Yule Ball Drama

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Yule Ball Drama

by FurySerenity

Summary

Who knew Harry asking Hermione to the Yule Ball in Fourth Year would cause so much
drama? Especially amongst those whom they thought were their truest friends!

Notes

Unlike most of my other Harmony stories, this one will simply be a Harry/Hermione pairing story. There will be no surprise Betrothal Contracts or Harems in the future of this story. It is simply a Harry/Hermione story, with my usual amount of bashing towards Dumbledore, certain Weasleys and others. I don’t know if there will be smut in this story before it ends, but it is possible. Rest assured, if there is, there will be warnings at the start of Chapters, to mark such content.

While this is not a Super!Harry or Super!Hermione story, Harry does wise up in this story. He becomes more confident with Hermione as a girlfriend. He does become smarter – especially when he decides not to appease Ron by holding himself back in his studies. He’ll also no longer be the malleable, self-sacrificing boy, because he now has a girlfriend and something to really fight for and live for. So he will become more powerful in this story, but again, he won’t be Super!Harry. There is a possibility Harry may even become more… politically savvy if politics comes up. But there will be good explanations for that. My Great Alliance that shows up in political stories might even play a part.

Also, unlike a couple of my past stories (example: Ilvermorny Champion), there won’t be any surprise, controversial decisions made in the Wizengamot that throws wrenches in the plot. This is not that type of story, no matter how political it could get.

My final note is that from the very beginning of this story, Harry and Hermione are not kind in their opinion of Ron at all. Let’s just say his recent betrayal, and his behavior even after his “apology” after the First Task has truly opened their eyes. Ron bashing runs rampant very early on in this story, and will soon be joined by bashing of other certain characters.
Harry Potter grinned down at the guinea pig that had, until a few minutes ago, been a guinea fowl. That had been today’s lesson in Transfiguration. Turn a guinea fowl into a guinea pig. And he had done it. Flawlessly. Well, perhaps not flawlessly, but it was certainly better than other attempts from students in the class. He glanced to his right, where Ron Weasley’s guinea pig looked horrendous. It still had the beak of the fowl, and it looked particularly ugly.

To his left, Hermione Granger’s guinea pig was the only other attempt in the class that looked just as good as his. He wasn’t surprised at that, however. Hermione was a perfectionist, and she tried to be the best at everything she did. She looked especially proud at her own attempt. Then he caught her glance turning to his attempt.

“Harry, that’s fantastic!” Hermione appraised, “You did very well! Harry?”


“You were staring at me,” Hermione said, looking confused.

“Sorry,” Harry said, “The way you were staring at your guinea pig. It was…”

“It was what?” Hermione asked.

Harry shrugged. He didn’t have a response. He couldn’t put it into words. Well, he could, but it wasn’t anything he could tell her. She had looked at the guinea pig the way he wished she would look at him. He suddenly pictured that expression of hers in a whole different way. It was a vision in front of his eyes. Not an entirely unwelcome vision either. She wasn’t looking at a guinea pig, she was looking at a baby in her arms. One she had just given birth to. Her baby. Their baby.

Harry blinked, and the vision went away. Where had that come from?

“Mr. Potter!” a voice said, breaking Harry from his thoughts.

For one wild moment, Harry wondered why Hermione had referred to him as that. Then he realized Hermione hadn’t called his name. It was Professor McGonagall. She was standing in front of him.

“Yes, Professor?” he asked, after clearing his throat.

“That is the second time I called your name, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Sorry, Professor,” Harry said, “I… was distracted.”

“Given how your guinea pig changed back into a guinea fowl,” McGonagall said, “It must have been quite the distraction for you to lose focus enough for that to happen.”
Harry hoped he wasn’t blushing. His cheeks felt a little hot. Yes, it was certainly quite the distraction, his strange vision.

“Perhaps you could attempt the transfiguration again, Mr. Potter?” McGonagall said, “So I know how to grade you.”

“Yes, Professor,” Harry said.

He pointed his wand at the fowl, then cast the spell again. To his immense relief, the guinea pig appeared to be much the same as it had been. The only difference was that it made a noise of frustration due to the fact that it was once again a guinea pig instead of guinea fowl. Harry didn’t blame it, though. The poor creature probably didn’t very much like being transfigured into something completely different than what it was.

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said; she made a mark on the sheet she was holding. “I do hope you’re no longer distracted. In a few minutes, I’ll have an announcement to make to the class. One you’ll be most interested in, I assure you.”

“Yes, Professor – I mean, no Professor,” Harry said, “No more distractions.”

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said

The Transfiguration Professor moved in front of Ron. “Why does your guinea pig have a beak, Mr. Weasley.”

“Dunno,” Ron muttered. “Maybe it is meant to?”

If eye-rolling made a sound, the action from Hermione might have masked the sound of disbelief coming from the Transfiguration Professor.

“I very much doubt it, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “Homework, Mr. Weasley Eighteen inches on how to turn a guinea fowl into a guinea pig, what the guinea pig is supposed to look like, and what it takes to successfully complete the transfiguration. Due the start of next class next Tuesday.”

“But,” Ron muttered, “You didn’t give homework to Harry or Hermione.”

“I didn’t need to, Mr. Weasley.” McGonagall said, “Their transfigurations were the best in class today. Neither Mr. Potter nor Miss Granger need homework to improve their guinea fowl to guinea pig transfigurations. If it makes you feel any better, most of your fellow students in the class will be getting the same homework as you.”

Ron grumbled as McGonagall moved on.

“Figures,” Ron muttered, “Instead of accepting that maybe my guinea pig was supposed to look like this, she ignores that and gives me homework!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Ronald,” Hermione said, “If it was supposed to look like that, Professor McGonagall would have said so!”

“Oh, so you’re suddenly a guinea pig expert now?” Ron demanded.

Harry suddenly felt the urge to scream at Ron. Hermione had done a great job with her
transfiguration, and Ron was dismissing it out of anger or jealousy or... something. Harry wanted to tell his friend off for his insult to Hermione. She had done a wonderful job today, and she didn’t need Ron to downplay her accomplishment, just because he didn’t do his work well enough. If he was honest with himself, it wasn’t the first time over the past couple of weeks this had occurred either.

Ever since Ron’s half-hearted apology after the First Task – Harry still found himself wondering why he had accepted Ron’s apology so easily – Ron had ignored a lot of what Hermione had to say. In fact, he still seemed as angry as he had been before the First Task – but his target was now Hermione instead of Harry. Harry still wasn’t sure what that was all about. If Ron and Hermione had argued about whatever was bothering him, Harry hadn’t heard about it. Hermione hadn’t said anything about it.

However, Ron’s behavior today reminded him of a similar scene long ago in Charms, during the Levitation lesson. That lesson had ended up with Ron insulting Hermione, and her ending up in a bathroom all day, only to encounter a troll that Harry – and Ron – had to save her from. Sure, it had kickstarted the friendship with Hermione, but it was one of Ron’s worst moments since Harry had met him. Three years later and he was still badmouthing her talents in class because of jealousy or whatever!

His reverie was interrupted when Hermione tapped him on the shoulder. He looked at her, and she nodded toward McGonagall’s desk. Harry turned and found McGonagall moving to stand in front of her desk.

“May I have your attention, please?” McGonagall asked, with the same raised voice she used during lectures.

The students who had been talking to their neighbors, all turned their attention to the Transfiguration Professor.

“The Yule Ball is approaching,” McGonagall said, “a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and an opportunity for us to socialize with our foreign guests. Now, the ball will be open only to fourth years and above -- although you may invite a younger student if you wish --”

Lavender Brown let out a shrill giggle. Parvati Patil nudged her hard in the ribs, her face working furiously as she too fought not to giggle. They both looked around at Harry, who ignored them, as did Professor McGonagall. Really, the immaturity of the girls, to interrupt the Professor when she was talking! Why were they laughing anyway?

“Dress robes will be worn,” Professor McGonagall continued, “and the ball will start at eight o’clock on Christmas Day, finishing at midnight in the Great Hall. Now then --” McGonagall stared deliberately around the class. “The Yule Ball is of course a chance for us all to – er -- let our hair down,” she said, in a disapproving voice.

Lavender giggled harder than ever, with her hand pressed hard against her mouth to stifle the sound. Harry could see what was funny this time: Professor McGonagall, with her hair in a tight bun, looked as though she had never let her hair down in any sense.

“But that does NOT mean,” McGonagall went on, “that we will be relaxing the standards of behavior we expect from Hogwarts students. I will be most seriously displeased if a Hogwarts student embarrasses the school in any way.”

The bell rang at that precise moment.
“Keep your guinea pigs – or the half-attempts some of you have produced – on your desks,” McGonagall said, as students began to scatter toward the door, “I’ll take care of them. Potter! A word, if you will.”

Harry had yet to make a move toward the door. He simply remained in his seat. Ron was halfway to the door, and had stopped to look back at Harry. Hermione was still standing at her desk, beside him.

“Go on,” Harry said to his two friends, “I’ll catch up with you two.”

Ron shrugged, turned around and left. Hermione looked like she wanted to say something. But she decided against it at the last moment, grabbed her bag and followed Ron out of the room. The rest of the class had already made their way out.

“Yes, Professor?” Harry asked.

“Potter,” McGonagall said, “As champions of the Triwizard Tournament, they and their partners are expected to open up the Yule Ball.”

“Partners?” Harry asked.

“Dance partners, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Dance partners?!” Harry echoed, “I… I don’t dance, Professor.”

“Oh, yes, you do,” McGonagall said, “And you will.”

“I’m… Professor, I’m not good at dancing,” Harry insisted.

McGonagall sighed. She stared at him for a moment, then huffed. “I will teach you.”

“You want me to dance with you?” Harry asked.

“How else am I supposed to teach you?” McGonagall replied, with another huff, “But, I suppose if you do not wish to dance with me, Potter, then I expect you find a date to the Ball as soon as possible. Otherwise for the next two Saturdays – from seven to nine in the evening – you’ll have no choice but to dance with me. No complaints, Potter. I will not have you besmirching Gryffindor because you make a fool of yourself. You represent Gryffindor as much as you do Hogwarts for the Tournament, Potter. Find yourself a date, and tell her she’s invited to practice dancing with you over the next two Saturdays. Because it will either be her, or me, who you’ll be dancing with during the lessons.”

Harry moped. That was a depressing thought. Finding a date would be hard enough! He couldn’t dance, and he was going to have to basically admit to his date he couldn’t dance – by telling them he and his date were expected at dancing lessons with Professor McGonagall! Who would want to be his date to a Ball if he couldn’t dance?!

There were bigger problems than dancing lessons, however. Right now, he hadn’t a clue who he wanted to ask to the Ball. Maybe Cho Chang? No, she was dating Cedric Diggory, his fellow Tournament Champion. Who was he going to ask?

“Do you understand me, Potter?” McGonagall asked.
“Yes, Professor,” Harry said, trying not to show how scared he was.

“Excellent,” McGonagall said, “You’re excused. Oh, and Potter? Twenty points to you, Miss Granger and Gryffindor. Excellent work today on your transfigurations. I was not lying to your friend, Mr. Weasley. You and Miss Granger were the only two today who successfully transfigured their fowls into pigs with perfect attempts.”

“Th-thank you, Professor!” Harry said.

“You may go,” McGonagall said.

Harry stood, picked up his bag, and walked out of the classroom. He was so lost in thought about who he should ask to the Ball, he almost didn’t see Hermione leaning against the wall outside the classroom. Ron was suspiciously absent.

“Hermione?” Harry asked, “Why are you here? Where’s Ron?”

“I was waiting for you,” Hermione said.

“Oh,” Harry said; for some reason, that made him very happy, “Ron didn’t want to wait?”

“No,” Hermione huffed, “I asked him to wait for you. He said you would find us when you were finished. I told him you wouldn’t be very long. He dismissed that. Then he told me to go with him, because he wanted help on his Transfiguration homework.”

“He didn’t say that exactly, did he?” Harry asked, giving her a knowing look.

Hermione scoffed. “No. You know how he is. He didn’t ask me to help him. It was… almost an order.”

“Like he expected you to do it for him,” Harry said, “What’s new? He does that a lot. I… I’m sorry to say I do too.”

“No, you don’t Harry,” Hermione said, “When you ask me to help you, you merely want me to look over your completed work to check if anything was off. If anything is off, you correct any mistakes, or add things that are necessary. Ron’s work isn’t even completed when he wants me to look over it. It is always half-done, if that. Then he asks me what else he should put down, and when I give him suggestions, he basically writes everything I say, and nothing else. That isn’t me checking it over for him.”

“He’s trying to disguise it as you making suggestions,” Harry said, “When in fact, you’re basically doing it for him. Which he knows you must disapprove of, so he tries to get around that little tidbit.”

“Yes,” Hermione said, “It has always been that way. I don’t even want to know what he had to do during most of November when he wasn’t talking to us. Did he try to fob off his work to someone like Neville, or Seamus?”

Harry shrugged. He hadn’t really paid attention to what Ron had done during that time.

“I wanted to yell at him earlier, you know,” Harry admitted.
“What?” Hermione asked.

“When he asked you if you were suddenly an expert on guinea pigs,” Harry said. “Not only did I wanted to yell at him, I wanted to hit him. You did great today in class, and he basically acted as if you did worse than he did! He might be nicer to me ever since that half-hearted apology after the First Task, but towards you –”

“You realized it was a half-hearted apology too?” Hermione asked.

“Not until a few days later,” Harry said, “To be honest, I was tired after the First Task. All I wanted to do was wind down, maybe get something to eat and relax. I was on the back end of an adrenaline rush. So when he chose that moment to apologize to me, which, mind you, was a very poor apology…”

“You didn’t want to deal with any drama,” Hermione said, “So you accepted his apology. Huh. I… I wonder if he did that on purpose.”

“What?” Harry asked.

“Perhaps he knew you were tired after the First Task,” Hermione said. “Maybe he figured you’d still be angry at him, but too tired to do so straight after the task. So he chose that time to make his half-hearted apology when you would be too exhausted to fight him over it.”

“He didn’t really make an apology, did he?” Harry asked. “He… he just said ‘I think somebody’s trying to do you in!’ He admitted he was a git, but that was the most he did. He didn’t say sorry for all the insults, and calling me a cheat or whatever.”

“But you still accepted his apology,” Hermione said.

“I’m… not sure I did, Hermione,” Harry said, “I still feel angry at him. And not just because of what he did. He’s still a right foul git, you know. Only… it isn’t focused on me anymore. Just you. It is like nothing has changed. You two fought and argued long before the Goblet of Fire spat out my name. And most of the time, you have to admit he was the one to start those fights. And ever since the First Task… its happened again. The separation he had from us those few weeks didn’t change a thing between the two of you. Don’t get me wrong, I blame you for none of that.

“Like I said, I wanted to yell at him in there for disrespecting you after you tried to help him. Because it is what he’s always done. I mean, damn it, it is just like that Levitation lesson on Halloween in first year!”

“It isn’t that bad, Harry,” Hermione mumbled.

“It is!” Harry insisted, “Just because you’re not running off to bathrooms anymore, doesn’t mean it isn’t as bad. He might not be telling you that you don’t have any friends, but be honest with me. His attitude today, over four years later – doesn’t it remind you of that Halloween in Charms?”

“I… yes, Harry,” Hermione said. “It does remind me. His attitude actually constantly reminds me of that, to be honest. I just never said anything to you, because he’s your friend. In fact, he was your first real friend, and I know what meant to you.”

