# Point of No Return

**by** DelphiBlack_Granger

## Summary

When a teenage Bellatrix Black gets stuck in the distant future of 1998, she must navigate a world in which she is wanted for crimes she has yet to commit. Alone at first, the help of unexpected allies may save her from the point of no return.

Or: Bellatrix Black finally gets some therapy, inherits a foul-mouthed Phoenix, and sets out to kill her alternate-timeline-future-self (but not necessarily in that order). Eventual Bellamione.

## Notes

Hi, this is my first time uploading a fic here, this first chapter is mostly setup but I hope you enjoy it nonetheless!
Bellatrix Black tried not to make a habit of indulging in the wills of long-forgotten spinsters, but her curiosity won out. She tapped her foot on Gringott’s marble tiled floor as the Goblin administering the will organised his files. The late Maia Black wasn’t quite a blood traitor, but she had come close. All of her would-be suitors and affianced contractors ended up mysteriously dead, and her clear refusal to wed earnt her the family’s scorn, but the Head of House at the time held a grudging respect for her. Her name was derived from the stubborn Taurus constellation, after all—they’d cursed themselves when they’d christened her. While she hadn’t been disowned from the family, she had been cast out to live on her own. For over a century the Black family tree continued to grow, and Maia’s stunted branch had been forgotten as the blood flowed to newer generations. Finally dead, with not even a funeral to remember her by, it was as if she never existed in the first place. Yet Bellatrix had been included in her will.

She grimaced.

She’d never met the old crone, and she wasn’t even closely related to her. They shared blood, of course, but there were cousins and second cousins and cousins thrice-removed that should have been on the will before her. It was a strange situation to start with, and part of her thought this trip wouldn’t be worth the effort, but the chance inheriting something that she could show off to her sisters was appealing enough to warrant it. Old ladies had a tendency to hoard, after all.

Merlin, what was taking so long? Bellatrix shot the teller a scathing look. Disgruntled by Bellatrix’s impatience, the Goblin—Skornok, according to his nameplate—muttered to himself as he procured the necessary documents. Then he cleared his throat.

“The will and testament of Maia Estelle Black IV, Born December 14, 1819, Died July 16, 1968,” he read aloud. “To Bellatrix Black, I leave my wand, made of Snowgum with a Phoenix feather core, 12 ¾ inches. It is tempermental, but incredibly potent. I trust it will make itself useful to you.”

The wand in question manifested itself on the desk as Skornok spoke. It was a pretty thing; the wood was pale but threaded with vibrant red and yellow bands along it. Wandlore wasn’t a subject Bellatrix paid much mind to, but she was intrigued by the use of Snowgum—wandmakers rarely strayed from the more reliable wand woods, and Eucalypts were still quite foreign to British wandmakers. It was also curious that the wand had been left to her, given that most inherited wands failed to attune to their new masters. Yet when she picked it up to put it away in her bag, it sent a small jolt of static down her arm. Oh.

Tucking the wand away in her bag and mind, she nodded at the Goblin to continue.

“Also, the bird comes with the wand,” he continued reading along, confusion lacing his tone as his mind registered the words. Bellatrix’s eyebrows furrowed before a wild apparition of flames lit the air above the desk. The flames crackled and twisted into an odd sort of shape, and in a surge of adrenaline she instinctively drew her own walnut wand. Even the Goblins in the surrounding desks had taken notice of the disturbance, and Goblins were known for being particularly unflappable. However, the whirlwind of fire subsided as quickly as it appeared, and in its place sat a proud Phoenix.

She’d only seen one other phoenix in her lifetime, the one which had sat in Headmaster Dumbledore’s office. But where Fawkes had brilliant royal red feathers dipped in gold, this one was coloured like honey with a dusty purple colour in a single lace pattern. It also had a more sleek build than Fawkes, and while she wasn’t well-read on the subject of phoenix dimorphism she
wagered a guess that this one was a female.

“I’m guessing that’s the bird, then,” she spoke primly, tentatively returning her wand back to its holster.

“There’s nothing in the will about a Firebird,” Skornok muttered, his eyes flickering up and down the document. Bellatrix smirked, somewhat smug that he had become so perturbed. She was willing to bet that Maia didn’t necessarily own the bird, but planned to pass it on through the wand it was apparently attached to. Skornok seemed to catch on as well, as he coughed and schooled his expression back to its stony professionalism. The phoenix chirruped and awkwardly attempted to perch itself on Bellatrix’s shoulder while she studiously ignored its efforts.

“To Bellatrix,” The Goblin continued, “I also bequeath the deed to my French estate, including all its furnishings and contents.”

Bellatrix struggled to mask her own surprise this time. As if the bird- well, the wand that the bird came with- wasn’t enough, the deed to her estate? Of course, given that Maia was a Black family pariah she doubted the maison was particularly handsome, but it was still unexpected. Perhaps the old coot knew that the eldest Black sister was a prodigious witch worthy of all the family’s riches, she mused. Either that or her name had simply been drawn from a hat. If only one thing was certain, it was that her sisters would be filthy jealous when she came home with her new bounty. She took the procured legal document off the desk, and tucked it neatly between two books in her bag so as to keep it straightened. Skornok cleared his throat once more and Bellatrix brought her attention back to him, steeling herself for any more surprises. She refused to be caught off guard for a third time today. Whatever Maia wanted to throw at her, she was ready for.

“Finally, I leave to you these words:

Follow the light of the eclipse’s sunset

Blood will reveal the lost art

Both guardian and warrior

Two paths diverge past the point of no return

I hope you have a safe journey.”

It was barely a second after the goblin uttered his final sentence that Bellatrix felt a jarring pull not unlike the sensation of apparition. It was as if the world was twisting around her, and she fought back the pang of nausea associated with it. The pressure inside her head started to build as the momentum squeezed her skull, and the ringing in her ears grew steadily louder as her insides revolved. Then, with a hiss of a faucet being twisted, the pain abated and she could breathe again. When the world stopped spinning, Bellatrix found that she was still sitting in her seat at Gringotts; she hadn’t apparated anywhere. Only the goblin sitting in front of her, with bushy eyebrows raised and shark-toothed jaw agape, was not the same goblin as the one reading the will. No, according to the nameplate on the desk, this was a goblin named Boregul. The Phoenix had dug its claws painfully into her shoulder, reminding her of its presence.

“How did you get here?” he barked in alarm. Bellatrix furrowed her brows.

“How did I- I’ve been sitting here this whole time, you rotten-”

“Get her out of here!” Boregul yelled at the security guards.
“I don’t know how you managed to do it, but wizard apparating in Gringotts is forbidden!” He turned and hissed at her.

Bellatrix was stunned into silence, and allowed herself to be escorted out by the guards. Internally, she wanted to give the foul creature a piece of her mind, but picking fights with the Goblins of Gringotts was a surefire way to get your assets frozen. That, and she wasn’t particularly sure just what was going on herself, either. Instead, she let herself seethe in indignance as she left the building into Diagon Alley. She huffed and straightened her blouse, sticking her nose up in the air. At least all that trouble wasn’t for nothing- the Phoenix was still clinging to her, the wand tucked away in her bag, alongside the deed to a house in France. The bird was becoming a bit of a problem, though; it was a bit too big to sit comfortably on one shoulder so it had let one claw wrap around her upper arm, and was starting to poke holes in her shirt. At least it had the good sense not to take a shit.

It was pissing down rain outside, which was odd considering it had been a rare sunny day when she’d walked into the bank, but she was grateful for the turn in weather. The kerfuffle would have otherwise garnered more than a few curious looks, but for now everyone was mostly concerned with scurrying inside. She also intended to bring the new familiar back home as soon as possible, for while a Phoenix wasn’t a creature to turn one’s nose up at, it simply wouldn’t do for rumours to spring up about her being some Dumbledore bastard. Her dark curls clung to her face as the downpour drove her to shelter under the shopfront balconies. She cast a quick drying charm on herself and strode down the cobbled street, making her way to the Leaky Cauldron. The muddy puddles on the ground were unavoidable, lest she walk out into the rain again, and so she trudged along with a souring scowl as her shoes and stockings soaked through. She skillfully maneuvered between the crowds, adjusting her pace and angling herself so as to not even brush against another body, but she was more accustomed to doing so without a deadweight on her shoulder. How she loathed Diagon Alley. As she turned a corner, she caught a familiar face in her periphery- herself. Or rather, a poster of herself.

Wanted. Bellatrix Lestrange.

Bella tore the poster off the wall and gave it a closer inspection. Like a twisted Mirror of Erised, her reflection stared back at her with dull eyes, features worn with age. Her blood ran cold through her veins and she didn’t dare take a breath as her eyes flickered over the poster again and again, willing the words to shift. She even took her wand out and tapped a revelio on it for good measure, yet it remained.

She shakily tucked the poster into her bag, resolving to look at it in closer detail later, but for now the obvious issue was to figure out what was going on. Surely this was some sick jinx, that the twisted Maia Black had somehow managed to play from beyond the grave. Perhaps the will had a curse on it- the words the Goblin had spoke rang in her mind.

‘I hope you have a safe journey’.

Shit.

She didn’t know what was going on, but she knew one thing for certain- she didn’t like it.

Logically, she knew that the woman on the poster was a good deal older than herself, and had a far more gaunt appearance- nobody would mistake her for a seventeen year old walking in the broad
daylight with a gods damned Phoenix. Still, she couldn’t shake the feeling of dread that she might be recognised and carted off to prison, which was the last thing she needed right now. Pulling herself together, she regarded her surroundings again. Still dreary, rainy Diagon Alley. Nearby, tucked under the awning of Flourish and Blotts, was a newsstand with copies of The Daily Prophet. She wordlessly hurried over and handed over a few knuts to the newspaper pusher and took a copy for herself, keeping the paper pressed surreptitiously against her face as she strode down a less crowded alley. Satisfied that she was alone, she pulled the paper down and gave it a glance.

Bellatrix blanched at the date in the top lefthand corner. July the seventeenth, Nineteen-fucking-ninety-eight.

Three decades in the future, right to the day. Her head was spinning, but she forced herself to take even breaths. It wouldn’t do for a scion of the Black family to have a nervous breakdown in the middle of the street.

Right. Time travel. Okay.

The events in Gringotts lurch back into her mind, and at least a few of the pieces started to fall into place. It would seem that her involuntary bout of apparition had taken her through time rather than space. Now all she had to do was figure out the why, the how, and the how to get back. Bellatrix cursed under her breath. Of all the bloody things- of course it just had to be time travel.

To a future, in which, she was apparently a wanted fugitive. And her feet were still soggy.

“Well this is curious,” a smooth, feminine voice spoke closely to her ear. Bellatrix whipped around in alarm and instinctively shot a stunning spell, but it ricocheted off of the walls of the empty alleyway.

“Bloody hell,” the voice hissed as she spun, and Bella felt the Phoenix’s claws digging roughly into her shoulder. She froze. No.

Her eyes slowly drifted to the bird, giving it a good look for the first time since she’d left the bank. Despite its lack of human facial features, it managed to give her an incredibly unimpressed stare.

“You’re a talking Phoenix?” Bellatrix asked incredulously. The Phoenix ruffled its feathers.

“All Phoenixes are talking Phoenixes, silly girl. You’re just a talking human,” she replied.

“But all humans can talk- What?”

This was it, Bellatrix supposed; she’d lost her marbles. Or someone had spiked her tea this morning and she’d been having hallucinations ever since. Mayhaps she’d died and this was just an odd purgatory. It would be a more rational explanation than time travel to a future with talking birds and an alternate self who’d gone and married a Lestrange (as well as the whole wanted criminal thing).

“Yes, of course. Humans hardly have anything interesting to say, but they do talk- just not to Phoenixes, who are much better conversationalists by the way. I suppose you’re the odd one here, being a human who talks to birds,” the Phoenix interrupted her thoughts.

“I don’t talk to birds!” Bellatrix hissed, feeling the last grains of her sanity slip between her fingers.

“Well I’m very sorry to break it to you dear, but you’re doing it right now.” Bella rolled her eyes and fought back the heat in her cheeks. Whatever- talking Phoenixes were somehow the least of her
issues right now.

“My name’s Phoenicis, by the way. You can call me Phene.”

“A Phoenix named Phoenix, how savvy. Did you come up with it yourself?” she mocked.

“Cute. Listen, we can trade insults all we like later, but perhaps we should go somewhere a little more private? You are a wanted criminal in a future we know nothing about,” Phene said.

“No, you listen, you overcooked chicken,” Bellatrix spat. A passerby gave her an odd look, catching the corner of her eye as she hissed at the very nonplussed bird. Her face flushed red and she shot him her best dirty glare, which sent him hurrying on his way.

“...Fine. What do you suggest, then?”

“Maia’s house- your house now, I suppose- is in France. We know you’re wanted in this country, but you might not be in France. Or you might be, but the French won’t hand you over to the Brits straight away, at least.”

“There’s a problem with that plan,” Bellatrix said, “because I can’t apparate to France.”

“Well it’s a good thing I can,” Phene replied.

“And how is that?” she asked, regretting the words the moment they left her mouth. With a flourish, Phene unfurled her wings and flapped them dramatically as they caught alight. Bellatrix fought the urge to flinch; she’d resolved to take any more surprises in stride. Though she supposed she’d walked right into this one.

The sensation of Phoenixfire apparition was less disorientating than regular apparition, but wasn’t entirely comfortable either. While the flames didn’t burn her skin, she felt awash with an explosion of radiant heat. The world around her dissolved in a fiery torrent, with herself in the eye of the storm. Just as she began to feel beads of sweat trail down her back, the flames flickered out, and the dreary streets of Diagon Alley had been replaced with warm, green French countryside.

The cool wind nipped at Bellatrix’s skin, providing relief from the lingering heat, and she could taste salt in the air. Free from the bustle of city streets and prying, curious eyes, she let herself shudder out a breath. Today she’d woken up to a morning just like any other, with the house elves preparing her a rich breakfast before delivering her mail. Andy and Cissy were still in bed when she’d left- they always relished in the chance for a late sleep in. She had intended to spend the rest of her lazy summer days practicing her dueling, spending time with her sisters, enjoying distinguished soirées and not-so-distinguished parties. She should have been coming home by now, armed with a few trinkets and shiny jewels from a distant Aunt who had no daughters to pass them to, and retiring to the library to seek out a new treatise on rites vs rituals. Instead, she was here.

Phene finally flew off her shoulder and landed on a fencepost.

“Welcome home,” she chirruped.

“Where is this place?” Bella asked. As demoralising as her situation was, she could at least appreciate the beauty of the estate.

The property was well secluded, as wizarding homes tended to be, completely surrounded by a screen of lush trees and gardens. The house itself was a stone chateau, not too grand nor too humble. It was certainly less extravagant than the sprawling Black estates she was accustomed to, but it was admittedly elegant and even charming in its own right. The small meadow surrounding it
had become overgrown with wild vegetation, but it would take little work (and magic) to restore it to a neat and trim garden.

“We’re aroundabout Vaucottes on the Normandy coast, not too far from Étretat. Just as easy to get to London as it is to get to Paris, from here. How’s your French, by the way?” Phene said.

“Sans défauts,” Bellatrix replied smoothly.

“Good. I suppose we’ll have to see if the wards will let you in, because if they don’t then we’re going to have a bit of a problem.”

Bellatrix nodded, and walked down the gravel pathway. She passed through the threshold without issue, and let out a breath she didn’t realise she was holding. It was good to know that of all the curveballs thrown at her yet, homelessness wouldn’t be one of them. From the state of the place, it likely hadn’t been occupied in the thirty years that had been lost. A sheen of dust coated the interior, and the air inside was thick and stale. There were almost certainly nests of doxies hiding in the walls, perhaps even a boggart or two in the wardrobes. However, there were likely charms on the antique furnishings that prevented them from falling into disrepair, and Bellatrix noted that the decor wasn’t so unfashionable as she might’ve expected. It was almost, one might say, quaint. It would make a good home base for until she could find a way to travel back to her own time, and when she did, she’d come back here in her own time and spruce the place up more to her liking.

She’d give herself time to explore later, but for now she decided to charter a course of action.

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**Wanted. Bellatrix Lestrange.**

Again, her mugshot peered lazily back at her. Swallowing her unease, Bellatrix read the blurb. Known Death Eater, convicted murderer, fugitive, blah blah blah. She pulled a pen and paper from her bag and scribbled a few notes down. Figuring out just what a Death Eater was would be a good place to start. Then there’d be the case of finding out what on earth had motivated her to become a murderer.

She wondered idly which of the Lestrange boys she would’ve had to have married. Alongside her notes she mapped out the family tree to the best of her recollection, but found that Rabastan and Rodolphus were the only likely suitors. Bellatrix couldn’t help the involuntary grimace. Neither had done anything to personally offend her, but from the few times she’d met them, they struck her as the kind of men with the intellectual constitution of a bag of rocks. Phene fluttered into the room, leaving a cloud of dust in her wake as she settled on the table. Bellatrix snatched the newspaper from under her claw, smirking as she lost her balance and nearly toppled over.

The front page of the Prophet had an article about a Death Eater attack on a muggleborn family business in London. While she couldn’t care less about the grief of a gaggle of mudbloods, she frowned nonetheless at the mention of ‘Death Eaters’ again. They were apparently some vigilante militia group that her future self was involved with, but she couldn’t figure why. She had no sympathy for mudbloods, but these attacks seemed brutish and vulgar—she truly couldn’t see herself associating with them. She was better than that. With a great deal of cynicism she scoured the
newspaper for more mentions of Death Eaters. She underlined a few lines here and there about some ‘You-Know-Who’ and mentions of a war, but most articles were written as if their reader hadn’t been under a rock for the past thirty years, so they did little to explain it.

Bellatrix groaned in frustration. Everything she’d learnt - which wasn’t much - had only left her with more questions. Phene gave her an inquisitive cock of the head.

“I’m still not entirely convinced this is real,” Bellatrix confessed. “I’m talking to a bloody Phoenix, after all.”

“I resent that,” Phene replied, but didn’t sound all too offended. Bella sighed and leaned back in her chair.

“What a cock-up,” she muttered to herself. “My future self has really gone to the dogs.”

“I suppose you’re not impressed, then, by the thousand galleon bounty just for information about your whereabouts,” Phene said dryly, flicking her tail.

“Well, whatever she’s done, I know I would have done it better, as if I’d ever let myself get captured and thrown into Azkaban,” Bellatrix said derisively. Honestly - marrying one of the Lestrange boys, joining some weird death cult, and getting thrown into Azkaban? And the wanted poster certainly hadn’t painted a pretty picture, either. Suffice to say, Bellatrix was not impressed.

“It’d downright embarrassing. It’s shameful,” she began to seethe.

“Maybe our little time warp has something to do with this,” Phene suggested. “A cautionary tale, if you will.”

“But if I go back in time, I’m only going to end up as her anyway, otherwise this future wouldn’t exist,” Bellatrix replied.

“Unless this future you and the future you are two separate people. Two separate timelines?”

Bellatrix sat on that thought for a moment. It did make sense - in a warped kind of way. After all, she wouldn’t be nearly so stupid as to end up thrown in Gods-forsaken Azkaban. No, she was so far above that. So far above her.

“But how is it possible? To cross timelines like that? The arithmancy for small pocket loops made by time-turners is insane enough as it is,” Bellatrix struggled. She’d have to be getting back to her own timeline, eventually, but figuring out the math of it was going to be a slog, if it was even possible it all.

“Time travel- warping- is kind of new to me, too, you know. I don’t really make a habit of it.” Phene grumbled in reply, her crest flattening against her head.

Her lips quirked. As mad as she felt, misery did love company. Instead of dignifying the bird with a response, Bellatrix took to reading an editor’s op about the ridiculous prices of floo powder these days. It was good to see some things never changed.

Unlocking the secrets of time travel, and perhaps dimension hopping too, was likely to be nigh impossible. But she was Bellatrix Black, and she didn’t know the meaning of the word. She would, however, need access to a lot more books and any other necessary resources than were available to her here. She’d figure out the logistics of it later, but for now the promise of a new challenge was enough to restore a sense of normalcy. And then there was the matter of her alternate self.
Yes, there were two Bellatrixes in this world. Herself, and this… failure. This failure that had meekly accepted a betrothal from their parents. This failure that had fallen into disrepair, into prison. This failure, who followed a cult lead by a Dark Lord- the absolute fool! This Dark Lord should know his place, should be kneeling to her. Bellatrix swallowed down the bile in her throat. She didn’t give two shits as to whether or not she'd been sent to this future for a reason- whatever plan Maia had for her, she could go shove it up her ass. No, Bellatrix Lestrange had royally fucked up their life, and it was up to her to clean up this mess. There were two Bellatrixes in this world. And soon, there would only be one.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The Golden Trio have a brush with death. Bellatrix and Phene go get ice cream.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Cygnus lived up to his namesake, the Swan constellation. A proud, elegant, beautiful bird. A vicious, and unrelentingly aggressive bird. He strutted up and down the parlour, ever the image of regality as he puffed on a cigar. The world of High Society was familiar with his aristocratic sensibilities, his refined taste and dignified composure. Bellatrix knew better. His hand, tucked casually in his pocket, was coiled tightly around his wand. With only the slightest provocation, it would be at her throat like a knife. As a proper son of a most Noble and Ancient house, Cygnus Black was as deadly as he was beautiful. His three daughters stood before him, lined up in a row. He halted his pacing, and they dared not tremble. A plume of smoke trailed languidly from his cigar, and they dared not cough at the thickening haze. They were the three young princesses of House Black, and they would not show weakness. Together they were strong, bound by blood, love, and solidarity.

Narcissa, the charming sweetheart. Sensitive and proud, she was their light.

Andromeda, the silent judge. Reserved and shrewd, she was their anchor.

Bellatrix, the fierce protector. Passionate and unflinchingly loyal, she was their martyr.

Finally shattering the tentative peace, Cygnus flicked his cigar over the papers on his desk. In an instant they caught alight, the tendrils of fire spilling over the oak, climbing down the desk’s limbs onto the plush carpet. Cygnus turned and bellowed at his daughters, and the inhuman sound reverberated around the room. A violent wind picked up, shaking the portraits and cabinets against the wall, and carried the fire along with it. Soon they were in the eye of the storm, Cygnus’ form fading away as their vision was overtaken with a flurry of fire. The flames circled around them, licking their flesh teasingly. Bellatrix crouched over her sisters, tucking their heads into her chest as she shielded them with her body. She would shelter them as best she could.

Bellatrix woke with a start. Inhaling heavily, she instinctively blanked her mind with occlumency. However, as she took in her surroundings, she had to lower her barriers again to just to remember where the hell she was. She gingerly lowered herself back against the bed, feeling the sheets cling to her sweaty back. It was going to be a long day.

Hermione grimaced. It should have been a simple excursion, nothing more than a fact finding mission. But that had made them complacent, thinking that the sleepy town of Mould-on-the-Wold would be free of Death Eater activity. The Snatchers had caught them off-guard, striking Harry
from behind and binding Ron, forcing them all to stand down. However, Snatchers were as dim witted as they were brutish, and hadn’t yet thought to dispel any possible glamour charms- of which there were several, keeping their true identities hidden. If they had known that they had Harry Potter himself, along with the other two thirds of the ‘Golden Trio’, they would have landed straight in the lap of Voldemort himself.

For now, they were sitting together, wandless and bound with rope. Being able to touch Harry and Ron was a small comfort, but she was grateful for it. They weren’t gagged, but they didn’t dare speak. The Snatchers had mostly left them alone after leaving behind bruises and welts, and they weren’t interested in catching their attention again. All she could do was let her thoughts wander, and try to distract herself from the current situation. It was a mostly futile effort, and it never helped the heaviness in her chest, but it was her go-to tactic for keeping her head above water. She let her mind travel to the other members of the Order. To Sirius, who was making a steady recovery from his near-fatal encounter at the Department of Mysteries. To Tonks, who promised her that she’d teach her how to make the perfect margarita when she returned. To Moody, who would always bark ‘Constant Vigilance!’ at them. Hermione swallowed back bile. If only they’d followed his mandate, they might not be here now. She couldn’t fight an involuntary shudder. Unfortunately, this action was enough to catch the attention of a Snatcher, who was likely trained to sniff out the slightest hint of fear.

“What a bunch of lucky kids youse are,” he leered, his voice dripping with sadistic glee as he approached them.

“You lot’ve got a front row ticket to Malfoy Manor.”

Bellatrix was never a domestic person. Yes, she was often the caretaker of her sisters, and then her cousins when they came along- but it was always up to the house elves to take care of the day to day chores. Cleaning was just so base. However, it was apparent that Maia’s House Elf had died at some point between the three decades in which Bellatrix had jumped, which left her to fix the place up herself. Of course magic made the endeavour a simple task, but it was slower than she would have liked given her lack of skill with domestic charms. Sure, she could master them in less than a week if she so tried, but it was with no small deal of spite that she’d always refused to learn.

She’d already made her way through the major rooms in the house, clearing out the worst of the grime in the kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms. There were a few oddities she’d found along the way, including a room filled to the brim with extravagant theatre costumes, and another filled with a diverse array of instruments. It had made her curious as to what else she might find, but not too curious- it would probably mean more cleaning, after all. She could have constructed a golem with the amount of dust that she’d swept up, and she was pretty sure she’d discovered an entirely new subspecies of poisonous fungus in the main bathroom.

By the time she was finished, Bella had particularly taken to a northern facing study room which had a beautiful view of the gardens, access to the library, and even a plush daybed to rest on. She decided to claim it as her centre of operations, pinning her wanted poster on the wall above the desk. Feeling generous, she’d also set up a stand for Phene to perch on in the corner- she hadn’t found a cage yet, but she intended to keep an eye out.

“What’re you up to?” The bird herself asked, her head cocking back and forth as she watched Bellatrix fling papers across the mahogany desk.
“Trying to see if there’s a copy of that riddle-prophecy-whatever from Maia’s will that activated our time hopping in the first place,” Bellatrix said, giving up and leaning back in her chair.

“Oh, that. I think it went something like, uh,

*Follow the light of the eclipse’s sunset, blood will reveal the lost art, both guardian and warrior, two paths diverge past the point of no return,*” she recited. Bellatrix slowly, unblinkingly, turned her head to stare at her.

“How on earth do you remember that?” She asked cautiously. She didn’t yet know Phene’s relationship to Maia, and immediately resolved to find out more. She idly pondered the merits of extracting information via torture methods over the effectiveness of manipulation.

“Dying and reincarnating over the course of the centuries does strange things to one’s memory. It’s very sharp in some places, very fuzzy in others. I don’t pretend to understand it,” Phene admitted.

“Right. Let me write that down,” Bellatrix said, grabbing a quill. Once she had transcribed Maia’s message, she pinned it alongside the rest of her notes.

“What about you, then? Have any epiphanies about time travel overnight?” Phene asked.

“Just a theory,” Bellatrix indulged. Truthfully, she’d spent half the night lying in bed thinking about it.

“Phene, you know this place best. Does it look like it’s been used at all, since Maia died?”

“No, not really. If anyone’s been here at all, they’ve done a good job of hiding it. Everything’s exactly where Maia left it, right down to the sugar in the salt jar and the salt in the sugar jar—don’t ask— and I didn’t notice anything particularly unusual when you were cleaning. I mean, I’m no forensic investigator, but none of the bedrooms looked any more or less used than the others. The wards haven’t been breached either, from what I can tell; if anyone’s been here, they’ve done an astonishingly thorough job of hiding it,” Phene answered. Bellatrix nodded, having drawn that conclusion herself.

“My hypothesis is that this is where our timelines diverge. I was in two minds about visiting Gringotts to pick up my inheritance, you see- I figured I’d been left some jewellery or maybe a book or two, and I’ve got plenty enough of those at home. I was going to throw the letter into the bin, but it was only because it was a nice day that I decided to take the excuse to get out of the house,” Bella explained.

“So you think that in this timeline, our other Bellatrix decided not to pick up her inheritance, thereby rendering Maia’s meddling obsolete?” Phene caught on.

“Right. I mean, I got to thinking—there’s no way I’d ever pick up the deed to a house, entirely in my name, and never visit it. This place would’ve been in a better state thirty years ago, and I’d definitely have gotten around to replacing some of this furniture, putting up more wards, you get the idea; I certainly wouldn’t have left it like this. So I don’t think this timeline’s me ever got the deed to the house at all,” Bellatrix said.

“Hm. It’s a good leading theory, to be sure,” Phene replied. “Gives us a starting point, at least.”

Bella could easily have devoted the rest of the day to theorising on time travel and parallel universes. However, there were more pressing matters, such as stocking the house with food. The
previous night’s attempt at preparing dinner had been a complete disaster, although she expected as much. Even the non-perishables in the kitchen had, in fact, perished. As undignified as it was, she’d ended up foraging for fruit in the gardens with Phene to keep her satiated enough to last the night. Buying some real food was a priority; it wouldn’t do for her to die of starvation of all things.

Bellatrix tapped her hair with her wand, wordlessly casting a glamour. Like an egg cracking over her head, a soft brunette washed down her roots to her tips. Her stomach churned uneasily when she appraised her reflection in the mirror. Although the face she was staring at was her own, she would have even mistaken herself for Andy. She debated changing the shape of her jawline or her brow, but the more glamours she used the more obvious they would become. Bella sighed as she turned away from her mirror image. Thoughts of her sisters had never left her mind the entire morning, plaguing her as she mechanically cleaned the house. She hoped that she’d be able to get home soon enough, able to get the arithmancy down to the same date so that her sisters would never even notice she’d been gone. However, a small, doubtful voice whispered that it was just as likely she’d be sent back in the equivalent of her time spent here. Which would mean that her sisters would be on their own.

She shook those thoughts from her head. It would do her no good to dwell on such things—her sisters needed her home, and she wouldn’t let herself get distracted.

“Are we heading out into town?” Phene asked, hopping off her perch and fluttering over to land on Bellatrix’s shoulder.

“I am, but you certainly aren’t,” Bellatrix scoffed, jerking her shoulder to try and dislodge the bird. “I’m trying not to be noticed, and you’re the most obnoxiously flamboyant creature I’ve ever met.”

“Come on, it’s been so long since I’ve had a partner in crime. And you’ve already got the crime part down, it seems. Ha!”

Bellatrix sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose. Wordlessly she tapped her shirt, reinforcing it with a charm that would stop Phene’s claws from poking more holes in it. New clothes were another thing on her list to get while she was out—Maia’s clothes were much too old-fashioned and moth bitten for her tastes.

“What’s your plan, then?” Bellatrix asked. Phene was still something of an enigma; she was undoubtedly central to Maia’s little riddle, but the question remained to what extent.

“My plan?” Phene parroted.

“Yes, yours.”

“Well, I’m not sure,” she hummed. “I suppose I ought to help you with this time travelling business. I mean, thirty years is a bit of a power nap for me, it doesn’t make too much of a difference— but if I’m going to lose thirty years, I’d rather do it of my own volition, not have them taken from me.”

Bellatrix furrowed her brow.

“So there’s nothing you intend to do, other than following me around?”

Phene shrugged her wings.

“Fate’s hand will guide me where I need to be.”

“That’s an incredibly lazy philosophy,” Bella replied flatly. Phene shrugged again.
“Anyway, I have an answer to our little ‘flamboyancy’ problem, as it were,” she said, then hopped off of Bellatrix’s shoulder and onto the ground.

In a brilliant burst of flames, Phene’s body was engulfed in fire until Bellatrix could no longer see her physical form. Then, slowly at first, the fire’s plumes twisted into a vertical spiral and formed an almost anthropomorphic shape. When the flames subsided, there was a plain, adult human woman standing on the scorched carpet where Phene had been before. She wore a long blazer over an ankle length skirt, and a small brimmed hat with a golden Phoenix feather tucked into it. Her brown curls were short but artfully styled, far less rebellious than the errant frizz that was Bellatrix’s own hair.

“I’m afraid I haven’t had a change of clothes since the last time I used this form- aroundabout 1915, I believe,” she mused to herself as she fiddled with the cuff of her sleeve. “Not that it matters much, wizards are very slow on the uptake when it comes to fashion.”

“You’re a Phoenix Animagi?” Bellatrix cried when she’d recovered her capacity for speech. She’d never heard of a witch nor wizard taking the form of a magical beast when they became an Animagus- but, well, she’d seen weirder things. She was in the middle of one of those weirder things right now, actually.

“Nope,” Phene replied, popping her lips, “full blown Phoenix.” She cocked her head to the side as she looked down at Bella.

“The Animagi thing works the other way around too, you know. For those of us who can, at least, and for those who want to. Goodness gracious, the amount of bloody unicorns I’ve bumped into,” she tutted, ignoring Bella’s incredulous gaze as she fiddled with the feather in her hat.

“Is there anything else I should know about?” Bellatrix asked, sounding more tired than she had intended. She already felt as if she were on the brink of her sanity- and honestly? It was exhausting. She didn’t know what she’d done to deserve becoming the centre of this cosmic joke, but she had the feeling the punchline was yet to arrive.

“That would be telling,” Phene teased, flashing her a cheeky grin.

Bellatrix felt her frustration bubble to the surface, agitated by Phene’s cavalier attitude.

“This is just bloody brilliant isn’t it,” Bellatrix spat. “I’m in the bloody future all on my own- one wrong move and I could be thrown into Azkaban- and I feel like a fucking lunatic, because you’re having fun playing espionage, shapeshifting into a fucking Phoenix of all things,” she continued ranting.

“Being an Animagi works the other way around- what kind of bullshit do you expect me to believe? Really?” Her wand had made its way into her hand at some point, and was spitting red sparks. A fierce wind blew the windows open, rattling the bookshelves against the wall. A Bellatrix Black temper tantrum was infamous, and this was barely the tip of the iceberg. Phene at least had the decency to look contrite.

“I’m sorry, it was wrong of me to poke fun like that,” she admitted. “I didn’t think about how unsettling you must find all this, but I promise I’m only trying to help.”

Bellatrix’s resolve wavered momentarily, unfamiliar with being on this side of an apology without the use of violent force.

“I’m just as thrown about this time travel nonsense as you are, but I’m used to things spiralling out
of control, really. And I deal with it by just rolling with the punches, but you’re so young, of course you find it unsettling- I shouldn’t have expected you to cope as well as I can.”

“I’m not a child,” Bellatrix hissed.

“You’re not an adult either,” Phene pointed out. “And I’ve been around longer than the British have had potatoes, so, you know. Anyway, I promise to tell you anything you’d like to know- about anything. And maybe ease you into it a bit better than just transforming on a whim. Really- I’m sorry.” Phene gave her an earnest frown, and moved to grasp her hands but thought better of it when she saw Bellatrix’s wand arm twitch.

“No need to be so patronising,” she muttered, but it lacked bite. She pushed the whole ordeal to the back of her mind. Flies were better caught with honey than vinegar, and Phene was laying it on thick. A part of her wanted to believe she was being sincere, but it was quickly shut down. Phoenicis- whoever she was- reeked of bullshit.

Phene snorted and muttered something that sounded like ‘teenagers’ to herself.

“Right. If anyone asks, I’m your hot, single auntie,” she said as she straightened up.

“Ew.” Bellatrix crinkled her nose. They would definitely have to have a talk later, girl to girl(?), and her favourite interrogation methods were definitely in the question. If Phene wanted her trust so badly, she was going to have to put her money where her mouth- beak- whatever- was. Because she had questions.

“Wait a minute-” she stopped.

“What is it?” Phene chewed her lip, bracing for another outburst.

“You’ve been able to turn into a human this whole time- but you waited until after I’d done cleaning to let me know?” She shouted. Phene attempted to look sheepish, but it didn’t really work.

“I don’t like cleaning,” she said, biting her cheek to hide her smile.

“I don’t- I don’t like cleaning either! You- ugh!” Bellatrix fumed.

“If it makes you feel better, I’ll take care of the cooking- I get the impression you haven’t picked up a kitchen knife for any reason other than stabbing people,” Phene replied. It didn’t make her feel better, but she wasn’t wrong either.

“Fine.”

“By the way, may I borrow your spare wand? The snowgum one, I mean,” Phene asked. “A wandless witch tends to raise questions.”

Bellatrix eyed her cautiously. Maia’s words echoed in her mind, the bird comes with the wand. She didn’t trust Phene as far as she could throw her, and she trusted Maia- deceased or not- even less. If the wand was some kind of anchor or key to keeping Phene in check somehow, Bellatrix would not be so foolish as to hand it over without thought.

“No,” she replied, “I think I’ll hang onto it, actually.”

Phene looked as if she might say something, but after a moment’s pause shrugged her shoulders and turned away.
“Alrighty then, if you say so,” she said dismissively.

With her brown curls matching Phene’s, the two made a picture perfect aunt and niece. Bellatrix Lestrange was a wanted criminal, but nobody would spare a second glance at sweet seventeen year old Carina Blanche. They’d figured out a cursory cover story- agreeing that ‘Carina’ was an orphan and ‘Penelope’ was her aunt and guardian, who homeschooled her after the traumatic event of her parent’s death. They’d toyed with the idea of playing mother and daughter, but agreed Phene couldn’t really pull off maternity very well, nor Bellatrix with saccharine daughterliness.

Together, they’d apparated- through normal means- to a Wizarding village on the border of France and Switzerland called Sorcelle. The town was big enough that nobody would notice their coming and going, but not so big that it would be heavily monitored by Aurors.

Sorcelle was sheltered by the French Alps, and a river of melted snow from the mountain caps ran down into the canals in between the streets, breathing life into the surrounding gardens. Sunlight bounced off of the crystal blue waters, and the air tasted of crisp, clean magic. The serenity of it all made Bellatrix wonder if anyone here had been notified that there was supposedly a war going on.

After grabbing something far heartier than figs and wildberries to eat, they’d spent some time shopping for necessities, funds courtesy of Maia’s not-so-secret stash. Soon enough they’d ended up at the library, flicking through archives of news articles and political essays on events of the past few decades. Or, at least Bellatrix was. Phene was a bit distracted, choosing instead to shoot flirty winks to the librarian. Bella was unsure whether to be amused or disturbed, and simply elected to ignore it.

“I found something on me,” she nudged her.

“Oh? Let’s see... hm, found guilty for torturing one Frank and one Alice Longbottom into insanity with the unforgivable Crucio curse, sentenced to life in Azkaban, blah blah blah… You really don’t muck around, do you?” Phene passed the newspaper back.

“She’s not me, she’s an alternate timeline me, obviously.”

“Obviously.” Phene nodded with an amused grin.

Though she was practiced at masking her unease, Bellatrix couldn’t shake the nauseatingly dreadful feeling sinking into her bones as her eyes flickered over the headlines, one by one. For starters, they had confirmed that she’d been married off to Rodolphus Lestrange at some point. The articles also spoke of her devotion to the Dark Lord, and it was maddeningly difficult to find out who he was seeing as they only ever referred to him as ‘He-who-must-not-be-named’. Which was bloody great, but she really did need a name. Neither Cissy nor Andy’s name came up once, and she tried to take that as a good sign.

There was an unsettling dissonance that came with reading of all the allegations against her, knowing that while it wasn’t really her, it still kind of was. She was antsy enough that Phene’s irksome humming came as a welcome distraction. When it became clear Bellatrix wasn’t making much progress, Phene raised her head from her hands.

“You got what you need?”
“Not really,” Bellatrix answered, “but it’ll do for now.”

Truthfully, she felt more lost than before. The more she read about these Death Eaters, the more conflicted she’d felt. Their mandate did hold a kind of appeal, in a way. Enforcing the superiority of Purebloods over the dirty halfbreeds and mudbloods was a noble goal, but what was she willing to sacrifice to make it happen? Her freedom and her sanity, apparently; perhaps even her soul. She’d never been as canny as Andy could be, but she knew a poor exchange when she saw one. It was a strange position to be in: no matter if she turned to the Ministry or the Death Eaters, both held a proverbial Sword of Damocles over her head. Still, she remained resolute in her plan to rid this world of its Bellatrix. She couldn’t let that embarrassment run around with her name and face any longer.

“Let’s go then, I saw a Gelato shop down the street and it’s been far too long since I’ve had a scoop of hazelnut ice cream,” Phene said, breaking Bellatrix from her reverie.

“Please try to stay focused,” she rubbed her forehead. “We ought to go straight back to Maia’s and figure out our next step, now that I’ve got a better clue about what I plan on doing.”

“Don’t see why we can’t do that after getting ice cream.”

“Is this some kind of game to you?” Bellatrix turned on her. “We’re not here to have a bloody picnic!”

“Keep your voice down, we’re in a library,” Phene droned. Bellatrix’s glare didn’t waver. Phene rolled her eyes and stood up, sparing only a glance as Bella got up and followed her past the irritated librarian and out onto the streets.

As soon as Bellatrix opened her mouth to spill some vulgar threat or furious insult, Phene cut her off.

“Would it kill you to relax a little? I get that this isn’t exactly your idea of fun, but getting a fucking ice cream isn’t going to be the death of you. What’s your real problem?” She stared at her expectantly. Bella sputtered indignantly, trying to form words. How had she ended up on the back foot here?

“I just want to go home! I don’t want to be here, stuck with you!” She cried, balling her fists and ignoring the stares of onlookers. For the moment, she was glad not to have her real identity, so that she could throw the pretense of decorum out the window.

“And we are going to get you home, but it doesn’t mean you have to be miserable the entire time until we do,” Phene clucked. “This could take months- even years to pull off, you realise? Just take it easy. As long as you don’t do anything stupid to blow our cover, you’ve got all the time and freedom in the world.”

Bellatrix still had a scowl etched onto her face, but she wasn’t spitting acid either, which Phene took as a good sign.

“Try to look at it like this. You’re a smart, fully independent young woman, and not even the sky is your limit. Carpe Diem, my girl,” Phene finished with a flourish, spreading her arms out as if they were still wings.

Bellatrix wasn’t too impressed with the display, but her lips involuntarily twitched into a small smile. Loath as she was to admit it, Phene had a point. She was going to do all that she could to get
back to where she belonged, but until that point she was on her own. And while that seemed
daunting at first, the implications were… enticing. Responsible only for herself, she could do
whatever she wanted- and Cygnus Black wasn’t here to stop her.

“Now, which flavour would you like?”

Malfy Manor was a cold, soulless place. It was technically beautiful in the same way a marble
sculpture could be considered beautiful, but just like the stone it was carved from, it was lifeless.
An architectural marvel, to be sure, but not a home. There was a noticeable absence of sound, as if
a silencing charm were cast in the walls themselves. The only noise that could be heard was the
quiet but heavy breaths of Ron and Harry, next to her. They were no longer bound together, and
Hermione wished she could reach out and grab their hands, but the Snatchers were at their throats,
looking for any excuse to slip. Narcissa Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy, and Draco all stood in a corner
each, silent and still as the surrounding décor. Like untouched chess pieces, they stood in waiting
for an order to move. She swallowed her tears back. She knew her mind ought to be racing,
searching for a way out of here, but in her heart she knew there would be no escape.

“Well, well, well. What do we have here?” A sickeningly sweet voice called out, shattering the
silence. Hermione felt any lingering warmth leave her body as if a dementor had entered the room,
although a dementor would have been preferable to this particular presence. Emerging from the
shadows was one Bellatrix Lestrange, with her signature crazed grin and manic, bestial eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Starting to get the ball rolling here, but Bella's gotta ease into this whole future thing
for at least a chapter so here we are. Thanks to everyone who sent encouraging
comments, I'm gonna work to get the next chapter out soon, which should be very fun
:> 
Phene: *is nice*
Bellatrix: Sounds Fake But Okay
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Bellatrix gatecrashes a party.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bellatrix sat in the middle of the floor of her study, pages of notes splayed around her like a salt circle. Arithmancy notes were plastered to the wall, forming a collage of equations that spanned the entire room. To the untrained eye it was a complete dog’s breakfast, with writing running off the pages and onto the wallpaper and diagrams drawn haphazardly on the ceiling. However, it was an organised chaos to Bellatrix, who knew exactly where her thesis on thaumaturgic entropy began and where her notes apparition ended. Like a map of the stars, her equations were her constellations- and at the epicentre of it all was her wanted poster.

Phene sat in the corner, perched on the stand. Since their outing she had mostly remained a Phoenix, only shapeshifting to prepare dinner or to tinker on the piano. Bellatrix hadn’t had the chance to interrogate her yet, but she prodded for information here and there. Her leading theory was that ‘Phoenicis’ was simply a Metamorphmagus with a few toys in the attic, but whatever she was was largely irrelevant; it was who she was that she was concerned with. Well, there was no time like the present to get some answers, she supposed.

"Who was Maia?" Bellatrix asked, disturbing Phene from her preening.

"You haven't got insomnia, have you? Did you hit your head?" she squawked.

"I believe the term you're looking for is amnesia, and that's not what I meant,” Bella huffed. “What I mean is that you obviously knew her when she was still alive, and I want to know what kind of person she was that she'd send me of all people to this precise point in time,” she explained.

Phene cocked her head from side to side thoughtfully.

"Truthfully I can’t say I knew her all too personally, because she wasn’t exactly an open book. Quite the hermit, really. I enjoyed her company for what it was, but I mostly only stuck around her because she kept my wand,” she answered.

"Your wand?" Bellatrix goaded- she wasn’t about to let that tidbit slip.

"Well, it’s your wand in name, I suppose, now that Maia’s passed it to you. But it’s got my feather in it, and draws upon my magic, which makes it mine,” Phene declared. Bellatrix smirked.

There it is . She tucked away Phene’s peculiar possessiveness to the back of her mind, and steered the conversation back to the point.

"Do you know if Maia a seer?" she probed. Phene shrugged her wings.

"Not sure. She said some strange things sometimes, but I figured she was just going senile, or that she really liked poetry. Though now that you mention it, it does seem likely. All of you Blacks tend to be astrologically inclined; I'm sure you know what I mean,” Phene replied. Bellatrix nodded. It was true that the Black family had a closer connection to the stars than most. Even though she
herself held doubts about the legitimacy of the field of divination and astrology, there was no denying that the Black family was … uncanny. Bellatrix had been named for the female warrior, and had been raised as such. That she was born under the Aries star sign was no small coincidence, either. There was a debate to be had over the role of nature and nurture, but prophetic naming was common in their family, in some way or another. Truthfully, she was glad to have never been named for Virgo.

“If there’s any clues, I’d suggest looking at some of her musical compositions. She was a talented orchestrator, you see- I’m sure you’ve gathered as much- and a lot of her works were loaded with magical double entendrés. I think one or two actually functioned as spells,” Phene continued.

Bellatrix had, in fact, figured that Maia was a musician. While the children of Noble houses were often taught to play the piano or violin, Maia had a collection of every instrument under the sun, including Guzhengs, Hurdy Gurdies, and even an intact Baroque Theorbo with Porlock gut strings. And that was even excluding the massive pipe organ she’d found in a hidden room- one which she had elected not to clean, given the ordeal that would have been. She didn’t doubt Phene on this one; if Maia had left any clues behind, her eccentric obsession with musical instruments would be a good place to start. Nothing in Maia’s riddle had explicitly mentioned anything to do music, but such prophecies tended to be wrapped in so many metaphors that they were indistinguishable from their intended meaning, so she wouldn’t rule it out. It could very well be the ‘lost art’, after all. She silently added a few more notes to her erratic mind map, jotting down annotations and scratching out others under Maia’s name.

“How much did Maia know about you?” She asked, delicately raising an eyebrow when Phene’s crest rose in what she assumed was surprise.

“Not any more than you do,” was all she offered. Bellatrix fought to keep the irritation off her face. Her habit of dodging questions was getting annoying.

“But you’re such a chatterbox,” she pointed out.

“Only in good company,” Phene cooed. “You never told me how you could do that, by the way- speak to birds, I mean.”

“I can’t.”

“Truly? Are you sure you don’t have a bird version of parselmouth? Or maybe we have some psychopathic connection,” she suggested.

“Telepathic is the word you’re looking for, but no,” Bellatrix replied dryly.

“Hm, another one of life’s mysteries,” Phene gave another dismissive shrug. Bella sighed to herself- she needed better answers than these, but held back on a complete interrogation for now. It was time for a different approach.

“You know, for a Phoenix, your human form is pretty plain,” she mused aloud. Phene huffed and turned her beak up, right on cue. Getting under the bird’s feathers was quickly becoming a new favourite pastime of hers.

“I don’t want to turn heads, that’s kind of the point. But I’ll have you know, that many humans over the years have found me quite appealing,” she griped.

“If you say so. I suppose I just thought you’d be blonde,” Bella said with a noncommittal shrug.

“I, uh, was blonde. For a while,” she confessed. “Hair’s easy enough to transfigure. And well, I
needed a new look. A more mature one.”

“I can’t imagine why anyone would think you weren’t mature,” Bellatrix shot her a mocking grin.

“You little shit,” Phene sneered, but the humour in her tone dulled its impact.

“If magical beasts can shapeshift into humans as you said they can, how come it’s not common knowledge? You’d think all of wizarding kind would know about it by now,” she prodded.

“Same reason muggles don’t know anything about wizards, because they’re too thick to figure it out,” Phene replied cockily.

“And you trust I won’t break this unspoken magical creature statute of secrecy then?”

“Who’re you going to tell? And what are you going to say? That your world has been infiltrated by walking and talking magical creatures? Give it a try, then, and tell me how it works out for you.”

Phene definitely sounded much too smug for Bellatrix’s liking. The implication was infuriating in its accuracy - that nobody would ever believe her. Because they wouldn’t. Bellatrix had always been considered eccentric by others, to put it kindly. Deciding that she was getting nowhere with investigation “Who Is The Crazy Lady That Cooks A Mean Pot Roast For Dinner And Is Also A Bird”, she went back to the drawing board.

There were two more names that caught her eye amongst the sea of parchment, and much like the mysterious Maia and Phene, she didn’t know nearly enough about them as she’d like. She regarded them more with curiosity rather than the suspicion she held for her housemate, only with a slight twinge of apprehension. But these were her sisters, and she knew that she could count on them. They’d held her life in their hands many times before, and they had never failed her. Pulling out a blank piece of parchment, she tapped it with her wand and muttered a dowsing charm.

“Andromeda Black,” Bellatrix spoke aloud, but to her displeasure the parchment remained unchanged. It was a specialised Black family charm, so the use of her maiden name should have worked regardless of who she’d married. Unless - no, Bellatrix scolded herself, Andy wouldn’t. It was far more likely that Andy had simply cast a counter on the tracking spell, removing herself from the directory. She had always liked her privacy, and it wasn’t uncharacteristic of her to make herself hidden until she wanted to be found.

“Narcissa Black,” she called out this time, and was relieved to see a rudimentary map bleed onto the page as the charm determined her location. She recognised the residence and its layout as the details spilled across the parchment, having been there once herself. Before she could even puzzle the pieces together, her sister’s name appeared.

Narcissa Malfoy.

It appeared that Narcissa had married Lucius Malfoy in this timeline after all. She smiled dourly. She hoped for both their sakes that he made her happy, because otherwise she’d have to devote more time here to killing two idiots.

“Come now, Phene. We’re going back to England to go visit my sister,” Bellatrix announced.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Phene asked dubiously. It didn’t need to be said that the Narcissa and Andromeda from the future were possibly going to be very different people than the ones Bellatrix had left behind, but she wasn’t worried.
“Of course.”

“Do you even have a plan?”

“My plan is to make up my plan as I go along,” Bella replied. Phene shot her the most disapproving stare a Phoenix could make, which she delighted in ignoring.

“I’ll take you there, but after that you’re own your own. And don’t call for me when it all turns to shit,” she muttered.

Bellatrix shook her head. It was going to be simple. She would waltz in, head straight for Narcissa, and hex the shit out of anyone who got in her way. And when she found Cissy, she’d reveal herself to her- and Cissy would do whatever she told her to, because that was how it’d always worked.

Really, she didn’t see how it could go wrong.

_Fuck!_

Bellatrix dodged a nasty curse, only narrowly avoiding crashing into the wall as her feet slipped against the polished floor. Apparently the rule around here was to attack on sight, which wasn’t entirely unexpected, but she’d thought she’d at least have the opportunity to call for a parley. And really, there was no way she could have anticipated the frankly _ridiculous_ level of security on the grounds. Either Cissy had become desperately paranoid about an attack, or she’d walked into the wrong place at the wrong time. Admittedly, it may not have been the best idea to walk into Malfoy Manor completely unannounced in the identity of a complete stranger. She was half tempted to lift her glamour charms- these knuckleheads likely know better than to cross Bellatrix Black of all people, but she felt confident she could shake them without dealing all of her cards straight away.

Determined to prove her point, she launched into a roll, dodging the dark spells that cruised above her head. Jumping up, she sent a nonverbal volley of her own curses back at her assailants, knocking them down like bowling pins. These attackers were quick and fought dirty, but they lacked the finesse required of a proper duelist. And, even armed with the unfamiliar snowgum wand, her skills were par excellence. Bellatrix knew she ought to make her exit now, and take advantage of the lull in the fighting to get away before she drew the attention of the entire manor. But she’d come all the way here to see Cissy, and she wasn’t going to leave until she did.

A handful of wizards adorned in dark robes and skull-shaped masks filtered into the room, their wands held at the ready. The moment they laid eyes on the intruder, they unleashed a flurry of curses in Bellatrix’’s direction. She deflected them lazily, and sent her own towards them for good measure. It would seem that she’d ploughed through all the pawns on the board, and now the knights were out to play. These were the Death Eaters, she presumed, not only from their attire but from the more malicious spells in their arsenal. She was the superior duelist, but as she was far outnumbered there was little she could do to maintain an advantage. They seemed to recognise this as well, as instead of trying to match her, they’d instead positioned themselves so that her only escape route would lead her deeper into the house, where more opponents were inevitably prepared for her.

Well, she always did enjoy a challenge.

Sending a point-blank _Depulso_ into the chest of a Death Eater, she whisked down the corridor they’d bottlenecked her into. In the middle of the room were what she assumed were three hostages. She didn’t pay them much mind- she was a little too busy barrelling through Death Eaters to appraise them properly. The fact that she was currently the enemy of their enemy was enough to
assure her that they weren’t an immediate threat to her. One of them had procured a wand at some stage and joined in the conflict; they weren’t as skilled as she was, but she’d take what she could get. A throaty growl caught her attention, and as she swept the floor with a particularly unsightly man with rodentlike features she glanced towards her next target. She recognised her with a startle. Bellatrix Lestrange.

A grin cracked across her face, and she whirled around to engage her future self. She’d made too much of a dramatic entrance to catch her off guard, but she didn’t need the head start anyway. She shot a barrage of curses, each darker than the last, intending to remove her little blemish. Bellatrix’s grin slid off her face as her duplicate blocked each and every one effortlessly, and retaliated with a rapidfire attack straight at her. Although they duelled wordlessly, she recognised a few spells as being terribly fatal should they land. It was all she could do to keep her shields up, and she knew she couldn’t stay on the defense for too long. She yelped as she nearly walked straight into a cutting curse, aimed at the direction she was going to make a break for. Lestrange cackled the entire way through. With a cold sense of dread, she realised she was being toyed with.

Fleetingly, Bellatrix noticed Narcissa standing solemnly against the wall, electing not to engage. Her younger sister wasn’t so young anymore, but her features were unmistakable. Why was she just standing there? She felt like a bombarda had caved her ribcage in, but knew that if Lestrange had landed a hit it wouldn’t have been something so meagre. Bellatrix struggled to maintain her focus. How could she be so foolish as to underestimate herself?

“What’s the matter, dearie? Bite off more than you could chew?”

Each strike was punctuated with a new taunt, and Bellatrix could feel her movements becoming more and more stilted as her vision swam red. A few sharp hexes had slipped through her defences-ones that she had allowed to pass in favour of dodging the more sinister ones- but her ego was suffering far more bruises than her body. At last she recognised a pattern in Lestrange’s movements, one that would seem incoherent and impulsive to most, but it was a dance she knew well. It was a technique that usually kept her opponents on the back foot given its unpredictability, but Bella was able to counter each spell with confidence.

“All right, playtime’s over,” Lestrange growled, and her frustration brewed as a tangible buzz in the air. She cast a spell Bella herself couldn’t recognise, and as it soared towards her she knew her shields wouldn’t hold for much longer.

“Phene!” she called desperately, her heart thumping between her ears as her defenses crumpled under the sheer assault of dark magic. Out of the corner of her eye she spotted a brilliant golden blur, and with a renewed surge of adrenaline she dropped her shield and rolled forward, using her new opening to send a close-combat blasting curse at Lestrange. It sent her opponent barreling into the wall, and left her with few precious seconds to escape. With a surge of flame, Phene had burst through the window and was currently sailing over towards the three hostages, who were standing back-to-back. Bellatrix dashed to meet them halfway, ducking a few errant hexes and doing her best to ignore the outraged scream that was so familiar to her ears. The warm welcome of the fiery vortex had never felt so sweet, and Bellatrix allowed herself a breath of relief as it engulfed her.

They reappeared on a beach surrounded by a wall of sheer bone cliffs and Bella let out an audible gasp, glad to once again be buffeted by the sea spray. Next to her, the hostage group groaned and coughed, likely as unfamiliar with the sensation of Phoenixfire apparition as she had once been. She heard a light wheeze, and immediately turned away from the excess baggage to inspect Phene’s prone body, lying splayed out on the sand. Why she’d thought carrying four passengers across the
English Channel was a good idea was beyond her, but she wasn’t going to start complaining now.

"Phoenicis?" she prodded gently, kneeling down to gauge the Phoenix’s state. Phene crowed in response, a fatigued affirmation that she was still in the living realm.

"Stupid bird," she tutted, picking her up and cradling her to her chest. It was as close as she was going to get for a 'thank you' for saving her ass.

“You idiot,” Phene wheezed in return, but Bella dismissed her dramatics. The others took longer to collect themselves, but thankfully weren’t too slow on the uptake either.

“That was bloody brilliant,” the redhead gasped. The brunette girl must have still been shellshocked because she was looking at her warily, and really, she’d just saved their asses too, so there was no need for that. The final member of their group was a boy with a curious scar on his forehead, who was gingerly getting to his feet. She could see the gears turning in his head when he looked at her, but he didn’t appear all too mistrustful either.

“Thanks for the rescue back there- but who are you?” he asked.

Bellatrix had no idea what to make of these strangers. Had no idea of who they were, or what they were doing being tortured by herself in her sister’s home. And really, she had no idea what she was going to do next, so she did the one thing that felt appropriate in this situation.

“I’m Carina Blanche,” she introduced herself.

Narcissa narrowed her eyes imperceptibly. The absolute whirlwind of a girl that blew through the house in a frenzy was so incredibly familiar, in a way she couldn't put her finger on. A sinking feeling broiled in her stomach as she absently noted how similar the girl had looked to Andromeda. But Andy had only had the one child- didn't she? Though, it was common knowledge that the daughter was a Metamorphmagus. Perhaps this was her true face? Narcissa swallowed back the dregs of melancholy that bubbled to the surface.

She watched as Bellatrix tapped on the windowsill incessantly, staring blankly out onto the grounds. Bellatrix was difficult to gauge at the best of times, but Narcissa still wondered if she was at all perturbed by today's events. Oh, she was certainly spitting at having Potter and his friends slip out of her grasp, but was she at all perturbed by the spitfire that dared duel her- and survive?

She worried for her sister, but she had become too far gone for help. She had become too far gone a long time ago.

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Chapter End Notes

I just want to give a thank you for all the kind words so far! I'm working to keep updates coming out regularly, and hopefully they're up to scratch
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Things go well for the whole of two seconds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rocky beach they’d landed on was only a short walk back to Maia’s, but having to entertain a crew of motley strangers was making the trip more sluggish than she would have liked. Her new companions were a little worse for wear but all of their limbs and major organs were in order, which had been a small mercy. She didn’t really know why Phene had brought them along for the ride, but at least she wouldn’t have to play medi-witch. Along the way they’d struck up a stiff conversation; if it even qualified as such.

"And what are your names?" Bellatrix had asked politely enough, although the trio had looked at her oddly. It wasn't as if that was such a strange question to ask.

"I'm Harry, and this is Ron and Hermione," Harry answered.

"Charmed." They hadn’t offered their last names either, as if they expected that she knew who Harry, Ron and Hermione were supposed to be. They were likely Purebloods then, she thought idly, to be so presumptuous. They certainly didn’t look, nor act the part, but she supposed a lot could change in a few short decades.

She surmised Harry might be a Potter or a maybe a Parkinson, given his dark hair and strong bone structure. She didn’t think he was likely to be a Black- his shocking green eyes were beautiful, but not a standard family trait. The Black genes for dark hair and dark eyes always dominated, or in Narcissa’s case where a stray Veela gene would slip through, there wouldn’t be a dark hair on their head. Blacks were either completely dark or completely light- there was no inbetween. She took it as a good sign, for now. God forbid if he was Sirius’ child. Or hers.

She shuddered.

Ron had the characteristic red hair of a Weasley, but she decided to give him the benefit of the doubt for now. It wasn’t uncommon for the odd redhead to pop up here and there in the Prewett or the Slughorn families. Other than that, he was markedly unremarkable. As for Hermione- well, she couldn’t pick it exactly. Perhaps a Nott, or maybe even an Ollivander or a Longbottom. She was a pretty little thing, but she didn’t have the typically patrician features most Pureblood scions had. There was an old saying in her family’s circle, that ‘the cut of one’s cheekbones could determine the cut of their jib’. Bellatrix shrugged inwardly. She may not have had a jawline to cut glass with, but those big doe eyes would get her far enough.

“Oh- Carina, you’re still bleeding,” Harry halted in his tracks, his gaze locked on a bright red stain flowering across the side of her blouse. She was pulled from her thoughts as she twisted around to get a better look.
“Ah,” she sighed, immediately cataloguing the spells she’d need to clean her shirt up. The wound felt hot and itchy now that she’d begun to pay attention to it, but she’d weathered far worse. It was only a superficial cut, though the fact it hadn’t clotted yet was an issue—likely cursed so that she’d bleed out before realising she’d even been sliced.

“I don’t suppose you have any healing tears for this one?” She jostled Phene.

“You can patch that up just fine, don’t be lazy,” Phene retorted. Bellatrix suppressed an eyeroll and grudgingly muttered a simple sealing spell, deciding to dress the wound properly once she arrived home.

“It’s incredible that you have a Phoenix so loyal to you,” Hermione said with undisguised curiosity. Bella smiled ruefully. Loyal wasn’t exactly the word she’d have used to describe the bird in her arms, but Hermione had no reason to suspect otherwise, and it was easier to play along.

“Yes, I suppose it is. Her name’s Phene— and no, I didn’t give her the stupid name, so don’t ask.” For that she got a nip on the hands, but her grin widened in spite of it.

“I’m afraid she has behavioural issues,” she said grievously. Another peck.

“How’d you end up with one of those? Dumbledore’s one is the only one I’ve ever seen,” Ron asked.

“I won her at a carnival,” she quipped, and Phene actually chuckled at that one. They seemed to catch the hint to stop asking questions, but their curious looks never wavered. A Phoenix was pretty novel, she grudgingly conceded. If she had been in their place, rescued by a beautiful stranger and her Phoenix, she might even believe that she’d somehow ended up in a trashy romance novel. But unfortunately for them she wasn’t in the habit of sweeping strangers off their feet on the regular, and she definitely wasn’t a charming, roguish protagonist, so they’d have to get their rocks off somewhere else. Bellatrix was relieved when they finally found the trail to the château, and hurried forward to invite them in.

“We’ve only just moved in, so my apologies for any disorder. Also, I’m afraid we don’t have a house elf,” Bellatrix admitted. A household without a house elf was embarrassing, but she hadn’t yet figured out where one actually goes about getting one— it was one of those household management lessons she’d decided to tune out of. Hermione’s smile brightened, and Bellatrix tried to swallow her spite at the gesture. There was really no need for her to rub it in. She guided them into the living room, and deposited a now livelier Phene on the sofa.

“You’re welcome to make yourselves comfortable while I go put on a fresh shirt,” Bellatrix told them, uneasy at leaving them alone— even if Phene was watching them— but she wasn’t about to sit around in dirty clothes.

When she returned she found them nestled into the sofa, taking a moment of respite to enjoy the sensation of not having their life threatened. Bellatrix didn’t know why they were letting their guard down so easily— they didn’t know for sure that she had brought them here to save them. In fact, she hadn’t brought them here at all. Phene had. She decided not to dwell on it; they were here now, and she intended to take full advantage of that. It was time to play hostess, a role she knew well enough. She busied about getting them all glasses of water and snacks— Phene would normally be in her ear about eating this late in the evening, but exceptions would have to be made. From the look on Ron’s face, he was more grateful for the charcuterie board than the actual rescue. It would seem she wouldn’t be eating much herself, after all.

“You have such a beautiful home. Where is this place, exactly?” Hermione asked, digging into the
“We’re on the Normandy Coast, close to Vaucottes,” Bellatrix answered just as Phene had done days earlier, although by now it felt like weeks.

“France?” she choked. “There’s no way- it’s not possible, not at least without a portkey,” Hermione rambled. Bellatrix raised an eyebrow.

“Well, here you are. Phoenixfire apparition works a little differently, after all.” And I’m not so sure Phene is a normal Phoenix, Bella added inwardly. Hermione didn’t seem totally convinced, but she likely didn’t have enough experience with Phoenixes to be able to argue the point. Instead, she leaned forward and grasped Bellatrix’s hands in her own, gazing at her with those shiny, brown eyes. Bellatrix leaned away from her intense stare, but stopped just short of ripping her hands back.

She forced her lips into a tight grin; Cygnus would have flayed her hide for such impropriety.

“We have to thank you again, for saving us. If you ever need help, we’d be happy to return the favour in any way we can. If we’d been stuck at Malfoy Manor any longer- I feel ill just thinking about it,” Hermione insisted.

“Yes, well, it’s not like I could have just left you there, now is it?” she coughed. She really could have, but that didn’t seem like the right thing to say right now.

"By the way, what were you doing at the Malfoy’s? Not that I’m complaining, but it’s not exactly the kind of place you just walk right into," Ron asked. Bellatrix hadn’t known that much when she walked right into the manor, but she wasn’t exactly going to tell him that either.

"I don't know that that's any of your business," she replied curtly. Phene pecked lightly at her arm, tugging on her sleeve.

"We've just saved their lives- they already owe us one. If you keep acting so defensive they're going to start getting suspicious," she piped up.

"Phene!" Bellatrix hissed, turning to her incredulously. They were certainly going to be suspicious if she was saying things like that.

"Silly girl, these beautiful imbeciles can't understand me. Right, love?" Phene said, turning to Harry. He gave her a small scratch under the chin, but only looked at Bellatrix curiously for her outburst. Shit- she’d forgotten that point. In fact, she’d almost come to the conclusion that Phene was a talking Phoenix, and the whole ‘you're the only talking human’ bit was part of the joke. Apparently not.

"Oh, um- she knows she's not allowed on the table," Bella recovered, letting out a breath when he accepted her explanation.

"Anyway, I was there because- these books, you see. They're necessary for a project I'm working on, and they can't be found anywhere else." It wasn’t a total lie- she really would need a few rare books for more notes on the theory of time as plasma, but she had no way of knowing if the Malfoys kept such a treasure.

"Books?" Ron near gasped. "All that for some bloody books?" He said incredulously. Hermione cleared her throat and shot him a chastising frown.

"What kind of project would that be, if you don’t mind me asking?" she asked. Bellatrix had to bite her cheek to stop herself from making a knee-jerk remark, because yes, she did mind. Instead she took a sip of water, taking a moment’s pause to regain her impulse control.
“It’s something of a private matter, I’m afraid. Have to keep things close to our chest in times such as these, you know,” she answered, hoping it was diplomatic enough so as not to provoke their suspicion. Thankfully they all seemed to accept this answer easily enough, familiar with the need for secrecy themselves. And honestly, they had been acting a bit hypocritical on that front. Not that she could ask what they were doing at Malfoy manor- she was starting to get the feeling that the answer should have been obvious to anyone familiar with this timeline’s politics. In fact, it was enormously frustrating that asking questions about nearly anything could raise their suspicions, because she really needed to learn more about this Dark Lord. But she was a Slytherin, and there was more than one way to skin a cat.

“It’s just so awful, I worry we’ll never be free of these Death Eaters,” she bemoaned, shooting them a mournful frown.

