strong it pulled her back a stepped and she wobbled, crashing to the floor.

“Hey!” George cried as Persephone stared up in shock—Goyle and Crabbe were turning their attention to the twins as they surged forward. Persephone knew in an instant what Malfoy was raising his foot for and before he could kick her, she raised her hand and palm first to the point of his foot. It froze in midair—the Slytherins around them, including Pansy, were staring at this movement.

It was strange—the air seemed to bend to her will so easily. She remembered Flitwick’s words, about asking permission. Her index tremble, trying the air, her mind screaming for permission and she felt the strength against her palm as a ‘yes’. The air seemed to solidify, enough for her to feel it. She truly felt every particle of oxygen and hydrogen, and she was sure she could probably ball up the air into her hand and it would solidify—but that was not her plan.

She tightened her fist into a hole, feeling the air solidify around his ankle, making him wobble and
then she pulled back and pushed as hard as she could—Malfoy went flying.

She stared after him and then turned to stare up at his goon squad. Using her index and middle finger, she swatted them both to opposite sides and they crashed to the floor. She pushed herself up, and turned to face the gawking students of Slytherin, “Anyone else?”

When several people stepped away hurriedly, she stormed passed them, dragging Fred by the front of his robes behind her towards the kitchens. George jogged after them, looking at her in complete awe, “MAaaaate!”

“Shutup,” She hissed. “I’m hungry.”

“I will never get on your bad side when you’re hungry,” Fred said as she let him go in front of the basement stairs.

“Or at all,” George said.

This nearly brought a smile to her face, “Har, har, Malfoy deserved it,” She said before turning suddenly to them, inspiration flooring through her veins. “That offer you made—may I make a condition?”

They raised their brows almost in sync, “Go on…”

Persephone thought back to how Susan’s face flushed when she talked about Malfoy--pretty Susan and awful Draco. She felt no remorse when she said, “I want Draco Malfoy to rot in humiliation by the end of this year.”

Mischievous grins spread across their faces as they looked at one another, “We can definitely make that happen.”

While they waited, Persephone had some fun with her appearance. She dressed in all black and straightened her hair perfectly with her brush and then putting it in a sleeked back pony tail of perfectly straight hair and then, just to be extra, she made her hair completely black. She had to admit—she looked good with dark hair. She stared at her mirror for a moment, and her skin became less rosy, less freckly and more of an olive tone. She turned in the mirror, smiling at her reflection—she had more of her father’s complexion and hair! Hmm…

She stared at her eyes before they darkened to a dark brown. Pretty…hmm…

She had a thought of mind—she changed her lip shape and thinned out her long, normally arched eyebrows to a darker black color. She smiled at herself—how strange…but pretty…hm. She looked like…a Veronica.

“Lily?” Hermione said, coming out of the bathroom. She turned to her and Hermione froze, “Um, sorry…”

“Why?” She raised a new brow at her. Hermione glanced at her forehead and made an ‘oh’ sound. “Do I look like a Veronica?”

“A Veronica?” Hermione raised a brow. “You definitely don’t look like Lily.” Hermione thought for a moment, “Maybe not looking like yourself is best, if we get caught—”
“We won’t get caught!” Persephone interrupted her. Persephone had skipped the panicking anxiety to the calm reassuring calm. She had been the one to be reassuring Hermione it was going to be okay with no personal knowledge that it would be okay.

They made their way down under the invisibility cloak, trying not to trip over it. Despite Hermione being slightly taller than Persephone, the cloak still had a lot of unused parts, a whole train behind them. This proved to be a struggle when they came across Peeves, who was bouncing against the walls in the entrance hall. By the time they had gotten out of the castle and down to Hagrid’s hut, Hagrid had Norbert ready to go in a large crate.

"He's got lots o' rats an' some brandy fer the journey," Hagrid said in a muffled voice. "An' I've packed his teddy bear in case he gets lonely."

Persephone didn’t dare announce that the ripping sounds coming from inside the crate were probably the teddy being torn to pieces.

"Bye-bye, Norbert!" Hagrid sobbed, as Persephone and Hermione made sure the invisibility cloak covered the entire crate and themselves. Good thing it was so big and long. "Mommy will never forget you!"

It was quite the job getting the crate up to the castle and then even more of a job to heave the crate up the marble staircase in the entrance hall and along the darkened corridors. It seemed like the castle truly seemed endless when they needed to pull along a crate with a dragon in it. Persephone nearly cried in relief when they finally reached the corridor beneath the tallest tower.

A sudden movement up ahead made them almost drop the crate.

They shrank to the side, staring ahead as two dark silhouettes started coming towards them. A lamp flared and Persephone saw the most unlikely of duos: Professor McGonagall dressed in a tartan bathrobe with a hair net and Malfoy, who she had by the ear.

"Detention!" she shouted. "And twenty points from Slytherin! Wandering around in the middle of the night, how dare you—!"

"You don't understand, Professor. Persephone Potter's coming—she's got a dragon!"

"What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies! Come on—I shall see Professor Snape about you, Malfoy!"

The steep spiral staircase up to the top of the tower seemed the easiest thing in the world after that. Not until they'd stepped out into the cold night air did they throw off the cloak, glad to be able to breathe properly again. Hermione did a sort of jig.

"Malfoy's got detention! I could sing!"

"I heavily advise you not to,” Persephone said but she too was smiling widely. They looked at each other and maybe it was the situation or maybe it was because it was a bad idea to be laughing but the girls had a hard time stifling their laughter.

They waited in the dark, with only the sounds of Norbert thrashing about in his crate and only ten minutes passed before four broomsticks came swooping down out of the darkness.

Charlie's friends were a cheery lot. Persephone was especially drawn to the one with bubble gum pink hair and the other one with dark curls, until she realize who it was—“Diana!”
Diana Johnson, her very un-magical neighbor in Privet Drive, was of the four. She smiled hesitantly, “Do I know you?”

Persephone realized she was under cover as a Veronica, as she chose to name this look, and quickly concentrated back into her normal look. The three other friends’ eyes widened while the girl with bumblegum pink hair, “Heyy!”

“Percy! Long-time no see!” Diana cried swooping in for a surprising hug. “I did not think you would be breaking so many rules your first year!”

“Persephone Potter? A metamorphamagus? Brilliant—this is bloody brilliant!” The girl with the bumblegum hair. She suddenly changed in the same way that Persephone changed and Persephone gasped. “You and I, mate, are two peas in a pot! Name’s Tonks.”

“You—you’re a—what in the bloody hell—”

“Listen, Perce,” Diana said in her faint accent, “As much as we can talk, we must hurry.”

“Wanna see the harness we’ve got?” Tonks grinned.

They showed Persephone and Hermione the harness they'd rigged up, so they could suspend Norbert between them. They all helped buckle Norbert safely into it and then Persephone and Hermione thanked them profusely. Diana hung back towards Persephone and Persephone still was in shock, “So….you know Charlie then?”

Diana smiled a brilliant smile, “We were in Hogwarts at the same time, though we were not in the same year.”

“And she was in love with Charlie’s older brother, Bill, weren’t you, D?” Tonks grinned, leaning into the conversation.

“A mere crush,” Diana blushed, “And now I go to Beauxbatons, as I told you I would finish my school with my sister. The Johnsons are my adoptive family before my biological family wanted me back. I happened to be visiting Tonks when she got the letter from Charlie.”

“Wow….you are….not related to them. How did I not see that?” Persephone muttered. “How come you never told me?”

She giggled, “I am so sorry, Percy, but we were bound by oath—I want to explain but we must hurry. I will see you still this summer, remember? We go to Italy, right? And you’ll get a chance to meet my new brother!”

Persephone hugged Diana once more, suddenly feeling more so connected to her, even if she were confused as hell—did this mean her parents were magical? And what did she mean by new brother?—before Tonks winked and they were off.

Persephone, breathless and dazed, filled Hermione in on who Diana was and Hermione nodded along, before Persephone gasped, “We forgot the invisibility cloak!”

They had to double back and get under the cloak once more and finally quieted down, slipping down the spiral staircase, feeling a lot lighter—Norbert gone, Malfoy in detention, her favorite person in Privet Drive a witch (!). She would look forward to the letter.

Their way back to the common room was interrupted by Neville, who was scrambling passed them, not seeing them invisible, of course.
Hermione and Persephone looked between them, “Neville?” Hermione whispered after him.

He jumped, looking back at them, suddenly seeing them. “Thank merlin! Draco said he was coming after you and he said you had a dragon and that you were in the Astronomy room—wait, where did you come from?”

“Don’t worry about it, come on, we should get back—”

“Oh, we are in trouble…” A voice suddenly said. The three turned and Filch loomed out of the darkness, an evil smirk on his face.
Persephone was ready to have an anxiety attack when she realized how bad the situation was exactly.

There was no getting out of this one—Filch was leading them down to Professor McGonagall’s study on the first floor. He had them sit and wait without speaking. Hermione had started trembling and Neville was close to tears he was so scared. Persephone’s mind was going a hundred miles an hour, fidgeting nervously.

She couldn’t think of a cover up story—not an idea of an excuse came up to her mind. She couldn’t figure out how this was going to work out okay. She would surely suffer—she was one of McGonagall’s favorite students. She surely would not be after this.

Her only thought of action was to stuff the invisibility cloak up her sweater. At least that would not add into the mix of disaster—she mouthed to Hermione, ‘don’t tell’. She would not say a word about the dragon or Charlie’s friends or the cloak. That much she knew for sure.

When Professor McGonagall appeared, she looked more likely to breathe fire than Norbert as she towered over the three of them.

"I would never have believed it of any of you. Mr. Filch says you were wandering around on the fourth floor. It's one o'clock in the morning. Explain yourselves."

It was the first time Hermione had ever failed to answer a teacher's question. She was staring at her slippers, as still as a statue.

"I think I've got a good idea of what's been going on," said Professor McGonagall. "It doesn't take a genius to work it out. You fed Draco Malfoy some cock-and-bull story about a dragon, trying to get him out of bed and into trouble. I've already caught him."

“If I may, we have no idea about any dragons or anything about Malfoy being out tonight but… Professor, Hermione and I, we’ve been tutoring Neville. Tonight, we were doing Astronomy, that’s why we were out in the middle of the night.”

Professor McGonagall looked between the three and then to Neville, “Is this true, Mister Longbottom?”

Neville nodded profusely. McGonagall sighed.

“Well, I cannot say that I am not disappointed by these good intentions but four students out of bed in one night is unheard of. All three of you will receive detentions and fifty points will be taken from Gryffindor each.”
“Each?” She gasped, her face flushing.

"Fifty points each,” said Professor McGonagall, breathing heavily through her long, pointed nose. “Now get back to bed, all of you. I’ve never been more ashamed of Gryffindor students.”

Any and all chance Gryffindor had had at the house cup had be tarnished in one night because of them. Draco had only lost twenty points! How had that been fair? And how could they ever make up for this?

She was dreading the morning—she had barely slept and woken up too early. Hermione was up too and her eyes were puffy and she seemed tired, as if she had been crying herself to sleep.

At first, Gryffindors passing the giant hourglasses that recorded the house points the next day thought there’d been a mistake. How could they suddenly have a hundred and fifty points fewer than yesterday? And then the story started to spread: Persephone Lily Potter, the famous Persephone Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, her and a couple of other stupid first years.

The thought of so many people hating her—for something as manipulative as house points—made her chest hurt. Even the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs had turned against her, because Slytherin was now in first place and no one wanted that, from any house but Slytherin. She was being insulted outright in the halls, being pointed at and laughed at and at some during Herbology, while George told someone off, she felt her chest clasp and tighten and she found herself unable to breathe. Her vision came in and out in black spots and she suddenly couldn’t feel her legs.

She’d experienced this sensation and was very familiar with it—growing up in the Dursley’s house made the feeling loom over her at all times. They were inevitable once she felt the sharp pain in her left arm, the tingling in her palms and the uncomfortable feeling in her middle.

Feeling adrenaline pump through her veins, she couldn’t bring herself to even tell Fred what was going on when he asked why she was shaking. When her breathing started in gasps, he panicked, drawing George’s attention, who reacted quickly by leading her as everything started spinning.

She didn’t remember much of it—she knew it hurt and that she could barely breathe through it but something about having the twins there made her feel better. She only remembered the slow part, the end of it, when Fred had started cracking jokes and she could register his words enough to laugh. She didn’t remember when he did so, but George had taken both her hands in his and let her slash them open with her nails as she squeezed them. She felt bad about that.

It lasted a whole period—she felt worse afterwards. Her head was throbbing and she was losing her voice from the damned incident. Her chest trembled, like sobs were still waiting to trail out of her throat. She was still trembling and her hair was a mess. She felt so weak.

It didn’t help when lunch came around and she walked past the Slytherin table filled with cheering and clapping Slytherins, "Thanks Potter, we owe you one!"

She dragged George to the Gryffindor table before he could march over there, feeling highly distressed. Ron did not ask where she was during their lesson.

"They'll all forget this in a few weeks. Fred and George have lost loads of points in all the time they've been here, and people still like them." He said as they sat.

“That’s true,” Fred agreed.

“We did.”
“Have you guys lost enough points to make most of the school hate you and call you names?”

“Er…no,” Fred said.

“But don’t worry, it’ll blow over in a good week,” George chimed in, bumping her shoulder.

She half considered to change her appearance permanently to Veronica and have Persephone disappear for good, start over. She hated herself in this moment and thought she might as well pitch herself off the Astronomy tower she felt so bad.

Even Quidditch had lost all its fun, as the rest of the team would refuse to speak to her or about her. If they had to, they referred to her as the Seeker. And not even to her face—Katie had turned to George while they had all gone to change out of uniform and told him, “Tell the seeker that we won’t be able to fill the gap even if we win this next match.”

George and Fred, the only two of the team that acted the same as before the loss of points, turned to Katie. Persephone swallowed heavily, feeling the same tornado of emotion in her chest and she tried taking a deep breath, reaching with a shaking hand to pull her hair up into a pony tail. She felt her eyes sting.

“Alright, that’s enough!” George shot back. Everyone looked at him. “This is utter rubbish—she lost fifty points. Not a hundred and fifty. Just fifty. Let’s not forget that she’s the reason this team is doing so well and winning this year. Let’s not forget she earns more points in one class than any of you do in a day! And let’s not forget that without her we wouldn’t even have a chance at winning the cup. So for all of you giving her a hard time, remember that we’re supposed to be a team that we’re supposed to treat our house members like family.” He fumed, throwing his hands up.

“And let’s not forget that the house point system is to advocate favoritism among the houses and is ultimately corrupt enough to have the entire school bully and harass a first year student, including her own house.” Fred said, copying her statement.

“Yea!” George pointed at him. “And not to mention she is a first year. Which one of you jackasses earned as many points as she has in your first year?”

“None? That’s what we thought.” Fred closed off.

The tension turned awkward after that and no one looked Persephone in the eye. She pulled her robes on, and waited while George and Fred finished and they walked out together, feeling relatively better.

The twins weren’t the only one who stood up for her—Cedric Diggory from Hufflepuff had told off several people in the halls and turned to her, “Don’t worry, everything’ll be okay. You don’t deserve to be bullied like this.”

Susan, too, was on her side but like, seven people against a thousand or so people. Hermione and Neville were suffering, too. They didn’t have as bad a time as Persephone, because they weren’t as well-known, but nobody would speak to them, either. Hermione had stopped drawing attention to herself in class, keeping her head down and working in silence.