“He’s been a pretty piss-poor friend lately,” Harry said, “He hasn’t learned at all from that Halloween. He’s barely grown up at all since that day, especially when it comes to how he treats
you. And I’ve just started to wake up to that fact over the past couple of weeks. And I don’t like it, Hermione. I don’t like how he treats you. And I’m sorry for never speaking up about it before now.”

Hermione’s eyes were suspiciously wet. “You really mean that, Harry?”

“Yes, I do,” Harry said. “You’ve always been there for me. Even last year, with the whole Firebolt thing. You tried to help me, and I… I was just as big of a git as Ron. But after the Goblet of Fire spat my name out, you were the only one there for me. You helped me. I wouldn’t have gotten through the First Task if it wasn’t for you. I don’t feel as if I’ve thanked you enough for that, or for always being there for me. I do feel like a right foul git for that. So, thank you, Hermione.”

Hermione shocked Harry by dropping her knapsack and pouncing on him in a hug.

“Th-thank you, Harry,” Hermione said, “That is the… best thing you’ve ever said to me. Maybe the best thing anyone has ever said to me.”

“Uh… you’re welcome?” Harry said.

Harry was shocked he could articulate words. Hermione’s body was pressed against his in a way Harry had never experienced before. Sure she had hugged him, several times since they became friends. But this one was different. For the sole reason, that Harry could – to his embarrassment – feel Hermione’s breasts against his body. Until now, he had never thought of Hermione with breasts. He knew she was a girl, and a fifteen year old girl at that, so of course she had those… parts. But he’d never really paid attention to something like that when it came to her. He noticed it on girls like Cho Chang, and Susan Bones – the latter girl was so curvy, it would be hard not to notice!

But Hermione? No, not until now. And he didn’t know why. Was it because he had seen her so often over the past three and a half years, that he was oblivious to her ever-changing body? Was it the school robes that were hiding her beauty?

Because Harry couldn’t deny it anymore. His best friend Hermione Granger was a beautiful girl. She no longer had the buck-teeth – wait, when did that happen?! Where did they go? Her hair was uncontrollable but that was part of what made Hermione her! She could keep it untamed and uncontrollable, and he would still think she was pretty.

Hermione was quite oblivious to Harry’s musings. She was also – thankfully – oblivious to the tightness in Harry’s pants. And if she knew her breasts had been pressed against him, she didn’t show she was aware of it.

Hermione finally released him, and cleared her throat. Her face was so red from blushing, Harry was afraid she might faint from the blood rushing to her face.

It was only then that Harry realized they had been standing outside the Transfiguration classroom all this time. Thank Merlin they had a free period before lunch, or they’d be extremely late to their next class! He was about to ask Hermione if she wanted to head back to Gryffindor Tower before lunch, when Hermione found her voice again.

“So,” Hermione said, clearing her throat again, “what did Professor McGonagall have to say?”

“What?” Harry asked; it took a moment for Harry to realize what she asked. “Oh! Er… she said… she told me Champions would be expected to open the Yule Ball first. Champions and their… um… dates?”
“Well, that is expected, of course,” Hermione said, “I read about it. The Yule Ball is a tradition with every Triwizard Tournament. The three Champions – or in this case four – and their dates are all announced to the rest of the guests at the Ball in a grand showing, to start off the Ball.”

“She did not tell me that,” Harry muttered. “No… she told me we were expected to be the first ones… to dance.”

“Well, yes, Harry, that should be obvious,” Hermione said, “It is a Ball. There is dancing at Balls.”

“I… I kind of told her – um,” Harry found himself mumbling now.

“You told her what?” Hermione prodded him to continue.

“I told her… I can’t dance,” Harry muttered, fully expecting her to take the mickey out of him.

“Oh,” Hermione said, “Well… that doesn’t surprise me.”

“Really?” Harry asked, surprised; that was a completely unexpected response.

“From what you’ve told me about your relatives,” Hermione said, “They don’t seem like the type of people who would teach you how to dance. Or even consider taking you to any social events where you might have danced with anybody.”

Harry smiled. He knew she shouldn’t have been surprised. Hermione had known him better than anybody, of course. Even though he hadn’t discussed too much about his home life with her, she was still logical enough to deduce clues about that very topic.

“Definitely not,” Harry said, “Anyway, I told her I can’t dance. And she told me… she basically told me she was going to teach me.”

“Oh, really?!” Hermione said, beaming; why was she beaming? “You mean, lessons?”

Oh. She was beaming, because he was talking about a lesson. Something he could learn. Of course she’d like that.

“Um… yeah,” Harry said, “Over the next couple of Saturday evenings – seven to nine in the evening, in fact.”

“Can you invite anybody?” Hermione asked.

Harry cleared his throat. “I’m – um – supposed to invite my date. Probably so I can practice with her, so we can prepare for the Ball. A good idea, I suppose.”

“So you’re only expected to bring your date,” Hermione said; she looked rather disappointed.

Harry suddenly wanted to invite her to go with him along with his date. Maybe she’d help him so he wouldn’t make a fool of himself. She certainly helped him during the First Task. But why would she want to help him and another girl dance?

Then he realized… why did he need another girl? Why did he need to waste time searching classroom, corridor, Common Room and Great Hall for a date to the Ball, when the perfect candidate
for that position was standing in front of him? Hermione seemed to want to go to the lessons, after all. Why shouldn’t he grant her that opportunity in the best way?

“Hermione?” Harry asked; he wondered if all the other Gryffindors suddenly suffered from a complete lack of courage in that moment, because he felt as if he was sapping up all the courage in the castle to ask the question that was on his mind. “Will you go to the Yule Ball with me… as my date?”

He was suddenly nervous. “I mean… you don’t have to. You’d have to suffer through dancing lessons over the next couple of weeks, and maybe end up in the Hospital Wing with broken toes. And if you don’t want to go as a ‘date’, precisely, maybe… we could go as friends?”

He was buggering this up, and he knew it. But he couldn’t help it, because he was now doubting himself when it came to Hermione. Why would she want to go with him as friends, when she could have an opportunity to go with somebody else – perhaps someone she fancied – as a date?

Hermione didn’t say ‘yes’. But she didn’t say ‘no’ either. In fact she didn’t say anything. She simply stared at him for a long moment. He was about to take back his offer, when Hermione picked up her bag, grabbed his arm and dragged him down the hall, and into an unused classroom that was located several feet from the Transfiguration Classroom. She dropped her bag, set his on the floor, then pushed him up against the wall.

Before he could say anything, like ask her what she was doing, her hands were cupping his cheeks and her lips were on his. Harry stood frozen for a long moment that seemed to last forever, before his brain kicked itself back into motion and he found himself kissing Hermione back. He could not believe it. Hermione Granger, his best friend, his beautiful friend, was kissing him. And he was kissing her! Why was she kissing him of all people? He couldn’t understand that. Why him?

The doubting, nervous, pessimistic side of his mind then shut down, and allowed the rest to focus on simply kissing Hermione. Because it was glorious, and it was perfect, and it was his first kiss, and he wasn’t going to let anything ruin it.

After what seemed like an eternity, but was somewhere between thirty seconds and a minute, Hermione backed away. The two friends found breathing difficult, and they panted, trying to bring oxygen back into their lungs.

“In case that wasn’t plain enough for you, Harry,” Hermione said, “My answer is yes. I would love to be your date to the Ball.”

“You… you… I…” Harry stammered; that pessimistic part of his mind had rebooted itself, “You kissed me.”

“I did,” Hermione said, chuckling. “You kissed me back, by the way.”

Then she, out of nowhere, abruptly started crying.

“Hermione?!” Harry asked, concerned, “What’s wrong?”

“Don’t mind me,” Hermione sniffled, brushing her hands on her face, and wiping the tears away, “I’m just… really happy you asked me actually. Really relieved too. Same goes for that kiss. That could have turned out completely ugly.”
Harry didn’t know what to say. “Why are you relieved?”

Well it was a better question than ‘Why did you kiss me?’

“When I first realized there was going to be a Ball of some kind this year,” Hermione said, “Which was around the time I received my booklist this summer, because it said we were required to bring formal wear. I started fantasizing about the whole thing. I started wondering who I wanted to dance with at the Ball. I figured… okay, I wasn’t certain you were going to ask me to the Ball. In fact, I believed you wouldn’t even consider asking me.

“At the very most, I was hoping you might dance with me for a dance or two, even if you were going to the Ball with somebody else. I actually didn’t think you would ask me. I figured I’d be going with somebody else – don’t ask me who, because I don’t know. In my fantasy, my date had no face. You and Ron were the only faces, because I figured I’d dance with both of you since you were my friends – I mean, when you weren’t dancing with your date anyway.”

Hermione sighed. “Let’s just say you asking me to the Ball is something I didn’t expect.”

“Why?” Harry asked.

“Because I knew you fancied Cho Chang,” Hermione said, “So I figured you would ask her. If not Cho Chang, then maybe someone like Katie Bell, because she’s on the Quidditch team with you. When I thought of her, I thought – okay, Fred and George will pick two of three girls, and the last one might go with Harry!”

“They’d probably fob her off to their friend, Lee, Hermione,” Harry said, with a snort.

“That… is a good point,” Hermione said. “Anyway, my point is… there are several other girls you could have asked instead of me. ”And, well, because of who you are, whoever you asked would probably have said yes.”

“Okay, first off, how many of those girls know Harry Potter?” Harry asked, “And how many girls know me as the Boy-Who-Lived?”

Hermione sighed. “The scales are tipped extremely on the side of the Boy-Who-Lived.”

“Exactly,” Harry said, “the only girl who was on my mind to ask was Cho Chang, that was until I realized she’s dating Cedric Diggory. To be honest, if I asked her… I’m not sure I would have had a very good time at the Ball. I barely know her. I liked her because she is pretty.”

“A lot of boys like girls because they’re pretty, Harry,” Hermione said, “I know I’m not…”

“Stop!” Harry said, immediately, before she could say anything else. “Don’t say that, Hermione. I think you’re beautiful. Gorgeous even.”

“Harry,” Hermione mumbled.

“I’m sure you’ll be the star of the Yule Ball,” Harry said. “But that isn’t the only reason I asked you. Hermione, you’re one of those girls who sees me as ‘just Harry’. Frankly you may be one of the very few who does. Most who grew up listening to those false legends of the Boy-Who-Lived certainly don’t just see the real me. I’m not sure they want to know the real me. However, there’s a big difference between those girls and you.
“Nobody else in this castle has been there for me the way you have. Ron’s betrayal last month demoted him to just friend. You’re my best friend, Hermione. You’ve never betrayed me. If anything, I betrayed you during the whole Firebolt thing. You were perfectly right to be suspicious about the broom, even if it turned out to be just fine. It was an anonymous gift, not to mention such a grand gift. And at the time, we thought there was a mass murderer after me. You weren’t in the wrong, Hermione. I was. Ron was worse, because he was all pent up over a possession that was mine, and he seemed to think it was his broom.

“I’m getting way off topic here. Hermione, you’re the reason I survived the First Task. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you. Frankly, I’m astounded it took me this long to realize exactly what you mean to me.”

Hermione sniffled, and a teary-eyed smile formed across her face.

She cleared her throat. “Harry, I’ve been keeping a secret from you for… well, quite a while. To be honest, if you hadn’t asked me to the Ball, I would probably never be able to say this. I… I think I started fancying you after you saved me from the troll. I… I started to fall in love with you, the night we saved Sirius. That… that ride on Buckbeak together. I never felt anything like it. It was so scary up there. You know how I am about heights. But… when I wrapped my arms around you, I forgot all about my fears. It was because of you, Harry. You made me feel safe and secure.”

“Hermione, I can’t believe I’m about to say this,” Harry said, “I don’t want you to just be my date to the Yule Ball, Hermione. Will you… maybe… be my girlfriend?”

Hermione beamed. “I want nothing more than to be your girlfriend, Harry. My answer is yes.”

Harry had the biggest, goofiest grin on his face. Hermione was his girlfriend! He was Hermione Granger’s boyfriend! Hermione giggled at his expression, then kissed him again. Before he could lose himself in her lips again, she backed away.

“However,” she said.

“Uh-oh,” Harry muttered, “That’s almost as bad as ‘but’.”

Hermione smiled. “I wonder if we should keep it a secret for now.”

“You’re not having second thoughts, are you?” Harry asked, concerned; he tried to save face. “Am I that bad of a kisser?”

Hermione giggled again. “You’re a perfectly good kisser, Harry. I’m not having second thoughts. However… if we announce it, we’re not going to get any privacy.”

That was a fair point. The problem was… did he want to keep it private? After all, if nobody knew Hermione had a date to the ball, he was sure someone would try to ask her to the Ball!

“I’ll make you a deal,” Harry said, “We can keep the fact that we’re… boyfriend and girlfriend… a couple… to ourselves, for as long as possible. I would value the privacy that would give us as well. However… I will not… in fact, I refuse to keep the fact that you’re my date to the Yule Ball a secret. In fact, I’m going to ask you again at lunch. There’ll be enough witnesses that the gossip will get around the castle by dinnertime. Otherwise, boys are going to try to ask you to the Yule Ball.”
Hermione smiled. “I… yes, that is a good point. In fact, I should have thought of that. Also, don’t put yourself down, Harry James. If girls didn’t think you had a date, there would probably be girls coming up to you – most of whom have probably never said a word to you before -- hoping you’d take them.”

“That will probably happen anyway,” Harry said, with a snort, “I said it earlier, didn’t I? I’m the Boy-Who-Lived, and one of the Champions. They’re going to ask me even though I already have a date. Because they think they would be a better date than you are. They would be completely wrong, however. Hermione, no matter how many girls insist they should be my date instead of you, you are the perfect girl for me. The only girl for me. I will tell that to any girl who dares ask me.”

It was Hermione’s time to smile goofily, which complimented the fact that she no longer had buck teeth.

“Okay, how about this?” she asked, “Until the Yule Ball, we keep the kissing and… snogging… private. Also, no holding hands in public. No public displays of affection until the Yule Ball. If you want, we can have our big public kiss at the Yule Ball. To everyone else, we’re simply each other’s date to the Yule Ball. Don’t get me wrong. I’m thrilled to be your girlfriend. I just want a little privacy between you and I, so we can enjoy ourselves as a couple for a little while, before I’m thrown into the spotlight as the girlfriend of the Boy-Who-Lived!”

Harry smiled at her jest. He knew she didn’t see herself as the girlfriend of the Boy-Who-Lived. She was ‘just Harry’s’ girlfriend. She was simply saying what everyone else was going to be thinking of.

“I can see Rita Skeeter jumping in joy at the headlining article right now,” Harry deadpanned, deciding a jest would let her understand he knew she was jesting too, “I completely agree with that, Hermione. I would love to try to keep our relationship private, between just the two of us, for as long as possible. Even if that means we have a big ‘first kiss’ at the Ball.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Hermione said.

“So, no public kissing and snogging,” Harry said, “What is public and what is private?”

“The Gryffindor Common Room is too public,” Hermione said. “Um… unused classrooms like this? And… oh, Merlin… I suppose I’ll lower my standards to broom closet snogs for the sake of privacy.”

Harry snickered. “You definitely don’t strike me as someone who would drag me into a broom closet.”

Hermione blushed. “I’m sure I could get used to it, for privacy’s sake. Um… well, I suppose if we can find a private patch on the Hogwarts grounds if the weather doesn’t get too bad, that might also be an option. That will be limited, of course. Before too long, the grounds will likely be covered in feet of snow, as per usual during Scottish winters.”

“The covered bridge?” Harry suggested.