“Don’t lose hope,” Harry said earnestly. “You-Know-Who isn’t as immortal as he likes to think he is.”

You Know Who? You Know Bloody Who? She needed a name! Bellatrix felt her eyelid twitch, and had to bite her lip so as to physically restrain herself from throwing her glass across the wall.

“How can you be so optimistic?” she dredged out between thick gulps, trying to swallow her frustration.

“We can’t give up hope, because then He wins. Compassion, love, hope- he doesn’t understand these things, and it’ll be his downfall, I’m sure of it,” Harry pressed on. “Besides, we’ve got a bit of a lead as to a potential weak spot of his. It’s what we were looking for, before we- y’know- got captured.”

Bellatrix leaned forward with interest, but they didn’t seem willing to disclose any more on that front. Stopping the Dark Lord wasn’t on her to-do list yet, but if the reports about her future self’s mania were true, dealing with him might become a necessity. Nonetheless she couldn’t blame them for not being all too talkative at the moment, although with a bit of time she might be able to glean some more details. Ron definitely didn’t seem like the subtle, secretive type, she surmised.

“What about you, Carina? Where’d you learn to fight Death Eaters like that?” Ron piped up.

Bellatrix shifted in her seat, wary as all three pairs of eyes turned back to her.

"Bella,” Phene nudged her, sensing her discomfort, “blink twice if you want your ‘aunt’ to come home."

Bellatrix kept her eyes focused on her guests, blinked twice- and Phene flew out the window. The trio seemed a bit startled by the sudden departure, but quickly returned their attention to her with renewed curiosity.

"My auntie must be arriving home from work, Phoenicis hates her," Bellatrix explained smoothly. “She’s the one who taught me most of what I know,” she added quickly, praising herself for the stroke of genius to throw the ball in Phene’s court instead.

The rattle of the door swinging open was a sweet reprieve, as her ‘aunt’ came in to distract their guests.

"Salut Carina," Phene called out, hanging her coat on a rack as she entered the room. She was wearing a casual blouse and ankle length skirt now, having forgone the hat with the Phoenix feather- which, while amusing, was something of a giveaway.
"Pardon, je ne savais pas que tu avais de la compagnie," she said when she caught sight of the group in the room. Bella was thrown for a moment, until she realised the both of them were meant to be French. Right.

"They're from England, auntie," she played along. She turned around to face her guests, who looked vaguely uncomfortable. Good. It would be to her advantage that she and Phene could communicate with neither suspicion nor eavesdropping.

"This is my aunt Penelope. Auntie, this is Harry, Hermione and Ron."

"Call me Pennie, dears," Phene said while putting on her best ‘respectable adult’ smile, which indeed served to make her look more like a human person and less like a walking pain in the ass.

“Auntie, I found these three at the Malfoys as hostages- I wasn’t able to get the book we need, because saving them became my top priority,” she staged.

“Oh! I see,” Phene nodded as she joined the act, “is there anything we can do to help you all?”

“Are you in contact with the Order of the Phoenix?” Harry asked hesitantly. Phene’s lips quirked slightly, and Bellatrix could feel the barely restrained mirth rolling off her in waves.

“No, I’m afraid not. We sort of run our own show here,” she supplied, sharing a glance with Bellatrix. This Order of the Phoenix was definitely a point of interest, but probing a secret society was going to be difficult. Harry was already wearing a more reserved expression, as were his two friends.

“You’re welcome to stay here while you contact them,” Phene offered.

“Thank you, Pennie, but we don’t want to impose. And there are people who’ll want to know we’re okay, and we won’t be able to contact them ‘til we’re back in Britain,” he replied.

“Oh dears, you’re certainly not imposing! Anyone dedicated to the fight against You-Know-Who is always welcome in our house,” she cooed.

“Well, maybe we could spend one night. It is late,” Ron suggested.

“Wonderful!” Phene cheered, interrupting Harry and Hermione’s protests. Bellatrix smirked as Phene sunk her claws in. The group settled back into the sofa as Phene scuttled off to prepare a few of the guest rooms. Bellatrix crossed her fingers in hope that there was an acromantula nest in the bedrooms she’d left untouched.

In the meantime they attempted to make small talk, but the conversation was stiff given Bellatrix’s proclivity for avoiding questions, and the fact that she couldn’t ask her own questions for risk of appearing ignorant. Their discussion had naturally steered towards that of the war, given that Bellatrix was still poking here and there for details, and that Harry, Ron and Hermione’s lives seemed to revolve around it.

“It’s awful what’s happening in Daigon Alley at the moment. The Ministry’s still sitting on their hands, as always,” Ron grumbled.

“Yes, well. As terrible as those Death Eaters are, I can’t say there’s any love lost for those mudbloods that become the collateral in all of this,” Bellatrix sniffed.
“I’m a muggleborn,” Hermione said coldly, all the warmth from earlier absent in her steely gaze. Bellatrix felt the blood drain from her face. How long she been sitting here, unknowingly entertaining a-

“Get off my couch, muddy! I just cleaned here, and you’re dirtying it up,” she cried.

“What- Carina, that is no way to speak to your guests!” Phene admonished from the doorway, and Bellatrix wondered why she was still acting the proper hostess- there was a mudblood in their home! Bellatrix and the trio all got out of their seats at once, facing off with gnarly scowls.

“You take that back,” Ron shouted as he levelled his wand at her, his face steadily matching his hair in its brilliant shade.

"You filthy blood traitor," she shouted, and drew her own wand faster than they could act. A blasting curse narrowly sailed above their heads, only missing due because Phene had grabbed her from behind and pulled her arm upwards.

"How dare you!" she turned around to face Phene and yelled up at her, but the hand wrapped around her wrist was firm and unbudging. With her free hand she reached up and backhanded her left cheek, the sharp sound slicing through the room- but Phene merely glowered down at her, her grip as steady as a vice. Furious, Bellatrix whirled around again, snarling at her guests. They had their wands aimed at her, and though they stood determinedly she could see the fear glisten in their eyes.

"Get out!" She roared. Although her wand arm was still bound, her yell was punctuated with a surge of static that shook the walls and rattled the windows. Apparently they were smart enough not to start a real fight with her, held back or not, and apparated away.

“Get a hold of yourself, girl!” Phene finally released her hold on Bellatrix, and for her efforts took a stupefy to the chest. She got up slowly, the grim scowl on her face unwavering, never breaking eye contact as she pulled herself to her full height.

“Stupefy,” Bellatrix called again, but Phene braced herself on her back foot to catch herself as she weathered the blow. Her eyes darkened and her scowl deepened, but what was most unnerving to Bellatrix was the silence. She made no move towards her, made no threats of violence, only keeping her unblinking, stony eyes trained on her. They both stared each other down in a stalemate of wills, but it was Bella who broke first.

“Lay a hand on me ever again, and you will lose it,” she snarled.

“I won’t let you attack your guests, Bellatrix. And do not make threats you cannot keep,” her eyes flashed dangerously.

“They’re not my guests! You brought them here! As if I would otherwise associate with that scum-” Bellatrix hesitated for a split second when Phene took a step towards her.

“I’m not going to hurt you, Bellatrix,” she murmured, and the fire in her eyes dimmed somewhat. “But nor am I going to let you carry on like some rabid animal. Pull your shit together,” she bristled, and primly turned around and left the room. Bellatrix swore at her retreating form, but suppressed the urge to hex her in the back- she wasn’t going to provoke a real fight as fatigued as she was. That could come later.

She didn’t know why Phene was so intent on protecting those mudbloods and blood traitors, but it didn’t matter. She refused to feel like a chastised child who was sent to bed without supper, and the
fire in her chest blazed on in fury. Her wand crackled in her hand, and she saw no point in stifling it. With a furious whip of her arm the windows blew outwards, shattered glass raining down to the ground. The wind howled woefully as it swirled throughout the room, biting her down to the bone as its chill curled around her. A scream let loose from her throat as she flicked her wand again, and the sofa found a new home splattered against the wall. Spell after spell, she unleashed her rage. A surge of magic frazzled her hair as it stripped the glamour from her curls, although there were no glass surfaces left for her to glimpse her feral reflection in.

Catching her breath, she took stock of the tattered remains of the living room. Her chest shuddered for a moment. The scattered debris; the ripped wallpaper; the scorched curtains. It was an all too familiar sight. Her hands trembled, and she felt the tug of twitching fingers around the hilt of her wand. It was never as cathartic as it should have been.

Merlin, she needed a drink.

Hermione leaned into Ron’s shoulder as they waited in line at the French Ministry’s portkey network. It had been a long, long day, but the promise of getting back home was enough to keep them powering on. As soon as they got to Britain they’d be able to send a Patronus to alert the Order of their whereabouts, but there was little they could do until they entered the country. Just the thought of coming home to the Burrow was enough to bring tears to her eyes. She could already feel the warm air from the roasting fireplace rising through the stacks of rooms, could smell the sweet scent of Molly’s creations bubbling atop the stove. And once she’d gotten nice and comfy, she would finally be able to push her troubles to the back of her mind. Despite all she’d been through, facing a righteous and hysterical pureblood never really got any easier.

They all agreed that it was a rather odd occurrence, to put it lightly. At first she’d thought Carina might have been a guerrilla fighter against the Death Eaters, operating with her aunt as part of a possible French vigilante group. It wasn’t an outlandish theory, considering how she’d saved them from inevitable horrors at Malfoy Manor. She had swept in, much like the star of a trashy romance novel, rescuing them in a blaze of Pheonixfire glory as if to say ‘Dumbledore, eat your heart out’. Then she’d taken them to her castle, and she and her aunt had been as hospitable as could be, claiming that the fight against Voldemort was their fight too.

And then, with the flick of a switch, she’d turned into a raving lunatic.

It made her wonder what she was doing in the fight against the Death Eaters at all. She seemed to share the same Slytherin bigotry as them- she could have easily been a recruit, had she wanted. Her skill and raw power was undeniable, given that she faced Bellatrix Lestrange and lived. Hermione hadn’t paid too much attention to the duel, given that she was a little busy fighting for her own life at that point, but Carina’s mastery of nonverbal magic and chained spells was, in a word, frightening.

Yet if she held such draconian views against halfbloods and muggleborns, why would she stage a rescue for Harry Potter of all people? She’d acted like she wasn’t familiar with his or any of their names at all, which was perhaps more odd again. And, if she was as pureblood as they came, why would she have a home free of House Elves? Her aunt had even seemed shocked by her anti-muggleborn rhetoric. None of it added up, and not knowing was a feeling that never sat well with
And there’s another thing, a voice in the back of her head whispered conspiratorially at her. Hermione quashed it. No. It was ludicrous. But her analytical mind could never be derailed once it was on its trajectory.

Bellatrix Lestrange was coarse and feral, so sharp that even her edges had edges. ‘Carina’ looked like a well dressed, curly-haired doll come to life. There wasn’t a more dissimilar pair, and yet they could have been doubles if not for the age discrepancy. Carina had a full, cherubic face where Bellatrix’s was hollow and gaunt, but the structure underneath was the same. They shared a jawline, a brow, a nose, their lips- and more. Carina spoke just as Bellatrix would; her idiolect was perfect, and the way she intoned and pitched her voice was an immaculate imitation, from the way she bantered to the way she screamed. The Lestranges were a traditionally French family, and Carina looked old enough to have been born during the first war. And, cliché as it was, she had her mother’s eyes.

Hermione shook her head- it was a wild theory, one she really shouldn’t be projecting onto anybody, pureblood psycho or not.

Chapter End Notes

are we having fun yet?

Some notes on this chapter: Phene and Bella are barely functional disasters at the best of times so of course at the worst of times they're an absolute trainwreck. Hermione's managed to catch their scent but her brain's a bit too rational for silly things such as time travel for the moment. And I can't promise that Bellatrix the Trashy Romance Heroine will be a recurring joke but it will probably be a recurring joke.

As an aside, if I drew a 5 min mockup poster for this pic should I post an imgur link or smthin? It's too messy to attach to the first chapter and I'm too lazy to work on it but I wanna share it too
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

'Hi I'm Bellatrix and this is jackass'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the image of a silver stag pranced through the fireplace at Grimmauld Place, the Order breathed a collective sigh of relief. Everyone had assumed the worst when the Golden Trio had gone dark, and to hear that they were on their way to the Burrow was a weight lifted from everyone’s shoulders. Harry had been vague with the details of their excursion, but there would be time for that later. For now they could rest easy, knowing that Harry Potter and his friends were in safe hands once again.

Sirius had spent the entirety of the previous night pacing in his room, and for the rest of the day had been utterly irascible. Not even Remus had attempted to pacify him, because what would he say? False platitudes were of no use to anybody. Only the sight of his Godson’s patronus was enough to set him at ease, which was fortunate given the critical nature of tonight’s Order meeting, scant as its members currently were. A grouchy Sirius was never of any use to anybody, and they would all need to put their heads together to figure out their next step.

Voldemort had made his reappearance known to the wizarding world two years ago, and it was largely the efforts of Dumbledore that was keeping the Ministry from falling apart under Fudge’s tremulous leadership. It was all the Order could do to devote its resources to countering Death Eater raids and Muggle-baiting hunts, let alone go on the offensive. After going public Voldemort had seemed to gain even more followers, as Death Eater sympathisers felt newly emboldened with the knowledge that the Dark Lord was back- and perhaps had never truly gone. Yet there was some renewed hope that Dumbledore had discovered a potential weakness of Voldemort’s, the tightly kept secret of his supposed immortality. However, it was the search for potential information about said information that Harry and his friends were seeking when they had been accosted, which meant that while they were on the right track, it was a very dangerous path. None of them could afford to slip up for a second time.

Maia Black had been gracious enough to leave behind bottles upon bottles of elven wine in the cellar when she’d died, perhaps using her seer skills to determine that Bellatrix would come to sample her finest. Wine was her favourite to get drunk on; it wasn’t as harsh as vodka or whiskey, not as indulgent as champagne or liqueur, and not as crude as beer or cider. It was the perfect aristocratic drink to get completely shit-faced on.
Not wasting time with a goblet or a glass, she uncorked a bottle of Pinot Noir with her wand and took a swig. It wasn’t long before she felt a sweet buzz warm her face, and her muscles and inhibitions began to loosen. The wine’s embrace was sweet and tender, and like an old friend she greeted it fondly. Though her mind was still sharp, a sluggish and complacent cloud settled over her thoughts, allowing the talons of rage to slowly loosen their grip on her.

She took another swig.

As she washed down all thoughts of dirty mudbloods and perfidious Phoenixes, the image of Narcissa’s icy stare haunted her from the recesses of her mind. Her sister was a stranger to her, all traces of her thirteen-year-old obnoxiousness carved out of the hard lines of her face. The cool mask of indifference she wore was familiar to her, but it had never been directed at her. Logically Bellatrix knew that Narcissa had no reason to recognise her, a seventeen year old covered in glamours, while her tangible and still very much alive older sister was around. Bellatrix grimaced. Facing herself in a duel had been, in a word, awful. Her future self was skilled, incredibly so, but there was something so incredibly inhuman about her that she found disturbing to the core. And each time she told herself that she’d never be her, a voice in the back of her mind that sounded suspiciously like her father’s concurred.

When she’d at first seen the poster of herself- Bellatrix Lestrange, she immediately assumed that this could not be her, because she would never let herself be married off to some brute like a trophy possession. Just as Maia Black had once done, she would kick up a fuss, throw another tantrum, and become a force so incapable of being reckoned with that they’d all cave to her will. Yet, if she couldn’t… well, she couldn’t let herself become exiled or even disowned. She would have to go along with it, for the sake of her family, even her sisters- she couldn’t imagine that they wouldn’t become collateral for Bellatrix’s disobedience.

And if she were promised a place to rule by the side of a Dark Lord, wouldn’t she take it? Maybe not today, and maybe not tomorrow, but in a not-so-distant future where she was chained to a husband she didn’t like for the sake of her family’s honour, the idea would seem so very tempting. The power of the Dark Arts was her birthright, she already felt its call- and its whispers were always incessantly persuasive. Bellatrix Black and Bellatrix Lestrange were two very different people, but it only took a snowball to make an avalanche. Without the gift of foresight that this timeline had given her, the stepping stones of her future’s path were deceptively inviting.

The thought that she and Madam Lestrange may very well be one and the same was sobering. Not sobering enough to actually sober her, of course- she took another swig.

The more she drank, the deeper down the rabbit hole she fell. Liquid courage was an apt euphemism; despite having to fight for control over her faculties, she felt like she could take on the world. There was no rush quite like it- she remembered times when she would drink and become bold, when she could be strong enough to mediate explosive arguments between her parents, when she had the audacity to stand up and fight for her sisters. True that in the morning, she would wake up to fresh regrets- but that didn’t matter. All that mattered was what happened in the moment, and in this moment, she could do anything.

A stray thought crossed her mind- there had been a book she’d remembered seeing at Grimmauld Place a year or two ago on protective memory charms. If she was going to travel back in time back to sixty-eight, it was imperative that she factor in the necessary enchantments that would prevent her from losing all memory of her time here. Because if she lost her memory when she was sent back, she would lose everything she’d learnt about Dark Lords, arranged marriages, and herself. And then she risked this becoming her future. Yes, she needed that book. And she needed it now.
Screw it, she thought, and grabbed a fistful of floo powder. She knew better—she knew better, but at the present moment it just seemed like the thing to do. She didn’t want bloody Phene giving her that disapproving stare, she didn’t want to stay here any longer, she didn’t want to have to think, all she wanted was to do, to get out of here—

“Grimmauld Place,” she spoke, consciously enunciating in spite of her otherwise slurred speech.

Bellatrix swaggered through the fireplace, taking a moment to lean against the wall. Using the floo was never a fun experience at the best of times, and doing so under the influence was hardly recommended. Once she’d managed to swallow the urge to heave, she brushed the ash off her blouse and strolled down the hall. Grimmauld Place wasn’t as dust caked as Maia’s house had been, but the estate was in such a state of disrepair that she had to assume it had been divested of its occupants for some time now; there was simply no way Walburga would allow her home to grow cobwebs.

As she strolled towards the library, a light coming from the kitchen caught her attention. Drawing closer as inconspicuously as she could, she poked her head through the door. Sitting around the dining table was a young woman with bright pink hair, an older man with an enchanted prosthetic eye, a dirty looking hobo, another dirty looking hobo, and a man with red but greying hair.

What? Who were these people?

Bellatrix groaned inwardly. What kind of messed up future had she been sent to? If she woke up at St. Mungo’s tomorrow, it would come as a relief. However, it was in that moment that the ragtag bunch of oddities noticed her as well. For half a second, the comical alarm on their faces was enough to make her giggle. And then all hell broke loose.

She felt the magic crackle in the air before it even left their wands, the whole room a tinder box set to ignite. Their shocked faces had morphed into something more akin to hatred, and no amount of inebriation could have dulled the glaring red flags warning Bellatrix to get the hell out of there. Within seconds of her turning tail and closing the door, a spell shattered the door next to her. The splintered shards cut across her cheek, and with a punch to the gut she realised that these hobos wouldn’t be so elementary as the detail at Malfoy Manor. Not even attempting a counterspell or even a shield, Bellatrix tore down the hallway, hoping to put as much distance between herself and her pursuers as possible. She staggered to and fro, her zigzagging motions unintentionally working to throw off their aim. They chased her down the hallways, which seemed to squeeze around them as she flew down the bannisters. Every now and then she’d veer down a corner that made itself available to her, although she was quite certain didn’t belong on the floor plan. Her pursuers were quick and professional, and she was tired and drunk, but she grinned wildly despite herself. It was as if the house itself was trying to protect her from these… squatters!

“Through here, girl!” a portrait of one of her Great Grandfathers called out to her, swinging open to reveal a passage. Without a second thought she dove through the hole. The shortcut bought her some time, but she could still hear shouts and curses with her name peppered inbetween from down the corridor. Bellatrix sent back a stunner of her own, but she soon figured that the time spent shooting spells that were almost certain to miss was time that had been wasted. She let out an undignified squeak as the man with the magical eye shot a blinding flash followed up with a cutting curse that would have opened up her abdomen if she hadn’t already staggered through a mirror which swallowed her up and spat her back out in the library.

Now that she’d arrived here, she finally remembered what exactly it was she came here for. With the leisure of a woman not on the run she slowly began to peruse the bookshelves, languidly
sliding her fingers along the book’s spines.

“Ah,” she muttered to herself, and hummed a short tune as she pulled out the book on memory charms. She shrunk it and put it away in her pocket, and took a short moment to browse a few other books while she was here. She was broken from her short reverie when the sound of a vase crashing echoed from across the room, where the red haired man stumbled against the wall. Bellatrix could have kissed the ground in gratitude to the house for warning her of her guest’s arrival, as she was able to slip between the shelves quickly enough to get a head start. Bellatrix shot down another hallway and took a sharp turn, landing in one of the cigar rooms.

And in the middle of the room, standing awkwardly with a bowl of pasta between her hands, was Phene.

“Bellatrix! There you are!” she sighed in relief. “I couldn’t- why are you running- Fuck!” She yelped as she ducked a bright red stunning spell, and legged it after Bellatrix. Her longer stride allowed her to catch up easily enough, but Bella’s knowledge of the household gave her the lead as they ran.

“Phene! What are you doing?” She shouted, dodging an errant hex.

“What are you doing? Who are these people?” Phene yelled back.

“Whatever I want! And- I dunno,” Bellatrix cried, careening around the corner. “How did you find me?” she asked before Phene could berate her.

“You still have my wand, numbskull,” she retorted, tripping up on an old matted rug before catching herself. “How are you still alive?”

“m badass,” Bellatrix coughed.

“When I told you to pull your shit together you really went and did the opposite just to spite me, huh?” Phene breathed out, juggling the pasta bowl as they barrelled through another secret passageway.

“Shut up, stupid chicken,” Bellatrix muttered witlessly, but continued guiding them down the hall.

“Bellatrix, child! Listen to me!” A portrait of her great ancestor Perseus Black called out to them. They halted, and Bellatrix frantically nodded her head at him. His portrait had always been fond of the eldest Black daughter, and she trusted that his word would be worth the precious lost seconds.

“There is a wardrobe in the next bedroom to the left. Speak the words ‘periculum mortale’, knock on the paneling on the back thrice, and you will find safety,” he ushered them. Bellatrix and Phene shouted their thanks as they followed his directions, ducking into the bedroom just as a particularly nasty curse sailed down the hall towards them. They squeezed into the wardrobe and Bellatrix hissed the password as she hastily knocked on the oak. After her third knock the inside of the wardrobe swung open, and they slammed the impromptu door behind them with a loud thud.


“Why? What’s here?” Phene asked between ragged breaths.

“Trophy room. I don’t think they can get in here. Perseus was right, we should be safe, for now,” Bellatrix sighed, and crouched with her back against the wall. Phene sagged down next to her.

She had rarely been allowed in the trophy room, it being reserved for only the most momentous of
occasions, with only the most esteemed company. She let herself take a breath, slightly more at ease. There were enough enchantments on this room to keep out most Blacks, let alone squatters. Even if the Lord of the House were here to let himself in, the trophy room would have been one of the last place they would look—breaking into Gringotts would have been easier than here. Which was why it apparently served a dual-purpose as a panic room, for those with the password and the know to get in.

On display in the room were various oddities and collections, most of them cursed from the inside out. There were shelves of highly esteemed awards won by Blacks in the past, coupled with trophies of the gold and platinum sort, as well as trophies of the ‘spoils of war’ sort. She’d be tempted to nab a few to take back to France with her, if she didn’t already know that even looking at some of these artefacts could be enough to send you straight to St Mungos. Bellatrix certainly didn’t doubt the authenticity of the blindfolded Gorgon head mounted on the wall.

“Care to get us out of here?” she asked, tilting her head to look up at Phene.

“Give me a minute to catch my breath, would you? This is the second time today I’ve had to travel across the pond and back— and you’re not light, you know that?” Phene shot back.

“Shut up, you stupid chicken,” Bellatrix groaned out again, knocking her head back against the wall.

Sirius was beside himself. How difficult was it for five trained members of the Order of the Phoenix to apprehend a drunk Death Eater? Moody’s spells were strong enough to decimate anything they came into contact with, but age had taken its toll and Bellatrix was spry and almost bouncing off the walls. What he lacked in agility was made up for by Tonks, but Bellatrix knew this house like the back of her hand and the house itself seemed to come to her aid, with cabinets and lamps and even chandeliers crashing all around them. Sirius believed that he had the skill, athleticism and knowledge of the house to apprehend Bellatrix himself, but he knew that the inevitable duel between them would get very ugly very quickly. It had been two long years since the battle at the Department of Mysteries, and Sirius had only recently been cleared of the injury he had sustained by Bellatrix’s wand.

That night he would have begged his cousin to send the killing curse his way, after the debilitatingly torturous spell that she had infected him with. The pain was unlike any cruciatus curse, filling his lungs with a viscous fluid that emptied out into his bloodstream as he choked on it. It was only the quick action of Tonks that saved his life, when she countered the spell’s soul-sucking tendencies with a modified patronising charm. Nonetheless, he had been in a comatose state for months, and when he had awoken he had found himself paralysed from the waist down. Remus and the Order were a blessing in aiding his physical therapy to the point where he could fight again, and he’d be damned if he let that bitch survive the night.

She had to have bypassed the wards somehow, but to do so would take a monumental effort, the kind of effort that necessitated an entire raid group— but she was here alone, crazier than ever. The only other entrance was the fireplace, but he’d made certain that all active Black households or associated estates were cut off from the network. There wasn’t a house left that Bellatrix could touch that would take her here.

“Are we all accounted for?” Moody called out. A chorus of grunts returned in affirmation-
everyone was still alive, miraculously enough.

“The blighter’s slippery, but she’s not out for blood, it would seem,” he pointed out. The question of what exactly it was that she was here for hung over their heads dreadfully, and did nothing to make them feel any safer.

“I saw her taking something from the library. And there’s another one- a woman, I don’t recognise her, she’s with Lestrange,” Arthur breathed out.

“I saw them too. They found a secret passageway behind a wardrobe in one of the bedrooms, I’m afraid I wasn’t familiar with it,” Remus panted.

“Shit! She could be anywhere by now,” Sirius spat, wiping the sweat from his brow.

“How do we find her?” Tonks asked, her pink hair deepening into a darker mauve.

“You don’t!” A portrait of Perseus Black butted in from above them, and let out a sickeningly familiar cackle.

“Shove it,” Sirius growled out, and pulled the curtains down over the brass frame. Whatever Bellatrix and her enigmatic companion were up to was a mystery to all of them, and the magic of Grimmauld Place was doing an infuriatingly good job of hiding her. There was the unlikely possibility that she would disappear just as spontaneously as she’d arrived, but until they could find a trace of her, none of them would be getting any rest. It was going to be a long, long night.

Bellatrix and Phene sat with their backs propped up against the wall, listening carefully for the sounds of a forced entry. Occasionally they heard muffled yells and mutters from behind the wallpaper, but there was no indication that anyone knew they were in hiding mere centimetres of plasterboard away. They held their breath for a moment longer, even once the coast had cleared, but after a good ten minutes they tentatively relaxed.

“What are you doing here?” Bellatrix muttered, her head lolling to the side.

“I wanted to come get you for dinner, and I was a little worried after you trashed the living room, and for good reason apparently,” Phene replied, shuffling slightly.

“Dinner?” Bellatrix asked absently.

“Of course. I wasn’t going to let you starve, silly girl. Do you really think me so cruel?” Phene offered her the bowl of penne and Merlin, she hadn’t realised how hungry she had been until the wafting scent of pepper, garlic and parmesan clouded her senses. She took the fork and began to dig in, all but moaning as she scarfed it down. The wine hadn’t settled well in her stomach, and filling herself up on pasta seemed to soothe her body’s burgeoning sickness. Phene wasn’t good for much, but damn if she wasn’t a good chef. They sat in silence for a good while longer, with Bellatrix cleaning through her dinner and Phene content to enjoy the relative peace.

“I’m not sorry for getting cross with you, but I shouldn’t have left things the way they were,” Phene spoke gently as Bellatrix set down the now empty bowl. The alcohol in her blood had mostly drained away, but she still felt the ghost of its sleepy touch.
“I shouldn’t have hit you,” she mumbled, avoiding eye contact. “I’m not- I don’t want to be like-“ she cut herself off. She loathed the tears that sprung forth to sting her eyes, and rubbed them away. An apology was as foreign to her tongue as this new world was, and perhaps that was the reason she was so out of sorts. Phene cautiously wrapped an arm around her shoulder, and when she met no resistance she pulled Bellatrix closer towards her chest.

“It’s okay,” Phene whispered. “We’ll do better next time.”

Bellatrix hummed softly, letting herself fall into the embrace as she rested her head against the crook of Phene’s neck. The unfamiliar intimacy should have been awkward and uncomfortable, but instead it felt… warm. And she hated that, most of all, it felt… nice. She blamed her weakness on the alcohol, her head already beginning to pound.

“You know we’re going to have to talk about this later,” Phene said softly. Bella groaned. It was a conversation they were going to have to have, but for now, she let herself drift off as the fiery embrace of apparition carried them home.

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Morning at the Burrow was always bustling, for as soon as sunlight streamed in from the East you could be sure that Molly was up and about, readying breakfast. The sizzling of bacon and eggs was a siren call, only Hermione found that there were more guests surrounding the table than there had been when she’d gone to bed. Remus, Sirius and Arthur were having a heated discussion, but halted when she traipsed down the stairs.

“Hermione,” Sirius breathed, his relief palpable.

“Sirius,” she replied as he rose to give her a hug. “Harry and Ron are upstairs, sleeping in I’m sure.”

“Let them rest. We’re all so glad to see you safe,” Sirius said as he let go of her. She stepped back and shared a warm smile with Remus and Arthur, who were both equally happy to see her in good health. Frankly, they all looked far worse than she did. As if summoned by the call of their names, Ron and Harry both descended the stairs, shouldering each other out of the way as they made a break for the bacon. They were intercepted by Arthur and Sirius respectively, both men eager to assure themselves of their sons’ welfare.

“How did the Order meeting go?” Hermione asked, sitting down with her plate.

“Last night was a bit of a circus,” Remus groaned, taking a sip of coffee.

“That’s one way to put it,” Sirius growled. “My lunatic cousin broke in halfway through, drunk as hell might I add, and went on a blitzkrieg through the house before taking off again.”

"I believe we might have been dealing with a boggart of some kind. She really didn't do so much damage as much as we nearly destroyed the place trying to get at her, and I’m not sure the real Bellatrix Lestrange would have been so merciful," Arthur offered.

"But that doesn't explain the appearance of the other woman!" Sirius called out. It was clear they’d been having this argument for a while now.

"Maybe the other woman was just a common thief, using an illusion of Bellatrix to distract us and
steal that book. The illusion might have been constructed based on a photograph, because the girl last night looked far too young to be the *real* Bellatrix Lestrange,” Remus suggested.

“I don’t know how, but it was Bellatrix,” Sirius ground out. It was at this tense stage that Hermione would normally try to calm everyone’s nerves, but there was a bothersome thought tugging at the back of her mind.

"So, a young Bellatrix Lestrange appeared in Grimmauld Place last night, and stole a book? What did the woman with her look like?” She asked.

"Tall, had brown hair, a bit like yours Hermione, but lighter and shorter,” Arthur answered.

Hermione, Harry and Ron all shared a quick glance. After finishing breakfast and helping Molly with the dishes, they reconvened in the garden, making sure the others didn’t follow them out.

“It’s an odd coincidence, don’t you think, that the very same night Carina saved us from Bellatrix, a *young* Bellatrix shows up at Grimmauld Place- in search of a book,” Hermione spoke in a low voice.

"You don't think Carina, and Pennie… ?" Harry asked.

"It's… I don't know what to think, but you can't deny there is a resemblance," Hermione answered. They seemed a bit surprised by that admission, but agreed nonetheless. She was hesitant to offer her theory, but if there was anyone who would understand her logic, it was her friends.

“Carina’s around our age- she would have been born before Bellatrix was sent to Azkaban. Do you think it might be possible that, Carina is…?” She spoke hesitantly. It sounded silly even as she said it, but Harry and Ron nodded gravely.

“They *do* look enough alike that Sirius could have easily mistaken her for Bellatrix,” Harry conceded.

"And that girl was a real nutter about all that blood purity tripe,” Ron added, pulling a face.

“Right. And if her aunt is a Lestrange who’d married into another family, it explains why they’re living in France,” Hermione continued. They chewed on the thought for a while, all its unsettling implications settling in. Her theory wasn’t one hundred percent solid, and there were many variables she couldn’t have possibly known- how Bellatrix might have been able to hide a pregnancy from the world, why Carina was opposing her mother, whether she even knew who her mother was- and that was all assuming her father was Rodolphus Lestrange and not-

*Best not go down that line of thought*, Hermione shuddered.

"So. I suppose we better go back to France and get some answers,” Harry said. Hermione and Ron shared a glance, but nodded and turned back to Harry. The wouldn’t tell the Order yet, not until they knew what they were dealing with- but figuring out exactly what it was that they were dealing with was imperative.

**Chapter End Notes**

Bellatrix get better coping mechanisms challenge.
I've been looking forward to writing this chapter for a while, because the idea of Bella running hogwild through Grimmauld Place as the benny hill music plays was just too good.

The reason that Bellatrix was able to use the floo will be elaborated on in the next chapter, but for now I can tell you that Maia Black's status as neither completely disowned but still exiled from the family means that her home wasn't automatically cut off when Sirius blocked off the network that connects active Black estates.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

days since our last nonsense: 0

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Maia’s house—technically her house, really—wasn’t her home. It was cosy, yet grand; inviting, yet imposing. And it was lonely. Black Manor wasn’t a hub of activity by any means, but there was always the soft popping of an elf coming and going, or the giggles of her sisters holed away in their rooms, or the quiet murmurings of their parents. She had learnt very quickly that silence was never a good sign. It was almost enough to make her seek out Phene’s company—almost.

Yet, despite the anomalistic circumstances, she was starting to appreciate the slice of life homestead. She hardly considered herself a homemaker, but the independence she held within these walls felt right. If she didn’t like the curtains, she could replace them, and if she didn’t like the bathroom tiles, she would get new ones. She could remove this and fix that, change here and clean there, until the house was worthy of having one Bellatrix Black live in it. What inspired her most of all was that there was nobody she had to defer to in such a process—if only over this, she had control.

She had, however, allowed Phene free reign outside.

“I’m not quite so old as to have been around for the invention of agriculture,” Phene had said, “but I do know a thing or two.”

Thus she had spent the better half of the day fixing up the gardens so that the landscaping was trim, prim and proper. The trellises had been clipped back so that they were fashionable rather than overgrown, and the hedges and wild scrub had been pruned back into a neater shape, although the topiary was a work in progress. Phene had even started a few vegetable and herb patches, and then popped off into town only to return with a large crate of brown, clucking chickens. Bellatrix had protested that she wasn’t interested in running a dirty farm like some Weasley, but the promise of fresh ingredients for gourmet meals was enough to sway her in the end. Though she tried not to think too hard about Phene cooking eggs.

It was all so dull and domestic, but after yesterday and all that had come before it, she was happy to seize a little boredom in her life. But she really was going to need to figure out where exactly one gets a house elf, and soon.

As if summoned by the thought of her name, Phene flew out from the house to join Bellatrix out on the back veranda, apparently finding more comfort in her natural form. It was a rare sunny afternoon and Phene took a moment just to bask in the sun’s rays, sitting down next to Bella on the heated timber. Her golden feathers glittered in the sunlight, and seemed to radiate their own gentle warmth. With the soft coastal breeze rustling through the spruce trees and the sing-song of Larks in on their branches, the garden held a picturesque pleasantness. Bellatrix felt her heart pang with a
bittersweet pulse; her sisters would have loved it here.

“How’s your head now?” Phene finally broke the peace, swinging her swan-like neck to look up at her. Though she lacked human expressiveness, her dark eyes glittered with amusement.

Bellatrix gave a halfhearted groan. Her hangover had subsided for the most part, but she had learnt the hard way that the pepper-up potions in Maia’s cabinet didn’t exactly have a shelf life of three decades.

“Yes, well. Red wine’ll do that to you,” Phene clucked. “But I suspect you already knew that, hm?”

It was an innocent, teasing question, but Bellatrix could recognise the implication behind it. She offered a one-shouldered shrug as an answer, knowing that ignoring the question as if it were rhetorical would only prove its point. Seeing that Bellatrix was aware of exactly what conversation Phene was trying to lead into, she decided to cut to the chase instead.

"Look, I'm a big girl. I’ve been around the block a few times- I can handle a nasty argument or two. But you know as well as I do that you can’t keep up this kind of behaviour for too long without hurting yourself too, and I don’t want to see that, for both our sakes."

“And who are you to tell me what I do or don’t need?” Bellatrix replied coolly.

Phene was right, although she would never give her the satisfaction of voicing it. Bellatrix knew that she would have to learn to rein in some of her more explosive tendencies so long as she was living here. She had only herself to blame for the remains of the living room, and although she was used to cleaning up after her own temper tantrums, there was something uniquely unsettling this time. Part of it she attributed to the fact that it was her house that she was trashing, and that right now she was the only one who could clean it up. But what was more disquieting was that without the need to rush to process for fear of retribution or consequence, she was left alone with her thoughts. Naturally, her mind drifted along to think and reflect upon the argument, her actions, and her feelings, and she almost found herself preferring the anxiety of appeasing Cygnus over the introspection.

“I’m someone who doesn’t like being slapped or shot at,” Phene broke her from her thoughts with a clipped reply. Yet her stony demeanour softened just as quickly as it had appeared, and she settled back down on ruffled feathers.

“What is it that had you so upset last night?” She asked quite redundantly; they both knew the answer to that very well.

“I can’t abide by mudblood filth in my presence. It was bad enough at Hogwarts, and if I never had to interact with one again it’d still be too soon,” Bellatrix replied, breaking eye contact with a disgruntled grimace. Phene cocked her head back and forth, regarding Bella as if she were an antique to be appraised for its value.

“What have they done to you?” Phene asked gingerly, enough to give Bellatrix pause as to who exactly she was referring to. Not dignifying the double entendre, she gave her reply.

“They exist, and that’s bad enough.”

Phene said nothing for a moment, which Bellatrix took as a cue to assert her mantra.

“Mudbloods are the filth of our world. Muggles are beasts, ants to be stepped on- but mudbloods see themselves as our equals. They try to push and shove their way into our society, uprooting our
ancient traditions and take our power for *themselves*. Our way of life is sacred, and these beast-spawn crawl out of the mud and demand a place at the table. *The arrogance!*” she howled. Surely she could see that these vermin were the termites chewing at the foundations of the wizarding world, taking and taking and *taking* until the entire structure collapsed.

“And I assume you think *your* family exists as one of these pillars of ancient tradition?” Phene said with a barely controlled derision.

“I wouldn’t expect *you* to understand the importance of Pureblood family heritage and responsibility,” Bellatrix snuffed, looking down at the bird.

“You’re right, I don’t,” Phene drawled, glancing up at Bellatrix with drooping eyelids. “I’ve watched empires rise and fall, dear girl, and the Blacks wouldn’t be the first dynasty to crumble,” she added, preening at a stray feather.

“We *won’t*,” Bella hissed. “Our way is pure- *Toujours pur*. We will never be tainted.”

“Hm. I won’t lie to you, Bellatrix. I can see that your magic is powerful. Your dedication to your house is noble, and your ties to your family give you strength. But do you know what any of it all means?” Phene asked, pausing in her preening to shoot her an odd look.

(Of course. If there’s one thing that makes me who I am, it’s the Black family’s historic superiority.”)

“See, I don’t think you do,” Phene replied airily. “I’m sure your parents have taught you all about how special and important you are, all because of the blood that runs through your veins. But your ancestors earned the reputation that they have because they *deserved* it. Do you deserve it?” She was careful with her words- hoping to prod Bellatrix’s sense of pride without stoking her ire. It was a calculated dance, and at least some of it seemed to get through her defenses.

(“Of course I do,” Bellatrix said without a trace of doubt. If Phene had a mouth, she would have grinned; hook, line, sinker.

“Prove it.”

The fire blazing in Bellatrix’s eyes spoke for itself: she had accepted the challenge. However, they were interrupted by a knock on the front door, charmed so as to be heard throughout the house. The two glanced at each other, but neither gave any indication to suggest they had invited a guest. Bellatrix stood up to go and answer it, and Phene hopped along behind her.

To both of their surprise, in the doorway stood the hostage group she had rescued and then turfed out of her home only yesterday. Harry stood in front, flanked by Ron and the *mudblood*. Fully expecting the treacherous creature to seek revenge, Bellatrix held her wand at the ready. Hermione mirrored the position.

(“We only want to ask questions, Blanche. Put your wand down, and we don’t have to do this,” she said.

“Oh, it has *questions*, does it?” Bellatrix sneered. Phene’s probing had suffered most of her patience, not that she would’ve offered much to her visitors in any case. Ron and Harry bristled, but Hermione kept her gaze level.

(“Yes. We know you broke into Grimmauld Place last night, and stole something.”)
Bellatrix swallowed down the bubble of anger that was threatening to burst from her throat. How dare they imply that she, a direct descendant of the Noble Black family line, would have to break into her family’s ancestral home? But that was exactly the kind of information she couldn’t afford to give them. Instead, she tried another strategy.

“What are you going on about? Last night, after kicking your sorry asses out of my home, I had an argument with my aunt, and went off to bed. Thanks for that, by the way.”

They didn’t seem particularly sorry, nor did they seem to believe her.

“We don’t know what you’re up to, but if it does have to do with stopping Death Eaters, we could have helped. We would have been willing to help, after you saved us. But instead you disrupted an Order meeting and sent them on a full lockdown by breaking in,” Harry accused.

“And why would I want help from a dirty little mud-”

It was difficult to tell who had fired the first spell; it could have been Bellatrix, but the dark expression on Ron’s face suggested otherwise. With all pretenses of amnesty dropped, Bellatrix threw up a shield to protect herself from the three-pronged assault. The onslaught forced her to step back into the house, and they followed her through the threshold. Squawking in alarm, Phene joined the fray as best she could, spitting fire and corralling the teenagers into different corners of the parlour.

Bellatrix turned to Hermione first, eager to knock her out early. The girl was no slouch, and her defensive manoeuvres were much more cohesive than her offensive ones, but in a one on one duel she’d wear out quickly. Unfortunately for Bellatrix, this wasn’t a one on one duel. Ron’s spells were packed with aggression and bluster, the kind that were best to dodge rather than waste energy attempting to block. However, leaning into strong offensive spells usually left plenty to be desired in terms of defense, and Ron didn’t exactly strike her as the versatile type. Out of the corner of her eye Bellatrix saw Phene and Harry distracting each other- and as she danced around Hermione and Ron, her instincts took over. Her strategy being devised faster than her conscious mind could comprehend, she acted on battle-hardened impulse.

Across the room Phene and Harry danced around each other, both making poor attempts to incapacitate their opponent. Phene swooped towards him, but even in the spacious room her generous wingspan limited her movement. Harry had little trouble blocking the fire she spat at him and his shields held against her claws, but he was making little progress with offensive spells. For one thing, he was holding back; it didn’t rest well on his conscience to attack a Phoenix of all creatures. Although, even if he had his whole heart in the effort, Phene was still adept at dodging his stunners- like water to a duck, they seemed to almost effortlessly past her.

When he looked over to his friends, he saw Carina exploiting Ron’s improper shielding to send a stunner through the gaps. Harry yelled out to Ron in alarm, but instead of following up on her attack Carina shifted her stance to face Hermione… who had dropped her own defenses so that she could protect Ron from Carina’s assault. Having anticipated Hermione’s reaction, Carina turned and sent her flying against the opposite wall before he could even think to warn her. He tried to rush towards them, but suddenly he was being lifted from the ground- Phene had grasped the back of his shirt in her claws and was apparently trying to physically remove him from the fight. They engaged in a midair struggle, which sent them both crashing back down to the floor.

Bellatrix had backed Ron in a corner and began to overwhelm him, whipping a flurry of spells against his meagre shield. Stirring from her momentary concussion, Hermione felt a jolt of adrenaline guide her movements and pushed her body off of the floor sooner than Bellatrix had anticipated. With the witch’s back turned to her, she finally put an end to the fight.
A thick, black rope accosted Bellatrix around her wand arm, and then began to wrap around her body. She shrieked in outrage as Hermione summoned a chair from across the room to bind her to. Phene fluttered off and landed on the back of a chaise lounge, evidently accepting that the fight had been lost.

"Phene! Do Something!" Bellatrix cried, hoping that the bird might pull out one of the tricks she knew was still hiding up her sleeve.

"Hold on, I kind of want to see where this goes," Phene chirped back.

"How dare you- you useless craven!"

"Come now, these children hardly look the sadistic sort. And interrogations work both ways," Phene attempted to placate her. Bellatrix glowered, and Phene almost seemed cowed.

"By the way, if you keep talking to me, they're really going to think you're crazy," she pointed out hastily. Bellatrix's eyes shot back to the trio, who were indeed looking at her as if she were a crazy person. Which their version of her was, so they were a little biased anyway.

“Hermione, you keep them here. Ron and I will go check if Pennie’s hiding somewhere,” Harry instructed her. She nodded in response, keeping her eyes trained on ‘Carina’. Despite being tied up she still seemed more dangerous than Phene, who was now more interested in preening than the impromptu hostage situation.

"Stay where you are, or I’ll hex your master," Hermione made sure to warn her, although the wavering of her voice betrayed her unease. Bellatrix raised an eyebrow at being referred to as Phene’s master, but couldn’t find it in her to be amused right now. Phene seemed similarly chagrined, letting out a low caw of irritation. Unwilling to sit silently, Bellatrix decided to channel her outrage.

“You will release me, you muddy-” a silencing charm shut her up.

“There,” Hermione grinned. “I think I like you a lot better this way.”

“Oh I’ll bet,” Phene jibed, and Bellatrix shot her the filthiest glare in her arsenal. A pair of frown lines creased Hermione’s forehead as she tried to determine why her vitriolic prisoner was directing her ire towards her chittering familiar rather than herself, but found no answers. For a long twenty minutes they sat in tense silence, and Hermione hoped the boys hadn’t run into any trouble in finding Pennie, or the more likely scenario in which they had instead found themselves lost.

Bellatrix flexed her muscles against the ropes, but they held frustratingly firm. Every now and then her vision would spin, and she could feel sweat pooling between her shoulders and under her arms. She had to fight to resist the urge to struggle, hyperventilate, and fall apart. Bellatrix was a Black, and she wasn’t intimidated by bumbling teenage interrogators, but it seemed her body hadn’t quite gotten the message on that. It was acting of its own accord, muscle memory responding to the situation- she’d been here before, hadn’t she?

Hermione took her distraction for feigned disinterest, and jabbed her wand towards her again in an attempt to seem threatening. Bellatrix raised her eyes to meet hers, and quirked an eyebrow lazily. She squeezed her hands to keep them from twitching and trembling and gave Hermione an aloof grin, as if she were amused by it all. Her heart pounded between her ears traitorously.

“\textit{Incarcerous!}”
Hermione was far too preoccupied with her own thoughts to notice the mounting distress of her prisoner. The fact she hadn’t figured it out earlier was almost embarrassing. Carina Blanche. Carina was the name of the keel constellation formerly belonging to the Argo Navis constellation—fitting in perfectly with the Black family’s naming traditions. And so the pseudonym Blanche, the feminine form of the French word for white, was just too obvious. Another glance at her prisoner left no room for doubt in her mind. It was evident that when they had first met Carina had used a glamour charm, because her distinct black curls would have given her heritage away in an instant. And really, what sort of normal teenager wears an underbust corset over their blouse, anyway?

Carina was young and beautiful, with ethereally patrician features. She held herself tall and proudly, but had a small, almost petite frame. Her cheeks were round and full, her lips pouty and soft, her eyes clear and calculating. And despite all these things, she was unmistakably Bellatrix. That the Order had mistaken her for Bellatrix herself wasn’t surprising, if they had seen her like this. She looked like the spitting image of a miniature Madam Lestrange, only with chubbier cheeks. Hermione realised with a mortified start that a part of her was tempted to reach out and pinch them (if only to assure herself this was real, of course).

Phene watched Hermione and Bellatrix stare each other down. As miffed as she was to be so blatantly ignored, it was nonetheless a perfect opportunity for her to sneak away. While the situation was more than amusing to her, what with these amateur-hour, would-be aurors attempting a half-assed interrogation—Bellatrix apparently didn’t share her sentiments. Her cool mask of indifference was well crafted, but Phene wasn’t born yesterday. Or at least, she wasn’t reborn yesterday. Bellatrix’s stiff posture and tightly clenched muscles were a dead giveaway that she was decidedly less than comfortable being bound by rope to a chair, and something was evidently wrong. Phene enjoyed teasing Bellatrix as much as the next Phoenix, but this was going a bit far. She wasn’t going to get anywhere in trying to get the girl to mellow out if she kept getting stressed like this, so it was going to be up to her to do something about it. And, well, she was never one to pass up a dramatic entrance.

Bellatrix kept her eyes studiously trained on Hermione’s, even as Phene scurried off in her peripheral vision. She didn’t know what the bird was planning on doing, but she wasn’t about to blow it before it could begin by flicking her eyes across and giving her away. Her vigilance was rewarded when a much more human-looking Phene burst into the room.

"Good Gracious! Please leave such activities to the bedroom," Phene cried out, aghast. Bellatrix's eyebrows shot up to her hairline, and Hermione's face had transfigured into a brilliant imitation of a tomato.

"And really- aren't you a little young for such things?" her voice strangled in her throat. Hermione tried to sputter in defence of herself, but Phene merely crossed the back of her arm against her forehead dramatically, and clutched at her chest desperately with the other.

"The youth these days! Though, Carina, I would've thought you preferred to be on the other side of the ropes. No matter! I have no judgement- so long as you practice safely and responsibly," she rambled, sweeping across the room.

"This isn't what it looks like!" Hermione finally found her words.

"Oh, I sure hope it is ," Phene cooed. "Because otherwise I'd have to conclude that you're interrogating or otherwise torturing my niece, and that wouldn't be very nice of you, now would it?" she said, dropping the theatrics like a hot coal as her voice shifted from coy sarcasm into a blatant threat. She held no wand in her hand, but she appeared no less dangerous for it. Hermione
raised her own wand at ‘Pennie’, apparently emboldened in spite of the intimidation tactics- she felt much more confident in having to defend herself against an aggressor than attack an otherwise innocent woman.

With a pop Phene was gone, and before either of the remaining girls could register what had happened, Phene had reappeared flush against Hermione’s back, one hand resting atop her wand hand, the other curled gently around her throat. Both Hermione and Bellatrix recognised the twisted mirror of the way she had apprehended Bella during their first altercation. Phene’s grip on Hermione was more of a caress, but the shorter girl knew that the light touch was the promise of a threat should she attempt to struggle. Slowly she plucked the wand from her hand.

“It’s alright. I know your heart wasn’t in it,” she crooned, and released Bellatrix from the ropes. Bella immediately made for the snowgum wand where it had been cast aside, and although it hadn’t been so kind to her as her own, she was glad for it nonetheless- her crooked walnut wand was incredibly distinct, and would have done a good job at shattering their ruse. Once armed, Bellatrix turned to Hermione with a sadistic grin, but Phene’s sharp glare warned her against some of her more dangerous spells. *No matter*, Bellatrix thought. She had just the spell in mind.

“*Incarcerous!*” She shouted, and now Hermione was tied to the very same chair she had been in only moments earlier. She was rewarded with a cackle from Phene, who appreciated the reversal. It was plain that while Phene may have had an aversion to violence, she still had a hefty mean streak- one that Bellatrix could appreciate far better when directed at others rather than herself. Hermione, who did not know that the bird and the human were one in the same, found it very easy to believe the regal Phoenix might hate the procacious woman.

“I think I like you better this way,” Bellatrix sang the words back to Hermione who refused to dignify it with a retort, although her eyes were alight with fear.

“*Oh I’ll bet* ,” Phene muttered once again, and this time both girls heard her. She shot them her best cheshire grin in return for their furious glares. What a fun time they were all having!

"Uh, Hermione. You really ought to see this," Harry called out as he and Ron entered the room.

"*Expelliarmus!*" Harry cried at the same time as Ron, and Bellatrix and Phene’s wands were easily caught as they soared from their owner’s grasps. Bellatrix was ready to resort to murder, but Phene seemed nonplussed.

“Do I look like the kind of bitch who needs a wand?” she said dispassionately, as if this was a normal thing to say. Bellatrix fought to keep her face neutral, lest she match the disturbed expressions of her home invaders. She wondered how much of it was hot air and how much of it was well founded, and not for the first time she wished she knew who exactly this creature was.

They were at something of a stalemate. Harry and Ron had their wands at the ready, and Phene and Bellatrix were unarmed- but the boys were unwilling to risk Hermione’s safety, even if the two women were wandless. Together Carina and Pennie shared a threatening aura, the kind of dangerous edge found in the worst of Slytherins. Thus it seemed to be in all of their best interests to attempt to cooperate with each other, if only to a limited extent. Phene sauntered slowly around towards a wine rack against the far wall, opening a bottle and helping herself to a glass as if all was right in the world.

"How do we know she’s not under the Imperius curse?” Ron whispered to Harry, jutting his chin
"How do I know you're not under the Imperius curse?" Phene replied at full volume, and although the words were teasing her tone was flat and unimpressed. She strutted over to them, ignoring their wands as she took a sip.

"Listen, you barmy bint," Ron growled. Phene splashed her glass over him with the vigour of a gardener watering her plants. Bellatrix grinned gleefully—she'd known there was a reason she kept the crazy bird around.

“No. You listen to me. You’ll give Carina her wand back, and we’ll let your friend go, and then we’ll try to have a reasonable conversation like reasonable adults. Do you think you can handle that?"

Bellatrix thought she looked almost authoritative, and might have even bought into the act if she hadn’t watched her miserable attempt to wrangle the chickens into their pen earlier today. The two boys, however, were suitably more convinced. Strong-armed as they were, Phene’s offer was all the prompting they needed. Harry passed Phene the white banded wand back at the same time Bellatrix released Hermione with a smug smirk. She scurried to get her wand back from Ron, and quickly lifted the wine stains out of his clothes while shooting Bellatrix a glare of her own.

“Now. While we do apologise for any disruption we had caused last night, you must understand we didn’t even realise that the building was occupied. Your Order of the Phoenix simply regarded us as intruders, and while it was a silly misunderstanding, I’m afraid they didn’t give us the opportunity to explain ourselves,” Phene assuaged them, and crossed back over to hand Bellatrix the wand. It relieved her a little that Phene didn’t fly off the moment she got it in her hands, but she was no less hasty to get it back from her.

“What was it that you wanted to show me earlier?” Hermione asked Harry quietly.

“Right—care to explain that room, then?” Harry directed the question at Phene and Bella. Phene wondered what he might be talking about, for she knew the many hidden rooms of the house and their not-so-inconspicuous contents. Bellatrix, however, knew exactly which room they were discussing.

Her study was still in its disorganised state, books splayed across the floor and notes plastered against the walls. Scattered around every surface were a number of different beverages, old newspapers, a half-eaten baguette, a textbook on the alchemy of fire here and another on the principles of divination there, a stray raunchy romance novel, and any other literature Bellatrix had deemed relevant. Which included the birdwatcher’s manual—though it hadn’t had anything meaningful on Phoenixes. To the others, it looked as though a bombarda spell had turned the office upside-down, and a manic littérateur had attempted to put it back together. Only Hermione could make any semblance of sense of it all.

“I recognise this—this is the theoretical formula for stable time loops, isn’t it? And this—this is the second principle of space displacement,” she spoke as she followed the trail of equations. If it bothered Bellatrix that she was able to recognise the contents of her notes so quickly, she hid it well.

“Yes.”

“And this is—well, it looks like it’d be the arithmancy for determining weight as a variable in
apparition, but you’ve got the numbers wrong here,” Hermione pointed out. Now Bellatrix did look bothered. Phene, Harry and Ron all stared blankly. They continued to watch Hermione as her trail led her to the eye of the tornado, where the haunted gaze of Bellatrix Lestrange, pinned ever so neatly above the desk, sneered down at them. Hermione gasped softly, and Ron and Harry cringed at the deranged woman’s scowl.

“She’s your mother, isn’t she?” Hermione murmured. She looked back at Bellatrix, and her big brown eyes were shining with sympathy. Bellatrix and Phene shared a slow glance.

“... Yes.”

Hermione’s face filled with pity, which, really, was slightly unnecessary- as much as Bellatrix liked to distance herself from Lestrange, she found it a little rude. Harry seemed as though he wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt, but was no less wary for it. Ron was just angry; not that she cared what any of them thought.

"And I'm going to kill her."

She could have heard a pin drop. Surprisingly enough, it was Phene who broke the silence.

"Wait a minute, wait- wait a minute -" she cried, "I'm sorry, but when did we decide this?"

"Oh, did I forget to tell you about that? Well. I've decided I'm going to kill her."

"And what could possibly make you think that that's a good idea?" Phene asked, a look of pained perplexity crossing her face. Maybe she was about to cry.

"It just seems like the thing to do," Bellatrix shrugged. Phene let out a high pitched whine, gripping her forehead. Bellatrix couldn't hear what she was muttering under her breath, but she assumed it wasn't nice.

"You're not a very rational creature, are you?" was what she said at last. Bellatrix sent her a beaming grin in reply. It was at this point Harry decided to jump in.

“Look, we’d like to see Bellatrix Lestrange dead too- but don’t you think you’re a little in over your head?”

“No. This is what my project is, mind you. Obviously I’m not about to get in a duel with her- not again, anyway- and expect to win. If I’m going to pull this off I need to be three steps ahead,” Bellatrix bluffed. Her top priority project was inventing time travel, but it was simply more likely that dealing with her future self was going to happen first. Yet it was clear to her now that she was going to have to pull some tricks out of her sleeve in order to pull it off.

“How about you let us help you? It’d be a real boon to the Order to get rid of her, and we can help you get whatever you need without having to go behind our backs,” Harry offered. The silent ‘and we can keep an eye on you’ hung in the air, but it was still a tempting offer. She may have been a talented young witch unlike the world had ever seen, but she was still woefully unequipped to navigate a timeline thirty years out of sync. Much as she loathed working with these… dimwits (to put it nicely), they seemed to be the next logical stepping stone, at least.

“Very well,” Bellatrix said distastefully, as if the words were sliding out of her mouth like tar. “I
suppose we can come to some form of agreement.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter ran on a little longer than I expected, so I hope it's entertaining the whole way through. The kids just aren't alright. There's a lot to unpack this time so I'll just say this: nobody has any idea what they're doing (me included)
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Team Golden Trio + Disaster Duo is Go

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The break in at Grimmauld Place had necessitated another Order of the Phoenix meeting, and every member from Albus Dumbledore to Mundungus Fletcher was to be in attendance. Snape had returned with the information that, during the night of the Grimmauld Place break in, Bellatrix Lestrange had been standing loyally by her master's side, very much literally. It came as a relief to some Order members, who had very good reason to be concerned with why Bellatrix might break into their headquarters, but disturbed those who held more concern for who exactly was there that night.

However, all the new protective measures to double down on security meant that getting in and out of Grimmauld Place had become a logistical nightmare. The floo had to be closed down entirely, as there had apparently been dormant links in the floo network that remained hidden due to the households remaining ‘inactive’. Harry had also made the odd suggestion that they ward against Phoenixfire apparition, pointing out that Dumbledore wasn’t the only wizard to have a Phoenix- and so they had acquiesced.

It was late evening by the time the last of them trailed in, apparently inconvenienced by having to apparate at least two blocks away before trailing a lap downtown, only to zigzag back. Yet, as they all congregated around the long dining table, three seats stood overtly empty.

“Where are Harry, Ron and Hermione? They were always so eager to join the Order, but now that they’re not children anymore they’re nowhere to be seen!” Molly chided, though her concern for them leaked through. It was a sentiment shared by everyone- the troublemaking trio had a disconcerting knack for getting themselves into hairy situations, and they preferred to keep them within arm’s reach because of it.

“Our friends Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley have assured me they are safe and well, and that they are taking a short reprieve so as to recuperate after recent events. I do believe we owe them that much,” Dumbeldore said, giving his audience a gentle smile. They were still uneasy, but if Dumbeldore believed they were safe, then they were safe. Having placated the most restless members of the Order, Albus began his speech.

“These have been difficult, trying times. As we all know, Lord Voldemort’s return has emboldened those who have seen weakness in the Ministry. There are those who wish for reform in any shape it may take, and those who have been swayed by promises of a more stable future, despite the costs,” Dumbledore said with a somber stroke of his beard.

“The break in here at Grimmauld Place last night is a disturbing turn of events, but I do not believe our mystery moonlighter held malicious intent. Nonetheless, it comes as a reminder to remain vigilant- it seems that in times like these, even the most absurd, illogical, nonsensical of things become our new reality. Take caution, for nothing is as certain as we’d like it to be.”
He was preaching to the choir, Sirius thought, but nodded along with the rest. Dumbledore spent the rest of his pep talk trying to assure them of the power of hope, that their efforts in stabilising the Ministry and fighting Death Eaters were producing results, and reminded them of all the lives they had saved.

Sirius wanted to feel reassured by this, but the words felt hollow. They all knew that the Death Eaters were creeping into the Ministry. They all knew that they were losing this battle of attrition. And they all knew that Regulus’ death had been for nothing.

Dumbledore had informed Sirius during his recovery that select members of the Order had been chasing a lead on Voldemort’s supposed immortality- horcruxes, he had said- which had fallen by the wayside when it was revealed that Voldemort had planted a false lead amongst his ranks and laid clues before members of the Order, so that when they sniffed at the trail he would know who was guilty. Regulus had suffered for that blunder, but Snape had evaded detection. Not for the first time, Sirius wished it had been the other way around.

Now, Dumbledore was promising that they had a new lead, new hope. He was very sparing on the details- not every member of the Order was trusted equally, and although there was no true inner circle, Sirius knew that Albus owed it to him to include him in the debriefing, when the time came.

Negotiating an accord between two parties that simultaneously disliked the other but still wanted to exploit them was par the course. Although the ideological differences between them were vast, Bellatrix Black, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley and Harry Potter all shared a common goal in wanting to rid the world of one Bellatrix Lestrange- and that would have to be enough. Phene had volunteered as the arbitrator, claiming that she couldn’t be biased because they all disliked her equally, and they found that none of them disagreed on that.

Together the five of them outlined a tentative alliance, although none of them seemed the happier for it. The conditions on Bellatrix’s part had been that the only Order members she wanted to directly associate with were Harry, Hermione and Ron themselves- and that they had to withhold her ‘true’ identity for the time being. She expected them to cooperate with any requests she had in regards to gathering information, either for her mysterious project or in relation to Bellatrix Lestrange’s movements.

In return, she and Phene would assist them in any of their endeavours, so long as it was a reasonable request. She doubted they trusted her enough to ask for help on any practical missions, but given her superior duelling skills she figured that it might come to it eventually. She also agreed that they could use her home as a safe-house should their current headquarters become compromised, but it was still currently limited to only the three of them.

It had been a tricky deal, particularly in convincing the trio that they should protect her identity from the rest of the Order, but the point that they had sought her out in the first place gave her the upper hand. And, of course, they still owed her one.

Ron sat through the entire ordeal looking as though Bellatrix’s existence offended him personally. Which, given that he thought she was the daughter of a genocidal lunatic and possibly also the Dark Lord himself, was probably true.

“The Order of the Phoenix has to know who we’re dealing with! What if the Death Eaters track us down here?” he argued, scowling deeper when Bella scoffed.

“I’m not going to grace you with the sordid details, but you can rest assured neither my mother nor
her associates have any knowledge of this place. But all it takes is one mole and you’ll have handed my location straight to her. A safehouse is only safe when it’s a secret,” she said, slapping her hand down on the table.

“There isn’t a mole in the Order!” Ron yelled back.

“Be that as it may, not everyone is going to play nice when they learn who I am, either. I know who Bellatrix Lestrange is and what she’s done, and I know that people will look at me as if we’re the same person,” Bellatrix shot a pointed glare Ron’s way. He was more right than he knew, but her point still stood- half of the reason she was still wasting her time with her ‘Carina, daughter of Bellatrix’ cover was because ‘Bellatrix, time travelling past version of Bellatrix’ would garner even less sympathy.

“My identity is not the kind of secret that is easily kept,” she eyed them warily, “and I have far more to lose if the wrong person finds out about it.”

“Yeah, more to lose than Harry’s bloody life,” Ron groused. Bellatrix made a show of rolling her eyes.

“Yes. I saved you from dying at my- mother’s hands only so I can give you back to her later. It was a brilliant plan, I can’t believe you figured it out,” she quipped dryly. The two glowered at each other, but when Hermione cleared her throat, she wasn’t focused on either of them.

“And I suppose you’re not really Carina’s aunt, are you?” She asked Phene, eyeing her carefully. The woman was another piece of the puzzle she couldn’t put together, and was completely abstract from any context clues. Phene looked down at her, relaxed as though they were all family friends who hadn’t tried threatening each other only hours earlier.

"Actually I'm her therapist. She hired me to help solve her many, many emotional problems," she said wistfully, resting the palm of her hand against her cheek.

"You're so full of shit," Bellatrix scoffed. Phene raised her hands in surrender.

“No, I’m only teasing. My real name is Penelope Partridge," she supplied, turning back to Hermione. Bellatrix fought desperately to swallow down the laugh in her throat- ironic as it was, it had to be the stupidest name she'd ever heard. As if sensing her dilemma, Phene shot her a withering scowl, which didn’t help Bellatrix maintain her façade at all.

"I work in the Ministère des Affaires Magiques de la France, in the Indicibles department. And I'm sure you understand why I can't elaborate on that," she continued, studiously ignoring Bellatrix’s vaguely amused coughing.

"I work in the Ministère des Affaires Magiques de la France, in the Indicibles department. And I'm sure you understand why I can't elaborate on that," she continued, studiously ignoring Bellatrix’s vaguely amused coughing.

"She’s an Unspeakable,” Bellatrix said upon noticing their confused faces. It was a good cover; the Unspeakables were renowned for… not speaking. In matters related to their work, anyway. Harry, Hermione and Ron would have no choice but to trust that she was withholding information from them simply because she couldn't share it. The fact that he Order of the Phoenix seemed to operate entirely in Magical Britain also meant that they were unlikely to have a contact in the French Ministry that could either confirm or deny Phene’s position. And it suited her, in the end. Unspeakables had a creepy je ne sais quoi that Phene held in abundance. She idly wondered if it was a cover she had used before.

"Partridge isn’t a very French surname,” Hermione pointed out.

“I married a British man.”
“You don’t wear a wedding ring.”

“That’s because I’m a scarlet woman,” Phene grinned. “It’s why we divorced, after all.”

Hermione had nothing more to say to that. Having reached her quota of amusement, Phene stood up.

“How about we adjourn this meeting for now? I daresay we’ve come to an impasse, and I think we could all use a break,” she decided, as if only just noticing the barely restrained hostility in the air. There was no room for argument as she got up and busied herself with stoking the fireplace, she would have received none anyway.

Hermione, Harry and Ron took the break to reconvene on the backyard of the house, far from Carina’s seedy glares and Pennie’s flimsy mask of courtesy. The once warm afternoon had settled into a gloomy dusk, and the crackling fire inside was far more inviting than the cold bite of the coastal wind, but for the teenagers it was a welcome reprieve. Finally, after holding it in to the best of his ability, Ron aired his grievances.

“This is bloody mental. We’re not serious about this, are we?”

“We have to do something to keep an eye on her— I don’t think Sirius can handle too many more incidents like the Grimmauld Place break in, if we’re being honest,” Harry replied.

"What's an Unspeakable doing with the daughter of Lestrange anyway? I bet she's not even human, and that's why they're interested in her." Ron continued. "I mean, think about it. If Bellatrix had a child then someone would have to know about it- you don't just run around nine months pregnant without anyone noticing. But maybe she never was pregnant in the first place, and Carina was created just as a vessel for another part of His soul."

"Somehow I doubt she's some kind of flesh construct," Hermione replied with a tight-lipped smirk. It was a frankly ludicrous suggestion that Carina could be a walking, talking horcrux, but she didn't want to mock it too much- he had supported her wild 'Carina is Bellatrix Lestrange's daughter' theory, after all.