Persephone tried hard to keep her mind focused on the end of year exams. She was spending lots of time in the library, away from everyone, even Susan, Daphne and Hermione. She liked being alone in the library, but she still kept herself up at night with Hermione and Ron, way after everyone else had left the common room. She was very well off in charms, potions and just in general spells and
such. What she needed to work on was remembering dates and keeping herself focused on her work.

She found it incredibly hard to focus on her studying, especially when the words started to float off the page. Her dyslexia seemed to finally be kicking in at full capacity and it triggered the worst parts of her focus—she kept thinking about the whole Philosopher’s Stone situation.

She thought several things over and ended up figuring some stuff out that was completely useless since she had vowed not to lurk anymore in things unrelated to school.

She finally took a moment to herself to go down to the lake, to be away from everyone in the common room. It was a sunny day, where she sat under a tree by the lake, staring at it in fascination. She felt something tingling in her legs, like they were asleep. It happened often when she was around the lake. She took her shoes and socks off and dipped her feet into the lake.

She was in deep thought—the sky was so blue, not a cloud in the sky. The water was reflecting the towering castle above, and it was tranquil. There nothing out of the ordinary…

“Why do you always hang out in the sun?” A sudden voice said.

She jumped, looking back. She already knew about who it was because no one else took a hobby out of startling her as he did.

“Hello,” She greeted, squinting up at him. He was well preserved in the shade of the tree, looking extremely pale. “And what’s that about the sun?”

“Nothing, never mind,” He sat and took her in. “Are you sulking?”

“No, I leave that to you,” She smiled, closing her eyes and leaning back on her hands.

He snorted, “I don’t sulk,” She opened one eye to glance at him. He’d sat on her clothe and picked up one of the books she had had laid open. “Can’t believe how easy this is—you first years should be getting perfect scores with easy subjects like these.”

“What year are you taking your exams with?” She asked.

“They’ve decided to divide my classes between second and third years and even then, I know a lot of the material,” He said, reading one of her books.

“Sounds boring,” She sighed. “Are you finally going to tell me your house?”

“Wampus—”

“Not your American school house!” She snapped, opening her eyes. He was smirking, still reading.

“Why does it kill you inside not knowing everything about a person?” He mused. She waited, staring at him. He finally met her eye. “What house do you think I’m in?”

“Er…” She thought for a moment. What house would he be in? He was a sarcastic, moody boy that appeared in random places and seemed to stalk her at times. But none of the houses had such characteristics. “I…”

“Let me know when you figure it out.” He returned to the book.

She thought for a moment, “Alright, let me ask you this. What house would you like to be in?” This said a lot about a person.
He paused, looking as though he was thinking deeply of his answer. It took a long moment but eventually, he answered, “Ravenclaw.”

She choked, “Really?”

“Not everyone wants to be in Gryffindor, Seph,” He rolled his eyes, his eyes returning to the book. She scoffed, “I didn’t want to be in Gryffindor.”

“Oh, right—let me guess! You wanted to be in Slytherin?” He joked.

“Yes,” She crossed her arms, “Yes I did.” He stared at her for a long moment before bursting out in laughter. She scolded, “What? What’s wrong with Slytherin?”

“Nothing’s wrong—I just thought the Girl Who Lived would have a prejudice against Slytherin house because of, well, the obvious!” He shrugged. “And my entire family is in Slytherin either way, and extended family too. They expect me to be in it too when I do end up wearing the Sorting Hat.” He sighed. “Ought to be fun when I disappoint them. Not that I care that I do.” He said quickly.

She thought for a moment, “Well, whatever. You’d make a good Slytherin.”

“Mm,” He hummed. “Anyway—”

“Hey! Lily!” She snapped her head over to where the voice called for her. “What are you doing?” Hannah Abbott asked her, flipping one of her blonde pigtails over her shoulder. She was walking down the slope towards Persephone with Susan, Ernie Macmillan and Justin Finch-Fletchley.

“Er…nothing,” She re-folded her legs and smiled up at them. “Hey Susan.”

Justin beamed down at her, “Nice to see ya again.”

“Ernie Macmillan,” Ernie said, though he did not shake her hand for he was holding a basket. She noticed Susan holding a thick, folded blanket in her own arms.

“Mind if we join you? This is the nicest spot,” Susan smiled down at her.

“Yeah—” She turned to ask if Nico was fine with it but found he was gone, the textbook laid down where he had been just a second ago. She dropped her hand and felt herself pale. “Yeah, sure.”

Persephone gestured for them to go ahead, feeling awkward as she grabbed her bag so Susan could shake the blanket open and spread it over the grass to connect to Persephone’s blanket as well. Persephone laid on her blanket, away from the water.

“My name was down for Eton, you know.” Justin said. “I can’t tell you how glad I am I came here instead. Of course, Mother was slightly disappointed, but since I made her read some of Lockhart’s books I think she’s begun to see how useful it’ll be to have a fully trained wizard in the family…” Justin told her as they all settled over the blanket.

“Lockhart?” She asked with a raised brow. The name was unfamiliar.

Susan giggled suddenly, “Oh, he’s such an amazing wizard! I cannot believe you haven’t ever heard of him!”

Persephone shrugged, leaning back on her hands, glancing around. Nico was nowhere to be found.
“He isn’t that great,” Ernie muttered and Persephone snorted. He looked at her and they laughed.
“Pass the grapes, would you?” Hannah passed the little jar filled with grapes to him. He grabbed a
handful before Hannah offered Persephone some. She took them gratefully.

“Have you started studying for the exams yet?” Justin asked the group. “I’ve started studying but I
cannot seem to figure out what I’m doing wrong with my transfiguration.”

“McGonagall’s offering extra practice next month, I think,” Persephone said. “I’m mostly having
trouble with history of magic. All those dates—” She started rolling her eyes backwards, “Ugh, I
hate it.”

“You’re in luck,” Hannah smiled, biting into her sandwich. “I can help you if you want—”

“Can I get in on this?” Justin interrupted anxiously. “Because I know you’re the best in our year at
Transfiguration and I could seriously use some help.”

It seemed everyone was getting into the harsh spirits of exams—Persephone didn’t think it too
strange that Nico had disappeared so suddenly, he was famously known for it. She forgot him as
she focused on pulling herself through exams. The resolution to keep herself focused on exams was
going well, until the week before exams were due to start.

She had been walking back to the dorms from her Hufflepuff study group, which had been joined
by Daphne, Reneta, Neville and Padma Patil, Parvati’s twin sister, when she heard somebody
whimpering from a classroom up ahead. She immediately resolved to find out what that was,
drawing her wand and drawing closer.

She heard Quirrell’s voice.

"No—no—not again, please—"

Persephone’s eyes widened—she could not hear a second voice and unless he was having a
breakdown by himself, it sounded like someone was threatening him. She moved ever so closer.

"All right—all right—" she heard Quirrell sob. She grimaced in confusion to herself—she had not
heard anyone speak. She thought of Snape for a moment, thinking of his quiet voice, but she had to
hastily push those thoughts aside when she heard Quirrell pace towards the door.

She took a great step up on the air as it solidified to her will and pushed herself up over the door,
just near the ceiling. Next second, Quirrell came hurrying out of the classroom straightening his
turban. For a wild moment, she thought she saw something rotten under the turban but he had been
walking away now. Good thing too—it would be terrible if he looked up.

She waited for a moment so the footsteps could clear away before floating gently down back to the
floor. She turned to stare at the door—it was ajar and she could see into it. There was no one
there…she stared after Quirrell in confusion…

Who had he been talking to?

She made her way hastily to the Gryffindor common room to look for Ron and Hermione—she
found them in a corner by a window. Hermione was testing Ron on Astronomy. She filled them in
quickly of what she’d seen and heard.

"Snape's done it, then!" said Ron. "If Quirrell's told him how to break his Anti-Dark Force spell --"

"There's still Fluffy, though," said Hermione.
“But that’s the thing! I didn’t see anyone in the classroom and there was no way they could have gotten out of there without me seeing them. Unless they jumped out of a window.” Persephone huffed, crossing her arms.

“Have the twins not told you their theory on Snape being a vampire yet? I don’t usually believe them but Snape a vampire seems likely. A quick getaway out the window—”

“It’s sunny outside, Ron,” Hermione interjected. Ron shrugged.

“He’s the potions professor, he probably has some weird potion that makes him able to go out in the sun.” He looked at Persephone. “So what do we do, Lily?”

The light of adventure was kindling again in Ron's eyes, but Hermione answered before she could.

"Go to Dumbledore. That's what we should have done ages ago. If we try anything ourselves we'll be thrown out for sure."

“We’ve got no proof! No proof, no witness, no case,” She groaned. “Quirrell won’t back us up and Snape will likely pitch for you two to be thrown out of Hogwarts if we need to explain why we think this. Or, likely, he’ll suck your blood because that vampire theory is looking very plausible.” She sighed. “Unless Dumbledore knows he’s a vampire and is keeping it lowkey—Dumbledore wouldn’t hire a vampire, would he?”

“Man’s mad, isn’t he?” Ron said. “And I guess we aren’t allowed to know about Fluffy or the Stone, so that’ll definitely get Hagrid in trouble…”

Hermione looked convinced, but Ron didn’t.

“I’ll look into vampires, then,” Persephone sighed. “No doubt the good books on them will be in the Restricted Sections,” She sighed, casting a longing look over to the towering shelves.

“Ask Snape for a note, he’d probably give it to you without too many questions,” Ron suggested, bitterly going over the moons of Jupiter.

She snorted, “Vampires probably can read minds, he’d pick it out of my head in seconds.” She perked up. “This theory is becoming more realistic—”

“Why would a vampire want the Stone if he’s already immortal?” Hermione asked. “I don’t think Snape is a vampire and it would be a waste of time trying to look into that,” Hermione said irritably. All this talk was messing with her studying it seemed.

Persephone rolled her eyes, “Snape isn’t the one after the Stone! Quirrell’s the one with a funky looking turban, isn’t he?” She raised a brow. “That sounded terrible—what I mean, is that he can be hiding things in that turban. And I think I’m done studying. I think I’ll go ask for that note.”

“From Snape?” Ron asked incredulously.

“Of course not!”

Professor Flitwick was almost too happy to sign a note for her. She’d told him she wanted to pick out some books on charms for further reading and he went as far as to welcome her into the Charms club, something only second years and above could join. She was flattered and slightly guilty in her lying—she concluded she would take out a few charm books as well.

She stayed up late that night, reading through the vampire section of the Living Dead book she’d
checked out. She had gone a little crazy—she’d checked out several dark creature books, mostly focusing on the more dangerous creatures, with ratings of xxx and above. She took notes and found some very interesting things that supported the Snape being a vampire theory.

They fed off human blood, of course, but dressed usually very dark, as to stay hidden in shadows and such. Their skin was pale and sick looking and their eyes were unusual colors—golden, red, black and purple, depending on their hunger. Vampires were created—there were no such things as born vampires, as vampire men could not impregnate women and it is theorized that if they did, the woman would not survive to full term.

Death of farm animals usually meant a vampire was near and people usually used religious items and garlic to protect themselves. Could...could this be why Quirrell always smelled like garlic? Because he wanted to keep Snape away from him? It didn’t seem to be working.

The following morning, notes were delivered to Persephone, Hermione, and Neville at the breakfast table. They were all the same:

*Your detention will take place at eleven o'clock tonight. Meet Mr. Filch in the entrance hall.*

*Professor McGonagall*

Persephone had completely forgotten the detention—the way she was being treated by most of the students truly felt like the worst of the situation. The worst of the situation was the detention, or this was as it felt.

At eleven o'clock that night, they said good-bye to Ron in the common room and went down to the entrance hall with Neville. Filch was already there—and so was Malfoy. Persephone had forgotten that Malfoy, too, had gotten a detention and suddenly, she felt slightly better.

They exchanged angry glares before Filch spoke.

"Follow me," he said, lighting a lamp.

"I bet you'll think twice about breaking a school rule again, won't you, eh?" he said, leering at them. "Oh yes... hard work and pain are the best teachers if you ask me...It's just a pity they let the old punishments die out...hang you by your wrists from the ceiling for a few days, I've got the chains still in my office, keep 'em well-oiled in case they're ever needed...Right, off we go, and don't think of running off, now, it'll be worse for you if you do."

They were headed towards the forest, this much Persephone could see. Filch seemed disturbingly delighted, too much so, and Persephone could only wonder what sort of punishment they had to endure.

Persephone started feeling sick—she felt suddenly cold and weak to her legs. The moon was bright. Had it started raining? She could not tell—it felt like her hair was sticking to her face in cold water. She couldn’t keep her thoughts together long enough to think this out.

They heard a distant shout that made Persephone jump.

"Is that you, Filch? Hurry up, I want ter get started."

Persephone felt she should have felt calmer—if they would be with Hagrid for their detention, could it really be that bad?

Filch noticed the relief on Hermione’s face, who must have been thinking the same thing, and said,
"I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with that oaf? Well, think again, girl—it's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out in one piece."

At this, Neville let out a little moan, and Malfoy stopped dead in his tracks.

"The forest?" he repeated, and he didn't sound quite as cool as usual. "We can't go in there at night—there's all sorts of things in there—werewolves, I heard."

Neville clutched the sleeve of Persephone's robe and made a choking noise. Persephone's eyesight was filtered with anger, "Werewolves don't live in the forbidden forest, you idiot, they would be killing every full moon being so near the castle." Malfoy looked at her. "Have you never read?"

"That's your problem, isn't it?" said Filch, his voice cracking with glee. "Should've thought of them werewolves before you got in trouble, shouldn't you?"

Her mind was swirling with images of Nico's eyes at the thought of werewolves.

Hagrid came striding toward them out of the dark, Fang at his heel. He was carrying his large crossbow, and a quiver of arrows hung over his shoulder.

"Abou' time," he said. "I bin waitin' fer half an hour already. All right, Sephie, Hermione?"

"I shouldn't be too friendly to them, Hagrid," said Filch coldly, "they're here to be punished, after all."

"That's why yer late, is it?" said Hagrid, frowning at Filch. "Bin lecturin' them, eh? 'Snot your place ter do that. Yeh've done yer bit, I'll take over from here."

"I'll be back at dawn," said Filch, "for what's left of them," he added nastily, and he turned and started back toward the castle, his lamp bobbing away in the darkness.

Malfoy now turned to Hagrid.

"I'm not going in that forest, he said, and Persephone was pleased to hear the note of panic in his voice.

"Yeh are if yeh want ter stay at Hogwarts," said Hagrid fiercely. "Yeh've done wrong an' now yeh've got ter pay fer it."

"But this is servant stuff, it's not for students to do. I thought we'd be copying lines or something, if my father knew I was doing this—"

"He'd tell yer that's how it is at Hogwarts," Hagrid growled. "Copyin' lines! What good's that ter anyone? Yeh'll do summat useful or yeh'll get out. If yeh think yer father'd rather you were expelled, then get back off ter the castle an' pack. Go on"

Malfoy didn't move. He looked at Hagrid furiously, but then dropped his gaze. Persephone found something satisfying about Malfoy's quick surrender—she wanted to see him plead and beg as he surrendered but nonetheless, surrender to her in quiet desperation.

"Alright there, Sephie?" Hagrid asked her, this time more worried, for Persephone seemed to be staring at Malfoy with a deranged look in her eye, her eyes shining a dangerous silver color. She snapped out of her reverie.