“Please, Harry,” Hermione said, with a snort, “It’s the third most popular snogging spot in the castle.”

“How would you know that?” Harry asked.
Hermione blushed. “I’ve caught my fair share of couples there. Frankly, I consider myself lucky they were doing nothing more than snogging, what with teenage hormones running rampant and all. Relax, Harry. I promise you, aside from a six-year old boy who kissed me on the playground when I was little, you’re my very first kiss.”

“Six-year old boy?” Harry asked; suddenly wondering why he was so jealous of a little boy – who might now be Hermione’s age.

“I think it was a dare from his older brother,” Hermione said, still blushing. “He ran off to an older boy, looking so embarrassed after it happened.

“Who was this little boy?” Harry asked, “Is he your age? Did he live in your neighborhood? Does he still live there?”

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione said, “You’re adorable when you’re jealous. I promise you, Harry. It didn’t count. He lived nowhere near me. It was on a playground in a park outside my parents’ clinic, which is several miles from my home, by the way. I’ve never seen him again. I wouldn’t even recognize him if I did. Why are we talking about this, Harry?”

“Because you remember it enough to compare it to your first kiss!” Harry exclaimed. “Can you even call our first kiss your first kiss?!”

Hermione pecked him on the lips, and looked into his green eyes. “Harry, listen to me, you silly, jealous idiot. I consider you my first kiss. Didn’t I say that? It was the perfect first kiss. Maybe, if you stop being a jealous idiot, you just might be the only one to ever kiss me.”

“Aside from a six year old boy,” Harry grumbled; he winced when she backhanded him across his chest. “Ow! I’m joking. I very much hope I’m the only person to kiss you. I certainly want you to be the only one to kiss me. Fan-girls who don’t know the word ‘no’, notwithstanding. Ow!”

She had backhanded him again.

“I’ll hex any girl who dares try to kiss you, Harry Potter!” Hermione growled. “Only I get that honor!”

Harry merely smiled. “Yes, ma’am. What are the first and second most popular snogging spots? The Astronomy Tower, I assume?”

“Yes,” Hermione said, “And the library.”

“The… library?” Harry asked, “Madame Pince’s domain is the second most popular snogging spot in the castle?”

“I know, right?” Hermione said, grinning. “But there are a lot of hidden corners and crannies in the library. They’re not meant for snogging though. They’re meant for private places to read without interruption.”

“Sounds tailor-made for some good snogging spots, actually,” Harry said, grinning. “Is that on your list of private locations?”

Hermione playfully glared at him. “Maybe if I feel naughty, and you’re a good boy.”
“Naughty? Really?” Harry asked, grinning when she blushed. “Does me asking you to the Ball and to be my girlfriend count as me being a good boy?”

“No,” Hermione said, “But we can go and find that private patch on the Grounds I mentioned earlier.”

“Really?” Harry asked, grinning.

“It is a free period right now,” Hermione said, “And we still have an hour until lunch. I have nothing better to do. I certainly don’t want to find Ron right now. Especially if he is still going to try to ask me to do his Transfiguration homework.”

“I’m going to talk to him about his behavior towards you, Hermione,” Harry said.

“You don’t need to do that,” Hermione said.

“Yes, I do,” Harry said. “He’s soon going to discover you’re my date to the Ball. I’m quite sure we’re about to experience a new fit of jealousy and anger from him, probably before the end of the day. A confrontation will come. You’re my girlfriend. I know you can take care of yourself, but I have a right to defend you now, more than ever. The inevitable confrontation would be the best time to do it.”

Hermione sighed. “Okay, Harry. But be careful. Make sure it is a public confrontation, in the Common Room at the very least. Definitely not your dormitory! And please do your best not to end up in the Hospital Wing, or in detention. Today has become such a wonderful day. I don’t want you to ruin it.”

“It is a great day for me too, Hermione,” Harry said, “I’ll do my best not to ruin it. However, if anyone’s going to ruin it for us…”

“It will be Ronald,” Hermione scowled. “Yes, I can see your point. He does tend to have a remarkable talent with that particular skill, doesn’t he?”

“He’s better at it than he is at chess,” Harry joked, “Which is saying something. He rivals Malfoy when it comes to that talent actually.”

Hermione chuckled. “Alright, boyfriend. Let’s go and find that private patch.”

“Lead the way, girlfriend,” Harry said. “You do realize we’ve been in the same area of the Transfiguration classroom since we left class several minutes ago?”

“We did kind of get lost in conversation, Harry,” Hermione said, “At least there was an unused classroom here, so we didn’t end up kissing in the middle of a corridor!”

“There is that silver lining,” Harry muttered.

Hermione giggled, as she picked up her bag. Wondering where this giggly side of his girlfriend had been hiding over the last few years, Harry picked up his bag as well, and they left the room. Only to find Professor McGonagall walking down the corridor, in their direction, from her classroom. Harry winced when she raised an eyebrow at the two of them.
“And just what were you two doing in an unused classroom?” McGonagall demanded.

“Harry asked me to the Yule Ball, Professor McGonagall,” Hermione said, smiling, “He wanted to make sure we had privacy to do so, so he dragged me into the classroom.”

“Oh, I dragged you, did I?” Harry asked.

Hermione elbowed Harry, then looked mighty embarrassed at doing such a thing in front of her favorite Professor. Wait… was that a hint of a smile on the Head of Gryffindor House?

“And what was your answer, Miss Granger?” McGonagall asked.

“I said ‘yes’, Professor,” Hermione said, with a bright smile.

“Well, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “If you were so good at doing everything I’ve requested of you over the years, like you did with getting yourself a date so quickly, you might be the top student in your year in my class, instead of Miss Granger here.”

“Um… yes, Professor,” Harry said, hoping the blush on his cheeks wasn’t so prominent.

“Well done, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “I’m very happy for the both of you. Have you told her about the dancing lessons?”

“He has,” Hermione said, “And we will both be happy to attend, ma’am.”

“Then I’ll expect you both in my classroom Saturday at seven in the evening,” McGonagall said. “Do not be late, even if you have to attend an early dinner so you can be here on time.”

“We will be on time, Professor,” Hermione promised; Harry simply nodded.

“Good,” McGonagall said.

“Professor?” Hermione asked, “Er… could you keep this quiet until lunch at the earliest? Harry’s going to publicly ask me then in front of witnesses at lunch, so we won’t be swamped with requests to the Ball over the next two weeks.”

“I wasn’t aware you thought me a gossip, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, raising an eyebrow.

Hermione looked horrified. “You aren’t, ma’am. I should not have implied. My apologies.”

“Apology accepted, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “I’ll make sure I am in attendance at lunch. I wouldn’t want to miss an event like this. Good luck, Mr. Potter. By the way, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger. Next time, perhaps you might think about having such a long and meaningful discussion somewhere better than outside my classroom?”

Harry and Hermione blushed and stammered.

“Yes, ma’am,” Hermione said, “We did, admittedly, lose track of time.”

“Understandable, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “I was not eavesdropping on you, I assure you. I was simply aware you were there, because I have certain wards outside my classroom, in order to prevent mischief from certain… trouble-makers who may want to… prank such a location.”
Harry grinned. He knew she was talking about Fred and George Weasley.

With a knowing smirk, McGonagall walked by them. “Twenty points for your classwork today, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger.”

“You already gave us points, Professor,” Harry said.

“Did I?” McGonagall asked. “See you at lunch.”

McGonagall walked off down the corridor, and Harry stared at her, trying to figure out what those points were for.

“Did she just give us points for becoming a couple, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Impossible, Harry,” Hermione said, “She doesn’t know we’re a couple.”

Harry nodded. That was a good point.

“She probably gave you twenty points for finding a dance partner for your lessons so quickly however,” Hermione said, with a smirk.

Translation: McGonagall very much approved of Harry’s choice of date.

Harry could only stare after Hermione as she started off down the corridor. Then he hurried after her. He suddenly discovered there was a certain… appeal… to letting her lead him wherever they traveled. He was so distracted by such an appeal, he nearly missed the first step on the Grand Staircase.

Chapter End Notes

Stop staring at your girlfriend’s… assets, Harry, or you’re going to fall down the stairs!

And so begins my newest story. Even though the story’s title implies this is simply a Yule Ball story, it will probably last at least through the end of fourth year, if not longer.

Next Chapter: Harry publicly asks Hermione to the Ball during lunch. The aftermath and an interesting Defense Class. I almost included the inevitable confrontation between Harry and Ron to be in the second chapter, but it will be at the start of the third chapter. It is hinted at in the second chapter, however.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT: Before anyone complains to me about posting a new story while I have other works-in-progress, and several incomplete stories. Let me tell you this. I am going to be working on Free Use Experience soon, and hope to get a good number of chapters published for that story in the near future. As for the other stories, yes, believe me, I know you want me to continue them. I want to continue them. But my muse is entirely unresponsive when it comes to those stories at the moment. I am honestly sorry about that. I hope this prevents anyone asking me in reviews for this story, to update OTHER stories, which is – to be frank -- entirely inappropriate.
Casanova and Cleopatra

Chapter Notes

The response to the first chapter was absolutely amazing! Glad to see so many readers like my story already! Thank you all to those who subscribed, gave Kudos and comments!

Viktor Krum rant, ahead!

I will warn you right now. I have NEVER liked Hermione paired with Viktor in any story, be it canon or fan-fiction. It makes me uncomfortable. For Merlin’s sake, after a date to the Ball, and a brief friendship, Hermione was the “thing he’d miss the most”?! Excuse me?! What about his parents?! Fleur’s was Gabrielle! So family was allowed! Gaah! Also, there is the fact he invited her to Bulgaria, when she was fifteen! He was eighteen! Ugh. You have to wonder why he invited her? Meet his parents? “Hello, Mum, Dad, meet the person I’d miss more than you – according to the Second Task -- even though I had just met her less than four months before said task.” Right. Introducing her to his parents wasn’t on his mind, I assure you.

Anyway, my opinion toward that pairing is discussed through a character in this chapter.

Apologies for my rant. Enjoy the chapter.

Other Chapter Title Considerations: “Showtime and Situational Awareness”, or just simply “Situational Awareness”. The chosen title will be obvious by the time you finish the chapter.

Warning: Character Bashing: Ron, Ginny, Molly, Snape, and Viktor Krum; Ship Bashing: Hermione/Viktor

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Thursday, December 10th, 1994)

“Hermione?” Harry asked, “When did you get your teeth fixed?”

Harry and Hermione were currently out on the Grounds of Hogwarts. They had found a suitably private spot at a copse of trees, one of the few not located near the Forbidden Forest, and were now sitting together at the trunk of one of them. It was a bit of a chilly spot, even though the air wasn’t too cold, due to the fact that they were sitting under the cover of the trees which blocked the sun. Even though that was a disadvantage, it also provided them the cover of privacy they desired. It wasn’t anywhere near a walking path on the grounds, so it wasn’t too easy for anyone to eavesdrop. But it did give them a good view if anyone just so happened to be walking in their direction.

“Finally noticed that, have you?” Hermione teased, with a smug smirk. “Did you notice before, during, or after our first kiss?”

“Before,” Harry said, “By about… five, maybe ten minutes?”
Hermione’s only response was to laugh. Loudly. It was almost a guffaw. Which only made Harry laugh too.

“Well, at least you noticed before you asked me to the Ball,” Hermione said, after they calmed down, “Or to be your girlfriend.”

“In my defense, it is mostly your fault,” Harry said.

“My fault?”! Hermione demanded. “How?!”

“This is going to make me sound horrible,” Harry said.

“I’ll try to forgive you,” Hermione said, dryly.

“We’ve been friends for so long,” Harry said. “Until very recently, I’ve never really thought about you aside from the fact that you’re just… ‘my friend, Hermione’. I’ve seen you as Hermione. I wasn’t really paying attention to your appearance or the changes you’ve had over the years. To be fair, these bloody school outfits do not do you justice as well. They hide your figure so badly, it took me forever to notice just how beautiful you are.”

“My figure?” Hermione asked.

“Let’s just say when you hugged me earlier – before I asked you to the ball,” Harry said, “It was the first time I ever realized how… Merlin, I don’t think I can say it.”

Hermione stared at him for a moment, before she chuckled. “Are you saying that when I hugged you earlier, it was the first time you could recognize feeling my… breasts against you? Even though I am sure it has happened when I’ve hugged you over the past few months? I am a very close hugger after all, and not shy at all when hugging either. I think you know that.”

“Yes, it was the first time,” Harry muttered. “Please don’t take that the wrong way. What I’m trying to say is… it has taken until very recently for me to notice just how… pretty you are. And I feel very bad about that.”

Hermione sighed. “Oh, Harry. I think I can forgive you. Because it actually is my fault.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

“Even when I’m wearing casual clothes,” Hermione said, “I’ve never really focused on looking pretty or beautiful or attractive you know? No, you know what? Molly Weasley is to blame.”

“How?” Harry asked.

“She’s so old-fashioned,” Hermione said, “I was afraid to wear any clothing around her that showed even a hint of any curves or beauty I possess. Even Ginny, who wanted to look attractive around you, wasn’t allowed to wear anything that was too revealing. This summer, while we were at the Burrow, and the Quidditch World Cup, that should have been a big opportunity me for to make myself look more attractive toward you. If it wasn’t for Molly Weasley, I might have done so. But I was under her roof, I was her guest, and I knew she wouldn’t approve, so I had to respect her wishes, verbal or not. So even then I was wearing clothes similar to these school outfits. Worse, actually, because I couldn’t wear skirts like this!”
Harry grinned. He always did like the skirt part of the female school outfit. They looked especially good on Hermione.

“So, yes, Harry,” Hermione said, “I am to blame, partially. Molly Weasley is also to blame, and also these school outfits. Because… I never gave you an opportunity to see me any differently, to see me looking pretty. I can’t blame you for not noticing I have curves until I hugged you… today, I assume?”

“Yes, today,” Harry said, “Which makes me feel worse, considering how much you hug me. How did I not… feel… *that*… before?”

“You’re a rather oblivious boy, Harry,” Hermione said, with a laugh, “Actually, now that I think about it. It is even more impressive that you find me beautiful. Because I’m not trying to be beautiful.”

“Yes, we’ll, you’re doing a pretty poor job of it,” Harry said, grinning.

“Thank you, Harry,” Hermione said. “That’s the first time a poor performance of mine actually sounds like a compliment. Now, we’ve gone far off topic. You asked about my teeth.”

“I did,” Harry said.

“Well, I’m sure you remember the day Malfoy hexed me with large teeth,” Hermione said.

“Yes,” Harry said, “In fact I’ve never hated Snape more than that day, when he said ‘I see no difference’. Forgive me for my language, but *fuck* that man!”

Hermione didn’t reprimand him. She merely smiled. “Well, of course, I wasn’t going to keep those fangs Malfoy gave me. Madam Pomfrey gave me a mirror, and told me to give her a signal when my teeth looked normal again. I might have told a white-lie, and let her fix my teeth to look normal like the rest of them. I’ve wanted to do that for forever, and I couldn’t pass up the opportunity. Especially since my parents didn’t want me to use magic to fix my teeth. I now have a story that will be believable when they ask me about them.”

“Merlin,” Harry said, “It has taken me this long to notice your teeth are different? I do not deserve to be your boyfriend, Hermione.”

“Of course you do,” Hermione said, “For the sole fact that you found me beautiful – when I wasn’t trying to be – *before* you asked me to the Ball, and to be your girlfriend. Let’s not forget, all those other compliments you gave me. Also there’s the fact that you noticed my teeth were different *before* I kissed you. If you didn’t notice until I kissed you, I might have been a little angry.”