While she definitely doubted that Carina was anything but a regular (biologically, at least) teenage girl, she agreed that having an Unspeakable as a guardian raised some questions. Simply being the child of two criminals, even if one was Voldemort himself, wasn’t likely to gain the attention of French Unspeakables. They were known for their work with magical anomalies and ancient artefacts, not for babysitting troubled youths. Pennie was either Carina’s guardian for reasons completely unrelated to her work, or there was something else about Carina that warranted her attention.

There was also the fact that Pennie might not be an Unspeakable at all, but she was willing to accept it for now. It didn’t explain much, but it still made Hermione feel better to imagine that she’d been bested by a trained Ministry professional who specialised in the Unknowable Arts. As for her odd personality, the Unspeakable department churned out almost as many crazies as Azkaban given their line of work, so it seemed almost reasonable.

“Maybe it has something to do with the Phoenix,” Harry offered. “Fawkes is a good judge of character, and if Phene can’t stand to be in the same room as Pennie then that’s all the convincing I need.”

“Maybe we should ask her. If she gives us an answer, then it’s obviously got nothing to do with her
“It’s a clever idea, Ron, but she might still refuse to tell us anything because she knows that we’re trying the process of elimination. And she seems like the sort of person who would think that it’s funny just to frustrate us, so I don’t think we’ll have a lot of luck,” Hermione sighed. She spared a glance through the window, watching the two living conundrums on separate sides of the room. The distance between them was unsurprising- they didn’t seem to be on the best of terms, ever since it all began yesterday. Perhaps they weren’t on good terms even before then. It was curious. Carina’s entire existence was an enigma, and everything she touched seemed to become intertwined with her mystery. But she wouldn’t be the first puzzle Hermione had solved, nor would she be the last.

Inside, Bellatrix stewed in her own thoughts. She was at the end of her rope with her guests, only she knew this time she’d have even less luck trying to kick them out a third time after they’d proved they could hold their own against her. Three against one (and a half) were usually fine odds for her, but she’d underestimated the mudblood and paid the price for it- not that she’d ever willingly admit as much.

She wanted them gone. She wanted Phene gone. She wanted to be home. But most of all, Bellatrix wanted her sisters. Now more than ever, she needed someone who she could trust. Phene didn’t exactly inspire confidence, the living masquerade that she was. Harry, Hermione and Ron were all the naïve Gryffindor types who likely weren’t capable of sedition and betrayal, but they clearly disliked her almost as much as she loathed them. Her sisters were the only ones right now who she could reveal herself to, knowing that they would choose to help her with no ulterior motivation.

She still ached whenever she thought of Narcissa’s now older, pale, disaffected face. Her little sister had always been the sweetest of them- although that wasn’t saying much. Nonetheless, Bella knew that Cissy would help her, if only she could get to her alone and reveal her true identity to her. Andromeda didn’t always understand their relationship, but there was a bond between the eldest and youngest sisters that came from inheriting their mother’s more eccentric proclivities, although of the two of them Narcissa was the best at hiding it. She didn’t have the madness that Bella had, rather her obliviousness to anything not immediately concerning herself was instead considered a side-effect of narcissism (and given how she had been named, it seemed almost predetermined).

Although she lacked their charisma, Andromeda was always far more level headed than either of them. She was grounded in a way only a middle sister could be, and though Bellatrix wouldn’t dare say it, she took after their father- as he was on his good days, of course. They were both cynical and reserved, and incredibly competent. She was going to need that competency now, and just as she knew that Narcissa would help her, she knew that Andy would too. Being closer in age they relied on each other most, shielding Cissy as best they could from their troubles.

They had always needed each other. Narcissa and Andromeda needed their older sister, their almost-but-not-really-a-mother, because she suffered so that they wouldn’t have to. Bellatrix and Narcissa needed their middle sister, their voice of reason, because they could always trust her to keep them focused and prudent. And Bellatrix and Andromeda needed their youngest sister, the golden-haired-girl, who dragged them by the scruff and pulled them from the depths of their own pessimism. Together, the Black sisters were so much more than the sum of their parts- and Bellatrix was determined to see them again, because she needed them now more than ever.
She was wrenched from her thoughts as the door to the deck creaked open. Harry and Hermione reentered the room and Ron trailed behind, looking no more pleased than before. Again the dark cloud of animosity settled above their heads, rumbling and cracking but never striking.

“Back to work are we? All right then, I believe we have the stipulations in order- now’s the part where we normally exchange a pledge of some kind, it’s mostly just a token,” Phene fussed. “The covenant is magically binding once that’s done.”

“Wait a minute- nobody ever said anything about a magical contract,” Harry said hotly.

“You’re going to take the oath,” Bellatrix replied in her most stern voice, but it didn’t quite have the effect she had hoped for.

“No bloody way!” Ron exclaimed.

“How do I know you’re not going to come back with your Order friends and force your way in, again, and leave me to their mercy, hm?” Bellatrix prodded, sending them frenzied stares.

“And how do we know you’re not going to sell us out to mummy and the Death Eaters?” Ron retorted, his face turning as red as his hair. The two glared at each other again, and Harry and Hermione made only a halfhearted attempt to stand between them. Soft strumming broke the strained silence as Phene began to pluck at the harp sitting in the corner of the room.

“I suppose we could just try to trust each other,” she mused, tapping out a tune against the walnut wood. She craned her neck around and grinned her winning Stepford smile at four matching dour faces.

“Alright. Let’s get this oath over with then,” Harry said, changing his mind at that suggestion. The oath itself was frustratingly simple, but Bellatrix was never going to have been satisfied with anything other than an Unbreakable Vow. As it was, the oath’s magic would simply alert the other party when if it had been broken, and the oathbreaker’s ability to make an oath in the future would forever be tarnished- Bellatrix had wanted to make an oath that at least cursed the oathbreaker in a debilitating way, but Phene had been stubbornly resolute.

“I, B-Carina Black, swear that Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, and Hermione Granger, will be granted safe passage in my home so long as they hold no harmful intent. And I swear to do what I can to assist them in arranging the murder of Bellatrix Lestrange,” Bellatrix said succinctly, a flutter of blue magic twisting around her raised hand. The use of her false identity raised little issue- magically binding contracts were far too powerful to allow something as simple as a fake name to be used as a loophole. So long as the subject of her intent was clear, the magic would recognise both parties’ magical signatures. Phene repeated the same oath, substituting her own pseudonym.

“I, Harry Potter, swear to maintain the secrecy of Carina Black’s identity to the best of my ability. And I swear to do what I can to assist her in arranging the murder of Bellatrix Lestrange,” Harry recited, and Hermione and Ron followed with solemnity and bitterness respectively. If Phene was bothered that she wasn’t included in the protection of their oaths, she didn’t show it.

With the negotiations and oaths all said and done, an uneasy lull filled the room. Although they’d just established something of an alliance, at the very least ensuring that no more violent fights
should break out, they were hardly on friendly terms. And nobody really knew what to do.

“Alright. Are you quite done here, now? Have any more questions?” Bellatrix sneered. It wouldn’t do for the group to get too cozy here, lest they start to think that they were welcomed.

“We don’t need to ask you anything to know that you’re just as crazy as your mother,” Ron shot back. Bellatrix glowered dangerously, deeply tempted to goad him into slipping. She’d included the ‘no harmful intent’ clause in her oath for a reason.

“Ron, don’t!” Hermione warned him, placing a hand on his shoulder. Harry made no move, but stared stonily at Bellatrix, waiting for her to lash out so that he could retaliate. She wouldn’t give him the pleasure.

“Pennie, they’re being mean to me,” she turned around and whined. Phene raised her eyebrows and quirked her lips slightly.

“Do control your tempers, children. Don’t you know that’s what got us into this mess in the first place?” she chastised the lot in a vaguely amused lilt. Ron and Harry took a step back, an instinctive response to being scolded, while Hermione looked abashed.

“You’re all just a little cranky because you’re hungry, I imagine. How about I serve up some dinner, hm?” Phene all but shoved them into the cigar room adjoining the kitchen, ignoring their protests merrily. Although their tension had now been redirected to Phene’s relentless hostessing, it was nonetheless very awkward between the teenagers, who had no desire to start another inevitably catastrophic conversation.

Bellatrix sat on her own on a plush couch, summoned a book from across the room and shoved her nose in it, doing a suitable job of pretending they didn’t exist. Harry opened his mouth to whisper something to Ron and Hermione, but closed it again, unwilling to break the silence. Hermione did a similar imitation of a gasping fish, trying to find the words to bridge a tentative peace, but finding none. So together they sat down, stiff and uncomfortable despite the luxury leather upholstery of the lounge.

After minutes of sitting silently, with only Pennie’s jovial humming to signal the passing of time, the awkwardness began to dissipate into boredom. However, just as the group began to fall into a false sense of security, Ron shrieked in alarm as a spider peeked out of a cupboard and scuttled across the countertop. In a snap Phene’s hand caged it, and without a second thought popped it into her mouth and crunched.

A pregnant pause occupied the room as all four humans regarded her with abject horror, although Bellatrix’s expression was marred with a certain exasperation. Ron looked as though he might throw up; Hermione looked as though she might join him. For once, Phene seemed a bit panicked, swallowing painfully.

“Oh, I’ve never quite been the same since the expedition to Brazil,” she coughed unconvincingly. The disastrous spectacle was perhaps for the best, because their guests looked very ready to leave, and Bellatrix was very eager for them to leave too.

“You know what? I don’t really feel all that well. I’m afraid I ought to retire to bed, terribly sorry. You’re welcome to use the floo now,” Phene said hastily.

“Yeah, we’ll be- on our way,” Harry said, taking the opportunity to usher his friends into the fireplace. Providing them an exit had been the politest thing Pennie had done for them so far. They’d practically flown out the chimney, and when they were gone Bellatrix turned on Phene, who was tugging at the collar of her blouse.
“What was that?” she hissed, growing more agitated as Phene grew more flustered.

“I’m not good at being a human for extended periods of time,” she groaned. “It makes me antsy. And I forget which things are bird things and which aren’t.”

“If any bugs end up in my food then we’re going to learn firsthand whether or not you can reincarnate yourself after having your head chopped off,” Bellatrix growled.

“I’m not that far gone, Bellatrix. And I can, by the way,” Phene replied absently. With an exaggerated sigh, Bellatrix threw down her book and stood up from the couch only to pace up and down the room.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Phene asked, and laughed at her own joke while Bellatrix groaned.

“I’m not pleased to have this scum running around my house as if they own the place,” Bellatrix spat, resuming her pacing.

“Yeah, I figured as much,” Phene sighed listlessly. Then a surreptitious look flashed across her face, and she regarded Bellatrix again with a crooked grin, tapping a wooden spoon in her palm.

“Maia’s house has its secrets. I think we ought to find some of them, don’t you?” She asked, quinking an eyebrow. Bellatrix stopped in her tracks and eyed her cautiously. Maia wouldn’t have been a Black if her house had no hidden rooms or vaults, and it came as no surprise that Phene knew of them. She wouldn’t pretend she wasn’t intrigued, and if the house had rooms that would allow her to circumnavigate the snooping presence of her houseguests she wouldn’t pass up the opportunity. But when Phene wore that devilish smile, she knew nothing good would come of it.

Back on British soil, Harry, Ron and Hermione returned to Grimmauld Place as if they had never left. Their return was treated as something unremarkable, for which Harry was glad. Only Sirius seemed to have been bothered by their absence, as he pulled him aside after he had finished exchanging pleasantries with the Order members he’d scarcely seen since leaving Hogwarts.

“How are you, Harry?” Sirius asked, clasping his hand on his shoulder. He spoke with a gentle weariness that betrayed the severity of what was an otherwise innocent question. Harry tried to meet it in kind.

“I’m hanging in there,” he tried to muster the most confident voice he could. Sirius could sniff out a lie a mile away, so there was no use trying to sugarcoat it- he really wasn’t fine. But he was dealing, just as they all were. Sirius grimaced, understanding entirely.

“Right you are,” he said. There was plainly a lot on his mind, but he wouldn’t ever burden the boy with his troubles. Instead, he patted Harry’s shoulder again, gave him a warm smile, and retreated upstairs.

Harry felt a heavy guilt weighing down on him. Sirius of all people, after what Bellatrix did to him, deserved to know the truth. Yet Sirius was also the last person he could safely share it with without ruining the tentative peace that they had established with Pennie and Carina. Harry held no care or concern for Carina Black, and he had even less inclination to ever trust the girl, but if Sirius knew the location of his deranged cousin’s daughter then Carina’s safety and innocence would come second to her usefulness as a bargaining chip. In such a potentially advantageous situation, Harry
had to wonder if even Dumbledore would intervene on her behalf. Unfortunately he couldn’t begrudge her desire to keep her identity a secret, given that he knew what it was like to be a pawn in someone else’s plan. Then there was also the pressing matter that the two crazy women seemed like the very, very vindictive type, and he’d really rather not deal with that nonsense right now.

Hermione emerged from the corner of the room where she’d been waiting for the polite time to interrupt.

“I know you want to tell him,” she said, and smiled sympathetically. He felt his stomach churn. He knew she wasn’t accusing him, but it still didn’t sit well.

“He deserves to know. After last night, after the Department of Mysteries- after everything. That Lestrange has a daughter, and we know where she is.”

Hermione pulled a torn face, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

“I know that people always tell you how you’re so much like your mother and father, but I know better than anyone that a person’s parents doesn’t determine who they are,” she finally said. She gave a short sigh of consternation. “I’m not ashamed of my parents, of being muggleborn, but how could ask Carina not to judge me for who my parents are when I can’t do the same for her?”

Harry nodded solemnly. Part of him wanted to argue that having a couple of Death Eaters for parents was different to a pair of muggles, but he didn’t think it was what Hermione wanted to hear right now.

“Anyway, as I’ve been trying to tell Ron, the fact that she’s on our side- at least, for the most part- isn’t something we ought to undermine by antagonising her. Whatever’s got her set on killing her mother is probably the only reason she hasn’t run off to join the Death Eaters at all, and I don’t want to give her any motivation.”

It seemed to Harry that Hermione was trying to rationalise the situation to herself, in order to justify the implicit betrayal of keeping secrets from the Order. There was no justifying it, not really, but they couldn’t just let Lestrange’s daughter keep running around like a headless chicken, one way or the other.

Hermione looked as though she wanted to say something else, but shook her head and left the room. He couldn’t fathom why she was so intrigued by them, but Hermione was always interested in the strangest things. He just hoped it wouldn’t become another one of her obsessions, like the Half-Blood Prince mystery, or- God forbid- SPEW. They needed her if they were going to keep Carina and Penelope under control, because otherwise the couple of loose cannons were likely to bring the walls crashing down around them.

Chapter End Notes

Not gonna lie, this isn't my favourite chapter, but it's a necessary interlude so that everyone knows where they stand when the plot gets moving again. And let's face it, trying to get these idiots to cooperate is like herding cats. If it isn't already evident, the timeline Bella has landed in isn't necessarily our main canon timeline, and there are notable differences. I've got a plot in store in place of the horcruxes, I just didn't want this story to become a retelling of the Deathly Hallows.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Bellatrix, shoving dinner mints into her bag: I have to go suddenly

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bellatrix had held Phene to her promise on revealing the secrets of the house, and so the very next day they had spent hours knocking on hollow panels, pulling levers disguised as books and drawing runes on false doors as they explored the true depths of Maia Black’s estate. Each nook and cranny was caked with grime and dust, and just about every room had a new instrument in it. Phene would regularly transform to and fro, promising that a harpsichord or an erhu needed extra careful cleaning in order to be properly maintained, while Bellatrix was stuck with the rest of it.

Maia’s collection of dark artefacts wasn’t near as impressive as her collection of woodwinds and strings, but she was still a Black, so there were a few oddities to be found. Phene would give commentary here and there, like ‘that mask’ll possess you if you put it on, and make you recite the entire Orlando Furioso,’ and ‘that cuckoo clock will launch a cursed dagger, every hour on the hour’. Under Phene’s guidance, the house was shaping up to be twice as large as she’d originally thought, with enough charmed rooms to house another family.

She committed much of it to her memory as best she could, keeping in mind which passageways would lead her where and which rooms would be best used as a hideout in case of another emergency. She also resolved to investigate at least one room which Phene had claimed was currently caging a poltergeist; but she wouldn’t do it until she had the proper equipment for an expulsion in the rare chance Phene was telling the truth.

Each room she passed was styled with antique décor, completely fashionable yet entirely impersonal. Nothing had provided much insight as to who Maia was as a person, that she might go around making prophecies and time travel riddles for a great grandniece she’d never met. She expected crystal balls and scrolls of star charts, like the ones that lived in the Divination classroom at Hogwarts. She expected photographs, portraits or diaries that might depict the course of her life. She’d at least expected some indication that Phene had once lived here, but none of what she expected could be found. What she got instead was an electric guitar that spat flames from its head.

She kept an eye out for any of Maia’s compositions, but those too were mysteriously absent. If there was only one certainty Bellatrix had, it was that Maia’s melophilic tendencies were the key to her riddle. She was willing to tear the entire castle down to find those coveted arrangements. Total destruction would have to wait though, because Phene was tugging on her skirts with her beak.

“Come this way. You’ll like this, I bet,” she said, hopping on clawed feet through the false back of a wardrobe. On the other side was a room Bellatrix had visited before, which she admired but otherwise avoided- the music hall. Deep down in the bowels of the house Maia had outfitted her massive basement to accommodate an orchestra, and each instrument floated patiently as they waited for a conductor to wave their wand and magic them back to life.

“They sound through the whole house you know. Maia liked to be able to play a symphony from...
the bathroom. Or the bedroom, or the living room, or the other living room. You ought to give it a try one of these days,” Phene said, fluttering down to land on the stage.

But Bellatrix wasn’t interested in the orchestra as she was in the massive pipe organ sprawling across the side of the wall. The polished brass pipes were framed by rich mahogany wood, which was decorated with ornate, gilded filigree. While it wasn’t the most grand machine she’d seen in her lifetime, it was still a marvel. Bellatrix gingerly trailed a hand over the panels, cringing as a thick layer of dust clung to her fingers.

"Ah, knew you’d pick it out. This, right here, is a *Musicanima*. Are you familiar with those?" Phene asked, hopping closer.

"I’ve heard of it," Bellatrix muttered, wracking her brain. "They’re basically an enchanted magical instrument, right?"

"*Basically*, yes. Every instrument in here is enchanted in some way, but this one's a bit more special. Go on, have a play."

Bellatrix waved the dust off with her wand and sat down at the console. There were more pedals and drawknobs than she knew what to do with, and three manuals with ivory keys. Standing the temptation no longer, she gently pressed down with a single finger, and a haunted note bellowed from the corresponding pipe. Emboldened, she played a few chords, testing the notes as they echoed through the room. Once she got a feel for the scale she tapped out a classical melody, breathing in the metallic, melancholic sound. As she played, wisps of golden light leaked from the keys and danced alongside her hands as they crawled up and down the manuals. And Bellatrix knew why this instrument was so different from the others. Suddenly she *knew* what she ought to play- a song she’d never heard, but it was as if she’d known it all her life.

“Having fun?” Phene brought her attention back to the present, and the hall fell eerily silent.

“It’s a wonderful instrument, but I don’t see why you think it’s so important,” Bellatrix stood up.

“A *Musicanima* is a key. What it unlocks, I don’t know. Probably a sex dungeon, but maybe not,” Phene explained thoughtfully. “It called out to you, didn’t it?"

Bellatrix nodded, looking back at the console. Its pull pleaded with her to finish the song.

“*Its* melody is, effectively, a password. You knew it despite not knowing it, because you’re the recognised owner of this house. Anyone else would find that it’s just a normal organ. There used to be a tradition in noble families to learn on these instruments so as pass down the family’s ancestral song, but because so few knew the true significance behind it, it’s fallen out of practice. Kids are still taught to play the piano and violin and such things, but mostly for cultural reasons than anything else."

Bellatrix trailed her hands down the keys again. It was a slight comfort that Phene was well versed in the traditions of noble families, but then again-

“We’ll come back to it. Show me more,” she demanded. She’d certainly be back to find what was hiding behind those brass pipes, but she wouldn’t bring Phene with her when she did. Unperturbed by the demand, Phene launched herself off the stage back onto Bellatrix’s shoulder, landing heavily.

“Carry on then,” she said, and Bellatrix made a fruitless attempt to shake her off before resignedly continuing through a new trapdoor. The next room was dark and musty, and Bellatrix had to wave
her wand to light the torches lining the walls in order to find her footing.

“Oh, you know what this room is,” Phene teased. The wine cellar looked exactly the same as when she had first found it, only there was a conspicuously empty slot in one of the racks where a wine bottle should have been. Bellatrix curled her upper lip, but otherwise gave no indication that she might be ashamed or embarrassed. Bellatrix did not do ashamed or embarrassed.

“You know, we've just survived a full twenty-four hours without any near-deaths or impromptu duels,” Phene said matter-of-factly.

“Your point?” Bellatrix asked dryly, entirely uninterested in being condescended to. Phene landed on the stone floor and sent any lurking critters scurrying as the cellar brightened in a flash. Her head now brushing the low hanging ceiling beams, she began to pull bottles from their racks to appraise their source, age and blend.

“We ought to celebrate,” she said finally, and put the bottle she was holding back in its place to search for a new one. That was something Bellatrix could agree with. Really, she’d shown a great deal of restraint in not murdering her earlier 'houseguests’ or even Phene herself.

"This one will have aged wonderfully," Phene breathed as she uncorked a bottle of elven Cabernet Sauvignon. She plucked two glasses from the cabinet against the wall and handed one to Bella.

"Do phoenixes drink?" she asked, holding her glass steady as Phene filled it.

"This one does," Phene replied, and poured her own glass.

They finally retreated upstairs and back into the sunlight, and contented themselves to lounge around in the living room, slowly draining the wine between them. Upon Phene’s insistence, Bellatrix waved her wand and brought the orchestra downstairs to life, setting the instruments in motion as they began to play a classical medley of their own accord. Despite living in what was effectively the basement, Maia’s charms worked their magic so that the sound resonated throughout every corner of the house. Meanwhile Phene set up the fireplace again, vanishing the ashes with a wave of her hand and alighting the kindling with a snap. Bellatrix watched with feigned disinterest as the flames roared with only the slightest bit of coercion from Phene’s fingertips. She shouldn’t have been surprised that a creature born from the ashes of its own combusted corpse would be so synchronised with the roaring fire, but the ease Phene displayed in wandlessly stoking its heat was enviable.

Bellatrix closed her eyes for a moment, relishing in the warmth as a fanciful overture filled the silence. She sank down lower onto the couch and threw her legs upon the armrest, cracking her joints as she stretched. When she twisted her head, she saw that Phene was a bird again, curled up on a black leather ottoman. Suitably comfortable, Bellatrix waved her wand from where she rested, pouring out another glass of wine for herself and floating it over.

“You know, I haven’t seen a radio anywhere. And I’ve been keeping an eye out. Do you know if Maia has one somewhere?” she asked idly. While she doubted the information she sought would conveniently pop up on a radio show, keeping a steady stream of news and updates on things in Britain would help fill in the gaps in her knowledge.

“Oh, right. No. If she wanted music, Maia would just play her own. Don’t think she listened to the news much either, the old hermit,” Phene replied, shaking her head.
“Spose we should invest in one then,” Bellatrix said, sipping from her glass.

“Right. But Maia’s only got so much money stashed away, you know—we should head down to Gringotts at some point soon, see if you can get into your own vault,” Phene pointed out.

“Don’t you have a vault?”

“I’m a bird, Bellatrix, of course I don’t have a vault. The Goblins wouldn’t give me one if I asked. More because they just don’t like me, but still.”

“The Goblins don’t like you? Colour me surprised.”

“Oh, shut up.”

Bellatrix’s lips twitched into a smirk behind her glass, and Phene shook her head again. Still, they sat in a companionable silence, dulled by the last dregs of wine and the fading rays of light. Masking a yawn behind the back of her hand, Bellatrix rolled on her side. The heady scent of wood smoke clung to her curls, and she breathed in a little deeper. She figured she must have been half asleep, because the fluttering of feathers against her arm pulled her back into the waking world. Cracking an eye open, she found Phene nestling against her side.

“What are you doing? Get up and make me dinner,” Bella scolded her, but gave into the temptation to scratch the feathers under her crest.

“I’m doing a slow roast. Meat won’t be ready for another hour,” Phene chimed. “Because I plan ahead, you see.”

Bellatrix tugged a little too hard on Phene’s feathers at that.

“I can plan. In fact, I’ve planned to see my sister Andromeda tomorrow,” Bellatrix said shortly.

“And have you planned how we’re going to find her?” Phene asked dryly, having recalled Andromeda as the one that hadn’t shown up on Bellatrix’s family locator charm.

“You’re going to deliver a letter to her, and I’m going to follow on one of those broomsticks out in the shed,” Bellatrix decided.


“But you can do it?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“Then that’s sorted,” Bellatrix said.

“Maybe you shouldn’t turn up on her doorstep out of nowhere,” Phene said slowly. “Just a thought. You know, because the last time we did that, I don’t think it was the reunion you had planned.”

“That was just a bit of bad timing and ill luck. Once I explain the situation to Andy, she’ll do what she can to help me. I’m sure of it,” Bellatrix said, faking confidence.

“Why don’t you just ask those kids if they know anything about her? Tell them it’s part of your research, or something,” Phene said, waving her wing around in the feeble attempt of a hand gesture.

“She’s supposed to be my ‘aunt’. It’d be suspicious if I, the daughter of a Black, knew nothing
about my family tree! As if!” She shook her head, and rolled back over.

“Well, we haven’t really come up with a story on that front. Maybe you were kidnapped from your mother as a baby, or something. She was in Azkaban for fourteen years, after all,” Phene suggested.

“I would never be kidnapped! I would fight to the death!”

“As a baby?”

“Yes!”

Phene let out a low, melodic chuckle.

“Okay.”

Bellatrix scrunched up her nose.

“You’re the worst familiar I’ve ever had.”

“I’ve heard that before.”

“And Penelope Partridge is the stupidest name I’ve ever heard.”

Phene muttered something under her breath. The orchestra played on, and the fire continued to crackle. At some point Phene must have gotten up to see to her roast, but Bellatrix had long fallen asleep by the time she did.

Andromeda relished the quiet days. Although it had been a long time since she had been on the forefront of either a physical or political battle, she was nonetheless familiar with the cacophony of war. She’d thought she’d escaped it when she’d ran away with Ted, and then again with the defeat of Lord Voldemort on that fateful night. But now she was in the thick of it again, dragged unwillingly by her daughter’s foolhardiness back into the fray. Nymphadora’s welfare took constant purchase of her mind, as if fate sought to scold her for hoping to submerge herself in wilful ignorance. There were too many occasions when Dora would stumble home worse for wear, hiding the grittier details of her latest auror mission from her parents. But on these quiet days, Andromeda could almost fool herself into thinking she was safe.

The buffeting of wings against the afternoon breeze disturbed that quiet. She dreaded the tidings that the owl must be carrying, her mail had already been delivered earlier this morning and such a swift return was never a good sign. Only, when she strode into the living room, she found that there wasn’t an owl at all. Sitting on the windowsill as if it were a portrait frame was a proud, marvellous phoenix. Tied to its left foot with a scarlet ribbon was a letter, addressed to Andy. At first she thought it might’ve been direct from Dumbledore, but this bird lacked the scarlet plumage that Fawkes had, and Dumbledore would have never addressed her by her nickname. Still, she hoped this wasn’t a new method of communication within the Order, because they couldn’t have gone for anything more obvious if they tried. The golden bird chirruped merrily at her, fluffed its feathers and trilled a new tune. Talkative thing. She scratched it under its beak and it let out an appreciative croon. She took the letter from its ankle and opened it with trembling hands, wary of its missive.
Dear Andy

I need your help. You know I wouldn’t ask unless it were important, and I emphasise that this is very important.

It’s not the kind of thing that can easily be explained in a letter, but I imagine you’ll understand immediately once you find me.

I’ll be waiting at the northern edge of the wards in an hour. Come alone.

There was no name attached to the letter, but she’d recognise the handwriting anywhere. It was a pitifully obvious trap. Bellatrix had never really been the sort for traps- she was too confident, too prideful to bother luring out her prey. No, Bellatrix preferred hide and seek; ready or not, she would find you. And if she did lay a trap, it would be the sadistic, ironic type with a dear hostage for bait, forcing you to walk into her cage knowing full well that you’re nothing but a mouse scurrying down the cat’s gullet.

This note, however, sought to appeal to the sisterly bond they shared, as if the past two decades had never happened. Perhaps Bellatrix thought that if she sounded desperate enough, vaguely implying that she for some reason needed her sister’s help to defect from the Dark Lord, that Andromeda would come running. But Bellatrix had to have known that she never would. She had to look out for her daughter now, and she wouldn’t put Dora’s safety at risk for the chance of her sister’s redemption. She’d made that decision a long time ago. If Andromeda was honest with herself, it was more likely this letter was an indication that her sister had finally cracked, her sanity gone for good. And that was a terrifying thought.

Not simply because Bellatrix was already unhinged long before she’d ever stepped foot into Azkaban, but because it was the shred of sanity left in her that made her predictable. Not that anyone would ever describe Bellatrix with that word, because she was far from it- but she was still a creature of reason. It was certainly warped reason, but nonetheless she held values, she held priorities, she held inclinations and habits, she held devotion to her master and she held an unwavering sadism. But if she was completely gone?

Without the capacity for reason, Bellatrix might be a new person every day. She might not be a person at all. If her note was any indication, she might very well believe that the last few decades had been a complete dream, and try to Waltz right up to her and greet her with open arms. What might she do, if Bellatrix no longer had enough of a mind to feel anything for Him, but still had enough muscle memory to launch killing curses at anything that moved? It was terrible of her to think, but Bellatrix Lestrange the Death Eater was preferable to Bellatrix Lestrange completely off the leash. Better the devil you know, after all.

And yet, why was she still tempted to go?

She looked over at the phoenix, who was now helping itself to the dinner mints she had left out on the table. Where on earth had Bellatrix gotten a phoenix? One that would deliver letters on her behalf? It was completely amiss, and she would have been less surprised if a basilisk had slithered through her window with a letter in its teeth. It was odd enough, wrong enough, to pique her interest.
Andromeda burned the note.

Ted was at work until late, and Dora would remain at Grimmauld Place for a few days yet. If she went out and met Bellatrix, they would never know. Likely because they wouldn’t ever find her body again. She let out a shaky gasp and ran her hands through her thick, brown curls- a nervous tic she’d never grown out of. She was mad. Mad for even thinking about it. But the Blacks were all mad from the get go, weren’t they?

She spent the next hour cleaning and pacing and fussing about like a madwoman, changing the décor slightly, only to change it back five minutes later. She tried to sit down and read the Daily Prophet, but easily lost focus when an article about suspected Death Eater movements caught her eye. The phoenix sat on the table idly, watching her in what she thought might’ve been amusement. It had eaten all the dinner mints, and so she busied about getting it some owl treats, which it neglected in favour of the mints she'd replaced. Then, it hopped up on her shoulder- just as an hour was up.

Northwards she walked; head held high, wand in hand, ready to parlay with death. Bellatrix would expect no less. The figure at the edge of the wards was propped against a rock, tugging at clumps of grass. It was hardly what she expected, but her sister always liked playing these games. Hearing her arrival, her sister brushed her hands on her skirts, then pushed against the rock to stand up. And then, Andromeda realised she was wrong. Her sister was never one to play games- she was more fond of breaking the rules.

"Bella," Andromeda gasped. Because this was Bella. Not Bellatrix Lestrange, not even Bellatrix Black, but Bella. There was no malice in her eyes, no madness, only caution, hope, and love. She could have been anywhere between sixteen and twenty- Bellatrix and Andromeda had shared the issue of looking younger than their age, which while gratifying in their later years, wasn’t well appreciated in their teens.

"Hi Andy,” Bellatrix replied, a thick strain to her voice.

Andy, her darling pain-in-the-ass little sister, was a woman grown. She looked beautiful, with her strong jaw and cheekbones cut finer than a marble statue, and her soft chocolate curls that fell perfectly in place. Age had certainly not been unkind to her, but there was a weariness about her that made her seem older than her appearance.

"Why don’t you explain what’s going on?” She said, neither too cold nor too warm as Bellatrix took a step closer.

“Andy, I’m- I need your help. You see, well, I seem to have misplaced thirty years of my life,” she said, rubbing her jaw. “And I was really looking forward to living it for myself.”

“Time travel?” Andromeda gave a shocked laugh.

“Yes and no. Dimension hopping is more accurate, I believe. Not that it matters, because I need your help getting back.”

Despite herself, Andromeda shook her head with an incredulous smile. It was so unbelievably Bellatrix to get caught three decades outside of her timestream, and apparently across dimensions. Into a world where she was a terrible fugitive.

"What's with the phoenix?” She asked, and pointed at the bird still sitting on her shoulder. Bellatrix
looked at the phoenix in question wearily. There were a lot of ways she could answer that question.

"I don't know. She's annoying and she doesn’t stop talking to me."

Andromeda was quiet, not sure what to make of that. Phene, of course, remained silent. The moment didn’t last long, as Bellatrix rattled on.

"And I know how crazy that sounds, and- I’m not crazy," her voice cracked at the last word, and she pressed the palms of her fists against her eyes. Andromeda was the only person she’d ever let see her cry, and even then it was against her own will. Her lips stretched into a thin grimace, and when a pair of arms wrapped around her, she knew it was useless to fight.

"I'm not crazy," she repeated.

"You never were," Andy soothed. “Come inside.”

Andromeda’s home was humbler than Bellatrix had imagined, even bearing in mind that her sister never enjoyed decadence or grandeur like the rest of her family did. It was immaculately cleaned and the interior design followed a modern style that was unfamiliar to her, yet fitting nonetheless. While it was certainly modest, Andromeda had found a way to make it simultaneously elegant and cosy.

“How much do you know about your future?” Andromeda started, sitting across the table from Bellatrix.

“Enough to know that it’s shitty,” Bellatrix replied helpfully, plucking a dinner mint from the glass bowl.

“Right. So I’m guessing you know about the Azkaban thing?”

“I had to flee the fucking country, Andy. Of course I know about the Azkaban thing.”

“Sorry, but I’m not actually aware of everything you’ve gotten up to since you got here,” Andromeda snarked back. “When did you get here, by the way? You’ve done a good job of hiding yourself,” she continued before Bella could argue back at her.

“About a week ago? I haven’t really been keeping track of the time, because it’s not really my time anyway. But anyway, I’ve been living in France. I inherited Maia Black’s estate- that’s kind of the whole reason I’m in this mess, actually. Should I start from the beginning?”

“That’s a good idea,” Andy grinned sardonically.

Bellatrix spent the next twenty minutes filling Andromeda in on prophecies, wands and birds and estates, run-ins with the Malfoys and the ‘Order of the Phoenix’, and her identity as Carina Black, but neglected to mention Phene’s propensity for speech and all the baggage that came with her. There was no need to make Andy think she hadn’t come out of the time warp with her sanity intact.

“You know who Harry Potter is, don’t you?” Andromeda asked when Bellatrix had finished getting her up to speed.

“No? Why should I?” Bella scoffed.

“He’s the infamous boy who lived. He’s the only known person alive to survive the killing curse,
when it rebounded off him and struck You Know Who nearly twenty years ago, now. Everyone
thinks he’s the salvation from the Dark Lord, now that he’s returned,” Andy explained. Phene
looked half-interested at the mention of Harry’s survival of the killing curse, but Bellatrix zeroed
in on a different issue.

“Yes, yes, but more importantly, who is this bloody you know who everyone’s talking about?
Because, no, I don’t know who!” She huffed. Her frustration abandoned her when she saw Andy’s
face whiten like a sheet.

“Well, we don’t say his name aloud because there’s a charm of sorts that alerts his followers of
your location when you use it,” Andromeda explained, buying for time. At Bellatrix’s unimpressed
stare, she sighed and pulled out a quill and some scrap paper, and scrawled the name.

Lord Voldemort.

Bellatrix worried her bottom lip between her teeth. She knew Lord Voldemort. She knew Lord
Voldemort very well.

A Pureblooded Lord who kept his heritage a secret, Andy had expressed her doubts about him
before, but his knowledge in the Dark Arts and the control he commanded over distinguished noble
families spoke for itself. He had often tutored her during her summers away from Hogwarts,
teaching her the art of occlumency and legilimency, of nonverbal spellcasting and literature
forbidden from even the restricted section of the Hogwarts library.

He was incredibly powerful and incredibly dark, but she hadn’t thought he could be the Dark Lord.
He’d always seemed too… disinterested in politics, and in people. Although he had worked his
way into the favour of the Malfoys, the Notts and the Lestranges, he never expressed anything
other than apathy about them.

Bellatrix had craved the knowledge he could impart on her, but she didn’t think he craved
anything, at the very least from an ideological standpoint. What could he possibly be wanting for,
the man who had everything? Why would he start a war? He parroted the same Pureblood rhetoric
as the rest of them, but that was hardly a distinguishing qualifier. Or had the war already started,
long before she’d realised?

“The summer you’d be otherwise going into if not for your little journey through time, that was
when your tutoring ended and your apprenticeship began,” Andy explained. “The things he
instructed you to do became increasingly abhorrent. And I don’t think anyone of us realised what
was happening before it was too late,” she sighed jaggedly.

It rankled Bellatrix that Andy was referring to Lestrange as you, as if her fate was already sealed.
She wasn’t going to be the insane and deranged Bellatrix Lestrange, and she didn’t want to even
think about her. This wasn’t her destiny.

“Alright, so what? Just because she’s a fuckup doesn’t mean I am!”

“Bellatrix, I’m telling you this because you have to understand what happened. What you did, what
he did to you—”

“Which he are we talking about?” Bellatrix cut in, and Andromeda’s breath hitched as her dark
gaze bore into her.
“Both of them,” she said, and swallowed roughly.

“It doesn’t matter,” Bellatrix broke off. “Because when you help me get back, I can change things. I’ll do things my way.”

“I’ll help you, Bella, but you really shouldn’t be on your own right now. My daughter, Nymphadora- she’s in the Order, she and I can explain what’s happened- Dumbledore can help you.”

Tucking aside the fact that she had a niece now, Bellatrix rushed to shut that idea down.

“You can’t tell anyone about this, especially not Dumbledore’s secret cult! People don’t exactly like me in this future, and you’re the only person I can trust. You and Cissy, at least, but I haven’t been able to get to her. You- you can tell her!”

“Cissy and I don’t really talk anymore,” Andromeda said curtly.

“What- why?”

“You and I, we had an argument, and she chose your side,” she said.

“We have arguments all the time,” Bellatrix said with a slight trace of a smirk.

“Not like this,” Andy muttered. A dark look flashed upon her face for the briefest of moments, before she shook it away.

“What was the argument about?” Bellatrix asked slowly, anticipating and dreading the answer.

“Who I married.”

“And who did you marry?”

“Ted Tonks. A muggleborn.”

“No,” Bellatrix gasped.

Andromeda didn’t look nearly as chastised as she should have, a grim sort of amusement tugging on her lips. The flush of anger Bella felt nearly sent her head spinning. If Andy did- then father would- and she would- Bellatrix fought back a shudder. How could Andy be so stupid? Didn’t she know? She took a deep breath in with her entire diaphragm and expelled it all in one go, but breathing exercises were of no use. She tried to empty her mind, but thoughts of her father’s rage swept in like a flood faster than she could clear them out. She was responsible for her sisters, she would be punished for this.

This had to be a fever dream- there’s no way Andy would-

Bellatrix felt a tingling in her fingertips as they trembled, and she stretched them out restlessly, itching to reach for her wand even if there was no enemy she could fight. She looked up, watching the world turn around Andromeda’s paling face.

It wasn’t real- she was crazy- there’s no way Andy would-

“I need to go,” she breathed, getting to her feet.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Andromeda gripped her shoulder, remaining stern. “You’re in danger, Bellatrix. Don’t be foolish.”
“Let me go,” Bellatrix seethed, roughly shrugging out of Andromeda’s grasp.

“Bellatrix, please,” Andromeda insisted, but Bellatrix had already made a dash for the door, desperate for fresh air. Phene and Andy followed her through, but where Andy stopped in the threshold Phene continued sailing across to land on Bellatrix’s shoulder. With a deep shuddering gulp Bellatrix looked back at Andromeda, and imagined that this was what it would feel like to jump in front of the Hogwarts Express.

“Take me home,” she rasped, only loud enough for Phene to hear. Andromeda took a step back as an explosion of fire engulfed Bellatrix, and when it had dissipated, she was gone.

Chapter End Notes

I know there's a comedic tone to this story but I don't want to make too much light of the more serious issues I intend on focusing on. Bella's little episode will be expanded upon later, both in relation to her PTSD and her relationship to Andy, but for now I hope it's clear that shit's gettin real

A little bit more of the Maia mystery is unravelling and Bella's made contact with her first sister! Things are finally moving somewhere
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Bellatrix gets the house to herself for one entire minute

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bellatrix had avoided Phene’s company since the previous day, entirely disinterested in allowing her to analyse her family affairs. She’d immersed herself in her research again, hoping to keep her mind off of Andromeda and her betrayal, but her thoughts kept wandering back of their own accord. Maybe Andromeda had been betrothed to someone truly incorrigible- there were a few Pureblood boys she could think of who’d make that list- and had attempted to pull a Maia, but had been far less successful. Maybe she’d finally snapped at mother; she’d always had less tolerance for their parents than her or Cissy. Bellatrix couldn’t say she’d seen it coming, but Andy’s relationship with the rest of their family had always been less than stellar.

She knew she shouldn’t be making excuses. She knew that running off and marrying a muggleborn should have been reason enough for Bellatrix never to contact her sister again- it was undoubtedly what her alternate self had done. Which was why Bella wasn’t really interested in doing the same. Oh, she’d give Andy an earful when next she saw her, but somehow Bella got the impression that she wouldn’t be particularly reproachful. And perhaps she shouldn’t, because a true Black heir never offered such things as remorse.

Bellatrix turned a page in her Introduction to Magic as Matter textbook. The knowledge was a little too rudimentary for what she was interested in, but it couldn’t hurt to freshen up on the basics. She’d always been better at practice than theory, particularly in regards to such dry material, so consolidating her understanding was a necessary endeavour. After ingesting the first three chapters, a tapping on the window sill pulled her back into reality. Phene sat on the ledge, and pushed the window open with her beak.

“What do you want?” Bellatrix groaned.

"I'm going out today. I'm not going to tell you what to do with your life, but it'd be really shitty if you died so try not to do anything too stupid while I'm gone," Phene said, nonplussed by Bella’s attitude. Bellatrix ceased her dramatic groaning- she had expected some condescending spiel about kith and kin at this point.

"Where are you going?” she asked. So far she had assumed Phene didn’t really have a life outside of whoever was holding her wand at the time.

"I need to catch up on things outside of wizarding society. It’s terribly insular, you know,” Phene replied.

“And what could muggle society possible have to offer?” Bellatrix said, her tongue dripping with disdain.

“Not the muggle world, silly girl. Wizards have long since forgotten about the fair folk, but I
promise they haven’t forgotten about you,” Phene muttered. Bellatrix scoffed to herself. Phene speaking of fairy tales was somehow the least insane thing going on in her life.

“Would you like to come with me? The Unseelie Court isn’t huge fan of witches these days, but I could probably pass you off as a vampire,” Phene offered.

“Maybe next time,” Bellatrix smirked. Much as she was intrigued by Phene’s delusions, she didn’t care that much. The idea of a full day to herself was far sweeter than the temptation of curiosity.

“Alright. If you need me, cast a killing curse or something with my wand,” Phene said, and took off from the window.

"Goodbye, don't come back,” Bellatrix called out after her. “Stupid bird,” she muttered, flicking a page over.

She tried to reinvest herself in the textbook but its words were like grains of sand, slipping faster through her fingers the more she tightened her grip. She slapped it back down on the desk and heaved herself up with an aggrieved sigh. Frustrated as she was, at least Phene’s disappearance meant that she could retreat downstairs without fear of harassment. In fact, it presented the perfect opportunity to investigate the Musicana further, and perhaps the room with the poltergeist if she still had time left.

Bellatrix headed down to the living room, and wrapped her hand around one of the brass light fixtures on the wall. Was it the left prong or the right prong that opened the passageway? Or the middle one? She shrugged to herself and pulled down on the left, and it snapped with a clang. Shit. She bit her lip and tried to force it back in its place, but there was little use. Bella threw her head back with a groan. Stupid house with its stupid old fittings...

A loud crack split the room, and Bellatrix dropped the light and raised her wand towards the sound. However, at the lack of a visible opponent, her eyes were instead drawn downwards towards the miserable form kneeling on the ground. At her feet was a decrepit house elf, dotted in age spots and withering hair, wearing only a musty loincloth over his leathery wrinkles.

"Mistress Bellytricks," Kreacher nearly sobbed.

"God you've gotten old," Bellatrix said before her mind could catch up with her mouth.

"Kreacher lives to serve," he croaked, although he didn’t seem particularly lively to her.

“What are you doing here, Kreacher?” she asked, crossing her arms. Honestly, of all the things-

"Kreacher waited until Mistress Bellytricks was alone before finding her, he saw her in Grimmauld Place, being chased by that filth," he muttered. Bellatrix nodded. She really hadn't been separated from Phene until now, and she was glad her 'guardian' wasn't around to stick her beak in her family business.

"That was very wise of you," Bellatrix said, and Kreacher positively shivered. She was taught better than to give thanks to a house elf, but a clipped compliment usually got the point across.

"Master Sirius does not know that Kreacher is here. Master Sirius will not approve," he groaned, raking his bony hands across his face. He stumbled over to the dresser and began to throw his head against it. It was a far less vigorous punishment than most house elves would deem acceptable, but Bellatrix couldn't be sure if that was because Kreacher didn't have his whole heart in it or if he just couldn't muster the energy for anything more. She prised him off the dresser anyway; she had no doubt his skull would have caved in after too long.
"Sirius is your master, then?" Bellatrix prodded.

"Yes, yes. My beautiful Mistress is dead, so too is her husband and son, and only the traitor is left," his voice wavered.

Bellatrix felt a bittersweet pang in her chest. Orion had always been kind to her, had been proud of her in a way her father never would be. When she was young he would call her la petite princesse, and he spoiled her with gifts whenever she wanted them. But she knew he was only that way because he saw her as a beautiful ornament on the Black family tree rather than a threat to his position as Head. He was far harsher on his sons than his nieces, the little girls who would never wield sufficient power to cause him any problems. So he would dote on them, and feed the jealousy of his sons for their lack of affection.

Although Orion had no more respect for her other than as a family possession, he had at least been kind. The only kindness Walburga had ever provided for her was that she hadn’t been the one to give birth to her, although she’d even held that against her. Her aunt had always thought very little of Druella, and decided to take it upon herself to teach her nieces the rules of propriety and nobility. Bellatrix was almost thankful when Sirius grew up to be quite the troublemaker- it was a poetic justice that the straight-laced woman would bear such an unruly son, and she had far less time for Bella and her sisters after that.

With both of them dead, the mantle of Head of House was now on Sirius' shoulders- despite whatever he'd done to make Kreacher think him a traitor. Bellatrix frowned in thought. She'd babysat little Sirius and Reggie a few times before, and while he'd certainly been a grubby fingered rugrat, he was also nine years old. It was strange to think of him as anything but a snot nosed miscreant, let alone a 'traitorous' Head of House. However, Bellatrix wasn’t about to look this gift horse in the mouth. If Sirius was apparently so foul as to drive his house elf into disobedience, then she’d savour the situation for what it was worth. But if Kreacher was going to attend to her, then there would need to be some ground rules.

"Kreacher, I want you to call me Carina in the company of others. Of course, you shan’t speak of me to anyone unless you’re ordered to, but if you must, only refer to me as Carina Black. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mistress Bell- Mistress Carina," Kreacher replied. Although she had only ordered him to call her by that name in front of others, she decided not to correct him- no need confusing the senile thing any more than necessary. There was also the fact that he managed to butcher her fake name far less than her real one.

"Right. Now Kreacher, I want you to report to me whenever you can. I imagine Sirius has ordered you not to speak of Order business to anyone outside of the Order?"

Kreacher nodded his head furiously, and Bellatrix imagined for a second that it might snap just like the light fixture and roll off his shoulders.

"But I imagine he never said anything about showing anyone information, correct?" Bellatrix continued.

"No, Master Sirius spoke nothing of showing- just that Kreacher is not to talk,” the elf croaked.

"Then you can offer me your memories, to view in a pensieve- and you won’t be breaking your Master’s orders, now would you?” she goaded. Kreacher’s blank face illuminated and he nodded his head again, tears shining in his eyes. Bellatrix hadn’t seen a pensieve anywhere in Maia’s house, but they weren’t particularly hard to get a hold of- all she’d have to do was find the right
“Kreacher will do what he can to spy on their meetings, and return to Mistress B- Carina with his memories,” he said, brimming with pride. He stood up a little taller, and stretched his shoulders back almost as if new life had been breathed into him. And she supposed it had- he lived to serve, after all. Then, just as quickly he deflated again, his heavily dropping ears pulling further back at the skin of his skull as he glanced around.

“Someone- someone is coming,” he warned. Before Bellatrix could ask what he meant he had popped out of sight again, and so she resumed her dueling stance, scanning the room warily. Then the fireplace crackled, and Bellatrix had to fight the impulse to point her wand straight at the bushy brunette curls poking through. **Damn**. It figured that the only time she had the house to herself was when everyone wanted to bloody come and visit.

“It’s me,” Hermione’s head called out. “Can I come through?”

“If you must,” Bellatrix sneered, relaxing her stance- but only just. Taking that as permission, Hermione fully emerged through the floo. Dusting herself off, she looked around the open living space.

“Where’s Pennie? Or Phene?”

“At work, and wherever phoenixes go in their spare time. Where are your boyfriends?” Bellatrix nodded.

“They don’t know I’m here,” Hermione said tightly. “And I’m not dating Harry. Just Ron,” she added. If she were at all worried that she stood completely alone with Bellatrix, who still looked inches from drawing her wand, she hid it well.

“Then what are you doing here?” Bellatrix demanded, and despite standing just next to the fireplace Hermione felt the temperature drop to an icy chill.

“I’d like to apologise. We were wrong to pick a fight with you in your own home. It won’t happen again,” she said, doing her best to express sincerity without letting down her guard.

“No.”

Bellatrix studied her for a moment, dropping her smirk. It wasn’t that she wanted another fight, but she’d be lying if she said getting the chance to put the blood traitors and their pet back in their place wasn’t a tempting thought. Pragmatically, she knew she was supposed to be trying to endear herself towards her new allies- particularly given her new insight about the ‘boy who lived’- but perhaps indifference would do for now. She didn’t really want to suffer Hermione’s presence any longer, anyway; she decided to throw the dog a bone.

“Alright then, you’ve cleared your conscience. You can leave now,” Bellatrix dismissed with a wave of her hand, and turned to stroll towards the kitchen. But, to her chagrin, the sound of footsteps followed behind her as she made to raid the walk-in pantry.

“I’d like to apologise. We were wrong to pick a fight with you in your own home. It won’t happen again,” she said, doing her best to express sincerity without letting down her guard.

“Not even if I call you muddy?” Bellatrix taunted.

“No.”

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“Actually, I was thinking… Well, the notes in your study. I was thinking I could have a look at them, help you with whatever it is you’re working on.”

“I don’t need your help with that,” Bellatrix said quickly, digging into a bag of salted cashew nuts.
“Maybe not, but it’d be done faster if I did. And you shouldn’t be so confident if it isn’t peer reviewed.”

Bellatrix whirled around, and found Hermione standing uncomfortably close. She fought the impulse to take a step back and instead barged past her, shoulder first. But Hermione was persistent. Hot on her heels, she followed Bellatrix up to the study.

“Really, I can just take notes from books if you’d like, to save you having to read them,” she continued.

Bellatrix grumbled around the cashews in her mouth, and grabbed a fistful more. Her self-portrait snarled at her as she entered her study, and she flipped her middle finger up at it before setting the bag of nuts down on her desk.

“Alright, you want me to put you to work? I’ll put you to work,” she relented. Bellatrix wasn’t about to share her interest in time travel, but there was at least one crucial aspect that she could disclose without giving herself away.

“I need a way of securing my memories. They’re rather important, you see, and I’d rather not lose them.”

“Is there someone who wants to tamper with your memory?” Hermione asked, a flash of concern crossing her face.

“Naturally,” Bellatrix replied, allowing Hermione to draw her own conclusions. Keeping her memories intact was essential in returning to her own time, or this whole event would have been for naught. Bellatrix was still convinced that this was a separate timeline to her own, as she knew she was better than what this dimension had made of her. But she wasn’t so arrogant as to take an unnecessary risk.

“I don’t care how you do it- whether you find the necessary charm or invent it yourself- but I need to be sure my memories don’t leave my head. Simply storing copies in a vial won’t do,” Bellatrix elaborated, then returned to her spot on the daybed and picked up the textbook she had discarded earlier. Hermione stood in the centre of the room, her neat and tidy appearance at odds with the shambles of notes and miscellaneous debris Bella had scattered across the room.

“The book on memory charms I claimed from Grimmauld Place is over on the desk,” she gestured with one hand, and Hermione took the cue to take a seat behind the mahogany wood.

Bellatrix felt an irrational surge of distaste as Hermione curled her lips in disgust at Lestrange’s mugshot. Of course, it was hardly a flattering photo, and she was a fugitive who’d lobotomised a couple of aurors, but she still deserved respect from her inferiors. Hermione seemed to notice Bella’s hard glare, because she flushed and turned her gaze elsewhere.

“What’s this?” She asked, thumbing a hastily scribbled note of parchment. “Follow the light of the eclipse’s sunset…” she mumbled aloud, and began to read the rest of the message silently.

Bellatrix clenched her jaw and eyed Hermione warily over her textbook. There was nothing explicit in the passage from Maia’s will, which was partly the problem. While she doubted Hermione could decipher it, what would she find if she did? No- what insight could a mudblood possibly have that Bellatrix didn’t? There was certainly no harm in letting her try to puzzle it out, which might even keep her distracted for a good while.

“It’s a riddle, or perhaps a prophecy. I believe it has to do with me, though,” Bellatrix shared.
Hermione visibly cringed at the word ‘prophecy’.

“What is the *lost art*?” she asked, giving the lines another lookover.

“If I knew that do you think I’d be telling you about it?” Bellatrix retorted. Hermione visibly bit back a snide remark of her own, and opted for a sarcastic grin instead.

“No, I’m sure you wouldn’t. But the first thing you ought to figure out is what ‘the eclipse’s sunset’ is supposed to be. Then follow it, I guess,” Hermione shrugged.

“Excellent deduction skills,” Bella droned, and settled on a smirk as Hermione rolled her eyes.

“I suppose the life of Carina Black isn’t allowed to be ordinary, is it?” she mused, reading the prophecy again.

“No, it isn’t,” Bellatrix agreed.

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Sunlight shone down on the mossy glen, gleaming off the waterfalls and streams as they twisted around the ancient rocky paths. Fairies fluttered alongside the butterflies, and the gentle grazing deer didn’t even rise to observe the Phoenix that landed in the centre of the toadstool circle. Phene swung her swan neck around and tentatively rose to her human form, careful not to char the grass underfoot. The creatures here had likely never seen a human, muggle nor wizard, in their lives— but they knew well enough that she wasn’t one of them. Phene cleared her throat, and the pixies twittering in the trees buzzed in amusement.

“Tha mi an seo gus a ‘bhanrigh fhaicinn,” Phene spoke aloud, and the songbirds and pixies, the deer and the fairies, and even the trickling water seemed to fall silent.

The toadstool perimeter blossomed with a rich golden glow, and the tranquil scene began to fade as Phene was transported to an ethereal courtyard, suddenly under the cover of nightfall. The only sound to be heard was the light tinkling of a windchime, only there was no breeze to be felt in accompaniment. The surrounding castle structure was made almost entirely of iridescent crystal glass, refracting mirror images of the stars in the sky onto Phene’s robes.

Striding from the fairy ring with purpose, bioluminescent blossoms guided her path as she headed towards the Monarch’s chambers. There wasn’t a single other soul to be seen, which was exactly to her liking. Her heels clicked dully as she climbed a glass staircase, and the vines wrapping around the railing blanked with glowing buds that continued to lead the way. Finally she reached the top of the stairwell, where an enormous gilded doorway blocked her path. The lionhead doorknocker growled at her when she rested her hand upon it.

“Who goes there?” he snarled.

“A servant of Titania,” Phene grinned.

“Hardly,” the lion scoffed, “I know you Phoenicis. You are servant to only one.”

“If you know me so well, why’d you ask who I was?” she drawled sardonically.

“Protocol,” he grunted in reply. Nonetheless, the door swung open, and Phene cleared her throat to
further announce her arrival. The room was grand and elegant, the walls lined with open glass balconies that overlooked the castle’s estate. Thin drapes flowed and swirled from each doorway, although there was still no wind to guide their movements. Against the one solid wall was a four poster bed that took up as much space as a normal sized bedroom. And on its edge sat the Queen, her pearlescent skin gleaming in the moonlight.

“Enter, Phoenicis of the Mortal Realm,” she spoke softly, but her empyreal voice carried throughout her chambers. Phene stepped through the threshold, bowing her head.

“Queen Titania, I am humbled by your presence,” she said reverently. “I have come to renew my pledge of fealty- I apologise for the delay.”

“Dear Phoenicis. It is interesting that you come to me now, because you have already done so only a mortal decade ago. But that wasn't you, was it?”

"No, your majesty. I am a guest in this time," Phene admitted. She knew her alternate, future self must have come here at some point, but she was a different self, and it would have been a slight for her not to visit the Queen. And a slight against the Queen would not go unpunished.

"As a guest in this world, I extend my welcome to you, and offer my hospitality. The Centaurs had already foretold your coming in the stars, you see, so I know you are not alone- where, may I ask, is your charge?”

“Young Bellatrix is not yet... accustomed to our ways. I believed it prudent to introduce her slowly,” Phene allowed herself a smirk, “for you know quite well the temperament of the Blacks.”

“You may find there is little time for prudence, Phoenicis of the Mortal Realm. Eclipse’s daughter has much to learn,” was the Queen’s cool reply.

Phene looked up with hesitation. Titania’s inky black eyes betrayed no thought or feeling, not even her line of sight- for her sclera, iris and pupil all swirled the same onyx shade. One of her long ears twitched, and for a moment her thin lips quirked in a mockery of a smile.

“You wish to know what the fates have written, both for you and for the girl,” she stated. Phene replied with a stiff nod.

“This, I cannot tell you. What I can share, however, is the end.”

Phene watched her with bright, insistent eyes, but the Queen only wistfully turned her head and stared out across the balcony overlooking her courtyard. Phene’s facade of veneration dropped like an anchor.

“Is that it?” she asked bluntly.

“Yes,” the Queen hummed, and gracefully stood up from the bed. Behind her back, Phene dragged her hands down her face. Then she turned around and Phene hurriedly regained her composure.

“Bring your charge the next time you visit, I expect her pledge soon,” Titania said, leaving no room for argument as her black marble eyes fell upon Phene’s irritated countenance. Phene bowed awkwardly, as if only half-committing to the gesture, but this was enough to satisfy the Queen, who turned around and walked towards one of the far balconies. Slowly Phene stepped backwards out of the room, and the door slammed shut in her face. The lion doorknocker chuffed at her, and she pinched its nose petulantly before strutting away, ignoring the obscenities he threw at her.

“Fucking Fae,” Phene grumbled to herself, clunking back down the stairs hard enough to leave
cracks in the glass, which soon began to repair themselves. She wasn’t looking forward to bringing Bellatrix here at all—Phene liked to think she had the patience of a saint, and even she was driven to madness by their ineffably enigmatic ways. She shook her head clear as she trudged back to the fairy circle. She still had a few more stops today, and it wouldn’t do to get worked up already.

“Lloyd Fairweather’s theory of arcane combustion is clear that magic simply cannot become dense enough to become a solid,” Hermione sputtered, slapping her hand against the hardcover textbook for emphasis. Bellatrix continued to lay on the daybed, watching Hermione pace a track into the rug. It was getting close to sundown and Phene still hadn’t returned—not that she was concerned, but she was getting hungry. Bella and Hermione had both transcribed an essay’s worth of notes each, but then they’d gotten stuck on an argument about magical theory and all work on the project had been forgotten.

“Don’t care. He’s wrong,” Bellatrix shot back, biting the inside of her cheek in a futile attempt to hide her grin.

“You have no evidence!” Hermione yelled. She turned furiously back on Bellatrix, and her jaw dropped as she watched her chest shudder with barely restrained laughter.

“You— you’ve been riling me up this entire time,” Hermione slapped her hand against her forehead.

“Mostly yes, but I still maintain that Fairweather’s theory has too many exceptions to the rule for it to really be considered a rule,” Bellatrix said. She reclined further on the daybed and pushed a hand through her curls, then spared a glance back to Hermione, who had slumped back down on the desk chair.

She certainly wouldn’t go so far as to say she enjoyed the girl’s company, but she was… tolerable. Certainly compared to the Weasel, at least. She had at least half a brain, and admittedly was making good progress on summarising the integral points within her books on memory charms—so she was marginally better than a house elf at this point. Bellatrix set her textbook down across her chest and closed her eyes, clearing her mind. She wasn’t going to allow a mudblood to occupy any more space in her head than absolutely necessary.

Hermione grinned, despite herself. She’d never had an argument so intellectually stimulating, and Carina hadn’t even been serious through half of it! Ron and Harry were… well, they weren’t stupid, they were just a bit slow on the uptake sometimes, but that also meant that they’d nod along to any of her theories with a ‘we’ll take your word for it’. Carina could actually follow along the complex topics and raise her own arguments, a refreshing change of pace from all her peers who just didn’t want to hear it.

Hermione peeked back over to where Carina lay sprawled on the daybed. Although her eyes were closed, Hermione knew better than to assume she was asleep. She gave the impression of a coiled cobra, always hissing and ready to strike, but there was a dormancy to her now. Hermione didn’t appreciate having to walk on eggshells around her, but so long as she did then their delicate truce was almost amicable. Almost.

In all honesty Carina was mostly just ignoring her, but Hermione found it preferable to the immature baiting and teasing that Malfoy and his gang offered. And at least here she could dig into a good book without being distracted by the constant comings and goings of Order members. Malis
Hollow’s Insight of the Mind was an entirely unorthodox text, describing very morally questionable methods of investigating people’s minds without the use of legilimency in only its first chapter. It would undoubtedly fall under the list of banned books in most of Diagon Alley’s bookstores; in other words, it was a treasure.

However, Hermione understood why Carina was concerned enough to try breaking into the Order of the Phoenix headquarters just to get her hands on it. Some of the techniques only described in the book could be incredibly manipulative if used by a skilled Legilimens, of which the Death Eaters had plenty. If Voldemort could get his hands on her, there’d be no question of his ability to reconstruct Carina’s mind into that of the perfect little Death Eater protégée; protecting her memories was likely the best defence she had.

Though it made Hermione curious, what were the memories that were so formative to her identity like? She couldn’t imagine the circumstances Carina might have been raised in, and wondered how much of the hatred she harboured for her mother was born of personal experience. She must have been exposed to plenty of Death Eaters, or at least their sympathisers, to have gained the prejudiced attitude she had. Everything about her, from her posh accent to her affinity for heels and cinchers (despite having a tiny waist regardless), absolutely screamed Pureblood.

Carina had also failed to mention anything about her father, although it was entirely possible that she didn’t even know who he was. Hermione knew better than to ask, but there was no hint in her phenotype- she was all but a miniature clone of her mother. It bothered her more than she’d like to admit, but Hermione had never been one to happily accept ignorance. It shouldn’t matter who Carina’s father was, because even if her father was Voldemort himself, she wouldn’t be dissuaded from helping Carina take down her mother.

But Hermione just couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something more to Carina than she was letting on.

Hermione spared another glance towards her, who by now looked as though she had fallen asleep. The tense lines on her face had relaxed, and her arm hung limply over the edge of the bed. No, she was a far cry from her mother, Hermione decided. Bellatrix was a monster, but Carina looked almost angelic with bouncy curls framing her face effortlessly, and the soft pink hue of the sunset dusting her cheeks.

Wait- sunset?

Hermione stood up hurriedly, and Carina reflexively straightened up as if she had been awake all along.

“Oh- I’ve completely lost track of the time,” she cried, and straightened her notes before grabbing her things. Carina grunted, then lay back down again.

“I’ve got to get back- I didn’t really tell anyone where I was going,” Hermione stuttered, hoping nobody was too worried for her. She hadn’t intended to stay this long, but that book had been really interesting and-

“Alright. Don’t care. Bye,” Carina shrugged. Hermione shook her head, she didn’t have the time to deal with her attitude right now. With a final wave, which Carina of course ignored, Hermione dashed downstairs and back through the floo.
“Mum, I’m home,” Tonks called out, stepping through the fireplace.

“It’s good to see you, Dora,” Andromeda said, a genuine smile lighting her face as she stepped forward into the living room to give her daughter a hug. Tonks fell into the warm embrace, her hair warming from a pastel pink to a more vibrant bubblegum shade.

“Have you eaten yet? I’ve got some of last night’s dinner left if you’d like me to heat it up- here, go sit at the table, I’ll bring it to you,” Andromeda said as she released Tonks to go and busy about the kitchen. Tonks rolled her eyes at her mother’s fussing, but followed to sit down at the dinner table with a grin.

“Security’s tightened at Grimmauld Place, if you’d even thought that possible. Dumbledore doesn’t seem to think moving headquarters is necessary, but everyone’s still a bit on edge, y’know?”

“What’s all the security for? Not that I’m complaining, mind you, but I hope it doesn’t mean you’ve been in any more danger,” Andromeda worried as she laid out a reheated curry on the table, and sat down in the opposite chair as Tonks dug in.

“Oh, some woman broke into headquarters and stole a book. She didn’t hurt anyone and we don’t think she was a Death Eater, but you know Mad-Eye- nobody can ever be just a common thief according to him. I mean, the fact that she was able to get in means that there was a huge security flaw somewhere, but I reckon Mundungus might’ve set it up somehow, it’d be like him. Anyway, that’d be that, only she set loose some kind of boggart or phantom based on an old photo she must’ve had of Bellatrix Lestrange when she was younger, to keep us busy. Again, didn’t hurt anyone, but Sirius has been spitting ever since,” Tonks explained between bites.

“There was a woman with her? What did she look like?” Andromeda asked. Bellatrix had explained how she’d managed to use a dormant floo network between Maia’s house and Grimmauld Place to get in, but had insisted she was alone.

“Well yeah, she conjured the thing. Tall and twiggy, short curly brown hair, early thirties maybe? Had a bowl of pasta with her, for some reason. D’you know her, or something?”

“No, no. No I don’t,” Andromeda grimaced. She rubbed her temples with two fingers. Why did she get the feeling this was another one of Bella’s noble but misguided attempts at protecting her from something? She’d gotten into the habit of it before she’d even reached her teen years, and it almost never ended well. And apparently being a grown woman with an adult daughter still wasn’t enough to prove that she could bear some of Bellatrix’s burdens.

Andromeda spared another glance at her daughter, who was now holding her plate up to her face to lick it clean. It was probably hypocritical, begrudging Bella of her impulse to keep secrets for her sisters’ ‘own good’ when she was withholding her new knowledge from Dora for that very same reason. But Dora had enough on her plate- figuratively, at least- and Andy was under no illusion that dealing with a Bellatrix of any kind was anything other than a death sentence.

If she was really going to go through with this, then she definitely couldn’t do it alone. She wasn’t
going to drag Dora into it, and Ted… well, Ted had been an only child. He just didn’t get what it meant to have a sister, to be a sister. Brother. Whatever. Point was, he’d try to stop her the moment she explained what she planned on doing, and Andromeda didn’t want to have to have that argument until absolutely necessary. Easier to ask for forgiveness than permission, and all that.