"Yes."
"Right then," Hagrid said slowly as Hermione, Neville and Malfoy cast her worried glances, "now, listen carefully, 'cause it's dangerous what we're gonna do tonight, an' I don' want no one takin' risks. Follow me over here a moment."

He led them to the very edge of the forest. Holding his lamp up high, he pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into the thick black trees. A light breeze lifted her hair as they looked into the forest.

"Look there," said Hagrid, "see that stuff shinin' on the ground? Silvery stuff? That's unicorn blood. There's a unicorn in there bin hurt badly by summat. This is the second time in a week. I found one dead last Wednesday. We're gonna try an' find the poor thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery."

"And what if whatever hurt the unicorn finds us first?" said Malfoy, unable to keep the fear out of his voice. Persephone, again, could not help the satisfactory smile from creeping to her face as she stared Malfoy down.

"There's nothin' that lives in the forest that'll hurt yeh if yer with me or Fang," said Hagrid. "An' keep ter the path. Right, now, we're gonna split inter two parties an' follow the trail in diff'rent directions. There's blood all over the place, it must've bin staggerin' around since last night at least."

"I want Fang," said Malfoy quickly, looking at Fang's long teeth.

“I want to go with him,” Persephone said immediately. She wanted to be alone with the blonde haired boy, only to have him to herself—dead or alive, she didn’t care.

Malfoy looked at her as if she were insane and seemed to take a step back from her—and for good reason. She looked lethal and ready to kill, silently staring at him, the smile still on her face.

"Er, no, Sephie, ye’ll come with me an Hermione."

Persephone clenched her jaw. She would find the boy in the forest, alone or not, and she would have him to herself no matter what Hagrid or anyone said. “Draco, Neville and Fang’ll go one way and we’ll do the other. Now, if any of us finds the unicorn, we’ll send up green sparks, right? Get yer wands out an' practice now—that's it—an' if anyone gets in trouble, send up red sparks, an' we'll all come an' find yeh—so, be careful—let's go."

It took a moment before Persephone would move, as she again said, “I want to go with Fang, take Neville instead.”

“Persephone, I don’t think—”

“Why not? It’ll be better matched!” She hissed.

It was a moment of silent staring before Hagrid said, “Neville, yer with us.” He patted Fang on the head. “You watch out fer her, won’t ya, Fang?”

Malfoy seemed scared of her as they walked. He walked on the other side of the dog, trying hard not meet Persephone’s eyes. Her eyes had flashed dangerous, silver again. Her hair had shone in the moonlight, a beautiful silvery blonde that flowed down to her waist, almost floating around her.

“What? Why do you keep looking at me like that—whaaaat?” Malfoy finally saw her change.

The forest was black and silent. She smiled. “Scared, are we?” He grimaced at her. They’d gone a good way into the forest now, away from the others and away from anyone who would hear him
scream.

“I’m disturbed—stop looking at me like that! Stop!” He hissed.

She tutted, “Best not be too loud for what lurks in the forest will hear you.”

He stared for a moment longer, “You’re crazy—I’m sending up sparks.”

“Ah, ah, ah,” She grabbed his hand, “We’ve found a clue!”

Persephone was right—the moonlight had lit up a path of branches with silver-blue blood on the fallen leaves.

“What is wrong with you!” Malfoy sounded more worried now. “Are you—you trying to scare me? Because it won’t work!”

“I don’t need to try—boys are so easily frightened,” She sighed. “And I’ve heard terrific things about the way they taste…”

Something suddenly started moving up ahead—Malfoy froze, his eyes leaving Persephone for a moment, a moment long enough for her to pounce. She hit him right on both shoulders, pushing him down behind a tree onto the forest floor. Shocked, he struggled against her, but she was stronger than him.

“GET—”

Persephone froze, hissing at him, “Be quiet.”

There was something moving. Something was slithering over dead leaves nearby. It sounded like a cloak trailing along the ground. The sound faded. “No werewolf could be killing unicorns fast enough,” She muttered to no one but herself.

Tears were sparked in Malfoy eyes as he struggled against her. Her hand went over his mouth and he struggled more but then she shushed him as she pulled him up, dragging him with her forward, “Don’t make a sound, I’ll slit your throat with my teeth faster than you can call for help.”

He whimpered, but followed, unable to think of any way he could get out of this.

They walked more slowly, ears straining for the faintest sound.

Suddenly, in a clearing ahead, something definitely moved.

They froze once more as the moonlight shifted behind a thick cloud. Persephone was suddenly breathing fire as she gasped. Her limbs ached. “What—what’s going on?”

“You were trying to kill me!” Fang barked at Malfoy’s suddenly loud words.

“What are you talking about—” Something red caught her eye and she looked up—a bright red dot in the sky was clear. “Mars.”

“You’re crazy!” He sent up red sparks with his wand as he pushed her away. He started running to the side, sending more red sparks up, leaving Persephone alone with Fang.

“What is wrong with the sky?” She started walking towards what she thought was north, still staring at the red dot that could only be Mars, until a good way in, she bumped into something.
She fell back and Fang whimpered. “What the…” He words were caught in midair.

Amongst the dense, dark trees, she could make out the shape of something…something strange. And then, someone had tackled her to the nearest tree, keeping her pressed up by the shoulders.

“What is the matter with you?” Nico asked, pushing her as she struggled. Fang growled at him. “Are you insane?”

“Let me—”

He cast some spell that Persephone didn’t catch and she found herself unable to move away from the tree. She stared at him as he caught Malfoy by the arm and whispered an incantation. Malfoy stilled and then blinked and he sent him running. Then he turned back to Persephone. Fang barked and Nico looked at him and then the dog whined, looking down.

“It’s the full moon,” He said. “And you’re in the middle of the forest, about to kill Draco Malfoy—look, I know he’s annoying but that doesn’t give you the right to—”

“I wasn’t going to kill him!” She said, finally coming to her senses. Was she going to kill him? She didn’t think so.

He raised his brows, “It sure looked like it.”

He waved his wand and she fell away from the tree, landing in his arms. He steadied her and he looked around, “We should go.”

“I have detention.”

He looked at her as if thought she were insane, “And you’d rather follow rules than murder someone?”

“I—”

A loud snap caused them both to still and Nico snapped his head in the direction, “Wait for me.” He said and before she could ask what he meant, he was gone.

“How do you do that!?” She cried out, looking around.

She held in a scream as she suddenly caught sight of something, recalling her one time encounter of the Thestrals. She stole her eyes away from it, noticing something at its feet—silvery-blue blood.

Were the Thestrals…what killed the unicorns? If so, where was the unicorn? It didn’t seemed touched by the blood. She hesitantly took a step forward, staring at the thestral until her eyes fully adjusted and she could see a slightly smaller one a few feet behind it. She almost smiled—a baby and mother. The same one as last time?

“Hello again?” She hoped they remembered her, else this would be a very stupid move. They didn’t move away, so she thought that they probably did remember her. She reached a hand out and gasped—her hands had sharpened nails that she did not remembered filing. Slowly, they were becoming her usual hands but she felt herself shiver—was she going to kill Draco?

Then, the Thestrals parted and she saw something so horrible and beautiful, it brought tears to her eyes.

The trees were so thick, she could barely make out what it was, but the path of blood became
thicker leading up to the thing and there not a doubt in her mind of what she was looking at.

Something bright white was gleaming on the ground. She inched closer and gasped—the unicorn was dead and she could not have seen something so beautiful and so sad. Its long, slender legs were stuck out at odd angles where it had fallen and its mane was spread pearly-white on the dark leaves.

Persephone had taken one step toward it when a slithering sound made her freeze where she stood. A bush on the edge of the clearing quivered....

Then, out of the shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like some stalking beast. Persephone and Fang stood transfixed. The cloaked figure reached the unicorn, lowered its head over the wound in the animal's side, and began to drink its blood.

She screeched a long and loud scream that seemed to be carried through the forest. Behind her, the black creatures took off, as did Fang and she was left alone. The hooded figure raised its head and looked right at Persephone—unicorn blood was dribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward Persephone. She could not move in fear but all she could do was scream.

A pain that seemed to blind her pierced through her head. It was like her scar was on fire. She staggered backwards, screaming still and she saw the figure stagger backwards as well, as if her scream affected him. She heard hooves behind her, galloping, and something jumped clean over Persephone, charging at the figure.

The pain passed in a minute or two—it felt like forever. When she looked up, she found she had fallen. The figure was gone but instead, a tall, half-horse half-man was standing near her. He looked young, with white-blond hair and a palomino body.

“C-Chiron?” She whimpered.

"Are you all right?" said the centaur, pulling Persephone to her feet.

"I think…thank you…what—what was that thing?"

The centaur didn't answer. He had astonishingly blue eyes, like pale sapphires. He looked carefully at her, his eyes lingering on the scar that stood out, livid, on Persephone’s forehead.

"You are the girl they talk of," he said. "Talked of so much but never of the dark hidden truth.” She stared up at him.

“The…truth?”

“You had better get back to Hagrid. The forest is not safe at this time—especially for you. Can you ride? It will be quicker this way.”

“Isn’t that…disrespectful?” She asked.

"We must ignore customs," He said, lowering himself on to his front legs so that she could get on. "My name is Firenze,” He added.

There was suddenly a sound of more galloping from the other side of the clearing. Two more centaurs appeared—one had red hair and beard with a gleaming chestnut horse body with a long, reddish tail. The other was a black-haired and bodied centaur. He looked significantly wilder looking than the red haired centaur.
"Firenze!" The wilder looking one thundered. "What are you doing? You have a human on your back! Have you no shame? Are you a common mule?"

"Do you realize who this is, Bane?" Firenze said. "This is the Potter girl. The quicker she leaves this forest, the better, especially under the moon we have tonight."

"What have you been telling her?" Bane asked. "Remember, Firenze, we are sworn not to set ourselves against the heavens. Have we not read what is to come in the movements of the planets? Ronan?" He turned to the other centaur.

Ronan pawed the ground nervously. "I'm sure Firenze thought he was acting for the best," he said in a gloomy voice.

Bane kicked his back legs in anger.

"For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs are concerned with what has been foretold! It is not our business to run around like donkeys after stray humans in our forest!"

Firenze suddenly reared on to his hind legs in anger, so that Persephone had to grab his shoulders to stay on.

"Do you not see that unicorn?" Firenze bellowed at Bane. "Do you not understand why it was killed? Or have the planets not let you in on that secret? I set myself against what is lurking in this forest, Bane, yes, with humans alongside me if I must."

And Firenze whisked around; with Persephone clutching on as best she could, they plunged off into the trees, leaving Ronan and Bane behind them.

Persephone did not understand what was going on.

"Why's Bane so angry?" she asked. "What was that thing you saved me from?" A vampire, probably—did that mean Snape?

Firenze slowed to a walk, warned Persephone to keep her head bowed in case of low-hanging branches, but did not answer her question. They made their way through the trees in silence for so long that she thought Firenze didn't want to talk to her anymore. They were passing through a particularly dense patch of trees, however, when Firenze suddenly stopped.

"Persephone Potter, do you know what unicorn blood is used for?"

"No," Persephone shook her head. "Other than in potions, it’s supposed to be extremely rare."

"That is because it is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn," Firenze said. "Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips."

Persephone stared at him—would that be…Quirrell? "Death’s better."

"It is," Firenze agreed, "unless all you need is to stay alive long enough to drink something else—something that will bring you back to full strength and power—something that will mean you can never die. Mr. Potter, do you know what is hidden in the school at this very moment?"

She didn’t have to think about her answer, "The Philosopher’s Stone! The Elixir of Life!"
"Can you think of nobody who has waited many years to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting their chance?"

It was as if something tied together—something so obvious that she should have guessed it when Hermione asked her who the main antagonist was. "Oh my—"

She remembered Hagrid’s words, from the night they had met. ‘Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die.’

"Voldem—"

"Lily!" Someone screamed. "Lily, are you all right?"

Hermione was running toward them down the path, Hagrid puffing along behind her.

"I'm fine," Persephone croaked, feeling pins and needles in her mouth. "The unicorn's dead, Hagrid, it's in that clearing back there."

"This is where I leave you," Firenze murmured as Hagrid hurried off to examine the unicorn. "You are safe now."

Persephone slid off his back, and met Hermione, who clung onto her. "We were so worried—Malfoy turned up, looking confused and like he was drunk! When you didn’t follow him—and we heard a scream—!"

"Good luck, Persephone Potter," Firenze said. "The planets have been read wrongly before now, even by centaurs. I hope this is one of those times."

He turned and cantered back into the depths of the forest, leaving Persephone shivering behind him.

Ron had fallen asleep in the dark common room, waiting for them to return. He shouted something about Quidditch fouls when Persephone roughly shook her awake. In a matter of seconds, though, he was wide-eyed as Persephone and Hermione began to tell him what had happened on either sides of their forest. She was shaking, unable to sit down or even pause.

“So Snape is probably a vampire who’s after the stone for Voldemort or he’s a vampire trying to scare Quirrell off who wants the stone and that’s why he probably stuffs garlic up his turban!” She wheezed. “And Voldemort—Voldemort is living in the forest and he killed the unicorns!”

"Stop saying the name!" said Ron in a terrified whisper, as if he thought Voldemort could hear them.

Persephone ignored him, “Firenze saved me but he should not have done so because he interfered with my being killed by Voldemort—it must be written in the stars that I will be murdered by Voldemort. I escaped him once but the stars are there—and MARS IS BRIGHT WHICH MEANS WAR OR SOMETHING RIGHT!?"

"WILL YOU STOP SAYING THE NAME!?" Ron shouted.

"So now, all there is to do is wait for that stupid stone to be stolen—why did Dumbledore ask for that stone? It was safe these past few centuries why not just leave it alone? Is it because he knew there was a chance that Voldemort wanted it and he wanted to make it interesting? Did he want us to figure it out? Is that the reason Mars is bright? What was the point of bringing the stone in so close to Voldemort!?"
Hermione looked very frightened, but she had a word of comfort.

"Lily, everyone says Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was ever afraid of, so with Dumbledore around, You-Know-Who won't touch you. Anyway, who says the centaurs are right? It sounds like fortune-telling to me, and Professor McGonagall says that's a very imprecise branch of magic."

“Imprecise because some people can’t figure it out properly and centaurs aren’t people, they’re beings! And what if Snape is a vampire? And what the bloody hell does Mars being bright have to do with this someone please look it up!”

The sky had turned light before they stopped talking. They went to bed exhausted, their throats sore. Hermione tried to keep calming her down and she slept with her in the same bed. They spoke only of exams, Hermione trying to calm her down. At some point, the two girls fell asleep, but not before Persephone thought of something—was Quirrell not there that day, in the pub, on July 31st, the day Gringotts was robbed, or almost robbed?

Chapter End Notes

Sirens' eyes are much better adapted for the water and I always imagine that they are excellent star readers, being as there is no light pollution in the middle of the ocean. This is my reasoning of why she's able to see the sky so clearly.
Exam season had descended upon Hogwarts.

The Gryffindor common room had officially banned Fred and George from their midst. All the students were stressing out, especially the fifth and seventh years, who were to be taking the Ministry’s O.W.L. and N.E.W.T.S. exams, respectively. Reviews had taken over every conversation topic and there had been thirteen nervous breakdowns in Gryffindor house so far. Slytherin was leading with seventeen, Hufflepuff right behind Gryffindor with ten and Ravenclaw had an impressive six, mostly because barely anyone was studying in that house.