Harry chuckled. “I probably would have deserved it. I definitely wouldn’t have deserved to be your boyfriend if that happened. That would have been a Ron-level insult.”

“Please, Harry!” Hermione exclaimed, “You are leagues better than Ron when it comes to noticing things about me. I don’t even think he knows I’m a girl!”

Harry laughed, a good belly laugh, which set off Hermione as well.

“Yeah,” Harry said, when he could stop laughing, “That’s pretty bad. It pretty much tells you what
“I know what he thinks of me,” Hermione said, “in fact the only reason he and I are friends is because we’re your friends. You, Harry, are the only thing we have in common. Since I apparently can’t have you without him being around, I have to tolerate him enough to call him a friend.”

“Yeah, well,” Harry said, seriously, “If his attitude toward you doesn’t change, I think my friendship with him is over. If he reacts badly to you and I going to the Ball together. If he reacts badly to you and I being a couple. I’ll consider it a worse betrayal than after my name came out of the Goblet of Fire. Because if he can’t support us, there’s no point having him be my friend. It would just be a lot of negative energy I just don’t want to deal with anymore – especially when it comes to him. It is so much worse than Malfoy, or the others because Ron is supposed to be my friend. Our friend.”

“I completely agree, Harry,” Hermione said, smiling. “If he isn’t happy for us, there’s no point being friends with him anymore. To be honest, Harry, I see no other outcome than a negative one with him. It’s just the kind of person he is.”

“Glad I’m not the only one who thinks so,” Harry said. “Given the fact he hasn’t changed since the Goblet of Fire fiasco, I don’t see him getting a maturity upgrade in the next few hours.”

“So it seems we should plan for Ron no longer being our friend,” Hermione said. “No regrets?”

“None, Hermione,” Harry said. “None at all.”

Hermione smiled and leaned in to kiss him again. The new couple kissed, cuddled, snogged, discussed nothing and everything, and kissed some more until it was time to head to the Great Hall for lunch, and the public reveal that they were going to the Yule Ball together.

Ten minutes before they were expected at lunch, they stood up and checked over themselves so they didn’t appear as if they had been all over each other for the past several minutes.

“Merlin, we’re a mess!” Hermione laughed, “I hope we didn’t look like this when Professor McGonagall saw us earlier. Oh, god, what if she did? We might have looked as if we just kissed!”

“We did just kiss a few minutes before we spoke to her again,” Harry said.

“I know that!” Hermione said, “But… she’s very observant. Oh god! She must have figured something was off about us!”

“Good thing she’s not a gossip then,” Harry commented.

Hermione calmed down almost instantly. “That is a silver lining, I suppose. Sweet Baby Maeve, we have to be more careful!”

Harry blinked. “Sweet Baby Maeve?”

Hermione blushed a deep red. “Forget I said that. Or I’ll hex you. Boyfriend or not.”

Harry snorted. Apparently, he just accidentally discovered Hermione’s workaround for swearing. He laughed when she backhanded him across the chest. It only made him laugh harder, and was quite relieved when Hermione joined in!
While they walked back to the castle, they discussed exactly how the public reveal should play out. It didn’t take very long for them to come up with a plan. In fact, they were sure Sirius and Professor Lupin would applaud them for the mere showmanship of the idea.

(Ten Minutes Later)

Minerva McGonagall made her way through the Great Hall, her stern gaze looking around at the group of third, fourth, and sixth years who were in attendance for the current lunch session. The rest of the years were in class at that moment in time. She noticed neither Mr. Potter nor Miss Granger were in attendance yet. She smiled privately at the memory of the discussion she had with her two favorite lions several minutes prior outside her classroom. She realized the new couple wanted to make a dramatic arrival for their public outing. She deduced from the conversation that they wouldn’t reveal they were a couple, merely that they were going to the Ball together.

Yes, she knew they were a couple, even though they might be trying to hide the knowledge of that for privacy’s sake. There was just something new about how they acted during her most recent conversation with them. Also, they were rather mussed up when she saw them. It was obvious they had kissed at least once. She was quite sure they had just experienced their first kiss whilst in that unused classroom. She was quite happy for her favorite lions, if that was true. They very much deserved each other in such a way.

However, she hoped – if they wanted to keep their relationship a secret – they fixed their mussed-up appearance when they made themselves public again. Otherwise it would be rather obvious what they were doing.

Minerva joined her fellow staff members who had no classes at that moment in time. Thankfully neither Severus nor Albus were in attendance. Severus would likely attempt to take points from Mr. Potter as a result of the performance that was soon to take place. And Albus… well… there was a suspicion deep in Minerva’s mind that told her the Headmaster might not… approve of the fact her two favorite Lions were now a couple. A ridiculous notion, of course. What business was it of the Headmaster’s to have such an opinion about a couple of students in the castle? Of course, Albus’ behavior toward Mr. Potter wasn’t exactly normal compared to other students.

Minerva pushed that thought to the back of her mind, as she sat down next to Pomona Sprout.

“You owe me ten Galleons, Pomona,” Minerva said. “Just so you know.”

Pomona glanced at Minerva, alarmed. Then she pouted dramatically. “Damn it, Minerva. Which bet did I lose this time?”

Minerva smirked. “If you stick around, I believe you’ll soon discover the answer to that before you leave this Hall.”

Pomona grumbled and returned to her lunch. Minerva merely smiled as she put together her plate of food. She always loved getting one up on certain staff members. Severus and Albus were on the top of that list. Pomona was third. The Herbology Professor and Hufflepuff Head was very competitive. Especially when it came to making bets about certain things – like students’ love-lives.

Speaking of that topic… Hermione Granger made her way – looking perfectly put together and no longer mussed up, thank Merlin! -- into the Great Hall, and sat down at a vacant spot near her fellow
students at the Gryffindor Table. A frown crossed Minerva’s face as she wondered why the girl had come in alone, without Mr. Potter. Then she saw Harry Potter walk in, looking just as perfectly dressed as his new girlfriend – ahem, Yule Ball date. The young man’s eyes found hers, and he winked at her. Minerva was suddenly reminded of another young man with dark, messy hair and glasses that looked remarkably like that young man. She merely raised her eyebrows at him – fighting back a smile that would have certainly ruined her reputation of stern taskmaster – and the young man responded with a smile. Then his gaze went straight to Miss Granger.

Minerva had to prevent a smile again. Showtime.

Harry walked toward the bushy-haired girl. But he did not sit down beside her. Instead he dropped to one knee next to where she was sitting. He did not say anything right away. It was soon obvious why. He was waiting for everyone in the Hall to look at him. And that was exactly what was happening. Aside from a few curious whispers amongst students, the Hall was silent, as everyone looked at Harry.

“Hermione Granger,” Harry said, loudly enough for the whole Hall to hear him. “Would you do me the greatest honor of accompanying me to the Yule Ball?”

Hermione’s beaming smile was a wild difference to the various girls around the Hall, who had expressions of shock, disappointment, and in a couple cases, jealousy or anger. If Minerva wasn’t beaming at her two favorite lions, she might have noticed such expressions of jealous anger on the two youngest Weasleys at the Gryffindor table.

“Yes, Harry,” Hermione said, her voice carrying across the Hall. “I would be more than honored to accompany you to the Yule Ball.”

There was a round of applause as Harry sat down next to his date to the Ball. But it definitely could not be qualified for the list of top rounds of applause ever to be witnessed in the Great Hall. Most who were applauding were imitating golf claps, or rounds of forced applause. It certainly wasn’t loud enough to drown out the whispers and gossip that was buzzing around the room.

“Damn it, Minerva,” Pomona muttered, as she took her coin purse from her belt. “I knew betting against you about those two was going to bite me in the backside. I was certain young Mr. Potter was oblivious to Miss Granger’s feelings for him.”

“Why did you even consider betting on Miss Granger and Viktor Krum of all people?” Minerva asked, happily accepting the ten gold coins.

“Irma told me she has seen Mr. Krum gazing at Miss Granger in the library,” Pomona said. “Even surrounded by his fan-girls, he watches her.”

“And what does Irma say about Miss Granger when it comes to Mr. Krum?” Minerva asked.

“Miss Granger seems to be oblivious or doesn’t care for him at all,” Pomona admitted. “Merlin, now I am wondering why I bet on those two!”

“You see?!” Minerva sniffed. “Besides, he is much too old for her, and she is much too… innocent for someone who seems as wild as him. Why would he even consider any possibilities of a fling with her?”

“She’s not a Quidditch nut, Minerva,” Pomona said, “Wasn’t it you who told me if Mr. Potter wasn’t
the Seeker, Miss Granger would go to the Library instead of the Quidditch Pitch for Gryffindor games?"

“So Viktor likes her because she isn’t hanging all over him?” Minerva huffed. “Is he interested in her because she doesn’t show affections for him? In that case, his affections toward her are borderline inappropriate. Especially given his school’s teachings and her being a Muggleborn. A fling like that could only be bad news and lead to ruin, especially for Miss Granger.

“Besides, she clearly doesn’t like Quidditch, as you said. And Viktor Krum is a Star Seeker! She probably wouldn’t even go to most of his games. What exactly do they have in common?! Now compare this to my two Lions, ask yourself how much those two have in common, and you’ll find Miss Granger is in fine hands with our young Mr. Potter.”

*Krum would clearly try to seduce her,* Minerva thought, but didn’t say out loud, *If Mr. Potter hadn’t asked her out, and Krum did, she would have fallen all over him because he would be the first boy to show affections for her. Her innocent nature would be the perfect prey for a predator like him. Miss Granger, you are very lucky to have such a nice young man like Mr. Potter. He’s definitely more suitable for you than… other people.*

“Well, it was either Viktor Krum or Ron Weasley,” Pomona said. “Perhaps a safer bet would have been Mr. Weasley, given the looks he was giving Mr. Potter and Miss Granger during that little scene of theirs.”

“Looks?” Minerva asked, alarmed.

“Have you not noticed?” Pomona asked, “Look at young Mr. Weasley. And his sister.”

Minerva glanced along the Gryffindor Table, and was startled by what she discovered. Ron Weasley, who would usually be gorging himself on the food in front of him, and ignoring everything else, was staring at Harry and Hermione, who were quietly talking to each other. No, he wasn’t staring. He was *glaring* at them. As was Ginny Weasley. She had never seen such dark, jealous, angry looks as she did on the faces of the two youngest Weasleys.

“You believe he was a safer bet?” Minerva asked.

“That was before I saw him look at Mr. Potter and Miss Granger like that,” Pomona said. “Now, on the other hand…”

“He would be bad news for Miss Granger,” Minerva said, “Especially given his behavior toward her over the past few years. Remember, he was the reason she was in the bathroom with that troll in the first place!”

“It looks as if there is no one better for Miss Granger than Mr. Potter,” Pomona said, “I simply should have realized that and not bet against you on that one.”

“I agree,” Minerva said; she pointed her fork in Mr. and Miss Weasley’s direction. “That bears watching, Pomona.”

“It does,” Pomona agreed. “What do you intend to do?”

“I will ask one of my elves to watch Mr. Potter, Miss Granger and the two youngest Weasleys over the next few days,” Minerva said. “And alert me if something dramatic happens between them.”
“That would probably be a good idea,” Pomona agreed.

Minerva frowned as she looked at the two youngest Weasleys. Something was very off about those two. Why had she never noticed anything about them before?

Then her mind went back to the whole Chamber of Secrets fiasco. Hadn’t Ginny Weasley been responsible for all of that? It hadn’t been her fault per se, but she had been under the influence of a dark artifact. Minerva hadn’t taken notice of that, during that entire year. One of her own lions!

She vowed to be better when it came to her lions. She would be watchful of any future trouble amongst the pride. Especially when it came to the two youngest Weasleys. If only because their current behavior made her very uneasy.

She was even more uncomfortable – and suspicious – when Ginny noticed her watching, and nudged her brother’s shoulder. He looked at her, she said something to him, and Ron glanced at the Head of his House. They abruptly, and forcefully, stopped looking in Harry and Hermione’s direction.

Yes, Minerva decided, *There is something really off about those two! What is going on between Harry, Hermione and the Weasleys? I thought they were good friends! Damn it. I can’t do anything until something happens. It will happen, though. And when it does… I’ll be there. And so will one of my house-elves. Which one? Hmm….*

(Meanwhile…)

Professor McGonagall might have been watchful and suspicious of Ron and Ginny Weasley, but Harry and Hermione were – at the moment – oblivious to the two youngest Weasleys. If only because of their older brothers, who had decided to sit down across from the new couple at the moment.

“Well, hello, young Casanova,” Fred Weasley said, to Harry.

“And hello to you too, Cleopatra,” George Weasley said, to Hermione.

“That doesn’t make any sense at all,” Hermione said. “Casanova and Cleopatra aren’t remotely related to anything between the two.”

“Perhaps,” Fred said, “but Harry deserves the title of Casanova for that performance.”

“And you, queen of denial,” George said, “have denied scores of girls the chance to accompany Mr. Casanova to the Yule Ball.”

“It gives you the opportunity to ask those girls to the Ball,” Harry said, shrugging. “Then perhaps they’ll ignore me, and I won’t have to deal with those girls who believe I should accompany them instead of Hermione.”

Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil suddenly pouted and turned their interest – which had been on the new pair and their private conversation – elsewhere. Ginny Weasley’s glare only turned darker, though Harry did not notice.
“Oh, we already have two girls in mind,” Fred said.

“We just haven’t decided which of us should accompany which witch,” George said.

“You probably should decide that,” Hermione advised, “Before someone else asks them.”

Fred and George looked at each other. Then they shared whispers nobody else at the table could hear. Then they took quills and ink from their bags, and wrote something down on two separate napkins. They then threw those two napkins toward Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet. The two Chasers glared at the twins when the napkins landed in their plates. They opened the napkins and their glares turned to blushes. Then the two girls gave them a thumbs-up.

“Well, there you go,” Harry said, “Who is going with whom?”

“We’ll tell you when we figure that out ourselves,” Fred said.

“For all we know they might confuse me for my less-handsome twin,” George said. “It happens a lot, after all.”

“And the one I chose might go with my even lesser-handsome twin,” Fred said, “instead of me.”

“So you’ll tell us when you clear that up between yourselves and the girls?” Hermione asked.

“Yes,” Fred and George said.

“Better go clear that up then,” Harry said.

Fred and George glanced at each other, then stood and moved back down the table to where they had been sitting across from the Chasers.

It wasn’t until they left the Great Hall a little while later, that they brought up their conversation with the twins.

“Casanova?” Harry asked. “I’m not a Casanova, am I, Hermione?”

“Better than Cleopatra,” Hermione muttered. “For a moment, I thought they were going to call me queen of denial, because of me denying my affections for you until today. Which would have revealed my affections for you.”

“Which would basically tell everyone we were a couple instead of dates to the Ball,” Harry said.

“For certain,” Hermione agreed.

If anyone – especially two particular young gingers – had decided to confront Harry and Hermione over the scene in the Great Hall, nobody had decided to do so just yet. Miraculously, they were not bothered by the time they arrived at the Defense Against The Dark Arts classroom.

And if Ron Weasley decided to sit with Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas instead of Harry and Hermione, the new couple didn’t give it a spare thought, even when Neville joined them instead. In the back of their minds, they knew a confrontation with Ron was in the future. But they were much too distracted by the thought of their little performance in the Great Hall, to worry about such just
yet.

It would be forced to the front of their minds only a couple hours later. But for now, they were lost in each other, ignoring the other students – especially girls – who were casting glances in their direction, until Professor Moody stepped into the room. Then their focus was on class.