Andy frowned to herself. It had been a long time since she'd even thought about getting in touch with Narcissa. She’d had her moments over the years, but Nymphadora’s safety had become her priority, and by now Narcissa had made her bed. But Dora was an auror now- she was routinely getting into exactly the kind of trouble Andromeda had wanted to protect her from. She had to accept that she could no longer use her daughter as an excuse to hide away from her younger sister. Divine forces had, for whatever reason, placed a star crossed Bellatrix into this world and provided her a second chance.

Not only for Bella, but for herself.

For her family.

Andromeda knew that she had a hand in its ruin. In the end, she’d chosen her new family over her old one. It was a decision she still didn’t regret, but it was always going to be a terrible ultimatum. In order for her to find happiness with Ted, to bring a wonderful daughter in the world, she had to sacrifice Bellatrix first. And perhaps this was her penance for that.

Chapter End Notes

Finally that good Bellamione content right? Sort of. Phene's acting shady as usual and Hermione's still a bit clueless. Hope you enjoyed this chapter, and I'll try to get the next one out soon.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Bella got bank

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Malfoy Manor could hardly be considered a cheerful place, but today it harboured an especially heavy malaise, one that followed Lord Voldemort wherever he appeared. His dark magic permeated his surroundings, a physical manifestation of his malevolence, and an indication of his current temperament. Lately the Dark Lord’s moods were volatile. He was both pleased with the progress his Death Eaters were making in their battle of attrition against the Order, yet disappointed that he could not yet move as overtly as he would like. Bellatrix had been punished for allowing the Boy Who Lived to escape from her grasp, but he wasn’t as furious as he might have been if he had orchestrated the event. It was an opportunity that she had failed to seize, but the Dark Lord’s plans were still on track.

Feeling the familiar burn on her right arm, Bellatrix immediately answered her master’s summons. She entered the atrium with her eyes lowered to the ground, apprehensive after her last session, which was spent getting reacquainted with Crucio.

“Step forward, Bellatrix,” Voldemort rasped. Without looking up from the floor, Bellatrix took a step closer to her Lord. He gazed upon her bowed head silently, and she held her breath as she felt rather than saw his crimson eyes scan her deference.

“You believe yourself to be my most faithful, my most loyal,” he said.

“Yes, my Lord,” Bellatrix hissed again, eagerly

“You please me, Bellatrix,” he said, and she shivered in rapture.

“Look at me.”

Her eyes were upon him in an instant. He showed no visible pleasure with her, and she knew better than to attempt to probe his mind, but it was no matter- she would always take his word as truth.

“Follow me,” he ordered, and stood up from his chair. Nagini slinked across his arm and down by his side, taking a place Bellatrix could only hope for. She trailed behind him through the manor, passing a handful of Death Eaters who stood aside and bowed at the waist as they glided through the halls. Soon they arrived upon the office that currently made his temporary dwellings in the manor, and the door swung shut behind them.

When the Dark Lord turned back around, it was not with wand in hand, but with an entirely new
artefact. In his grip he held a black painted skull with a pair red diamonds fixed in its eye sockets.

"Is this?" Bellatrix asked, cocking her head curiously.

"You would be correct in guessing that this is our late friend, Gellert Grindelwald," Voldemort said. Bellatrix hummed appreciatively as he allowed her to caress its cranium, her nails sliding across the bone with the utmost tenderness.

"You will place this deep inside your vault at Gringotts. I needn’t have to warn you, but if you fail me in any way by losing this possession, not even death will keep you safe from my wrath," he warned candidly, and allowed her to take it in her hands.

"Yes, my lord," she whispered. It was a threat she knew he’d deliver, her Lord was never one for exaggeration.

Hermione stared stubbornly at the wall as she scratched Crookshanks behind his ears. If she weren’t so irritated, it would have been amusing; it was almost always Hermione berating the boys for dangerous behaviour, not the other way around. But she was still in one piece, wasn’t she? The boys had no right to doubt her ability to take care of herself, really. Crookshanks yowled as she tugged on his fur a little too hard.

"Sorry Crooks," she muttered, and he warbled in reply as she let him off her lap.

"She could have killed you!" Ron tried to catch her attention again, and Hermione swung her head to look back at him. He backed up a step when he met her glare, but he didn’t drop the grim scowl he wore.

"No, she couldn’t, Ron. That’s the whole point of the oath we swore," Hermione repeated. As much as she understood their worry, they really should know by now that she would only accept rational arguments.

"Honestly, I’m fine," she stressed. “Pennie wasn’t even there, and Carina didn’t try anything,” she added.

"The fact that you were alone with her isn’t exactly comforting," Harry pointed out. Hermione huffed in frustration. Harry had always had an annoying habit of excusing himself from her and Ron’s arguments until suddenly it was a topic he was invested in.

"Look, Carina’s not too far from a typical Slytherin bully, but Pennie is just- she’s unhinged, I think. I really think you’re focusing on the wrong person here,” Hermione argued. For a moment, Harry seemed almost convinced, but Ron didn’t give him much time to think on it.

"You said it yourself though, she’s a bloody Slytherin git! And that’s how Malfoy started, wasn’t it?"

"Malfoy’s much worse than she is, and I’ve already been dealing with him for years now, haven’t I?"

"Not voluntarily," Ron replied. Hermione pursed her lips- maybe he had a point there, but still!
“She’s a bit, well, she’s mean, but I think it’s more of a reflex than anything. She really wasn’t that bad, once we started working.”

"I don't see why you're defending her, 'Mione. You know what her mum did to Neville's parents! To Sirius!” he called out, and Harry nodded in support.

"She's not her mother, Ronald!” Hermione shot back. That was the crux it. Carina had a… brittle, personality. But it just didn’t sit well with her that they could damn her for Bellatrix’s actions, even though she had very well saved their lives at Malfoy Manor.

Hermione knew intimately what it felt like to be judged based on who your parents were. Ron was sympathetic, as he was used to being judged for his family being poor and considered blood traitors by most, but nobody really hated the Weasleys. A clear example was Percy- he had felt as though he had to work harder than most in order to get recognition, but there was no systemic disadvantage that prevented him from rising to great heights in the Ministry.

But people hated her parents, despite never knowing them. Because they were muggles, and that was enough for people to decide that they were worthless. Even Arthur, who was enamoured with muggle society, held very little respect for muggles as a whole. He valued their lives and their right to exist without harassment from prejudiced wizards, but his whole department behaved as if they knew what was best for muggles without really considering their perspective in the process.

Hermione doubted Harry would understand her very well either. It wasn’t his fault that people kept comparing him to his parents, and his pride for his heritage was well deserved. However, growing up with the Dursleys as his main exposure to muggles had skewed his view of them somewhat, and she couldn’t blame him for that either. It was just that, well, he didn’t really relate to her when she wanted to embrace her muggle family, who were intelligent, kind and impressive even without magic. To Harry, the magical world was an escape from a hellhole, but she saw value in her muggle roots. The fact that wizards, even ones such as the Weasleys, believed that there couldn't be anything wrong with House Elf slavery because they enjoyed serving their masters so much, was just one case for the importance of viewing the magical world through a modern lens.

Which was all to say, she understood what it was like for people to decide they already knew everything they needed to know about you just because of your parents. For people to decide they hated you because of your parents. Carina couldn’t help being attached to Bellatrix Lestrange any more than Hermione could help that she was born in the muggle world.

“You can’t blame her for things she hasn’t done. Yes, she’s arrogant, but I think that a lot of that attitude comes from a defense mechanism, and when you get past that she loses a lot of hot air,” Hermione continued.

"What does that even mean?” Ron asked exasperatedly. Well, it sounded better in her head.

"It means, Ronald, that I want to give her a chance. She’s already proven she can help us- and we ought to do the same. I don’t think she’s known much kindness in her life. She and Pennie don’t really seem to get on too well, and she’s probably grown up around snotty Purebloods, maybe even Death Eaters, and she still has the conviction to fight against them, so there must be some good in her. But you’re so worried she might be a Death Eater, you don’t even realise that your attitude could very well drive her right to them! If she thinks the Order is worse than Death Eaters, what does that say about us?” Hermione ranted.

In the corner of her eye she saw Harry scratch behind his neck, studiously avoiding looking at her. It did nothing to sate her ire; she might have been getting through to him, but he was never willing to stand up to Ron on her behalf. She hated being so angry with them, but they never did make it
easy for her. Back in their earlier school years they could drive her to tears so quickly, but now she
only had rage left to give. So instead she got up and slammed the door behind her furiously,
knowing that if she stayed any longer she might say something she’d regret later.

Hermione was still wandering the hallways of Grimmauld Place long after everyone else had gone
to bed. If there was one thing to be grateful for in this dreary house, it was that it was vast enough
that she could avoid running into anyone so long as she took the right turns. And it happened to be
a right turn that took her towards the library.

She had been warned not to touch any of the books, because almost all of them were covered in
curses that would leave anyone outside of the Black family tree with some nasty disfigurement.
That fact had caused a bit of a debate after Carina and Pennie’s break in, and although there was
little mystery to the incident now that Hermione knew who Carina was and why she broke in,
everybody else had been flummoxed. Sirius was still convinced that it had been Bellatrix who had
broken in despite being so uncharacteristic, and those who believed that Pennie had broken in alone
assumed that she had enough skill in cursebreaking to lift a relatively ordinary book from the
library with little trouble.

Nevertheless, the library books were a forbidden fruit to her, and there was nothing more
unbearable to Hermione than having all this knowledge available, but just outside her grasp. She
hadn’t asked Sirius to try to retrieve any books for her because she didn’t want to give him the
wrong impression, but Carina… well, maybe if she could get the girl to warm up for her, she might
give her a library card of her own, so to speak. The thought made Hermione a little giddy. If she
could convince Carina that it could help her with her project, then it probably wouldn’t be very
difficult to persuade her. She hadn’t had a problem with her reading the very book she’d stolen,
after all.

And, well, maybe there was a spiteful little part of her that gained pleasure from the idea of going
straight back to Carina to ask for her help, knowing that Harry and Ron would be against it.

The next morning, Hermione pushed her irritation to the back of her mind. Molly had placed a
plate of pancake stacks soaked in maple syrup in front of her, and it would have been difficult to
stay mad even if she wanted to. Ron had the decency to look abashed, giving her a nudge with his
shoulder as he sat down next to her.

“Sorry for getting cross with you last night, we should have trusted that you can take care of
yourself,” he mumbled. He didn’t seem too keen to withdraw his comments about Carina, but she’d
take what she could get. Hermione offered him a small smile.

“It’s okay, Ron. I understand you were worried, and I should have told you where I was going and I
really shouldn’t have stayed out so late, but I’m glad if you can trust me,” she admitted. It did
genuinely make her feel better to settle that issue, and she couldn’t stay mad at Harry and Ron for
too long, not when they were only concerned for her. However, it didn’t mean she had to bow to
their apprehension about Carina- or about anything, for that matter.

Part of the reason why she didn’t want to bring it up again was because she herself didn’t really
know where her defensiveness was coming from. Carina may not have been Bellatrix, but she was
a bit of a prat. An admittedly dangerous prat, who alongside her aunt- no, her guardian- had tied
her to a chair. But that was only after Ron had attacked her first.

Carina was admittedly the most interesting person she’d met in a long time from a purely academic
standpoint. There were very few people she knew who could keep up with her on topics of magical physics and theory, let alone debate them. And, well, maybe she just wanted some female company after being sardined in Grimmauld Place with Harry and Ron after graduation. It was surprisingly easy to justify to herself because in the end, Hermione wasn’t like them, recklessly barrelling headfirst into trouble just because something sat with them the wrong way. Instead she was calculated and meticulous, and would assess all the possible risks going in. She could handle Carina, no problem.

“Say, Ron, do you think I could borrow Pig? I need to send a letter to my parents,” Hermione asked.

“Sure, go ahead ‘Mione,” he nodded, shovelling food into his mouth. Hermione got up and left to go find Pigwidgeon. Ron, of course, didn’t know that her parents had given her a Nokia mobile phone to call them with over the summer. It was a bulky brick of a thing that only worked outside the wards of Grimmauld Place, but with the increasing presence of Death Eater forces seeping into the Ministry and wider wizarding society, muggle technology was more secure than anything else right now.

But she doubted Carina had a mobile phone of her own, and well- what Ron didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

Paris was bustling with summer festivities, and the magical fraction of the city was no less jubilant. Place Cachée was not too dissimilar from Diagon Alley, lined with all sorts of shops and stalls, selling cauldrons here and quidditch supplies there. It seemed cheerier, perhaps for the lack of Azkaban’s most wanted posters. Bellatrix presumed the Beauxbatons students must be out for their summer holidays too, because gaggling groups of teenagers flocked from store to store. It suited her just fine, because with ‘Pennie’ by her side she looked like just another student in the sea of adolescents, making a shopping trip with her auntie.

“You don’t need to follow me around, you know,” Bellatrix snipped as Phene trotted along next to her.

“I don’t need to, but I always enjoy a good day out. Besides, I was more than happy to come as a phoenix. You’re the one who thought it was too conspicuous.”

“Too gaudy is more like it,” Bellatrix scoffed.

She was in her Carina Blanche glamours again- the three stooges might believe they’d already uncovered her identity, but that didn’t mean she was going to parade around as ‘Bellatrix Lestrange’s daughter’ in public. The main catalyst for their trip to Paris sat proudly at the end of the street, just like its counterpart in London. Gringotts, filled with gritty Goblins and an underbelly of gold, was going to have to pay its dues for its part in sending her here.

The building’s interior was identical to the one in Britain with its white marble flooring and thick columns, and Bellatrix could have imagined that they shared a pocket dimension if it were wizards rather than Goblins running the place. At least in here, where Goblin law ruled, she didn’t have to fear her counterpart’s fugitive status. Bellatrix approached an open podium, clearing her throat to
catch the attention of the Goblin behind the desk. He looked up at her and sneered.

“Yes?”

“I’d like to make a withdrawal from my account,” Bellatrix declared.

“And what is your name?” he asked.

“Bellatrix Black.”

The Goblin gave her a flabbergasted look; it was an expression Bellatrix was growing increasingly familiar with. Quickly shifting to a sly grin, the Goblin seemed almost amused.

“And you would be willing to take a blood test to prove this claim?” he asked, his shark toothed smile contorting his gnarled face.

“Of course,” Bellatrix returned with an impish grin of her own. The Goblin’s smirk dropped, and his opaque eyes glinted calculatingly. He must have presumed her either entirely bonkers or entirely cocksure, and either one was disturbing in its own way.

From underneath his desk he pulled out a steel dagger, and a thin sheet of parchment. He scrawled her name on the paper, and held his clubbed fist out. Bellatrix gave him her hand and didn’t so much as flinch when he dragged the dagger across her palm. Blood welled to the surface, and he squeezed her hand so that the rivulets trickled down onto the litmus parchment below. The bright crimson blotches began to swirl into a rich gold as they drained into the ink. With her name now glittering with her certified blood, the Goblin had no choice to accept her identity. An aggrieved scowl marred his face.

“You’ll have to come with me to the anomalies department,” the Goblin stepped off his desk and opened a gate for Bellatrix and Phene to follow him through.

“Come this way, Miss… Black,” the Goblin sighed. “Will the Firebird be coming?”

Bellatrix was confused until she noticed Phene looming over her shoulder, shooting the Goblin a glare disguised as a wry smile, which he was returning in kind. She should leave Phene behind, but the animosity was kind of entertaining.

“Yes, she will,” she said, and the Goblin visibly withered.

He guided them down a gilded corridor, where passing Goblins gave them skeevy glances. After taking a few twists and turns that Bellatrix was sure only existed to give the impression that the interior was more vast than it truly was, they arrived at the ‘anomalies department’.

Sitting behind the lectern was the oldest Goblin Bellatrix had ever seen in her life. His bushy eyebrows hid his eyes completely and he wore a thick beard that could have rivalled Dumbledore’s, which trailed down long past his feet. Above him was a portrait of what looked like himself in his younger years- equally as ugly, only slightly less hairy. Vard the Antique was what read on his plaque- it was fitting, but Bellatrix had to wonder how esteemed such a title was in Goblin society.

“Who is this?” the old Goblin rattled.

“This is Bellatrix Black, as confirmed by our blood tests,” the first Goblin ground out.

“How is it, that one Bellatrix Black and one Bellatrix Lestrange née Black can exist
simultaneously?” He pondered to himself, but nonetheless awaited an answer.

“Time travel and or dimensional displacement,” Phene piped up.

“Ah… Do I know you?” he raised one bushy eyebrow, revealing the beady black eye underneath as he scrutinised her form.

“No, I’m sure you don’t,” she replied, shrugging one shoulder. He grunted, but looked down towards Bellatrix.

“So, you want access to your vault, hm? Well, seeing as you’ve passed the blood test, which does allow you to make a withdrawal of a maximum of one thousand galleons. However, to retrieve any possessions or any larger sum, you must pass the eligibility tests of your vault in Britain,” the Goblin explained.

“Can you at least tell me what’s in it?” Bellatrix asked. She didn’t really know if the Goblins kept stock of exactly what was in their vaults, but she wouldn’t be surprised if they did.

“That is not information I can give you at the present time,” the Goblin replied.

“But I would have access to all of it, if I passed the tests in London?” Bellatrix asked.

“Theoretically, but I imagine you’ll have trouble doing so. The tests will determine what you will be eligible for, but there are few key issues. While you and Madam Lestrange share blood and entitlements, you still may be considered as separate entities.

Your marriage to Rodolphus Lestrange causes some amount of complication- you, for all intents and purposes, are an unwed maiden. Bellatrix Lestrange, however, is avowed to the Lestrange family. You are entitled to the full extent of your dowry, yet I’m sure that you can imagine that there is a certain… grey area, as to how much of Madam Lestrange’s wealth you can access, considering that it is tied to the Lestrange line while you are not.

And while time travel tends to recognise both witches as having a shared identity, if you do come from a different dimension, that dimension may be separate enough from this one that you and your alternate self aren’t identified as the same person. That you passed the blood test is a hopeful sign, but it may not be enough for you to access the full extent of Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault.”

Bellatrix fought back a groan; she really hated magic philosophy. There was still one request she had to make, however.

“I believe that I had an inheritance, in 1968, from the will of Maia Black. Would it be possible for me to recover those items?”

The corresponding document conjured itself in front of Vard, and he tipped his glasses forward as he scanned it.

“Maia Black’s estate has already been claimed by one Bellatrix Black, and the Snowgum wand in question is no longer in Gringott’s possession,” he established.

That was unwelcome news. She couldn’t be certain about Maia’s estate, because it was entirely possible that she had claimed it for herself the moment the wards accepted her on arrival, but the wand was a different story. So far Bellatrix’s dimension-travel theory hinged upon Maia’s will not being fulfilled in this dimension, but if that were true the wand should still be waiting for her at Gringotts. Unless…
Bellatrix spared a glance at Phene, who was entertaining herself by mapping the grain variations on the marble floor. Her future self had been mysteriously absent, for someone so obnoxiously present.

“If that’s all, would you like to make your withdrawal, Miss Black?” The first Goblin caught her attention.

“Yes, I’d like to withdraw the full one thousand galleons I’m entitled to,” Bellatrix decided. It was far more than she needed, but it would save her from having to make multiple trips. Besides, it was better off in her pocket than Lestrange’s.

With pockets stuffed full of money, Bellatrix strode down Place Cachée as if the world was at her fingertips. Because when you had the fortune of the Blacks, there was nothing money couldn’t buy.

“Damn that I can’t access the whole thing though,” Bellatrix muttered. “That would have been nice.”

Phene looked down at her in amusement, stifling a laugh at Bellatrix’s petulant pout.

“I’m sure you’ll make do without,” she assuaged. Bellatrix’s frown deepened, but she wasn’t going to bring up the issue of the missing second wand just yet.

“I suppose,” she grudgingly offered.

“Well, now that we’ve pulled out some money, where’s our next stop?” Phene asked.

“I need to buy a pensieve. And a radio, and maybe a few other things,” Bellatrix replied, ticking off her mental list.

“All right then. You should find most of what you need in the shops here, but head down Allée d’Ombre if you want anything off the menu, so to speak. There’s a bar down Rue Girardon called le Griffon Buveur, I’ll meet you there when you’re all done,” Phene said, adjusting her hat.

“What? Where are you going?”

“Me? I’m going to buy groceries. We need those, you know. To eat. You can come with me if you’d like,” Phene offered.

“No thanks,” Bellatrix replied, and took off. Phene stared after her and muttered something to herself before wandering off in the opposite direction.

Bellatrix made quick work of her shopping trip, picking up a few odds and ends here and there, occasionally stopping to buy a new skirt or a nice green silk ribbon or two. Acquiring a pensieve was even easier than she had anticipated, given that the French Ministry’s laws on restricted and ‘dangerous’ classified items were far more lax than its British counterpart. Nevertheless, Bellatrix did end up scouring Allée d’Ombre to get her hands on a Poltergeist expunger, which she sent back home with a tap of her wand.

When she got bored with window shopping she decided to indulge Phene and meet at the reconnaissance point, only to find her sitting as a Phoenix on one of the tables outside, receiving a
head scratch from a passing child.

“You’re terrible,” she said flatly.

“What? I used that nifty little charm of yours to send the shopping home already, I thought you’d appreciate it. The stench of seafood can be a bit clingy, after all. I’m making a Paella tonight, see,” Phene said. Bellatrix inhaled deeply, and tried to exhaust her frustration with the following sigh. So much for trying to be subtle.

“You’re killing me, Phoenicis,” she grit out, unwilling to say much else lest she get caught in a conversation that to everyone else seemed very one-sided. Nonetheless she held her arm out for Phene to hop onto, and apparated them out before Phene could pull her phoenixfire trick out in the middle of the street.

Phene stumbled off her arm when they landed back home, letting out a wretched croak. Yet Bellatrix couldn’t find it in herself to mock her for it, because sitting on the picnic table on the garden outside chez Maia were Andromeda and Narcissa.

Their faces were grim, and they looked like they’d both rather be anywhere else but right next to each other. But they were here.

Chapter End Notes

Writing Gringotts was fun because it poses a kind of philosophical question: is someone who traveled through time still the same person as their future/past self? Does the magic rely simply on biological chemistry, or does it take a person's sense of identity into account? All very fun.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Andy and Cissy realise that Bella is still, in fact, a disaster

Andromeda had seen her sister many times in the past few years. The Malfoys were prominent in almost all aspects of Wizarding politics, with their fingers in every pie from the school board to the stock exchange. It was thus only given that Narcissa could be found dutifully at her husband’s side at public events, making the front cover of The Daily Prophet every now and then. She was a far cry from the young girl Andromeda once knew, and yet so familiar nonetheless.

She already knew that there was no use sending Narcissa an owl, as she would probably throw the letter straight into the fireplace without a second thought. Her Manor was far too well warded to make a surprise appearance, but Andromeda wasn’t interested in that option either. She knew Narcissa was housing Bellatrix somehow, even if the aurors were incapable of proving that fact, and she had no interest in running into the this timeline version of her older sister. It would take too long to wait for Narcissa to leave the Manor of her own accord, so she would need to draw her out somehow. The thought crossed her mind that Narcissa would most definitely come running if she believed Draco’s safety was in question, but that would probably work too well. It wouldn’t do for her to show up with Bellatrix and an armada of Death Eaters alongside her.

The idea slowly formed in her head... how to contact her, raise her interest but not her concerns, and corner her.

Narcissa headed to the private room in the Onyx Pearl, one of London’s most exclusive magical clubs. She hadn’t planned to visit tonight, but a summons from a mongoose patronus about information regarding a leak in the top offices of Porlock&Key Inc. was an offer she was unwilling to pass up. Only when she entered the room, her mysterious benefactor wasn’t so anonymous after all.

"After all these years, Andromeda? Why the sudden change of heart?" Narcissa asked waspishly.

“I haven’t had a change of heart. However, there is a situation that requires both our attention,” Andromeda put down her drink.

“How did you even afford this place?” Narcissa sniffed. It was no secret that Ted Tonks did not hold a fortune even near that of the Black’s, and booking a private room would have cost a month’s worth of his salary.

“I was willing to pay the price,” Andromeda shrugged. “I doubt you will feel the need to compensate me, but I’m sure when I explain the situation you’ll understand that it is worth every knut.”

“I’ll give you one minute to speak your peace before I leave,” Narcissa offered dispassionately.
Unless Andromeda were begging for forgiveness, she didn’t really want to hear it, but if she were serious enough to call her here then it was probably worth giving her a chance. Storming out or otherwise causing a scene was more Bellatrix’s style, anyway.

"Our sister is a time travelling lunatic, and turned up at my house last night," Andromeda replied, equally as steely.

"It wouldn't have been the first time she's tried to kill you," Narcissa said, studying her nails nonchalantly.

"She didn't try to kill me, Cissy. She didn't travel through time from the future, she came from the past- from sixty eight."

"And why should I be concerned about this?" Narcissa finally shifted her gaze back to her sister. Andromeda knew her sister was just acting contrary out of spite, but she wasn’t about to indulge her in this little game.

"Because, you daft girl, this Bellatrix is about as wise and mature as your twit of a son, and she’s equally as impressionable. We need to help her get back to her own time before she gets some ludicrous idea about saving our family or something," she explained.

“And you really expect me to believe all this?” Narcissa challenged. Andromeda smirked cruelly.

“I sure hope you do, seeing as she even visited you before she came to see me. Told me that she got ten feet from you, but had to depart when her future self got a hold of her," Andromeda said, feeling a little smug as Narcissa’s façade broke upon realising just who had broken into her house that day. The mystery of the little upstart with an unnerving resemblance to Andromeda who was able to survive an altercation with Bellatrix was a lot less disconcerting if it actually were Bellatrix. Finally she seemed to appreciate the gravity of the situation- Bellatrix was still particularly passionate about her family at that point, not having yet projected that fanaticism onto the Dark Lord. And if the Dark Lord found out she was visiting this timeline, then she was in far more danger than she realised.

“I know what's left of our sister can't be saved," Andromeda continued, "but she can be. And I need your help because she's running around in France with a stranger as if she's the saviour of our timeline."

Narcissa hesitated for a moment.

“Yes, that does sound like her, doesn't it?” she mused quietly to herself. Andromeda’s resolve softened a touch.

“I don’t want your forgiveness,” she said, although the words rang hollow. “What I want is your help. Not for me, but for her.”

“And where was this attitude thirty years ago? Twenty years ago? Why should I believe you suddenly care about Bellatrix’s wellbeing?” Narcissa steeled herself again.

“I always have!” Andromeda yelled. “I have always cared about her, and you are just as guilty as I for letting her fall so far.”

“How dare you,” Narcissa seethed, “I may not be innocent, but don’t you dare compare yourself to me, not after what you did.”
“I had to put my daughter's safety first, Cissy. You know that Bellatrix would not have spared her life,” Andromeda railed on. Narcissa neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement; Andromeda was likely correct, but she knew better than to assume anything of Bellatrix.

“Please, Cissy. You didn't understand then, but I know you do now. Don't tell me you wouldn't pack your bags and run in a heartbeat if you believed Bella was going to turn on Draco,” she persisted. That was something Narcissa had to begrudgingly agree with. And even though her son was proud, pure of blood, unlike Andy's brat- she understood. Her duty as a mother would always come before her duty as a sister.

But she wouldn’t give Andromeda the indulgence of her admission.

“And why should I go with you? She found me before, I’m sure she’ll find me again,” Narcissa said.

“Because I already know where she’s staying. You can wait for her to go looking for you again- although I doubt she will, seeing as you gave her such a warm welcome, or you can come with me. It suits me much better if you want to stay and sulk by yourself, but the only reason I’m extending the offer is for Bellatrix’s sake,” Andromeda snapped.

Narcissa schooled her face into its usual frigid mask, unwilling to let her temper flare or worse, to express humility. They endured a short staring contest- Narcissa knew she had lost the argument, but she still had the patience to maintain her dignity. As she expected, Andromeda cracked.

“Look,” she sighed, “she might not think she needs our help, but she's going to get it anyway.”

And that they could agree on.

Andromeda had held on her promise, and they met again the very next day in a discreet joint where neither of them would seem too out of place. From there they floo’d to Maia Black’s estate, finding that the wards invited them in due to their Black blood. Andromeda found herself quite taken with the place- it was near enough to the standard of luxury she had been raised in, but was homely enough that it wasn’t as foreboding as their childhood home. Still, there was no doubt that Bellatrix had claimed this castle as her own. There were books scattered all over the living room, hair ties here and there where she had plainly abandoned them, and most of the blackout curtains were drawn closed. Narcissa turned her nose up at the state of the place- Bellatrix certainly needed a better house elf if they were leaving her constant trail of mess behind.

That Bellatrix hadn’t greeted them yet was a sure sign that she wasn’t home, which was a notion that disturbed the sisters more than was probably rational. Neither felt entirely comfortable waiting around in a house they hadn’t been formally invited into either, so they opted to enjoy the sunshine and wait outside. Only the garden was peculiar; there were a flock of chickens scratching around under a score of citrus trees, and all around the landscaping was arranged in a professional style that Narcissa knew from personal experience that house elves couldn’t achieve.
Finally popping onto the grounds with a tipsy Phoenix stumbling off her arm, Bellatrix made her appearance. Despite her leaner yet healthier frame and glamoured features, there was no mistaking their sister. For starters, she was dressed nearly head to toe in black, but when she turned to look at them it was the emotion in her dark eyes that betrayed her most of all.

Bella, young Bella, untouched by years in Azkaban- by years of service to the Dark Lord. Her face lit up in the brightest smile Narcissa had seen on her sister's face in all those years. Innocence was the wrong word to describe Bellatrix with, but compared to what she would become… she radiated it. It shone in her unrestrained relief to see her sisters, the way she bounced on her heels in excitement, and the complete absence of her usual edginess. Of course, by this age she would already be very cynical and toughened by their parent’s abuse- even if she only recognised Cygnus’ for its physicality- but she wasn’t censoring herself the way she had learned to under the Dark Lord’s tutelage.

Andromeda’s betrayal had yet to taint her sense of familial loyalty, although Narcissa knew that Bellatrix hadn’t originally been as offended by the act of marrying a mudblood as much as it was the fallout of their father’s wrath that scarred her. Yet Narcissa was grateful that this Bellatrix was not so jaded because when she swallowed her in a hug Bellatrix embraced her just as tight. She choked out a thick laugh, and Narcissa felt tears prick her eyes. When she pulled back, she could see that Bella was struggling with the same issue, though she played down her effort to blink back her tears by letting out another chuckle.

"Not such a little sister anymore, hm?" she joked.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,” Narcissa teased back.

Bellatrix turned to Andromeda and shot her a short glare; a promise that she was going to get a stern talking to later, but Andromeda smirked and shrugged it off.

“Let’s go inside, shall we? I’ll have to give you a tour of the place- I’ve been thinking of giving it a proper name, now that it’s a formal property of the Black estate,” Bellatrix said, and guided them into the house. She gave them a cursory tour, taking them through the multiple open living spaces surrounding the kitchen, pointing out bathrooms and bedrooms here and there. She skipped her study, already envisioning their distaste at the state she’d left it in, and showed them to the music hall as the finale. Both Andromeda and Narcissa were suitably impressed, as they should be. This was what Bellatrix had wanted after inheriting a house in France all to herself, not a bloody time travel escape.

With that finished, Bellatrix fixed them some tea and a cheese platter like a proper hostess should, then kicked her feet up on the coffee table.

“Tell me about what you’ve been up to for the past three decades, Cissy. Does Lucius treat you well? Do I have to kill him?” Bellatrix asked.

“Our marriage is perfectly fine, Bella. The fact that he’s still alive and you haven’t killed him yet is a testament to that,” she said. Narcissa had to stop herself from cringing- she hadn’t meant to refer to her sister in front of- well, her sister- who looked just as uncomfortable as she felt. She hastily moved on.

“We have a son together, named Draco. He’s about your age, in fact. I wonder if you’d like to meet?”

Bellatrix thought about it for a moment. Did she want to meet him? Admittedly, she was interested in seeing if whatever spawn Narcissa might have produced was worth the Black half of their blood,
but she didn’t know if she could trust him. He was half Malfoy, after all. She wanted to like him, but didn’t want to set herself up for disappointment, and if he met her expectations, then it would be strange going back to her own timeline only to meet him again as a newborn. But her curiosity won out.

“We’ll see,” she obliged. “I don’t want him knowing the truth of who I am, but I imagine he’d see right through my disguise- I don’t have any children by the way, do I?”

“No,” Narcissa and Andromeda replied instantly, and all three of them were relieved for it.

“Thank Gods for small mercies,” Bella muttered.

“Now, I suppose I have to ask, how exactly did you get here Bella?”

Bellatrix casually relayed her time travel tale to Narcissa, who slowly absorbed it all. Having already heard it once, Andromeda took the liberty of asking for clarification on certain details- the exact phrasing on Maia’s riddle, the date of her departure, and other such things.

“So you’ve been living on your own- without a house elf to maintain the place? What have you been eating?” Narcissa worried.

“I can figure out my way around a kitchen, Cissa, it’s not like it’s hard,” she bluffed. Narcissa simply looked scandalised, and Andromeda rolled her eyes. Phene let out a halfhearted caw of reproach for losing credit for her cooking, catching the attention of all three of them from where she rested in front of the fireplace.

“It’s an impressive bird,” Narcissa said, appraising Phene’s plumage with a keen eye. “She puts Lucius’ peacocks to shame.”

“I suppose, if you’re into that kind of thing,” Bellatrix dismissed.

“I was informed that there was somebody else with you in Grimmauld Place,” Andromeda continued. Bellatrix’s gaze wandered back over to Phene. Her eyelid blinked open as she felt Bellatrix’s eyes on her and ruffled her feathers in the approximation of a shrug, then settled back down.

“An illusion I conjured, of course,” Bellatrix explained eventually. “Throw the scent off, and all that.”

Neither Andromeda nor Narcissa looked fully convinced, so Bellatrix beat them to the punch.

“Believe me if you will, or don’t- but I promise I’m not in any… immediate danger,” her eyes flickered to Phene again, “I have everything on my end under control. It’s everything else I’m concerned about- I really don’t want a dementor showing up on my doorstep,” she said.

“Bellatrix, I’m sorry I didn’t do anything to help you that day. I didn’t recognise you-” Narcissa started.

“Because I wanted to remain hidden,” Bellatrix assuaged, “and for good reason too, because if the other me knew who I was then we’d have a real situation on our hands.”

Andromeda and Narcissa sat on that sobering thought; there was really no telling what Bellatrix Lestrange would do if she got her hands on her past self. She might brand her with the dark mark there and then, getting around to indoctrinating her to the Death Eater’s ideology later, or she might exercise the spells in her arsenal once she realised that her younger self was more stubborn than she
liked. But no matter what situation they could envision, none of them were pretty.

"I have to kill her. I think it's the reason I'm here," Bellatrix admitted. "I mean, this timeline's gone terribly wrong for me to end up in such a hideous state. And I have to be the one to fix it- it can't be anyone else," Bellatrix shook her head. Narcissa’s teacup went crashing to the ground, and Andromeda simply stared in shock.

"Are you insane? No- don't answer that," she choked out.

"Why me? And why now? It’s the only thing that makes sense!" Bellatrix argued.

"That makes no sense at all!" Narcissa cried.

“Look, I’m not going to go out tomorrow and go and chase her down, but the time will come and I don’t think she’ll accept death from anyone else” Bellatrix stated. It was a flimsy argument, particularly given that hunting her down had been her plan before she realised how unequipped she was to deal with herself with an additional two-to-three decades of experience. Narcissa and Andromeda both looked as though they had aged an additional decade of their own, with Andromeda’s head thrown back and Narcissa’s buried in her hands.

Bellatrix was more than a little offended by their reactions, but she decided to drop the subject seeing as she was outnumbered on this one. Instead she steered the conversation over to more neutral, impersonal topics that she hoped wouldn’t stoke the thinly veiled ire Narcissa and Andromeda were directing at each other. For the next few hours they discussed the changing fashion trends of the recent decades (Pureblood styles were unchanging as always, but brighter colours were a new trend), if Fudge or any of his predecessors as Minister had any competence (they didn’t), and who had gotten paired off and produced offspring with who.

Bellatrix found it vaguely amusing when Cissy and Andy began boasting about their own children, not-so-subtly trying to outdo the other. *This* was what happened when you only had one child to dote on, she supposed, but it was getting increasingly annoying when their bragging turned hostile.

“'I get it, you both have wonderful birthing talents,” Bellatrix butted in before they could start arguing over the privileges of being born a Metamorphmagus. However, as they exhausted the safer lines of conversation, it quickly became apparent just how long they had spent catching up.

Locked in a battle of wills, neither Andromeda nor Narcissa wanted to leave first and give the other an opportunity to speak with Bellatrix alone. However, Narcissa ultimately gave in- the pressure of Death Eaters and a certain Dark Lord awaiting her return won out over the need to prevent Andromeda from getting in Bella’s ear. But she would be back, without Andromeda and on her own terms, and she would be sure to warn Bellatrix of the truth about their sister.

“I wish I could stay longer, Bella, but I wouldn’t want anyone curious as to why I’ve been out so long. But I will be back, I promise you,” Narcissa said and squeezed Bellatrix’s shoulders.

“I trust you, Cissy,” Bellatrix assured her, and Narcissa’s resolve almost wavered. Slowly she extricated herself and used the floo to return to Malfoy Manor, leaving Andromeda and Bellatrix alone.

“Cissy’s done well for herself, hasn’t she?” Bellatrix said pointedly.

“You know very well that it was a stroke of luck that she and Lucius actually liked each other,” Andromeda dismissed, “but nonetheless I am… happy for her. No matter the bad blood between us, I’d never wish an unhappy marriage upon her.”
Bellatrix frowned awkwardly. Her own marriage was one she didn’t want to dwell on, but was it possible she and Rodolphus had found happiness, or at least an ambivalent partnership? The fact that they had no children together was something she found promising—they either had a mutual disdain for them or simply chose to avoid each other, which was far better than her being shoved into the role of a housewife.

“And your marriage is happy?” Bellatrix asked dubiously.

“Yes.”

The firmness of Andromeda’s tone and the hardness in her posture left no room for argument, so at least Bellatrix could be sure that living with a mudblood for the past how many years hadn’t eroded her pride, even if it should have. Eventually Andromeda relaxed, and a soft smile graced her lips.

“As much as I’d like to enjoy your likely abysmal attempt at cooking,” she said, “I should get going too. Ted and Dora know I don’t have much of a social life, and I wouldn’t want them getting suspicious either. I doubt Narcissa will want to coordinate with me again, but I’ll send an owl to let you know when I can get away.”

Bellatrix pulled a face when Andromeda mentioned her husband, but didn’t protest as Andy gave her a parting hug.

“We’re here to help, Bella. No matter what, don’t forget that,” she said as she disappeared in a bout of green flame. Bellatrix quirked her lips.

It was obvious her sisters were both keeping something from her, and it felt like an uncomfortable itch in a place she couldn’t scratch. She was going to have to grill them later when they inevitably came individually, but she couldn’t exactly begrudge them for withholding information. Bellatrix’s eyes wandered over to where Phene sat perched on the windowsill, her long neck tucked under one wing. No, she wouldn’t bother her sisters with such nonsense right now.

Bellatrix woke up feeling the most well rested she’d been since landing in the nineties. After finishing her morning stretches, she headed downstairs to grab a croissant for breakfast. She hadn’t intended to swap her usual English breakfast for a more French style one just because she was living here now, but without a house elf or Phene to cook bacon and eggs for her it was all she could do to throw together some yoghurt and fruit. Downstairs Phene was still sleeping, curled up on a couch as usual. She hadn’t claimed any of the bedrooms yet, and probably wouldn’t any time soon given that she hadn’t taken a room when Maia had owned the place either.

A tiny, fat owl slammed into the window, stirring Phene from her sleep as it flew in circles around the room, screeching its little head off.

“What the hell?” Bellatrix growled, and upon hearing her voice the bird seemed to remember its target and dove at her aimlessly. It took little effort for Bella to step out of the way as it skidded across the kitchen countertop, and finally she noticed the letter attached to its foot. She untied it from its leg, noting that it was addressed to Carina rather than Bellatrix, meaning that there were only three people who it could be from. Bellatrix registered a faint buzzing sound as she opened
the letter, but ignored it as she began to read.

“Carina,

I was hoping you might agree to another visit, you could set the time and date of course. A few of the tomes in Grimmauld Place have caught my eye that I think might have relevant information on the Damocles Theorem, and I was hoping we might be able to figure a way to circumvent the enchantments on them so that I could bring them to you, or for you to get them without revealing yourself to the Order.

P.S. I’m sorry about Pigwidgeon, but I had to borrow him- I don’t have access to any other owl right now.

- Hermione”

The buzzing grew louder, and Bellatrix slammed down the letter in frustration.

“What is that noise -“

“Delivered! Delivered! I delivered! Yes, yes!”

Bellatrix’s jaw fell slack as she watched Pig fly circles around the room with horrified chagrin.

“Owls,” Phene muttered derisively, “stupid beasts, the lot of them.”

Bellatrix snapped her eyes down to look at her.

“What did you do?” She hissed.

“What do you mean what did I do? Honestly-“

“Why can I hear that-“

“Pig did good! Pig gets treats! Pig did good! Pig gets treats!”

Bellatrix growled and pressed her hands against the sides of her head.

“That!”

“Why should I know?” Phene whined. “You’re the one who can talk to birds, not me. Well, I can also talk to birds, but I mean vice versa with the human thing.”

“Delivered! Delivered!”

“Shut up!” Bellatrix howled, and Pig finally settled down on the back of a chair. Bellatrix took a deep breath and raked a hand across her scalp and through her curls, easing her building headache. The newfound silence was enough for her to recover her bearings, and with a sigh that shook her whole body Bellatrix dropped down onto the couch.

For the most part she had assumed that her ability to communicate with Phene was wholly between the two of them- either because Phene was playing dumb to hide her unusual abilities, or because Maia’s time travel spell had interlinked them in some way. She had almost been getting used to it, because magic was a far more logical explanation than whatever this was. However, Hermione’s owl Pigwidgeon had most certainly not been whisked through time with her, and yet for some
reason she could hear the words behind his inane twittering clear as day.

“Why me?” Bellatrix sank lower into the couch.

“I don’t suppose you ever studied Ornithomancy, did you?” Phene suggested.

“What would some outdated branch of divination have to do with this?”

“I don’t know, the augurs used to harp on about the language of birds, but it was mostly just folk tale. Unless you really have been blessed by Odin or Athena at some point, in which case you probably should have said something,” Phene said.

“I don’t think I have. I take it that it’s the kind of thing you notice,” Bellatrix pursed her lips.

“This only started after Maia’s will- do you think she had anything to do with this?” she asked.

“If Maia could talk to birds, she never talked to me, which I find offensive, so I’m going to go with no,” Phene replied. “It’s possible I simply unlocked whatever latent power this is just by virtue of being a magical bird and not a pillock owl. I was right in your ear, after all.”

Bellatrix worried her bottom lip between her teeth, toying with the idea. While Phene was most certainly the catalyst for this given that she had been the first and, until now, only bird who she could understand, the idea that it was a latent ability was more than a little disconcerting.

“I used to get migraines up at the owl tower at Hogwarts all the time- usually, I think, because if I had to send an owl it meant that there was some stressful situation worth addressing, but…”

“But being in a room full of chatting owls was probably putting pressure on whatever mental block you had up?”

Bellatrix looked back towards Pigwidgeon, who was hooting softly.

“Something like that.”

“Pig is very happy, yes, yes yes!”

“Shut up!” Bellatrix hissed, and got up off the couch. Hastily she grabbed a quill and some spare parchment and began scrawling a reply to Hermione’s letter.

"Hello Muddy,

I will let you know when it is an appropriate time for you to visit. You would be correct in assuming I have no intention of visiting Grimmauld Place again myself, but I agree that there are still books which are of value to us there. Catalogue a list of titles that seem relevant, and we can discuss how best to retrieve them later.

- Carina Blanche"

Bellatrix rolled the paper into a scroll and tied it to Pig’s leg, then grabbed him and pitched him out the window. With her crest raised and beak hanging open, Phene almost looked aghast. Now that she had that headache out of the way, Bellatrix settled back down on the couch.

“I only know of Parseltongue, any other reference to wizards speaking to birds is, as you said, folklore- Morgana le Fey and all that shite.”
“Well whatever you’re doing isn’t exactly like Parseltongue, given that you don’t speak a separate language to do it,” Phene pointed out. Bellatrix nodded along, only half registering the words, and instead tried to focus on the sounds themselves.

“Say something again,” she ordered.

“Uh… alright. This is novel, isn’t it? Usually you’re telling me to shut up,”

“Okay, now shut up.”

Phene let out a flat chirp in offence, which Bellatrix noted still sounded like a regular bird call.

When Phene spoke, Bellatrix heard the voice she recognised from her human form clearly, although listening carefully she could hear the regular trills and chirps that she associated with Phoenix calls, although dulled as though underwater. She assumed that everyone else was hearing the regular sounds, while somehow she was mentally interpreting the meaning behind them, which implied some kind of legilimency.

“We can do some research on it later, if you’d like, but of everything going on right now I think this is the most benevolent of twists, don’t you?” Phene mused. Bellatrix had to concede to that point; there were far more pressing things for her to worry about, including a certain Dark Lord and his lieutenant.

“The baby cries all the time. Do you not feed her?”

“The elves feed her! Babies just cry a lot.”

“That sounds terrible.”

“It’s okay. She’s going to grow up soon, and when she’s big like me and Andy she’ll play with us all the time!”

“But humans take such a long time to grow!” The raven cawed.

“Nuh uh!” Bellatrix shook her head, black curls bouncing around wildly. At this age she really did look like a porcelain doll bewitched into sentience, although she was better proportioned now that she had shed most of the baby fat clinging to her limbs. As she grew into her body, her motor skills were improving by the day- she was already practicing wand movements- and her conversational skills were following at the same rate.

Cygnus stepped into the room, leaning against the doorframe as he watched Bellatrix ramble at the raven. Although he had wished for a son, Bellatrix’s had a fighting spirit and an incredible precociousness that the entire Black family adored. He would take great care in moulding her into the dignified and influential young woman she was destined to be.

“Bellatrix,” he said, and she nearly slipped off her chair in alarm. She righted herself quickly, giving him her undivided attention.
“Your games with the birds are amusing, but you must understand that you are getting too old for such things. You are the eldest of your sisters, and they will look to you as a role model. I’m afraid you must stop this silliness.”

“But father- it’s not a game! They really talk to me,” Bellatrix insisted.

Cygnus scowled.

“Do not argue with me, Bellatrix. People think your little conversations with the owls and the crows are endearing now, but the novelty will wear. You must grow out of it.”

Bellatrix looked mournfully at the raven, and bit her lower lip to keep it from wobbling.

“Yes, father.”

Drowning out the conversations of the wagtails and the robins and the pigeons was a difficult task at the age of four (and a half!), but Bellatrix already knew there was no negotiating with Cygnus’ orders. She would learn to ignore them, there was simply no other option. The ravens eventually learnt to leave her alone; she wouldn’t engage in their conversations anymore. Tuning out the gossiping waterfowl by the pond was the easiest- she never cared much for their anecdotes. But it hurt her head when the owls bothered her for treats, until she learnt to ignore them too.

She missed the chatter of the birds, when they were gone. But Andy was getting more and more talkative, and even Cissy was starting to pick up a few words- she could say B’lla already. She traded the company of aves for that of her sisters, and that was the end of that.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

everyone's pissed: the sequel

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sirius kept his nose to the ground, and one ear perked upwards to the sky. Remus, Molly and the lot of them would be spewing if they knew he was outside and sniffing around, but he had been locked up for far too long and he was not going to sit idly by while Harry was getting himself into trouble. The moment Harry had pulled out the invisibility cloak, there was no question that he was up to something. The fact that Hermione was absent was also concerning— it meant that they were either doing something she would disapprove of, or this was some kind of rescue mission. Either way, Sirius was not going to let them slip away that easily. Sirius made sure to cling to the walls and the shadows, keeping out of Harry and Ron’s sight as he tailed them.

“Why wouldn’t Hermione just floo in to Black’s castle?” Ron mumbled, and even with his heightened hearing Sirius struggled to follow their conversation.

“Because she doesn’t want us to know she’s going there. We probably wouldn’t have guessed if you weren’t snooping when Pig came back,” Harry replied.

“It’s not snooping if it’s my owl,” Ron defended.

“It buys us a bit more time anyway,” Harry continued, “as soon as we get to Paris we can apparate.”

Their hushed conversation was difficult to follow, both audibly and mentally. What Black castle were they talking about? Other than himself, there weren’t any Blacks left. He also couldn’t remember any registered Black properties in France that he hadn’t warded to keep intruders out— and he hadn’t offered that information to Dumbledore and the Order, either. As he dwelled on it Harry and Ron disappeared around a corner, and Sirius cursed himself for letting them slip through his paws.

If they were at a Black estate, then there would be some record of it back at Grimmauld Place. It was time to do a little digging.

Standing at the door with a wicker basket covered by a teatowel, Hermione looked like little red riding hood standing at the wolf’s door. But the disguised creature at the door was only Bellatrix playing Carina, which was only marginally less troubling than Phene playing a human being.
“I picked up some scones from a bakery,” Hermione raised the basket in her hand.

“Should have brought wine,” Bellatrix quipped, but took the basket nonetheless. It was a feeble attempt to maintain the pretense of congeniality, but Bellatrix could appreciate it for what it was worth. She’d always liked scones.

The cold, howling winds rushing in from the coast were in full force today, and the girls were quick to retreat to the western living space where the roaring fireplace provided a cozy warmth. Gusts of wind strained against the rattling window frames and swung shed doors back and forth, a cacophony which masked the soft patter of a third and fourth pair of feet.

“Have you come up with any clever ideas as to how you’re going to gain access to the Grimmauld Place library yet?” Bellatrix asked, carrying a stack of books in from Maia’s own collection.

“No, I figured we could, ah, brainstorm. Because theoretically a biological element might be enough—polyjuice, for example, but I wouldn’t want to do anything of the sort without your permission,” Hermione answered, arranging the cream and jam on the coffee table. She paid no mind as Phene, all wrapped up in feathers, stole a scone from the table and claimed a rocking chair for herself.

“Right, and you’re not going to get it. Not only would polyjuice be a terrible idea even if it did work because your little group will assume you’re me anyway, but if you think you’re getting your hands on my hair you’ve got another thing coming,” Bellatrix warned.

“Well, do you have any ideas?” Hermione countered, settling down.

“No,” Bellatrix sniffed, “but I’ve decided what I’m going to need you to do to repay the favour once I figure it out.”

“Getting a bit ahead of yourself then?” Hermione teased.

“Certainly not. Anyway, I have an appointment at Gringotts at London. You’re going to help me get in and out without attracting anyone’s attention.”

Bellatrix didn’t doubt that she’d be able to make the trip herself if she needed to, because her glamours were working well and if everything went south Phene could bypass most anti-apparition wards. However, walking around in the heart of Wizarding Britain was a bit riskier than her usual strolls around Sorcelle or Paris, so if she could get an extra hand in covering her tracks then she’d take it.

“What do you need to go to Gringotts for? I thought there was one here in France,” Hermione asked.

“Don’t ask questions,” Bellatrix dismissed. Hermione looked affronted, and Bellatrix thought she might argue when she puffed up her chest in offence, but then she exhaled a deep sigh and dropped it. Phene cocked her head back and forth.

"Maybe you should go to Gringotts first, see how you fare on their tests to get a gauge of the biological element of-" "Well, I was also thinking that you might be able to create a library card of sorts."

Phene squawked indignantly, and Hermione startled at the sharp sound.

"What did I do?" she asked, furrowing her eyebrows as Phene flattened her crest and glared at her.
"You interrupted her," Bellatrix smirked behind a scone.

"What?"

"It's alright, I'm sure whatever she had to say wasn't very important," she said with a one shouldered shrug, and Phene hissed softly.

"Anyway, how do you suggest that would work?" Bellatrix prompted.

“I might have to ask Bill for some extra curse breaking notes- Bill Weasley, that is, he’s a cursebreaker for Gringotts- but rather than breaking the wards on the books, we could create a key that could slot into any holes in the enchantments,” Hermione considered.

"If there are any holes in the enchantments," Phene muttered, although mostly to herself this time. Bellatrix raised an eyebrow and glanced back to Hermione, who had waited for Phene to finish warbling this time. Only Hermione was just staring back at her, uncomfortably silent.

"What?"

"Can you understand her?" Hermione asked.

"What- no, of course not, don't be daft," Bellatrix scoffed. Hermione didn't seem entirely convinced, but a sharp glare told her to drop the subject.

“Careful, she’s onto you,” Phene crooned. Determined to ignore her, Bellatrix showed no sign of having registered the taunt and instead grabbed another scone.

“Right, right. She still thinks you’re your own daughter, so she can’t be that astute. And yet she’s still finding flaws in your little project, despite not even knowing what it is.”

Bellatrix's eyebrow twitched, but kept her poker face trained down at her book. Phene ruffled her feathers in irritation.

"Whatever. If you're going to keep being boring, I'm going for a flight. I'll be back in time for dinner," she said. Hermione startled when Phene abruptly took off, and Bellatrix had to feign her own surprise. She then settled back down in her chair, feeling just a little more relaxed.

It was stiflingly hot under the invisibility cloak, and both Harry and Ron had to crouch so as to hide their ankles. The time when they could all fit comfortably under it was long past, and Harry was just glad Hermione wasn’t under it with them now. So far Carina and Hermione hadn’t erupted into a duel- verbal or otherwise, but it was only a matter of time. They kept sharing shrewd, odd glances when they thought the other wasn’t looking, as if they were sizing each other up.

Harry was disgruntled to learn that his fears had been proven right, and that Hermione had found a new fixation in turning Carina Black into an ally. Although Harry held a more pragmatic view than Ron- it was true that Carina had saved their lives, Bellatrix’s daughter or not- her bullheaded hostility towards Hermione upon learning she was a muggleborn wasn’t so easily forgotten. And even now, with an unsteady truce between them, Harry was willing to bet that Carina was simply biding her time.

Bellatrix tossed her book to the floor and reclined across the chaise lounge. Of course she wanted
to figure out how to invent time travel, but that was far easier said than done. Even the preliminary theoretics were incredibly, incredibly boring. She glanced over to where Hermione was sitting and writing notes, hardly fatigued at all. Bellatrix idly wondered how frustrated she would get if she were to pester her.

"So, why the weasel? I would've thought Potter was more conventionally attractive," Bellatrix mused, curling a strand of hair around her finger. "If he lost those terrible glasses, of course."

Under the cloak Harry fought the urge to fiddle with his glasses' frames.

"You think Harry's good looking?" Hermione said, looking up with amusement.

"I said he's conventionally attractive. It's hard to look bad with dark hair, a pale complexion, and good cheekbones," Bellatrix stated, running a hand across her jawline.

"You're just describing yourself."

"Exactly."

Hermione tried and failed to hold back a laugh. Bellatrix caught herself grinning as well, and quickly smothered it, coughing into her fist.

“So you agree?” she countered.

"We've all been friends since first year, Harry's like a brother to me," Hermione said, shaking her head.

"and Weasley isn't?" Bellatrix cocked an eyebrow. Hermione shifted uncomfortably, and Ron gripped the invisibility cloak tighter.

“Ron’s different,” she said stiffly, and Bellatrix barely suppressed her smirk. It didn’t sound very convincing, but she hardly cared enough to press the matter.

Behind the cloak Harry tried to quietly jostle Ron and signal him to shuffle out of the room. With the tension between the two girls easing, he was starting to feel less like a protective presence and more like an eavesdropping schoolboy. While he doubted that they were going to talk about anything more uncomfortably awkward than Ron and Hermione’s relationship, he didn’t really want to test that theory. Unfortunately, Ron didn’t seem to get the message, remaining unbudging as Harry attempted to drag him away.

“I think the memory protection charm you’re looking for is possible, but it’d likely be more effective if used in conjunction with occlumency,” Hermione announced, figuring out a few more variables in her notebook.

“I imagine it would,” Bellatrix agreed, “but we’d need to test the theory. And your occlumency would definitely need to be at an adequate level, which mine is, but I don’t exactly want to prove that right now.”

It wasn’t that Bellatrix didn’t think she couldn’t keep the mudblood out of her mind, but while she was guarding the identity of a time travelling proto-fugitive and other, darker family secrets, she wasn’t exactly jumping at the bit to have anyone test her occlumency skills.
“Well, I don’t exactly want you in my mind either. No offence,” Hermione admitted.

“Alright then muddy, pass me that notebook over there and we’ll work on theory instead,” Bellatrix said, wriggling her outstretched fingers. Hermione frowned in consternation.

“Do you have to call me that?” she asked, passing the notebook over.

“It’s what you are,” Bellatrix dismissed. “You should be thankful I even tolerate your presence.”

Hermione grit her teeth and took a deep breath before meeting Bellatrix’s eyes again. That lazy black stare was akin to the wings of a butterfly; beautiful, but had the painted eyes of a predator. There was an intrinsic resentment under the surface of indifference, and Hermione had to wonder how deep that hatred ran. And she wondered what it might take to uproot it.

“I’d like to think that this is more than just tolerating,” she pointed out. Bellatrix shrugged languidly.

“I’ll agree to disagree.”

They stared each other down, neither breaking the stalemate. Hermione was itching to argue, to prove her point and stand up for herself, but she wasn’t going to start another disagreement either. It was thanks to their silent standoff that Bellatrix caught the faint sound of rustling, not the crisp groan of Hermione shifting in her seat, or the whisper of the curtains, but a thick, stifled sound.

Bellatrix froze.

She slowed her breathing, taking shallow, quiet breaths. Ever so slightly, she cocked her head- left, then right, then centre again. Another rustle, this time definitely from behind her left. As casually as she could without revealing her wand she positioned herself just right- then cast the stunning spell.

There was no time for Harry to react; the spell knocked him back off his feet, dragging Ron down with him.

“Carina, what-” Hermione shouted, then caught sight of Harry and Ron’s tumbling bodies, half exposed now under the invisibility cloak. Seizing her advantage, Bellatrix disarmed them both, their wands flying into her waiting palm. Furiously, she turned on Hermione.

“Don’t you dare touch her,” Ron yelled, his hands balled into fists.

“You dirty little- how dare you sneak around like the filthy little weasel you are,” Bellatrix seethed with unrestrained malice, nearly suffering whiplash from the speed at which she glared at him. She swished her wand in a perversion of the Leviosa spell, poked out a quick Petrificus Totalus, added a little sticking charm and flick. Immediately frozen, Harry and Ron now found themselves as the decorative companions to the chandelier.

“Carina stop ,” Hermione yelled.

“You ,” Bellatrix hissed.

“You planned this, didn’t you? Traitorous mudblood,” she growled, closing in on her.

“No, no I had nothing to do with this, they must have followed me,” Hermione pleaded. It fell on deaf ears, and she had only a split second to block the red stunner flying in her direction.
As hesitant as she was to start a fight, she was very much prepared to end one. Hermione followed up her shield with a disarming spell, which was blocked as expected. Her best chance was to stay on the offensive for as long as possible, until she could hopefully get Ron and Harry back on their feet. She took care not to cast any particularly harmful spells, but there were only so many incapacitators in her repertoire.

Bellatrix barked out a manic laugh as she deflected a stunning spell that in turn crashed through a window. The mudblood’s tactic was simple yet effective, but she didn’t count on one thing: Bellatrix Black didn’t do defensive. She countered the barrage of spells coming towards her, mentally timing them like the staccato beat of a song, and when the final one splintered against her shield she surged forwards.

Hermione yelped out another stunning spell out of adrenaline fuelled instinct, which Bellatrix had already factored into her calculation. Swerving to the left, she threw her weight forwards against Hermione and into the wall, pinning her down with her body. She still held her wand in her hand, but in such a position Hermione knew she’d never be able to cast a spell, wordless or not, fast enough to get away.

“I thought there was supposed to be a war,” Bellatrix murmured, dragging her wand across Hermione’s cheek, feeling a thrill jolt through her veins as the girl trembled under her gaze. She leaned in close, her nose brushing the shell of her ear.

“You’re like lambs to the slaughter,” she whispered. When she leaned back Hermione was looking suitably uncomfortable, but she was also sending a pleading look over her shoulder, and Bellatrix turned her head to see what she was so focused on.

“Am I interrupting something?” Phene said, standing behind them with her hands tucked in her blazer pockets. An amused smirk played upon her lips, but her eyes shone with warning.

“You have terrific timing,” Bellatrix sneered.

“Mais bien sûr. Call it an instinct. Should I ask?” Phene spoke in French, and pointed up to the two boys affixed to the ceiling.

“They snuck in with in invisibility cloak,” Bellatrix spat, “hiding right under our noses to sneak around, the little shits.”

“That is a bit concerning,” Phene frowned. “However, they wouldn’t be granted safe access through the wards if they had malicious intent. The oath covered that, remember?”

“What, you think I’m going to let them get away with it? Just because they didn’t cast any spells doesn’t mean it wasn’t a violation of-”

“Tie them up if you must, and we can figure out how to deal with them with level heads,” Phene instructed with an arched eyebrow, leaving the ‘Don’t do anything stupid’ implied. Bellatrix stayed still, her wand still digging into Hermione’s cheek, who was attempting to follow their conversation through the words she recognised.

“Come on, I’ll make some of those stuffed courgette flowers you like, and we can crack open a bottle of Coteaux Champenois,” Phene offered.

“Are you bribing me?”

“Yes. Is it working?”
Bellatrix tilted her head in thought, looking from Hermione’s grimace back to Phene, who was miming out popping a cork.

“...Yes.”

Phene clasped her hands together, very pleased with herself.

“I’ll go downstairs and get the bottle, I don’t care how it happens but when I come back I want all the children off the roof and in seats.”

“Alright, alright,” Bellatrix muttered, and waved her off.

“Is everything alright then?” Hermione piped up, finding her voice again now that Phene had left the room. Bellatrix finally remembered that she was still holding the girl at wandpoint, and Hermione almost regretted reminding her.

“Do you want to play a game, Granger?” Bellatrix twisted her lips into a cruel smirk. Hermione raised her head and put on a brave face, gripping her wand tighter.

“Don’t be like that, now. This isn’t one of those games. Think of it as a… trust exercise. I’ll let your little friends down from the ceiling and tie them up- no need to let them miss out on the fun this time, hm? But you hand your wand over to me, and I won’t tie you up.”

“And I’m supposed to trust you won’t do anything to me once I’m defenceless?” Hermione said scathingly.

“Yes, that’s rather the point. Though I wouldn’t say your defences are all that strong now, anyway,” Bellatrix replied. “You’re the ones that started this. You have the choice to end it,” she crooned.

Hermione gave her a bitter glare, resenting being toyed with. She was no stranger to an angry outburst after seven years of friendship with Ron and even Harry, and she could accept that this time they were in the wrong. But she despised these twisted games that Slytherins liked so much. The truth of the matter was that there was no choice- she would have to give up her wand, or allow Harry and Ron to suffer the consequences.

“I’ll play,” she said, lifting her chin up.

“Good,” Bellatrix grinned, taking the vine wand in hand. She twirled it around in her palm appreciatively. It didn’t hum in her hand as the snowgum wand did, or surge with magic as her walnut wand did, but it whispered a familiar song that brushed the back of her mind. She tucked it away with the other two wands, both silent in her holster.

True to her word Bellatrix took a step backwards with her hands held up in mock surrender, allowing Hermione the comfort of personal space. She then turned around and lowered Harry and Ron from the ceiling, strapping them into chairs by the kitchen island with a quick Incarcerous. Hermione hovered behind her, scrutinising her as she lifted the petrification, replacing it with a silencing charm that stifled their cries and sputters.

Phene arrived with a container of flowers and a bottle of sparkling wine, pleased to find everyone alive. She shuffled around the kitchen, popped the cork on the bottle and poured herself and Bellatrix a glass. As an afterthought she extended an empty champagne flute to Hermione who lifted a hand in refusal, shooting Phene a disapproving look which she and Bellatrix both ignored.

“Do you know if there’s any veritaserum in the house?” Bellatrix asked, hopping up on a stool.
“No, why would there be?” Phene replied, busying herself with her cooking.

“Nevermind,” Bellatrix scowled. Figuring out what these brats were up to would have been a lot easier if she had truth serum at hand. Her legilimency skills were hardly mediocre, but her success rate was largely dependent on her target’s occlumency abilities, or lack thereof.

“You might have the right idea, though. It would be a shame if this working relationship were to fail due to a lack of trust,” Phene offered, getting flour on her chin as she rubbed it with her thumb.

“And what do you suggest? I don’t need them, nor do I want them, and if they’re going to crawl around my house like a swarm of fucking cockroaches then I’d rather put them down like one,” she spat. Phene’s lips twitched, unsure if she should take it as a joke or not.

Hermione didn’t speak French, but she could figure out what they were discussing from picking up the mention of veritaserum.

“Legilimency,” Hermione said, earning her the matching surprise of Bellatrix and Phene.

“You like games? How about this one- I let you use legilimency on me to see that I’m telling the truth, and if you’re satisfied then you give me back my wand. And at the same time you can test if my occlumency barriers are good enough to practice the memory charm, too,” Hermione proposed. Bellatrix cocked her head slowly, a vague smirk playing on her lips.

“And you think I’ll let you and your friends just walk away? What if I don’t like what I find?” she mocked.

“You won’t, and I’ll deal with them,” Hermione replied. Once again she met that cold, analytical stare, before it slipped back into the familiar resting smirk.

“All right,” Bellatrix purred, “let’s play.”

“We can do it after we eat,” Phene interjected, slamming down a fresh plate of stuffed and fried courgette flowers between them. “I didn’t make these just so that you could let them go cold.”

Bellatrix gave her an exaggerated eye roll but snatched one nonetheless, all while ignoring the two furious boys next to her. Slowly Hermione sat down next to her, and she shot the boys a furious glare that immediately halted their struggling.

Phene took a long sip of wine and used those blessed fingers to rub her eyes. There was no real reason for her to try curbing Bellatrix’s violent tendencies, and she hadn’t survived centuries of human history by being squeamish. Hell, she was hardly a shining beacon of morality herself. But sadism and bloodlust always made things messier than they had to be, and she’d been around the block enough times to know when to nip something in the bud.

The future Bellatrix’s situation really only proved her point, even if present-past Bellatrix had her hang ups about whether or not they shared a destiny, or whatever. Phene swirled the remaining dregs of sparkling rouge in her glass thoughtfully. She’d wager this timeline’s Bellatrix had her own part to perform in whatever cosmic theatrics they had been assigned, but she doubted she was going to play along without a fight.

Phene bit down on her knuckle in agitation. It would be nice if her Bellatrix could unlock the secrets of time travel or possibly dimension hopping, but it wasn’t likely to happen any time soon. In the meantime, she would follow the girl around and attempt to keep her safe- a task already
proving difficult—until fate’s design revealed itself. She furrowed her eyebrows when she tasted copper, and realised she’d dug in a big too hard. Bellatrix raised a lazy eyebrow at the sight of blood streaking down her hand, and she shrugged lightly in reply before licking it clean. When she looked back up Bellatrix was eating a courgette flower (stuffed with goat’s cheese, garlic, pink peppercorns, fried and then and glazed with honey, thank you) in front of Ron’s mournful face, and Phene sighed to herself. Her carefully crafted mask of apathy was getting ever harder to maintain.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for taking a little longer to update this one, this chapter just didn't want to be written and I've also been pretty busy with other projects. But here we are, another little bump in the road.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Family Reunion: Redux

Chapter Notes

this chapter depicts a short scene involving a needle/injection, so skip the first italicised paragraph if that's a concern for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sitting on a double king sized bed which seemed as though it could swallow her form any which way she stretched, Hermione faced Carina with crossed arms. Despite her facade, she was sweating underneath her jumper, desperately hoping that she'd made the right choice by allowing her mind to be infiltrated just for Carina’s satisfaction. After finishing dinner Hermione and Carina had retreated upstairs to the master bedroom, which was noticeably devoid of any character. The walls were lined with beautiful landscape paintings, but absent of any framed photos or even portraits. The furniture was stylish but impersonal, and the room was even absent of all the instruments that lined the other rooms. She had been meaning to ask about those, but she hadn’t really found a good opportunity to bring it up without stoking Carina’s temperamental ire.