Most classes had been reviews and lectures now, which Persephone found pointless, since she understood everything. Thankfully, after impressing most of the teachers with her brilliant wand work and magic, she was allowed to simply study for History of Magic. She couldn’t concentrate a bit but it was still worth it.

The exams were split between two—writing papers in blistering hot classrooms with special quills that had been bewitched with an Anti-Cheating spell and the practical exams.

Persephone was confident that she would have a top grade of the first years. She not only made the pineapple tap dance but she went ahead with Professor Flitwick’s offer of bonus points to levitate something, which she did—she levitated the desk, pineapple, seats and even her hair floated upwards. Since she’d been having extra help, she would be graded more so by Flitwick and she was sure she scored a perfect five hundred on five hundred.

Professor McGonagall offered a more complex exam. Perhaps it was to make everyone more nervous to see how they’d perform on their feet. The students all waited outside the Transfiguration classroom, being called in one by one. Thought it felt like forever, it was actually no more than fifteen minutes a student, though Hermione did hers in two minutes. Susan did just as well. Persephone couldn’t help watching her watch.

Finally, when she was called in, she took a deep breath and checked her watch.

“Good afternoon, Miss Potter. This examination is not as straightforward as you’ve been used to, as I’ve taken the liberty to adapt it to your talents, but it implies heavily on using the logic that comes from Transfiguration. There are several clues in this room that will help you into getting out,” She clicked the door knob locked with her wand and took a seat next to the door. “There are several keys in the room but only one of three will open the door, two of which will help you along. Use logic and Transfiguration. You may begin.”

It was undetailed that for a moment, she needed to go over these words. The next moment, she was examining the room—and then the cup of water inside the cage of a mice, with a mice next to it. Okay. She glanced at Professor McGonagall, who was watching, before she approached the glass of water. It was sat on an old looking stool. She pursed her lips before examining underneath the stool. Key. She grinned.

She stood up with the key and unlocked the little cage. She took the water out and stared at them. Now what? Now all she had was a mouse—oooooh. They had done this in class. Mice to snuffbox. Here we go.

She, once more, pointed her wand and wordlessly did the spell and here was a pretty snuffbox. She glanced between the water and the snuffbox. Simple enough—she placed her wand behind her ear
once more and, ignoring the disapproving look from McGonagall, she concentrated hard for a moment, feeling her fingers tingling for a moment, almost as if she could feel the blood moving through her, and then the water flowed with her will.

Slowly, the water fitted into the lock of the snuffbox and it unlocked—she grinned. There was a key. Had the mouse swallowed it? Hm.

She took the key and turned to McGonagall, who was staring with raised brows. “Very well done, Miss Potter.”

It didn’t seem like she’d done as well as she’d thought by the expression and tone. “Ha—have I done something wrong?”

“You have finished in record time, Miss Potter, why do you think that?” McGonagall could tell she was trying to figure it out before Persephone realized quick enough.

“The water wasn’t there because…I was supposed to use the solidification spell, wasn’t I?” She nodded to herself, flushing. “And I will probably be losing marks, right?”

McGonagall awarded her a rare smile, “Nonsense. You performed brilliant magic.”

Potions was by far her calmest exam. She knew what she was doing and felt the same confidence she had in Herbology. It was when they had their flying exam that Persephone had some free time.

She decided to sit out on the courtyard steps. There was not much to do but wait. And it was windier today, thank god. She sat, her eyes closed, trying her hardest not to panic with everything she’d uncovered. She tried to just focus on the wind through her hair. She was breathing too fast to be relaxing so she tried to slow that down.

“What the honest hell, Seph.”

So much for relaxing.

She opened her eyes to find Nico with his arms crossed, staring down at her.

“Not only did you forget to mention your detention but you also forget to mention it was on a full moon.” He hissed. “And by the time I find you, you’ve attacked Malfoy—I had to use three memory spells to get him to stop blubbering about a monster! You’re lucky I’m so good at them, otherwise he’d have gone straight to Dumbledore—or worse, his father. And when I asked you to wait—you don’t! What the hell!

“Hm?” She asked dreamily. She hadn’t heard a thing he had just said—there was a ringing in her head that was much too loud. She felt dizzy.

He raised a brow and surveyed where she sat. There were flowers growing wildly out of the steps and she had let her book bag drop in front of her. He slowly, while watching her, bent to pick up her things and put them back into her bag before picking up a heavier envelope.

“What’s this?” He asked her, setting her bag down and clasping it closed. She looked. He had the letter from the dance company in his hands.

“Letter from Dance Company that I auditioned for in January—came in last week.”

He glanced between the letter and her. “And you haven’t opened it? You’re a dance nut, open it!”
He held the letter out for her. She shook her head. “No thank you.”

“What—are you okay?” He asked, sitting farther down the steps in front of her, leaning against the column. “What’s wrong?”

She shrugged, looking away. She met his eye again and he looked concerned. She sighed, grabbing the letter and opening it. After briefly skimming through the lines, she shoved the letter back into her bag. He waited patiently, and wondered aloud, “You didn’t get in?”

She shook her head, “I got in.”

His eyes widened, “Hey, great! Good for you!”

Her eyes—and mind—were far away, “Have you ever thought about that first war? The one my parents died in?”

He stared at her, narrowing his eyes, “Uh, sure?”

“Mm…” She closed her eyes.

He was silent for a long time that she thought he had disappeared again. When he spoke, she was surprised, “If…if you wanna know more…about it, the war…maybe you can meet my foster mom? She fought in it—both my foster parents did…maybe it would help you with…whatever you’re going through…” He was uncertain with his words, wondering if she could hear them.

“Mm.”

They spent their afternoon in silence.

Friday came with their final exam—the most dreaded of them all, History of Magic. It was simply awful—this was so boring. So, undeniably boring that she half wished Voldemort would come rushing in to kill her, as she’d been worrying all through all her exams.

When it was over, she was hoping to finally sleep for a week before having to get their results. She’d been having stabbing pains in her forehead forever now, since the trip into the forest, which she did not remember all that clearly. Malfoy did, however, as he had taken to glaring at her across any distance. It was quite annoying—what had she done to him this time? Breathe in his direction?

“That was far easier than I thought it would be,” Hermione said as they joined the crowds flocking out onto the sunny grounds, all cheering for the end of exams. "I needn't have learned about the 1637 Werewolf Code of Conduct or the uprising of Elfric the Eager.”

“I don’t remember learning that,” Persephone remarked. Hermione gave her a look.

“You barely pay attention in class. You basically depend on my notes!” She said. She was building herself up to start going over their exams, as had become habit now.

Ron complained that talking about the exams was making him ill and so they wandered around the grounds, plopping themselves near the lake, under a tree. Persephone’s eyes strained towards the water, unable to keep the strange feeling at bay. The water seemed to clear her mind.

Ron sighed, “No more studying, thank Merlin.” He said, stretching happily on the grass.

“What’s wrong, Lily?” Hermione asked.

“I’m thinking so much all of a sudden, I can’t concentrate.” She muttered, frustrated. She crossed
her arms and leaned against the tree. “And my stupid scar keeps hurting on top of that.”

"Go to Madam Pomfrey," Hermione suggested.

"I don’t think she’s ever dealt with a scar left over from someone trying to murder a baby and failing to do so with the most murderous spell ever with no sort of defense known," She snapped. Hermione raised her brows. “Sorry I just…I can’t help thinking that it’s a warning. Like…a sign that there’s danger…”

Ron couldn’t get worked up, it was too hot.

"Lily, relax. Hermione’s right, the Stone’s safe as long as Dumbledore’s around. Anyway, we’ve never had any proof Snape or Quirrel found out how to get past Fluffy. Besides, Snape nearly had his leg ripped off once, he’s not going to try it again in a hurry and Quirrel’s too much of a coward. And Neville will play Quidditch for England before Hagrid lets Dumbledore down."

“Well, he did have an illegal dragon egg in a school—OH!” She gasped, jumping up, fluffing her skirt down quickly as she ran.

"Where’re you going?" Ron called in surprise.

"Hagrid’s!" She called back, nearly tripping over her own two feet.

"Why?" Hermione called, trying hard to keep up

"Don't you think it's a bit odd," She panted while scrambling up the grassy slope, “That the one thing that someone luckily is carrying around, something very dangerous and illegal, in a pub would meet Hagrid? Something that Hagrid wants more than anything?” She threw her hands up. “I thought how weird that was when we first found out about the dragon, why didn’t I connect the dots, I’m such an idiot!”

"What are you talking about?" Ron asked, keeping up fine with his much longer legs.

She said nothing as she continued to sprint towards the forest. Hagrid was sitting in an armchair outside his house; his trousers and sleeves were rolled up, and he was shelling peas into a large bowl.

"Hullo," he said, smiling. "Finished yer exams? Got time fer a drink?"

"Yes, please," said Ron, but Persephone cut him off.

"No, no we need to know something Hagrid, please, do you remember the night you won Norbert. Did you, by any chance, mention Hogwarts at all?"

"Mighta come up," said Hagrid, frowning as he tried to remember. "Yeah...he asked what I did, an' I told him I was gamekeeper here....He asked a bit about the sorta creatures I took after...so I told him...an' I said what I'd always really wanted was a dragon...an' then...I can' remember too well, 'cause he kept buyin' me drinks....Let's see...yeah, then he said he had the dragon egg an' we could play cards fer it if I wanted...but he had ter be sure I could handle it, he didn' want it ter go ter any old home....So I told him, after Fluffy, a dragon would be easy..."

"And...and did he seem at all interested in Fluffy?" She forced herself to say the name, feeling horror seep into her system. Panic was next.

"Well—yeah—how many three-headed dogs d'ye meet, even around Hogwarts? So I told him,
Fluffy's a piece o' cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus' play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight off ter sleep—"

Hagrid suddenly looked horrified.

"I shouldn'ta told yeh that!" he blurted out. "Forget I said it! Hey—where're yeh goin'?"

Persephone, Ron, and Hermione didn't speak to each other at all until they came to a halt in the entrance hall, which seemed very cold and gloomy after the grounds.

"This is it, Hermione, you've got your wish. We must tell Dumbledore. Whatever it takes, we need to." She panted. "Hagrid told a stranger how to get Fluffy, in the most obvious way—music! Just like the myth, for the love of Hades! Oh God, Dumbledore needs to know now!"

They looked around, as if hoping to see a sign pointing them in the right direction. They had never been told where Dumbledore lived, nor did they know anyone who had been sent to see him.

"We'll just have to—" Persephone began, but a voice suddenly rang across the hall.

"What are you three doing inside?"

It was Professor McGonagall, carrying a large pile of books.

"We want to see Professor Dumbledore," Hermione spoke up, rather bravely too.

"See Professor Dumbledore?" Professor McGonagall repeated, as though this was a very fishy thing to want to do. "Why?"

Persephone had not thought this far but she winged it.

"It is a concerning inter-house unity. I was hoping to start up a club sort of thing, seeing as there isn’t one at Hogwarts and I would have come to you, being as you are our Head of House, but I thought since this concerns all the heads I thought it best to make an appointment with the Headmaster.” She nodded, smiling.

“A club? What would be going on in this club?” She asked suspiciously.

She was quick on her feet, thank god. “Support from all the houses, a safe place where house colors did not matter. We can support each other on issues such as feminism, race, religion and sexuality. We could help each other.”

“Hm.” Professor McGonagall straightened. “A delightful idea, Miss Potter. I shall pass along the message to the Headmaster.”

“Is—is he not here today? It would be very quick,” She continued to smile.

"Unfortunately, Professor Dumbledore left ten minutes ago,” she informed them. "He received an urgent owl from the Ministry of Magic and flew off for London at once."

"He's gone?" Persephone’s face fell in horror. “Now? Like, he’s already vacated the castle?”

“Yes,” McGonagall said incredulously at her sudden change of state. “Was there anything else because Professor Dumbledore is a very great wizard, Potter, he has many demands for his time—”

“Oh, yes!” She laughed nervously, nearly hysterically, “Totally slipped my mind! I wanted to say, Quirrell has found out how to get passed the three headed dog guarding the passageway to the
Philosopher’s Stone and we are very sure that he is on his way to steal it as we speak to deliver it to Voldemort, so—I just thought we should let you know.”

Whatever Professor McGonagall had expected, it wasn't that. The books she was carrying tumbled out of her arms, but she didn't pick them up. Or perhaps, it was the use of Voldemort’s name. “How do you know—?” she spluttered.

She eyed her with a mixture of shock and suspicion.

"Professor Dumbledore will be back tomorrow," she said finally. “I don't know how you found out about the Stone, but rest assured, no one can possibly steal it, it's too well protected."

"But Professor—"

"Weasley, I know what I'm talking about," she said shortly. She bent down and gathered up the fallen books. “I suggest you all go back outside and enjoy the sunshine."

But how could they? Their head of house just ignored their pleas and the stone would be stolen. Voldemort would probably barge in here tomorrow.

"We've only got tonight.” She said, miserably watching McGonagall walk away. “The stone will be taken tonight, I’m sure. If anything, it’ll be safer with us, I’m sure.” She hoped before turning and jumping.

Ron and Hermione wheeled around to see Snape standing there.

"Good afternoon," he said smoothly.

They stared at him.

"What would three Gryffindor students be doing inside on such a day like this? Finished with all your exams and not enjoying the weather, someone might think you were…” His eyes lingering on Persephone. “Up to something.”

“Ron and I burn in the sun, you see—redheads, you know?” She laughed nervously and glanced at Ron, who got the idea and laughed too. “And Hermione is—”

“Suffering from overheating, I just faint whenever it’s too hot, so…” Hermione lying to a teacher? Nice.

The three must have seemed so suspicious, nodding in sync, that Snape narrowed his eyes before focusing on Persephone. “Second year, as you know, is the year you are required to join a club—I invite you to join my Potions club, as you insist on always being ahead of everybody else.”

She nodded, just wanting to get away from him—they needed to plot and no one could plot with Snape around. “Er, sure, yes, I will graciously accept your offer, thank you so much, sir, Professor,” She nodded, smiling uncomfortably. She was thinking—Snape would believe her. “Professor, there’s something you ought to know—”

“Wow, would you look at the time!” Ron said, looking at his wrist, where the was no watch. “Hermione just said we ought to—to go find Professor Flitwick. He is, er, expecting us.” He nodded. He pulled Persephone along.

When they were far from him, they watched him stride off in the direction of the staffroom.
“Lily nooooo!” Ron gasped silently. “He’s gotten you to trust him!”

“Rubbish, he isn’t the bad guy in this situation!” She told him. “Whoever is, is going to steal the stone and we need to figure out how to get there before asking the question of who it is—”

“Before Snape turns around and kills you, you mean!” Ron said.

“I’m going in to get it,” Persephone said and she started off towards the Gryffindor common room.

“What!”? Hermione squeaked.

“You’re mad!” Ron said as they both followed her.

“You can’t!” said Hermione. "After what McGonagall and Snape have said? You'll be expelled!"

“I’d rather be expelled than let Voldemort get the Stone.” She told them. “Last time he was trying to take over, remember how many people died? How many families died? Some of them weren’t even apart of the war! Some were non-magical people who didn’t even know there was a magical war going on! As someone who comes from non-magical people and is quite fond of them, Hermione, you surely must understand! I’d rather get to the stone then get expelled for it then let Quirrell get it without doing anything to stop it. Maybe I’m being stupid but I’m doing it and nothing will stop me.” She clenched her jaw. “Especially after Voldemort killed my parents.” She glared at them over her shoulder as she started up the stairs.