“Today, class,” Professor Moody said, “We are going to discuss situational awareness.”

Harry grinned, knowing this was going to be a fun lesson. Then his grin vanished when Moody’s magical eye turned to look at him.

“Potter!” Moody growled.

Harry jumped as his name was called. “Yes, sir?”

“A few minutes ago,” Moody said, “you found yourself in a very vulnerable situation. Can you figure out what this situation was?”

“N-no, sir,” Harry stammered.

“Really?” Moody asked. “Because it certainly seemed like a big moment for you. You walked into the Great Hall at lunch, and immediately did a very stupid thing.”

Harry blinked. The Professor couldn’t possibly be talking about asking Hermione to the Ball, could he?

“You brought attention to yourself, Potter!” Moody growled. “While that isn’t so bad, you did so while focusing on one particular subject, instead of every single thing in the room! You focused on that young lass sitting next to you!”

Harry and Hermione blushed.

Moody continued. “And you did so, while also on one knee, and your wand in your back pocket! That was a very vulnerable position indeed, Potter. If someone drew their wand on you, you would have been hexed or cursed before you could even draw your wand and stand up! Certainly before you could face your attacker and defend yourself!

“Mr. Potter, given your celebrity status in the wizarding world. Given how… popular you are, especially amongst the young female half of the population in this castle, you did not take an important consideration into mind.”

“And what is that, Professor?” Harry asked.

“Jealousy,” Moody uttered. “There were girls in that room with you, who were acting pretty jealous at the very sight of you asking that wee lass next to you, to the Ball. Jealous girls are dangerous, Mr. Potter.”

A few of the boys in the class snorted, or raised eyebrows at that. Meanwhile, the girls not named Hermione Granger either tittered or made sounds of shocked disbelief.

“Even more so, considering every one of them in this castle carries a dangerous weapon!” Moody growled; he raised his wand. “If you do not know this is a dangerous weapon by now, you do not
deserve to be in this class, much less this castle! These girls are not only ruled by their jealousy, but by their hormones, Potter! It is entirely possible one of those girls could have overreacted and sent a hex in your direction, or the direction of that young lass, at the very idea of what you did! Did that cross your mind, Mr. Potter? Even once?”

“N-no, sir,” Harry stammered.

“CONSTANT VIGILANCE!” Moody growled; as usual, most of the students in the room jumped. Moody limped over to Harry and stared down at him with both eyes. “Mr. Potter, consider two things. Somebody put you in this Tournament, intending to do some harm to you.”

“I… I know that, sir,” Harry said.

“Well, that tells me you do have a brain in that head of yours,” Moody muttered. “But have you also considered this? Ever since your performance, you now have the possibility of scores and hordes of hormonal jealous girls after you or your lass to watch out for! Do not let me catch you unaware again, Potter! Or I will be the one hexing you. Do you understand me?!”

“Yes, Professor,” Harry said.

“Good,” Moody said, “And Potter?”

“Yes, sir?” Harry asked.

“Next time I see you down one knee with your wand in your back pocket,” Moody said, “We will spend an entire lesson discovering whether or not you could recover from such a foolish position and defend yourself against an attack! And you’d be facing me! Understand?!”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said.

“Excellent,” Moody said.

Moody limped back to the front of the classroom. “Situational awareness, class. That is today’s lesson. Hopefully by the time class is over, none of you will be as stupid as Mr. Potter was a little while ago.”

Harry frowned at the tittering sounds coming from his classmates. Under their desks, Hermione grasped Harry’s hand. His frown turned into a small smile, and he looked at her for a moment, before he turned his attention back to Moody.

Once again, a Moody-led Defense class proved to be very interesting.

(Two hours later)

“Notice he only warned me about hormonal, jealous girls,” Harry muttered. “He didn’t even consider warning me about blokes. It is a fairly good point, since there are sure to be guys angry at me for asking such a beautiful girl like you to the Ball before they could.”

After their Double Defense lesson, Harry and Hermione were on the seventh floor of the castle, making their way to the Gryffindor Tower. They had decided to put away their bookbags before
heading down to dinner.

“Harry, this isn’t a joking matter,” Hermione said, “Professor Moody made a very good point. Neither of us have been very aware of our surroundings since our show in the Great Hall. Before that showing, weren’t we wary of Ron, expecting a bad reaction from him?”

“We were,” Harry muttered.

“Yet, we didn’t even spare a thought or glance at him between the time we went to lunch, and now,” Hermione said. “However, I did notice that he didn’t sit with us as he usually does. Neville sat with us, while Ron sat with Seamus and Dean. Ron was avoiding us, Harry.”

“Then he is definitely angry at us,” Harry said, with a deep sigh. “It looks like the so-called Golden Trio is about to become the Golden Duo.”

“Really, Harry?” Hermione chuckled, “Do you have to refer to us by that nonsensical nickname?”

“It does have a nice ring to it,” Harry said, with a smile.

“Perhaps,” Hermione allowed. “Harry, it is time to be serious. We need to be ready for anything when we get into the Common Room. He could be waiting for us. Or somebody else could.”

“Like who?” Harry asked, “The scores and hordes of hormonal jealous girls? Well, one-fourth of them anyway?”

Hermione glared at him. “Out of all those girls, who do you think would be the first to confront us?”

“Lavender and Parvati?” Harry asked. “They did seem particularly interested in me during McGonagall’s announcement about the ball.”

“I think the biggest risk from them in our near future is targeted more at me than you,” Hermione muttered.

Harry narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean? Are they going to hex you? Maybe ambush you in your dorm-room? Hermione, I can’t follow you there.”

“They’ll likely ambush me, yes,” Hermione said, “But with words, not wands. Their weapon is gossip, Harry! They’re going to bombard me with questions about us! I can see those questions now. Have I kissed you? Why did I say yes to you? Why did you ask me? Did you consider any other girl before you asked me? Are we dating? Were we dating before today? Is there a chance we’ll break up before the Ball, so you can ask one of them instead? How far have I gone with you?”

Harry blushed, especially at the last question. “That’s a lot of questions, Hermione!”

“That is probably half of what I expect them to ask me, Harry,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes. “I’ve had to deal with them for nearly three and a half years, remember? I know how they think.”

“Okay, so the gossip girls might not be a danger to me – as far as hexes go,” Harry said. “Who else?”

“Ginny,” Hermione said bluntly. “In fact, she’ll be the biggest problem, I believe. Maybe bigger than Ron. She fancies you, Harry. She’s… almost obsessed with you. This is her first year to go to
Hogsmeade, and over the summer, while I was at the Burrow with her, she asked me all about you. She asked if you might consider asking her out to Hogsmeade. She didn’t know there was going to be a Ball, or she probably would have brought it up, and whether or not you’d ask her.

“Then there were the other questions. About us. About whether I fancied you, or you might fancy me. I skillfully skirted around those questions. And for good reason. She’s going to be angry at both of us. She might even accuse me of stealing you from her.”

“I… I don’t understand, Hermione!” Harry exclaimed, “I barely know her! She has barely said a handful of words to me! She usually avoids me!”

“That doesn’t matter to her,” Hermione said, “You saved her in the Chamber of Secrets. That was enough for her.”

“I would have saved any girl in her position!” Harry exclaimed. “I didn’t do it just because it was her!”

“I know that, Harry,” Hermione said, soothingly. “But you must understand. She is… I’d call her the ultimate Boy-Who-Lived fan-girl. She’s… she’s fancied you for years. No, she’s fancied the idea of you for years. I don’t know the actual story behind it, because she barely alludes to it. If I bring it up, she glares at me. It is like a big secret for her. But I know she fancied the idea of you long before she even met you.”

“She doesn’t fancy ‘just Harry’, ” Harry grumbled, “She fancies the fucking Boy-Who-Lived. He’s not me, Hermione!”

“I know that, Harry,” Hermione said.

“I know you do,” Harry said. “In fact, I’m starting to wonder if you are the only one in this castle who knows the real me. Ron doesn’t seem to.”

“Before Halloween, I might have disagreed with you on that,” Hermione said with a sigh. “But, I think to him, you being a Tournament Champion is simply just another Boy-Who-Lived adventure, and Ron wanted to be the side-kick in the story. When you denied the fact that you entered your name, when you spoke of not considering yourself a Champion… that story disappeared.”

“Merlin help me,” Harry muttered. “Hermione, thank you for being a real friend to me. Perhaps even my only one. Certainly my best friend.”

“You’ve already thanked me for that today, Harry,” Hermione said, “And I say the same. Thank you, just Harry, for being my best friend.”

Harry smiled. He took Hermione’s hand, squeezed it in a silent message about what her words meant to him, then released it, in case someone was nearby who could see them.

He then swallowed his nerves as the Fat Lady’s portrait came into view. He and Hermione shared a look that clearly said one thing:

Showtime.

Chapter End Notes
Cliffhanger! I absolutely adored this chapter. Private spot snogging and talking, a proactive (and gambling) McGonagall, the public date proposal, Weasley twins, and a strange Defense class with a (helpful?) Impostor! Moody.

Yes, Professor Moody is Bartemius Crouch, Junior in this story (unlike other stories of mine, where he is impersonating his father which is the SMARTER option!). His behavior in this chapter seems odd, because he seems helpful and supportive of Harry. There is a good reason for it. There is a theory that Voldemort wants Harry to feel fear throughout the entire Tournament, which is why he waits to kidnap him until the end of the Third Task. Crouch Jr’s behavior in this chapter reflects that. Notice he explicitly mentioned the danger of Harry being in the Tournament. Now Harry has something else to be paranoid about. Works nicely for Barty and Voldemort.

“I see no difference” – Professor Bastard – I mean, Severus Snape, Goblet of Fire. That is canon. That is something Rowling wrote, not a fan-fiction author. How can ANYONE like Severus Snape after that? That is BULLYING at its worst, and toward a girl who is sensitive about her teeth already. I hated Snape the moment I first read that many years ago. I will always hate him, simply because of that line. Fuck that man.

“Sweet Baby Maeve” shamelessly stolen from cloneserpent’s Harry Potter And The Sword of Gryffindor. It is an erotic comedy, so read it if you like smut. I might use Sweet Baby Maeve again. Maybe in a similar way to that story…

Next Chapter: The Confrontation! Ron and Ginny react (predictably) badly, and Harry gets some… strange assistance during the Confrontation. McGonagall (not the strange assistance) to the rescue, and she has a discussion with Harry and Hermione that changes her views toward a good majority of the Lions she feels are her – no pun intended – pride and joy.
“Fairy Lights,” Harry said to the Fat Lady.

The Fat Lady nodded once, and the portrait swung open. Harry and Hermione inhaled and exhaled, then walked into the room. Ron and Ginny were talking in whispers to each other, and were oblivious to Harry and Hermione’s entrance for the moment. That moment didn’t last long.

Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil hurried over to them, which got the attention of most of the crowd in the room.

“Harry, Hermione!” Parvati squealed, “We’re so happy for you!”

“Are you?” Hermione asked, “You certainly seemed to hope Harry would ask one of you to the Ball. You were looking at him when Professor McGonagall made her announcement.”

“You giggled at her, and looked at me – interrupting her speech,” Harry said, “it was rude.”

Lavender sniffed. “She didn’t take points, did she? She’s a Gryffindor Lion. She’s as biased to Gryffindor as Snape is to Slytherin. She wasn’t going to take points from us for something as silly as that.”

“And yeah, we were looking at Harry, Hermione,” Parvati said, “We were hoping he might ask one of us. But I’m sure every girl hoped he would ask them.”

“Including you!” Lavender said, looking smug, “So don’t act so prissy, Granger. Or maybe it is jealousy? Is that it? You don’t want any other girl to flirt with Harry? Are you going to be possessive about it? Because that is very unhealthy for a positive relationship. It is like you can’t trust him with other girls.”

“I think you’re right, Brown!” Ginny Weasley’s voice carried.

Harry and Hermione narrowed their eyes as Ron and Ginny walked over to them. The crowd seemed to part as the two Weasleys made their way over, even Lavender and Parvati shuffled to the
“Why shouldn’t she be possessive?” Ginny asked. “She should be trying to keep him from everyone. Especially if she’s so insecure, that she fears she won’t be able to keep him faithful to her before the Ball even comes around. Harry’s so fanciable. He’s the perfect guy, isn’t he? Every girl here knows it. He could have any girl. They’d do anything he wanted. He could have six girls on the evening of the Yule Ball lined up outside of a broom closet, waiting for him to invite them in and let him have his way with them!”

“Is that what you want, Ginevra?” Hermione asked. “Do you want to do that right now? Drop your knickers right in the middle of this room and let him have his way with you?”

Ginny’s face went deep red.

“How can Harry trust you, Ginny, if you are so easy like that?” Hermione asked. “If you’re willing to drop your knickers for Harry, why shouldn’t we believe you wouldn’t do it for any guy in here? Or in the rest of the castle? Why should we even believe that hasn’t happened yet, Ginevra? Are you still intact, Ginevra? Or will you tell me you lost it while riding a broomstick? What color was that broomstick? Peach?”

Several students in the common room laughed, jeered and cat-called in Ginny’s direction as her face lit up as red as some of the walls around the room.

“So you didn’t want to wait for Harry before giving your virginity away?” Hermione asked. “Were you hoping your skills at sex would lure Harry in?”

There was more jeering and cat-calling.

“How dare you insult her like that, you bitch?!” Ron growled.

“Do not speak to her like that, Weasley!” Harry said.

“Mate, listen to me,” Ron said, “She has you under a Love Potion or something! Get away from her. Ginny and I will take you to the Hospital Wing to have a Flushing Draught!”

“Why should I believe anything you have to say, Ron?” Harry said, “You didn’t even give me a proper apology after the First Task for betraying me! Why? Were you hoping I would be tired enough to accept a lame apology from you, just so you could once again say you were the best friend of the Boy-Who-Lived!”

“This is that bitch’s words coming out of your mouth, mate!” Ron said, “You know I gave you a right proper apology. You were too tired just to remember it. That is why you accepted my apology, because you knew I meant it! She told you my apology was so poor, because she wants to have you alone. Come on, mate. Why else would she be by your side after your name came out of the Goblet? How could she believe you didn’t put your name in, when everyone else here says you did! Except me and Ginny, mate! It took a bit for us to realize you were right. Because Granger told us you put your name in. It was her who made us stay away from you! She wants you all to herself!

“Please, Harry! Get away from her so I can hex her, before she can stop us from helping you. Then we can take you to get cured! If you are under her thrall too long, you will be too weak to survive the rest of the Tournament! She’s trying to kill you, don’t you see! She put your name in the Goblet of Fire! That is why she told us you did, because she knew exactly how to do it. That is why she was
so convincing! That is why we believed her! This is her plan! We’ve discovered your plan, Granger! Get away from him!”

Ron whipped out his wand. But before he could do anything, he was suddenly thrown across the room, and was now hanging on a wall above the fireplace.

“Students are not permitted to duel!!” A high but powerful voice said.

A house-elf appeared between Harry and Ginny. It was now holding Ron’s wand.

“You bloody creature!” Ron growled, “How dare you steal a pureblood’s wand! I will have you executed for this! Ginny! Help me! Harry, mate? Get away from that bitch and come help me! Then we’ll make sure this creature pays for its stupidity!”

“That creature, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall’s voice rang out as she entered the Common Room, “is my personal house-elf, Mallory. If I hear you threaten her, or another student, again. I will see you gone from this castle!”