Earlier Carina had grudgingly untied Harry and Ron at her insistence, after she pointed out that they were wandless anyway (though she suspected it had more to do with Pennie’s bawdy suggestions than anything). But as angry as she was with them for completely derailing the progress she had made in getting Carina to relax around her, she didn’t want them at the UnSpeakable’s mercy either; there was something particularly unnerving about Pennie that she couldn’t put her finger on. Although, as Hermione stared at Carina’s disgruntled visage, she wondered who had drawn the shorter stick. Her pouty face was hardly the most intimidating thing she had seen- she’d gone toe to toe with Death Eaters and Snatchers, after all- but she didn’t want a Death Eater’s approval the way she did Carina’s. This was their test that their side was the right side, and so far Hermione wasn’t sure they were passing.

“If you’re not ready I’m coming in anyway,” Carina groused, and Hermione shifted uncomfortably.

“I’m ready,” she said, mentally preparing herself for the invasion.

“Legimens.”

Hermione sat in a white, sterile room with her parents as a man with a stethoscope hanging over his shoulders swiped her arm with an antiseptic soaked cloth. ‘Just a routine blood test’, her parents had explained. She kept her head held high even as she trembled, and kept her eyes trained on the wall as the needle sank into her arm. The pain itself was relatively dull, but what distressed
her most was the sensation of blood being suctioned out of her body.

Hermione could sense Carina’s confusion in the back of her mind, until her own belated epiphany arrived. The feeling of Carina probing around in her mind was disconcerting and uncomfortable, and the closest thing she could relate it to was that feeling of discomfort she had felt in the doctor’s office.

“Mudblood,” Carina hissed, fire and brimstone flickering in her abyssal eyes. The face of Bellatrix Lestrange stared down at her, the hatred and the anger completely eclipsing any sanity and humanity.

Just the mere thought of Carina had brought a flood of associated memories, thoughts and musings, all while the girl herself watched-

Carina giggled- a lilting, almost juvenile sound. Hermione groaned, but a smile twitched across her lips nonetheless.

“All you need to do is stand at high elevation and scan the curvature of the horizon!” she pointed out.

“Nope,” Carina shook her head, black curls bouncing around in its ponytail, “Earth’s flat.”

She giggled again, and Hermione sighed in mock frustration. The mischievous glint in her eyes was far more welcome than the usual animosity, and although their argument was borne of Carina’s desire to annoy her, it was the most agreeable (albeit disagreeable) she had been all day.

-Hermione quickly threw up the occlumency barricade she had practiced. Opening her eyes, she was met with Carina’s unimpressed stare.

“We agreed to test your occlumency skills after, if I recall correctly,” she said curtly.

“Right, sorry,” Hermione muttered, and drew a deep breath. Carina lifted a single eyebrow, and Hermione steadied her resolve.

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Legilimens.”

Hermione stalked the aisles of Grimmauld Place’s library, searching for weak spots despite knowing she’d find none. She cautiously waved a diagnostic spell, hoping to determine if some books had stronger enchantments than others. Were they activated by blood alone, or by a stronger sense of filial ties?

Hermione hastily shifted her memories, pulling the ones she needed most to the forefront before Carina lost patience and went digging for herself.
“You know, at this rate you really ought to get your own owl,” Ron pointed out as Hermione tied her correspondence to Pigwidgeon’s leg. He ambled off, flying with all the grace of a bumblebee, and Hermione turned around once he had left her line of sight.

“I think Crookshanks might get a bit too jealous. And if he were to attack my owl, I’d never stop being paranoid that it’s an animagus,” she replied, grinning at the thought of her fuzzy orange friend.

Hermione scratched Crookshanks’ belly, grinning as he halfheartedly swatted at her arm- Focus!

“I’m going out today,” Hermione announced, shrugging on her jacket before Harry or Ron could argue.

“Where are you going- we’ll come with you,” Ron suggested, already getting out of his chair.

“No, no no,” Hermione dismissed, waving her hand. “I’m just going to the library at Diagon Alley- you’ll both get bored and start bothering me.”

“This isn’t about her is it?” Harry asked.

“No- I got to thinking about horcruxes again, and I know that they were fakes, but it gave me an idea- but I need to do some research first,” she admitted. It was a half truth; she really did have a new theory regarding Voldemort’s apparent immortality. Only, it was far more likely that the texts she needed were either in Carina’s own library, or in Grimmauld Place’s own- which she would need Carina for anyhow.

“Don’t wait up!” she called, as she hurried out the front door.

“Will that suffice?” Hermione said tartly as Carina withdrew from her mind. Carina pulled a childish face but leaned back nonetheless, apparently unable to find fault in what she had seen.

“So, you weren’t in on whatever your braindead friends were up to. Big deal,” she scoffed.

“I’m sorry that they can be… foolish, but they’re just looking out for me. You don’t exactly have a great track record when it comes to friendliness,” Hermione pointed out.

“Oh, so you’re turning this back on me, are you?” Carina said hotly.

“No, I’m not,” Hermione groaned, dragging her hands down her face. “Must you be so stubborn?”

Carina reclined back on the bed, keeping herself propped up on her arms as she stretched the knots out of her neck. Hermione’s cringe at the loud cracking put a smirk on her face.

“Yes.”

“What’s it going to take for you to understand that we’re on the same side?” Hermione deflated. Carina examined her carefully, then snorted and dropped her torso onto the bed fully.

“Why do you care so much?” she asked absently as she rolled her shoulders. Hermione slumped
back on the bed, finding that the bed was still big enough for her to leave a comfortable distance
between herself and Carina without falling off the side.

“I don’t know, I-” she sighed through her nose, “If you’re really so committed to stopping your
mother, then I want to help you. And I want you to trust us. And I know we’re not doing a very
good job winning you over, but- are you moaning?”

A loud pop and a guttural groan was her answer as Carina twisted her leg into an impossible angle.

“I’m trying to be serious!” Hermione whined. Carina propped herself back up on her elbow and
leaned over to look down at her.

“I’m tense,” she pouted.

Hermione pursed her lips, but decided to let it drop. She had expected more of a struggle from the
stuck-up witch, and she wasn’t about to push her luck.

“We should test your occlumency now,” Carina said, sitting up again. “I’m going to go digging,
you do your best to keep me out. If you can, then we can look into the next stage of that memory
charm.”

And there was the kicker, Hermione thought.

“Legilimens”

Hermione prided herself on being unlike the other giggling girls in her school; she was controlled
and rational and not at all ruled by hormones. But she struggled to stifle the awkward giggle
building in her throat as she pressed her hand against Ron’s.

“It’s so much bigger than mine,” she said, finding that the tips of her fingers barely surpassed his
metacarpal bones and-

‘Ugh. Moving on,’ Carina’s voice echoed in her mind. Hermione tried to push back, but Carina dug
deeper, now relentless.

Rows upon rows of swirling crystal balls lined the endless shelves. Hermione didn’t believe in silly
things such as auras, but there was a malevolence radiating from Bellatrix Lestrange that could be
felt long before she was ever seen. Hermione felt paralysed by fear, but she wouldn’t allow it to
control her. Blood rushed in her ears and through her veins as her heart pumped wildly- she would
need the increased oxygen flow to keep herself alive when all hell broke loose.

Hermione successfully shoved Carina from that dark corner, but nonetheless she followed the
breadcrumbs from one thought to another.

Carina’s body was flush against hers as she pressed her to the wall, wand poking into her cheek.
Hermione’s grip on her own wand tightened, but she knew she’d never have the speed to pull off a
counter. And then curls were brushing against her cheek as Carina leaned in, and despite the hot
breath on her ear, she shivered.
Hermione surged against Carina’s mental presence, dragging her away from that thought but not from her mind entirely.

*The Beauxbatons girls fluttered by, twirling in a whirlwind of skirts past Hermione’s seat in the courtyard. At the apex of their migratory formation was none other than Fleur Delacour, the girl who had stolen half the hearts of Hogwarts and Durmstrang combined. Hermione watched them prance onwards. Fleur’s legs were so long. She almost looked like a bird on stilts, she thought. Did she have good legs? Maybe her calves were too short. They’d never look as good as Fleur’s, not even in heels.*

Finally, Hermione strained and brought up a blank, meditative wall. The sensation of Carina prodding and poking at it was decidedly uncomfortable, but before long she felt that foreign presence recede from her mind. Opening her eyes, Hermione found herself back in the external world, and Carina wore a condescending grin that she scarcely liked the look of. Her mouth parted as if something were tickling the tip of her tongue, but she closed it again, and her grin grew wider. Hermione fought to keep the scowl off her face.

“What?”

“Your occlumency skills are piss poor. I know I’m a good legilimens, but I’m not *that* good- not yet anyway, so we’ll have to work on it. Honestly, what would you have done if I weren’t just scratching the surface?”

“I would have hoped you wouldn’t do that anyway,” Hermione replied, fidgeting with the stray ends of her jumper.

“Another point of trust to my side, then,” Carina grinned. “You’re falling very behind- I do wonder how you’ll make it up to me.”

Hermione frowned. The saccharine tone, the vague blackmail- it was all so very *Slytherin*. If Carina had attended Hogwarts with them, there would be no doubt that the sorting hat would declare her for the house of snakes the moment it touched her pretty little head. Could they have become friends? Or would the house rivalry and blood purity doctrine she followed divide them irrevocably? She couldn’t even call them friends *now*, as they were simply operating on an ‘enemy of my enemy’ basis. But there was something more to this witch who defied all expectations to end up on the opposite side in a war against everything she would have been raised to know, even as she still valued it.

“I’ll figure it out,” she said grudgingly, loath to give Carina any more leverage than she already had.

“You think too much,” Carina said as she got up and straightened out her skirt, then headed to the ensuite.

Hermione lay back down on the bed, folding her hands over her stomach as she stared at the ceiling. Why had Carina chosen those memories to pull forth? Or was it simply her own subconscious, carrying Carina as a passenger on her train of thought? And what was with that damn smirk on her face after she slid out of her mind?
Bellatrix stared into her reflection in the bathroom mirror, searching for those gaunt lines, those hardened eyes, that mad smile. Seeing her wretched self in Hermione’s mind left her skin crawling. She didn’t remember her looking so feral at Malfoy Manor, but then she wasn’t paying all too much attention to her looks at that point. Bella shook her head, and when she stared back into her face she saw a young woman, determined, beautiful, and unstoppable. Her mirror image’s grin matched her own. She didn’t know exactly how yet, but she knew that she wouldn’t have to worry about her future self for too much longer.

A muffled crash thumped through the walls, and unintelligible shouting drifted from downstairs. She could pick out Phene’s voice as the sole feminine screech, accompanied by the shout of an older male voice which definitely couldn’t have come from the two pipsqueaks.

She tore out of the room without a backwards glance. Another crash, a heavy thump, and the shout of the man’s voice pushed her faster, and she paid no heed to the sound of Hermione’s heavy footsteps trailing behind her. Bella jumped the final few steps of stairs as she whirled into the main living room, which was slowly starting to fill with dirty smoke. Phene’s body lay crumpled over Harry, who seemed torn over whether or not he should be helping her or leaving her be. Ron was trying to extinguish the flames that had caught on the curtains, but was having little success without his wand, and was doing more to fan them than anything.

Standing in the epicentre of the living room’s destruction was a lean man with shaggy dark hair- a man she recognised from her excursion to Grimmauld Place. Bellatrix snarled. He met her gaze and matched her contemptful glare with his own, and two wands fired simultaneously. Their spells clashed in a brilliant spray of light, and the two of them fell back into a duelling stance as they traded hexes to test each other’s defences. It was a far more awkward dance than the one at Malfoy Manor; where the Manor had been spacious and open, the living room was scattered with upturned furniture and the cramped space forced the two of them into a closer combat style.

Each drill, each victory and each failure, and the accumulation of skill she had earned in her duelling practice with father and… well, it came as easily to her as breathing. Sometimes the speed of her own mind impressed Bellatrix herself, predicting and reacting to manoeuvres through a combination of muscle memory and pure instinct. But her opponent was no slouch either.

Something flashed in his eyes- perhaps recognition? Bellatrix’s wand gesture faltered for a second, before she caught herself and fired a stunner. However, her moment’s hesitation cost her, and a jinx aimed at her legs sent her crashing to the floor. Her legs felt heavy and dead, but she rolled over and dragged them into at least a sitting position, narrowly dodging the hexes that burned holes into the carpet in their wake.

Bellatrix fired a chain of stunners of her own, but from her position it was unlikely any of them would land. She knew that could either keep fighting or search for an escape route, but she couldn’t do both at the same time. Duelling was currently the only thing keeping her protected, but she wouldn’t be able to weather the assault forever. She had enough knowledge of the house’s passageways that she had an advantage in that regard, but she would need a healthy dose of luck if she was going to let her guard down long enough to find one that she could reasonably hope to access.

However, her decision was made for her when a wreath of vines circled her, forcing her to concentrate on burning them down before they could grasp her. Yet as she fought to keep her shield maintained from the barrage of spells still spiralling her way, a thorny branch launched forwards and trapped her waist, and another snatched her wand arm. Now fully immobilised, Bellatrix struggled in a futile attempt to free herself, unwilling to accept defeat. Her assailant stared down at her with dark, haggard eyes and a scowl etched into his face, surrounded by weary lines of
age and stress. Bellatrix felt her body turn to lead under his furious stare, and steeled herself for his final spell. She jerked reflexively at the flash of red that filled the room, but in the microsecond it took her mind to register that the spell hadn’t hit her, her opponent collapsed onto the ground.

Standing behind him was Hermione, wand held aloft, staring at the pair of them on the ground with muted horror.

“Mione, what did you do?” Ron cried out in shock, running up behind her.

“Oh, don’t start with me Ronald,” she groused back, coming back to her senses.

Hermione leaned down and offered a hand to Bellatrix, who took it grudgingly. After being assisted up she tried to step back dust herself off, but the jinx that took out her legs was still taking the toll on her balance, and she would have toppled over again if not for Hermione’s hand reaching out to steady her. Bellatrix grunted in frustration, dragging her feet into a more steady position before shrugging her off.

“And what’s your excuse for that?” she hissed, casting a quick Finite on her legs as they slowly regained feeling. Hermione ignored her, and turned on the two boys.

“Both of you sit him down and take his wand, and if you can’t keep him under control I will,” she stated. Harry shot her a peevish look as he walked past her and wedged Sirius’ arm over his shoulder as Ron grabbed the other.

Phene’s body still lay prone on the floor, and Bellatrix toed her ribs. Hermione rescued her from the dilemma of whether or not she should leave her by rushing to her side and propping her into a more comfortable position. With a softly muttered incantation, Hermione tapped her wand gently against her forehead, who sluggishly cracked her eyes open.

“Did we win?” she mumbled, rubbing her eyes with her palms. A shallow gash ran down the side of her arm, but otherwise she didn’t look too worse for wear. The rest of the room was in ruins, although the fire had been put out and much of the damage could be fixed with a bit of wand waving.

“There isn't going to be any more fighting.” Hermione affirmed, giving everyone in the room a sharp look. Bellatrix filled a glass of water in the sink, glowering into the cup as she tried to cool off.

“Doesn’t mean I won’t rough him up,” she grumbled.

“Listen, Carina, you have every right to be upset, but I promise that Sirius is in the Order, he was only worried about us,” Hermione insisted, standing up again. Bellatrix choked on the water in her throat, desperately fighting for air as her chest heaved with heavy coughs.

*That* was *Sirius?*

She took another look at the man- Sirius- finally seeing the similarities between him and Orion Black. Despite being of a similar age to his father as Bellatrix had last seen him, Sirius seemed to have aged an extra decade. Azkaban hadn’t been kind to him, either, it would seem. Bellatrix had come across her cousin’s name in her investigation about her alternate self, given that both had achieved an escape and were in league with a certain Dark Lord. She hadn't paid much mind to him- the Sirius she knew was only a boy, and never as close to her as her sisters. Hermione’s declaration that he was apparently working alongside this Order came as a surprise, and absentely she wondered if the same was true of her other self, in some capacity. Bellatrix pushed the lot to
the back of her mind. This wasn’t her future, so it was all liable to change in the end.

“Once we explain the situation, I’m sure he’ll see this was just nothing but a misunderstanding,” Hermione continued. Bellatrix offered her a disgruntled frown.

“We’re not explaining the situation. You’re taking him back wherever he came from, and then I’m boarding up the floo.”

“Carina,” Hermione said curtly, “it’s not going to be that easy. I don’t know how he found out about this place—certainly none of us told him, because you’d know if we broke the oath—and however he was able to find us, he’d know how to do it again.”

Bellatrix sneered at her, but unfortunately, couldn’t fault the logic.

There was another wand negotiation: Sirius’ wand in return for Harry and Ron’s, given that Hermione had already made clear whose side she would support if Sirius tried anything. And as usual, the Incarcerous spell was involved.

“I’m starting to think we should invest in some Goblin steel ropes,” Phene drawled, lying across the lounge. Bellatrix pointed her wand at her and flicked her hat into her face in annoyance. She then turned back to Sirius, studying his weary, unconscious face. As pissed as she was for his simply atrocious behaviour, he was still family, and the boy from her own time was little more than a particularly mischievous child. He should be thanking her for her efforts to set both the future and the past right, because when she got back she’d be sure to keep him in line too. Not that she was going to tell him as much, of course.

Bellatrix jerked her head and Phene took the unspoken instruction to wander over to her.

“I don’t suppose you have any ideas on how to deal with this, before you completely derail mine?” Bellatrix spoke in hushed French.

“I can seduce him if you want,” Phene said, rubbing her chin.

“God, no,” Bellatrix gagged. “Gross.”

“Just putting it out there,” Phene defended, holding her hands up.

“No. We intimidate him. We’re good at that—or I am, at least,” Bellatrix muttered.

“don’t know if you’re as intimidating as I think you are,” Phene said flatly, and Bellatrix shot her a glare that was promptly ignored.

“Penser vite, il se réveille,” she continued, and nodded at Sirius with a wide grin.

“Shit,” Bellatrix swore, and shoved Phene out of the way. Slowly Sirius came to, groaning unconsciously as he took stock of his surroundings. Relief flickered across his face as he saw that Harry, Hermione and Ron were all unharmed, but his vicious scowl returned when his eyes fell upon Bellatrix and Phene. Bellatrix sneered in response, and she could see the wheels turning in his head.

“So you’re the little shits that tore up my house. I didn’t know the kids were helping you,” he said, cracking a twisted smile.

“We didn’t know her when that happened,” Harry spoke up, feeling sick at the insinuation of betrayal.
“Well, we did- but not properly,” Hermione corrected.

“Properly enough to know she was nuts,” Ron chimed in, ignoring Bellatrix’s furious stare. Hermione also turned on him.

“She saved our lives, Ron. If she hadn’t helped us escape the Manor then-“

“How did you find this place?” Bellatrix asked Sirius, who was watching the entire exchange silently.

“It really is uncanny, what a spitting image you are. I do have to wonder…” Sirius drawled. Bella stiffened.

“They told me you were fake, a boggart,” he continued, “but I knew better. Your Bellatrix impression is very good, after all.”

“She’s my mother, of course there’s a resemblance,” Bellatrix dismissed. Although she would have preferred to deny her relation to her alternate self altogether, it was far too late for that now. As flimsy as her cover story was, it was more reliable than the truth.

“Is she? She never mentioned you, and we were stuck together in Azkaban for twelve years,” he prodded.

“Answer my question,” Bellatrix ordered, tightening the ropes with a flick of her wand. “How did you know to come here?”

“I knew Harry was heading to one of the Black properties in France, so I had a little look in the family grimoire- and what did I find? Manoir Taureau, previously held by Maia Black, passed down to Bellatrix Black,” Sirius revealed.

“So you did follow us,” Harry accused.

“You talk impossibly loud,” Sirius admitted with a sheepish shrug.

“This isn’t their interrogation, it’s mine,” Bellatrix hissed. Another flick of her wand, and the ropes tightened again.

“Stop it!” Harry yelled. Phene placed a firm hand on his shoulder as he instinctively jerked forwards, and a sharp glare quelled Ron’s rising temper.

“There’s no use trying to talk sense into their kind, my boy,” Sirius grinned despite the dwindling circulation in his wrists. He gave a pointed look to Phene, who simply smirked and rolled her eyes.

“I think introductions are in order,” she said. “Penelope Partridge, enchanté.”

“And what’s your role in all this?” Sirius asked, his lip twitching.

“That’s for the French Ministry to know, monsieur Black,” was her toothy reply.

“This is Carina Black, daughter of, well, I’m sure you’ve figured it out,” Phene gestured vaguely at Bellatrix.

“Not a Lestrange? Who would think that pure, sweet Bella would ever birth a bastard? Was daddy’s name not sacred enough for you?” he grinned. Bellatrix allowed her overall frustration with the situation to surface, and she could feel her eyelid twitching beneath her left eye. Sirius couldn’t be further from the mark, but if he thought she was pressed about his woeful barbs then he
wouldn’t have reason to doubt them.

“Why did you immediately start attacking?” Hermione took over, pleading with her big brown eyes for Sirius to at least feign reproach.

“Forgive me for not immediately trusting anything that even vaguely resembles my cousin,” he retorted. Hermione let out a heavy sigh, looking wearily to Bellatrix.

“Carina rescued us from her mother that day, and it’s thanks to her we’re here and alive,” she eventually revealed, although Sirius didn’t seem particularly impressed.

“Then she went mental and kicked us out after she learned you were muggleborn,” Ron added, and Hermione and Bellatrix both sent him a scathing look.

“Rergardless,” she pressed on, “you shouldn’t be hasty to judge Carina for the family she comes from. Your family. She wants Bellatrix Lestrange gone, just as we do.”

Sirius frowned at being chastised by the young girl, feeling far too much like a naughty schoolboy and far too little like the authority figure he was meant to be. Her resemblance to McGonagall was uncanny, too.

“If you agree not to start fighting again we’ll undo the ropes and give your wand back. We- well, we can’t do anything that might be considered ‘malicious intent’, so you have to trust us,” Harry said, hoping to abate his godfather’s more erratic tendencies.

“Oh, don’t tell me you made an oath with that snake,” Sirius barked. “How could you be so daft?” An embarrassed look flashed across Harry’s face for a second before it settled on a scowl.

“Well, Sirius, you weren’t really there at the time, so we couldn’t really take your advice,” he shot back. Suitably berated, Sirius stayed silent as the Incarcerous spell was lifted.

“Carina,” Sirius spoke, and Bellatrix held his gaze with folded arms. He watched her intently, scanning her for something- she threw her occlumency shields up, but couldn’t feel any mental invasion, despite the scrutiny.

“If you really do want to help off my cousin, then you’re welcome to try. But for now the Order can keep an eye on you, and no more late night trips into the library,” he said.

“I don’t think you’re the one who should be calling the shots here,” Bellatrix retorted, gripping her arms tighter.

“Drop the attitude, would you? Didn’t your mother teach you better?” Sirius scoffed.

“Oh, I’ll-”

The arms of both Phene and Hermione held Bellatrix back as she lurched forwards, the girls standing off across from the boys. Then Bellatrix turned and stormed from the room, and Hermione spared a quick glance to the others before chasing after her.

“Maybe this isn’t such a bad thing,” Hermione said, catching up as Bella began to pace in the foyer.

“Now we don’t have to figure out a way to bypass the library’s enchantments, and there’s so much the Order of the Phoenix can do to help you,” she continued.
“It doesn’t matter, I’m going to obliviate him,” Bellatrix decided, stopping in her tracks.

“No, you’re not,” Hermione stated. “Sirius can be… well, he’s reckless, and he had no place attacking you the way he did. But he’s Harry’s godfather, and he’s our friend.”

“Right, of course, you’re running to protect your little boyfriend,” Bellatrix bristled.

“You know that Harry’s not my boyfriend, and even if he was it wouldn’t be unreasonable for me to do so. Face it, you’re outnumbered here,” Hermione argued, her own temper flaring.

“Watch your tone, muddy,” Bellatrix hissed and shouldered past, trudging back into the room with the others. Harry and Ron had the decency to fix up at least some of the furniture, as the couches and chairs were all upright again as the boys sat huddled around the coffee table next to Sirius.

“Where’s Ph- Pennie?” Bellatrix demanded.

“Went to the bathroom to go dress her wound. Didn’t trust me to fix her up,” Sirius shrugged. Bella’s lip curled, but she crossed the room nevertheless. She found Sirius’ blasé attitude exceedingly irritating, although the thought of Walburga failing to drill those terrible habits out of him was almost comforting. Until he sent that arrogant smirk her way, and then it was just irritating again.

“Lose the argument, hm?” he asked. The two boys looked surprised, and Sirius just looked smug. Bellatrix cocked her head and gave a tight, sarcastic smile.

“I suppose you’d know the feeling. But at least I’m not the fifty year old man who got chastised by a teenager,” she replied.

“Fifty?” Sirius choked, glaring at her peevishly.

“Oh? Aren’t you?” she grinned.

Hermione reentered the room, fixing the furnishings here and there as she went.

“I think it’s time we went home,” she announced, stitching together a tear in the upholstery of the couch.

“Second that,” Ron said, already getting up.

“What about my wand?” Sirius asked, shooting a quick glare to Bellatrix before turning to Hermione.

“You’ll get it back when we’re back at Grimmauld Place, where you were supposed to stay,” Hermione said, sending him, Harry and Ron scathing looks of her own. They looked ready to argue, but her heated scowl alongside Bellatrix’s mocking grin kept them quiet.

“We’re going to have to tell the Order what happened, but I’ll try to give you a few days’ notice,” Hermione told Bellatrix before shuffling everyone off into the fireplace. Bella opened her mouth to argue, but before she could get a word in Hermione was gone in a whirlwind of green flame.

Groaning, Bellatrix sat down on the couch. There were far too many people involved already- Phene was an unwelcome attachment from the very beginning, her sisters were necessary but still had their own reservations, and while the ‘Boy Who Lived’ and his groupies had their uses, they were becoming far more trouble than they were worth. Bringing Dumbledore’s secret society into the mix was the last thing Bellatrix wanted, but it didn’t look like she was getting a choice.
Phene wandered back into the room, her arm now absent of its previous gash, and she poked her head around in surprise.

“Where did everybody go?”

Bellatrix sighed.

Chapter End Notes

sorry about the delay in updating! I've gone a bit off course with my plan so I'm struggling with the direction a bit, but still the story must go on
As interested as the Order was in the existence of one Carina Black, daughter of Bellatrix Lestrange, the issue of Sirius’ little excursion seemed a more pressing matter to deal with. Hermione was glad that it bought her more time, but both Harry and Ron were still giving her the cold shoulder for taking Carina’s side against Sirius. She rolled her eyes at the thought. The whole situation reminded her of when Sirius had sent Harry his new broom in their third year, and she had reported it to Professor McGonagall- and despite not knowing Sirius’ true nature at the time, both boys had been ropable with her even though she had only been concerned for Harry’s safety. The difference was that back then she had cried to Hagrid until they finally acknowledged the severity of the situation, while now she wasn’t willing to sit back and take their attitude.

Hermione appreciated the positive influence Sirius had on Harry’s life; she loved her friend, and he deserved the love of a godfather that he had been denied all throughout his life. She also respected Sirius as a person, knowing that fourteen years of wrongful imprisonment in Azkaban would be enough to bring out anyone’s worst behaviour. However, that didn’t mean she had to approve of his reckless personality and propensity to cast first and ask questions later. She decided she wouldn’t give him such a hard time though, given that he was currently getting chewed out by a very voracious Molly Weasley, and an equally disappointed Remus Lupin. Although he only had himself to blame, Hermione did not envy Sirius at all. Only the arrival of Albus Dumbledore himself could have stalled Molly’s rant, and so to Sirius’ great fortune it was none other than the wizened wizard himself who stepped through the threshold.

“T’m sure that Sirius is very remorseful for his actions, as nobly motivated as they were,” he said with a nod, and all of the hot air escaped from Molly’s face as she visibly deflated.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right,” she conceded, but sent a quick, seedy glare at Sirius nonetheless. Dumbledore offered them both an easy smile, and with that the topic was dropped.

“No, I think there is another matter worth discussing- the elephant in the room, as Muggles might say,” he continued. Hermione hid her wince behind a glass of water.

Not all of the Order members were present, and certainly not the periphery members. Arthur, for instance, knew that Molly would relay any important information to him, and that anything pertaining to Ministry affairs would be better off in Kingsley Shacklebolt’s hands. Mundungus Fletcher was also absent; while he was more likely to hold any information from the underbelly of the wizarding world, the complete lack of any rumours of a Lestrange-Black daughter until now meant that he was likely as in the dark as any of them, which was how they wanted it to stay. However, there were still more Order members than Hermione was comfortable with simply over a meeting to discuss the existence of Carina Black. Tonks’ presence was a given, considering her family ties. Snape was also in attendance, having the closest ties to Voldemort and, by extension, Bellatrix Lestrange. Hermione thought that Moody hardly had a reason to be here, but
the man was nothing if not paranoid.

Eventually everyone took their seats around the metaphorical round table that stretched across the dining table, and so the meeting began. Hermione watched with narrowed eyes as Kreacher hung silently in the corner, leering at them all but staying oddly silent. Her eyebrows knitted together but she decided not to draw attention to his odd behaviour—Sirius gave the poor elf a hard enough time already. Dumbledore cleared his throat softly, drawing the attention of everyone in the room.

“I’m sure most of you have heard some version of the events we must discuss, but for the benefit of anyone who has not: young Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley have recently made the acquaintance of a girl who goes by the name of Carina Black, claiming to be the child of Bellatrix Lestrange.”

Bellatrix lay across the chaise lounge in the study, frowning at the book hanging between her two fingers. The hidden orchestra played a quiet, classical tune through the charmed walls and the warm sun shone through the windows. It should have been pleasant, but Bellatrix could not shake the restless feeling that had settled in her core. She had not heard back from the mudblood and her boyfriends, nor anyone from their little club. Nor had she from either of her sisters, for that matter. She knew she ought to contact them and update them on these new circumstances—doing so could be dangerous for either of them, so she didn’t. Yet now she was stuck in an indeterminate waiting game until somebody showed up to decide her fate. Granger seemed to have some amount of faith in her, which was foolish, but not entirely unappreciated. The boys, however, did not.

Phoenicis’ ability to bypass most anti-apparition wards eased her nerves somewhat, but she still hoped it wouldn’t come to that; she’d just gotten settled in here, and she wasn’t really an ‘on the run’ sort of girl. In the meantime, she had turned back to her project of unravelling the enigma of time travel, only to run into the small problem that was contemporary quantum physics.

“I don’t suppose you understand the principles of fourth dimensional spacetime?” she sighed, twisting her head to look at Phene upon her perch. Her train of tail feathers twitched and she pulled her neck out from under her wing languidly. One beady black eye blinked open, and she tilted her head in an attempted smile.

“Having some trouble understanding the fundamentals of the universe?” she cawed.

“Shut up,” Bellatrix said, turning back to her book with a scowl. She had anticipated such difficulties, but they were necessary if she ever wanted to see her sisters—her sisters—again. Maybe she was in over her head, attempting to invent a kind of magic untouched by far greater, more powerful wizards than herself. But she was a Black, which meant that there wasn’t anything she couldn’t do once she set her mind to it.

“Failure is not an option,” she recited to herself.

A loud pop broke the meagre peace, drawing Bellatrix and Phene’s dual gazes to the centre of the office. Standing there was the miserable form of Kreacher, who stood bent over in half so that his large bat ears brushed the floor.
“The Order of the Phoenix has finished their meeting concerning Mistress Carina,” Kreacher announced.

“What a great bloody help you are,” Bellatrix hissed, and stormed off to slam her book down on the desk.

“Kreacher is a good house elf,” he pleaded, “he has brought memories!”

That gave Bellatrix pause. She slowly turned to look at him, making him suffer patience until she finally decided to indulge him.

“Give them to me,” she ordered.

Phene let out a trill of laughter and fluttered to the floor, then rose to her full height and adjusted her hat.

“What is Phoenicis doing with the young Mistress?” Kreacher asked warily. Phene waved off his concerns with a twirl of her hand.

“Oh, don’t be like that. I was always a good familiar, wasn’t I?” she replied. Kreacher narrowed his eyes, but there was no denial to be had.

“You two know each other?” Bellatrix asked casually, although it was clear that she was listening very intently. When Phene failed to reply, Kreacher took it upon himself to explain.

“Phoenicis had been a guardian to the young Mistress Maia for as long as Kreacher has known. When Maia left the family, so too did she.”

“And just as well. Dealing with her unwanted suitors was becoming such a chore,” Phene said with a shrug.

“Mistress Maia should have married, as was her duty to her House. Phoenicis should not have interfered,” Kreacher grumbled. Phene narrowed her eyes, shifting into a terrible scowl that was unfamiliar on her typically classic features.

“Isn’t there something you were meant to be doing?” she asked Kreacher pointedly.

As much as Bellatrix was happy to let the argument continue, her own situation was currently more important.

“Right. Give them up,” Bella agreed, transfiguring a spare shirt button into a vial. Kreacher kneeled shakily as she pressed the tip of the snowgum wand to his temple, and slowly pulled the wispy silver strands from his mind. With the memories in place Bellatrix put the stopper back on the vial, and looked down at the crotchety elf.

“Your service is acknowledged. Now go home before anyone notices you were ever gone,” she ordered. Phene gave him a sarcastic wave as he bowed and apparated away. Bellatrix made towards the empty guest room that she had used to store some of her purchases that she hadn’t been bothered to put away, and she could hear the clicking of heels as Phene trailed behind her. Pulling the pensieve into place atop its stand in the centre of the room, Bellatrix emptied the vial into the bowl.

“What’s this?” Phene asked, grabbing a cast iron ring that encased a thick, glass lens.

“That’s the- what’s-it-called- the projecteur. The man at the store threw it in when he sold me the
“pensieve,” Bellatrix replied, snapping her fingers. Phene peered through the glass, her features distorting through the lens.

“What’s it do?”

“It should refract the memories from the pensive into the room. It’s meant to allow multiple people to view memories at the same time, but I wanted it because I don’t like standing around with my head dunked in a bowl like a stupid bloody ostrich,” Bellatrix said. She took the projector from Phene and placed it atop the sieve, and when she tapped the glass with her wand the interior of Grimmauld Place’s dining room materialised as a skin on the room’s walls. Around them Kreacher’s memories took shape, and both Bellatrix and Phene instinctively stepped back to stand against the wall as a dining room table and its occupants took shape in the room’s centre, while Kreacher himself hid away in the corner. Around the table Bellatrix recognised the faces of the musketeers three, Albus Dumbledore, her maniac cousin, one or two redheads that must have also been Weasleys, and a few of the other attackers when she had first visited Grimmauld Place. Dumbledore, of course, sat at the head of the table.

“And you say she is how old?” Albus asked, stroking his beard.

“I don’t think she’s any older than us,” Harry replied, glancing at Hermione and Ron, who nodded in agreement.

“And certainly no younger. Azkaban didn’t exactly have a daycare centre,” Sirius pointed out. Dumbeldore acknowledged the point with a short nod, and a man with a dark curtain of hair cleared his throat and began to speak.

“I assure you that Bellatrix Lestrange showed any signs of pregnancy prior to His fall. There is a possibility she simply exhibited no signs, but it is more likely than not that some kind of magical means was used to either conceal or conceive a child,” he said.

“Is it possible, Severus, that you were simply out of the loop?” Sirius asked sardonically.

“If what these children are saying is true,” Severus continued, ignoring the sharp glare from Harry, “then it is likely none other than Bellatrix, the Dark Lord, and the father- whoever he may be- knew of it. Bellatrix has never had a penchant for subtlety, yet this does seem to be a secret she would be willing to hold close to her chest,” he admitted while sending a scathing glare Sirius’ way.

“Who does this man think he is? ‘Not one for subtlety’. What does he know?” Bellatrix snarked, crossing her arms. Phene bit back a smile and stayed silent as the phantom conversation continued on.

“We have also learned that this was the same young woman who accessed Grimmauld Place’s library some time ago,” Dumbledore shared for the benefit of the other Order members.

“Do we know how she got into our headquarters in the first place, then?” a wiry, mousy haired man asked.

“She has a Phoenix familiar, which was able to apparate us out of Malfoy Manor. I assume they got here the same way,” Harry chimed in.

“I didn’t see a Phoenix- neither here nor at her house,” Sirius frowned. Ron shrugged.

“It comes and goes, I think,” he said.
“Yes, Fawkes has a habit of taking off every now and then too,” Dumbledore smiled. “I like to imagine that wherever he goes, he’s helping those who need him more than I.”

Bellatrix shot a surreptitious look at Phene, who was not-so-subtly stifling a giggle behind one hand.

“Be quiet,” she elbowed her.

“That does explain a few things, but honestly I think I’d be happier if she really were a boggart,” a redhead woman, likely the Weasley matriarch, commented. A few heads nodded in agreement, and Hermione frowned.

“Who was the other woman, then?” somebody asked.

“The woman accompanying Miss Black has been identified as Penelope Partridge, an Unspeakable for the French Ministry, although for obvious reasons we cannot be certain of the extent of her involvement in Miss Black’s affairs,” Dumbeldore explained.

“What’s the French Ministry got to do with any of this?” Mrs Weasley butted in.

“We don’t know, and we’re unlikely to get a very good answer. Their Ministry is uncooperative with ours at the best of times,” a dark skinned man replied.

“But why has the little devil-spawn suddenly made an appearance now, when for all the world it’s as if she doesn’t exist,” a gruff old man grumbled, his prosthetic eye whirring around the room as he gauged everyone’s reactions.

“She says she’s been working on a project that will help her deal with Lestrange, and I’ve been helping her over the past week or so- she seems very serious about it, although she keeps the details of her plans to herself,” Hermione explained.

“You’ve been spending some time with her then?” Dumbledore arched an eyebrow inquisitively.

“Yes,” Hermione admitted, ducking her head slightly as all eyes turned on her.

“Watch the mudblood slander me in front of all her little friends while she thinks I’m not there to watch,” Bellatrix sneered.

“And I believe, that despite her upbringing- troubled as I’m sure it was- she’s a good person. It may be difficult to see at first because she’s, well, she’s abrasive-” both Bellatrix and the memory Sirius snorted at that, “-but I know she can be kind, too. If she hadn’t rescued us from Malfoy Manor, we probably wouldn’t be here right now.”

“You were saying?” Phene grinned.

“Oh, shut it. You were the one that saved them, not me,” Bellatrix said, ignoring Phene’s smug look.

The girl with pink hair leaned forwards in interest, and the shifting of its hue to a lighter shade gave her away as a true metamorphmagus. There were a few aggrieved looks shared across the room, uneasy either about the altercation at Malfoy Manor or Carina’s role in the rescue, or both.

“It’s a little suspicious though, isn’t it? That a scrappy little girl could hold off my cousin in a duel long enough to get away?” Sirius pointed out.

“He says that as if I didn’t kick his ass,” Bellatrix growled.
“You didn’t kick his ass. Hermione did,” Phene countered, pointing at the memory of the girl.

“Oh, you wouldn’t know. You got knocked out in the first ten bloody minutes,” Bellatrix replied stiffly.

“First of all, it wasn’t hard to figure out based on the contextual clues of your conversation, and second of all, this body wasn’t built for dueling. I’m used to a near three-sixty degree special awareness, it’s not easy to adjust you know-“

“Quiet, they’re still talking!”

“I don’t think we can trust her. It’s all too convenient- if she even is who she says she is, there’s no way of knowing that it’s not a trap. The Death Eaters wouldn’t be past using a young girl as bait, whether she’s going along with it willingly or not,” the man with the mad eye decided. A cacophony of voices rose and clashed as every Order member sitting around the table tried to offer their opinion and throw in their two cents. It was Dumbledore’s soft cough, however, that cut through the rabble to catch everyone’s attention.

“What do you have to say to that, Miss Granger? You have, after all, spent the most time with her, and I believe I speak for everyone here when I say that I trust your judgement,” he asked. Hermione glanced around bashfully, but didn’t shy away from the question.

“Well, I admit that I don’t know a lot about her, and well, sometimes I feel that maybe she is hiding something- but that much is to be expected, given her circumstances. But there’s the fact that she makes no secret of her prejudices, which I wouldn’t expect her to do if she were trying to warm us up to her. Really, most of the time she only barely tolerates us,” Hermione explained, and Ron and Harry both nodded in agreement.

“There’s also Ms Partridge to take into account; I don’t know who she is, or if she’s ever telling the truth- she’s a bit creepy, to be honest- but she and Carina don’t seem to get along very well. I think she’s been assigned to watch over her, and I know better than to dismiss somebody as a potential Death Eater just because they don’t seem the type, but even if she is, I don’t think they’re working together .”

“You’re a smart girl Hermione, you can see the signs. The possibility that she’s working with her mother isn’t easy to ignore,” Sirius said, appealing to her rational nature.

“I know that,” Hermione agreed, “but that’s not the impression I get. When she looks at the poster of Bellatrix Lestrange, it’s with a contempt that I know can’t be faked.”

The group stewed on that for a moment, each coming to terms with their own thoughts on the situation.

“Kreacher, go bring us some Firewhiskey, will you?” Sirius called out wearily, catching the old elf off guard. With a grumble he popped away, taking the scene of the dining room with him.

As the memory ended, Bellatrix felt her head spin as her mind readjusted to the new, original setting of the spare guest room.

“You know, your cover is working pretty well. Better than I thought it would, really. Didn’t think it’d last this long, but then again I suppose people don’t really jump to the time travel conclusion when there’s a more logical one on offer,” Phene mused.

“I hate it,” Bellatrix snarled, and Phene raised an eyebrow.
“Really? I suppose you could have been a distant cousin just as easy,” she said, rubbing her chin.

“No, I hate- I hate all of it. I don’t want to be Carina or anyone other than myself, but there’s already one of those running around and she’s a fucking fuckup!” Bellatrix fumed. “I just want to go home and live my life, but apparently in order to invent time travel, you actually have to know complex magical theory at a professional level!”

“I know it’s not the answer you want to hear, but your best chance of bringing us back to our own time is to fulfil that prophecy,” Phene pointed out.

“There’s nothing to fulfil- it’s all tripe,” Bellatrix scoffed, although she didn’t sound so sure as she seemed.

“I’m even more hopeless than you at theoretical time travel nonsense,” Phene said, ignoring Bella’s glare, “but I do know someone who’s good at interpreting prophecy nonsense.”

“And you didn’t mention this earlier because?” Bellatrix growled, her eyes flashing dangerously as she shot telepathic daggers.

“Because she lives in the ethereal plane,” Phene countered.

"Right. The ethereal plane," Bella scoffed rolled her eyes, losing all her steam. Phene smiled thinly.

“See- I knew you wouldn’t give it a chance.”

“Let’s make a deal, shall we?” Bellatrix said, and Phene perked up with renewed interest.

“Oh, I like deals,” she crooned.

“I’ll play along with this little fantasy of yours for a day, and then you leave me alone for a day. Does that sound fair?”

Phene tossed her head from side to side as she inspected a speck on the ceiling in thought.

“I suppose so,” she finally decided, then held her hand out. Bellatrix clasped it in her own and then jerked it downwards, informally sealing the deal. There was no magic involved, but she felt the surge of an oath made nonetheless. Neither of them reacted to it, although the smile Phene wore was almost unnerving- if Bellatrix could be unnerved by something so benign.

The telltale pop of apparition sounded from the hallway, and without looking up Andromeda greeted her daughter.

“Good evening, Dora. Ted’s working late, so he probably won’t get back until after dinner,” she said, carefully dicing the tomatoes. Most witches used spells for such a chore, but she had always avoided using magic in the kitchen during Dora’s childhood, afraid to leave a chopping knife unattended. And even as Dora grew up she became no less clumsy, so Andromeda hadn’t bothered to shake the habit.
“Wotcher, mum,” Dora called back, but her voice lacked its usual chirpiness. Finally looking up, Andromeda recognised the pastel colours of distress in her daughter’s hair. She set the knife down in concern.

“What’s wrong? This isn’t about Remus again, is it?” she asked. Andromeda knew of her daughter’s romance with the werewolf, and while she didn’t judge them—she was certainly in no place to—she had often found herself consoling her daughter over the troubles that they shared. And there were many, with at least half of them attributed to Lupin’s attachment to Sirius.

“No, no- Remus is fine. So is Sirius, thankfully, but you’re not going to believe it,” Dora muttered.

“Try me,” Andromeda replied, trying to bite back a grin. Right now, there was nothing she wouldn’t believe. Dora sucked in a deep breath and exhaled, readying herself.

“The kids- Harry, Ron, and Hermione, that is- though I s’pose they’re not kids anymore- well, they’ve been hiding this other kid called Carina for a few weeks now, I think it’s been. Only she’s been going by the last name Black, and, well, they’re saying that she’s Bellatrix Lestrange’s daughter,” Dora rambled, the strain in her voice growing tighter until she stopped for a breath.

“Are you supposed to be telling me this?” Andromeda teased, hoping to put her daughter at ease. Dora smiled weakly and let out an awkward chuckle that shook her shoulders.

“Well, I- I just wanted you to know, I guess. She’d be my cousin, after all.”

Andromeda schooled her features into the reserved look she had been trained since birth to wear. It was natural for Nymphadora to be conflicted over this—even if she didn’t know the truth.

Perhaps especially because she didn’t know the truth.

She considered how she ought to react. If her sister—the very one she had been raised with, who had loved her until she hadn’t—was revealed to have a daughter running around, how would she take it? She let a weary smile fall upon her lips. There were few who would believe it, but Bella had always had a maternal streak. Being the protective eldest daughter, often the babysitter of the family, and their mother’s closest confidant, there was no denying that Bellatrix was capable of caring a child if she wanted. She hadn’t wanted—despite her obsession with family values and pureblood ideology, becoming an obedient housewife with the single purpose of producing heirs had never been a fate she was willing to accept. Apparently, being the right hand soldier to a madman was the life she preferred.

But if she did have a daughter? There was no doubt that the child would be raised in an ideological cesspit of privilege, prejudice and a false sense of victimhood. The child would be a terror from hell, groomed by its parents to become a war machine—a fate Andromeda knew she would be willing to intervene in if the opportunity arose. Which was what she planned to do, even if she knew Carina Black by another name.

“Well, if that’s true, then the most important thing is that we treat this child like her own person. We cannot control the circumstances of her birth, but if she is willing to accept a helping hand to escape that world, then it is our duty to extend it. Lord knows I needed it,” she said, and spared a pointed glance to the photo frame of her and Ted on their wedding day. Dora followed her gaze, and her hair regained some of its usual colour.

“Yeah, you’re right,” she agreed, “Hermione thinks she’s getting through to her, so that’s got to count for something.”
Andromeda paused.

“Wait- Hermione? Isn’t she the muggleborn girl?”

“Yeah, funny that, isn’t it? Harry and Ron say Carina was pretty hostile to her at first because of how she was raised and all, but ’Mione says they’re starting to get along. So maybe she isn’t a lost cause after all,” Dora shrugged.

“How… curious,” Andromeda remarked. Bellatrix must be desperate if she was willing to tolerate a muggleborn’s presence. But, then again, this was also a Bellatrix who hadn’t yet been completely radicalised by Lord Voldemort’s subtle indoctrination. While she had always been prejudiced and perhaps even cruel towards those she considered lesser- which was most everyone- she was also capable of being civil (when she wanted to be). Andromeda also knew that Hermione was known as the brightest witch of her year, with an academic record that could have rivalled Bella’s own, which would probably be enough for Bella to tolerate her presence. Somewhat.

“Also, turns out the woman that was with her when she broke in was a French Ministry employee. So she says, of course, but we don’t know for sure- and of course, they’re not about to hand over a list of their Unspeakables, so we’re a bit in the dark on that,” Dora continued.

“So there was somebody else,” Andromeda said aloud, breaking from her thoughts.

“Yeah…? Didn’t I tell you before? Goes by Penelope Partridge. Nobody really knows what she’s doing running around with cuz, and Hermione doesn’t think they’ll spill any time soon,” Dora replied.

Andromeda pursed her lips. There was no telling what this Partridge character was up to, but if Bellatrix was trying to hide her, then it couldn’t be good. A part of her had already known that Bellatrix was lying about something, but the question was why she felt the need to- she usually only did so when she believed doing so protected her and Narcissa. Yet if there was only one thing Andromeda knew for certain, it was that she and Bellatrix were going to have a serious sisterly talk about time travel and honesty.

“This woman, what else do you know about her?” she asked.

“Not a whole lot. We’re all going off what they’ve been saying through the kids, and it’s near useless to even try to get any information from across the pond,” Nymphadora explained.

“That is awfully convenient, isn’t it?” Andromeda mused to herself.

“Yeah,” Dora nodded, “and who knows what she’s doing with Black. Moody thinks it’s all too fishy, but he thinks that about everything. Sirius is being grouchy about it- because of his whole grudge against Lestrange and all- and I don’t know about the others, but I think Remus and Dumbledore think that if Carina’s set against the Death Eaters, we ought to help her, shitty attitude or not.”

Andromeda hummed in agreement.

“I don’t know how she might feel about me, from what I’m sure she’s been told. But we should give her a chance to make that decision for herself, shouldn’t we?” she suggested. It was odd, how fitting the double entendre was.

“I can try to set up a meeting through the Order, but it might take a while,” Dora said.

“I think that’s a good idea,” Andromeda said, giving her daughter a comforting squeeze on the
shoulder.

“In the meantime, I want you to find out everything you can about this Penelope Partridge.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the wait on this chapter, but I hope it was a fun one! I enjoyed writing Phene and Bellatrix in the metaphorical box at the theatre Kreacher's memories
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Who you gonna call? Probably not these idiots

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Phoenicis was the first to extend the olive branch in regards to their deal, as the next day she was nowhere to be found. There was no clinking of pots and pans from the kitchen, no chittering or clucking from the garden, and there were no snarky comments and smug grins following her around. Bellatrix couldn’t help but let out a small giggle as she skipped down the stairs and threw the pantry door open. Without the old bird standing over her shoulder judging her life choices, she was free to steal whatever she wanted. Gleefully she grabbed an unopened pack of chocolate dinner mints, ready to start her uninterrupted day of solitude on a good note.

She strolled past the study; she could bore herself to death with interpolar magic equilibrium any other day, and there were two rooms she didn’t want Phene to poke around in. The first was the sealed room which may or may not hold a poltergeist, which Bellatrix decided she wouldn’t waste her time with yet, for she was drawn instead down to the theater.

The music hall thrummed with new life, each instrument innervated from having been exercised. The pipe organ sprawled across the wall like a massive brass octopus, and Bellatrix felt its unseen tendrils wrap around her and draw her towards it. Already, she could hear its song calling her, tempting her to reveal its secrets.

But a mere marionette, Bellatrix sat at the console and placed her hands upon the ivory keys. Reverently she played the first chord, and a shiver ran down her spine as the loud chimes disturbed the silent hall. Then, just as it had done before, a song that felt as foreign and familiar as a childhood lullaby clouded her senses. It begged to be played, and she ached to play it.

As her fingers drifted across the keys the strings and percussion instruments joined her, as if her melody had awoken them from a deep slumber. The music swelled as she became more bold, and Bellatrix couldn’t fight a grin as the unique touch of Black family magic surged within her. Each arpeggio was like an itch in just the right spot, and when she switched to a smooth legato style she felt as if she were stepping into a warm bath. Every note brought a satisfying twist, creating a hauntingly beautiful melody, and every accompanying chord delivered an equally decadent sound.

Lost in her concert, Bellatrix almost missed the creak of rusted hinges.

A jolt of adrenaline flung her from her seat as she whirled around to keep her back to the wall and face the intruder. Her heart rate momentarily steadied as she recognised the faces of Hermione, Harry and Ron, but in less than a second her mind whirled from shocked to relieved to furious.

They had apparently caught on almost as quickly, because all three of them backed away and began shoving each other back through the door.

Bellatrix would have been embarrassed at being so easily startled, but she was too busy being livid for such nonsense. She had been so close!
“Get back here so I can throttle you!” she yelled at their retreating forms. She itched to chase after them but the siren song of the organ tempted her to look back at it—now seemingly unassuming and nondescript against the wall. Whatever magic had bloomed from its roots had dissipated, and now it looked for all the world just like any other insignificant instrument in the house. Bellatrix groaned in frustration.

“Why does nobody in this decade ever knock! Or send an owl! Just because you can come and go doesn’t make it any less impolite!” she raved as she stalked the hallways, window and portrait frames rattling as she passed. Apparently assuaged by the fact that she hadn’t resorted to flinging spells yet—yet—the trio stood huddled defensively in the living room, positioning themselves closer to the floor for a quick getaway. While the oath currently protected them from her physical fury (which was too bad, because it had been too long since she had wrapped her hands around somebody’s neck), it did nothing to abate verbal abuse.

“Damn it, who raised you? Or wait—don’t answer that. I really should have known,” she continued, now pacing back and forth as she lost herself in her own irritation.

“What’s your problem? You don’t have to be such a bloody git about it,” Ron shouted back, the first of the three to finally find their Gryffindor courage. Hermione clasped his hand in hers in a show of support, and Harry stepped between them.

“What’s my problem? Every time you lot show up, things turn to shit for me,” she snarled. “Also—this is my house! What if had been nude? Because— and remember this part—I wasn’t expecting visitors!”

The three of them must have shared that mental image, as all of their bluster melted away in favour of awkward coughs and reddened cheeks. Having made her point, Bellatrix could only place her hands on her hips and shake her head in a condescending manner, doing her best impression of Aunt Walburga. With them properly cowed and back in their place, she pressed on.

“Now, what is it that you came here for in the first place?”

“We thought we should tell you in person that you’re invited to come to Grimmauld Place tonight, to meet a few of the members of the Order of the Phoenix. You don’t have to come, but if you don’t Sirius and Dumbledore want to meet you here anyway,” Harry explained.

Bellatrix cursed inwardly. Of course the day that Phene had left her alone was the day that the Order came knocking. While the bird could be a real stick in the mud, she had also stood by Bella’s side more often than not when things came to blows, and her presence was a small (small) comfort during altercations. Still, it wasn’t worth trying to summon her back now—she had a Phene free day, and she was damn well going to see it through.

If it came down to meeting with their entire group alone or just her batshit cousin and Dumbledore, then she decided she’d take the latter option. Although the Headmaster had always favoured the Gryffindors, he was still outwardly kind to all, and had a somewhat calming presence; she doubted he’d give her too much trouble. In fact, she was counting on him to keep Sirius in line.

“I’m not going to meet the Order without Pennie, but she’s working late and probably won’t be home in time. If Sirius wants to force his way back into my home then I suppose he’s welcome, so long as he doesn’t start any more fights,” Bellatrix said, and Hermione nodded to assure her—there was no way she was going to allow a repeat of the other night.

“Oh—and I expect them to bring me food. I don’t have dinner planned,” she added.
Thirty years had aged Dumbledore far more than Bellatrix had anticipated. When she had last seen him he still had dark strands in his trimmed hair, and he had been wearing finely tailored robes and a smart wizard’s hat as he handed her her well-earned certificate, with an ‘O’ score for all of her classes- and she had taken every class they would allow her (and then some). Now his hair was white as snow, the robes he wore favoured comfort over class, and he was holding a large dish of what appeared to be pork chops. And, sitting perched on his shoulder, was a phoenix.

Sirius only looked slightly less deranged than before, but at least had the decency to wash his hair.

“It is a pleasure to meet your acquaintance, Miss Black,” Dumbledore said, bowing slightly.

“And you, sir. Your reputation precedes you,” Bellatrix said and gave a small curtsy of her own. She made a show of ignoring Sirius.

“Such a warm welcome,” Sirius said with a wide grin. Bellatrix knew Aunt Walburga would have also trained her son in the art of elitist snobbery, but he was obviously too boorish to employ it.

“I think I’m being very hospitable, considering you only sprung me on this today,” Bellatrix pointed out.

“I understand- but time runs faster during times of war. I must admit, I was looking forward to your attendance at Grimmauld Place, although I can understand the comforts a home can provide,” Dumbledore said, not-so-subtly placing himself between them.

“Ms Partridge and I have something of a… partnership. It would be remiss of me to accept such an invitation without her presence,” Bellatrix offered cordially.

“Where is the bird, anyway?” Sirius asked, and Bellatrix stared at him in muted horror for the half-second it took for her to realise that he had used a slang term and did not, in fact, know the truth about Phene.

“Must you be so crude?” she spat, trying to cover her moment of shock. He grinned impishly at her and she rolled her eyes at him.

“If you must know, she’s at work. To do her job. Have you ever had one of those?” she sneered. Dumbledore cleared his throat before Sirius could react, and he lifted the dish in his hands to their attention.

“How about we continue this conversation over a hot meal, rather than loitering here?” he suggested.

They wasted no time in settling in at the dining room table, which had been set earlier thanks to Bellatrix’s staunch refusal to acknowledge her lack of a house elf. Though as she looked at the meal Dumbledore had provided, she considered that it definitely hadn’t been cooked by Kreacher. Phene had enlightened her on some of the basics of the culinary arts by now- not that she ever
intended to use them- and she knew that the sauce the pork had been baked in would have taken hours to marinate, and that house elves usually preferred cuisine that could be prepared quickly, as per the whims of their masters. An ill thought struck her as she pondered who exactly had cooked the dish, and she poked at it warily with her fork.

“Swap plates with me,” she said to Hermione, who sat beside her.

“What? Why- you didn’t spit in yours, did you?”

“Do you really think I would lower myself to such a boring prank? Anyway, I don’t trust that there’s no veritaserum in this. Swap with me.”

Hermione rolled her eyes but acquiesced, bowing to Bellatrix’s paranoia in the hopes that she wouldn’t make a bigger fuss. Dumbledore watched the exchange with interest, his eyes twinkling behind his half-moon glasses as a million thoughts undoubtedly unfolded in his mind. And to her credit, Bellatrix did her best to withhold her ire at Ron’s impeccable table manners, although she was carving some impressive ridges into the table with her nails. Eager for a distraction and to get the whole ordeal over with- she caught Dumbledore’s attention by waving her fork in his direction.

“Alright. You can begin your interrogation then,” Bella said frankly, cutting into Hermione’s former dish.

“Miss Black, this is no interrogation. We simply want to know more about you.”

“Right. Because I’m an unknown quantity, and I don’t factor into your plans,” Bellatrix pointed out.

“There is no need to be so cynical, Miss Black,” Dumbledore reprimanded quietly.

“She wouldn’t be a Black if she wasn’t,” Sirius said with a smirk. Bellatrix sent him one of her own.

“Finally recognising me as such, hm?” she hummed, finding the remark more amusing than anything. She was just about as Black as Blacks came, she didn’t need validation from her seedy cousin who philandered with Light aligned Orders.

“The most pressing question we have is how exactly you came about this estate, and how you can be sure that Mrs Lestrange doesn’t know of your whereabouts,” Dumbledore explained, preaching the matter of safety.

"As you know, this house once belonged to Maia Black, who was exiled but not expelled from the family tree. It now belongs to my mother, but trust me when I say this place has been long forgotten,” Bellatrix answered. “As to how I ended up here- well, I’ll let Pennie answer that.”

Dumbledore and Sirius looked aggrieved, and Bellatrix fought desperately to keep her face even.

“I still can’t believe that this place belonged to the Maia Black,” Hermione interjected, her eyes alight with wonder.

“Who?” Ron asked between mouthfuls of baked potato. Hermione looked at Bellatrix to answer, but she held her poker face firm; she wasn’t about to admit that she didn’t know anything about her own (albeit estranged) family member. At her lack of response, Hermione took over.

“Maia Black was a famous composer, who invented all sorts of spell enchantment techniques in regards to autonomous instruments and wrote a whole book on music as it pertains to magic. That,
and all her compositions are incredible- her rhapsody about the forsaken handmaiden is one of the best magical suites I've come across,” she explained. Bella nodded in affirmation, and made a mental note to research more about Maia Black’s apparent spellwork and compositions, remembering that Phene had once mentioned them as well. Still, she had no doubt that whatever she was looking for was hidden behind the Musicanima, and not in sheet music.

“Well then. May I ask about the nature of your project? Perhaps I can review your notes; not that I believe you incapable, nor do I doubt Miss Granger’s skill- but three heads are better than two, one might say,” Albus suggested.

“No, I’d like to keep such details to myself, thank you,” Bellatrix dismissed the thought. Right now her notes were too sparse, chaotic and -unfortunately- baseline to be able to decipher their true purpose, but if there was one wizard who could figure that she intended to master the secrets of time magic, it would be Albus Dumbledore. He opened his mouth to argue the point, but Bella held her hand up, and padded at her lips with her napkin with the other, ignoring everyone’s shared expressions of disdain.

“Allow me to ask a few questions of my own, sir,” she said finally.

“Ah, yes. Of course; I’m sure you have many,” he nodded.

“What is it that you expect from me?” she asked, getting straight to the point. “I mean, I know you’re really here to determine if I’m the real deal, or some kind of spy, or some such nonsense- but should I prove myself genuine, or what counts as genuine in your eyes, what is it that you want?”

“I want merely what is best for you and your situation, that you may be safe from any harm that the Death Eaters may intend for you, that you may be free to pursue a lifestyle of your own choosing, that you may have a peaceful future,” he replied, steepling his fingers. It was a diplomatic answer, to be sure, but one that didn’t offer much by way of short-term goals. However, outnumbered as she was, Bellatrix decided to let the matter drop.

Dumbledore asked a few more questions about her past that were artfully dodged and politely declined, and Sirius asked a few more questions that were poignantly evaded and rudely rebuked. When it became clear that they would have better luck juicing bricks than getting anything else out of her, they gave up their inquisition for the moment.

“Miss Granger mentioned you also have a Phoenix familiar,” Dumbledore noted, steering the conversation into lighter territory as he scratched Fawkes’ chin. Fawkes leaned into the touch, warbling softly with a light and melodic song.

“Familiar would imply domestication. In reality she’s far more of a… wild card, you see,” Bellatrix conceded, “I’m sorry that she couldn’t be here for Fawkes to meet.”

“Ah, I understand,” Dumbledore nodded, although Bellatrix had to doubt that he understood her double meaning.

“Yes, Phoenicis does have a tendency to disappear at the worst of times,” came a low and unfamiliar male voice. Bellatrix’s eye twitched.

“But I suppose you already know that,” Fawkes finished, tilting his head so that his beady black eye caught the light, twinkling just as his master’s did. Bellatrix glanced over at everyone else; Ron was still eating, Harry was in the middle of a conversation with Sirius, and Hermione and Dumbledore were both looking at her oddly, but nobody seemed to notice the talking Phoenix. She
sunk lower into her chair and grabbed her glass of wine, doing her best to ignore the chuckling from a sixth, distinct voice that nobody else could hear.

Harry watched from across the room as Carina scowled into her wine glass. They had reconvened in the living room by the fireplace, enjoying the warmth of the flames and the comfort of the expensive, antique furniture as music from the basement wafted in through the enchanted walls. Sirius was now busy talking to Dumbledore, and with no food left on offer Ron sat back in his chair, stuffed yet far from satisfied.

“Mate, I’m telling you, she’s up to no good. I know that Hermione thinks she’s some helpless victim, but you know what her mum did to Neville’s parents,” Ron whispered loudly to him.

“I know, Ron. I don’t like this any more than you do, but all we need to do is let Dumbledore handle it,” he said in an attempt to placate his friend. Ron didn’t look so convinced, but he wasn’t about to argue against Dumbledore’s judgement, either. At least, not while he was in earshot.

Harry watched Hermione as she tried to engage Carina in conversation and draw her out of her cranky mood. Yet, for all her efforts, Carina’s walls were an impenetrable fortress of stunted emotions and prejudice. It rankled with him that she was abusing Hermione’s ill judgement, and Ron must have felt the same way; the stern look across his face was uncomfortably similar to Percy’s usual countenance, and he was visibly struggling to restrain himself from forcing himself between the two girls.

“I’m gonna go catch some air outside. Make sure nobody kills each other yeah?” was his parting statement as he got up and left the room.

“Perhaps I best go talk to him, and relieve you of the burden of listening to him air his grievances,” Dumbledore leaned over and whispered to him, and Harry shot him a grateful smile. With an exasperated smile the old wizard got up and followed Ron out, Fawkes bobbing on his shoulder as he left.

“Is there a bathroom I could use?” Sirius asked, looking a bit awkward and out of place without Dumbledore’s company.

“I’m surprised you know what one is,” Carina sneered, and before Sirius could reply, Hermione stood up.

“Come on, I’ll show you where it is,” she offered, glad at least of the opportunity to separate the two.

That, unfortunately, left him alone with her. Harry knew it was wrong, but whenever he looked at her all he could see was Bellatrix Lestrange staring back at him. And he knew Hermione was right, and that it wasn’t fair of him to project her mother’s likeness (and terrible, terrible personality) onto her, especially considering how much he hated when people did it to him.

But his brain kept blurring the two women together, and there was an unreasonable part of him that
revolted when he thought any positive thoughts about Carina. And it absolutely *roiled* when he so much as acknowledged her beauty- so it was easier to impose Bellatrix’s attributes onto Carina, as opposed to Carina’s onto Bellatrix.

To Harry’s eternal misfortune, she noticed him staring and snapped up to meet his gaze.

“Got something you want to ask, then?” she prodded.

“Why did you save us that day? It was almost as if you didn’t know who we were,” Harry asked, deciding to rise to the bait. Her scowl was replaced by more of a grimace, and she took her time in answering.

“You’re right, I didn’t recognise you all at first. Call it the heat of the moment. Anyway, I shouldn’t have to explain why I’d want to rescue anyone from… *her*. The enemy of my enemy is my friend and all that,” she said, and shrugged noncommittally.

“Look, I want to say- thank you. I know Hermione’s been doing most of the work reaching out to you, and for some reason she seems to think you deserve it, so I guess I ought to give you the benefit of the doubt, after everything."

It occurred to Harry, as Carina glanced up at him, that her wine glass seemed to be refilling itself without prompting.

“I don’t suppose your Weasel friend shares the same sentiment?” she asked dryly.

“See- you don’t have to be rude to him,” Harry said tersely.

“Let’s get one thing straight,” Carina started, standing up fixing him with a sharp stare. “I don’t give away respect like party favours, I expect it to be earned. Titles like ‘Dark Lord’ and ‘Boy-Who-Lived’ mean nothing to me, because actions speak louder than words. And I have found your actions *severely* wanting. So you and your friend can suck it up and figure out how to prove that you’re not a couple of drivelling, quibbling idiots, and I just *might* give you the time of day.”

With a surge of anger not unfamiliar to him by now, Harry stood up and used his height advantage to glare down at her.

“I’m sure you haven’t had an easy life, but that doesn’t mean you can-”

“You have no idea about my life!” Carina shouted. A flurry of emotions crossed her face, and Harry couldn’t pick a single one until it settled on hardened determination.

“Let’s get this settled, then. You don’t like me- that’s fine. I don’t really like you either. But for better or worse, we’re both in this fight, so you can either help me and Granger, or you can get out of my way.”

They continued to glare at each other, but Carina’s use of Hermione’s actual last name- without her usual acidic tone- took the edge off his anger. Slightly.

A warbled echo of laughter interrupted their staring contest, reverberating around the walls. The two spun their heads around to find its source, but the ghostly sound was coming from each and every direction over the music- until they saw a bright blue form approaching from the hallway. Harry and Carina both ducked as the poltergeist shot like a cannon over their heads. It howled with laughter as it flew in circles around their heads, rocking all the hanging lamps and chandeliers dangerously. Sirius let out a disgruntled shout as he stumbled out of the hall, covered in a thick layer of ectoplasm.
“Been snooping around, have we?” Carina yelled, her voice thick with mixed amusement and vindication as he fired hex after hex at the ghostly form spinning circles around the ceiling. Hermione rushed out after him, still clean but looking no less frazzled.

“And where have you been?” Carina asked.

“Oh, don’t drag me into this!” she hissed back. Luckily for Hermione, Carina was distracted by the poltergeist’s shrieking as it shot above her head again, hurtling straight towards Sirius now, thick strings of ectoplasm dribbling out of its mouth.

“That’s going to be impossible to get out of the carpet! I hope you’re happy!” she cried, sending her own curses at the poltergeist—although given her drunken state, her aim wasn’t so impressive as usual. As it dove to dodge her spells it shot towards Harry, who had to make use of his quidditch reflexes to dive behind an upturned couch to avoid ecto-splatter. At the sound of the calamity inside Ron rushed in through the door, while Dumbledore ambled in behind him.