"You're right Lily," Hermione said finally in a small voice. “Of course, you’re right when you say it that way.”

"The invisibility cloak should cover the three of us, don’t you think? I don’t know any invisibility spells." Ron said, making her stop and stare down at him front the higher step. They both stared at her with scared determination.

"The…three of us?” She questioned.

"Oh, come off it, you don't think we'd let you go alone?"

"Of course not," said Hermione briskly. "How do you think you'd get to the Stone without us? I'd better go and took through my books, there might be something useful..."

"But…but wait, no, you’ll be expelled—Hermione, you once said being expelled was worse than being killed.”

"I’d like to see them try,” Hermione said with determination lacing her words. “I got five hundred percent on the exams. I’d like to see them try and throw me out after that.”

Ron shrugged, “Not a chance I’m not coming, no matter the risk.”

She stared down at them, incredulously, and turned away before tears fell out of her eyes and down her cheeks. “Fine. After dinner then.”

The three sat in the common room, suspiciously quiet. Nobody bothered them—no one liked Persephone anymore to bother them. She was finally at a point where she didn’t care. Hermione was skimming through her notes while Persephone kept tapping her foot, which irritated Ron. She kept playing with her necklace. They probably looked like first time drug dealers or something.

Finally, when the final few people had drifted upstairs, Persephone unfolded the cloak from under
her. It was good she had changed into a floral sundress—she had been sweating like crazy. She passed Ron the flute Hagrid had gotten her for Christmas, assuring him she could sing.

"We'd better put the cloak on here—"

"What are you doing?" a voice from the corner of the room made them all jump. Neville appeared from behind an armchair, clutching Trevor the toad, who looked as though he'd been making another bid for freedom.

"Nothing, Neville, nothing," Persephone said quickly, hiding the cloak behind her back.

Well that definitely sounded like a bunch of troublemakers not doing anything.

Neville stared at their guilty faces.

"You're going out again," he said.

"No, no, no," Hermione said. "No, we're not. Why don't you go to bed, Neville?"

They couldn’t afford to waste so much time but if Neville followed them…

"You can't go out," said Neville, "you'll be caught again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble."

"Neville, please, you don't understand!" Persephone begged, "This is more important than some stupid house points."

Neville was clearly fighting with himself as much as he was with them—he wanted to trust Persephone, because she’d helped him out all year and been his friend, but he also didn’t seem to want to lose any more house points. “I won’t let you do it—I’ll...I’ll fight you!”

That took a lot of bravery—it was not uncommon that Persephone had landed that punch on Malfoy a few weeks ago. She threw her hands up, making him jump.

"Neville," Ron exploded, "get away from that hole and don't be an idiot --"

"Don't you call me an idiot!" said Neville. "I don't think you should be breaking any more rules! And you were the one who told me to stand up to people!"

"Yes, but not to us," said Ron in exasperation. "Neville, you don't know what you're doing."

He took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the toad, who leapt out of sight. "Go on then, try and hit me!" said Neville, raising his fists. "I'm ready!"

Persephone winced as the idea came to her and she stepped forward, “Neville, I’m really so sorry about this, but you’ve left us no choice.” She raised her hands and concentrated on the floor he stood on. Slowly then all at once, he was knocked off his feet and she had him hover over to the couch before she pulled her wand out.

“I’m so sorry, Neville,” She said before raising her wand. “Petrificus Totalus!”

Immediately, Neville's arms snapped to his sides. His legs sprang together. His whole body rigid, and he was frozen where he lay on the couch. Hermione ran to him and peered over him. Neville's jaws were jammed together so he couldn't speak. Only his eyes were moving, looking at them in horror.

"What've you done to him?" Ron whispered.
"It's the full Body-Bind," Hermione said, impressed, "Nicely cast, Lily."

"We had to, Neville, no time to explain," Persephone told him before leaning away.

"You'll understand later, Neville," Ron said and they turned away from him, all three of them guilty and not looking at each other. Persephone, again, unrolled the invisibility cloak and handed it to Ron, who was tallest. The girls ducked under and they set off, apologizing once more to Neville.

Perhaps because of what they were about to do, Persephone glanced around nervously. She was imaging things, of course, but she could swear every shadow cast by a statue looked like Filch could be lurking in, every howl of wind outside sounded like Peeves, sweeping down on them in a nasty surprise.

They encountered one obstacle and that was Mrs. Norris, who could not see them but could probably smell them.

"Oh, let's kick her, just this once," Ron whispered in Persephone’s ear, and any other time, she would have considered this a tempting thought, but she could barely keep herself from shaking as she shook her head. They climbed carefully around her, her eyes following near them, but she stayed seated at the foot of the stairs. For a long few minutes, they encountered no one else, thank god, but then, as if Persephone had jinxed it, they met Peeves, bobbing halfway up a staircase, loosening the carp so people would trip.

"Who's there?" he said suddenly as they climbed toward him. He narrowed his wicked black eyes. "Know you're there, even if I can't see you. Are you ghoulie or ghostie or wee student beastie?" He rose up in the air and floated there, squinting at them. "Should call Filch, I should, if something's a-creeping around unseen."

Ron was brilliant, of course, "Peeves," He said in a hoarse whisper. "The Bloody Baron has his own reasons for being invisible."

Persephone nearly welcomed the silent giggle when Peeves nearly fell right out of the air in shock. "So sorry, your bloodiness, Mr. Baron, Sir," He said nervously. "My mistake, my mistake—I didn't see you—of…of course I didn't, you're invisible—forgive old Peevsie his little joke, sir."

"I have business here, Peeves," Ron continued. "Stay away from this place tonight."

"I will, sir, I most certainly will," said Peeves, rising up in the air again. "Hope your business goes well, Baron, I'll not bother you." And he scooted off.

"Brilliant, Ron!" Persephone and Hermione said in unison and Ron looked triumph. But then, they were outside the third-floor corridor and all the color melted from their face when they saw the door slightly ajar.

"He’s already gotten past Fluffy—" Persephone whispered in horror. She turned to look at the others. "Now’s the time to turn back and I won’t be mad or blame you if you did. You can take the cloak, I won’t need it."

"Don't be stupid," said Ron.

"We're coming," said Hermione.

Unable to push the feeling that she was leading her best friends into a trap that could result in them paying with their lives, she pushed the door open.
Along with the loud creak of the door came low, rumbling growls. All three of the dog's noses sniffed madly in their direction, even though it couldn't see them.

"What's that at its feet?" Hermione whispered.

"Looks like a harp," said Ron. "Snape must have left it there."

"Just like the myth," Persephone muttered darkly. "It wakes up the second the music stops playing," She said. "Still got that flute, Ron?"

Ron put Hagrid’s flute to his lips and blew a soft bit. It didn’t really sound like a tune but it was good enough for the dog’s eyes to start to droop. Slowly, painfully slowly, the dog’s growls ceased. It lay its heads on its paws and fell to his knees. It was sort of cute—but as it blew out large amounts of dog breath as it slept, she decided not as cute as initially.

"Keep playing," Hermione warned Ron as the girls slipped out from under the cloak and crept towards the trapdoor.

"We should be able to pull the door open," Persephone said. She stared back to where she heard the flute playing from and cleared her throat. She started to vocalize that tune that Ariel sang from the Little Mermaid, when she traded her voice in for legs. Hermione looked surprised and Persephone shrugged, gesturing for Ron to come towards them.

Ron gritted his teeth as he pulled the ring of the trapdoor, which swung up and open.

"What can you see?" Hermione asked anxiously.

"Nothing—just black—there's no way of climbing down, we'll just have to drop."

Persephone stepped towards the trap door carefully, pointing her wand, without stopping her singing, she thought *Lumos Maximus*. A light at the end of her wand did nothing to the pitch black. She looked at Ron with his flute and he got the message, and restarted to play the flute. They watched the dog sniff a few times before resuming peacefully in slumber.

Persephone took a deep breath—it would be better if she went first. She could slow down the fall. She took a deep breath, closing her eyes. "If anything happens to me, don't follow. Go straight to the owlery and send a letter to Dumbledore with Hedwig."

"Right," Hermione said, "See you in a minute, I hope..."

Persephone took a step and she dropped.

Cold, damp air rushed past her as she fell. It was a long fall and just she waited a moment before she slowed, her hands reached out, and it felt like she were floating down in water. She drifted for a moment in complete darkness, before she could feel a soft landing under her.

She felt around, her eyes slowly adapting to the weird glow of the dark—it felt like...a plant? She frowned in the dark but she looked up, "Soft landing, you can jump!"

Ron followed right away. He landed messily next to Persephone.

"What is this stuff?" He asked in disgust.

"A weird plant?" Persephone struggled to get up but found it hard to find a solid floor and she started sinking in. "This ought to be Professor Sprout’s protection but I don’t know what it is..."
As she spoke, the distant music stopped and there was a loud bark but Hermione had already jumped. She landed right on Persephone, making her gasp.

“Sorry!” She gasped, “We must be miles under the school—oh! Sorry!” She said as she tried to roll off Persephone, but she elbowed her in the jaw.

"A little help, ‘Mione?” Persephone wheezed. “Stop grabbing me!”

“I’m not grabbing you!” Hermione had finally leapt and struggled toward a damp wall, leaving Persephone to be tangled by…the plant?

Persephone gasped, “Devil’s Snare!” Her voice had become muffled a vine went around her face. She immediately felt herself panic.

"Stop moving!” Hermione ordered her. "I just—let me remember how to kill it!”

“Well hurry!” Ron snarled, leaning back, trying to stop the plant from curling around his neck. He tried reaching for Persephone, who was trying hard to find some sort of way to bite the plant off her to scream to Hermione that she just needed light, dammit.

"Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare... what did Professor Sprout say?—It likes the dark and the damp so…Agh!” Hermione threw her hands up. Persephone struggled for a moment, trying to normalize her breathing and found her skin had lit on fire—literally. Something started smoking under her and she screamed into the plant, wondering how the hell she missed the part of the lesson on Devil’s Snare that taught them that it spontaneously burst into flames.

“PERSEPHONE!” Hermione screamed and it caught Persephone off guard to hear someone close to her call her Persephone. It caught her off guard enough for her mind to blank in surprise to find that the fire wasn’t from the plant but from her.

The fire travelled up her arm as she felt it roam and she could finally feel the plant around her mouth let her breathe, “LIGHT A FIRE!” She gasped.

"T—there's no wood!” Hermione cried, wringing her hands.

"HAVE YOU GONE MAD?” Ron bellowed. "ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?"

"Oh, right!” Hermione gasped and she did a quick job of bringing her wand out, waving it with the words Persephone could not hear but could see its effect of bluebell flames she had used on Snape, this time directed to the plant. This with the fire that was simmering from Persephone skin managed to have the plant unravel itself from the redheads.

"Thank god for you, ‘Mione,” Persephone gasped.

“Yeah,” Ron said, “Lucky Lily doesn’t lose her head in a crisis—‘there’s no wood,’ honestly!”

“Only one way to move now,” Persephone said, nodding towards the one path forward.

Apart from the patter of their footsteps, there was the ominous sound of the water trickling down the walls. They started to walk downwards and Persephone, who felt herself growing more hyperaware of everything around her, started hearing some strange sound.

“Do you hear something?” She whispered.

It was some sort of soft rustling and clinking that was started to grow louder up ahead.
“Is…is that a ghost?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, Hermione. The next obstacle we need to overcome is a ghost, something we can walk right through.” Ron said sarcastically. Hermione glared at Ron.

“Sounds like wings,” Persephone said, trying to ignore the two and the urge to giggle at Ron. "There's light ahead—I can see something moving."

They had reached the end of the passageway now and saw before them a brilliantly lit chamber, the ceiling arching high above. It was full of small, shiny birds, all fluttering around the room in different directions. Persephone nearly lost her mind at the sound—sensory overload, maybe.

“Do you think they’ll attack us if we try to walk across?” Ron asked, nodding to the heavy wooden door on the opposite side of the chamber.

“I—I don’t think those are birds.” Persephone said, watching them, fascinated for a moment by them. “They are…shiny.”

“Huh…” Ron squinted at them, before his mouth popped open, “They look—yeah! They’re keys! Winged keys, you see?” He pointed.

Persephone grasped his line of thought quickly, “One of them must unlock the door—but how are we supposed to–oh!” She caught sight of broomsticks lined up on the wall. “We need to catch the right one!”

"How are we supposed to know which one is the right one? There are at least a hundred up there!” Hermione asked, anxious at the thought of flying.

Ron examined the lock on the door, "We're looking for a big, old-fashioned one—probably silver, like the handle."

Each of them grabbed a broomstick and kicked off. Persephone immediately felt like her instincts had taken over and her built-in seeker inclination to examine the keys ten at a time took over. It was impossible to catch it, as proven by Ron and Hermione, who flew a few laps.

Persephone only slowly went around and stopped to stare around. It was as if she had gone into a strange hyper aware place where she was focused on only silver keys. She caught sight of one that stood out, its wings bent and misshapen, as if shoved through a keyhole.

“There it is!” She called to them. “That big one, just there! With the bright blue wings!”

Ron went speeding in the direction that Persephone pointed to and crashed into the ceiling, quite nearly falling off his broom. She barely saw him recover, as she didn’t take her eyes off the key with the damaged wing. “We need strategy—Ron, come at it from above, Hermione from below, we’ll all go towards that door and slowly. I’ll try and catch it. Remember—towards the door,” She said. “NOW!”

Ron dived, Hermione rocketed upward, the key dodged them both, drifting towards the wall. Persephone was after it, streaking carefully behind it, pushing the air at her to gain speed and then she caught it between her fingers. She spun the broom so her feet bounced onto the wall.

They quickly made for the door and Persephone, the key struggling in her hand, shoved the key into the lock and turned—one of the best sounds in the world, the key clicking in place and unlocking the door.
"Ready?" Persephone asked the other two, her hand on the door handle. They nodded. She pulled the door open.

The next room was darker than the last. They proceeded carefully and cautiously, Persephone immediately grabbing the elbows of Hermione and Ron, who were on either of her sides. When they stepped into it, the room was basked in light, making them jump.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind the black chessmen, which were all taller than they were and carved from what looked like black stone. Facing them, way across the chamber, were the white pieces.

"This must be the Transfiguration portion—a giant game of wizard chess." Ron muttered. "We’ve got to play our way across the room."

Behind the white pieces they could see another door.

"How?" Hermione asked nervously.

"I think," said Ron, "we're going to have to be chessmen."

He walked up to a black knight and put his hand out to touch the knight's horse. At once, the stone sprang to life. The horse pawed the ground and the knight turned his helmeted head to look down at Ron.

"Do we—er—have to join you to get across?" The black knight nodded.

Ron turned to the other two.

"This needs thinking about," he said. "I suppose we've got to take the place of three of the black pieces...."

Persephone and Hermione stayed quiet, watching Ron think, each fidgeting nervously. Neither girls had ever won a game of chess. Finally he said, "Now, don't be offended or anything, but neither of you are that good at chess—"

"Just tell us what to do," Persephone interrupted. "You’re king in this."

“Well, actually, I’m a knight, but you’ll be the bishop, Lily. Hermione, you’ll be next to her, here, as a castle."

The chessmen seemed to have been listening, because at these words a knight, a bishop, and a castle turned their backs on the white pieces and walked off the board, leaving three empty squares that Persephone, Ron, and Hermione took.