“House-Elves are not supposed to attack anybody!” Ginny complained, “She should be punished… executed for attacking my brother!”

“She attacked Ron because he drew his wand on Harry and me,” Hermione said.

“I would never attack you, Harry!” Ron said, “I wanted you to get away from her. Professor McGonagall, Granger has Harry under a Love Potion! She’s trying to get him killed in this tournament!”

“Those are serious accusations, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said. “If you insist on continuing this line of thought, I will have no choice but to give you, your sister, Miss Granger and Mr. Potter Veritaserum, Truth Serum, to discovered what really happened here. Including what your motive is, Mr. Weasley, for accusing Miss Granger of such things! Are you still going to insist on those accusations?”

“No, he won’t, ma’am,” Ginny said, before Ron could say anything, “He’s simply jealous of Harry and… Hermione’s relationship. He told me earlier he was planning on trying to get Harry to break up with her. Everything he just said, he… he thought Harry would believe him. Because Harry is his friend, and Ron is Harry’s first and best friend.”

“Ginny!” Ron cried. “What are you doing?”

“Yes, what are you doing, Ginny?” Hermione asked. “Ron isn’t the only one trying to break up our relationship, is he? We have witnesses here who saw what you said. Are you going to tell us you’re not trying to break us up? Does that truly sound like you want to be our friend and support us?”

Ginny didn’t say anything.

Ron, however, decided to open his dumb mouth. “Lying bitch!”

“Detention, Mr. Weasley!” McGonagall exclaimed, “Tomorrow night my classroom, seven-o-clock! And you too, Miss Weasley!”

“What?!” Ginny barked. “Why me?!”
She yelped when McGonagall summoned her wand as well.

“Don’t think I didn’t see you with your wand out, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said, “If my elf hadn’t stopped your brother in time, I have enough evidence to know you would have joined him in whatever foolishness he was about to do! Especially since you won’t answer whether or not you wanted to interfere in Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s relationship. For that alone, I have reason you are not being entirely truthful about your actions.”

Ginny scowled. “Fine. It seems you want to make me your scapegoat, so I can’t say anything in my defense. Not that you’ll believe me anyway. Can I be excused?”

“Only if you are going straight to your dormitory, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said; she used her wand lowered Ron down from above the fireplace. “You too, Mr. Weasley. Both of you are grounded to your dormitories for the remainder of the evening. I will have dinner delivered to you in your dormitory. If you are lucky, you will receive your wands back tomorrow morning at breakfast. Go!”

Miraculously, neither Ron nor Ginny dared to look at Harry and Hermione with McGonagall’s presence in the room. They simply walked toward their respective stairwells and disappeared up the stairs.

“Messrs. Frederick and George Weasley,” McGonagall said, “I do hope you weren’t about to be involved in your siblings’ foolishness?”

“Only to stop what they were doing, Professor,” Fred said. “We cannot believe their actions tonight.”

“We’re appalled by their behavior,” George added. “And swear they are adopted.”

“Or maybe we are,” Fred said, “We can’t get the true answer out of Mum. She says she gave birth to all of us. We know she’s lying.”

“Because how can we be related to those two?!” Fred and George said in unison.

Minerva huffed when the others in the Common Room snickered or chuckled.

“Adopted or not, please keep an eye on your siblings more often, Messrs. Weasley,” McGonagall said, seriously, “If they step another toe out of line, they very well might be suspended or expelled from this castle. Understand?”

Gasps and whispers were heard around the Common Room. A student was rarely ever expelled from Hogwarts! Rubeus Hagrid might have been the last one, and Newt Scamander before him! Certainly nobody had been expelled while Dumbledore was Headmaster!

“Yes, ma’am,” Fred and George said.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, turning to the new couple, “Follow me. Neither of you are in trouble. I just wish to have a discussion with you.”

Harry and Hermione nodded and followed the Head of Gryffindor House out through the portrait-hole. Then she led them down the corridor, and led them to a red and gold tapestry several feet from the Fat Lady.
McGonagall waved her wand, and the tapestry folded itself up toward the ceiling, revealing a door behind it. Harry and Hermione gasped at the sight of the door. They had never known this was here, even with the Marauder’s Map.

McGonagall muttered something under breath, and they heard a mechanical sound. The Professor opened the door and led the couple inside. Harry expected to enter a room, but found another corridor, this one narrower than the one they were just in. There were four doors along the walls of the corridor.

“The three further doors lead to a small common room, and currently vacant private quarters meant for the Head Boy and Head Girl, when said students are Gryffindors. Percy Weasley enjoyed said room last year. The common room is used for the Head Boy and Head Girl and their guests to hang out together, since they are not given permission into each other’s private quarters. This door here, is where our current destination is.”

McGonagall led them through another door, and into the adjoining room. Harry looked around the room and found it was similar to the various Professor’s offices he had been in – aside from the Headmaster’s, who was one of the grander rooms in the castle.

The room had red and gold wallpaper on the walls. Gryffindor colors. There was a fireplace that had lit just as McGonagall and the two students entered the room. Instead of a desk where a Professor might sit, there was a comfortable-looking sitting area near the fireplace. Two comfortable-looking couches and two chairs were positioned there.

“Please sit down, the both of you,” McGonagall requested, “You may sit together if you wish. In fact it might be better to do so. I fear this will be a difficult conversation, and you may need each other’s comfort.”

Harry and Hermione blushed, even as they were curious and confused at the Professor’s statement. They walked over to a couch and sat down, while McGonagall sat down in a chair.

“This,” McGonagall said, “is the office of the Head of Gryffindor. Behind that door, is the Head of Gryffindor’s private quarters.”

She indicated a door Harry had not noticed until now.

“I used to use these rooms before I became the Deputy Headmistress,” McGonagall said. “Now it is vacant. I now believe it was a grave mistake of mine to have vacated this room.”

“What, Professor?” Hermione asked.

“Because it means I have lost focus on being the Head of Gryffindor, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, sadly. “Tell me, you two, can you ever recall a time, before tonight, when I met you and the other students to have discussions with you about anything?”

“After Hermione was petrified in our second year,” Harry said, frowning, “You gave us a warning that the school might close.”

“Last year,” Hermione said, “When Sirius broke into the Gryffindor Tower. You… yelled at Neville, as I recall.”
McGonagall sighed. “Yes. Notice a pattern? I’m only there to meet the students when something bad happens. That is not my only duties when it comes to the Head of Gryffindor House. Rather, it should not be my only duties. Ask a Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, even a Slytherin, and they’ll tell you their Heads of Houses – yes, even Professor Snape – has meetings every now and then with their students. For example, I know the other three Heads meet every new first year each year, and introduce themselves and discuss the ins and outs of their particular House. For example, Ravenclaw has a private library.”

“What?!” Hermione squeaked; then she blushed. “Sorry, Professor.”

“Quite,” McGonagall muttered, making Harry laugh and Hermione blush deeper, “Each House has their own secrets and things that make it special Ravenclaw’s is the private library. Now, as I was saying, I haven’t hosted any meetings like that in several years. I believe the last one was the year before you two started here. I am afraid I am terribly overworked in my duties. Nobody should ever have three separate jobs.”

Hermione muttered, “Headmaster Dumbledore.”

McGonagall gave a wry smile. “Very much so, Miss Granger. The Headmaster, aside from this job, is also the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and also has important duties with the International Confederation of Warlocks. Three very busy jobs, and sometimes I feel that my duties are even busier, and all of my jobs are in the same location! I have been so remiss in my duties as Head of Gryffindor lately, and this year, tonight especially, it shows.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, you are here for three reasons. First, is to tell you something I’ve should have done three years ago. Second, I wish to discuss with you the events of this evening. Third, the events of this year concerning Gryffindor House.

“But before I begin with that, I must do something. Forgive me, both of you for what I must do.”

She waved her wand toward the couple, and for a mad moment, they thought she was going to attack them! But nothing happened. She just stared at them for a moment, her eyes traveling from Harry to Hermione, and back and forth.

“I am sorry, you two,” McGonagall said. “I had to take Mr. Weasley’s accusation seriously. I checked both of you for Love Potions. You are not under the influence of any. Unfortunately, I cannot check you for anything besides that.”

“Can Madam Pomfrey?” Hermione asked.

McGonagall grimaced. “Yes, but… I can’t ask her. If you are under any negative Potions or enchantments, it probably means someone in this castle may be responsible for that. I do not want them to discover such a thing if you were to get them removed here. Madam Pomfrey could give you Flushing Draughts, but… a proper evaluation would inform us if you were under any negative influence. And maybe who is responsible. A Healer at the wizarding hospital St. Mungo’s can do it. In fact, I have a friend who would do it for me as a favor. I tell you what. I’ll contact my friend, and arrange an appointment for her to meet the three of us for a meeting in Hogsmeade. She can evaluate the two of you then.”

“Would my parents and Harry’s guardians need to assent to such things?” Hermione asked.

Harry grimaced at that question. The Dursleys were cautious about doctors when it came to Harry,
due to past malnutrition. They would never give permission.

“Not for this, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Your permission, and mine, will be enough.”

“Then I accept,” Hermione said.

“Me too,” Harry said, “Er… what if we are influenced by anything? I mean… how would we know?”

“I recognize no oddities with either of you at the moment,” McGonagall said, with a sigh. “Until we can get that appointment, I’m afraid that will have to be the best we can do.”

“We’ll just hope it means nothing is bad for us,” Hermione said.

“I suppose it has to be enough for now,” Harry said. “I mean… I don’t feel different. If Ron or Ginny were trying to keep me and Hermione apart… today tells us they didn’t succeed.”

“A good point, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said. “For now, as you said, that must be enough proof of no immediate problems. So I think I can move on with my reason for us being here.”

She cleared her throat and clasped her hands together. “I was going to start with that Halloween of first year, but I just realized something else. Mr. Potter, if you had any other choice, would you have played Seeker that first year? If I hadn’t basically ordered you to?”

“I… don’t know, Professor,” Harry said. “Even then I loved flying. From the first moment I was on a broom I loved flying. I suppose if Quidditch was the only way I could fly on a broom, then – yeah, I would have played Seeker.”

“Perhaps,” McGonagall said, “But I ordered you to be Seeker. I did not ask you. I didn’t even take in the fact you knew so little about Quidditch. I should have been more respectful toward you about that whole business.”

“You’re forgiven ma’am,” Harry said, “I do love Quidditch. I might not have been on the team without your help. Certainly wouldn’t have had such a good broom like the one you gave me.”

McGonagall allowed a rare smile. “Thank you, Mr. Potter. That was the easiest part of this, I believe. On Halloween of your first year, I took notice you were missing for most of that day, Miss Granger, and I did nothing until the troll was in the castle. You were almost injured or worse, and it took Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley to protect you. Not me, or the Headmaster. Two first year students. Yes, I know the story you told me, Miss Granger. You did not go search for it yourself, young lady. You were in that bathroom because of Ron Weasley and his big mouth.”

Hermione blushed. “I apologize for lying to you back then. I didn’t want to get Harry and Ron in trouble. I should have been in the Great Hall for the feast that night, and I was embarrassed that I had spent so long in the bathroom feeling sorry for myself. Also, I hoped if I had stopped Harry and Ron from getting in trouble, they might become my friends.”

“It worked,” Harry said, smiling.

McGonagall smiled. “Apology accepted. I ask for your forgiveness too. It was one of my mistakes I’ve made, especially concerning the both of you. Several mistakes, if I include all those times Mr. Malfoy and his friends decided to go to the Gryffindor table for no other reason than to pester you. It
always ended up with Professor Snape taking points from you, and I could have prevented each incident by telling Mr. Malfoy to go to his own table.

“Then there is the detention which ended up with you in the Forbidden Forest. I learned you were out past curfew helping Hagrid with that dragon of his. But I only heard about it the following summer. I wish you would have told me what you were doing, or had come to me before that evening. I would have helped Hagrid with the dragon. But… since I realize I’ve not been a proper Head of Gryffindor, you might have been wary about me.

“I made that even worse with the Philosopher’s Stone incident. You three came to me that day to warn me the Stone was in danger. To my deep regret, I dismissed you, simply because, Mr. Potter, you and your friends remind me of a certain other group of friends in the past.”

“The Marauders,” Harry said, smiling.

“Very much so,” McGonagall said. “I assumed you had become like your father, and was trying to prank me. I should have realized it wasn’t a prank. To my deep regret, you nearly got yourselves killed that night! And yet, the three of you were able to get past the obstacles. Do you know how embarrassing it is that three first years got past all those obstacles? Even the first door was opened with a first year Charm! I tore into the Headmaster the following summer over all of that! I was embarrassed with myself and my fellow staff that we could not do anything better to protect the Stone! And that it took a first year to protect it for us! Again, my apologies on the behalf of my fellow staff!

“Then your second year. Oh, where to begin? The Basilisk and the Chamber was a clear disaster for all staff in this castle. How did we not realize it was a Basilisk? The King of Serpents, an obvious beast Slytherin would have used! To my deep regret, I should have pressed into the Headmaster deeper, when I suggested he bring in the DMLE to help us! He did not! It lead to several students getting petrified including you, Miss Granger, and two students almost dying! There is also the whole ‘Heir of Slytherin’ thing. The gossip and rumors, the insults and accusations toward you, Mr. Potter. I should have stopped it! And again, you, Mr. Potter, had to do our jobs for us and save the day, and Ginny Weasley’s life.

“And how does she repay you? By almost attacking you tonight?! By helping her brother provoke you, then lying about it all to me, of all people! A Professor! The nerve of that girl! She basically dismissed the fact you saved her life, over the desire to be with you romantically! She dishonored you greatly, Mr. Potter. Not for her actions tonight, but for turning on you after saving her life! Things like that should be sacred in the wizarding world!”

Harry nodded. That was a very good point.

“Miss Granger, you’re going to argue with me,” McGonagall said, “But I should have never allowed you to use the Time Turner. Percy Weasley took as many classes as you did and didn’t need a Time Turner. Even then, I could have convinced you not to take Divination and Muggle Studies, told you that you would have resigned from those classes by the end of the year, as you had done. You exhausted yourself, and with the Dementors nearby, it was even worse! I feel terrible about not realizing these things much sooner.”

Hermione merely shrugged. Harry knew she couldn’t admit she was okay with using the Time Turner, given how they had used it at the end of last year. He expected that was her very line of thought.
“And so we move onto this year,” McGonagall said. “Something tells me I don’t know half of what has been going on in this castle. So I can’t apologize about any of it yet, since I don’t know what to apologize for. I will apologize for one thing, however.

“You see, I could have prevented what took place a little while ago between yourselves and the Weasleys. And I did not. I had predicted a confrontation between you two and them, and I did nothing to stop it before it started.”

“How did you predict it?” Harry asked, curiously.

“I am sure you’re aware your performance in the Great Hall today caused many girls to become jealous and angry,” McGonagall said.

“Yes, we’re aware,” Hermione said, “We just decided to ignore it.”

“Did you ignore young Mr. and Miss Weasley during lunch?” McGonagall asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said, “We – ah – predicted the confrontation as well, and we didn’t want it to take place at lunch.”

“You predicted a confrontation – the confrontation that happened in the Common Room?” McGonagall asked.

“Yes,” Hermione said, “We were expecting it either before or after dinner.”

McGonagall sighed. “I suppose it was inevitable to the point you couldn’t avoid it otherwise.”

“If it happened tonight,” Harry said, “It could have happened in my dormitory. There wouldn’t have been any witnesses. We didn’t want to risk it.”