“Blood hell mate! What did I tell you?” he yelled incredulously, while Albus watched on as if they were all sitting around discussing the weather. Ron’s shout, however, drew the poltergeist’s attention over to him. It let out a keen laugh and swooped down at him, retching a new load of ectoplasm onto his head as it dodged Fawkes’ spitting flames.

“Oh, Ron!” Hermione groaned from her corner of the room, content to stay out of Carina and Sirius’ firing range.

Finally, with a shriek of frustration, Fawkes leapt from Dumbledore’s shoulder and chased the poltergeist out of the room and back down the hallway, nipping at its heels. Yet the room they had left behind was devastated; errant spells meant for the poltergeist had overturned chairs and blasted scorch marks onto the walls, while near every surface the ghost had skimmed over was coated in a viscous sheen of ectoplasm.

“That’s it! Everybody Out!” Carina yelled, her typically pale face flushed from a mixture of anger and intoxication.

“Absolutely not! We’re not leaving without-”

“Come now Sirius, I fear we have overstayed our welcome,” Dumbledore said, placing his hand upon his shaking shoulder. Sirius looked as though he might argue, but another loud screech from down the hallway changed his mind. Instead, he abruptly turned and headed out the floo, followed by closely by Ron. Dumbledore said some parting farewell that Harry missed as he climbed into the fireplace, never so glad to be heading back to Grimmauld Place.

Bellatrix felt her eye twitch flare up again as she watched their retreating forms, a tick exacerbated by the alcohol still flowing freely through her system. However, a shifting movement from behind her caught her eye— and thankfully Hermione’s form was distinct enough from that of a poltergeist that she needn’t immediately move to jump or duck.

“Staying to clean up your friend’s messes?” she asked dryly.

Hermione sighed, taking in the sight of the trashed living room which had suffered such a fate at least three times in her presence now; just another incident to add to the growing laundry list of grievances directed her way. Bellatrix found the sigh contagious, losing all her previous steam and choosing instead to direct her ire at the poltergeist— for now, at least. She could return to her
grudges when she was feeling less groggy.

“Come on then, I’ve got an expunger somewhere around here,” she said, turning down the hall and gesturing for Hermione to follow her.

They spent the next few hours getting sweaty and slick with ectoplasm, having the misfortune to run directly underneath the poltergeist as Fawkes continued to swoop after it. With Fawkes’ (thankfully silent) help they corralled it back into the room it had originally been sealed in— which still held the remnants of the wards necessary to contain such a nuisance— and threw a few spells at it for good measure. When it was finally cornered, Bellatrix aimed the expunger at it, allowing the magically enhanced vacuum to drag the kicking and screaming poltergeist into the container.

Resolving to clean up and get rid of the sealed gheist the next morning, Hermione and Bellatrix both crashed on the remaining upright couch, aching with exhaustion. Both wanting to get up and take a well needed shower but losing the will to move, they unwittingly allowed consciousness to slip away.

Snape floated down the hallways of Malfoy Manor, keeping his occlumency shields firmly in place as masked Death Eaters leered from around corners. Despite the Death Eater’s lack of progress in their goals to rid the world of one Albus Dumbledore— paving the way for an easier infiltration of the Ministry of Magic— Voldemort’s numbers continued to grow. And many of the rookies were eager to get the chance to scrutinise the Inner Circle’s most controversial member.

The longer he stayed toeing the line between both sides, the more precarious his situation became. Lies entangled with half truths and more lies, and it was getting more and more difficult to tell where the Order member started and where the Death Eater ended. He and Dumbledore had discussed how they ought to handle the issue of Carina Black, and the Order’s newfound knowledge of her. The situation was just one of many tightropes, determining how much information he was supposed to have as an inside member of the Order without giving too much vital knowledge to the Death Eaters, all without arousing suspicion.

Without bothering to knock, Snape entered the Malfoy’s office, where the Dark Lord had been holed up for the past week or so.

Voldemort sat on the wingback chair behind the desk as if it were a gilded throne, and Bellatrix stood on his right, her hand gripping the frame of the chair in an almost casual way, but one that suggested a kind of intimacy. Earlier, Severus would have simply considered it a power play, a way for Bellatrix to assert dominance over him by flaunting her closeness with the Dark Lord— but now? Snape had to withhold a shudder. The Dark Lord barely acknowledged his presence, instead choosing to run his bony fingers along Nagini’s smooth scales from where she sat perched along the chair. Despite the low lighting, His pale skin shone in a near translucent way, while Bellatrix’s dark hair seemingly absorbed the limited light that touched it. These were the two deadliest humans in the country, perhaps even the world, and they were ethereal.

His voice, barely above a whisper, could be heard the as loud and clear as if he were standing right
beside him.

“Severus. I believe you have information for me?”

“It has come to the attention of Albus Dumbledore and the Order of the Phoenix that Bellatrix has a daughter, a seventeen year old girl who has been calling herself Carina Black,” Snape revealed, gauging their reactions cautiously.

Bellatrix and the Dark Lord stared at him. Voldemort’s face was a stony, unfeeling wall— as it always was— but Severus could not feel the icy chill that usually preceded his ire. Bellatrix, however, burst into laughter.

“The old man has really lost the plot!” She howled between cackles, and Snape forced himself to ignore the irony.

“Tell me about this child. Why is Dumbledore so convinced?” Voldemort asked. Bellatrix stilled and schooled her face back into an indifferent mask.

“As mentioned, she appears to be of age, but not much older— she has a near uncanny resemblance to Bellatrix, and the poor attitude to match,” he explained.

“I think I’d remember giving birth,” Bellatrix scoffed, but there was an uneasy tremor to it. Snape understood instantly; Voldemort certainly had the unethical scruples to completely obliviate an entire child from one of his lieutenant’s memories.

“Fear not, dear Bella,” Voldemort soothed, reading her fears immediately, “you have never had a pregnancy you didn’t know about.”

Snape found the wording of that rather odd, but had no time to dwell on it. Rather, he was in two minds— the child was undoubtedly related to Bellatrix in some way, from the memories Dumbledore had shared with him. Examining the woman in front of him closely, the similarities were astonishing. They shared a nose, a jawline, dark eyes and wild curls; if not for Bellatrix’s years in Azkaban, she would nearly be a mirror image. But Severus was also a cynical man, and it was difficult for him to accept that Bellatrix could have hidden a daughter seventeen years ago. The timing felt too convenient, her story all too suspicious, and there were far too many unknowns for him to willingly play along. And now, with Bellatrix’s own denial of Carina’s existence, Snape only knew one thing.

Carina was not who anybody thought she was.

“She was discovered when she rescued the children from under the Malfoy’s and Bellatrix’s noses,” Snape smirked, enjoying the way Bellatrix flinched at the reminder of the incident. Voldemort exhaled deeply through his nostrils, the only sign of his displeasure.

“She is certainly no child of mine,” Bellatrix hissed.

“Of course. She is an unknown actor, if she had been working with the Order prior, then I would have warned of her planned invasion, but confusion seems to remain where she has appeared from, or what her motivations are. We know she has been in contact with another woman named Penelope Partridge who claims to be a French Ministry Official, but of course there is limited knowledge on her existence either. This child potentially being a metamorphmagus has not entirely been ruled out, but I see little reason why anybody would want to masquerade as the child of a wanted Death Eater,” Snape continued. There was truly very little the Order knew, and he had to share as much as possible to the Dark Lord so that he wouldn’t think that he was withholding
information. The only thing he couldn’t divulge was that Carina had formed an alliance with the Golden Trio, to discourage him entirely on the idea that she could be in any way connected to Harry Potter.

“As you are already aware, 12 Grimmauld Place is being used as the Order of the Phoenix’s headquarters. The Order was first made aware of her existence when she broke into the house and stole an item from the library. She was able to bypass the wards the same way she was able to infiltrate this Manor- she has the rare access to a loyal Phoenix. We believe her sudden appearance and perhaps even motivation has something to do with the Ancient House.”

“I see. And how has Albus Dumbledore and his associates been taking this… revelation?” Voldemort asked.

“Sentiment on her existence is divided on the Order. Some believe she is a spy working on your behalf, others want to give her a chance despite her parentage,” he sneered.

“I want to meet this girl who calls herself Bellatrix’s daughter. Just as I’m sure you do too, Bella,” Voldemort said, and Bellatrix affirmed the sentiment with a growl. Nagini, too, swung her head to set her beady eyes on Snape’s form, hissing in assent. Somehow, Snape knew what was expected of him before it was even asked.

“Severus, I’m sure you’ll be happy to arrange a way for us to meet,” Voldemort suggested, but the order was loud and clear.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for being patient on the wait for this update, it was bothering me for a little while because I was worried it was boring but then I think I ended up making it fun.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

broke: Dumbledore is manipulating Harry
woke: Fawkes is manipulating Dumbledore

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the dead of night, Phene reappeared. Her tall figure silhouetted in the pale moonlight made for an imposing sight, if Bellatrix had been awake to see it. Hermione, however, opened her eyes to meet two shining orbs that reflected the light in an inhuman way. She froze in horror, only faintly aware of the other girl’s weight pressing against her side from where they had fallen asleep on the couch. She didn’t dare breathe, didn’t dare move, and could only stare at the eerily silent woman looking down at them. Then, with a click of her fingers, the lights flickered on- and Bellatrix stirred.

“We must hurry,” Phene hissed, leaning down and shaking them.

“What? What is it?” Bellatrix cried, getting to her feet in an instant. Hermione only had a second to marvel at her near-instant lucidity before getting up herself, her heart still pumping in her ears at the shock of Phene’s arrival.

“Get up, get your wands,” she persisted.

“What’s wrong? What’s happening?” Bella demanded. Her head thrummed, but the surge of adrenaline coursing through her body was doing a suitable job of suppressing her growing headache.

“We’re not in any danger,” Phene assured, “but somebody else is, so we need to hurry.”

Bellatrix scrutinised her warily- Phene seemed sincere, but she was hesitant to jump into action without any warning. However, Hermione- Gryffindor that she was- looked ready to charge headfirst into battle, and Bellatrix already knew there was no point trying to delay them now.

“Where are we going?” she asked, but Phene was already pushing them out the back door and into the backyard.

“The forest. It’s a fifteen minute walk, faster if we run. No use apparating- not tonight- you’re going to have to follow me.”

Bellatrix cursed under her breath. She hadn’t been avoiding going into the local forest per se, it was just that she saw no advantage to walking into a dangerous environment as dense and untamed as Hogwarts’ forbidden forest without good reason. And now they were rushing into it in the middle of night, with only Phene to guide them.

Great.
Phene led the pace with a jog as she ferried them down a beaten track, dodging felled branches and scattered rocks until they reached the forest’s edge, where they had to slow to a power walk to avoid tripping over gnarled roots and stray vines. The path was lit up by the light of the waxing gibbous moon—thankfully still a day or two away from a full moon—but as they drew deeper into the forest both Bellatrix and Hermione needed to light their wands in order to see three feet in front of them. Phene trudged ahead unbothered with such things.

As they closed in on their destination the tension in her body began to ease, and though they marched ahead with purpose, the hard lines crossing her face began to melt away.

"I have to ask- which one of you let out the poltergeist?" she asked, her eyes twinkling with amusement as she pulled a string of ectoplasm off Bella’s shoulder.

"Sirius," Bellatrix answered, spitting the name like bile. "I'll explain later," she added at Phene’s confused expression.

"Hm, well. Good on you for getting rid of it," she said, and that was that— for they reached their journey’s end.

They had arrived at a small clearing, which was aglow in the light of the moon filtering through the spaces between the tree canopies. It was deceptively serene, with speckled starlight glittering off the dew on the grass, the moss on the trees, and a nearby lake. And in the centre of the clearing, near blinding in its shining light, was a unicorn mare laying on the ground. Hermione gasped as Phene dragged them closer to it, and let out a relieved sigh when she saw it heave a sigh of exhaustion.

“You brought us out here for a bloody unicorn?” Bellatrix asked, the makings of a scowl forming on her face.

“A unicorn giving birth is at its most vulnerable. Do you want all the dark creatures and wizards who travel this forest jumped up on unicorn blood? Because that’s how you get it,” Phene retorted. Hermione then realised that she was right; the mare heaved another sigh with its pregnant belly, already in the early stages of labour.

“The local centaurs think she might have complications, so I’ll need you two to guard her while I assist the birth,” Phene explained.

“Why aren’t the local centaurs guarding her then?” Bellatrix asked, gripping her hips with her hands.

“They are,” Phene replied, “along the outskirts. But there’s only so much they can do without getting near her, and she’ll be far less stressed by two young girls.”

As if on cue, a dark shape shot like a blur from between two trees— the only features visible on its hooded face being two bloodshot eyes. It screeched as it scrambled towards the unicorn, ambling forward surprisingly fast for its two thin, bony legs. Before Hermione or even Bella could react, Phene twisted her arm and jabbed it forward, a plume of fire revolving around her wrist until it was launched forwards like a cobra strike. The figure's body caught alight, and in the glow of the flames they could make out the hag's warped features as it screeched.

With a bone breaking *Bombarda* at the tip of her tongue, Bellatrix banished the burning creature into the depths of the lake. After the day she’d had yesterday, it felt good to cause something some pain.
The mare let out a distressed whinny, and Phene nodded at Bella, and then to Hermione.

“I’m trusting you both to keep us covered,” she said, then hurried to the unicorn’s side.

Hermione and Bellatrix only had a moment to glance to each other before another creature slipped through the trees- this time just a regular wolf, tempted by the scent of a vulnerable mare. But where there was one, a pack was sure follow. Hermione sent a few stinging hexes towards its face and feet, hoping that she could demonstrate to it that an attempted attack wouldn’t be worth the effort. It snarled at her but got the hint, if only for now.

Bellatrix spared her a glance and then a nod, and set off to stalk the perimeter, while she stayed in position to fend off anything on her side.

Occasionally Hermione would hear the thunderous galloping of centaurs- or perhaps other unicorns- from deeper within the forest, and then the wailing of whatever deviant creature had dared to cross their path. She was thankful for their help, because even with them guarding the outskirts of the clearing, there was still a steady stream of opponents slipping through.

She paid little mind to Pennie and the unicorn, hoping only at the back of her mind that they were doing alright. Instead she focused on aiming her wand at a stray vampire which thankfully already looked a little bruised, with a centaur’s arrow still piercing its shoulder. It bared its fangs at her and hissed, and she narrowed her eyes and whipped a carefully aligned firebolt at it, making sure not to accidentally set any trees alight as she attempted to incinerate its body.

Its screech of pain was shrill enough to make her ears bleed, but she held steady and sent a few more stunners its way even as it began to charge at her. With a hurried wave of her wand Hermione threw up a shield that she hoped would repel its advance, but she never had the chance to test its strength as a blasting curse hurtling from its left sent it bowling over, until at last the flames ignited on its body consumed it entirely.

She turned her head to see Carina stepping away to patrol the other side of the clearing again.

After what felt like hours (but was likely closer to just over one) the attacks slowed down, and each wave brought a bigger delay than the last. Together Hermione and Carina had made it clear by now that there was little use for anything or anyone to try to attack or sneak past them, and the window of opportunity was closing as the unicorn began to give birth.

Hermione watched Carina as she shot another bright red spell into the body of an acromantula, its body crunching as it slammed against a thick oak tree. It was the first opportunity she’d had to really stand back and watch the girl fight; every other situation had required her full attention, after all.

Even though she was likely been dead tired, Carina was disciplined enough to maintain a perfect stance and a strong wand grip. She had undoubtedly been trained professionally- given that Death Eaters were in the profession of homicidal spellcasting. Her technique betrayed years of drills and formal education, while her speed and her reflexes demonstrated a natural talent that could not be coached. And of course, there was also something erratic about her, something impetuous and vicious.

It took a while for her to notice, but Hermione eventually realised where part of that off-kilter style
had developed. Although Carina held her wand in her right hand, her stance was favouring her left foot, thus relying on a reversed pattern than most wizards favoured. And while left-handed witches and wizards tended to use what was called a ‘goofy-footed’ stance, Carina choosing to use her right hand inverted that method yet again. In using formally trained duelling exercises that were flipped and reversed, as well as adding in an element of impulsivity combined with raw natural talent—there was no wonder why she appeared so unpredictable.

Hermione had little time to admire after that, as a fresh wave of acromantulas sprung from the trees again, unbothered by the fate of their brethren. However, unfortunately for them, she was growing tired of simply shooing them away and instead opted to fire a few cutting curses to their oversized abdomens. She couldn’t blame Ron for his fear of spiders—they were pretty disgusting—and Harry and Ron had both been second years when they’d encountered Aragog’s swarm while she was a witch of age who was only facing the dregs of whatever had slipped by the centaurs, but she was finding them very easy prey by now. It only took a few more flicks of her wand to leave their husks scattered around the clearing’s edge, and then she scanned the area again.

Although the sun had yet to rise, the sky slowly lightened from an inky blackness to a cool, dusty blue, and the birds in the trees began to sing their morning song as the forest awoke; each diurnal creature rearing its head as the night walkers retreated to their hideouts. Hermione found that she no longer had to keep her wand lit up in order to see the dark shapes between the trees, which were now revealing benevolent animals like deer, foxes and rabbits, and she could even spot the odd centaur.

A loud whinny broke her from her scouting, and she looked back to see Pennie hunched over a small gold body, covered in a thin sheen of silver. Then its head lifted up—and Hermione gasped as she looked upon the newborn foal as it took its first glance at the world. She couldn’t help but draw closer towards it, and out of the corner of her eye she saw that Carina was joining her, having realised that the immediate threat was gone.

The rising sun lazily rose to peer through the trees, setting the ground alight in a sheer golden glow, and the foal bathed in the light as if it were born of pure magic itself. It was such a beautiful moment that Hermione almost felt like crying, but she had the feeling Carina would never let her live it down if she did. Though even she wore a small, almost relaxed smile—which was likely the sleep deprivation kicking in.

“It’s gorgeous, isn’t it?” Hermione whispered to her, fearing that speaking too loud would shatter the peaceful scene.

“Yes. I enjoyed getting to kill things,” Carina replied, the easy smile still fixed on her face. Then her lips quirked and she glanced to her out of the corner of her eye. “But the foal is cute too, I guess.”

Hermione chuckled at that, but still taking care to keep her voice low. Carina shifted to face her, and her smile was replaced with a rather wry frown.

“Your hair looks like a rat’s nest,” she stated, looking her up and down disapprovingly.

“So does yours,” Hermione pointed out, and this time laughed aloud at the sheer disarray her dark curls were in. Carina’s hair seemed to have dried ectoplasm and the occasional twig caught in it, and parts of it were likely hard to the touch. A few strands were glued to her face, and her skin was patchy with blood and other, interstitial fluids.

“And you’re covered in goo. Did you know your shirt is ruined?” Carina replied, and Hermione looked down and realised she looked much the same.
“You both look terrible,” Pennie interjected. “How about you two head home- you’ll be able to find your way out now that the sun’s up and you can apparate from there, and I’ll stick around until mum’s ready to go.”

“Why can’t we just apparate from here?” Carina asked, her voice thick and grumpy.

“Displacement magic doesn’t work very well in here, especially not nearing the full moon. You’re welcome to try, if you want, but if you end up wasting more time because you landed somewhere you shouldn’t have, don’t come crying to me,” Pennie replied with an easy shrug. Carina’s pinched expression made clear what she thought of that, but then she grunted and turned around, taking the northern route through the trees they had first entered the forest from. Realising she was fast being left behind, Hermione chased after her.

She caught up as Carina was slowed down by the difficult terrain, and together they walked in silence towards the forest’s edge, which could be found by following where the trees grew less and less dense. Then, to Hermione’s surprise, Carina nudged her with her elbow.

“Listen, Granger,” she said uncertainly. She was biting her lip and her eyebrows furrowed as she stared into nothing in the distance, fighting what must have been an internal battle. “There’s something you need to know, about Pennie. She’s- well-” she glanced back towards the clearing- “she’s not what she seems.”

“What do you mean? She’s not- she’s not a Death Eater, is she?” Hermione asked, hoping she didn’t sound too eager- but this was obviously important, and it was unlike Carina to share.

“No, not that-” Carina replied, “I just don’t trust her. And you shouldn’t, either.”

Hermione tried not to let her frustration show on her face. How annoyingly vague.

“Carina, if you’re in danger at all,” she started, hoping to encourage her to open up, but Carina simply shook her head.

“Don’t worry about me,” she said, and strode ahead between a couple of trees to where the forest ended at an open field. Hermione rushed to follow her pace, but Carina didn’t so much as look back at her.

“You know where the house is,” she said, and apparated away.

Bellatrix soaked in the wonderful scent of soap and shampoo as she stepped out of the steaming shower and into a thin nightgown, even as the sun began to ease closer to the sky’s centre. A quick spell relieved her wet mass of curls of the water that clung to them, and another sought to fix her errant flyaways back into place- with mild success.

As soon as they reached the estate, Hermione had to head back to Grimmauld Place so that she could have a shower and a proper sleep before anybody else woke up, loathe as she was to leave things as they were. Bellatrix was eager to do the same, and catch up on some well deserved rest.

Absolutely ready to collapse, she squirmed into the centre of the master bedroom’s massive bed, looking like a prim little moppet in a giant’s own dollhouse. However, just as she wriggled under the covers, the patronus of a lithe, silver Oriental long haired cat strolled into the room and spoke
with Narcissa’s cool voice.

“Bella, I intend to visit sometime within the next hour. This is important, so please clear your
schedule,” she said, and then the patronus disappeared. Bellatrix groaned and pulled the sheets
over her head, choosing to ignore it in favour of slipping into oblivion.

She didn’t know how long her nap had lasted, but what she did know was that it had been rudely
interrupted by somebody shoving her shoulder.

“Bellatrix! I told you I would be coming! What are you doing in bed at this time of day?” Narcissa
admonished, pulling the covers off her.

“Cissy!” Bella cried, pouting up at her adult sister’s stern face. It was an odd feeling, but one she
didn’t pay much mind; she was far more interested in going back to sleep.

“I was up all night and all morning helping a unicorn give birth,” she moaned, and collapsed back
onto the bed, hugging a pillow to her chest.

“What?”

“It’s what I said,” she grumbled, and writhed deeper into the mattress.

“Bellatrix, this is important,” Narcissa said. “You have to be careful. The Dark Lord, and Bella- I
mean, my sister- well, you- anyway, they know you exist, and they want to find you. Please, keep
your interaction with Dumbledore and the Dark Lord’s opponents to a minimum,” she pleaded.

Bellatrix groggily sat up, propping herself up against the pillows, and looked at Narcissa
thoughtfully.

“What do you mean by that? Do you know what they want from me?”

“They’ve been told your cover story, that you’re pretending to be Carina Black - but obviously
Bella knows that’s not right because she never gave birth to you- herself! And I don’t know what
they want from you, but I don’t think they appreciate you parading around as a bastard child. I
can’t let them think I’ve been helping you, or even know you. I don’t think I can protect you,”
Narcissa said, her perfectly plucked eyebrows digging deep frown lines into her brow.

“And what if I told them the truth?” Bellatrix asked. Narcissa hissed through her teeth.

“Bella, I promise you that is a very bad idea- ”

Narcissa was prevented from extrapolating, as the creak of the door opening drew both her and
Bella’s attention.

“Oh, I didn’t realise you’d be here,” Andromeda said, straightening up.

“What are you doing in bed, Bella? Dealing with Sirius can’t have been that exhausting,”
Andromeda teased.

“Yes, you both have impeccable timing,” Bellatrix interjected, and slumped into the pillows.

“What are you doing in bed, Bella? Dealing with Sirius can’t have been that exhausting,”
Andromeda teased.

“It was,” Bella groaned, knocking her head back against the headboard.

“Sirius?” Narcissa exclaimed. “What were you doing with that fleabag?”
“Apparently the Order tried to spring a surprise meeting on her yesterday, which of course she refused to attend- which was the right decision, by the way- only Dumbledore and Sirius came here to visit instead,” Andromeda explained, strolling to the bedside next to her younger sister.

“Your daughter has been feeding you information, has she?” Narcissa asked, though not entirely disapproving.

“You can trash me all you like Cissy, but you can’t say she doesn’t understand family loyalty,” Andy replied proudly.

“That’s nice. Now go away,” Bella grumbled, shooting them both a glare that was more sleepy than intimidating. Narcissa grabbed her shoulder, and Bellatrix reacted by closing her hand around her wrist and pulling her down onto the bed with her. Surprised by the action, Narcissa squeaked as she fell onto the mattress, and had to roll over on her side to avoid squishing Bella. Andromeda barked out a laugh, but Narcissa narrowed her eyes and mirrored the action, catching her off guard. Soon enough all three of them were splayed out on the bed, which was big enough to fit them side by side easily.

Bellatrix gave them a satisfied smirk, and snuggled back down under the covers.

“What are you doing in bed?” Andromeda asked.

“She birthed a unicorn, apparently,” Narcissa replied dryly.

“I helped birth a unicorn,” Bella corrected. “I stayed up nearly all night last night because Sirius let a poltergeist loose in my house, and then I had to run around the forest fending off dark creatures who would love to eat a unicorn foal, and now I’m in bed because I’m tired,” she said with a huff.

“A poltergeist? Dora didn’t mention that,” Andromeda said, propping up her head on her arm.

“Hm. Of course none of them would bring it up- because then they’d have to admit that they were poking around in rooms they weren’t meant to be poking around in,” Bellatrix groused, and rubbed at her sore eyes. It would seem her sisters weren’t going to back off and let her rest.

“Sirius has always been a little bit of a ratbag,” Andromeda replied, to Narcissa’s great amusement.

“A little bit?”

“I suppose mother must be as chuffed as a niffler in Gringotts, after the hard time Aunty gave her about us ,” Bella sniggered. Narcissa and Andromeda shared a glance, and Narcissa nudged her shoulder gently.

“Bella… mother and father have both passed away,” she murmured. Bellatrix’s smile fell.

“Oh. I- I didn’t realise,” she said flatly. There were a number of emotions flooding her mind, and in her inability to settle on any one she instead accepted the numbness that came with the mental bottleneck. Narcissa and Andromeda both watched her warily, with that look that told they expected her to break at any moment; that same look of love and apprehension that they always seemed to wear around her.

Bellatrix didn’t know how she was meant to react. Maybe Narcissa thought she was meant to be sad. Maybe Andromeda thought she was meant to be happy. Things between them and their parents had always been… complicated, to say the least. Instead of acknowledging it she just rolled over flat on her stomach, pressing her face against the mattress.
An amused smirk played on Andromeda’s lips, but before she could move to shove Bella’s shoulder, she caught Narcissa’s jaded gaze and thought better of it. Neither of them knew how Bellatrix- the younger, uninfluenced and slightly less cynical version of her- would be processing this information, and their Bellatrix hadn’t handled it well even when she’d seen it coming. At least, that’s what Andromeda assumed- she hadn’t really been around at that point.

It was no secret that Bellatrix had done her best to shield her sisters from the worst of their parents, shouldering the burden of managing them herself so that they could sneak away unscathed. She was their favourite hostage, and she the stockholm syndrome she had developed was one borne of unconditional love and great expectations. If there was one thing Andromeda and Narcissa agreed on, it was that their parents were better off six feet underground.

After a minute of silence, Narcissa began to rub soothing circles into Bellatrix’s back, hoping that she would say something, anything- until a muffled snore shook her frame.

This time Narcissa went to shove her shoulder, but it was Andromeda who stopped her with a simple shake of her head.

“Let her rest,” she whispered, and got up from the bed. Narcissa followed her, but not before leaning over to tilt Bella’s head so that she was better able to breathe. Andromeda waited for her by the bedroom door, and Narcissa shot her a scathing glare as she walked through it.

They marched out into the open space of the foyer, their momentary truce faltering.

“What were you thinking, allowing the Order of the- bloody Phoenix to visit her? You can’t allow her to get close to them!” Narcissa hissed, her voice strained with fury.

“And what? Let the Death Eaters get to her? Is that what you want?” Andromeda retorted with a hushed shout. “I thought we agreed that we were going to do everything we could to make sure she won’t follow our deranged sister’s footsteps.”

“You have no right to talk about Bellatrix that way, not after what you did,” Narcissa seethed, her icy facade melting as her fingers twitched around her wand, which had by now made its way to her hand.

“So you’re happy for her to grow into His second hellhound, then?” Andromeda replied, stepping closer.

“It is exactly because I don’t want that that I’m telling you to keep them away from her! You have your spies and we- they have theirs, which means that the You-Know-Who’s followers are learning about her through the Order!”

Andromeda sucked in a breath. If Snape really was feeding information to the Death Eaters… Bellatrix’s cover story, as convincing as it was to Dumbledore’s side, wouldn’t hold water for even a second when it came to her ‘ mother ’. And her flimsy cover would be the least of their worries if any of the Death Eaters got their hands on her.

Seeing that Andromeda was beginning to realise the severity of the situation, Narcissa continued.

“I can’t protect her, Andy,” she said, anguish lacing her tone. “Bellatrix can’t know I’ve had anything to do with her, and if she finds out who she really is- what we’re trying to do, together- I don’t know what she’ll do.”

“I’ll- I’ll see what I can do, from my side,” Andromeda murmured. Narcissa nodded; she knew
Andromeda had limited influence on the group that she technically wasn’t even a part of, just as she herself had virtually no control over the Death Eaters.

With that argument out of the way, there was little else to discuss. The silence between them grew uncomfortable fast, and Andromeda’s mouth opened and closed as she debated what she ought to say. Noticing her dilemma, Narcissa nodded in parting and immediately made for the floo before anything more could be said. Andromeda stared after her, a small part of her wishing to call out for her to wait, but she knew that she’d have nothing to say if she did. So the two went their separate ways, paying little mind to the two phoenixes sitting on the furniture, watching the exchange with curious eyes.

Bellatrix was content to lie in bed even as the sun sank below the horizon, and although she felt rested enough the comforter was cozy and the bed had insulated itself to her body temperature, and she was unwilling to leave its embrace. It was eventually the alluring smell of sizzling garlic and caramelised onions that tempted her to traipse downstairs, leaving the bed and the memory of her sisters’ visit behind.

As she entered the kitchen she saw Phene juggling pans and pots and bowls and plates, which wasn’t unusual- but sitting perched on the back of a chair was a second phoenix. Cloaked in brilliant gold and red feathers, Fawkes sat proudly on the chair as if he was still in Dumbledore’s office.

“Oh fuck, there’s two of you,” Bellatrix groaned.

“Good morning to you too,” Phene grinned at her as she took a seat next to the one Fawkes was occupying.

“Is this how she usually treats you? I have to say, I remember the children back in her day being more respectful,” Fawkes said. Bellatrix scowled at him.

“What does he mean back in my day?” she asked.

“Oh, he knows about us and the time travel incident. Not to worry- I don’t suspect there’s anyone he’s going to tell,” Phene said with a laugh. Bellatrix turned to frown at her, but gave up with a sigh when she saw Phene ignoring her in favour of mixing vegetables into her dish. Bella huffed to herself, and grabbed her wand to transfigure her nightgown into more appropriate attire.

“Yes, yes, of course,” Fawkes parroted. “Except for present-day Phenie of course, who will be absolutely thrilled. You’ve gotten quite irascible these days, don’t you know?”

“So there is another version of you out there,” Bellatrix mused aloud.

“Well of course there is- but I don’t expect her to be all too interested in my business, particularly if she’s already seen and done it all,” Phene replied. Bellatrix snatched a stick of roasted carrot before Phene could slap her hand away as she considered that. She didn’t believe for a second that the other Phene wouldn’t be sticking her sticky beak in everyone’s business, and she had to wonder
how much *Fawkes* knew. And she took an extra moment to marvel at the absurdity of it all, that she now had to be suspicious towards Albus Dumbledore’s pet phoenix of all things.

However, all three of them were distracted from their conversation as a doe patronus stepped cautiously through the fireplace, and all three of them watched it as it lifted its head to regard them. In a surprisingly deep, male voice, it delivered its message.

“Carina Black. I have information on Albus Dumbledore’s Order of the Phoenix that may be of interest to you— I know that they are trying to court you, and it would be remiss of me to allow you to make the decision to join them without knowing the details I possess. Consider me then the enemy of an enemy, and come to Paris with due haste. I will find you.”

Phene snorted, and Bellatrix looked at her with an aggravated scowl.

“What, you don’t think I should investigate a possible lead concerning this dumb little club I’ve gotten myself involved with?” she asked, resting her hands on her cocked hips.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Fawkes sang, and pecked at her wand hand for good measure.

“Well, good thing I don’t have to listen to overcooked chickens,” Bellatrix spat, and apparated away.

“I s’pose I should go after her,” Phene sighed, turning the stove off.

“Oh, you definitely should. Things are going to get very interesting,” Fawkes replied.

“What did you just goad her into?” Phene asked slowly, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Let’s just say that Albus can’t play chess without an opponent- and having made the last move, it’s *his* turn now,” Fawkes said, tipping his head at her before taking off. Phene let out an aggrieved groan, and transformed so that she could apparate away after Bella.

Following Bellatrix’s signature, she landed in a sidestreet in Allée d’Ombre, Paris. Already uneasy—this was certainly no place for a phoenix, after all—she flew high above the rooftops in search of a curly haired girl who would hopefully stand out in her pristine clothes and noble manner against the dregs of society that haunted the alley. Her keen eyesight worked wonders even as the dusk settled into night, and she knew the girl couldn’t have gotten far, but the longer she took to find her the more dangerous the streets became.

A loud shout that was promptly muffled caught her attention, and she immediately swooped down in its direction. To her horror she spotted two near identical figures, one pressing the other against a wall. They were leaning in, whispering something, a move which delayed their departure just a few precious seconds. However, those seconds were enough; Phene knew there was little she could do at this point but to shoot towards them, and a dual mix of relief and horror rushed through her veins as she landed on Bellatrix’s shoulder, allowing the pull of apparition to tug them away.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter out! If you’re guessing that things are about to get very messy, you’d be guessing right! So chew on some unicorn fluff and get ready.
Bellatrix stalked the alleyway, bitter and unconcerned. It was typical of Phene- and Fawkes now, apparently- to dismiss her concerns. For all she knew, the reason her future self had joined Voldemort’s Death Eaters was because of something the Order of the Phoenix had done to force her to the opposite side. She was still so woefully ignorant of this new world she’d landed in, one where birds could talk and Avada Kedavra curses failed to kill people.

She wasn’t going to take this stranger’s information at face value, and would of course evaluate it from her own perspective, fact check and double check, maybe take another trip to the library- but she needed knowledge. And she was getting desperate.

Alright, so maybe it wasn’t the safest idea to apparate straight to Paris at night and chase a patronus down an alley, a fact Bellatrix was only willing to admit to herself because it had since disappeared, and she was getting pissed off. How she hated these fucking games.

She turned another corner, ignoring the seedy stares of bypassers that were familiar enough with her specific glare to stay out of her way. Her footsteps, light as they were from years of childhood ballet classes, echoed down the narrow path as she skirted by the wall, taking care to keep her back covered at all times. The further she drew from the heart of Paris, deep down winding sidestreets, the more sinister the shadows in the pale moonlight became. It was nearly full now, and she could almost feel the supranatural energies vibrate in anticipation.

Bellatrix heard the slightest clicking noise- what could have been nothing more than a beetle or a dropped button- and stood still in her tracks.

“Well, well, well. Look what we have here.”

Shivers ran down Bellatrix’s back as she gripped her wand tight in her hand, but before she could so much as draw it in a firing position, she was knocked hard against the wall. She let out a cry as she hit the jagged bricks, but a hand at her throat strangled the sound. She’d never been one to bruise easily, but she imagined that the claws on her neck would leave a mark. Bella had been trained well enough not to drop her wand on impulse even as the oxygen was being choked out of
her lungs, but it made no difference as a familiar walnut wand was already pointed between her
eyes.

She stared into eyes that mirrored her own, stained with vitriol and a spark of sadism. Eyes framed
by dark lashes that rarely needed mascara, topped with heavy lids that made painting eyeliner a
complete nightmare, shadowed by pinched eyebrows groomed in the shape she’d always liked.

Bellatrix Lestrange was not pleased to see her, but she was very excited to play with her new toy.

“So this is the little pet who’s been running around with my face, is it? It’s probably the worst one
you could have chosen, so I have to wonder why,” she mused.

She eased her hold on Bella’s neck only just, relishing in the strained gasps that choked out the
night’s silence. The younger Bellatrix knew better than to speak, not to provoke herself- for what
could she say? That she was a time travelling past version of herself that she mustn’t have any
recollection of, otherwise she’d understand exactly who she was? It would probably earn her a
laugh, but not salvation.

“We’re going to have some fun together, just some good old fashioned mother-daughter bonding,
hm?” Lestrange leaned in and cooed into her ear.

Bellatrix didn’t dare twitch, but out of the corner of her eye she saw a golden blur barreling
towards them, and her heart leapt into her throat as a pair of claws connected with her shoulder
just as a tug on her navel whisked her away.

Bellatrix’s body revolted at the sensation of being strung through a thin tube as she was side-
apparated through time and space against her will to God knows where. There was little time for
thought in interdimensional space, but the one thread she could pluck together was the absence of
Phene’s usual engulfing flames. Then, just as fast as they had departed, they had arrived.

The room they landed in was vast and claustrophobic at the same time. The large glass
windowpanes were curtained shut, and the only light was looming down on them from a dimly lit
chandelier. It was likely some kind of dining hall, but the furniture had all been removed but for
one wingback parlour chair, making the room seem open and empty, thus allowing the occupant of
said chair to seize all attention.

Sharp talon grips dug into both her shoulders, and although Phene had anchored herself deep
enough in her flesh to draw blood, it was Lestrange’s hand that brought a greater promise of pain.
Lestrange positioned herself closer to the chair and dragged Bella alongside her. She knew
firsthand that Phene’s apparition could bypass their wards, and wasn’t going to let go of the girl
long enough to allow her to get away this time.

Phene’s silence was equally unnerving.

Although at any other time Bella would have been thankful that she’d finally shut up, her annoying
remarks and the snarkish commentary that only she could hear had fast become her new normal.
But now it was possible that Bellatrix wasn’t the only one who could hear her- or she was, it was
just that there were two of her right now. The fact that Phene couldn’t say anything without
potentially alerting Bellatrix Lestrange, who may or may not also have the same curse to hear
talking birds as Bella herself had, would have been an absurd predicament if it hadn’t been so very
dangerous.

The Dark Lord merely watched them, taking in Bella’s appearance with a shrewd once-over. It was clear that Lord Voldemort was more monster than man by this point, with white skin stretching over protruding bones and a red, soulless stare cleaved by thin pupils. His body was entrenched in the remnants of dark rituals, and he exuded an oppressive aura of power and malevolence. It was sending Bellatrix’s fight or flight response haywire, and she had no doubt that was his intention; without the ability to indulge in either, it was all she could do to swallow down her body’s natural flood of adrenaline before it could overwhelm her.

When she had been tutored by Lord Voldemort in her time he had been undeniably, unmistakably handsome. Certainly she’d been drawn to him more for his proficiency in the Dark Arts, his unorthodox methods, and his general philosophy of blood purity- but his good looks didn’t hurt. If he’d asked her to join him on a muggle raid she’d have joined him in a heartbeat, and Andromeda had indicated that the summer she was currently missing in favour of this time travel excursion was when he’d begin to court her to join the Death Eaters. From there it would simply snowball.

Yet now she could see where that would lead her, because the answer was standing next to her. It was a small mercy that Bellatrix Lestrange seemed far healthier than she had in Hermione’s memories or in her Azkaban mugshot, but she looked no less haunted. Inspecting her like this felt odd; Bellatrix admired the way she’d grown into her own curves, but her youthful skin had melted away into harsh and uninviting edges. How must she have looked in her prime, before years of solitude in Azkaban wearied her body? It was disturbing to think about, but exciting at the same time- she knew she was pretty now, but maturity would improve her even more (and that overbust corset was doing wonders, too).

"How interesting," Voldemort crooned. "Little Bella, you don't belong here do you?"

Bellatrix could have heaved sick on the floor right then and there from the sheer speed of her stomach dropping. She didn't even feel anything pressing against her occlumency barriers, how could he-

"I don't ever forget a face. And how could I? When it's one I look at every day," he said. Lestrange glanced at him, her features marred with confusion, but she didn’t dare contradict him.

“You really are quite resourceful,” he said in response to her questioning gaze. “Upon finding yourself thrust into our future, you have managed not only to evade capture, but to conceal your identity and position yourself favourably in Albus Dumbledore’s graces. Always so useful to our cause, even without realising it.”

Bellatrix thought he might be finding a warped kind of amusement in speaking to them both as if they were both of one mind, even though it was clear that neither fully understood what was going on. She couldn’t read him well enough to tell if he was being sarcastic, although she truly hoped he’d just given her an excuse for not running straight to him as he obviously expected her to have done.

Lestrange’s face shifted into a calculating veneer, studying her now with distrust and cynicism. Although she could only guess at her younger self’s play, she still understood her potential motivations and interests better than even her Lord could. She had always been tempestuous, and had less interest in espionage than simply slashing her opponents’ ankles before they could hope to stand a chance against her.

Though what she was doing with a bloody phoenix of all things sitting on her shoulder was still a mystery.
Bellatrix stiffened as she felt the Dark Lord enter her mind this time, his invasion like a thick and slippery oil, congealing in the parts of her brain that housed all her aspirations and plans, for this world and her own. She knew she had to redirect him—she couldn’t learn too much—she couldn’t think of—shouldn’t think of—think of—

the riddle. Think of the riddle!

Two paths diverge… past the point of no return… blood will reveal… the lost art… both guardian and warrior… the riddle, keep thinking of the riddle and not-

“You seem very obsessed with this Riddle,” Voldemort said, and leaned back in his chair thoughtfully. “This prophecy of yours has sent you here for a reason, I should imagine.”

Bellatrix let out a shaky breath and nodded, not trusting herself to speak. He had taken the bait, finding interest in the note Maia had left for her. Images of Phene’s first arrival, the scene she had caused at Gringotts and then of finding herself in a wanted poster in Diagon Alley had been extricated from her mind, and now that his curiosity was satisfied Voldemort had little interest in what she had done since.

He continued to appraise her, raking those unfeeling eyes over her body in thought. When he next spoke, it was with a carefully calculated derision.

“Yet I feel you hold some resentment for your future. You hadn’t imagined this outcome for yourself—how could you? It wasn’t until I took you in as my apprentice that you learnt of all I could offer you, of the world I planned to build. One without mudbloods and their filth.”

“And near half of my life rotting in prison,” Bellatrix spat, unable to help herself.

“Is this the way you feel Bellatrix?” Voldemort spoke, his question aimed at the older woman yet never breaking eye contact with the younger.

“Never, my Lord! I was sent there for my service to you, something I would never regret,” she hissed furiously, fervently. It was the complete sincerity of her words that disturbed Bellatrix the most.

Then, faster than she could blink, Voldemort stood up from his chair and crossed the small distance between them. Lestrange shrunk back only slightly, an action ignored by the other two. Bellatrix stared defiantly up at the Dark Lord, suppressing the urge to shiver. He, in turn, stared down at her with neither overt hostility nor amusement.

“Can you deny that the mastery over the Dark Arts you wield is greater than anything you ever could have imagined? Can you deny that you have your independence, in a society that would have seen you bound to a life of house service, of doting over children and a husband that, despite being more inept than you, gets to enjoy the power that rightfully belongs to you? Can you deny,” he hissed, “that your sisters, for all their faults and transgressions, are still alive?”

It was a point she couldn’t argue against.

But there was still something very wrong.

It wasn’t something that she could put into words, no, but the whole scene was wrong. Where was her pride? Bellatrix Lestrange may have had independence from her husband, but she was still leashed to another man. She may not have been forced into a life doting after children, but she was
still doting after her master, doing his bidding as if she were a mere servant, a mere house elf. Yes, she held power, but she did not hold control.

“You are not convinced,” Voldemort stated.

“How dare you be so arrogant!” Lestrange howled at her, growing flushed with anger and shame at her former self’s attitude. Flooded with vindication and contempt, Bellatrix stood up straighter, as the cloud of anxiety fogging the edges of her mind ignited with pure rage.

“I’ll kill you,” she hissed at the mockery of herself, “and I’ll kill you too, for good measure,” she spat at Voldemort. Phene’s claws digging tighter into her shoulder was the only sign of her disapproval, but Bellatrix couldn’t care less.

There was a moment of quiet as Voldemort stared down at her with his ever emotionless gaze and her older self stood in unabashed horror.

“This is your problem, Bellatrix. Deal with it,” Voldemort eventually instructed, and Lestrange took his order as a cue to stride across the room and drag Bella with her. Her hand fisted tightly in her hair with a surprising strength and Bellatrix struggled to keep up to minimise the pain ripping against her scalp. Lestrange quickly grew impatient; instead of marching her to the cellar she unceremoniously shoved her into the next room, which was less expansive but by no means small.

A nonverbal hex sent Phene careening off her shoulder and onto the floor, but before Bellatrix could cry out in alarm a brilliant scarlet bolt burst into her abdomen, knocking her to the ground as well.

“Crucio!”

Bellatrix immediately bit her tongue hard enough to draw blood, but was able to muffle her screams in the back of her throat. Her nerve endings burned, but she was familiar enough with the experience to know that this was only a warmup. She writhed on the ground near soundlessly, but there was no use trying to mask her agony. Bellatrix Lestrange knew her own pain threshold very, very intimately.

“Don’t expect me to have sympathy for you, brat. I don’t know what’s wrong with you that you’re behaving like a Gryffin-fucking-dor, but it’s making me look like a fool.”

“Oh, you don’t need me for that,” Bellatrix wheezed, grinning madly. Then she choked as her capillaries caught fire, and shook violently against the floorboards as the blood-boiling curse wrought her senses. Bellatrix Lestrange was hesitant to cause any permanent damage, with what little knowledge she had of the situation there was no way of knowing if she would end up causing irreparable damage to herself. But that didn’t mean she couldn’t cause harm.

She lifted the curse instantly, and the sudden shock of relief was near orgasmic. Bellatrix moaned into her shoulder, venting the mix of pain and pleasure to relieve the pent up stress.

“Let me explain this to you in a way you might understand,” Lestrange said slowly as she stepped towards Bella’s shaking body and leaned over her, occasionally toeing her with her boot.

“The Dark Lord has given us everything. He has taught us dark arts that were believed to be extinct. He has given us armies to cleanse the world of muggle filth with, and I am glad to do it. And you will be too- or are you content to be a broodmare, married off to the highest bidder and happy to play along because mummy and daddy told you to, hm?”

Bella rolled over and turned her back to her tormentor in the guise of another seizure, and grasped
at her wand as her body blocked her movements. Its smooth ridges and even shape felt odd to her even still, but despite its uncanny disposition it obeyed her unfailingly. Her walnut wand was held firmly in Bellatrix Lestrange’s hand, but that wand- twelve and three quarter inches, with a dragon heartstring core, unyielding despite its crooked shape- was born for Bellatrix Black’s hand too.

“Expelliarmus!”

The wand went flying across the room, unable to identify its master. Lestrange stood still for just a moment, blind with rage yet examining her former self in a new light. Bella didn’t waste a second and jumped to her feet, eager to distance herself from her older self. Even without a wand, she knew she wasn’t one to be underestimated.

In the corner of her eye she watched Phene stir, and Bellatrix rushed towards her, mentally begging for her to carry them away. Lestrange summoned her wand back silently and blasted chunks out of the floor between them, stopping Bella in her tracks as rubble ricocheted into her skin. The commotion was enough to draw the interest of two passing Death Eaters, who knew that Bellatrix Lestrange’s madness spelled bad things for all of them.

“Don’t let her get away,” Lestrange hissed at them, and they followed her orders as if they were from the Dark Lord himself.

But for as skilled as they were Bella was equally matched in avoiding their attacks, although it was all she could do to simply dance around them. She threw up a shield here and there, but in order to even begin to mount a proper defense she would need to halt their momentum long enough to enter a corresponding duelling stance.

She tried not to think of how outnumbered she was, how outclassed she was, how utterly helpless the situation was, how completely stupid she had been-

A bright green flash hurtled towards her, and it was only Phene's last-ditch effort to throw herself in front of it that spared her life. The Phoenix let out an agonised croak before promptly bursting into flames, and Bellatrix cursed hysterically as she bent down on her knees over her burning body. "Don't kill her you idiot!" Lestrange screamed, and the distraction bought her enough time to scoop up the scranny, pink featherless blob that poked its ugly head from the soot growing on the floor. With the reborn Phene secured in her hand, Bella took the opportunity to back up through an unguarded doorway and tear down the hallway, even as a barrage of stunners clipped her heels.

Bellatrix ran as fast as her trembling legs would carry her while shouting ‘protego’ as often as her breath would allow, finding little use for the added effort a nonverbal spell would need. In the dark of night the glow of the hallway torches lit up the manor ominously, and she recalled some of the twists and turns of Malfoy Manor’s hallways from the first time she had raced through it. Although the Death Eaters were no longer shooting to kill there was an everpresent danger that had been absent before, as Voldemort’s presence alone made the situation far more serious. And, as she cradled Phene’s body to her chest, she knew she had no exit strategy now.

A blasting curse skimmed her leg, knocking her off balance and sending her crashing to the ground with a sharp cry. She scrambled back up, unwilling to look down at it- the fact that she could still control it meant that it was still there, at least. Phene chirped in alarm, and flames licked at her back as the Lestrange caught up to her, singing her clothes deliberately. It wasn’t fiendfyre, but that didn’t make it any less deadly. Her dark cackle echoed behind her, in front of her, and everywhere around her. A flash of platinum blonde hair tickled her periphery, but she couldn’t afford to spare
Narcissa a second glance.

“If you dare set fire to this house!” a male voice shouted, and Bellatrix nearly tripped over as Lucius’ (far deeper) voice caught her by surprise.

She heard a small scuffle as the two butted heads, and she thanked the Gods for Narcissa’s uptight husband buying her an extra few precious seconds. With that, she vaulted onto the balustrade overlooking the lobby and let her balance carry her as she slid down the handrail by the stairs, and blasted a hole through the front doors—lest she waste time trying to open it. It was an odd time to consider it, but she had always wanted to do that.

Once outside, Bellatrix broke for the wardline, bypassing the two snatchers who had been guarding the door before it had exploded outwards onto them. To her great benefit most of the warding protections on the apparition line existed to keep people out rather than in, so all she would need to do was reach the boundary. Her feet pounded against the gravel pathways of the garden, but there was no time to admire the neatly lined rose hedges or the ivory peacocks that fled from her approach with alarmed squawks.

A solitary snatcher who had been stalking the perimeter stood in her way, eyes hungry and smile lecherous; his wand already pointed straight ahead. There was no time to throw up a shield, and normally Bellatrix could have dodged a near point-blank strike but her impacted leg was already shaking as it hit the paved ground, and she didn’t trust it not to collapse under her if she broke her pace. She was just going to have to weather the hit, whatever it may be.

A flash from his right flank blasted him across the grounds, and Bella’s gaze followed it backwards to see another flash of platinum blonde, this time framing a much more feminine face. Bellatrix had no time to spare her sister a second glance as they both retreated—Narcissa back into the shadows and her past the apparition wards. There was a distinct tingle that rippled down her spine as she crossed them, and the second she did she was gone with a deafening crack.

With a ragged scream she landed on the streets of London, right outside the location where the Black family’s ancestral home should be, missing a chunk of her flesh high on her left thigh. Bellatrix collapsed onto her hands and knees, careful not to crush the tiny body still cradled in her palm, and hissed from the pain of her splinched leg. It wasn’t anything some dittany and a spell or two couldn’t fix—so long as she didn’t lose too much blood before then— but splinching hurt like a bitch.

Up until now she’d had a perfect track record with apparition, but she felt she could be forgiven for her lack of deliberation given the circumstances. Thankfully her arrival had caused enough of a ruckus that someone quickly appeared from out of nowhere, coming from the direction Grimmauld Place was hidden. The rushed padding of footsteps caused her to look up, and Bellatrix peered into honey brown eyes that shone down at her with worry.

In that moment, she realised she’d never felt so relieved to see a muggleborn before. That was of course before a wave of nausea slammed into her like a sledgehammer to the back of the head, forcing her stomach upturned. She became acutely aware how empty her stomach had already been as she coughed up bile, struggling on her arms to keep herself from falling into it.

Hermione immediately bent down and hoisted Bellatrix up under her arms, and Bella used her free hand to leverage her weight onto her side, leaning heavily on her good leg.

A few more heavy footfalls could be heard as more Order members joined them on the street—
some watching her dubiously, while others rushed to her side. Harry was one of them, apparently putting aside their little feud for now, and another was a pink haired- no, white haired girl. Before Bella could dwell on that a sharp nip at her fingers caught her attention, and she looked down at her clammy hand to see Phene still curled up tight, peeping away.

It came as a small reminder that the immediate danger had passed, and now that she was in relative safety the shock began to wash away.

And slowly, the creeping numbness suffocated her senses.

Chapter End Notes

I enjoyed writing this chapter more than I probably should have. Most of my more action-y chapters are shorter, but I hope the pacing doesn't feel neither too rushed nor too sluggish.

This is also technically our first character death but she's fine we're fine.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

please somebody help this child

Chapter Notes

Minor warning for suicide mention

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The blankness was always worse than anger. As exhausting and terrible as her temper could be, the fire that rushed through her veins was a reminder that she could feel, that she was alive. She was explosive, she was catastrophic, and although it wasn’t great for her health to burn herself and everyone around her in a fiery supernova, it served as a reminder that she was powerful, and it was unequivocally her.

But the blankness? The dull, empty feeling that left her a husk of herself- barely able to gauge her surroundings? She was unable to dredge up the feeling of hatred that she knew this state deserved, and it was all she could do to hold onto the smallest sliver of hope that it would eventually pass, because she didn’t know what she would do if she never awoke from it.

“It’s okay, Bella. It’ll be okay,” Narcissa whispered into her ear.

When had she gotten here?

Bellatrix shifted her head slightly to look up at her, only faintly registering the splashes of tears that were falling from icy blue eyes down onto her cheeks. Then suddenly Andy was at her left- or maybe she’d always been there, and she had only just noticed. She was muttering something incomprehensible, waving her wand here and there, and the jagged red lines weeping bloodstains onto the carpet zipped themselves back up.

Ah.

Some indeterminate amount of time passed as she coolly watched their ministrations, and when they lifted her up from the ground to carry her away she was glad to see that one of them had the sense to bleach the carpet.

“It’s alright,” one of them whispered, though she couldn’t tell which- they always sounded so similar when they were like this.

Hermione dragged Bellatrix inside and rushed her to a spare cot to treat her injuries. They’d set her
on her side in the recovery position, which provided them better access to her wound. Apart from her leg most of the damage was superficial, but there had been a short stall as both Hermione and Harry had been rather hesitant to volunteer themselves to lift her skirts up high enough to mend the splinching wound. In the end it had been the Metamorph who had pushed them aside and got on with the job, rolling her eyes at the still-teenagers who couldn't shove their discomfort aside long enough to heal somebody who was fast losing blood.

Bellatrix would have verbalised her agreement, but the only thing currently anchoring her to reality was the scrawny bird still sitting in her hand, shifting ever so slightly every now and then. Tonks vanished away her torn, bloody stockings and immediately set about stymying the blood flow with the aid of a clotting spell, and ordered Hermione to bring her the dittany and Ron to retrieve a blood-replenishing potion. She then sent Harry away to distract the others who were beginning to crowd around the door.

Cool hands and gentle magic eased the pain in Bellatrix's thigh, even as they worked higher up towards her hip. Tonks worked professionally, never dallying and never wandering; she was evidently well practiced. Ron returned with the potion first and scrambled away after that to help Harry field the burning questions—what was going on?

"You're going to be okay, kiddo," Tonks murmured, but frowned at the lack of a reaction. What was more troubling to her than the splinching, or even the subtle tremors that suggested she had been on the receiving end of a torture curse, was that Bellatrix had remained mute and glassy eyed ever since she'd arrived. Spellshock wasn’t altogether uncommon in the Auror Corps, but it was certainly unusual to see a case like this from a teenage girl.

Hermione returned with the dittany, while Harry and Ron directed most of the Order away and joined them in the main living area, although Sirius chose to loiter around the doorway. Green smoke billowed from the wound as Tonks applied the dittany to the wound, and Hermione watched as she performed the finishing few spells that would bind the new flesh seamlessly to the old. With a deft wave of her wand the injury faded before their eyes, and then Tonks focused on the less pressing fractures and burns.

Bellatrix stirred slightly as Tonks peeled away the cloth at her back that had singed her skin, and Hermione rushed to her side when she realised that she was still awake.

"Carina, what happened? Are you alright?" she asked. Bellatrix willed herself to look at her, to open her mouth and answer. But her body remained unmoving, and her voice remained silent. Hermione’s hand slipped into her free one and squeezed, sending an unfamiliar but not unwelcome surge of warmth through her skin. Achingly stiff, Bellatrix finally gathered the force to twist her neck and flicker her eyes to meet Hermione’s, but there was little else she could do. Her body had become deadweight and her mind locked away in a glass jar, banging at the walls but unheard by the outside world.

"What’s wrong with her?" Hermione asked, glancing up at Tonks.

"Bellatrix used to have episodes like this in Azkaban," Sirius answered gruffly, still standing by the door. “It’ll pass, eventually, then she’ll go back to yelling at you.”

Hermione looked back down at her, a new, curious look in her eyes that Bellatrix didn’t like one bit. Not that she said anything of it.

"It’s probably some kind of spellshock. You see it with Aurors who got caught up in missions gone wrong, and of course it was a lot more common to see during the war," Tonks nodded at Sirius in acknowledgement, "so it’s probably something you’re going to get used to seeing these days."
Biting back a grimace, she cast a basic *Episkey* to clear up the purple splotches crossing Bella’s neck, forming an obvious handprint. Hermione worried her lip and glanced between the two of them, then joined Tonks in mending the tattered cloth at her back and scouring away the splashes of sick staining her front.

“Best let her sleep it off, then ask her what happened when she wakes,” Tonks muttered, and Bellatrix made a soft noise of affirmation in the back of her throat, resting her head back against the pillow as Phene continued to squirm in her hand, pin feathers poking into her skin.

By the next morning Phene had regrown her glossy golden feathers, and had already grown to the size of a common duck. She was still uncharacteristically silent, but would peep and chirp every now and again in contentment. Even her movements seemed more subdued, and Bellatrix supposed most of her energy was being drained by her rapid growth.

Bella, on the other hand, was brimming with it.

Although her body yearned for more rest, she wasn’t going to leave herself vulnerable and exposed surrounded by a group of strangers for any longer than she had to. Now that the fog in her mind had cleared she had no desire to lay around in bed, so she tentatively slid out of the cot and extended an arm for Phene to perch on. She crept towards the door, her bare feet padding silently against the mottled rug, but when she poked her head outside it was not to the empty hallway she was expecting.

“Oh, good morning. Will you be joining us for breakfast?” a man with thinning red hair asked, stopping short as he saw her poking out of the doorway.

“Oh. Yes please,” Bella answered awkwardly, feeling her stomach burn with hunger as she realised just how wonderful food sounded right now.

“This way then,” he directed, as if she hadn’t been caught in a goose chase in this very house, which had made it quite clear that she knew the house’s twists and turns very well.

“I’m Arthur, by the way.”

“Carina. And this is Phoenicis.”

“A pleasure,” Arthur grinned, and led her down towards the kitchen. Bella’s stomach gurgled as the aroma of syrup drowned waffles and cinnamon toast wafted through the air, and she could nearly taste the sugar on her tongue. A redheaded woman Bella recognised from Kreacher’s memory was brewing up breakfast, and she glanced over at them with a wary smile.

“Good morning, you two. Come, grab as much as you want- there won’t be much left when the boys wake up,” she said, and Bellatrix wasted no time in loading up her plate and retreating to the table.

It was a strange semi-déjà vu, but there was something almost normal about sitting in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place as the morning light filtered through the window, stuffing her face with pancakes before she’d so much as brushed her hair. Almost. The company was strange and the house had become even more dilapidated since the 60s, and she felt as if she were in a parody of her usual trips to her cousin’s house. But nonetheless, the slight familiarity helped put her at ease.

A sleepy Hermione shuffled through the door, still dressed in an oversized shirt and plush pyjama pants, and took a double take when she saw Bellatrix digging into her breakfast.
“Carina! I didn’t think you’d be up this early,” Hermione said, a smile teasing the corner of her lips. “Did you sleep well?”

“Fine,” Bellatrix answered with a casual shrug, then shovelled more syrup drowned breakfast into her mouth to avoid elaborating. Hermione hesitated, a million questions burning her tongue, but she managed to withhold them and instead grabbed her own plate of waffles and sat down next to her. Bellatrix glanced at her with a small frown, wondering when she’d gotten so comfortable around her.

Phene hopped down from her shoulder onto the table and took turns stealing bites from both of their plates, dodging both of their lazy attempts to shoo her off. Slowly the room filled up as the seductive scent of searing pancakes stirred every last occupant. Tonks gave them a nod as she grabbed a nod as she grabbed her own plate, followed by Lupin, until eventually Harry and Ron ambled in. There was a red haired girl Bella didn’t recognise- another Weasley, most likely- though Sirius was nowhere to be found.

It was increasingly alien to see the dining table overflowing with such bizarre characters. Bellatrix felt as though she were in the Great Hall of Hogwarts again as the room buzzed with conversation and the maddening, insufferable sounds of people chewing all at once. She slouched and leaned back in her chair, hoping to silently slip away, but she wasn’t going to be so lucky.

“You had us worried last night, you know,” Arthur commented, sitting adjacent to her with a plate of his own.

“Right,” Bellatrix cleared her throat, “I figured after all the headaches you lot’ve caused me, it’s the least you could do.”

“That’s the thanks we get, is it?” Ron grunted, scowling at her. “We only dragged your sorry arse in here and patched you up.”

Bellatrix sneered at him and slammed her fork down against her plate, and Arthur looked like he’d rather be anywhere than next to her.

“My sorry arse is the reason you’re still enjoying breakfasts with mummy and daddy, Weasley. Or would you like me to drop you off back at Malfoy Manor, let you parlay with the Dark Lord, hm?” she mocked with a mad smile to mask her rage. Taking no time to examine the shocked faces of those around her, she pushed her empty plate aside and stood up, and Phene fluttered up onto her shoulder as she left the room. Causing such a scene wasn’t ideal given her current situation, but it was really in everybody’s best interests to allow her to have the final word.

“She’s not going to let that one go, is she?” Ron grumbled, half in anger and half in exasperation. Hermione reached across the table and placed her hand on his arm, drawing his attention away.

"I know you don't like her, Ron, and I'm not asking you to. But please, lay off her for a little while," she pleaded. Ron grimaced, but eventually gave her a small nod. The conversation around the table soon resumed its general hum as everyone finished eavesdropping, and Hermione sighed and stacked the abandoned plate atop her own empty one. With emotions running as high as they were currently, she hoped that her boyfriend and her quasi-friend would just avoid each other for the time being.
As it turned out, Hermione got her wish; Carina had disappeared completely. She knew she was still lurking around the house somewhere, because whenever Hermione asked someone if they’d seen her they’d nod and point in some direction, but she was always missing when she turned the corner. It was enough to make her wonder if she was avoiding her- but then she ran into Tonks.

“Looking for Carina?” she asked, scratching her now bubblegum blue hair.

“Yes actually, have you seen her?” Hermione replied.

“I’ve been trying to find her too. Kreacher told me she was hiding in the trophy room again, but then Remus said he’d seen her in the cigar room, so either that boggart’s come back to impersonate her or that little bugger’s lied to me,” she huffed. “You wanted to ask her about what happened last night, yeah?”

“Yeah, I- I hope her home hasn’t been compromised, but she hadn’t told me about any plans to go out- she doesn’t tell me much at all, really,” Hermione answered.

“Mum thinks I should get close to her. Open up a dialogue, y’know? Problem is after last night, I don’t think she’s feeling particularly talkative,” Tonks said.

“You told your mum about her?” Hermione asked, arching an eyebrow with a slight smirk. Tonks’ hair took on a lighter shade for a fraction of a second as she realised she’d been caught out.

“Don’t tell the others,” she grinned sheepishly. Hermione shook her head goodnaturedly, and let out a soft laugh.

“I think it’s fine- she’s technically your family, after all. But maybe you shouldn’t let the others know how much you do tell your mum,” she grinned.

They found Carina wandering the library, pulling books off the shelves to inspect their covers before putting them back. Hermione envied her- how she wished she could raid the bookshelves without risking a debilitating curse. But there would be time for that later, now they just had to corner her without making her feel like she was being cornered. Easy.

Right on cue, Carina looked at them with her usual annoyed countenance. She slammed the book in her hand shut with a loud thump, and slid it back on the shelf without breaking eye contact.

“You must be Nymphadora.”

“Call me Tonks,” Tonks replied, restraining her grimace with limited success. Carina’s eyes narrowed slightly at the muggle surname and Tonks’ narrowed in response, but the moment quickly passed.

“Well then, Tonks, I suppose you’re not here to browse A Treatise on the Properties of Heifers over Sows in Haruspicies,” Carina said dryly as she plucked an old leather book from the shelf, then flashed the cover at them. Tonks grimaced at the depiction of entrails laid out in a brimstone sigil and shook her head.

“No, we’re looking for you, funnily enough.”

Carina gave them her signature, sarcastic smile. She looked halfway ready to bolt, yet remained rooted to the spot. Hermione frowned inwardly; she was already on the defensive, meaning this wasn’t about to get any easier.
“And I suppose you’re going to frame this as, oh, you’re so concerned for me and this doesn’t have anything to do with prying for information about what I was doing?” she hummed.

“Look, like it or not we’re family. And Hermione’s your friend- you can trust us,” Tonks asserted. Carina’s eyes flickered over to her and Hermione thought she’d argue against that assessment, but instead focused back on Tonks.

“Some family. You didn’t even know who I was until just recently,” she said, and an odd grin stretched across her face.

“Carina, please just tell us what happened. You were in a really bad way when you showed up, and I know it wasn’t just a botched apparition. We- I don’t want you getting hurt like that again,” Hermione said, taking a step towards her. Carina’s jaw clenched, but she didn’t move away.

“I had an unfortunate run in with my other- my mother. I barely got away with my life, Phene wasn’t so lucky. Happy?”

Hermione gasped, despite the blunt recount. Carina leaned away from her touch when she reached out to place a hand on her shoulder, so she drew back to avoid making her any more uncomfortable. Tonks looked uncharacteristically grim at the mention of her aunt, and made no move to comfort her either. They had expected her to have some kind of run in with a gang of snatchers, maybe even a Death Eater or two, but to have faced Bellatrix Lestrange- twice now- and escape with her life and limbs was altogether miraculous.

“How did you get away?” Hermione asked, bringing a hand up to her mouth.

“What, you think I’m lying? You think that this was all some kind of ruse, do you?” Carina snapped, cocking her head with bared her teeth.

“I don’t think you’re lying!” Hermione shouted back, frustrated with the wall of distrust Carina had built around herself. “Is it really so hard for you to believe that I care about you?”

Despite her abrasive attitude, she had seen the cracks in Carina’s armour. She could see them in the way she cradled Phene close to her chest, in the way her cheeks dimpled when she tried not to smile at something, in the way her lower lip trembled as she struggled to keep her emotions in check. Like now.

“Why?”

Hermione’s shoulders slumped as she crossed her arms, and she chewed on her bottom lip as she struggled to reach out to her without spooking her emotionally stunted brain.

“I like to think we’re friends, Carina. And I know you don’t,” she said tersely, “but I don’t need any reason to care about you other than I just do.”

Tonks blinked at the two of them as they stared each other down, until Carina scoffed and crossed her arms to mirror Hermione.

“I think you’re my friend,” she said defensively, sticking her chin up and glancing away. Hermione was glad that Carina’s head was turned, because there was little she could to to hold back the amused smirk threatening to break out across her face. The awkward silence was finally disrupted when Tonks coughed loudly into her fist.