"White always plays first in chess," Ron spoke out loud, peering across the board. "Yes... look..."

A white pawn had moved forward two squares.

Ron started to direct the black pieces. They moved silently wherever he sent them. Persephone trusted Ron not to lose—he had never lost a game that she had witnessed. They could not possibly lose—McGonagall’s Transfiguration was nothing against Ron’s chess skills.

"Lily, you move diagonally four squares to the right."

Their first real shock came when their other knight was taken. The white queen smashed him to the floor and dragged him off the board, where he lay quite still, facedown.
"Had to let that happen," said Ron, looking shaken. "Leaves you free to take that bishop, Hermione, go on."

Every time one of their men was lost, the white pieces showed no mercy.

Soon there was a huddle of limp black players slumped along the wall.

Twice, Ron only just noticed in time that Persephone and Hermione were in danger. He himself darted around the board, taking almost as many white pieces as they had lost black ones.

"We're nearly there," he muttered suddenly. "Let me think let me think..."

The white queen turned her blank face toward him.

"Yes..." said Ron softly, "It's the only way... I've got to be taken."

"NO!" The girls shouted immediately.

"That's chess!" snapped Ron. "You've got to make some sacrifices! I take one step forward and she'll take me—that leaves you free to checkmate the king, Lily!"

"But—"

"Do you want to stop the stone being stolen or not?"

"Ron—"

"Look, if you don't hurry up, he'll already have the Stone!"

There was no alternative.

"Ready?" Ron called, his face pale but determined. "Here I go—now, don't hang around once you've won."

He stepped forward, and the white queen pounced. She struck Ron hard across the head with her stone arm, and he crashed to the floor—Hermione screamed but stayed on her square—the white queen dragged Ron to one side. He looked as if he'd been knocked out.

Shaking, Persephone followed through with her task.

The white king took off his crown and threw it at Persephone’s feet. They had won. The chessmen parted and bowed, leaving the door ahead clear. With one last desperate look back at Ron, all the while shaking, Persephone and Hermione clasped hands, just to make sure they were there, and charged for the door.

"What if he's—?"

"He's not," Persephone cut her off immediately. "He's going to be perfectly alright.” She changed the subject with a hard gulp. “We’ve seen Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms…what’s next?"

“Either…either Potions, Defence Against the Dark Arts, or whatever Dumbledore had put.”

Persephone nodded and took a deep breath when they reached the next door. They exchanged a look and Hermione was squeezing Persephone’s hand. For a moment, Persephone knew her heart was racing at just the physical contact but she pushed the door open.
A disgusting smell filled their nostrils, making both of them pull their robes up over their noses. Eyes watering, they saw, flat on the floor in front of them, a troll even larger than the one they had tackled, out cold with a bloody lump on its head.

"There’s DADA," Persephone told Hermione. "Wonder who else could have dealt with a troll that size?" She gave Hermione a look but neither girl let go of the other’s hand.

She pulled the next door open and found, with almost comfort, that there was nothing frightening. Actually, it was more comforting—“Potions,” They both said. A table with seven differently shaped bottles stood in a line.

They stepped over the threshold, and immediately a fire sprang up behind them in the doorway. It wasn't ordinary fire either; it was purple. At the same instant, black flames shot up in the doorway leading onward.

They were trapped.

"Look!" Hermione seized a roll of paper lying next to the bottles. Persephone read over her shoulder:

_Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,
Two of us will help you, which ever you would find,
One among us seven will let you move ahead,
Another will transport the drinker back instead,
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,
Three of us are killers, waiting bidden in line.
Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;
Second, different are those who stand at either end,
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

Hermione let out a great sigh and Persephone was surprised to find she was smiling.

"Brilliant," said Hermione. "This isn't magic—it's logic—a puzzle. A lot of the greatest wizards haven't got an ounce of logic, they'd be stuck in here forever."

"So…we need to solve a riddle to figure out which will take us forward, then?" She pouted, thinking, and reading it again. “Smallest bottle, then?"

Hermione looked at in her surprise and Persephone shrugged, “I’ve got a weird gut feeling.”

“You’re going to take Divination in third year, aren’t you?” Hermione asked in almost disgust. “We need to go through this first before deciding.

Persephone waited with impatience, debating on whether or not to just take the last drop of the smallest bottle and pitch herself into the fire to prove a point.

“You’re right,” Hermione admitted begrudgingly.
Persephone chose to give her lenience and fought a much needed smile, “There’s barely enough for one of us—listen, you take the one that will bring you back. You get Ron and get out of the trapdoor with the brooms from the flying-key room. Go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to Dumbledore, we need him. I might be able to hold Quirrell off for a while, but I'm no match for him, really.”

"But Persephone—" Again, there was her name, and it sounded like a farewell gesture. “What if You-Know-Who is there too with him?”

"I’ll—I was lucky once,” She smiled weakly. “And who knows? You said it yourself. I’m awfully good at getting out of trouble.”

Hermione's lip trembled and her eyes filled with tears. For a moment, they stare at each other in woe, but then Hermione dashed forward to throw her arms around Persephone, sobbing once into her shoulder, “You’re…you’re a brilliant witch, Persephone, really. A brilliant person…” She was shaking.

“Not as good as you,” Persephone said, smiling weakly as she too let the feeling find her too. “Brilliant witch of our age…” She let her go.

“Me?” She choked, almost laughing. “Me? With my books? There are more important things—friendship, courage, kindness and just—oh!” She sniffed. “No matter what anyone says, you…”

“Please don’t get sentimental on me, ‘Mione,” Persephone giggled, crying now too.

Hermione straightened, pulling herself slightly together, “You are—the most brilliant witch of this century—if not now, than you will be. And…and you’re my best friend.”

Persephone smiled, unable to say anything so she awkwardly said, “You too.”

They sniffed a laugh before Hermione handed Persephone the bottle. She took her own bottle in hand.

“Good luck,” Hermione told her.

“You too.”

Hermione chugged the potion and shivered before casting a long look to Persephone—not a smile, but a long glance, like she was drinking in her every detail—before she turned and walked straight through the purple fire.

Persephone watched her, before she turned to stare into the fire.

"Olympus help me,” She said, draining the little bottle in barely a gulp.

It was indeed as though ice was flooding her body. She put the bottle down and walked forward; she braced himself, saw the black flames licking her body, but couldn't feel them -- for a moment she could see nothing but dark fire -- then he was on the other side, in the last chamber.

And dammit, she wished Ron and Hermione were there to see how she was right—because it was not Snape. It wasn't even Voldemort.
“I knew it,” Were the first words she breathed upon seeing Quirrell.

He smiled, not a twitch in his face.

“Did you, now?” He pondered calmly.

“It was so confusing for the longest time—but then I remembered you were there that day, the day Gringotts was broken into and I thought it had to be you.”

“Well aren’t you quite the insightful little girl?” Quirrell laughed. She gritted her teeth at the title. “And here I was, thinking Severus was the center of all this attention. He does seem the type, doesn’t he? Swooping in like an overgrown bat…

Her mind was going so many directions—she had been right…this entire time, she’d been right.

“So…so the Quidditch game?”

“I was so close but your friend Miss Granger accidentally knocked me over as she rushed to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She broke my eye contact with you. Another few seconds and I’d have got you off that broom. I’d have managed it before then if Snape hadn't been muttering a counter curse, trying to save you.”

She faltered, “S—Snape was trying to save me?”

"Of course," Quirrell said coolly. "And he was furious for it, too. ‘If you ever lay a finger on her…’ Why do you think he kept such a close watch on you at all times? You think he wanted to spend his time at a school production of the Wizard of Oz?” He cackled. “You think he didn’t have better things to do than referee a Quidditch match? He had grown paranoid—it had come to a point where he didn’t consider Dumbledore’s presence to be reassuring enough that I could not try anything again.”

“Snape…Snape destroyed the play production, didn’t he?” She closed her eyes and then opened them “And, and you…you let the troll in, then, didn’t you? As a diversion to go find out what was protecting the stone but then Snape stopped you!” Her respect for Snape was growing.

Quirrell snapped his fingers and suddenly, ropes sprang out of thin air and wrapped themselves around Persephone. She was bound tightly by the ropes that quickly solidified to some sort of harsh rock.

“Quite an imagination you’ve got there—and nosy too. Much too nosy to live, always poking your head where it does not belong.”

She gasped out, “So you did let the troll in?” She needed to keep him talking.

"Of course I did, you stupid girl! I am greatly gifted with trolls—certainly you must have seen so in the chamber you just passed! It was the perfect diversion to keep everyone hurrying around like scared mice but then Snape, who already suspected me, went straight to the third floor to head me off. How easy it would have been if the troll had just finished you off and that three-headed dog didn't even manage to bite Snape's leg off properly.” He scowled, turning to face what was standing behind him—was that the Mirror of Erised?—and his attention drifted. “And now, now it was all for nothing because I will get the stone for my master and you will die.”
She paled. That was what Dumbledore meant when he said the Mirror would be moved—it was moved here.

"This mirror is the key to finding the Stone," Quirrell murmured, tapping his way around the frame. "Trust Dumbledore to come up with something like this...but he's in London...I'll be far away by the time he gets back...."

Persephone mind was racing—all she could think of was how to keep him away from that mirror.

"I thought—you and Snape, in the forest…"

"Yes," said Quirrell idly, walking around the mirror to look at the back. "He was on to me by that time, trying to find out how far I'd got. He suspected me all along. Tried to frighten me—as though he could, when I had Lord Voldemort on my side...."

Quirrell came back out from behind the mirror and stared hungrily into it.

"I see the Stone...I'm presenting it to my master...but where is it?"

"But if Snape knew, why did he go to such troubles?"

"Lack of proof, I daresay—he must have thought it best to simply scare me off you," He laughed to himself. "Wasted time, as you will die now."

"Why? Why did he want to scare you off me? He barely notices I'm around so what's so special about me?"

"You must not know. Snape was friends with your mother and I daresay the image you have haunts him guilty. A carbon copy of Lily Evans lurking in his classroom must have pushed him."

Her mouth popped wide open—"But—"

"Oh but how he hated your father...not enough to hate you, as I so thought he would, but perhaps it is your mother image that protects you...not enough…"

She blinked—this wasn’t the time for a family story. "So Voldemort—he's on your side? How? I thought he was dead—or barely alive."

Quirrell finally showed a sliver of emotion—fear flittered across his face. "He is but once I deliver the stone to him, he will be restored once more….he is a great wizard, even in the state he is in…"

She squinted her eyes at him, trying desperately to keep the conversation going. "You mean, near death? So much so he needs to drink from unicorns in the Forbidden Forest? Why is he so weak, after a decade? And if he is, why is he living in the Forbidden Forest?"

He chuckled, but it was a dark laugh, "You foolish girl, he is never parted from me. He is always there, wherever I may go," He said quietly. "I met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it...Since then, I have served him faithfully, although I have let him down many times. He has had to be very hard on me."

Quirrell shivered suddenly. "He does not forgive mistakes easily. When I failed to steal the stone from Gringotts, he was most displeased. He punished me...decided he would have to keep a closer watch on me..."
“How he could do that, living in the forest, powerless and without a wand?”

“Nosy, nosy, nosy…” He muttered in great disdain. “Have you not grasped it yet? That Lord Voldemort is the most powerful wizard of all? He needs not a wand—”

“Then why does he need a slave like you to get the stone for him? Why does he need the stone at all if he’s so powerful?” She said with a great bit of nerve. It was working—he was growing less concerned with the mirror and more so with Persephone’s big mouth.

Quirrell started turning towards her before he winced, as if in great pain. He sobbed and Persephone grimaced—this was an ugly sight. “I’m sorry, master…I will leave her to you.”

He turned away, ignoring Persephone. He cursed under his breath, "I don't understand... is the Stone inside the mirror? Should I break it?"

Persephone still couldn’t think straight—if he looked into the mirror, shouldn’t he be able to find him? Wasn’t that his heart’s deepest desire, no matter how ludicrous it was? Was that not what Dumbledore meant about the mirror—Quirrell wanted the stone.

Maybe if she looked into it before he could, she could find where it was hidden! She could only assume Quirrell did not know how the mirror worked so she started to edge to the left, to get a clear view of the glass, but the ropes only tightened. She fell over.

Quirrell was too busy talking to himself like the lunatic he was, "What does this mirror do? How does it work? Help me, Master!"

To Persephone’s complete horror, a voice answered, and the voice seemed to come from Quirrell himself

"Use the girl...Use the girl..."

Oh bloody hell…

Quirrell rounded on Persephone. She stared up helplessly.

"Yes—Potter—come here."

He clapped his hands once, and the ropes binding Persephone fell off. She got slowly and shakily to her feet—he couldn’t possibly believe she would tell him what she saw in the mirror?

"Come here," Quirrell repeated. "Look in the mirror and tell me what you see."

She was careful not to step too close to him when she turned to look into the mirror. He didn’t understand this comfort, for he moved right behind her, to stare over her shoulder at the mirror too. She had never smelt the terrible smell that Quirrell seemed to sweat so strongly before.

She saw her reflection at first. But then it flickered—she had long blonde hair, slick and floating behind her, her skin had completely paled and her eyes had grown so pale, they glowed white. But then she flickered back to herself, her rosy, red-haired self. She stared in shock and confusion but it continued to happen—her reflection changed and changed. While she was blonde, she smiled and winked, pulling out the stone from inside her shirt, the shelf between her collarbone and her bosom.

Somehow, the sudden cold, dead material that now rested inside her shirt was not her mother’s necklace. Incredibly, she’d gotten the stone.
"Well?" said Quirrell impatiently. "What do you see?"

If Quirrell was like one of those men, he would take advantage of his position and look down Persephone’s shirt, easily because of the unbuttoned first few buttons. He didn’t, thank god, so she breathed shakily, playing his stupid game of nerves.

“I see myself as a grownup—I’m a potions master and I’m the—the headmaster of the school.” Did that sound realistic enough? “And I’ve gotten taller.” She did want to be taller, so that did sound realistic enough.

Quirrell cursed again.

"Get out of the way," he said. Persephone moved aside, breathing carefully against the stone. It was stuck safely against her collarbone—had her chest really done that much growing in the year? —and she wondered if she could make a run for it.

Too soon, when she made it nearly five paces, a voice stopped her, a voice that sent chills up her spine.

"Liar…liar…"

"Potter, come back here!" Quirrell shouted. "Tell me the truth! What did you just see?"

The high voice spoke again.

"Let me speak to her... face-to-face..."

"Master, you are not strong enough!"

"I have strength enough... for this...."

She watched, petrified to the spot, not daring to breathe too harshly in fear of the stone falling. She watched as Quirrell reached up and began to unwrap his turban. What was going on? The turban fell away. Quirrell's head looked strangely small without it. Then he turned slowly on the spot.

Persephone gasped, harshly enough that her chest heaved down and the stone fell down to the little place where her shirt was tucked into her skirt. Thank god for her clothes fitting right and tight, as it settled there now. She raised her hands to her mouth to keep from screaming.

Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, the most terrible face Persephone had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.

"Persephone Potter..." it whispered.

She couldn’t move.

"See what I have become?" the face said. "Mere shadow and vapor...I have form only when I can share another's body...but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds.... Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks...you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest...and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own....Now...why don't you give me that Stone in your pocket?"

She went into hyper mode and made a nervous pffft sound, “What pocket? I’m wearing a skirt.”
"Don't play tricks with my, girl, hand the stone over," snarled the face. "Better save your own life and join me... or you'll meet the same end as your parents.... They died begging me for mercy...