“I suppose I see your point,” McGonagall said. “Well, if you hadn’t ignored Mr. and Miss Weasley at lunch, you would have seen what I did. The expressions on the two youngest Weasleys were – to be frank – the darkest expressions on any student I’ve seen in a long time. Worse than even Professor Snape can achieve. They were worse than Slytherins, even. Their expressions of jealousy and anger were so terrible, that I immediately knew they were up to something suspicious. They only stopped glaring at you two, because Miss Weasley noticed me looking at her. Then she made her brother stop.”

“Oh, god,” Hermione whispered, “We… we didn’t know it would be that bad.”

“I hoped it wouldn’t have been so bad either,” McGonagall said, “But I’m glad I took precautions. That is why I asked my house-elves to watch you two and them. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, I will warn you. This is not over between you and them. They’re… up to something. I don’t know what, but I don’t like it. You two getting together has set those two off something serious. Let’s just say I wish I could suspend them this evening. Be careful around them, you two.”

“We will,” Hermione promised.

“I won’t let them do anything to Hermione, Professor,” Harry said.

“They won’t do anything to you either, Harry,” Hermione said, “I’ll make sure of it.”
“No, you two,” McGonagall said, “I will make sure of it. You’re going to have an house-elf escort everywhere you go for the foreseeable future. When you aren’t together, there will be one for each of you. Don’t worry, they won’t interfere in private moments you two want. They’ll be watchful, but they’ll make sure you have privacy. You will also never see them unless they want you to. I wish this wasn’t necessary, but it is.”

Harry thought Hermione would argue, given her stance on House-Elves. But even she knew she needed the security an elf would give her.

“We’ll agree to that, Professor,” Hermione said.

“So… Professor?” Harry asked. “I think I might know a house-elf that would love to do the job. He currently works here actually.”

“Call him, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “And I will call one of mine. Mallory!”

“Dobby?” Harry called.

Two house-elves suddenly appeared as they were called. Harry and Hermione recognized the elf as the same one who had defended them from Ron earlier. And of course, both of them were familiar with Dobby.

“The Great Harry Potter calls Dobby?” Dobby asked.

“Do you know Professor McGonagall, Dobby?” Harry asked.

“Dobby is very familiar with Professor Kitty,” Dobby said, nodding.

McGonagall’s lips thinned at the nickname. “Hello, young Dobby. Thank you for being here. You as well, Mallory. Dobby, Mr. Potter tells me you may be able to assist him with something.”

“Dobby will always help the Great Harry Potter!” Dobby exclaimed.

“Mr. Potter and Miss Granger have recently come into some complications,” McGonagall said. “I believe they may be in danger from someone they thought were their friends. Two students, Ronald and Ginevra Weasley, might be plotting something we are not clear about. They attempted to attack Mr. Potter and Miss Granger this evening, before Mallory stepped in and stopped them. Dobby, Mallory, I want you two to watch and protect Mr. Potter and Miss Granger respectively, night and day while here in this castle. Not all night, of course. One of you will rest for a few hours while they sleep, while the other is keeping an eye on them. Then the other will do the same while the first rests. Do not be seen by anyone, including Mr. Potter and Miss Granger unless you must step in to help them. Call when they ask you to come. Mr. Potter and Miss Granger will only call for you as an emergency. Is this clear?”

Harry and Hermione agreed, as did Dobby and Mallory.

“Dobby promises to protect and watch Harry and his Hermy!” Dobby exclaimed.

Hermione snorted softly at the nickname.

“Excellent,” McGonagall said. “The two of you may remain here, out of sight, until I call for you again.”
Dobby and Mallory bowed, then disappeared, but they did not leave the room.

“Well, that makes me feel better,” Hermione said.

“Same here,” Harry said.

“I have another plan to keep you safer,” McGonagall said, “But I will mention that after we’re through with the next topic of this meeting. Because if my suspicions are correct, the plan will definitely need to come into fruition. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger. I want you to be completely honest with me. Do not be afraid to keep anything back. There will be no repercussions from myself, staff or any students, especially your house-mates because of this. I just want your honest answer. My question… how safe do you feel in the Gryffindor Tower?”

Harry and Hermione blinked at such an unexpected question.

“Let me make it easier,” McGonagall said. “When you first arrived here, I told you your house would be like your family. Does that hold true at this moment?”

“Honestly, Professor,” Hermione said, “I think Harry will agree with me on this. If our house is like a family, I think we might want to apply for divorce from Gryffindor.”

McGonagall frowned and closed her eyes. She pinched her nose, then clasped her hands and opened her eyes.

“Forgive me,” McGonagall said. “I… actually expected that answer. Now I want you to clarify.”

“Gryffindor hasn’t treated me – and Hermione, I suppose – like family, since my name came out of the Goblet of Fire,” Harry said. “Okay, they were thrilled I was chosen as a Champion. However, they would not listen to me or believe me when I said I did not put my name in. When those damned badges claiming I ‘stink’ were made, there were several Gryffindors who wore them. I’m not sure if Ron and Ginny wore them.”

“They did,” McGonagall muttered, “The badges had charms on them that – if activated – would make none of the staff or certain other individuals see them.”

“That is why the staff never did anything about them!” Hermione gasped.

“Indeed, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Mostly. I could see them, because, due to my Animagus for, I have… enhanced senses. My eyesight isn’t superhuman, but it is far better than normal. If I wear glasses, they are for show. I can see through enchantments like Notice-Me-Not Charms. Mr. and Miss Weasley used such charms on the badges so you wouldn’t see them, as did others. Those who didn’t use them wanted you to know they wore them. If I were to ask all the Gryffindors how many of them wore the badges, and to be completely honest about it, I assure you, there would be a lot more students who wore those badges than you think.”

“However, the Headmaster, who could also see them, didn’t want me to do anything about the badges. He didn’t give me a great reason for doing so, but unfortunately, I accepted his request. For that, I apologize once again. Please continue.”

“The Gryffindors were very sneaky about their… dislike… toward me, and again, Hermione, I think,” Harry said; Hermione frowned and nodded. “They mostly disliked me for one main reason.
Because I am a reluctant Champion. If I had said I put my name in, they might have supported me, and do it honestly. But because I do not want to be Champion, they support me publicly, and disregard me privately. I’ve heard insults and various other negative remarks since Halloween.

“They cheered me on at the First Task and cheered me afterward at the party I was forced to attend. But only because they thought I was no longer a reluctant Champion, because I had done so well. They didn’t understand I did all that to survive. Not because I wanted a good score. When they realized I was still that reluctant Champion, the insults started again. At least a handful of students told me I should have been eaten by the dragon. Or simply lay down and summoned a white flag instead of my broomstick. Since I was a reluctant Champion, they wanted me to make myself look like an idiot during the Tasks.”

“Merciful Merlin,” McGonagall muttered.

“I had to ward my bed so none of my dorm-mates would hex me or something.” Harry said; he squeezed Hermione’s hand, which he had been holding for several minutes as he smiled at her, “Hermione helped me with figuring out how to put them up. I might not have made it to the First Task in one piece if it wasn’t for her. I definitely wouldn’t have survived the First Task if it wasn’t for her.”

Hermione blushed and smiled. She kissed his cheek, then blushed deeper when she looked at McGonagall.

“Sorry,” she murmured.

“No apology needed, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “I am very glad you are there for Mr. Potter, and he there for you. It sounds as if the both of you have helped each other get through all the troubles this year.”

Harry and Hermione nodded and smiled as they squeezed each other’s hand.

“I think the only reason Ron apologized to me after the First Task,” Harry said, “was so he could be Harry Potter’s best friend again. Or is that the Boy-Who-Lived? Was it all for show. I’m quite sure it was. Because while he portrayed himself as my friend, he treated Hermione just as bad as he always does. Frankly, I don’t think his attitude changed toward Hermione in the past three years. He still behaves – toward her – as that little boy who bullied her and scared her off into that bathroom. He just does a great job at not letting me know how bad it is. And Hermione…”

“Ron was Harry’s first friend, Professor,” Hermione said, “I didn’t want to ruin their friendship by telling him that Ron is still the same bully when Harry isn’t around. I was too scared to lose Harry’s friendship if I said anything. If I lost Harry’s trust or friendship, I… I might have left Hogwarts and never come back.”

Harry’s eyes widened as he looked at her. She never told him that.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” she said, “It is true. I might love being a student here, but without you in my life, I wouldn’t be able to bear being here another day. Especially as each day would be a reminder of what you and I have, or… had, because it would be past tense in that scenario. I would have to you see you every day if I was to remain here, under that type of scenario. I could not do that if you no longer considered me a friend.”

“That will never happen, Hermione,” Harry said, “Never. I… Professor, I would leave too, if she
was forced to leave Hogwarts. I would not care what you, Dumbledore, the students, or even the Ministry would have to say to me. I’d leave with her. I’d probably convince her to go to another school with me. Maybe Ilvermorny in the States since they speak English. I can’t be here if she isn’t, Professor.”

“It pains me to hear it, but it does not surprise me, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said. “I completely understand. Every staff member, including me, has failed you in some way or another – even those Professors you’ve never met or had a class with -- ever since you started your education here. I am apologizing for that tonight, and starting anew. I am going to try to redeem myself. And I will start with this.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger. I have heard enough for me to make this decision. Starting tonight, after this meeting, the two of you will not step foot in Gryffindor Tower for anything ever again. You’ll still be Gryffindors, but from now on, you will reside in the Gryffindor Head Boy and Head Girl rooms. If we have a Head Boy or Head Girl in Gryffindor before your seventh year, we will make different arrangements for you. Until then, those quarters are your residences, and the Common Room is yours to share. You can invite any friends you wish, however – be wary about who you invite.

“After this meeting, I will be replacing the door and tapestry outside in the corridor with a Portrait. Only you two, me, and anyone you give permission to will see that portrait. There will be a Notice-Me-Not Charm on the portrait and the doorway keyed to anyone besides you two, me and anyone you wish to invite here to hang out in the Common Room for a set amount of time per day. Because of this security, there will be no reason for a password. Anyone not welcome here will not be able to see you – or those who are invited – going through that doorway. They will believe you went elsewhere in the castle instead.

“Of course there are rules. Neither of you are allowed in either one’s private quarters. There will be portraits on the doors of your Quarters that you may address if the occupant – each of you respectively – is inside. The portrait – who will have another copy inside the room – will inform the occupant you have a visitor. You can then choose to go to the Common Room located across the hall from your rooms, or elsewhere in the castle.

“Do not abuse the Common Room privilege. While I will permit some types of intimacy, there will be enchantments that prevent any clothes from being removed while you are in that room. Therefore, I am sure you can use your imagination as to what is permitted when it comes to intimacy. Do you understand?”

Harry and Hermione blushed and nodded.

“Yes, Professor,” Hermione said.

“I understand, Professor,” Harry said.

“Are there any Gryffindors you can trust at this moment?” McGonagall asked. “Whether or not you wish to invite them to your Common Room is not the point right now. I want to know, so I am not addressing them in the near future when I meet with the rest of my students.”

“There are a few, I suppose,” Harry said, “Neville Longbottom, Fred and George Weasley, Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet and Katie Bell.”

“Thank goodness,” McGonagall muttered, “I don’t have to kick anyone off the Quidditch team.”
Harry chuckled. “I can’t think of anyone else. Wait! Um… the entire class of Gryffindor first year students.”

“I’m listening,” McGonagall said.

“Although some of them might have been mean to me or insulted me,” Harry said, “It was probably due to peer pressure, or the desire to fit in. They haven’t been here long enough to know the House dynamic. I will forgive all of them as long as they know they were in the wrong and do not do it again.”

“That was very thoughtful, Harry,” Hermione said, “I completely agree.”

“As do I,” McGonagall said, smiling. “Peer pressure could be considered bullying, and we will cast that blame on the older students. Trying to fit in… understandable. They were trying to prove they were Gryffindors. They just did so the wrong way. Yes, they will not be targets for my… ire. Miss Granger, anybody you wish to add?”

Hermione shook her head. “I’d say Lavender and Parvati, but… now that I am with you, Harry? Especially after what they said when we returned to the Common Room. They are not our friends.”

“I understand your caution, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “What about the Prefects?”

“I… I don’t even know who the Prefects are, Professor,” Harry said.

“Well, that tells me how bad they are when it comes to you, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall muttered.

“I know who they are,” Hermione said, “They are as bad, Professor. They didn’t do their jobs of helping us when we needed them.”

McGonagall sighed. “As much as I don’t want to give the Weasley twins a Prefect Badge, it looks like I have to give one or both of them a badge, as well as Miss Bell and one of the two older Chasers. Because it sounds as if the others do not deserve their Badges.”

“Sorry, Professor,” Harry said.

“Do not apologize to me for this, Mr. Potter – Harry,” McGonagall said, sternly; “You do not need to apologize to me for anything. Do you understand me? None of this is your fault, Harry. None of it. It is mine. If I didn’t know the trouble it would bring, I would resign as Head of Gryffindor. But it needs to be me, because only I know – now, that is – what is going on in my Tower.”

“I can’t think of anything to say,” Harry said. “I’d apologize for that, but….”

“I understand,” McGonagall said. “Dobby, Mallory?”

The two house-elves appeared. “Mallory, gather Miss Granger’s belongings from Gryffindor Tower, and put them in the Head Girl’s room down the hall. Dobby, do the same for Mr. Potter and put them in the Head Boy’s Room. Come back when you’re finished.”

Mallory returned thirty seconds later.

“Done, Mistress,” Mallory said.
“Well done, Mallory,” McGonagall said.

Three nervous humans waited for nearly a minute before Dobby returned.

“Done, Professor Kitty,” Dobby said, “Dobby be late because he be dropping eaves.”

“Dropping eaves?” Harry asked.

“He overheard something,” Hermione said, “What did you hear, Dobby?”

“Dobby be hearing bad Weasel boy,” Dobby said, “Bad Weasel boy be ranting and saying very bad language about not being able to get into the Great Harry Potter’s trunk.”

Harry growled. “I knew he had a history of stealing from my trunk! I should have known he was responsible for the missing candy and Galleons. At least ten Galleons over the past three and a half years have gone missing. Maybe more! And all of my dorm-mates denied taking anything every time. They said it was someone else in the Tower. Anyone could get in my dorm, including girls. Ginny proved that by stealing from me in my second year. Only this year, I warded it when I warded my bed.”

“I will make Mr. Weasley and Miss Weasley tell me about everything they’ve taken from your trunk and other trunks,” McGonagall said, “If they stole from yours… they possibly stole from others.”

“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said.

“Did Mr. Weasley say anything specific, Dobby?” McGonagall asked.

“Bad Weasley boy be saying he wants the Great Harry Potter’s broomstick, and Cloak,” Dobby said, “Said he deserved them for everything he did, and that he had earned it as another reward.”

“Another reward?” Hermione said.

“He didn’t clarify?” Harry asked.

“No, Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said, “Dobby believes there was something stopping him. Magics be preventing him from saying too much if anyone was listening. Dobby be hearing more.”

“What did he say?” Harry asked.

“Bad Weasley be saying he wants the map too,” Dobby said, “so he can watch the Great Harry Potter and his Hermy. He… he be thinking you haven’t had a first kiss. He says he wants to be there to prevent you from kissing your Hermy. Because only he should be kissing Hermy, and only Bad Weasel Girl should be kissing the Great Harry Potter. He… he be trying to say more, but the magics stopped him.”

McGonagall pinched her nose. “Mr. and Miss Weasley are plotting against you two, and if I can’t discover this so-called magic, I won’t be able to know what that plot is.”

“Dobby be having idea,” Dobby said.