“Alright then. Come on, squirt, I know we don’t need to give you a tour of the house, but how about you show us how you got into the trophy room?” she said, and elbowed Carina in the ribs.
teasingly.

“Call me squirt again and I’ll break your wrists.”

Without her usual thick, heeled boots, her small stature was further exaggerated as she glared up at Tonks. Hermione looked away as her heart fluttered ever so slightly, and she found herself trying to suppress a smile she hadn’t realised stretched her face. She didn’t know what it was, but she was finding these reactions ever more commonplace. It was difficult to decipher—there was just something magnetic about Carina.

Some small, insecure part of her warned her that this was how she was supposed to feel about Ron. But that didn’t make sense; she could never deny she loved Ron while Carina was merely a fleeting fancy.

And she didn’t fancy Carina.

Did she?

Bellatrix sat solemnly, staring out of the window of the room she’d been given. Ever since that green light had destroyed Phene’s body, a spell which was meant for her instead, she had been consumed by terrible thoughts. Terrible impulses. She stared out onto the drizzly London streets, not really looking at anything, but instead stewing in her own head as rain beat upon the windowpane.

Somebody lightly knocked on the door, and then after a moment the hinges creaked open. Bellatrix didn’t need to turn around to guess who it was—there was only one person in this house who would willingly enter a room with her without verbal permission. Soft footsteps making their way towards her could be heard even over the rain, and when Hermione’s hand gently gripped her shoulder she turned slightly to look at her, curiously.

This close, Bellatrix could almost count the freckles scattered across her sun kissed cheeks. Even in the dim light of the overcast sky, she radiated warmth and—well, there was a word for it, but it wasn’t in Bella’s vocabulary. Hermione squeezed her shoulder almost imperceptibly, and prompted her with a reassuring smile and eyes that gleamed with compassion, and understanding.

Bella didn’t know which it was that made her swallow and open her mouth to speak.

"What?"

"I was going to tell you dinner’s almost ready, but I can bring something up if you’d like?"

“Uh. Yes, I think I’d prefer that,” Bella replied, and turned back to the window.

“Knut for your thoughts?” Hermione asked. Bellatrix’s eyebrows knit together as she stared down onto the street and watched as muggles passed by with nothing but a sheet of cloth tied over a steel frame to protect them from the elements. She exhaled slowly, her breath fogging the glass.

"If you were able to go back in time and meet Tom Riddle, before he became Lord V— you-know—"
who. Before he killed anyone. Would you kill him then, even if he's innocent at that point in time, knowing that the future you've created from then on will be a better one for it?" she asked, her dark eyes seeking out Hermione's own.

"I don't know," Hermione answered honestly, never breaking her gaze. Bellatrix's lips tugged into a deeper frown.

"It's a complicated situation- what if the future I create is actually worse for it? I'd have no way of knowing how the consequences would affect the rest of the world," she explained. Bellatrix let out a small huff, and turned back to stare out the window again. Then, after a pregnant pause, she asked instead, "what if it were you?"

"If it were me?"

"If you knew somehow that in the future, you'd become the next Lo- You-Know-Who. You'd kill people, torture and all that. Would you kill yourself then, to prevent that future?" Bellatrix asked.

Hesitantly, Hermione grasped Bella's hands with her own, and was surprised to meet no resistance. "You shouldn't kill yourself, Bellatrix," she said.

Bellatrix stiffened, and for a second the world around her seemed to spin.

"How?" she croaked.

Hermione bit down on an uneasy smile.

"Because you just admitted it?"

Bellatrix stared at her blankly, her mouth hanging open slightly as her brain fought to remember how to use it.

"It didn’t make a whole lot of sense at first, really," Hermione rambled to fill the silence, “the timeline checked out, and nobody had enough information to refute it- but then you were so secretive, I didn’t really have a lot to go off either. And then I started to wonder why your project involved the base formula for repetitive time anomalies, which I recognised because I’ve had my own mishaps with time turners, and the question remained, why were you living with an Unspeakable?"

Bellatrix continued to stare at her.

“The more I learnt the less I knew, it felt. Everyone was so preoccupied with your father likely being You-Know-Who, that they paid less attention to the fact that you were solely identical to- well, you. And the fact that you didn’t recognise Harry at all. Or that you suddenly appeared out of nowhere one day, for no apparent reason.”

“But that’s all just conjecture,” Bellatrix pointed out stiffly. Hermione sighed through her nose.

“I know. But then, when Dumbledore and Sirius came to your home, I- I slipped into the office, just to double check one of the books I’d made notes on, and I found her wand. Your wand,” she said, inadvertently squeezing Bellatrix’s hands as she instinctively made to clench her own.
Of course.

She’d left her walnut wand in a desk drawer in her office that night, knowing that keeping it on her person was a bad idea for so long as Dumbledore and Sirius were around to visit. She’d been separated from it for longer than she’d liked, but it was far too unique a wand to be explained away as a mere coincidence. Hermione would have recognised it immediately.

“The more I thought about it, the more it almost did make sense. And when you asked me what I’d do if I went back in time, I knew you weren’t being facetious. Only, it took you really confirming it for me to fully believe that you’re…”

Bellatrix screwed her eyes shut, then gave a jerk of her head that could have been a nod. The words hung above them, unspoken.

A shiver ran down Bella’s spine as the hands still holding hers began to rub soothing circles into her palm, and as she opened her eyes she averted her gaze by turning her head to the side. Her mouth tightened into a thin line and tears pricked at her eyes, burning like acid, but she stubbornly bit them back even as her lower lip trembled.

Gingerly, one hand slid up her arm, ghosting the curve of her neck until it cupped the cheek she had turned away. Hermione’s palm was warm against her skin, almost clammy, familiar in a way that teased the edge of her mind- had they done this before?

Hermione’s voice broke her from that thought.

“It’s alright,” she whispered.

Bellatrix spared a quick glance at her from the corner of her eye, which was enough to be her undoing. Looking into Hermione’s eyes, she found the sympathy she hadn’t known she’d been desperate for. She hissed a jagged breath and the unbidden tears rolled down her cheeks, and leaned into Hermione’s touch.

The only sounds to escape her lips were small, choked sobs; quiet whimpers that betrayed all her uncertainty and frustration. Hermione closed in and wrapped her arms around her, which only made her gasps and shudders louder as her walls broke down against her own will. Still, Bellatrix pressed her head against Hermione’s neck and groaned, squeezing her eyes shut tighter to relieve the sting. Her hands clenched into fists around the loose fabric of Hermione’s shirt, desperate to physically ground herself to something.

Hermione stayed silent; like a cracked glass, all it may take for Bellatrix to shatter could be just a little too much pressure. And just as a fragile glass could splinter into shards sharp enough to draw blood, a broken Bellatrix would inevitably bring everything she touched crashing down with her- which was why Hermione contented herself with simply rocking them back and forth, ever so gently.

Bellatrix swallowed roughly and attempted to speak- muffled as she was by Hermione’s shirt- but struggled to form the sounds, let alone the words. Hermione hugged her even tighter as she began to hyperventilate, and rubbed circles into her back in an attempt to get her to slow down.

Quickly exhausting herself, Bellatrix’s breathing evened out as she relaxed into Hermione’s embrace. The stubborn, irascible voice at the back of her mind was screaming for her to push away, to try to recover some semblance of dignity and indifference- but she was far too tired to listen to it. Instead, she allowed herself to be guided to the bedframe in the room’s corner, and continued to cling to Hermione until she climbed atop the covers with her.
And only then would she let herself fall asleep.

As Bellatrix dozed in her arms, Hermione couldn’t help but brush the errant curls from her face, which even now looked troubled. It was the very same face that vexed her so thoroughly, and while she would like to lay the blame on some innate knowledge that Carina was Bellatrix the whole time, it would be a lie. Rather, she had been plagued by errant thoughts of the headstrong and cantankerous girl who at some point had become her pet project- her challenge.

It turned out that her challenge to encourage a sympathetic (but admittedly bratty) pureblood girl to question her views was more momentous than she had anticipated.

It was a surreal situation; if you’d told her at any point in her life that she’d be sitting around, comforting Bellatrix Le- Bellatrix Black, she would have told you that you were mad. She could scarcely believe it herself, and she was currently living it. She had no idea exactly how Bellatrix had landed some odd decades into the future, or better yet why, but that wasn’t important right now. What was important was that, for all of Bellatrix’s prejudices and terrible personality traits, she wasn’t yet the person she would become.

It was honestly terrifying.

If Bellatrix Lestrange still existed in this world, then this Bellatrix would inevitably go back to her own time somehow, and still turn out to be the cold blooded, maniacal killer she is today. Perhaps here time here was what would shape her into that person- but if there was any chance Hermione could influence her future- even if it meant changing this one- she would take it.

Bellatrix’s forehead near touched the floor as she bowed, finding herself mirroring the same position she had taken some weeks ago now, when the Golden Trio had slipped from between her fingers. No- they hadn’t slipped, they had been snatched. Snatched by the very same girl who was now responsible for her second failure, daring to break free from the stronghold that was the Manor.

Herself.

“I understand why you might have been… soft, on her. These are truly unique circumstances,” Voldemort said, staring down at her from atop his throne.

“I- thank you for your patience, master,” Bellatrix settled on, not daring to look him in the eye. She wanted to argue that she certainly hadn’t been sympathetic to the girl who claimed to be her past self, but it would only make her look more incompetent than she already did. It was easier to settle for a momentary lapse in judgement than to admit personal failure.

“I should think that this is not an emergent issue- she knows it is too dangerous for her to reveal who she truly is, and for now we will keep her identity a secret kept between only us,” Voldemort said. “After all, we cannot risk some renegade deciding she is an easier target than you, creating a paradox if she is killed.”

Bellatrix swallowed and nodded. Voldemort watched her festering unease transform her features, and didn’t need to reach out with legilimency to know that she was altogether perturbed by the
situation. Which was just as well for him; his Death Eaters were always so much easier to control when they had something to fear.

“Do not fret. I believe she will be persuaded eventually. She is you, and you are my most loyal, are you not?”

“Of course, my Lord,” Bellatrix hastily agreed.

“If you want to remain in my favour then I expect results. Everything is in order. Inform Rookwood and Dolohov that they are to make for Diagon Alley on my command.”

Chapter End Notes

Tadaaa!! I hope you all enjoyed that as much as I enjoyed writing it. So... Hermione knows. I dare say that will change a few things, won't it?

On a more serious note, I hope I did this chapter justice. Dealing with Bellatrix's trauma is a serious topic and I want to treat it with the necessary sensitivity, so I hope it comes across that way. I also hope that the reveal was satisfactory- it's a scene that's been sitting in my head for a long time, and it always felt right to me.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Phene's back! And she's everyone else's problem now

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bellatrix wasn’t quite sure where she was at first. The mattress she was lying on felt far too rigid to be her own, and the room she was in was absent of any natural light and was instead illuminated by a yellowing lamp. And when she came to her senses she found there was a soft body wrapped around her that was numbing most of her limbs. With a rough shove they were disentangled, and Hermione garbled a thick, sleepy cry as she hit the ground.

“What was that for?” she moaned, rubbing her side as she pushed herself up.

“Cuddling is a privilege you haven’t earned yet,” Bellatrix replied roughly, straightening out on the bed.

“But you were the one- you know what? Nevermind,” Hermione grumbled as she brushed the floor dust off of her clothes. It was now pitch black outside, and she was sure a few hours must have passed since they fell both asleep. Two cold bowls of soup sat on the bedside table, most likely left behind by Kreacher, and with a quick wave of her wand they were bubbling and steaming once more.

Carina- no, Bellatrix- began to obnoxiously crack all her stiff bones as she stood up and stretched. Bella gave a soft gasp as her neck popped and Hermione made no effort to hide her grimace, uncomfortable with both sounds for different reasons. She sat down on the edge of the bed with her bowl, and Bellatrix grabbed her own bowl and sat down next to her. The thin mattress dipped under both their weights.

“You know I expect you to act as if nothing has changed and you don’t know who I am, correct?” Bella said smoothly.

“In public, yes,” Hermione answered- she understood the importance of keeping her identity secret, but she wasn’t going to pretend that Bellatrix wasn’t Bellatrix when they were alone. Bella pulled an unamused frown, but didn’t bother to argue the point.

In some ways, she was glad Hermione knew. The fact that she’d had to build a new persona at all was a pain in the ass, but it was clear that there were a lot of people in this world that wanted Bellatrix Lestrange dead and they wouldn’t care if she looked seventeen or not. Despite her… unfortunate blood status, Hermione was the best company she had. Not that she had a lot of choice- between an insane talking bird, two adult sisters, and two angsty teenage boys, it wasn’t really a competition.

“I suppose I should clear a few things up,” Bellatrix sighed. Although she wasn’t looking forward to explaining her long-winded tale again (and Hermione was particularly prone to questions), it was refreshing to be able to get the story off her chest to someone who wasn’t her sisters. Not that she
didn’t love them and appreciate their help, but they were too tied up with their own lives and sides in the war to constantly be by her side the way Hermione was.

As Bella retold her story, filling in details here and there to answer Hermione’s inescapable, incessant questions, she found herself grateful that Phene’s cover as an Unspeakable allowed her to work ‘Pennie’ into the story without too many issues. For a split second she almost considered telling Hermione about the shapeshifting phoenix, but decided against it. She imagined sitting next to the teenage, time-travelling version of a mass-murderess and prolific torturer was enough to chew on without adding all of Phene’s nonsense on top of it.

“And here we are now, no closer to killing the other me than before and certainly a lot worse off for it,” Bellatrix huffed.

“What? I thought that was just a cover,” Hermione exclaimed.

“Oh, no. I intend to destroy her,” Bella replied. Hermione pulled a face that looked eerily similar to Narcissa’s pinched expression of anguish, and Bellatrix huffed to herself.

“Look, it’s on the bottom of my list for now. I’m more interested in getting back to my main timeline- dimension- wherever, but if I get the opportunity to do some cleanup here then I’m going to take it.”

“Cleanup,” Hermione repeated, no less aggrieved. With a sharp exhale she closed her eyes and shook her head, dropping the subject for now. She had no idea where to go from here, really; it seemed almost anticlimactic to go back to casual small talk, but she knew lingering on the topic of Bellatrix’s future self was only going to make her cranky. Crankier.

Hermione knew it would be difficult for her to mentally separate the women as two unique people who just happened to share an identical appearance, past, personality- and possible future. But she was going to have to, in order to avoid a self-fulfilling prophecy. When she figured out (or thought she had figured out) Carina’s heritage, she was determined not to let her judgement of the girl be influenced by Bellatrix Lestrange’s actions. It was the same situation yet, and Hermione held onto the hope that Bellatrix’s theory that she had come from a divergent timeline was true.

But naturally, there were doubts.

Bellatrix set her empty bowl back down on the bedside table and rubbed her red lined eyes with the heel of her palms. Hermione watched her for a moment, feeling the grim weight of everything from the past day to the past month pressing down on both of them. But Bellatrix must have been exhausted carrying it alone until now, so she was willing to shoulder some of the burden. Hermione remained by her side, hoping that her presence would be enough.

A light rap on the door accompanied by a feminine voice interrupted their moment of apprehensive companionship.

“Knock knock.”

Standing casually in the doorway was Phene in all her human glory, looking a little ill but with that same usual shit-eating grin on her face. Both teens stared at her for a moment before Bellatrix rushed over to her and pulled her into a crushing hug. She wasn’t much of a hugger- and would blame Hermione for rubbing off on her- but the woman had sacrificed her life to save her. Immortal or not, the gesture still stood.

Thin hands wrapped around her shoulders in return as Phene leaned down to return the embrace.
“I’m glad to see you too,” she chuckled. Bellatrix stepped back, unable to say all the things she wanted to say- not in front of Hermione, and not to herself. Instead, she studied Phene’s new dress: a draped, mid-thigh length gown in the same shade of forest green as the curtains.

"Are those-

"Don't tell," Phene smirked and held a finger to her lips. “Je pensais que ce serait plus sûr que de me promener nue. La combustion spontanée ne coopère pas vraiment avec les vêtements.”

“Right.”

“I’m right here, you know,” Hermione huffed, now standing in the centre of the bedroom with her hands on her hips.

“So you are,” Phene grinned at her.

“She knows now, by the way. About me not being Carina,” Bella explained. “Mais je ne lui ai pas parlé de tu, alors gardes tes histoire droit.”

“Oh, come off it,” Hermione groaned as Bellatrix shot her a smirk.

“You really don’t like not knowing things, do you?”

“I'm going to learn French just to spite you, you know?” Hermione replied, but the beginnings of a smile teased her lips nonetheless. Phene glanced surreptitiously at the two of them, and her face contorted as she tried to decipher the new dynamic between them. Recognising the look from whenever her mother caught her next to some boy, Bellatrix immediately distracted her.

“What was it that you wanted, anyway?”

“To check up on you, of course. I’m sorry that I haven’t really been... around, until now, but I’m glad you’re okay,” she said, hesitantly placing a hand on Bella’s shoulder. Bellatrix nodded, still incapable of finding the words she needed to express her convoluted feelings of gratitude.

Hermione watched the scene curiously; it was only a few days ago when Carina- Bellatrix had warned her not to get close to Pennie, and even before then their relationship had seemed ambivalent at best. She couldn’t pretend to know much about either of them, particularly given this new revelation about Bellatrix, but this tenderness was just about the last thing she expected from them.

The two jumped apart as the door flew open and slammed against the wall with a harsh bang, and Bellatrix felt an aneurysm begin to form as the man she had come to know as ‘Mad-Eye Moody’ shouldered his way into the room with an exasperated Sirius trailing behind him. His glass eye whirred over the room before roving over Phene- who looked thoroughly perturbed by the action.

“How did you get in here?” he barked at her.

“The front door, of course,” Phene replied, grinning cheekily as she pointed at the street.

“Moody! This is Penelope Partridge, from the French Ministry,” Hermione said, stepping forward between them before Moody could fire off at her.

“It’s nice to formally meet you, sorry about blasting you unconscious and all,” Sirius said, also pushing past Moody to extend his hand to Phene, whose smile faltered as he too eyed her up and down. He brought the back of her palm to his lips, and both she and Bellatrix winced.
“Yes, well. If I had known you had no interest in harming the boys I wouldn’t have wasted my time trying to shield them, but what can you do?” she hummed. Bellatrix masked a laugh as a cough into her fist, and Phene glanced sharply at her before giving Moody her favourite Stepford grin.

“And we’re to assume that you’re not sneaking around, up to no good then?” Moody groused at her.

“Naturally. You already know I can get in and out at my leisure- if I didn’t want you knowing I was here, you wouldn’t. So, if you don’t mind, I’d like to ensure Carina is in good health and capable hands,” she replied, keeping her mask fixed in place.

“So you just let yourself in then? Couldn’t even ring the doorbell?” Sirius scoffed, a hard edge to his casual tone.

“Oh, I just assumed you all had your hands full- Full moon and all, tonight, isn’t it?” Phene said, tilting her head at him.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he replied lowly, dropping the aloof facade. Phene grinned.

“There were some terrible noises coming from the basement- I made sure to avoid it, of course. I’m not stupid. But I do have to wonder if you knew about the cracks in the plaster? I do hope there’s sliver lining the gypsum.”

Moody cursed, and hobbled out of the room as fast as his pegleg would allow him. Sirius stayed put, cynicism outweighing his immediate impulse to check on Remus. Hermione was far less interested in attending to the werewolf who had once almost killed her, while Bellatrix was embracing the novelty of not being the subject of everyone’s stares for once.

Phene was also infinitely better than Bellatrix at dealing with such situations, because instead of indulging Sirius in his attempted stalemate, she ignored him completely. Paying no mind to the three pairs of eyes on her, she turned around and knocked twice, then once, then thrice on a spot in the wall- and then a doorway emerged for a newly formed adjacent bedroom. With a wink to the girls she walked through it, and shut the door behind her. The sound of a lock clicked, and the doorway disappeared as if it never was.

“I don’t know what the you and that woman are up to,” Sirius said, narrowing his eyes at Bellatrix, “but if anyone here gets fucked over because of you, I’m sending your head on a platter to Bellatrix myself.”

“Charming,” Bellatrix replied. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to go have a shower- or would you like to follow me in there too, you slimy old pervert?”

Hermione and Sirius both pulled equally unimpressed faces as Bellatrix pushed past them, but Hermione did follow after her- Sirius could be cagey and unpredictable, and somehow she’d rather be alone with a younger Bellatrix Lestrange than him.

The mood the next morning was no less heavy than the previous day’s, with Bellatrix still recovering from her altercation with her alter ego and Hermione still reeling from her revelation about Bellatrix’s identity, while everyone else suffered the post full moon hangover that came with
Phene was the only one in high spirits, and she had died not even two days ago. She was currently making a nuisance of herself, popping in and out of all the passages she and Bella had taken advantage of in their first visit, making her knowledge of the house’s layout well known.

It didn’t surprise Bellatrix that Maia’s familiar would be familiar with the nooks and crannies of Grimmauld Place, but needless to say it left the rest of the Order significantly harried. Phene was always generally disturbing, and while Bellatrix had become accustomed to it by now it was amusing to watch her keep everyone else on their toes. She was doing a truly superb job of convincing them all that she was an Unspeakable, because who else could be so creepy?

And, well, it made Bellatrix feel a bit more comfortable to think that she was the one who held all the secrets this time, not Dumbledore or Sirius or whoever else.

Phene’s jovial mood was hardly infectious, but not for any lack of trying. After popping out behind a portrait frame, she had immediately begun to pester Bella.

“Come on, I think a day out would do you kids some good. It’s a good opportunity to head to the London branch of Gringotts, after all,” she said, putting on a deep fake frown.

“I- Lestrange knows who I am now. If I rob her she’s going to know exactly who did it,” Bellatrix said, rubbing her forehead disdainfully.

“All the more reason to empty her bank before she thinks to set up better security then,” Phene replied. “She’s not exactly enamoured with you right now anyway, and if the Goblins let you in then by all rights, her belongings are yours.”

“I suppose so. I’ll make my decision when we get there though, but I wouldn’t mind a day out in Diagon Alley anyway, it beats spending all day here,” Bellatrix said. Phene nodded.

“I’ll ask your little friend if she wants to come too- she seems like she needs to get out more,” she said, and popped away again before Bella could protest. She huffed and blew a curl out of her face, but didn’t bother to chase after her. Seeing as Hermione knew her identity, there was no reason she couldn’t come along to Gringotts, and maybe she’d be easy to lose in the throng of Diagon Alley. Bella toyed with the idea of inviting Harry to tag along (and maybe Ron), if just to keep her distracted while she ran off.

It’s not that she hated Hermione’s presence… it was just, she was getting claustrophobic. With its decrepit disrepair, Grimmauld Place seemed far too small and suffocating for its many occupants. Really, how they’d let it become so rotten was beyond her; she had cleaned up much of Maia’s estate (which she had decided by now to dub Manoir Taureau) easily enough, and she was far from the homewitch Molly Weasly was. And speaking of, Molly was just one of the people here who constantly watched her with thinly veiled suspicion.

Yes, Bellatrix would be thankful just to get out of this place.

Phene hadn’t recovered enough to apparate them back to France, and it would be easier for them to wait a few days than to try to get their hands on a British Ministry portkey. Until then, they were unfortunately on lockdown- but Bellatrix got the feeling that everyone would be happy for Phene to drag her out to Diagon Alley if it meant they didn’t have to deal with the both of them.

Hermione found her fifteen minutes later, dressed and ready to go. Bellatrix smirked inwardly; it
seemed she wasn’t the only one desperate for a breath of fresh air. Hermione was wearing an odd pair of denim pants in a tight-fitting style unseen in Bella’s time, and without her usual frumpy sweater on her trim frame looked quite fetching. She cleared her throat awkwardly as she watched Bella’s eyes flicker up and down her body, but instead of shying away Bellatrix simply held her gaze- then gave the slightest smirk that Hermione thought shouldn’t have looked as flirtatious as it did.

“Should- should we go?” she stuttered, and pointed to the door. Bella’s smirk grew but she nodded in acquiescence, leading them down the hall.

“Where are you two off to?” Ron asked, catching them out. They stopped in the front hallway by a troll-foot umbrella stand and hanging, mottled curtains that certainly didn’t block any window.

“Just a quick trip to Diagon Alley. Clothes shopping,” Hermione answered. She felt a little guilty for hoping that would deter the boys from trying to join them, but they were supposed to be visiting Bellatrix’s vault in Gringotts- a phenomenally bad idea even without the boys attached to it- and she wasn’t really interested in spending the entire day as a buffer between them and Bellatrix again.

“Oh. Yeah, uh, right. You know, maybe you and I could go somewhere, later? Just us?” Ron asked stiffly, and Bella did her best to restrain the oncoming eyeroll.

“That’s- yeah, I’d like that,” Hermione replied, and Ron looked conflicted between smiling at her and scowling at Bellatrix’s taut grimace. There wasn’t much left for them to do but linger around as they waited for Phene, and Bella leaned back against the wall as she tried to ignore the awkward couple for the sake of some peace and quiet. However, as she brushed the tattered velvet curtains, they flew open and a horrible screech filled the halls, strings of curses flying through the air until suddenly, it stopped-

“Bellatrix? Is that you?”

Bellatrix froze and turned to look up at the portrait of Walburga Black hanging upon the wall, depicting her decaying old self with unpleasant realism. Walburga’s eyelids flickered as she inspected her from head to toe, her trademark sneer curling her lips.

“No- I suppose not, you’re far too young. And dear Bellatrix would never allow herself to appear so unkempt in my presence.”

Bellatrix frowned and looked down at herself; her clothes were a bit rudimentary, having been transfigured from plain, borrowed clothes, and her hair hadn’t been properly brushed for a while, but she was still pulling it off.

“She’s my mother. And I’m not unkempt,” she grumbled.

“And so rude, too! Did she never teach you proper manners? Not that Druella ever taught her how to properly behave,” Walburga muttered. Bellatrix’s frown deepened, miffed of course by her aunt’s dismissal of herself (twice in one go) but Walburga’s constant belittlement of her mother was a sore point in the family. Apparently she couldn’t let it alone even thirty years later.

“Yeah, well, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree and all that,” Ron added.

Bellatrix smiled tightly and inhaled sharply through her nose, shutting her eyes before she spun around to face him. And then her eyes snapped open.

“I’m sorry, what exactly prompted you to think that anyone gives a shit about anything you have to
“You’re a bloody lunatic, you know that?” was all Ron said, shaking his head. “Better be careful that you don’t start trying to jinx us all, or curse us into insanity, the way you take after your mum.”

Hermione gasped at him, and Bellatrix’s false smile fell into a murderous glare.

“Oh no, I am sick to fucking death of you trying to guilt me for something I didn’t fucking do,” she bellowed. The anger bubbling to the surface was blinding, and some subconscious part of her struggled between tethering it down or letting it loose. The shouting had quickly gained them an audience, watching the explosive teens carefully. Their faces poking out from stairwells and doorframes was was enough to remind Bellatrix that she was outnumbered in this household, so she did her best to swallow down the worst of her ire.

“I am tired of suffering everyone else’s consequences,” she growled, and made a point of catching everyone’s gaze as she said it.

The look she sent Hermione was no less poignant.

Ron glanced between the two of them, unaware of the depth of their exchange but suspicious of it nonetheless.

“Come on, ‘Mione. Are you going to tell them what she called you? What she still thinks of you?”

Walburga was the one to answer the question.

“MUDBLOOD FILTH, IN MY HOME! ABSOLUTELY.”

Sirius whisked the curtains shut, muffling Walburga’s wails, which was about the only good thing he had done so far in Bella’s opinion. Still, she grimaced; she wasn’t entirely unfamiliar with the pointy end of Walburga’s ire, but this vitriol was something altogether new and ugly. Bellatrix turned to Hermione, eager to defend herself, but was faintly surprised to see unshed tears clouding her eyes.

“Just stop it, won’t you?” she hissed, and stormed out through the front door. Ron hopped to hurry after her but Phene chose that point to appear, and moved to block his path.

“What-”

“Trust me, boy. She’s not going to want to talk to you right now- give her some space,” she said, and nudged him back by the shoulders. Although her height was less prominent compared to his tall stature, she still loomed over him. Ron turned around in search of support, but Ginny averted her gaze and Sirius grinned and held his hands up in surrender- everyone else had already cleared out.

Bellatrix sent Phene a grateful look behind her back, then followed Hermione’s footsteps. Thankfully she hadn’t gone far, only standing on the street across the road. Bellatrix crossed it cautiously- she knew enough about the muggle contraptions known as cars to know that they could cause dangerous collisions- and met Hermione on the other side.

Her… friend, was standing with her back to the house, eyes trained upwards on the sky as she held her crossed arms close to her body. She was sniffling occasionally, but seemed to have successfully held back a complete emotional breakdown.
“Hey. Uh. You alright?” Bellatrix asked, internally cursing her stilted voice.

“Wha- oh. Yeah,” Hermione replied, shuddering out a sigh. “I’m sorry, really. I asked Ron to leave you alone, just for a little while, but of course he couldn’t help himself.”

“I mean, he was right. Sort of. I just- well, I hope you know I didn’t think you were this upset by it,” Bellatrix said, crossing her arms and hugging them to her chest to mirror Hermione.

Guilt wasn’t a foreign emotion to her, but it was mostly reserved for her sisters when they got stuck in etiquette lessons with mother and Walburga while her father tutored her in practical Dark Arts and strategy. Outside of the rare occasions where she might feel guilt towards a house elf after blaming it for something she’d done, or for her mother when her own ill behaviour drew her Walburga’s scorn, it was an emotion Bellatrix had little time for. She was Bellatrix Black, and she shouldn’t waste time feeling shitty for other people.

She didn’t like it when some people expected her to feel it on behalf of her future self’s actions, and she didn’t like it when it conflicted against her carefully pruned world views. Because she shouldn’t feel guilty about hurting a mudblood’s feelings- which only made the churning in her stomach worsen, because a part of her did. Hermione exhaled a heavy sigh with a smile turned grimace.

“Bellatrix… I know. I know you still believe in blood superiority- it’s how you were raised. But you’ve been able to put that aside, for the most part, and yet when I ask Ron to just give you some space for once, he can’t do it!” she said, and barked out an incredulous laugh. “Can you believe it?”

Bellatrix watched her warily, and slowly shook her head in lieu of answering. She guessed that this was the point where she was supposed to ask her if everything really was alright, or offer some kind of comfort, but she didn’t really want to hear about Hermione’s relationship troubles and she had already met her quota of human contact for the month.

Thankfully, she was saved by the sound of a door slamming from the terrace home, followed by the clicking of heels as Phene caught up to them.

“There you two are. How are you both doing?”

Neither answered her; trying to lie was pointless, but neither was interested in opening the floodgates to their each own brittle emotional dam. At least, not here and not now.

“...Right. How about we get some ice cream? Hermione, do you know any good gelato shops around here?” Phene asked.

“What’s with you and ice cream?”

“There was an ice cream parlour in Diagon Alley we could have gone to, but- well, it’s been boarded up ever since Florean Fortescue went missing. Death Eater attack,” Hermione said, shifting from somber to morose.

“...Right,” Phene said, and the trio stood silent for a moment.

“How about we just head off anyway, and go to a bakery instead. Do you like milkshakes? We can get a milkshake,” she finally suggested, then apparated away with a pop. Hermione turned to Bellatrix, by now more perplexed than distressed. Bellatrix simply shrugged at her and apparated off- she did kind of feel like a milkshake. Then Hermione stood alone.
She let out a shaky, ridiculous laugh and glanced back towards Grimmauld Place, then apparated away.

“Here, do you like chocolate? I bought you chocolate,” Phene said, passing Hermione the milkshake. Bellatrix sipped on her own strawberry one, scanning the streets of Diagon Alley properly for the first time this decade now that she wasn’t immediately in danger of being recognised. She had charmed her hair to a light, mousy brown colour not too dissimilar from Phene’s, and when she stood next to her and Hermione they almost looked like an uncanny family.

Despite the rising tension between the Death Eaters and Dumbeldore’s loyalists, the denizens of London were happy to continue their business as usual. Diagon Alley wasn’t quite as insouciant as Sorcelle was, wanted posters still lined the walls and nobody cared to loiter around for too long, but the only sign of any conflict was the scant storefronts of missing muggleborn owners.

“You kids can go off on your own, I’ll meet you at Gringotts in, say, an hour?” Phene said, draining her own banana milkshake. Bellatrix nodded and dragged Hermione away, happy to ditch Phene whenever the opportunity arose. Phene smiled and waved them off, chuckling to herself at Bella’s hurry to get away. Although she was coming a long way in earning the girl’s trust, she wouldn’t begrudge her of the need for independence. Teenagers would be teenagers, and teenagers didn’t like spending their outings with their ageless pseudo-aunts. As soon as they disappeared from her sight, she spun around and took a left turn off of the main street.

Phene’s heels clacked against the cobblestone path as she wandered down the alleyway, twisting and turning with no real sense of direction. She meandered for a moment in a crossway before pitching right, and idled by one of Knockturn Alley’s seediest inns for a moment before stepping through the threshold. The bar area was empty save for the barkeep and two disgruntled wizards playing Bavarian style exploding snap, although an equally bedraggled wizard followed through the front door as Phene headed to the bar. As out of place as she looked, the barkeep didn’t comment; there was always more to someone than what meets the eye in the Alley.

“What can I get you?” he asked, baring a set of silver teeth.

“Just keys to a room for the night, if you please. Single bed should be fine,” she replied, flashing her own perfect smile. The barkeep raised a scarred eyebrow but said nothing more as she slid a handful of sickles across the bar and grabbed the rusted key from him.

The accommodation was as dilapidated as expected from a hovel as downtrodden as this one, with cockroaches and spiders scattering under the bed and into cracks in the wall as Phene unlocked the door. Delicious as they were, she had no interest in hunting them down; she had a bigger catch in mind. Unsurprisingly the room’s wards were flimsy at best, which was how the witches and wizards around here liked them. The point of holes-in-the-wall like these was the assumption that anyone here was far below notice, because people who hid behind stronger wards had something to hide.

The door clicked shut and Phene hummed to herself as she turned to face the wizard who had followed her in.
“Following a girl around on streets like these, it’s almost enough to think you’re up to no good,” she remarked.

“Who are you, really?” he asked, narrowing beady eyes at her.

“Oh, drop the disguise Nymphadora. It doesn’t become you.”

The wizard scowled, but eventually his wrinkled features melted away to Tonks’ natural appearance, chestnut hair and all. Phene appraised her carefully, smile still stuck to her face. She wondered if Tonks was the kind of auror who turned a blind eye to brutality, maybe even employed it herself if she could be sure it wouldn’t be spoken of. Though she didn’t carry the surname, a Black would always be a Black after all.

Phene knew she couldn’t best her in a fight- not like this- but it didn’t have to come to that. “I’m going to ask again. Who. Are you.”

Tonks raised her wand as Phene took a calculated step closer to her, and held her ground.

“My name is Penelope Partridge. I’m an Unspeakable working for the French Ministry of Magic.”

Tonks’ mouth twisted from a hard line into a mocking sneer.

“Bullshit.”

Phene took a step closer, so close in fact that Tonks’ wand pressed into her sternum. That was the thing about wizardkind these days, she considered. They were so blinded by the power of their little *wands* that they didn’t consider that anything else could pose a threat. Phene hoped Tonks would learn that lesson now, as she moved with an unnatural speed to grip her wrist and twist it upwards so that the jet of red light shot forth into the ceiling. She clenched her other hand around her spare wrist, and shouldered them both against the wall until Tonks was effectively pinned to it by her weight.

"You should be more careful, Nymphadora," Phene crooned down at her. "You’re not the only one with *secrets.*"

In a second her eyes flashed, the sclera a brilliant gold cleaved by narrow, vertical pupils. Then they were back to normal in an instant, faster than Tonks could blink. But the leer on her face warned her that it was far more than just her imagination.

Tonks struggled against her grip, but then the hands holding her wrists burned like fire. Tonks shouted as Phene’s body caught alight seemingly out of nowhere, and as soon as she let go of her the blaze whisked her away. There was no apparition trace to follow, and all that was left of her was a scorch mark on the floorboards.

Chapter End Notes

how ooky spooky! Dynamics are definitely shifting now that Hermione knows (most of) the truth, but the more things change the more they stay the same ;p
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

what a beautiful day I sure hope nothing bad happens

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hermione watched Bellatrix out of the corner of her eye as they wandered the shelves of Flourish and Blotts. Her glamoured hair gave her a softer look, and without her usual boots and corset she looked everything like a young teenage girl and nothing like Bellatrix Lestrange, regardless of their identical features. Although her typical black hair was striking, it was a part of Lestrange’s unmistakable look- and Hermione was happy to push thoughts of the Death Eater to the back of her mind.

She was glad it was just the two of them on this trip, because Harry and Ron would have dragged them both out of the store by now. Bellatrix made no secret of her interest in academic texts and philosophically driven fiction novels, even if a few niche erotica paperbacks were slipped between them. There had been a few Ravenclaws in her year whose passion for books rivalled her own, but they weren’t exactly the friendliest bunch; Bellatrix was just as clever as them and more charismatic by leagues.

Bella noticed her staring and passed her a book with a cheeky smile, and Hermione rolled her eyes at the cover.

“Gilderoy Lockheart and the Orgastic Vampire Coven. How pleasant. You know he was my DADA Professor in my second year,” she said as she handed it back.

“No way,” Bellatrix laughed as she slid it back on the shelf. “Did he teach you how to defend yourself against horny vampires?”

“He didn’t teach us much of anything, really,” Hermione replied, trailing after her as she wandered down the aisle.

“Well. The answer’s that you don’t, by the way. If a vampire wants to get frisky you don’t pass up that opportunity,” Bellatrix continued. Hermione laughed unevenly, hoping that was in jest.

“I don’t think it really matters much anymore. He accidentally obliviated himself at the end of the year.”

And that was probably the least crazy thing that had happened that year, Hermione thought to herself. Bellatrix erupted with an unladylike snort, and wheezed with laughter to the point where she had to reach out and lean on a bookshelf to support herself.

“He- he accidentally obliviated himself?” she gasped, and broke into another fit of laughter. It was a charming sound, bubbling forth with a sincerity free of malice or derision, and it was infectious. “How did he? Accidentally-” she choked.

“I wasn't there for it, but apparently he tried it with a busted wand that didn't belong to him, so,”
Hermione indulged her. That just made Bellatrix burst out into another fit of giggles, and alright, it was pretty funny. Lockheart still hadn't properly recovered, but he had intended to cast the spell on Harry and Ron so he deserved what he got.

They made their way back to the main street after buying their book haul (and narrowly avoiding a fight with the vendor who didn't believe Bellatrix should be buying adult novels at fourteen, to which Bella had asked if he'd seen any fourteen year olds with ‘a body like this’). Bellatrix’s attention span was considerably short, overstimulated by all the crowds and sounds and storefronts that were the same but different, but Hermione was content to trail along behind her as she flitted down the street.

Diagon Alley had lost most of its novelty and wonder since her first visit, when she had lost herself in awe at the magic dripping from the walls of every store, but the technicolour wonderland still remained an interesting place. Many of the stores were new to Bellatrix, or at least improved, and she made sure to stop and inspect every one- although she didn’t express much interest in Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, which was probably for the best because Hermione couldn’t think of a worse person to own a Portable Swamp.

Lost in thought as she was, Hermione almost bumped into her as Bellatrix stopped them in front of a rather upmarket shop with mannequins on display.

“Now, I think I remember you saying that we were going clothes shopping,” Bella said with a wink, and pulled them inside of the London branch of Gladrags Wizardwear.

The shop was lined with racks of robes glittering with all sorts of colours, prismatic and eccentric, everything like Dumbledore’s typical garments and nothing at all like Bellatrix’s usual style.

“Merlin, what passes for fashion these days,” Bellatrix mumbled under her breath, and led her to the back of the store where the clothes slowly became more monochrome and tasteful. She let go of Hermione’s hand and wandered through the racks, and Hermione took the opportunity to inspect the clothes on display.

There were robes of all different fabrics and styles, some of which looked to be hand stitched and embroidered with sparkling gems. They each looked as though they each cost more than all the contents of the Burrow combined, and these were just the off-the-rack pieces. The dresses were on par with what Hermione had seen the Beauxbatons girls wearing at the Yule Ball, although some of them had a far more scandalous cut than any student would have been permitted to wear.

Hermione brushed past them, careful not to mar the ostentatious garments with her fingerprints. She continued along to where Bellatrix was standing, eyeing up a leather bustier, and hurried over to wrench her shoulder away.

“Hey!”

“Don’t you think you own enough of those?”

“Never,” Bella hissed, but schooled her expression as she eyed Hermione’s torso. “You could try it on, though. Every girl should have at least one, and who better to help you find the right fit?”

“I don’t need a corset, Carina,” Hermione huffed, crossing her arms over her chest to block Bella’s roving eyes.

“Arguable. Your muggle clothes are acceptable,” Bellatrix said grudgingly, which was likely as good as she was going to get, “but you ought to own at least some traditional witch fashion. You’ll
stand out less as a muggleborn that way.”

“Maybe I don’t want to hide the fact that I’m muggleborn,” Hermione hissed affrontedly. Bellatrix winced as though she had swallowed an earwax flavoured jellybean, and quickly waved her hand.

“I didn’t mean it like that. Mostly. But if you ever need to go for an interview for a job at, say, the Ministry- if you show up in muggle business wear they’ll just send you straight to the muggle liaisons office. If you want Purebloods to respect your culture, you need them to know that you respect theirs first.”

“Maybe I don’t respect theirs. It’s their world in a bloody civil war right now,” Hermione huffed. Bellatrix grit her teeth and struggled to maintain her composure.

“Look, I’m not going to give you a lecture on Slytherin political games because I’m sure you don’t want to hear it, but they’re just clothes. Nice clothes. You’d look good in them.”

Hermione softened only just, but she maintained her stern posture. Bella watched her cautiously before that scheming look crossed her face.

“How’s about this? You let me pick out one whole outfit for you, and I’ll let you pick out one muggle styled outfit for me.”

Hermione’s eyebrows near hit her hairline in shock, and Bellatrix stole her silence to continue.

“I’ll be paying for them both, of course- so don’t you dare go for any budget lines. And I’m trying to be nice here, so if I find out you’ve chosen some terrible, god-awful fashion for me as a joke I will set your hair on fire.”

“Really?”

“Well, maybe not your hair. But your clothes, certainly.”

“No- I mean, you’ll wear muggle clothes?”

“I never said anything about wearing them,” Bellatrix backtracked, “but I’ll own them, so if I do ever need to wear them I can- but yes. I can’t imagine why I would, but if I’m ever going to wear muggle fashion, I expect to be the most fashionable person in the room regardless.”

Hermione scrutinised her carefully, but neither budged.

“Alright,” she eventually agreed. “Pick out an outfit for me- but no corsets.”

Bellatrix sighed dramatically, but her excitement was betrayed by the speed in which she grabbed Hermione’s hand and pulled her over to the skirt selection.

Thankfully the displays Bellatrix had begun to rifle through were more demure, although Hermione had to wonder if she’d look as good in her ruffled collars and ankle-length petticoats. She didn’t have much time to second-guess her decision however, as she was unceremoniously shoved backwards into a changing room and instinctively grasped the bundle of clothes Bellatrix had thrust upon her. Hermione huffed and blew a loose curl out of her face, then hung the clothes up, locked the door and undressed.

The changerooms were a cramped space even for just one person, and when Bellatrix joined her
Hermione could feel the phantom traces of her body pressing against her as she circled the tight space. Bella inspected her from every angle, her hand shooting out here and there to drape the fabric a different way or to straighten and tighten a hem.

Taking a look at herself in the mirror, she felt a light flutter in her stomach as she examined herself from head to toe. Although her hair wasn’t styled particularly impressively, the neat white blouse and black blazer made her look remarkably professional while still maintaining a fashionable cut. The trousers and heeled boots she had tried on were more modern than Bellatrix’s wardrobe, and gave her a shapely silhouette. Hermione stifled her growing smile by biting down on her lip, but light shone in her eyes nonetheless. She looked good.

Then Bellatrix pressed against her front, fixing the ribbon bow tie around her collar so that it sat perfectly symmetrical. Hermione averted her eyes from the tongue that peeked out from between pink lips, and then from the dark lashes obscuring narrowed eyes, and instead sought eye contact with her now uncomfortable reflection in the mirror. She let out the breath she had been holding as Bellatrix finally stepped back and nodded at her approvingly.

“There we go. Not too casual, not too formal,” she muttered. “Lacks a bit of flair but that’s alright. There’s something sexy about sensible women anyhow.”

“I didn’t realise you leant that way,” Hermione noted with a growing blush. Bellatrix shrugged casually as if to distract from her own warming face.

“I’ve always fancied all sorts. It was kind of an open secret, but it never really mattered because I was inevitably going to be married off anyway—” Bellatrix explained, only to cut herself short. Her future marriage was something she’d always tended to push to the back of her mind, the looming bridge she’d either cross or burn only when she arrived at it. As such it was something that had become almost hypothetical in her mind, not really real until it was real. Unfortunately, being thrust into the future had made such a situation very regretfully real.

“When did you figure it out?” Hermione asked, desperate to redirect the conversation. She could make a few educated guesses as to why Bellatrix had become suddenly pensieve, and had no intention of leaving her there.

“Well it wasn’t exactly hard to tell,” Bellatrix replied, stirred from her thoughts, “I grew up surrounded by lots of glamorous women and at some point I had to admit to myself that my admiration of them wasn’t strictly platonic.”

“Oh. I can’t say I’ve ever really thought about it, to be honest. Wizard society can be oddly conservative for all its Pagan and Grecian roots,” Hermione said.

“What, you’ve never imagined what kissing a girl feels like? I could have sworn I saw that in your memories somewhere,” Bellatrix taunted, leaning in closer.

“No, I’ve never been curious,” Hermione sputtered. She had to fight the urge to tug her collar loose to cool her flushed neck, because that would only invite Bella to fuss over her again.

“I thought you didn’t like not knowing things?”

To her relief, Bellatrix backed away, but the wide grin never left her face.

“You know I can keep a secret,” she continued with a wink. “You have so much potential blackmail on me, why I think it’s only fair that I have some on you. That’s what friendship is, isn’t it?”
“That’s a very twisted view of friendship,” Hermione chuckled, eager to change the subject.

“Maybe it’s just a cynical way of saying I ought to get to know you better,” Bellatrix replied. “Now change back and give me the clothes so I can pay for them.”

After sending their purchases away to Hermione’s room in Grimmauld Place, Bellatrix and Hermione made their way to Gringotts with a mixture of dread and anticipation. They couldn’t be sure if Bellatrix would even be allowed into Lestrange’s vault, and neither of them was sure if that would be a good thing. Bellatrix was less concerned about Hermione about the potential consequences if they did get in, but now that she was in front of the building she found she had some misgivings.

The last time she had walked into Gringotts at Diagon Alley, she had walked out thirty years in the future. She doubted it would happen again (and perhaps she’d end up unwillingly taking Hermione with her) but it would really complicate things if it did.

Phene slipped through the crowds to stand by their side, appearing in their periphery from out of nowhere.

“Where’ve you been?” Bellatrix asked indifferently.

“Around. I expected you two would lose track of time, so I wasn’t in much of a hurry,” Phene replied, equally as noncommittal. She was the first to stride forward into the building, and Hermione and Bella followed after her after sparing each other a quick glance.

To Bellatrix’s relief, she wasn’t immediately thrown out like she had been last time. She earned a few suspicious looks to be sure, but the promise of gold to be exchanged was enough to stay their hands. An open teller waved her over, and she strode over with her head held high, Phene and Hermione flanking her sides.

“What service do you require today?” the goblin asked, tapping his clawed nails on the podium.

“I would like to access my vault,” Bellatrix said primly, lifting her chin up at him. The goblin stared down at her, the wrinkles on his forehead deepening as he examined her.

“And your name is?”

“Bellatrix Black.”

The goblin sneered, unveiling jagged yellow teeth.

“We were warned you might turn up here. Present your wand,” he said finally, and she reluctantly handed over her walnut wand. She felt its loss immediately, and fidgeted on the spot as she watched him turn it over in his ugly little hands.

“I see,” he muttered to himself. He passed the wand back to Bellatrix, her agitation dissipating as soon as it was back in her holster, and procured a file with a snap of his fingers.

“The Paris branch sent us the results of your blood test, but you’ll need to pass an eligibility test to gain at least partial access Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault.”
“What does partial access entail?” Hermione asked, piping up from behind Bellatrix. The goblin glared down at her, but relented under Bella’s stern gaze.

“What does partial access entail? Miss Black will be entitled to whatever the eligibility results allow her—which will become clear after we perform the test. If you’d follow me,” he said, and stepped down from his podium to lead them into a private office.

The three of them took a chair in front of the desk, while the goblin rifled through a cabinet to retrieve some papers. He then trudged over to a small vault built into the side of the room, which took a good five minutes to unlock. Some sort of distortion ward blocked their view of what was inside, but they could clearly see what he had pulled out. In his hands were a pair of Goblin Steel cufflinks, which were engraved with a runic language Bellatrix didn’t recognise.

“Hold your arms out,” he instructed once he sat down at his side of the desk. Bellatrix eyed the cuffs warily. At the very least they weren’t linked together with a chain, but she knew enough about magic suppression handcuffs to know not to trust enchanted bracelets. But Phene and Hermione were looking at her expectantly, and as apprehensive as she was she knew she had to continue, so she held her arms out and prayed to the Gods that this goblin had the key to get them off. The goblin toyed with a mechanism on the cuffs that adjusted their size to allow them to press flat against her thin wrists.

“Now, summon your magic. The metal will absorb the excess,” he explained.

Bellatrix squeezed her hands into fists and stretched them out again, then began to channel her magic. The feeling of magic rushing through her veins was far from an unfamiliar one, but without a wand in hand to direct it she felt unsteady. She hadn’t summoned freehand magic like this since she was a child, since the results were usually rather explosive.

Yet as the magic surged down alongside the nerves stretching from her shoulder to her fingertips, the steel redirected it away so that not so much as a spark emerged from her hands. The cool metal warmed against her skin as it became infused with her magic, and the engraved runes began to glow a deep violet. With a quick bite to her lip to hide her grin, Bellatrix tapped into her core and flexed until faint lines of static magic crackled between her fingers. The goblin watched her with only a single raised eyebrow to indicate his interest, although Hermione and Phene weren’t aware of the heights of power she was exerting as most of it was siphoned away.

Bellatrix hadn’t had the chance to stretch like this in ages, her magic burning like pulling a tense muscle taut, and she had to fight not to moan from the sensation.

The steel soon began to burn against her skin, and a slight tug in the muscles of her wrist warned her not to push herself much further. Then two sharp metal needles protruded from the inside, piercing her Radial artery. The sudden pain caused her magic to flare, but the cuffs simply glowed brighter until she finally stopped her channeling.

“Prick,” Bellatrix hissed, and the goblin grinned.

“Yes, it does feel a little like that, doesn’t it?”

The purple runes swirled into a glittering gold once mixed with her blood, and apparently the goblin was satisfied by that. With a snap of his fingers the cuffs clicked open, and Bellatrix snatched her hands back and rubbed them close to her chest. The goblin appraised the cuffs as the engravings began to shift and reshape themselves, and hummed as he looked down at the files on his desk. Both Phene and Hermione leaned in to inspect the new runes, and although Bella was more confident that Hermione’s interest was largely academic, it wouldn’t surprise her if Phene
could actually read it.

“You and Madam Lestrange are genetically identical, which comes as little surprise,” the goblin started. “Your magical signature is not completely identical to Madam Lestrange’s, which is to be expected given the changes becoming a Death Eater will bring, but there are some… peculiarities.”

“Like what?” Phene was the one to ask this time, cocking her head as she scanned his face.

“There are multiple members throughout the Blæc dynasty with near identical magical prints—which can likely be traced back to a direct ancestor who existed before Gringotts was established. Every signature is unique, but as this vault is linked to the Black family’s historic warding system, it cannot differentiate between two Bellatrixes or, say, Bellatrix and Maia Black,” the goblin explained, and passed over one of the documents on his desk.

On the parchment were a number of shifting symbols, all swirling in dark violet and indigo inks above a printed name. There was no true visible representation of a magical signature as it wasn’t something that could be literally translated, but the Goblins had constructed a runic system of representation nonetheless, which was the closest approximation the Ministry had available.

Bella’s signature sat at the bottom of the page, next to Lestrange’s- and though they weren't exactly the same, the differences were near imperceptible. Each swirling pattern represented a different facet of her magical blood, and it slithered around the page next to her other self like a twin-headed hydra. And just as the goblin had said, it was also near identical to Maia’s- and a scattering of other family members across the tree. She noticed that her sisters’ were similar as well, but theirs complemented each other rather than replicating the same image.

“Oh how cute- you all match, it’s like you’re a family,” Phene teased.

“We are a family,” Bellatrix replied, but frowned at all the unforeseen implications. However, the goblin didn’t give her time to dwell on it.

“Vilbog will take you to your vault, and can give you assistance by showing you what you will and won’t be able to withdraw,” he said finally, and whisked the parchment away before Bellatrix could inspect it further.

The goblin named Vilbog was waiting for them outside the office door and wordlessly gestured for them to follow him down to the carts. They all squeezed into the cart, and before they could attempt to get comfortable it jerked to a start and whirled down the rails with sickening speed. Bellatrix, Phene and Vilbog sat stiffly in their seats as it whisked through the stalactite caves, but Hermione was gripping for dear life onto the back of her chair, her knuckles turning frighteningly white.

A loud, bellowing roar erupted from the near bottomless cavern, and Phene gripped the handrail tighter as she heard it, with an uncharacteristically grim frown settling on her face. Then they were doused with a heavy slam of water as the cart whisked its way past the dissolutive waterfall. Bellatrix wrung the water out of her hair with a scowl, which was now black as night again since her glamours had been washed away.

“Surely there’s a better way to disenchant spells or whatever than a fucking waterfall,” she growled as Hermione dried them off with a charm. Phene remained unchanged, which honestly just raised more questions. Vilbog raised an eyebrow at them but didn’t comment as the cart finally shocked to a halt in front of a thick golden vault door. He got up and pressed his hand against it, and the hatch began to unlock as each mechanism unlatched itself. Bellatrix exhaled as she steeled herself.
“Let’s empty this bitch.”

The heavy door swung open soundlessly and Bella, Hermione and Phene all had to cover their eyes at first as the glittering reflection of the crystalline walls bounced light off of the mountains of gold inside.

“I don’t think we’re going to be able to put a dent in this bitch,” Phene stated.

“Well, a good fifth of it is off limits to you, as part of your entitlements and bride price from your marriage contract with Lestrange- a contract you have not signed,” Vilbog stated. Hearing the words ‘bride price’ leave his thin lips was enough to make Bellatrix shudder, but she was quick to push it to the back of her mind.

“Only a fifth of all this? Feh,” she scoffed. Phene reached out to inspect a goblet, but her hand was swatted away by the goblin.

“There’s a multiplication charm on these contents! Only Missus Black can touch any of it,” he scowled at her, and Phene sneered down at him.

“Yes, yes, I give them permission to touch it,” Bellatrix huffed. “They’re going to need to help me carry some of this too, you know.”

Phene grinned childishly at Vilbog and picked up the nearest artefact, and was immediately distracted by her reflection in it. The vault was filled with all sorts of trinkets of immeasurable value, and Hermione was immediately drawn towards the racks of potion shelves and began to gather them into the magically extended depths of her beaded bag. It felt a little like stealing, but so long as she had Bella’s permission it was all technically legal. Not that she would have minded raiding Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault for what were certainly one-of-a-kind concoctions, but this simplified things tenfold. Once she had cleared most of the potions, she glanced around again.

There were piles of hides of all sorts from dragon to demiguise, jewels of every colour of the rainbow and a few suits of armour which had probably been worn by a Black ancestor of old, still rusted with blood. On a shelf above the suits was a glimmering sword, and Hermione’s mouth fell open in shock.

“Is that the sword of Gryffindor?” she asked.


Hermione crossed the vault over to Bellatrix, who was staring at a silver tiara lined with sapphires as she held it in both hands. Bella noticed Hermione standing behind her, and with a bitter sigh put the tiara back on a glass shelf.

“My mother wore that on her wedding day,” she explained.

“Oh. I- I see. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah. I imagine plenty of this comes from the Rosier family,” Bella waved offhandedly at the mountains of gold, “Grandmother was a notorious hoarder, you know. The old dragon even had a stuffed Leprechaun. Glad to see I didn’t inherit that.”

“You inherited somebody’s skull, apparently,” Hermione said, and pointed at a skull sitting atop one of the largest piles. It was painted such a dark black that it was hard not to confuse it for a shadow, but it had to be physical because it had two red diamonds fixed into its eye sockets that seemed to stare down at them.
“Do you feel that?” Bellatrix asked, and Phene poked her head out of the pile of goblets she was rummaging around in to join them.

“The feeling that it’s looking right through me, or the feeling that I’m getting cursed just looking at it?” Hermione replied.

“I was talking about the unique Dark magic radiating from it, actually, but yes.”

“We’re taking it,” Phene decided, and summoned it into her outstretched palm. At this close proximity, Bellatrix noted that Hermione had a point about the ‘cursed by looking at it’ kind of feeling.

“What? No, I don’t want a creepy skull that stares at me. Leave it here,” Bellatrix argued, but Phene was already stuffing it in her bag.

“I want to take a closer look at it when we get home. It reeks more than anything else in here,” was the only explanation she offered before scampering off to collect more treasure. As anticipated though, even with shrinking charms and extension charms on their bags, there was little they could do to collect even a fraction of the vault’s contents. It was partly to Bellatrix’s relief, because she didn’t think Bellatrix Lestrange would even notice anything had been taken if she didn’t think to check the access log. However, she had mainly taken galleons, while Phene and Hermione were more interested in the trinkets and artefacts respectively. Vilbog occasionally harangued them about what was off-limits, although there truly wasn’t much that was.

Once they were satisfied they jumped back on the cart and began the journey back up, which was no less of a rollercoaster. Bellatrix made sure to reapply her glamour charms before they stepped out into Gringotts’ lobby again, and sent their bags full of gold back to Grimmauld Place with a note to Kreacher to have it sent to Manoir Taureau immediately.

The moment they stepped out back into Diagon Alley, they were met by screaming crowds pushing against them, all scrambling to the safety of Gringotts. Up in the sky were at least four- no, five- billowing spirals of dark smoke. The Death Eater’s preferred method of locomotion was too fast to effectively fire at, but that didn’t mean that they weren’t shooting spells of their own. Bright flashes of spellfire whizzed towards the streets, and a few of the more savvy witches and wizards thought to throw up shield charms as others dodged and shrieked.

It was complete chaos, and it was only the complete chaos that saved Bellatrix from being recognised. Because landing in the centre of the nearly deserted street was Bellatrix Lestrange, surrounded by a group of Death Eaters.

“Oh you have got to be shitting me,” Bellatrix groaned.

Chapter End Notes

You might've noticed that my username's different but it's okay I'm still Erazon, I just decided to go with this username because I only post Bellamione here anyway. So anyway onto the writing stuff.
Anyway, here's the date-that's-totally-not-a-date and a venture into Gringotts! I'll try to get the next chapter out soon for you, because things are going in a direction
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

It's getting hot in here, so take off all your clothes,

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bellatrix shielded herself behind Phene as the stampeding crowd continued to flood through the streets towards Gringotts. Many of them were too young to apparate, and even those who could wouldn’t chance the risk of splinching themselves to death in the midst of the panic. Wizards and witches clambered over each other in the hopes of reaching the safety of the heavily warded vaults, but two Death Eaters landed right in front of the doorways. They made no attempt to get inside and were thus ignored by the Goblin guards; instead they maimed anyone who tried to press past them.

The ringing blasts of explosions and the terrified shrieks of onlookers ripped through the air. It brought Bella’s rattled heart a small drop of comfort to know that she wasn’t the immediate target, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t in just as much danger as everyone else. There were six other Death Eaters she could count who were busy herding people out of the alleyways. Bellatrix Lestrange, on the other hand, was doing nothing but cackling in the revelry of it all. Hermione tugged at Bella’s hand, hoping to break her from her esoteric daze, but she wouldn’t budge. Together they stood like monoliths against the rushing tide, stalwart yet seized by terror.

And then the Aurors arrived.

Where there was panic before, there was now complete hysteria. This was what the Death Eaters were here for. A few of the Aurors attempted to engage them, but there were too many people in the way to get a clear shot- not that the Death Eaters cared for the collateral. Bellatrix Lestrange’s job had fast become clear as she fired at the Aurors with frightening precision. It took at least two of them to hold her back, and instead of trying to defeat them she was taunting a third to join in. He looked very much like he wanted to, but the ultimatum of capturing the most wanted Death Eater alive or trying to protect the remaining bystanders was both difficult and straightforward. With Lestrange keeping them on their back foot and the other Death Eaters encircling them, they were corralled cattle waiting for slaughter.

The Death Eaters harassing the crowds began to turn on the Aurors instead, and Bellatrix was immediately alarmed as Lestrange fell back to the other end of the alley. They were pushed closer to the fray by the moving swell of human bodies, and in that moment Bella and Hermione shared a terrified glance. They knew they were likely going to die here, and all that went unspoken was expressed through tear stained eyes. Bellatrix turned to peer at her alter self and saw Lestrange smirk right through her. From the tip of her walnut wand a crimson sea emerged, and she instantly felt the heat kiss her skin as the Fiendfyre rippled towards them. In the distance chimaeras, snakes, eagles- any beast that the mind could imagine- rampaged towards them, their bodies shaped by the enchanted and inevitable fire. The beasts chewed through the buildings like a rush of locusts, each plume swallowing entire hardwood beams or brick foundations. Bellatrix could only continue to stare in a horrified daze.

As each fraction of a second passed a new regret bloomed in her mind. She regretted leaving her
sisters behind, even if leaving was never her choice. She regretted not telling them she loved them enough- both past and future versions of themselves. She regretted all the things she never got to tell her parents, the good and the bad. She regretted that Hermione had to die here too. By now even the Aurors knew there was no hope for them and were doing their best to overwhelm the remaining Death Eaters guarding the entrance to Gringotts, even as they shot bone breaking curses at anyone scrambling to safety. Most everybody else was now too frozen in terror, silently succumbing to their fate.

“Shields up!” Phene yelled.

“That’s not going to-”

“Do it!” she screamed.

Bellatrix and Hermione immediately cast the strongest shielding charms they could hope to maintain, channelling all their strength into forming a protective barricade as the inferno funnelled towards them. At their apex Phene stood, bracing herself with outstretched arms. As the blaze reached them, she was able to redirect the flames by creating a narrow, concave channel. The fire split as they formed a plough, and though their shields were protecting them from immediate death the heat alone beat against them with the force of a hurricane. Even past their Protegos, the skin on Bella and Hermione’s hands began to itch as their skin peeled back to reveal raw, blistering flesh. Neither of them dared spare a backwards glance to see how anyone else was faring for fear of losing concentration, although ahead of them Phene remained locked in a battle of will against the beasts that surged towards them. Her skin was melting and blistering black.

The smell was vile.

Bellatrix then recognised the Protego Diabolica Phene had summoned as wisps of onyx flames flickered against the Fiendfyre’s gnashing claws and fangs, although in the heat of action she had little time to dwell on the oddly dark spell for a phoenix. The two fire based spells clashed like the swell against the rocks- where one stood steadfast and strong, the other ruptured violently in its sheer force.

A loud crack sounded behind them and Bellatrix, Hermione and Phoenicis were rescued from their efforts as Dumbledore cast a golden wave of light that extinguished the remaining flames. Phene crumpled to the ground with nothing but a wretched gasp to signal her consciousness, and Hermione and Bellatrix slumped down against her. There was nothing but silence- or at least, Bellatrix thought there was; it was entirely possible she was in shock. But then a familiar caw rung out, low and melodic and melancholy. Fawkes gingerly landed on Phene’s prostrated form, and she gave a choked laugh as he chirped at her.

“I’m still mad at you, you know,” she murmured.

Healing tears leaked from his beady eyes as he pressed his head against her cheek, and she hummed in relief. Both Hermione and Bellatrix watched transfixed as the peeling, raw skin across her face repaired itself near instantaneously. Droplets dribbled down to splash over the disfigured flesh of her hands, with each tiny speck healing expanses of skin.

“Save some for the girls,” she muttered, and they both looked down to take in their own burns properly. Hermione cried out in a combination of shock and pain as her body finally registered the pain, and she whimpered at the sight of her particularly damaged wand hand. Fawkes rushed to her side first and perched on her shoulder, and his tears splashed down over the worst of her burns until they melted away back into smooth, unblemished skin. Bellatrix hazarded a glance back towards Gringotts and watched as a new team of Aurors evacuated the injured and covered the
corpses. Moody had one of the Death Eaters in his custody and apparated away before anyone could notice, while a few other Order members assisted in putting out the last of the Fiendfyre flames. Then she turned the other way.

Diagon Alley was gone.

Charcoal coated the ground like tartarus’ snow, and Bellatrix could barely see the clouds beyond the concrete gray haze of smoke. Only skeletons of the building’s foundations stood, blackened and withered and barely standing against the breeze. The Fiendfyre stampeded through the main street and so Knockturn Alley and all of the splintered sidestreets were relatively unharmed, but cobweb fractals still skirted outwards from the epicentre.

Bellatrix didn’t feel Fawkes land on her shoulder, but she did feel the tingling down her forearm as his tears bubbles and washed away the worst of her burns until there was nothing left but angry red skin. She was still peeling in some places, and his tears could not hope to reach each pockmark and blister, but what would otherwise be permanent disfiguration could now be treated by standard wizarding healing spells.

Flames washed over her again, and Bella cried out in alarm until a familiar voice crooned in her ear.

“I’m taking you back to the seat of the Blacks,” Fawkes reassured her, but the heat of his phoenixfire was sticky and stifling. The remnants of her shirt clung to her sweaty skin as the fire encircled her, tight and claustrophobic and far too hot and far too tight and far too hot and far too tight.

Then they were gone.

In the week following the attack on Diagon Alley, the wizarding world had quickly plummeted into chaos. The fragile stalemate between Dumbledore and Voldemort had shattered. Until now, Death Eaters had only been targeting the muggleborns- a crime that the rest of society could overlook, for the most part. Dumbledore would keep them safe, Dumbledore would maintain order. But Dumbledore was an old, old man who could not be everywhere at once, and Voldemort’s forces were growing. The Diagon Alley attack had made on thing clear: Voldemort’s fear of Dumbledore was no longer enough.

The attack had created the perfect opportunity for Pius Thicknesse to wrangle control of the Ministry, even though it was well known he was under Voldemort’s thumb. It was expected that Dumbledore’s days as Headmaster were numbered- it wouldn’t be long before Dolores Umbridge returned to place a pink clawed stranglehold on him, and plans were already being made to move Severus Snape into the Headmaster position so that Voldemort would ignore Hogwarts if he believed it was under his control.

The little Bellatrix had seen of wizarding society in this world was already being turned upside down, but it mattered very little to her. All she wanted was to get home- and when she did, she would do whatever she could to prevent the world from plummeting into this one’s disaster. Killing her alternate self was still on the to-do list, but the way things were looking now made Bella think she perhaps hadn’t chosen the wrong side. Voldemort’s words continued to ring in her head- as fractured as her family was, they were alive, and she could only hope that he would keep
that promise as the world became tenfold more dangerous.

When Hermione had been delivered back to Grimmauld Place to be healed further and get some rest she had received a teary and heartfelt reunion with all the people that loved her. Bellatrix and Phene were easily forgotten as they hid away from it all. Grimmauld Place was in complete lockdown mode which hadn’t helped Bellatrix’s mood in the slightest, and even though she was glad Phene was more subdued it was going to take her even longer to recover now. Hermione was busy being coddled by her boyfriends and all their entourage, and Phene was avoiding everyone and their gratitude by hiding in her phoenix body and flying away, so Bellatrix hadn’t seen much of either of them since. Tonks had popped in to check on her at one point but was quickly chased away by her foul mood. Bella supposed she ought to feel guilty, but she was too busy feeling shitty to care.

However, it wasn’t long before Tonks returned- and brought a visitor with her. Bellatrix was genuinely pleased to see her sister, but she had to restrain the smile threatening to split her face because as far as Tonks was concerned the two of them had never met.