"Now who’s the liar?" She said through a clenched jaw.

Quirrell was walking backward at her, so that Voldemort could still see her. The evil face was now smiling.

"How touching..." it hissed. "I always value bravery... Yes, girl, your parents were brave.... I killed your father first; and he put up a courageous fight... but your mother needn't have died... she was trying to protect you.... Now give me the Stone, unless you want her to have died in vain."

"For the most powerful wizard in the world, you really are a dumbass…” She hissed and did the only thing that seemed appropriate. She landed her right hook square in the middle of his face and kicked Quirrell between the knees.

She barely made it far when Voldemort screamed, "SEIZE HER!" and the next second, Persephone felt Quirrell's hand close on her wrist. At once, a needle-sharp pain seared across Persephone’s scar; her head felt as though it was about to split in two; she yelled, struggling with all her might, and to her surprise, Quirrell let go of her. The pain in her head lessened—she looked around wildly to see where Quirrell had gone, and saw him hunched in pain, looking at his fingers—they were blistering before his eyes.

"Seize her! SEIZE HER!" shrieked Voldemort again, and Quirrell lunged, knocking Persephone right off her feet. He took hold of her neck and before she could start screaming on instinct, he was screaming in agony.

"Master, I cannot hold her—my hands—my hands!"

And Quirrell, though pinning Persephone to the ground with his knees, let go of her neck and stared, bewildered, at his own palms—Persephone saw they were burned, raw, red, and shiny.

"Then kill her, fool, and be done!" screeched Voldemort.

Quirrell raised his hand to perform a deadly curse, but Persephone, again, landed a right hook, but this time to Quirrell. He let out a louder than needed scream and rolled off her.

"AAAARGH!"

His face was blistering, too, and then Persephone was sure—he could not touch her skin without being burned, without suffering terrible pain—her only chance at surviving would be to touch him, skin to skin.

She sprung up, and she jumped him, quite literally, clinging onto his arm. He screamed and tried to throw Persephone off as Persephone’s own pain grew with his. She could barely see and all that she could hear over the ringing that had progressively grown in her ears was Quirrell's terrible shrieks and Voldemort's yells of, "KILL HER! KILL HER!"

And then, maybe her own scream had blended in as well and something nearby had shattered, someone toppled down and something warm was on her hands.

She was seeing something strange—the snitch was moving so slowly in front of her. It was under water? She reached out her hand, her strangely pale and nail-sharpened hand, to grab the snitch.

She blinked. Huh. How weird. The snitch wasn’t a snitch but her glasses reflected on a pitcher of
She blinked and the room came more into focus. Also reflected on the pitcher was the smiling face of Albus Dumbledore.

"Good afternoon, Persephone," Dumbledore greeted her. Persephone stared at him for a long moment.

Then, like a light switch, she remembered. "Sir! Quirrell has stolen the stone! Sir—quick you have to—"

"Calm yourself, dear girl, you are a little behind the times," Dumbledore was still smiling. "Quirrell does not have the Stone."

"What's happened? Why am in the hospital wing? Is—"

"Please, Persephone, relax or Madame Pomfrey will have me thrown out for good."

Persephone tried to take a deep breath but found that her throat was aching. She snapped her head to the water and quite literally drained the entire volume of it. She had sat up now and felt herself strengthen. As she put the jug bag, she noticed that next to her there was another table with a large pile of what looked like could supply a candy store.

"Tokens from your friends and admirers," Dumbledore said, beaming. "What happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret, so, naturally, the whole school knows. I believe your good friends Misters Fred and George Weasley were responsible for trying to send you a toilet seat. No doubt they thought it would amuse you. Madam Pomfrey, however, felt it might not be very hygienic, and confiscated it."

She could manage a smile at that but it faltered quickly, "How long have I been in here?"

"Three days. Mr. Ronald Weasley and Miss Granger will be most relieved you have come round, they have been extremely worried. Of course, Mr. Di Angelo—or should I say Black?—has been tending to your wounds."

"Ni..co?"

"Yes, he is an adamant volunteer in the hospital wing, has he not told you?"

She shook her head, pushing this aside for later, "Sir—the stone?"

"It's a very admirable quality to be unable to be distracted. I am happy to inform you that the Stone is not in Professor Quirrell's possession. I arrived to find that I was not needed."

Persephone stiffened, "I—did I ki—"

"It was self-defence and very well deserved, given the circumstances." He watched her take a deep shaky breath kindly. "And may I add, I feared I might have been too late, given what sort of scene I walked in on."

She looked at him questioningly.

"The mirror was broken—completely shattered and surrounding the two of you."

"Oh…" She was sure there was no way the mirror could have been damaged… "Well, you nearly were. He almost got the stone—"
"Not the Stone, Persephone. No, I mean you. The effort it took to stay even alive just nearly killed you. For one terrible moment there, I thought it had. And as for the Stone, it has been destroyed."

"Oh." Persephone said. She thought that was for the best—riches and immortality were far too toxic to the wrong people. "And Nicolas Flamel?"

"Oh, you know about Nicolas?" said Dumbledore, sounding quite delighted. "You did do the thing properly, didn't you? Well, Nicolas and I have had a little chat, and agreed it's all for the best."

"And so he and his wife will die then?"

"They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order and then, yes, they will die."

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Persephone's face.

"Death, my dear girl, is nothing to be frightened of at that age. You will greet him like an old friend when the time comes that you are at the age of Nicolas and Perenelle."

"I don't think I'll live as long as six hundred years, sir," She told him, almost smiling. How could she ever be immortal?

"You never know," He said without missing a beat. She tried not to let that stir her thoughts. "Death at that age is welcomed, like going to bed after a very, very long day. And what is death but an adventure into the unknown?" He smiled and she pursed her lips. "You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all—the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them."

Persephone did not know what to say so she continued to stare at him. Dumbledore hummed a little and smiled at the ceiling.

"Sir?" She spoke again. "Is Vold—sorry, You—"

"Call him Voldemort, Persephone. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself."

"Yes, sir. Well, Voldemort's alive and he nearly just came back, didn't he…so he'll try again, won't he? Being with that whole Slytherin ambition and determination thing? I mean, he won't just be gone again, will he? At least, not for another ten years?"

"No, Persephone, he has not disappeared. He bids his time elsewhere, perhaps looking for another body to share. Being as he is not truly alive, he cannot truly be killed. He left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies. Nevertheless, Persephone, you delayed his return to power once again and while I am sure he will try again, it will merely take someone else who is prepared to fight what seems a losing battle next time—and if he is delayed again, and again, why, he may never return to power."

Persephone thought, "No…no I don't think he'll stop unless he is dead."

Dumbledore stared at her, "Perhaps but it is not something a first year should be concerning herself with."

She pursed her lips, looked away and looked back, "I wonder, sir, if I could ask you something. I wanted to know the truth about something."
"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution. However, I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I beg you'll forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie."

Persephone tried to reign her mind in and get it in order, "I know many families were killed by Voldemort's followers but he said something…that my mother was only killed because she tried to stop him from killing me…why? Why wasn't she killed nonetheless? And why did he want to kill me in the first place?"

Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

"Alas, I cannot answer either. Not today. Not now. You will know one day, I tell you this, but I advise you to put it from your mind for now, Persephone. When you are older... I know you hate to hear this... when you are ready, you will know."

Persephone bit her lip but moved on.

"Why couldn't Quirrell touch me?"

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good."

Dumbledore now became very interested in a bird out on the windowsill, which Persephone was grateful for as it gave her a chance to wipe her eyes. When she had coughed the heaviness out of her throat, she said, "You sent the invisibility cloak?"

"Ah—your father happened to leave it in my possession, and I thought you might like it." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Useful things...your father used it mainly for sneaking off to the kitchens to steal food when he was here, as you do now." He gave her a look and she blushed again and coughed a laugh.

"About my dad…and my mum…Quirrell said something, that Professor Snape knew them? That he knew my mum and hated my dad? How is that?"

"Well, your father and Snape did rather detest each other. Not unlike yourself and Mr. Malfoy. And then, your father did something Snape could never forgive."

"What did he do?"

"He saved his life."

"Wait, what?"

"Yes..." said Dumbledore dreamily, "Funny, the way people's minds work, isn't it? Professor Snape couldn't bear being in your father's debt...I do believe that is part of the reason he worked so hard to protect you this year because he felt that would make him and your father even. Then he could go back to hating your father's memory in peace..."

“And my mother?” She pushed.

“Ah…they were friends, for a good portion of their schooling years. I believe Snape holds a soft
spot for you because of this, being the daughter of the good friend he had from childhood. And you will tire of hearing this I’m sure, but Persephone, you look just like your mother.”

Persephone hid the surprise as well as she could—Professor Snape had never told her anything.

"One last thing, if you don’t mind."

"Just the one?"

"How did I get the Stone out of the mirror?"

"Ah, now, I'm glad you asked me that. It was one of my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me, that's saying something. You see, only one who wanted to find the Stone—find it, but not use it—would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life. My brain surprises even me sometimes...Now, enough questions. I suggest you make a start on these sweets. Ah! Bettie Bott's Every Flavor Beans! I was unfortunate enough in my youth to come across a vomitflavored one, and since then I'm afraid I've rather lost my liking for them—but I think I'll be safe with a nice toffee, don't you?"

He smiled and popped the golden-brown bean into his mouth. Then he choked and said, "Alas! Ear wax!"

Persephone was not allowed any visitors, this much she learned when she asked Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, a nice but very strict woman. She was not allowed to see anyone who passed by to see her—not Daphne, not Susan, not the twins and most definitely not Ron and Hermione.

She pleaded long and hard and then, finally, she must have cracked her,

"Oh, very well," she said. "But five minutes only."

And she let Ron and Hermione in.

"Lily!"

Thankfully, Hermione did not fling her arms around Persephone like how she obviously wanted to. Her head was still very sore.

"Oh, Lily, we were sure you were going to—Dumbledore was so worried—"

"The entire school is raving on about it but no one knows what happened," Ron said. “What happened?"

Persephone filled them in on everything: Quirrell; the mirror; the Stone; and Voldemort. They provided a good audience, gasping in the right places and when she told them about what was under the turban, Hermione screamed out loud.

"Wait, so the Stone's gone?" Ron finally asked. "Flamel's just going to die?"

"I guess so but Dumbledore barely gave it a second thought. He said something like—death is just an adventure or something? I don’t know I think I was half asleep while we were talking."

"I always said he was off his rocker," Ron said, though he seemed impressed.

"So?" Persephone asked. “What about you two? What happened?"

"Ron and I got up again," Hermione said. "The dog was still there but we got passed him quick"
enough. We were on our way to send an owl when we met Dumbledore in the entrance hall—he
already knew—he said, ‘Persephone’s gone after him, hasn't she?’ and hurtled off to the third
floor."

"I can’t believe it…” Ron said. “D’you think the stone was in there the entire time we were with
the mirror? That would be ironic.”

“No it wouldn’t,” Hermione snapped. “To think, Dumbledore sending you the cloak. It was like he
gave you the key to Pandora’s Box!”

"I don’t think it is…” Persephone said, thinking. “He knew that I sneak off to the kitchens at night
with the twins and use passageways. I think he knows everything that goes on here and he knew
that we would try. He just helped. He told me how the mirror worked, he gave me the
cloak...maybe he thought I deserved to face Voldemort.” Though she didn't say it out loud, he was
right in telling her about accepting her parent’s death. Had she, though?

“Yeah, Dumbledore's off his rocker, all right,” said Ron proudly. "Listen, you've got to be up for
the end-of-year feast tomorrow. The points are all in and Slytherin won, of course—you missed the
last Quidditch match, we were steamrollered by Ravenclaw without you—you also missed the
dance concert Flitwick put on, y'know that club? It wasn't that great so you didn't miss much,” He
said unconvincingly. “but the food'll be good.”

At that moment, Madam Pomfrey bustled over.

"You've had nearly fifteen minutes, now OUT" she said firmly.

Finally, finally, after a long night’s sleep, Persephone could finally dub herself back to normal
health. “I feel a lot better—back to normal, really!” She told Madame Pomfrey as she straightened
her candy boxes. “So...am I able to go to the feast?"

"Professor Dumbledore says you are to be allowed to go," she said stiffly, like it was not her idea
and that she was against it. “And you have another visitor.”

"Oh, really?” Persephone said. Susan had visited her with her friends from Hufflepuff and Daphne
had come by briefly with Pansy—it seemed she had forced Pansy to be nice, for she did not say
anything to her. Nico was done with volunteering at the hospital but was allowed in because
Madame Pomfrey seemed to have a soft spot for him and he didn't do much but tell her she was a
dumb and heroic girl. “Who is it?” She was hoping for the twins.

Hagrid sidled through the door as he spoke. Persephone smiled, happy to see him but he didn’t look
at her. He sat by her and took one look at her smiling face and immediately burst into tears. Her
smile froze in place.

"Look—at—yeh! In here—all—my—ruddy—fault!” he sobbed, his face in his hands. “I told the
evil git how ter get past Fluffy! I told him! It was the only thing he didn't know, an' I told him! Yeh
could've died! All fer a dragon egg! I'll never drink again! I should be chucked out an' made ter live
as a Muggle!"

"Oh, Hagrid!” Persephone said, shocked to see Hagrid so miserable. “Hagrid, it isn’t your fault!
You know how Voldemort is, he'd have found another way to get through the dog. You were just
another victim used to his advantage and you should not feel like it’s your fault.”

"Yeh could've died!” Hagrid sobbed as if she had not spoken. "An' don' say the name!"

"Oh, Hagrid! It’s just a name! It literally could be Chuck-e-Cheese and people wouldn’t dare speak
Persephone snapped. “I’ve met him and I’ve lost my family because of him—I deserve the right to call him as I please!” This was so shocking that Hagrid choked on his next sob. He seemed to truly see her in that moment and she faltered in her determined expression. “Cheer up, Hagrid. I don’t blame and neither does anyone else. Want a Chocolate Frog? I’ve got too many to know what to do with.” She smiled.

Hagrid wiped his nose on the back of his hand and said, "I…s’pose yer right…that reminds me. I’ve got yeh a present."

"It's not a stoat sandwich, is it?" Persephone asked anxiously with an underline of teasing. It worked with a great effect—Hagrid gave a weak chuckle.

"Nah. Dumbledore gave me the day off yesterday ter fix it. 'Course, he shoulda sacked me instead—anyway, got yeh this..."

He handed her a handsome, leather bound book. It wasn’t thick but wide and when she opened it, her mouth dropped at the smiling faces that waved to her from the magic pictures. Her parents were as young as she saw in the mirror, painfully young that she couldn’t help the sudden drop of tears.

"Sent owls off ter all yer parents' old school friends, askin' fer photos...knew yeh didn' have any...d'yeh like it?"

Persephone couldn’t speak, but Hagrid understood.

There were some pictures, of Lily Evans a young school girl like Persephone. She had to assume the girl in the pictures with her was Marlene McKinnon, with blonde hair. Persephone saw the writing that it was Marlene McKinnon, another girl murdered at the hands of Voldemort. Another few girls popped in the pictures a lot, Mary MacDonald, Dorcas Meadows and, surprisingly enough, Alice Longbottom. Some pictures had Alice with Persephone’s father and Frank Longbottom. She made a note to show Neville, as she did not know any other Longbottoms. Her eyes lingered on Mary MacDonald, though—she looked strangely familiar…

When it was time, Persephone walked down to the end-of-the-ear feast alone that night, later than she was meant to be. Madame Pomfrey held her up with fussing and a last minute checkup so when she walked into the Great Hall, it was full. Unfortunately, it was decked out in Slytherin colors to celebrate Slytherin’s winning the house cup for the seventh year in a row. Any seventh year Slytherin student had now seen their entire schooling years filled with Slytherin winning every year. A huge banner showing the Slytherin serpent covered the wall behind the High Table.