“Carina, I’ve heard a lot about you,” Andromeda said. There was a clipped edge to her voice that Bella couldn’t decipher, so she ignored it and nodded her head.

“Andromeda. It’s a pleasure to meet you,” she replied, and had to bow to hide the small smirk playing on her lips.

“Mum and I thought it'd be nice to keep you company- and see if you'd like to stay with us for a little while,” Tonks said. “Headquarters here is getting a little bonkers with everything that's going on, as I know you know, and Mum’s place is as safe as any.”

“I’ll consider the offer,” Bellatrix acquiesced for now. Grimmauld Place was rather hectic at the moment as the Order of the Phoenix gave their meagre attempt at damage control, but she was also content just to hole herself up in her room until Phene had strength enough to carry her across the channel. Andromeda smiled warmly, first at her and then at Tonks. Seeing Andromeda almost motherly was… odd. Then she turned back to face her, and despite the smile still on her face the temperature of the room seemed to drop ten degrees.

“I was hoping to meet Penelope Partridge today as well- I’m told she’s the one to thank for saving most of those people’s lives,” Andromeda said. Bellatrix winced and choked down a dry gulp; Andy wasn’t going to let her worm her way out of this one.

“Well, I- I helped,” Bellatrix cringed.

“It’s interesting. How does my sister’s daughter end up in the care of a French Unspeakable? It must be quite a tale,” was Andromeda’s way of saying ‘You can’t keep hiding this from me’.

“It’s a long story, I’m sure I don’t need to bore you with the details,” Bellatrix cringed.

“I have the time. And we have so much to talk about,” Andromeda replied evenly. Tonks glanced between them warily; there was a tangible tension, and their façade of ignorance to each other was waning.

“Dora, sweetheart, do you mind bringing us something to drink? Some tea, perhaps?” Andromeda asked her, and Tonks obeyed hesitantly. As soon as she left the room, Andy deflated and looked at Bellatrix wearily.
“Are you okay, Bellatrix? I heard about your run in with her, and now this— I’m afraid we’re doing a terrible job of keeping you safe.”

“It’s not your job to keep me safe,” Bellatrix folded her arms against her chest. That was evidently the wrong thing to say, because Andromeda glared at her with all the fury of a disrespected mother. Bella flinched at the sight of it, but stubbornly kept her chin held high.

The Andromeda Bellatrix was used to was introverted and largely apathetic to the going-ons around her, and kept herself out of other’s affairs lest they interest themselves in hers. Andromeda did not care for Bellatrix’s business, just as Bella did not care to involve her in it. It was not entirely unexpected that this older Andromeda carried herself with the confidence only adulthood could bring and that she was highly invested in Bellatrix’s affairs given that they did concern her. However, Bella didn’t have to like it. Andy was her little sister, and she shouldn’t be getting her hands dirty in her messes. And what a terrible mess it had become; one that was only going to get worse.

“Cut the attitude, you pest. Everyone knows you do a terrible job of taking care of yourself, and how you’ve survived to adulthood I’ll never know,” Andromeda said, and smacked her on the back of the head for good measure. Bellatrix scowled at her as she rubbed the sore spot, and Andy rubbed at her own forehead.

“I… I know that you feel like you have to do this alone, because that’s what you’ve always done. But that clearly didn’t work out for you, so stop playing the martyr already.”

“We don’t have to have this conversation now,” Bellatrix said, the dismissal clear in her tone.

“No, I suppose you’re right, because there’s something else I want to talk about,” Andromeda replied primly.

“Oh?”

“I seem to remember you telling me that you were working alone— that the woman with you were merely an illusion, that there was nobody else living in your house with you,” she continued, steepling her fingers.

“Oh,” Bellatrix flushed at being called out this time.

“I don’t know what to think, Bella. I don’t know what you’re hiding from me. But it’s something that can stand in direct line of Fiendfyre and live, and it’s something that threatened my daughter,” Andy said tersely. Bellatrix blinked and swallowed back a dry gulp. Just what the hell was Phene getting up to? Andromeda’s eyes flashed dangerously, and Bellatrix hummed a low note as she stalled for time.

It was clear she needed to tell Andy something. There was no denying that she wasn’t working alone, and the only reason she trusted Phene even marginally was because she had actually died for her. But telling her the whole truth still felt like an astronomically bad idea— even if Andy didn’t have half the mind to throw her straight to St Mungo's for believing in transforming phoenixes that talked to her, if Phene didn’t want to be outed then she could definitely make life a living hell. Yet if Andy ever did find out the truth, she was going to be ropable about having been lied to again.

Bellatrix exhaled. It would hopefully never come to that, and it was easier to ask for forgiveness later.

“Listen, yes, I’ve been living with someone in France. She’s working as a glorified House Elf
mostly, doing all the cooking and what have you. But Pennie’s an Unspeakable with an untold interest in time travellers, and she’s been keeping me safe so as to prevent any paradoxes from me dying before I’m meant to and whatnot,” she explained. Andromeda didn't look fully satisfied, but there was little she could do to poke holes in the cover story.

“I’ll see if I can arrange a meeting between you both, alright?” Bellatrix relented, already regretting the words as Andy nodded.

“I expect as much. Let's see if we can't make that canary sing, hm?”

Life continued to be dreary in Grimmauld Place, and the only victory was that the Death Eater Moody had accosted at Diagon Alley was now the Order of the Phoenix’s plaything, but somebody had the bright idea of bringing him into the werewolf-proofed basement. It was a ridiculously stupid plan in Bellatrix’s opinion (not that they were going to ask her). However, it did give Sirius something to do other than antagonise her, so there were always silver linings. She had learned his name was Augustus Rookwood, an Unspeakable who had been Voldemort’s spy until he was caught and sentenced to Azkaban. He was almost unassuming, at least by Death Eater standards. He was ugly and brutish of course, but far from the dynamic powerhouse that was Bellatrix Lestrange. Yet he was not to be underestimated. As expected, he didn’t crack under their feeble interrogations. His occlumency was advanced enough to keep out even a trained legilimens, and he’d merely thrown their veritaserum back up onto their shoes.

Bellatrix wasn’t allowed into the dungeon with him- not that she had any interest in such a thing- and the room was soundproofed for the whole werewolf thing. Still, everyone who came in and out of that room was always swearing profusely or scowling at something or another so she hardly had to guess how their efforts were going. She was sure she could do a better job of interrogating him, if they’d let her. Not that she wanted to, but the Order was Light and Moral and Good, and didn’t know the first thing about even simple torture curses other than how to lift them. Alastor Moody was something of an exception, but it was clear his techniques were old-school and the Death Eaters had already adapted to them. What they really needed was a little creativity.

Apparently Hermione agreed.

Bellatrix was sequestered away in her room, reading one of the novels she had picked up from Flourish and Blotts in the hours before the shop had burnt down, when Hermione knocked on her door. She shut the book with an aggravated sigh- she had just gotten to the sauciest part.

“Come in,” she called out, hoping to stifle the edge in her voice. She tugged the book under her pillow and stood up as Hermione entered the room. Her usual unruly curls were particularly frazzled today, and there were dark circles under her eyes. The warm chocolate gaze Bellatrix had grown to expect was dim as she looked up at her.

“You look like shit.”

“Thank you. You’re too kind,” Hermione huffed. Bellatrix offered her a wry smile and sat back down on the bed, and patted the space next to her.

“Don’t expect me to lie to you to spare your feelings because I won’t. And it doesn’t really matter anyway- it’s not as if you have anyone to impress,” Bellatrix shrugged as Hermione sat down.
“How are you so, so… put together? You were there too. But I- I can’t go to sleep without hearing the screams,” Hermione shuddered. Bellatrix stared at her evenly, then turned up to look at the ceiling with a heavy sigh.

“Compartmentalisation, mostly. I don’t think about things that I don’t need to think about, don’t dwell on it. A lot of… I don’t remember a lot of it. And there’s no point trying to.”

“That’s… I don’t think that’s how you’re supposed to deal with it, Bella,” Hermione replied, frowning deeply.

“You’re in a war, girl,” Bellatrix offered a shrug, “I don’t think there’s much of a choice. You’ve got to move on.”

But Hermione was still looking at her oddly.

“You’ve had a lot of practice with this, then,” she stated. Bellatrix bit back a groan.

“Did you have a reason for coming to see me, or are you just here to harass me about my personal issues?”

Hermione at least had the decency to look contrite.

“I suppose you’ve heard about the Death Eater they’re keeping downstairs,” she said, redirecting the conversation.

“Hard not to. Secrets don’t really exist in this house, particularly when you’re a Black,” Bellatrix replied with a smirk.

“Then you know how terrible it’s all going?”

“Naturally. I get that you’re all the virtuous heroes or whatever, but if this guy’s ever been tortured by a version of me that’s even more skilled with unforgivables, then whatever you’re doing to him downstairs probably doesn’t even tickle in comparison,” Bella affirmed.

“I agree. That’s why I think- I think they need you, to help with the interrogation. If he thinks you’re Bellatrix Lestrange, he might talk to you,” Hermione said, and shuffled to face Bellatrix plainly.

“In what world is that a good idea?” Bellatrix blanched at her. “If I could convince a Death Eater that I’m her, what do you think everyone else is going to think?”

“Please,” Hermione insisted. Bellatrix quirked an eyebrow at her; there were tears swimming in her soulful brown eyes at this point. She knew Hermione was more than a little on edge after the Diagon Alley attack, but surely she knew this was irrational-

“They have Luna, and Neville. They’re my friends, and he knows where they are” Hermione answered her perplexed look. Bella exhaled through her nose, closed her eyes and fell back on the bed.

“Yes, Hermione,” Bellatrix, whined again and leaned over her, refusing to let her shy away. When she opened her eyes again she was startled by the proximity; she could hardly remember what it was that Hermione had asked of her when her mind was busy counting the freckles across the bridge of her perfect little nose.

“They’re my friends- if there’s any way we can save them, I need to know,” she continued.
Bellatrix was stirred from her reverie when Hermione finally leaned back, a faint blush dusting her cheeks, and she pushed herself back up with an exaggerated grunt.

“Look, you can suggest the plan to the others, if you’d like,” she relented. “But I’m counting on them denying you, so don’t complain to me when this terrible idea gets stopped in its tracks. And naturally, if they come even close to figuring out I’m exactly the person I’m pretending to be, I’m going to make it your problem too. And it is going to be a very big problem.”

Bellatrix was near hissing by the end of her speech. Then she squawked as Hermione’s arms flew around her, and pulled her into a tight hug that cracked a few vertebrae.

“Thank you, Bella! You won’t regret this.”

Bella patted Hermione’s back with a deep grimace, but she couldn’t help but inhale the heady scent of her shampoo as chestnut curls blew into her face. The Stockholm syndrome she was experiencing with these mudbloods and blood traitors was really fogging her brain, she considered, as she tried to ignore the burning touch on her skin where Hermione’s hands lay. And then Hermione pulled away, and the ghost of her touch seared in a new, melancholy way.

“Alright, alright. You’d better run off to your entourage before my generosity exceeds itself,” Bellatrix brushed her off. Hermione only replied with a tired smile, disappointed to see Bella walling herself off again but glad that she was willing to help her out nonetheless. She excused herself from the room with promised to visit again soon, even though by now Bella was back to slumping over the bed bonelessly.

When the door clicked shut, Bellatrix rushed to her feet and began to pace around the confines of the room.

“Kreacher!” she called out, and the crotchety house elf appeared in the blink of an eye. She ignored him as he grovelled one the ground, bemoaning something or another, and snapped her fingers impatiently.

“Find Phoenicis for me, won’t you? And then come back here- I’ll probably need your help in this too, if Granger gets her way.”

As it turned out, Granger got her way.

The details were rough, but the Order agreed that if they had a little Bellatrix clone running around, they ought to use her. There wasn’t really anything to lose and it was agreed that the information Rookwood had was too important not to explore every possible avenue of extracting it. Mad-Eye had naturally been the first to object.

“There are eccentricities unique to Lestrange that nobody would be able to properly impersonate. If he catches on that we’re interrogating him, he’ll lock up like Azkaban. He won’t knowingly spill his secrets to anyone, Death Eater or not.” Moody explained to the Order members sitting around him at the latest conference.

"But what if he did it unknowingly?” Hermione countered.

"What?"

“If we can somehow simulate a dreamlike state, we might be able to lull him into a false sense of security,” she explained, “at which point he’ll be more likely to share intelligence once under the
assumption that he won't have to face the consequences of reality.”

"And how might we achieve that?" Moody pressed her.

"Well, you couldn't use standard hallucination charms, but-"

Bellatrix didn't miss the devious look Sirius was sending her way, and she already knew she wasn't going to like what he had to say.

"You know, I imagine it's every Death Eater's dream to shack up with a young Bellatrix Lestrange," he suggested. Her and Hermione's jaws both dropped in horror, and Hermione immediately regretted her suggestion.

“No. No, no no no no. Absolutely not,” Bellatrix said, and gagged for good measure. But the rest of the room was silent, mulling over the suggestion in their minds.

“I probably ought to object to this too,” Phene piped up from where she was huddled on a sofa bed, nursing an undoubtedly alcoholic drink. Bellatrix envied her.

“It's the best chance we have. Snivellus’s told us that You-Know-Who and his band of merry men are still keeping Carina’s existence tight under wraps, and Rookwood knows a real life walking, talking, mini Trixie actually showing a sliver of interest in him would have to be a dream. I doubt anything less would work,” Sirius argued. Hermione chewed her lip as she looked back and forth between them, struggling with the desire to protect Bellatrix’s dignity while wanting nothing more than to help her captured friends. Bella caught her fraught expression and heaved her most fatigued sigh of all.

“I'm going to fucking regret this, aren't I?” she muttered.

“Oh, absolutely,” Phene agreed. Bellatrix scowled and stood up to snatch her drink, then skulled it in one go- Whiskey dry. She swallowed back the cough that threatened to erupt from her throat and did her best to ignore the multitude of calculating stares on her back. There wasn’t enough whiskey in the world for her to be able to deal with this shit.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not super happy with this chapter but I've had this sequence of events planned for a while and at this point we can proceed.

Edit: As an addendum I want to be clear that seduce =/= shag, I'm going to put some content warnings on the next chapter for sensitive material but breathe easy that I'm not going to take the interrogation scene /that/ far.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Bellatrix leaves behind a trail of debris and broken hearts behind her ;o

Chapter Notes

Minor warning for sensitive content

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Contrary to the popular opinion of the Hogwarts student body, sexy wasn’t really Bellatrix’s thing. Sure, she knew she was attractive, but in the eyes of the randy student body that was enough to mean she was a promiscuous seductress. The truth, however, was that her experience was rather limited. She had had a few altercations, and the resulting rumours were blown far out of proportion- but it suited her well enough to let her peers believe she wasn’t some blushing virgin. Which she still was, but nobody had to know that.

The Bellatrix Black that existed in their minds was far more alluring than the reality, and precious few knew her for the person she really was. They didn’t see her as one of them. To them she wasn’t the young girl who loved to spend all her free time reading by the lake, to them she wasn’t the teenager that wanted the thrill of a stealthy hookup but was afraid of it all the same, and to them she wasn’t the young woman who was desperate for a chance for power in a world that saw her body as a political possession.

In their eyes, she was so much more.

She was a symphony of projected teenage daydreams: intelligent, well connected, beautiful, rich. Powerful.

Bellatrix was happy to let them buy into the myth that she was this simultaneously aloof yet ruthless aristocrat, but the juggling act of pretending to be the person they wanted her to be and hiding the unfortunate truth- that there was something intrinsically wrong with her, that her father could never beat out and her mother could never tuck away- was increasingly difficult. As it stood, everyone loved to hate her and hated that they loved her, because her attention could mean ascension or ruin. It was a power they gave her willingly, and she was born ready to wield it. Yet there could be no denying that teenagers loved to play with fire, and Bellatrix was the deadliest flame of all.

Such was the current circumstance, in which an alcohol-addled teenage would-be snake-charmer was attempting to reserve himself a seat on her lap. A Half-Blood Ravenclaw named something-something Daniels, too lowly for her to waste her time with but high enough upon the food chain that she needn’t avoid being seen near him for fear of social ruin. Though, that opinion was quickly changing as she had to slap away a hand that was inching precariously close to one of her
“Piss off, Daniels. Find yourself an easier girl, won’t you?” she said, and elbowed him for good measure.

"Come on, Bellatrix. Am I too young for you, is that it?" he slurred at her, incognisant of the volume of his voice. Undeterred by her swatting hands, he made an attempt to rest his sweaty palm on her thigh, which was met with a stinging jinx.

"Lady Parkinson and I never slept together," Bellatrix replied tersely, tucking her wand back away. That rumour in particular had spiralled far out of control- largely because it was baked in the truth of Lady Parkinson's keen interest in her. It was uncomfortable then and it was uncomfortable now, considering word had spread that she’d cuckolded the Lord of an Ancient and Noble House.

“Right, right. Then what’s the problem?” he asked, cautious not to touch her this time but leaning in towards her chest. His other hand, which was curled around a honey coloured drink, was unwisely wandering to press the glass against her lips. Bellatrix’s eyes flared, and the hum of conversation around the room seemingly stilled as everyone except Daniels could see the fraying ends of her patience come undone.

“The problem’s that you’ve pissed yourself,” she said.

“What- No I haven’t-“

Then Bellatrix stood up, deliberately knocking the drink over his pants, creating a dark stain.

“My mistake,” she tutted, and stood over him as he swore and pat at the spot in an effort to dry it out. As he was distracted, a hand snapped forward and clutched his neck, pulling him up to his feet with a strength unexpected from a girl her size. He stared at her in fear as her nails dug into his throat, delicately squeezing, suddenly more sober than he had been all night.

“When I tell you to try a different girl, you try a different girl,” Bellatrix hissed, and Daniels nodded frantically. She released her grip on him and he stumbled backwards into the chair, while she dusted her nails on her blouse. With a final glare down at him, she sauntered off.

Students moved out of the way of her stride, ducking their heads into their cups. She could see her sisters watching her from the corner of her eye, but she paid them no mind. Before too long she’d be out of school and no longer able to keep an eye out for them, so they ought to watch and learn how it was done now.

“And make sure to really sell it. If you half-ass it then we don’t get another shot,” Sirius said.

“How about you chug some Polyjuice then, and you do it. If not, kindly fuck off,” Bellatrix snapped at him. The costume they’d stuffed her in wasn’t all that much more scandalous than what she’d typically wear- corset laced up to ‘Walburga wants you to meet this young fellow’ standards, a silk dress that hugged her skin to the point that you could trace the contours of her lace lingerie, stiletto heels that she could barely walk in- but it was hard to feel comfortable given the circumstances.
Ron was trying to look anywhere but at her, which was expected given his girlfriend was standing right next to him, but if he were staring at Hermione rather than the ceiling then perhaps he’d notice that he ought to be concerned about her staring. Bellatrix thought she might’ve been mistaking Hermione’s wide eyes for nerves at first, but there was no hiding the flush on her cheeks, nor the way her gaze followed the shifting curves of her body as she moved. It was possibly due to the miserable situation she was in right now that Bella found herself enjoying the attention, even if it was from the muggleborn whose presence she was only grudgingly beginning to tolerate. Besides, being able to steal pretty girls’ attentions away from their boyfriends was something that would never feel bad.

Harry Potter, ever the neutral party, was neither as timid as Ron nor as blatant as Hermione with his staring, but he was a teenage boy nonetheless and Bella delighted in pointing out each time his line of sight slipped below her collarbones. Still, she had to commend his remarkable dedication to seeing the whole ordeal through- anything to do with Voldemort was personal to him, and he never let anyone forget it. He was a stubborn little piece of shit, but at least they shared the same goal.

He followed her into the basement first, although together they hung behind the wardline that separated them from Rookwood, who would not be able to see or hear them until they passed it. Bellatrix tugged anxiously on the thin straps of her dress, noticing Harry’s eyes drift at the movement.

“Aren’t my eyes pretty enough for you, Potter?” she teased, although it didn’t ease her nerves as well as she hoped it would.

“Save it for Rookwood,” Harry shot back, and Bellatrix scowled and turned back to the scene in front of them.

Augustus Rookwood sat strapped to a chair by enchanted silver chains in the middle of the floor, frozen in place by a petrification spell that spared the few facial muscles that would allow him to speak. His back was turned to them, as even though he could not see them it was a precautionary move to be able to fire at him from behind. Bellatrix couldn't see his face, but she didn't have to guess that it looked gruesome. Alastor Moody was in the basement with him, circling him like a shark drawn to his bloodstained flesh.

“And what of Neville Longbottom?” Moody hissed at Rookwood, sending another hex to his chest.

“The Longbottom boy… why, Bella’s been having a lot of fun with him. And Xenophilius’ fucking braindead daughter, too,” he answered, and broke out into a deranged laugh that nearly put Bellatrix’s to shame- nearly. Moody growled and slammed him on the back of the head with an enchanted bludger, built for the very specific purpose of knocking Quidditch players out cold without completely caving in their skulls (which worked just as effectively on Death Eaters).

Now it was Bella’s turn to step in.

Ron, Hermione, Phene, Sirius and Remus all joined them behind the wardline, ready to assist in case anything went wrong. Remus looked as though he could be knocked over by a breeze, and Bellatrix didn't trust Sirius to have any inclination to help her at all. Ron and Harry would have no hope against a Death Eater of Rookwood’s skill, and Hermione was probably only around for the moral support. Phene wasn't going to be able to do much either, particularly because she was unlikely to pull her whole dying stunt again. Bellatrix sighed inwardly. Somehow she was going to have to place all of her trust in fucking Moody of all people.

To his eternal chagrin, he had to numb Rookwood’s injuries- any pain would be an instant
giveaway that he was conscious- and clean his face of blood and dirt for Bella’s benefit. Moody
then filled the room with a heady smoke, one that would ideally cloud Rookwood’s mind even
further in an attempt to recreate the essence of a lucid dream. The issue was that Bellatrix was
inhaling the same smoke, and although she knew very well that she was firmly in reality it was an
added challenge not to fall to the temptation of Morpheus’ kiss. She figured she’d manage.

Bellatrix inhaled her last breath of fresh air before crossing the wards. If this was going to work,
she was going to have to fully lean into her future self’s zany peculiarities, which was
uncomfortably easy, and startlingly fun. Yet it was also simultaneously a terrible zero-sum game
where in order to portray a convincing Bellatrix Lestrange, she was going to have to reveal just
how good she was at being Bellatrix Lestrange. The less she thought about it, the better.

Moody patted her shoulder as he passed her and retreated past the wards with the others, and
Bellatrix took the shudder she had to suppress as a warmup.

She strode up to stand behind Augustus Rookwood with the final traces of apprehension, and when
she was close enough to reach out and touch him she instead snapped her fingers, sending a twinge
through the air that roused him from unconsciousness. He groaned and surveyed his surroundings
with all the focus he could muster, but the fog settling in the room was already coating his eyes
with glass. Still behind him, Bellatrix skirted her hands across Rookwood’s shoulders, her touch
feather light as if only a trick of the wind. He jerked minutely under her fingertips but the
petrification spell held him resolute.

“Who is it this time, then? Is the big bad wolf back for another round, or is it his bitch Black?” He
called out, his voice teeming with false bravado to cover the edge. Bellatrix allowed the oncoming
giggle to rupture from her throat at that and leaned into it, forcing her laughter into a melodramatic
cackle that echoed off the walls. Although he sat statue still, she could have sworn she saw his
posture stiffen further.

“I do hope you’re referring to Sirius,” she drawled, finally slipping into his field of view. His
bulging eyes roved across her body, less out of lust than shock- which just wouldn’t do.

“You're not… you're not Bellatrix. You're not real,” he snarled. She cocked her head back and
forth, and then swung her hips from side to side as if lost in the movement as much as thought. It
was a tightrope; she needed him to think she wasn’t real, but she still needed to be realistic enough
that he bought into the ‘dream’.

“Would you be willing to bet on that?” she finally asked and cracked a wide grin. If he knew her at
all, he’d know better than to place bets with her.

“Who are you?” He demanded instead, refusing to take the bait.

“Have you really forgotten my face so quickly, Gus? Hm? Have you forgotten these?” Bellatrix
hitched an eyebrow and leant down, drawing his eyes to her breasts as they near spilled out of her
corset. Suddenly he lost all of that paranoid defiance.

“I- I haven’t.”

Bellatrix couldn’t help the sneer that fell across her face. So fucking predictable.

“But you’re not- you’re too young.”

“But that’s how you like it, isn’t it?” she countered. There was truthfully no way she could have
known for sure, but men like him were always shallow that way. Internally steeling herself, she
straddled his lap and dug her nails into his scalp. He wouldn’t be a Death Eater if he didn’t like it rough, and being able to draw blood from the fucker was making this a little more bearable. He was numbed to the worst of the pain, lest he ‘wake up’, but he’d get the idea. The smoke fogging up the room was starting to tease the edges of her mind and she did the best to shake it out without physically shaking her head. However, she was encouraged by the fact that Rookwood’s eyes were becoming increasingly unfocused. Convincing him he was in a dream would only get easier from here.

Bellatrix lowered her head to more properly gauge his expression, allowing him to simply bask in their proximity. Time to test the waters.

“I want to play a game. It involves you, and me, and two filthy little blood traitor children.”

She swore she could feel him shiver.

“Those children have to be just as old as you, though,” Rookwood pointed out. She levelled him with a flat glare that should have had him squirming.

“Gus,” she pouted and slapped his cheeks with her hands not-so-lightly. “This is just how you perceive me. Just how you want me.”

Bellatrix looked over Rookwood’s shoulder as the wardline flashed. She could now see Sirius’ face, clearly mouthing at her to ‘KISS HIM’. She pulled a face at him and mouthed an equally as determined ‘NO’. The smoke was casting a thick haze in her mind by now, but she clutched the pearls of reality with aching hands, allowing her disgust to ground herself. If this was her dream, her victim would be a lot less ugly and a lot more bookish. If this was her dream, Sirius and Phene wouldn’t be pulling juvenile faces at her from behind the barrier. Yet everything that made this situation her nightmare was enough to convince Rookwood that it was his dream, and he was thoroughly lost to it. There was no masking the desire in his eyes now, and she could feel the tension in his body as he strained against the petrification spell.

“We’re playing a game of hide and seek, but I haven’t been able to find them,” Bellatrix continued, and grabbed his jaw with sharpened nails.

“I’d rather play a different game, one where you’re on your knees and I’m-”

She pinched his lips shut before he could finish.

She was going to kill him.

Hermione and Remus were frantically waving their arms in the corner of her eye- Phene was making a series of crude gestures that involved slicing motions and a thumbs up. Her mind was too busy trying to fight off the delirium to come up with any good reasons why she shouldn’t pluck out his lecherous eyeballs, and yet Hermione’s distraught face over the fate of her friends flashed across her mind and she remembered why she was doing this.

Wait- why was she doing this?

Bellatrix’s back straightened as she was momentarily sobered, unintentionally giving the Death Eater a better view. When she caught sight of his roaming eyes a surge of rage shot through her down to her hand, which was now wrapped around his throat. Nevermind that his reaction was exactly what they were trying to provoke.

“Where are my toys?” Bellatrix growled at him.
She froze as nails riveted into her skin. When had- when had the spell worn off?

One of his arms was constricted around her waist and the other was holding her head locked into place, both of them decidedly not as petrified as they were supposed to be. Her hands instinctively flew to his as she tried to claw them off of her, but he remained unbudging. He leaned in closer to her, the careful distance she had maintained diminishing rapidly as he rasped into her ear.

“Why, they’re at your place.”

Then his teeth were at her neck, sinking into her flesh and drawing blood, and the basement was lit up in red.

Rookwood slumped against her as the stunner hit his back, and Bellatrix scrambled backwards off him the moment his grip relaxed. Her ass hit the floor thud and she scuttled away until her back hit the wall, and her nails scratched against the brick as she tried to push herself away further again. The fog in her mind was evaporating even before Moody dispelled it from the room, and although the haze still tinged the edges of her vision the pain had sucker punched her with shocking clarity.

The wardline fell and the room was flooded with people already arguing with each other. Sirius was already theorising about where ‘Bellatrix’s place’ was supposed to be and Harry remained silent, but there was no mistaking that reckless, cagey look in his eyes. Bellatrix pushed herself up off the floor and crossed over to the exit without a single look at Rookwood’s body as Moody prodded it cautiously. Hermione was making a beeline straight towards her and Phene sauntered reluctantly behind her, but she shot out of the room and up the stairs before she could be caught. She didn’t want to be fussed over, she wanted- needed a fucking break, and took a deep breath and shook the last of the cobwebs from her brain before retreating to her guest room- slamming the door behind her.

Her fingers itched. A lamp sat provocatively on the bedside table, begging to be violated. She acquiesced, and introduced it to the hardwood cedar door with a scream. Not even the sight of its scattered fragments across the floor could placate her urge to rip and tear into anything she could get her hands on, but the room itself was rather sparse on furniture. Forced between the choice to recollect herself or struggle to dismantle a bedside table, she opted for the more dignified option-spelling it to dust with a forceful wave of her wand.

A few more deep breaths, and she was starting to feel a little better. Then she caught sight of her reflection again, and was back to searing rage. She mutedly fixed up the wound on her neck, and was about to claw the stupid dress off of her body when the door flew open, startling her five feet into the air.

Bellatrix pointed her wand at the intruders, but to her surprise the gaggle of Gryffindors pushed into her room without so much as a glance at her or her desecrated lamp as they whispered heatedly amongst themselves. It would seem they’d figured out that nobody ever went into her room when she was in a bad mood, so they wouldn’t be interrupted. Wonderful. Hermione sent a few surreptitious glances her way which were meaningfully ignored, but she was too busy negotiating with Harry to follow through on them.

“We’ve got to help them,” he was saying, brokering no room for argument.

Bellatrix couldn’t help the amused scoff that escaped her lips. She knew she should just keep her mouth shut and ignore them in the hope that they’d do the same in return, but suffice to say she was feeling a little at the end of her rope already.

“And what- you’re going to swoop in and save them? Does anyone even know where he was
referring to? Because my mum owns more than one house,” she said. It was another thing she
didn’t know for certain but could make a fair guess about because in truth her mum did own
multiple houses- Druella made a hobby of buying and flipping them, and Bellatrix was sure she’d
inherit at least a few. When Rookwood said they were at ‘her place’, that could’ve meant
anywhere. It could have been Black Manor, it could have been the Lestrange estate, it could have
been that cottage her mum bought in Sonning that she’d always liked, for all anyone knew.

“Moody says Aurors had been patrolling Lestrange’s home since the breakout, and Sirius has
crossed out a few- once we’re able to narrow it down we need to have a plan on how to get Neville
and Luna out of there,” Harry said.

“You can’t be serious,” Bellatrix replied. She tensed as Hermione’s hand fell upon her shoulder.

“Don’t touch me,” she hissed, and slapped her arm away. Ron took a step towards them, ready to
defend Hermione’s honour, but she shook her head at him. He sighed and glanced over at Harry
instead.

“Bloody hell. Who knows what kind of torture they’ve been going through,” he said, crossing his
arms. “I’m with you Harry, we have to get them out of there as soon as we can or it might be too
late.”

Bellatrix tried to bite her tongue, but her restraint had already long been abandoned.

“They’re not dead yet, which means they’re being kept alive for a reason. Hostages, most likely, or
it could be that purebloods are remiss to spill the blood of pureblooded children at this stage. Either
way, their situation isn’t likely to change between now and when you can come up with an actual
plan,” Bellatrix said. Of course, it was likely that they were suffering whatever sadistic
entertainment the Death Eaters had dreamed up for them without killing them, but she didn’t feel
that was important to add.

“That’s not a chance we can take,” Harry rebutted.

“This is so fucking stupid- what good are you to anybody if you’re dead? You get within thirty feet
of Black Manor or anywhere else and you’re nothing but a scorched mark on the ground, and the war
ends,” Bellatrix huffed. “All you can do is try to negotiate a prisoner exchange or somehow get a
decisive victory and force the Death Eaters to surrender. Which isn’t likely, but it becomes even
less so when you get yourself killed on suicide missions.”

“We can’t just leave them behind. Not after everything- we can’t just sacrifice their lives for the
greater good,” Hermione argued back.

“I thought you were smarter than this, Granger. Throw your life away if you want, but don’t drag
me into it this time,” Bellatrix said, punctuating her point by crossing the room to try to physically
exit the conversation.

“There’s no point reasoning with her. She’ll never choose us over them in the end,” she heard Ron
mutter, and halted in the doorway.

“Don’t you fucking dare,” she glowered. She knew she should leave it. She knew she should leave
it. She turned around.

“You don’t get to pretend that you’re doing the right thing just because you don’t rub your two
brain cells together long enough to consider what the actual consequences of your actions are. You
don’t get to turn this into an us versus them thing, this is a you versus me thing, you sentient piece
of centaur shit,” she spat at him, stalking forward towards him.

Bellatrix could see Hermione cringing in the corner of her eye, but couldn’t find it in herself to give a shit. If she couldn’t keep a leash on her boyfriend, that was her problem. To his credit, the sour scrunching of his face betrayed all the vitriol he was attempting to hold back, but she had a score to settle.

“If you want to say something to me, say it. And maybe I can finally teach you a thing or two about consequences,” she finished with a sadistic grin that came upon her face all too easily. At some point the snowgum wand found its way to her hand, but with it came the creature that never left its side.

“Come on, we’re not doing this again,” Phene said wearily, hanging in the doorway.

“Mind your fucking business,” Bellatrix hissed without turning to look at her. The tension in the air was palpable, and sparks of magic ignited at the ends of Ron and Bellatrix’s respective wands. Hermione and Harry had their wands out too, but were unsure where to point them so as best to defuse the situation.

“Stupefy!”

“Expelliarmus!”

“Protego!”

“Flippendo!”

The four spells clashed in the cramped space of the room with a vibrant and volatile explosion that forced them all a step backwards. Bellatrix swore under her breath and blocked the next few spells sent her way. There was no way that the rest of the Order hadn’t been alerted to their little impromptu duel yet, and it would only be a matter of time before they stormed in. It was hard to say who’d shot the first spell, but it didn’t matter; she was outnumbered and she was untrusted. And she was still wearing the stupid fucking dress.

Merlin, she hated this place.

Phene moved behind her but she couldn’t turn her back on the three wands pointed her way to try to see what she was doing. The telltale heat of her fiery magic burnt against her back and Bellatrix arched away from the flames, but there was no use; Phene was dragging her away, so she had to succumb to the pull of apparition as it severed her from Grimmauld Place.

Hermione was at her wit’s end. The same impulse driving her to join Harry and Ron in hatching a plan to rescue Luna and Neville was also vying for her to chase after Bellatrix instead. Both those urges were being quashed by her far more rational instincts. For starters, she had no idea where Pennie had taken her—although the pressing question remained of how she was able to bypass Grimmauld Place’s complete lockdown wards with a kind of magic usually reserved for Phoenixes. The next issue was that Molly and Arthur had just burst into the room yelling at them for causing a fuss and drawing their wands inside, and where was Carina?

Ron and Harry tucked their wands away, thankfully realising that trying to implicate Carina-
Bellatrix- would only be admitting their guilt to starting a duel inside the house, and instead scurried away from the Weasley’s scrutinising eyes. Hermione didn’t follow them.

Bellatrix was right, rushing in to save them was a fool’s errand, but convincing Harry and Ron of the same would be impossible. Trying to get through to the boys was an endeavour that had never ended well for her. And if she couldn’t do it, neither could anybody else, so she’d always end up chasing after them, sticking by their side against her better judgement even if it meant risking death.

This was her ultimatum. If she chose her own life and let Harry run off without her, anything that happened to him was her fault regardless of the fact that she’d had no hand in it. If she ran off with him she might be able to help keep him alive, but it would be at who knows what cost. She had the choice of either a selfless death or a selfish life. Maybe this was what it meant to be a Slytherin; dying a hero’s death is pointless if you win the battle but lose the war, which was something Harry might never learn. She would never stop caring about him, but she was so, so tired.

They were downright callous with her life. Why did it have to be Bellatrix Black of all people to point that out?

She knew she was working herself up into an irritable mood and that she should probably avoid the boys until she cooled off, but she couldn’t ignore the feeling that already they were doing something stupid. She didn’t feel any less conflicted about their proclivity for reckless grandeur, but at the very least she could contribute to the planning part of it. With a placating smile to Molly and Arthur (one of the benefits of being the Goody-Two-Shoes was that nobody ever suspected her of wrongdoing) she ducked out of the room and down the hallway, searching for the boys in Harry’s room instead.

The muffled mutterings behind the door gave them away; it was silly of them not to think of putting up silencing spells, yet it was even worse that they were complacent without them because the adults in the house save the Weasleys failed spectacularly in anything close to parenting or general observation. Hermione steeled herself as she placed her hand on the brass doorknob. The boys ceased their whispering as she entered the room. They looked at her expectantly, and she knew she didn’t have Bellatrix to distract them this time.

“So. What plan have you come up with, then?” she asked, hoping that she didn’t sound too derisive straight away.

“Er-”

“Well,” they stammered.

“You thought I’d come up with it, then?” Hermione said evenly.

“I mean, we figured you’d tear any plan we came up with to pieces anyway,” Ron said, and though he was right Hermione felt a twinge of annoyance anyway. Planning was never their strong suit, and it usually came down to Harry giving the directions in the heat of the moment- but it was clear that without knowing anything about Bellatrix Lestrange’s home and its protections, there was little that they could do. It wouldn’t stop them, of course, but it meant that they would have to rely on more improvisation than usual, which never spelled good things.

“I’m not saying that we don’t try to rescue Neville and Luna,” Hermione started, because for better or for worse she did want to see her friends safe, “but Carina’s right. Rookwood gave us a clue, but we still don’t know enough about the situation to be doing anything right now- least of all when that’s exactly what Remus and Molly and everyone are expecting us to do. With more time, Moody
may be able to get more information out of Rookwood, and we can research better methods of infiltration than just running around wands blazing.”

If she was winning them over at first, she lost them with the word *research*.

“Mione, we can’t just sit around waiting while they’re being tortured by *Bellatrix Lestrange*. Aren’t you supposed to be a Griffyndor? Don’t let Black make you forget that,” Ron said.

“Being brave doesn’t mean we have to be rash, it doesn’t mean- look. Even if we could figure out a way to get in, we’d probably have no plan to get out and have to improvise along the way, just like we always do, and we can’t keep counting on *luck* . We can’t just keep jumping into situations without thinking it through, like leaving school to hunt down clues about You-Know-Who’s immortality, like storming Carina’s house and getting into a fight without telling anyone where we went, like… like our relationship,” Hermione sighed.

“Is that what you think?” Ron demanded. She knew he wasn’t referring about their misadventures.

“It’s the truth, Ronald! It was a decision we made without much thought because… because thinking about it might have…”

“Might have what?”

“Might have made it clear that this wasn’t going to work,” she exclaimed. Her words hung in the air and silence settled around the room like dust, thick and suffocating. Standoffs with snatchers had been less nerve wracking, but it would be decidedly un-Griffyndorish for Hermione to back down now.

She was always walking on eggshells these days, trying to tiptoe around people’s feelings to avoid their inexorable tantrums. Yet the person who should be the worst offender was slowly relaxing around her, and her boyfriend remained as sensitive- and insensitive- as ever.

Bellatrix gave in and helped her get information from Rookwood even though it was one of the worst ideas she’d ever had. Bellatrix actually tried to compromise with her in Diagon Alley after their little argument. Bellatrix was changing- only ever so slightly, and she was still prickly as ever when her mood fell sour- but that was still enough to prove that she was *capable* of changing. And if Bellatrix fucking Black was capable of changing moreso than Ron Weasley, then that raised more than a few concerns.

Harry had wisely inched his way out of the room, leaving Hermione and Ron to duel it out alone. If it weren’t for the gravity of the situation, Hermione would have laughed at the Déjà vu. Instead, however, she maintained her hard expression. She was resolute, knowing that if she wavered now Ron would jump at the chance to grasp any insecurity or doubt that might change her mind.

“You don’t really think that, Mione. You’re just stressed right now, is all,” he said to her, but she shook her head. She was going to say her peace without backing down.

“Ron, sometimes it feels like we’re fighting whenever we’re together. And not just now- it’s always been like this.”

“Is it Black getting into your ear about this? She doesn’t know anything about us- about you! You’ve got to stop letting her get to you, Mione,” Ron huffed. Hermione fought the urge to tear her hair out.

“She has nothing to do with this! This is about us, Ron. This is about you and me, and the way we got together because we were *supposed* to and not because it was right,” she yelled. Her chest
heaved in anger, and though she regretted the way it was said she did not regret her words.

Ron exhaled.

“Is that what you think?” he asked again, and there was a vulnerable edge to his tone that Hermione had never heard before. It made her heart ache, but there was no point denying it. Ron shook his bowed head, his ginger hair swaying with the motion as it blocked the grim expression on his face.

“I’m sorry, Ron. I shouldn’t- I didn’t want to ever hurt your feelings like this. I should have told you sooner, and kinder, but-” Hermione spoke, feeling tears well up in her eyes against her will, “-but It’s the truth.”

Ron grimaced, and stormed off past her out of the room. She didn’t call after him. He had the right to be upset with her, and she knew he was trying his best not to lash out at her. The tears finally slid from her eyes, and they brought her back to reality. She hastily rubbed them away.

Hermione wouldn’t ever had admitted it to Ron, but Bellatrix did have much to do with the way she was feeling about their relationship. It wasn’t his fault, not entirely, that she didn’t feel attracted to him the way she was meant to be. Yet before she had met Bellatrix- or Carina- she hadn’t been able to put her finger on the feeling of an absence of a feeling. Things became a little clearer when she’d managed to get through to Bellatrix (somewhat), and she felt all the things she wasn’t supposed to be feeling about a friend and all the things she was supposed to be feeling about Ron.

Ever since Bellatrix had confessed that she was equally attracted to women as to men, Hermione couldn’t keep her, and all of their interactions, out of her mind. She kept catching Bellatrix with that distracted, dreamy gaze in her eyes that looked close to madness but closer to something else. And while grappling with the idea that Bellatrix might be attracted to her she should have been uncomfortable it was instead rather… exciting, because when she walked out of her guest room wearing a dress that clung to her body like that, well, maybe Hermione had to consider that she wasn’t the straight arrow she thought she was.

While the typical blouse, cincher and skirt combination Bellatrix wore wasn’t exactly modest, it didn’t overtly show off the curves that she was growing into either. She didn’t quite share the figure Bellatrix Lestrange was famous for yet, but in that damn dress she had come remarkably close. To say that watching Bellatrix seduce Rookwood was disturbing would be an understatement, but when Hermione had for the briefest second imagined herself sitting in that chair, Bellatrix writhing obscenely on her lap, her internal (and external) reaction far superceded anything she had experienced before.

It wouldn’t do to dwell on that now, though. She would have time to unpack and then microanalyse and then compartmentalise later; for now she had to figure out a way to help Neville and Luna without getting anybody killed. Preferably before Harry and Ron did anything impulsive under the Order’s terribly obstructive noses.

Hermione indulged in an outward groan to herself and hurried back to her room to pack her things. The first thing she was going to have to do was go back to France.

Chapter End Notes
This is the longest chapter I've done so far at 6k words, and I was slowed down by writing some of the necessary but less fun scenes (aka the Ron fight). But I did get a chance to write the scenes I did want, including a little Hogwarts prequel because while there won't be a lot of time for this Bella's hogwarts life to be explored, I do enjoy a bit of meta commentary of the stereotypes placed onto her in school fics ;o I hope this wasn't too painful to read or that you even enjoyed it, and I'll try to get another update out soon!
When Bellatrix opened her eyes, she did not recognise where they had landed. They were in the flatlands of a wide valley, but despite the open fields of lush green there was no life to be found. Or rather, there was no human life to be found. In the absence of cottages or roads there was a single dirt pathway, so narrow that it was more likely to have been pounded away by travelling deer over the years. Instead of the drumming of muggle cars and chatter of urban streets, there was nothing to hear but the tree leaves rustling as birds chittered in the branches, and a nearby river splashing along. The sloping hills surrounded them like the cusp of a massive green goblet, but there was something comfortable rather than claustrophobic about it.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Phene asked next to her, drawing her mind back to the outburst she'd had at Grimmauld Place. Bellatrix scowled- in the midst of landing in some secluded valley who-knows-where, she'd nearly forgotten why she was so pissed off. Fucking mudbloods and blood traitors and their lot, and fucking Death Eaters and Orders and fucking- she hated the fucking future.

"No," she answered shortly.

"Of course not," Phene sighed to herself.

"Don't give me that. Are you going to talk about what in Salazaar's name you're doing threatening my niece of all people?" Bellatrix spun around.

"It was hardly a threat, just a bit of friendly ribbing- ouch, okay!" Phene yelped and took a step away from her, cringing and rubbing her side where it had been viciously elbowed.

"Look, if she wants to follow me around that's her prerogative, but I don't have to pretend I don't notice it. She's trying to 'figure me out' but that's not going to end well for either of us," she huffed. Bellatrix rubbed her forehead.

"Yes, well, I don't have you figured out either."

Phene gave her a moody, forlorn look that Bellatrix decided she was having none of.

“Don’t- don’t look at me like that,” she seethed. “How about you start by telling me where the fuck we are.”

Phene actually perked up a bit at that.

“I’m so glad you asked. The locals call this place Gleann na Banríon, and that over there is an doras,” she said, and pointed to a lonely stone archway up ahead. It was overgrown with weeds and grasses, and looked terribly out of place amongst the natural oasis.
“That means nothing to me,” Bellatrix said.

“Let me finish,” Phene swatted her. She began to follow the wearied path down to the archway, and Bella had no choice but to match her stride to catch the rest of her explanation.

“This here’s a pretty little valley in Ireland, but you can only get here if you know how. Which means it’s promptly been forgotten for generations, of course, except by me- and now you. The arch over there is what we call ‘the doorway’, simply put. And the reason for all of this mystical secret garden bullshit is because, for those who know how, the door’ll take us to Titania’s realm.”

"Of course. And when we're done, do you think we could stop off by Babbity Rabbity's tea shop?" Bellatrix replied.

"Listen, I'm a phoenix, you're a witch who can talk to birds, we're in the bloody future, and somehow the long-documented existence of Fae- as riddled in oral legend and mythology as it is- is where you draw the line?" Phene asked exasperatedly.

"It's all just a bit ridiculous though, isn't it? What, are you going to tell me next that it's my destiny to pull Excalibur from the stone?"

"Look, just humour me long enough for us to get there," Phene groused.

Bellatrix scrunched up her nose- only half paying attention now that Phene was prattling on about her fairy tales again. Instead she paid more mind to her surroundings again, absorbing the natural energy that the scenery exuded. She itched to explore; even as a child she had been prone to wandering around in beautiful locations that tingled with magic and sparked her imagination full of dreams of fae and fauns and fairy tales. But that’s all they were. Dreams.

As they approached the archway, Bellatrix could see a host of runes etched into each stone, some of which she recognised as Futhorc and Ogham, but others were totally unfamiliar to her. Phene stepped underneath the arch, which looked as though it would collapse over her head if it weren't being held together by a valiant trellis. She knocked a few of the flat rocks with her knuckles, and as soon as she did the runes scratched onto them began to seep with white light. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the pattern, but at least the runes weren’t glowing red or causing any earthquakes, so Bellatrix could only hope Phene knew what she was doing.

“Take my hand,” she said, and outstretched her arm.

“This isn’t some bonding exercise, is it?” Bellatrix asked, but took her hand nonetheless. Phene smirked at her and pulled her to stand beside her underneath the archway. For a moment she felt stupid standing there, a small part of her mind expecting something to happen, yet there was nothing except for insects chirping and leaves rustling at her feet.

“Well, this is bull SHIT-”

Bellatrix yelped as the world spun around them, blurring her vision as smudges of green shifted into a deep blue and a mighty wind encircled the archway. It was as if they were standing in the eye of a tornado, one powerful enough to drag the sun out of the sky and pull the moon up in its place. In the midst of it all, Bellatrix wondered that it didn’t come with the nausea usually associated with instant travel, and for half a second she was mildly perturbed that she had so many different methods of teleportation to compare with.

But just as quickly as the sensation came, the wind settled down and the world returned to its axis. If the lush green acres of the valley could be considered beautiful, then the place they had landed
could only be considered Elysian. They were in some kind of courtyard, where verdant flora Bellatrix couldn’t identify scaled glass walls of a bloody castle. The soft ringing of metals clinking together carried along the breeze, but there wasn’t a windchime in sight. The whole world was awash in cool blue moonlight, and lonely yellow lanterns floated along with a mind of their own. The only thought she could conjure was that Cissy would love it here.

“Welcome to what I like to call the Ethereal Plane. Ancestral home of Fae and the root of all magic on the Mortal Plane, and so on and so forth. Magic is a little different in this realm, as you can probably tell,” Phene said as she stepped out from the archway beside her, stirring Bellatrix from her gazing. She didn’t know what she meant by that, but she could feel a near imperceptible tingling in her extremities.

“All I can tell is that I’ve got pins and needles” she said, shaking her arms out.

“Yes, that’s your brain adjusting to being able to feel the magic in your veins. It should pass, in a moment,” Phene assured her. And sure enough, the tingling faded to a faint discomfort that was easy enough for her to ignore. Yet still an odd feeling lingered; as if her mind was inebriated with something and as a result was struggling to keep her magic on the inside.

“Come on- we’re in the West Gardens, so we’ll have to do a little more walking,” Phene said, as if that meant anything to her. She began to walk down a cobbled stone path, with runes lighting up the ground where her shoes met stone, and Bellatrix found herself following her yet again. Although she would love to linger just to spite the woman, she knew better than to ignore the whispers in her mind warning her not to be caught alone in such an alien place.

They strode inside the castle, never passing a single soul. Some of the walls were transparent, but many of them were so thick that it was difficult to see through them, while others were frosted and opaque. Bellatrix thought she could see the distorted figure of a House Elf through one, but couldn’t stop to press her face against the glass to check. Phene continued to lead, ushering her up a precarious staircase with only a thin vine with glowing buds holding it all together. As they ascended the spires, Bellatrix spared a few glimpses down to the elegantly manicured courtyards, and in the distance she could see a wide winding river that flowed silver under the bright moon. A few hills in the distance echoed the topography of the valley in Ireland, but it was impossible for her to recognise where on earth she might be- assuming this place paralleled Earth as she knew it at all.

When they reached the highest tower, her calves aching in protest, Bellatrix leaned against the frosted glass doorway and let its icy touch cool her down. Gold lacquered steel frames and a brass doorknocker in the shape of a lion’s head had to be the first non-crystal nor floral wall fixtures she’d seen, and the elaborate decoration of stained glass at the doors advertised the importance of this room above all others. She hadn’t had the chance to change out of the stupid dress they’d put her in, and the heels weren’t exactly made for long strolls, so she took them off in spite of whoever was behind the ornate door.

“Who goes there?” the doorknocker barked at them, startling her.

“Your mother. Let us in,” Phene said, and banged the knocker in its mouth against the door a few times for good measure.

“Who is us? Who’ve you brought here, you wretch?” the lion growled at her.

“That’s Bellatrix, you blind little shit.”

The doors swung inwards, but not by the accord of the doorknocker- they had been opened by the
woman standing behind them, who looked very unimpressed.
“Stop insulting the brassware, Phoenicis. Come in,” she said, and retreated back into the room.

This was the woman Bellatrix assumed Phene was referring to- Titania. She had bone white skin, ghostly white tresses that trailed down to her lower back, and long slender ears which poked out from behind them. Her eyes were pitch black and endless.

While people often compared her own dark brown eyes to the dark of night or the smoothest onyx, nothing could compare to the marble stare fixed on her. There was no need for metaphors or poetry- they were just black. Bellatrix could appreciate that. Titania was also insanely tall- she stood above even Phene, and honestly, what were they feeding the women in this realm?

Bellatrix was pulled from her musings as she realised Phene was talking, murmuring something or another to this Fae Queen, who she was still having trouble believing in even as she was seeing her. Perhaps Phene had slipped some drug into her system some time between apparating her away and taking her under the archway, and this was all a strange and lucid nightmare.

“This is no hallucination,” Titania said cooly, and Bellatrix shivered as she renewed her Occlumency shields. Phene glanced between the two of them, unsure of what had transpired.

“You can shield your mind from me, but you cannot shield your soul. Certainly not one so familiar to me.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Bellatrix spat. “Stay out of my head, you oversized house elf.”

“I tried to warn you she’d be like this,” Phene said, shooting a furtive glare at Bella which was ignored as always. Titania raised an eyebrow- one so white it blended in with the rest of her face- and glided over to where Phene was standing, ignoring Bellatrix altogether. A slender pale hand toyed with her brown curls, pulling them taut as she inspected the colour. Marble eyes levelled at her.

“You died.”

“Yes.”

“Go to the memory room and take what you need. Then return to us with the Blood of Eclipse.”

Phene paled and pulled her face taut, but nodded in response. With a flourish of fire and feathers Phene flew out onto one of the open balconies and soared off into some spire unseen, leaving Bellatrix alone with the uncanny woman. Without Phene as a buffer, her undivided gaze was unflinching and unnerving. If the fairy tales could be believed, then this Titania was the Queen of Fae, daughter of Titans. She was the mother of all the fair folk, from the Dökkálfar and Ljósálfar to the disgraced House Elves. It was curious that she associated with Phoenicis of all creatures, calling into question what exactly she was.

“I’m guessing the Blood of Eclipse isn’t regular blood,” Bellatrix said eventually, hesitant to break the silence.

“Yes and no, but you will find it quite revealing, I think,” Titania replied.

“Fuck me dead,” Bellatrix swore to herself and rolled her eyes. “Phene said you could help me. That you were some magical fairy queen who had all the answers to why I’ve been stuck in this stupid future, so what- are you going to help me, or are you going to just speak in airy fairy riddles?”
“I thought you might recognise the phrase,” Titania’s lips twitched ever so slightly, “Blood will reveal the Lost Art. It is time you find it, young one- you will need it, when the time comes.”

“Blood will- oh. Phene’s told you about that stupid riddle-prophecy then,” Bellatrix huffed. “And I’m sure you can't tell me what this lost art is, because that would just be too straightforward, wouldn’t it?”

"Quite."

“Look, I’ve had a really shitty day, alright? All I want- I just want to get this stupid dress off,” Bellatrix grappled with the clingy material, “and go to sleep and forget for a while. But instead I got dragged here, to deal with you.”

“I see. I’m sorry then, that fate has not treated you kindly on this day. But you have much to learn, and we haven’t a moment to spare,” Titania said, and then she cocked her head to the side as if in thought. It was difficult for Bellatrix to get a read on her; the endless black eyes were impossible to interpret.

“I think we’ll join Phoenicis in the memory room. It’s not what I had planned, but I think there’s something you ought to see before we begin,” she said, and a frown tugged on Bellatrix’s lips. Without so much as a snap of her fingers or a wave of her hand, Titania apparated them both. It was so instantaneous that Bellatrix felt her head spin, not from the teleportation itself but from her brain’s inability to process the new environment in time. There was no fanfare- no spinning, no squeezing, no burning, it was just a blink and they were somewhere else. She allowed herself a small gasp.

Rows upon rows of crystal vials filled with a glittering, opaque silver liquid filled the room. It reminded Bellatrix of Hermione’s memory of the Department of Mysteries, but where the prophecy room was dark and foreboding this room was light and purely magical. The moon reflected pink and purple light through the stained glass, scattering colourful stains across the endless vials.

"What are all these memories for?” Bellatrix asked as Titania waved her hand and summoned one from one of the nearer rows.

"They belong to Pheonicis," Titania answered, a curious look shining in her marble eyes. Bellatrix took a double take at the vast room in shock.

"All of them?”

“She’s lived a long time,” was Titania’s response. She waved her hand again and with a melodic chime the glass vials hummed, until one flew off the shelves and into her outstretched ivory palm. Titania pushed the cork off of the vial with her thumb, and the silver liquid escaped its container as it evaporated into a thin mist in the air.

“What the-”

“This is my realm, Bellatrix. The magic here obeys me,” she explained as the memory took shape around them, not unlike the way it had with the use of the pensieve projector. But instead of projecting an image onto the world around them, Bellatrix now felt immersed inside of the memory she was standing in. The difference was clear because now they were standing in the same courtyard underneath the glass castle, only she could feel the warm rays of the sun on her skin and the cool but gentle breeze playing with the stray strands of her curls.

Phene stood in front of her, wearing something closer to a toga than her usual Edwardian garb, and instead of short brown curls she wore her hair in long waves of blonde that glittered in the sunlight.
just as her feathers did. Next to her stood another tall woman with the long, signature black curls of the Black family, and in front of them both was Titania, looking identical to the one in the present day right down to the gown she wore.

“Cennestre, þin nama, þin ríce, forgýf us ure gyltas,” Phene spoke, her accent thick and drawl heavy.

“I don’t understand what she’s saying,” Bellatrix hissed at the Titania next to her. She blinked twice and then nodded, and Phene’s voice warbled slightly until Bellatrix could recognise the words coming from her mouth.

“But this is the only option we have. The covenant of the Dark recognises her legitimacy, and your cosmic blessing would be greatly appreciated,” Phene had said, and finished in a flourish of a bow.

“You understand the consequences of this, yes?” Titania had said, her ears flicking backwards minutely. Bellatrix wandered forwards, circling them, and saw that Phoenicis’ face- though unchanged in centuries- looked uncharacteristically grim. She glanced over to the woman beside her, who wore a carefully crafted poker face. The woman wore elaborate robes styled in a very ancient fashion, but there was no question as to the quality of it. She had a sharp brow and a sharp cupid’s bow, and Bellatrix was amazed to see her own eyes on the face of a woman who predated her by untold generations.

“I know. And I dedicate myself to this cause, because-”

“You don’t need to explain yourself to me, Phoenicis. I understand well enough,”

Titania interrupted her, then turned to face her ancestor.

“Very well, your Highness. May your line be blessed with the powers of your fiefdom, eternal and infernal.”

Bellatrix could feel the magic in the air shift- and the magic in herself along with it. Her blood burned in her veins, but it was a soothing kind of burn, much like an early morning stretch or sharp nails against an itch. Then it faded just as quickly as it had arrived, but it left an echo that chilled her to the bone. Like the first taste of a sweet on a platter, her body wouldn’t be satisfied with what little she had received and already it craved more.

The vision faded until they were standing back in the memory room, the shelves undisturbed despite the scene that had played around them. Bellatrix pressed her index finger against her forehead and rubbed her temple as though it might ease her oncoming headache- though whether it was from irritation or withdrawals she couldn’t be sure.

“Was that supposed to explain something to me? Because I’m just more confused.”

“That woman you just saw was an ancestor of yours, which I’m sure you gathered. Would you be surprised to learn that she still lives, as a ruler of the Infernal Plane?”

“What? You could have led with that,” she cried.

“Oh, she has very little to do with the Mortal realm nowadays, so it’s nothing you really needed to know, but what you needed to witness was the pact she had made- one to give her line a power borne from her own that draws upon the covenant of the Dark and her place within it. One that has been… lost, to time,” Titania elaborated.

“Lost... oh, fuck you.”
“Your impetuousness is getting less and less endearing by the minute,” Titania challenged, a small sneer slipping past her mask. Bellatrix felt her magic flare; she couldn’t be certain if it were the strange atmosphere of this world-realm- whatever, or residue from the Dark magic that had touched her so viscerally in that memory.

“Oh, you both followed me here- I got what you asked for and- is everything alright?” Phene asked, choosing that moment to join them. The tension in the air refused to settle as she glanced between them, but eventually Titania cooled her gaze and turned to reach out for the black vial in Phene’s hands. The Queen inspected the glass, the obsidian liquid reflecting an endless Droste effect of the abyss in her eyes.

Then without warning she tossed it over to Bellatrix, who only caught it out of sheer reflex.

“I don’t have to drink this, do I?” she asked, her lip curling at the opaque vial.

“No, it’s up to you to use how you deem necessary.”

“And I’m sure you’re not going to explain that further. Thanks, you’re really helpful.”

Phene grimaced and even the stupid hat on her head seemed to wilt. Titania ignored her.

“I’m sure there are times in your life where you have felt your magic’s call. Perhaps in some childhood epiphany, or in a reaction to some greater cosmic fate- and I imagine in response in that memory.”

Bellatrix shuddered, feeling the ghost of that power at the tips of her fingers. The musicanima in Maia’s house also sprung to mind, with the way she couldn’t help but gravitate towards it.

“When the time comes, your magic will know what to do with it,” Titania finished.

Bellatrix directed her scowl at the reflection of herself in the vial, which sat dead in her hands without stirring even a trace of her magic. Somehow she was starting to appreciate Phene’s candor in face of this impossible woman.

“There’s little else I can offer you today, not with the mood you’re in, so you’re dismissed for now,” Titania rolled her shoulders, then peered down at Bellatrix. “Both warrior, and guardian. Remember that, child.”

Phene noticed the broiling look on Bella’s face and hurried to drag her away.

“Thank you, my Queen! I’ll be back later alright goodbye!” she shouted as she all but pushed Bellatrix down the stairs to prevent her from charging her way back into the room and flinging spells. As soon as they reached the ground floor Phene released her grip on Bellatrix’s wrist, and led them back out towards the courtyard.

“What an ass. Why did you even take me here? I didn’t get any answers, she just threw shit at the wall in the hopes something might stick,” she ranted.

“Yeah, that’s kind of how the Fae work,” Phene agreed.

“What’s the deal with you and her? I can’t tell if you like her or not,” Bellatrix prodded. Phene glanced down at her and then back up at the sky, her face contorting as she figured out her response.

"Titania found me at a very difficult time in my life," Phene answered. "I owe her my servitude for
“bringing me to my senses.”

“That doesn’t really answer my question,” Bellatrix pointed out. Phene pouted at her.

“I’m getting to it, girl. What I’m saying is that I respect her. She chose to show me mercy when she could have been a powerful enemy, so I do what I can to assuage her… oddities, knowing that I owe her that much.”

“So it’s a hostage situation.”

“I’m not a hostage,” Phene grunted, but a small smile teased the corners of her lips. “But it’s an arrangement of mutual benefit, yes.”

Bellatrix pinched her eyebrows, but decided not to follow that train of thought. Instead, she decided to chase up on another one.

“Can you tell me what that memory of yours she showed me was all about? The one with the something-something Dark covenant pact and that magic. I can’t help but feel like I’m missing something there.”

Phene raised an eyebrow at her and shrugged a single shoulder.

“Sure, but it really is what’s written on the tin. Ékleipsis Blæc didn’t want to run off to the Infernal plane without providing her family with a safety net of sorts, in the form of a new power. Titania wants you to learn how to use it, I suppose, even though it’s become a bit irrelevant over time. I mean—some things are better left in the past, you know. I’m so glad urinomancy isn’t a trend anymore—”

“Phene!”

“Right, right. Listen, I’ll tell you all I know about it and that little vial in your hands when we can sit down over dinner and a drink, but before then I’m going to have to disappear for a while— I’ve got a few errands to run, service to the Queen and all that. Anyhow, that fairy ring over there’s the nearest portal to our place back in France. Just stand in it and it’ll take you back to the Mortal realm, and you can apparate away. I’ll be home in about a week— you’ll be able to take care of yourself until then, right?” she said, and pointed to a ring of flowers and glowing toadstools across from them.

“I’m certain I can last a week without getting into some death defying situation,” Bellatrix smirked sarcastically, though she gripped the vial in her hands a little tighter.

“I don’t know, you have a pretty shite track record,” Phene teased, but nudged her away nonetheless. “I’ll apparate to you should you need me, but please, don’t need me.”

Bellatrix strode off with a dismissive wave behind her, disappearing through the fairy ring without fanfare.

Up above them in the highest spire of the castle, Titania watched as the two women parted ways.

“Do you think there’s any hope for them?” A feminine voice next to her spoke.

“Don’t doubt yourself, Phoenicis. This you seems much more put together, in fact,” Titania said, and glanced over at the woman next to her. Her hair was a brilliant, scarlet red that tumbled down
her back in tousled waves, but nevertheless her features were the same. Her face contorted into an unamused frown, but she didn't hold Titania’s stare for long. Instead she gazed down again as she followed her alternate self across the courtyard.

“I don't doubt myself, but there are too many variables. Too many ways for things to go wrong. Why did you have to bring them here?”

Titania’s long ears flicked backwards as a thin smile cracked her veneer.

“You know better than to question my plans, Phoenicis. You’ll understand in due time.”

Phene pulled a frown.

“Fucking Fae,” she muttered.

It was late at night when Hermione arrived at Manoir Taureau, as sneaking out of Grimmauld Place had been a hurdle in and of itself, and portkey travel through the Ministry had been severely restricted since Diagon Alley. There was only a single light on in the house, and Hermione stalked through the hallways cautiously until she reached the one room with warm yellow light peeking through the doorway. It was, of course, the master bedroom. She rapped lightly on the door with her knuckles but received no answer, so she carefully stepped forward and pushed the door inwards.

Bellatrix appeared even more dishevelled than she’d been when Pennie had- somehow- apparated them away, and she’d obviously fallen asleep without even taking off her dress. One of the straps had slipped down her arm and it was bunched at the waist, pulling the hemline even higher. Dark smudges ringed her eyes from the improperly removed makeup, and her hair was tangled and frayed from crown to tip.

Whether she stirred from the sound of footsteps or Hermione’s mere presence she couldn’t be sure, but slowly Bellatrix sat up with a deep groan. She rubbed her eyes- smudging her makeup even further- and only vaguely registered Hermione’s existence with a dull frown. Instead of acknowledging her she simply tugged the dress she was wearing at the hem.

“God, I need a fucking- help me get this shit off, Granger,” she moaned. Hermione hurried to help her with the clingy fabric, not at all interested in testing her ire, and got a whiff full of stale ethanol. “Are you drunk?” she asked.

“Fuck off,” Bellatrix grumbled, and finally peeled the dress off. Hermione immediately averted her eyes at the sight of pale skin marred by angry red lines, and black lace lingerie that couldn’t have been comfortable to sleep in at all. She was thankfully spared of any notice from Bellatrix, whose audible stomping to the ensuite was punctuated by a loud slam of the bathroom door. There was a squeak followed by the drum of shower water hitting tile, so Hermione allowed herself a moment to relax back on the bed.

When Bellatrix emerged, now dressed in a loose oversized nightshirt over black wool tights, she didn't look much more refreshed. She had traded mascara streaks for bags under her eyes and the weary frown she wore made her look closer to her older self than ever before. With sluggish steps she crossed the room and slumped back on top of the bed, her dead weight bouncing the mattress.
“What are you doing here, Granger?” Bellatrix asked her, her voice thick and hoarse. At some point she had traded venom for exhaustion, and Hermione wasn’t sure which one was worse.

“I’m sorry. It was my idea that got you into that situation, and I’m glad we have new information about Luna and Neville but you’re right, we can’t just go rushing in like always and—” she interrupted herself, “I don’t want to unload all that on you, but just know that I am sorry.”

“Yeah, well. It’s just one little thing on the list of shitty things I have to put up with now, isn’t it?”

Hermione’s frown deepened.

“Is there something- did something else happen?” she asked, careful to keep her voice soft and unassuming.

“Phene took me to- um. Actually, I don’t think you’re going to have any idea what I’m talking about,” Bellatrix replied, rubbing her face.

“Phene? I haven’t seen your phoenix in a while,” Hermione commented.

“Yeah- uh, nevermind. Just forget I said anything.”

Bellatrix held her breath as Hermione remained silent for a moment.

“Are Pennie and Phene the same person?”

“Oh, fuck off!” Bellatrix groaned and rolled over.

“Am I right?” Hermione yelped, but Bellatrix ignored her in favour of shuffling under the covers.

“I’m going to bed. You can stay if you want, but if you start hogging the blankets I will kick you out.”

Hermione huffed, not at all done with this conversation, but reclined against the pillows anyway and stayed quiet as Bellatrix flicked the lights off with her wand.

Chapter End Notes

sorry that this chapter came so late! I was struggling to write parts of it and it didn't at all feel right so I had to rewrite a lot and I'm still not completely satisfied with it but here we go! Starting to branch out a bit into some new plot elements and I hope you enjoy it

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