As soon as she walked in, a sudden hush waved over the tables for just a second and then the talking resumed even louder. Persephone was glad to find Hermione had saved her a seat right next to her, right across from Ron and the twins. She sat down, ignoring that people had stood up to get a look at her.

Fortunately, Dumbledore arrived moments later. The babble died away.

"Another year gone!" Dumbledore said cheerfully. "And I must trouble you with an old man's wheezing waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads are all a little fuller than they were...you have the whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty before next year starts...” Several people laughed.

"Now, as I understand it, the house cup here needs awarding, and the points stand thus: In fourth place, Gryffindor with three hundred and twelve points; in third, Ravenclaw with three hundred and
fifty-two points; Hufflepuff has four hundred and eleven points and Slytherin, four hundred and seventy-two points."

There was a sudden cut in the silence with a storm of cheers and stomping from the Slytherin table. Persephone was cursed with a clear sight of Malfoy, banging his goblet on the table. She had purposely not worn her glasses (as she had run out of contacts) for the purpose of not seeing this but here it was.

"Yes, yes, well done, Slytherin," Dumbledore said, not sounding like he meant it. "However," Persephone snorted. She was not sure what she found funny about this but it was. "Recent events must be taken into account."

The room went very still. The Slytherins' smiles faded a little.

"Ahem," said Dumbledore. "I have a few last-minute points to dish out. Let me see. Yes...

"First—to Mr. Ronald Weasley..." Ron went purple in the face; he looked like a radish with a bad sunburn. "...for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has seen in many years, I award Gryffindor house fifty points."

Persephone was the first to start screaming for him and she was sure that scream was making the stars overhead quiver. Amongst the Gryffindor cheers, Percy could be heard telling the other prefects, "My brother, you know! My youngest brother! Got past McGonagall's giant chess set!"

At last there was silence again.

"Second—to Miss Hermione Granger...for the use of cool logic in the face of fire, I award Gryffindor house fifty points."

Hermione buried her face in her arms; Persephone could tell she had just burst into tears. Instead of cheering, Persephone wrapped her arm around her shoulder, shaking her. The entire Gryffindor table was beside themselves in absolute glee. They were a hundred points up—no longer last place but in second! Holy shit!(!!!!!!) "Third—to Miss Persephone Potter..." said Dumbledore. The room went deadly quiet, as everything held their breath, "for pure nerve and outstanding courage, a Gryffindor at heart, I award Gryffindor house sixty points."

The cheers were deafening, she could barely hear herself laugh in near hysterics of happiness. Persephone was keeping score, even over the yelling and she was screaming to find that Gryffindor and Slytherin were tied.

Dumbledore raised his hand. The room gradually fell silent.

"There are all kinds of courage," said Dumbledore, smiling. "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom."

It was then that she knew that she had gone deaf—the explosion of cheers from not only Gryffindors but all the houses were enough to compare to a storm. The Gryffindors had stood up and Persephone had been picked up my George, who had moved to sit by her other side.

"Which means," Dumbledore called over the storm of applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, "we need a little change of decoration."

He clapped his hands and immediately, instead of green and silver, the hangings became scarlet and gold—much better colors, if you ask Persephone. The giant Slytherin serpent crest vanished
and its place was the towering Gryffindor lion crest. Snape was shaking hands with Professor McGonagall's hand, a horrible, forced smile evident on his face. He caught Persephone's eyes only to look away quickly.

It was the greatest night of Persephone's life, especially when she noticed, though how blurry it was, that Malfoy had frozen in shock and humiliation.

All in all, the last few days after saving the Stone were the best. The exam results came in to conclude Hermione and Persephone were the best in their grade and instead of growing jealous and competitive as they once upon a time would have, the girls screamed into each other's ears as they hugged. Ron passed with good marks as well and Neville, too, passed with marks good enough for the coming year. They had hoped that Goyle, who was almost as stupid as he was mean, might be thrown out, but he had passed, too. It was a shame, but as Ron said, you couldn't have everything in life.

The last full day the students had everyone feeling some sort of way. Nostalgia between the leaving students and excitement for those who would come next year. Everyone was, more or less, looking forward to the summer holiday. All except Persephone, who was sure she would not be allowed to go on the Italy trip with the Johnsons and had the Dursley's for company.

However, the night before they had to board the train back to King's Cross, was happy. There was a promised party to come with having won the House Cup and it was not just the Gryffindors—many students from the other houses would be in attendance, even including some Slytherin. Or this was the rumor.

The day was spent in chaos. The rule was the trunks would be ready before dinner, so they could be packed early. The girls in Persephone's dorm were going nuts—as were most other dorms. Lavender could not repack her trunk properly and Hermione had taken too many notes over the year to pack them all in. Hair products were strewn across the room by the time Persephone had returned from breakfast run—she was the only one packed and ready to go, with the special charm she'd put on her trunk that no one else seemed to think of.

She handed out toast and set down drinks while Hermione was piling up stacks of books around her bed. Persephone sighed, "Anyone have any library books needing to be returned? I'm heading down either way."

Persephone’s help was greatly appreciated and so this was how she found herself walking down the hall, levitating a tall pile of books in front of her. It seemed her powers had strengthened—she only needed one hand to levitate the heavy books up in the air and she had a free hand to eat a slice of toast.

“How passed due date are you?” A voice asked her.

She turned to find Cedric Diggory walking next to her. He, too, had a pile of books, though he was carrying them in his arms. She smiled, “Dangerously. You?”

“Consider me dead,” He smiled. Persephone noticed the boy had gotten slightly taller. “You must read a lot,” He noted, staring up at the books.

She shrugged, “They’re not all mine.”

“So... congratulations on winning the house cup.”

“Oh, thanks,” She smiled. “It was a team effort,” She laughed.
"Well, you did earn the most amount of points, didn’t you?” He countered thoughtfully. She blushed.

“And lost the most amount of points,” She said. “But who’s counting?”

“Well, I heard Gryffindor is going all out for the party tonight. The twins have been inviting most of our year so…”

“Oh, you’re coming, then?” She asked, surprised. She didn’t take cat boy to like parties.

He suddenly flushed, “Maybe…are you?”

“Well, I am Gryffindor and friends with George and Fred so I don’t think I have a choice,” She laughed and he snorted.

“Right,” He smiled. It got awkward then, with neither saying anything, though Persephone noticed the boy glancing at her very often from the side of his eyes. “So…you get into the program? The dance program, I mean?”

She nodded happily. Now that it was the end of the year, she could fully appreciate the summer plans. He smiled, “Brilliant! Me too! Hey—I know this might be last minute, but every year, we board someone for the month of the dance program—August, I mean. Greggory just dropped out—would you want to board? It’s only because I live really close to the place.”

“Actually, that would be really great!” She smiled, thinking of being away from the Dursleys. Susan and Daphne had already extended invitations to spend the summer together. “Could I get back to you?”

“Yea, sure,” He grinned. “You have an owl?”

“OI!” They heard. “Down, Diggory. She’s just a first year,” George said jokingly, coming up in between them. Fred and Nico followed.

Cedric blushed and stuttered something like, “Not like that—barely know her.”

George walked between them and Fred took to her other side, “Well, you can come this summer—fixed it up with mum and she’s very excited to meet you. Just need permission from your family.”

Persephone would have dropped the books if she’d been actually holding them. “Seriously? Oh—I don’t want to burden—”

“Rubbish,” They both said. “We want you to.”

Fred picked out a book from the pile and whistled, “Who even reads about gardening anymore?”

“Uh, Freddie, I’m named after the god of spring and flowers—it’s in my blood,” She told him. He rolled his eyes.

“By the way, got you a note from McGonagall,” George said, waving a paper in his hand. “Not to use magic outside of school—”

“I always hope they’ll forget to give us these,” Fred said sadly, making Persephone laugh wildly. She looked back at Cedric, who was listening, smiling uncomfortably. “And yeah, I have an owl, I’ll be sure to send you a letter as soon as possible.”

Nico and George exchanged a look while Freddie rolled his eyes.
Madam Prince glared at each student carefully, checking for any guilty faces to see if anyone had damaged her books. It took so long that when she was done, she bid Cedric a wave that he did not see and she flushed and left.

The party was in full swing before eight. Someone had magically expanded the common room and the twins had a fully stocked snack bar and drinks were passed around. Someone had gotten some bottles of elf-made wine and suggested they play a few rounds of games of Secrets and Sins, Truth or Dare, and even spin the bottle. The first years were allowed to play too and even Neville was pulled in.

There were cheers as two girls, drunk, did a little more than kiss and then it was Persephone’s turn. Rolling her eyes, she spun the bottle and she watched it spin. She had a few sips of wine from Katie Bell’s glass and was giggly. It landed on back on her, “OOOH, NOW YOU HAVE TO KISS THE PEOPLE NEXT TO YOU!”

Daphne was on her right, Hermione on her left. Shrugging, Daphne leaned in and Persephone’s first kiss was more than satisfactory and amazing and holy shit had she forgotten her feelings about girls so easily that year!? She concluded kissing was brilliant, especially with a girl. Daphne smelled really good too. When she leaned away, she smiled, “You’re a good kisser.”

Persephone found this hilarious and blushed at the cheering. She turned to Hermione, “Want to?”

Hermione took a deep breath, “I’d rather have my first kiss with my best friend than some boy,” She said before winding up and rushing forward, pressing her lips harshly on Persephone’s. Giggling into the kiss, Persephone pressed back and held her face and when they pulled away, they were both giggling. There were whoops from the boys. Ron’s mouth had fallen open.

“Alright, perverts, who’s next?” Persephone called out.

And that was it. She was packed, leaving behind the dormitory and the friends she had. They boarded the Hogwarts Express, and Persephone suddenly was very popular. People from all houses stopped by their compartment to bid her farewell and a promise to write, even if half the people she barely knew. Oliver Wood stopped by and gave her a package of paper in a binder on how to keep herself training for Quidditch in the non-magical community, where she could not ride her broom.

All her non-magical friends gave her slips of papers with their number and some wrote them on her skin. She only made sure to memorize Hermione’s. The girls in their dorm all promised to write to each other as they talked and laughed, the countryside became greener and tidier. Amanda had stopped by, and Persephone had tensed up—the girls had not spoken properly since the incident a while back. Amanda only smiled and bid her, “Hey, have a great summer, yeah?”

They ate Bettie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans as they sped past Muggle towns. They changed out of their robes and Persephone pulled on one of her new sundresses. It made her look nice, the green sundress against the red of her hair.

The students spilled out onto the platform. She carried her trunk like a suitcase, pushing her glasses up her nose, looking around the crowds of reuniting families hugging and kissing.

"You must come and stay this summer," Ron said, following after her, "both of you—I'll send you an owl."

"I don’t know how I’ll be allowed but I’ll try," She promised.

People called out to Persephone as she passed them:
"Bye, Persephone!"

"See you, girl!"

"Still famous," Ron grinned at her as she waved back to Cedric Diggory.

"Only here, trust me," She smiled back.

"There she is, Mom, there she is, look!" A sudden, high pitched voice. It was Gary Weasley, Ron's younger brother and he was pointing at Persephone. "Persephone Potter!" He squealed. "Look, Mom—!"

"Be quiet, Gary, and it's rude to point." Mrs. Weasley chided her son before turning to smile down at them. "Busy year?" she said.

"Absolutely," Persephone smiled at her. "Thank you so much for the Christmas gifts, Mrs. Weasley, it was very sweet."

"Oh, it was nothing, dear."

"Ready, are you?"

Uncle Vernon did not look much too different from when she last saw him. He was still purple-faced, still mustached, still looking furious at the nerve of his freak of a niece. He cast a glance at the owl she carried in her cage, as if trying to decide if he regretted coming to get her.

Before she could answer, someone called her name, “Lily! Lily, there you are!”

She turned to find Daphne waving her, Susan by her side, both their trunks in two. Seeing Daphne made her heart speed up. Daphne had a girl’s hand in her hand and she smiled, “I was hoping to introduce you to my little sister. She’s been wanting to meet you since I mentioned you in a letter.”

“Oh,” Persephone smiled at the girl—unlike Daphne’s blonde hair, the girl had dark brown hair, thick but straight and pulled back away from her face. Like her sister, she was very pretty, with handsome dark brown eyes and a perfectly symmetrical face with a distinct heart shaped face. She was flushing and smiling widely.

“Lily—er, well, Persephone, this is Astoria. Astoria, this is Persephone.” Persephone shook Astoria’s hand.

“I have heard the rumor that our daughter had befriended the famous Persephone Potter,” A tall, well-dressed man said behind the girls. By his side was a blond woman that looked perfectly like a mix of Daphne and Astoria. “An honor and pleasure it is for us to make your acquaintance, I am Daphne’s father, William, and this is my wife, Estelle,” He bowed his head down in a fancy curtsy and Persephone, awkward as she was, smiled up at them.

She smiled up at him, “It’s nice to know you.” She glanced back at Uncle Vernon, who was watching the exchange in quiet suspicion about the finely dressed Greengrass family. Behind him stood Aunt Petunia and Dudley, looking terrified at the very sight of so many magical people.

They noticed her glance, and Daphne turned her attention to them, “And you must be Lily’s family. You must be proud of her report, aren’t you? Top of our entire grade, I don’t know how she managed it while playing on the Quidditch team!”

Seeing the look on Uncle Vernon’s face, she quickly said, “Actually, we better be on our way,
we’ve got, er, cleaning to do,” She smiled.

“I don’t know how you survive without a house-elf,” She shuddered. “Write to me?”

Persephone promised to, shook hands with her parents, waved to her sister and hugged Daphne goodbye, not wanting to let go.

"Hurry up, girl, we haven't got all day." He walked away.

Persephone nodded, turning to Ron and Hermione, “See you later, I hope.”

"Hope you have—er—a good holiday," said Hermione, looking uncertainly after Uncle Vernon, shocked that anyone could be so unpleasant. “Call me, will you?”

“Of course,” Persephone smiled.

“Percy!” Someone called to her.

She turned at the familiar voice and found a smiling brunette, pushing through the crowd. Persephone gasped, “Diana!” She screeched, meeting the older girl half-way. They hugged, giggling and squealing. “Oh my gosh, I’ve missed you!”

“As I ‘ave missed you!” She smiled back. “I’m so sorry for saying anything—really, everything’s been so hectic—here have you met my foster brother?”

Persephone’s heart suddenly did a double beat as she followed Diana’s hand, pointing in the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, standing with a tall black haired boy. She lost all air for a moment. “He’s cool, you need to meet him—”

Diana dragged her along and they stopped. Mrs. Johnson gave her a hug and smiled, “I suppose you’ve uncovered our secret, hm?”

“Er…” Persephone laughed nervously. Nico was standing next to Mr. Johnson, watching.

“Well, I suppose I ought to re-introduce myself.” She smiled and suddenly Persephone knew why the girl in the picture in the album Hagrid had given her looked so familiar. “My real name is Mary Cattermole, though my maiden name is Mary MacDonald.”

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