“Yes, Dobby?” Harry said.
“When Dobby be working for Bad Former Master Malfoy,” Dobby said, “Bad Master Malfoy be wanting Dobby and other elves to find and collect artifacts. Not bad artifacts. Helpful artifacts that helped Bad Master eavesdrop or spy on certain things. Dobby be certain young Bad Malfoy has these items. Dobby knows how to sneak into young Bad Malfoy’s trunk to take these artifacts if they be there. Dobby can give artifacts to Great Harry Potter and his Hermy to wear. If Bad Weasels be talking in secret, believing nobody else is hearing, and Great Harry Potter and his Hermy overhear while wearing artifacts, Dobby thinks they be hearing Bad Weasel secrets.”

“So let me get this straight,” McGonagall said. “I cannot outright ask Mr. and Miss Weasley to tell me their secrets. They can only talk about it, and be overheard with these artifacts if they believe nobody is listening. Draco Malfoy has said artifacts that might assist Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, if they wear these, and eavesdrop on Mr. and Miss Weasley.”

“Dobby believe so, Professor Kitty,” Dobby said. “House-Elves cannot wear these artifacts. Elf magic interferes when wearing artifacts.”

“So we would have to be lucky to hear something,” Harry said.

McGonagall sighed. “These artifacts sound like something Draco Malfoy should not have. You have my permission to steal them, Dobby. Simply because I believe Professor Snape would never let me have them, and I fear we need to use them so we can learn what Mr. and Miss Weasley are up to. I will create fakes of these artifacts, convincing fakes, to give you to return to Mr. Malfoy’s trunk. Go now, Dobby. Be safe.”

“Dobby be back soon, Professor Kitty,” Dobby said.

McGonagall sighed as Dobby vanished. “I never believed I’d be doing something like this. I’ve never had to deal with something like this. Jealous girls and boys, sure. A prime example is your parents, Mr. Potter.”

Harry perked up, always eager to hear about his parents. “Really?”

“Yes, McGonagall said, with a very brief smile, “Long before your parents first became a couple, your father still badly fancied your mother. He was paranoid that if your mother went on a date with another boy, it’d be a long-term relationship and he’d never get a chance with her. Your father discouraged several of your mother’s potential suitors by pranking them, so that when they went on a date with her, they had very bad dates. Bad flatulence, for example. Or a boy wouldn’t be able to keep their eyes off your mother’s… breasts. Or they’d be overcome with bad breath (for those who wanted to kiss your mother), or symptoms of the Muggle disease known as Tourette’s.”

Hermine giggled. “They’d have uncontrollable urges to use swearwords. Targeted at Harry’s mother?”

“Precisely” McGonagall said, with a smirk. “Lily had so many bad dates that she finally gave up for two years. The next date she went on was with James, and they never looked back. Aside from your father’s knack for cursing your mother’s suitors, there was a long history of stuff not associated with any Marauders. Bad relationship break-ups that resulted in hexes and curses and pranks for a few weeks. There’s even been some pregnancy scares, and a couple of pregnant seventh years who chose to become pregnant before they finished their education.”

McGonagall muttered a phrase under her breath, and Harry swore he heard her say “Molly
Weasley.” He decided, if it was true, it would certainly explain a lot of things.

McGonagall continued. “Never have I dealt with someone like Mr. and Miss Weasley actively plotting of deliberately interfering in your new relationship. Enough to accuse you of such ridiculous things like they did tonight! Believe it or not, I’ve never had to deal with anybody, until now, trying to break another couple up. Your father targeted your mother’s suitors on their first date, before they could ever agree to become a couple. No established couples. So that doesn’t count. I am quite sure Ronald and Ginevra are plotting to do something to break you up as a couple. Permanently. Maybe to a point that…”

“What, Professor?” Hermione asked, when the Professor hesitated.

“Because of your show in the Great Hall,” McGonagall said, “Everybody will know you’re going together to the Ball. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, I have to apologize for what I’m about to request of you. I know you wanted to keep your relationship private for now. I have to ask you to consider changing your mind. You need to convince everyone in this castle there is no doubt that you two are together and are a dedicated couple to each other.

“Simply because I believe Mr. and Miss Weasley’s endgame may very well be to try to break you up through nefarious means, and convince everyone that there is nothing sinister with the way you two ended your relationship. I can think of several scenarios, you too. It is very plausible. But until I can come up with proof, I cannot move against Mr. and Miss Weasley at all.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other.

“Do you really want to do this, Hermione?” Harry asked. “I know you wanted this privacy for us. So you wouldn’t be seen in the spotlight as the girlfriend of the Boy-Who-Lived.”

“Harry, if I have to sacrifice privacy for the promise that nobody will be able to break us up,” Hermione said, “I’ll do it in a heartbeat.”

“First public kiss at dinner?” Harry suggested.

“Ron and Ginny won’t be there,” Hermione said.

“Professor Snape probably will,” Harry said.

“I will handle Professor Snape,” McGonagall said. “I’ll use Dobby’s thievery plan as a white lie. I’ll say a Gryffindor has accused a Slytherin of stealing an priceless family heirloom. But he doesn’t know which one it is, because multiple suspects have threatened to steal it. Professor Snape will have to investigate… immediately. Stealing family heirlooms would get the perpetrator in a lot of trouble.”

“If you think that will work,” Harry said, “Then go ahead.”

“If you think you must,” Hermione said.

“For you two to protect yourselves and your relationship,” McGonagall said, “I will do so. I mean it, you two. You cannot leave doubt with anyone in this castle. Because it will be the students who will have to come forward if anything suspicious about a break-up between you two is noticed.”

“What about you?” Hermione asked.
“I’m afraid since I’ve placed Mr. and Miss Weasley in detention, I’ve made them wary of me,” McGonagall said. “Believe me, some of my plausible scenarios have me completely forgetting anything concerning your relationship.”

“Obliviation?” Hermione gasped. “You think you might be Obliviated of our relationship?”

“I think there is a good chance if Mr. and Miss Weasley succeed,” McGonagall said, “we three might be Obliviated of any evidence of your relationship. We might forget everything about your relationship, from the fact that you fancy each other – or ever did – to the beginning of your relationship this morning – to whatever happens between the two of you.”

“Oh, god,” Hermione whimpered.

Harry wanted to throw up.

“They cannot possibly Obliviate the mass of students,” McGonagall said, “If they could, it might have happened before now. That is why there is no possibility that you two have an already existing romantic relationship you do not remember. Unless it happened during a summer, of course. Like this summer. Fewer people to Obliviate. Too many to Obliviate here, before it becomes risky. So they will be your witnesses. Convince them, you two. They will be the reason you remain a couple for however long you wish that to happen.”

“What can we do about this right now?” Harry asked.

“Trust Dobby and Mallory to protect you,” McGonagall said, “Be wary, be cautious. Constant Vigilance as Professor Moody would say. And be suspicious of what Mr. and Miss Weasley are doing. For you may soon be able to discover their true plan. Until you discover that plan, we cannot move against them at all. We can only do damage control before they do any more damage.”

“The Opening Salvos,” Hermione said, “We have to make the opening moves. We have to be several pieces ahead.”

“Against a very good chess player,” Harry muttered.

“If you remember, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “That chessboard you beat in your first year was mine.”

“Ron beat it,” Harry said.

“Because I wasn’t able to raise the difficulty on it too much,” McGonagall said. “The Headmaster prevented me. Apparently he wanted the thief – Quirrel – to pass the obstacles and get stuck at the Mirror. Anyway, I am a better chess player than Mr. Weasley. Between the three of us, we can get through this.”

Dobby chose to appear at that moment. “And Dobby will do everything to help the Great Harry Potter, his Hermy, and Professor Kitty against the Bad Weasels.”

“Do you have the items that will help us in that quest, Dobby?” McGonagall asked.

Dobby opened his hands. Two bracelets were in his palms. “The Great Harry Potter and his Hermy be wearing one at all times. Then they just be listening when Bad Weasels be speaking bad secrets, and they be hearing those bad secrets.”
“I wish to check those bracelets before I give them to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger,” McGonagall said.

Dobby set the bracelets on the table in the center of the area. McGonagall carefully ran her wand over each of the bracelets. Then she conjured two identical copies of the bracelets and gave them to Dobby.

“These will last for about a month,” McGonagall said, “Dobby, place them in Mr. Malfoy’s trunk. Then you may come back and resume your duties. Thank you for everything, Dobby.”

“Yes thank you, Dobby,” Hermione gushed.

“Thanks, buddy,” Harry said, affectionately.

“Dobby be glad to be helping the Great Harry Potter, his Hermy and Professor Kitty,” Dobby said.

He took the fake bracelets and vanished again.

“Well, there is nothing sinister with these bracelets,” McGonagall said. “They do have some interesting enchantments. I think they will do as Dobby said. You can wear them. I will place an enchantment on them so Mr. Malfoy, nor anyone else who might have bad intentions toward you, notices the bracelets as anything but costume jewelry. They shouldn’t interfere with the already present magic on the bracelets.”

She cast the necessary enchantments, then motioned to them. Harry and Hermione each took one of them.

“I believe we are finished here for now,” McGonagall said. “You two know your mission. You can explore your new quarters. Tonight at dinner, I will ask all the Gryffindors – aside from the two of you, and those students you named, including the First Years – to remain in the Great Hall after dinner. And I will speak to all of them about their behavior this year. Mr. and Miss Weasley won’t be there, but I’ll have an explanation for them during their detention.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Hermione said, “For everything.”

“What she said,” Harry said, “Since you don’t think you deserve my thanks for anything.”

McGonagall smiled. “You two are most welcome. I just wish none of this was necessary. Enjoy your new Quarters. I will escort there, and show you in, then I’ll see you at dinner for your second show.”

“The Opening Salvos,” Hermione said. “Because apparently… we’re at war with Weasleys.”

Chapter End Notes

Cry havoc! And let slip the dogs of war!

(Warning: Long Author’s Note ahead, I feel I need to explain this chapter, because of its
I feel so mean to Harry and Hermione right now. They wanted nothing more than to keep their relationship private until the Yule Ball. It was their one desire for their relationship (at least in the early days). They even discussed where they could kiss and snog in private, just to keep that dream. And it dies less than twelve hours after they got together, because they need it to be public so they’re in less danger! Aw, well, blame it on Weasley plotting! At least I gave them their own Private Quarters and Private Common Room where they can cuddle and snog!

The Confrontation could have gone two ways. 1) Ron and Ginny try to quickly break up Harry and Hermione by trying to convince Harry that Hermione is evil, a Potions Princess, and she is using him because she wants to see him dead before the end of the Tournament. 2) Ron marches up to Harry and Hermione as they enter the room, calls Harry a traitor for stealing the woman he fancied. Ron telling Harry that Harry should have known Ron fancied Hermione. Ginny coming and basically doing the same, yelling at Hermione about stealing her boyfriend. (Yes, she would call Harry her boyfriend). Then an argument ensues, Ron pulls his wand, same results as what happened in story.

I chose #1. Why? Because #2 seemed to be generic and seen in several stories. #1 may not be unique, but I’ve read no stories with that kind of argument.

Is Ginny a virgin? I don’t know. She certainly wasn’t saying anything. Whether or not she is, she’s going to be doing a lot of damage control about those rumors.

As I’m writing more and more into this story, and as the story goes on, I’ve realized one thing. Ron’s motives in this story are really… weird. How is he supposed to “woo” Hermione (to keep her away from Harry), if he – especially in this chapter – tried to paint her as a Potions Princess and the villain who put Harry’s name in the Goblet, just because he wanted to convince Harry he is still his best friend, and Hermione is poisoning his mind against Ron?

I’m just going to say Ron is dumb, and Ginny, her mother and Dumbledore are just going to have to attempt to do damage control around his dunderheaded mistakes! Also, I think he’s counting on Love Potions (and literally nobody noticing the fact for this to work, Hermione would have to forgive him and fall in love with him?) to succeed with his plan. Yeah, Ron is an idiot in this story. He has his moments… but most of the time he’s an idiot.

Mild Spoilers ahead:

By the way, those bracelets? They’re almost a Deus Ex Machina. The only reason they exist in this story, is because of a scene I wrote for a future chapter – before I wrote this chapter – that contradicts what Dobby said about “magics blocking him from understanding something that Ron says.” I didn’t want Dobby to overhear everything Ron might say, because it would be too easy to discover his secrets. Harry and Hermione are meant to find out the secret plots Ron and Ginny are hatching. Those bracelets exist solely because of a future scene in this story I wrote before this chapter existed. Otherwise Harry and Hermione couldn’t eavesdrop on the conversation without them.
Next Chapter: The Opening Salvos. Harry and Hermione have their first public kiss, and McGonagall makes her opening move to reclaim her position as the Lioness of Hogwarts!
The Opening Salvos

Chapter Notes

: I may not be able to put up a chapter this Sunday, as it is Easter and I might find myself too busy to do so. So you’re getting this one early due to that factor alone. There should still be a new chapter for tomorrow (Saturday) however.

For some reason this feels like a filler chapter to me. But it has some important moments which pave the way for future stuff.

Had a rude “guest” review (on Fanfiction.net) recently about how I should either update my other stories instead of new ones like this, or, and I quote “cease writing full-stop.” Readers, don’t be like this “guest”. In addition to being an cowardly “guest who hides anonymously so they can insult without repercussions”, this guest is obviously just a reader and not a writer. I am not bashing “just readers” here. I am simply saying those who are not authors do not know what writing is like.

A writer knows all about the negative parts of writing, as much as we know about the positive. The biggest negative – bigger than flame reviews – is called writer’s block. Writer’s block happens when your muse will simply not give you a single piece of inspiration for any story you currently may be writing. Your muse, however, will give you so many other ideas, ideas you simply want to write about. Writers love writing. Writer’s hate having writer’s block. To cure writer’s block, you write new content for new stories instead of old stories. Sometimes, when this happens, your muse comes to you with content for your old stories. Always a good thing.

I suffer from Writer’s block. I also love writing, and I get ideas about new stories all the time. Thus, why I have so many work-in-progress stories. Thus, why Yule Ball Drama exists.

I, of course, did not accept that review. My story’s name is Yule Ball Drama. Not Reader Drama Rants. Which do you think readers want to read? If you answered the first one, then perhaps you’ll know not to be the source of the second one.

Sorry for my rant. Enjoy the chapter.

Warning: Bashing: Dumbledore, Ron, Ginny. Manipulative!Dumbledore plotting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Thursday, December 10th, 1994)

Harry grinned as he looked around his new Private Quarters, otherwise known as the Gryffindor Head Boy Dorm. How many students over the years had the honor and privilege to reside here? Percy Weasley had lived in these Quarters last year. Harry could imagine that “pompous, perfect Prefect,” Percy Weasley would appreciate living here. His head had probably grown three sizes when he first laid eyes on the place.

Harry had felt a pang of guilt when he first walked around the Private Quarters, as Professor
McGonagall gave him the tour. He didn’t feel as if he deserved to be able to live in a place as nice as this for the next three and a half years – at least those months when he was at Hogwarts. He and Hermione had been allowed to live in these Quarters because Professor McGonagall didn’t believe them safe anymore in Gryffindor Tower. Snape would surely hear about this soon, and Harry could just imagine what the bastard would say. “Special privileges for a spoiled brat” would be the kindest thing he’d say.

He had said much of this to Professor McGonagall – aside from Snape’s imagined comments.

“Mr. Potter, as a Champion of the Tournament, you should have already had the privilege of living in Quarters like these,” McGonagall had replied. “But the Headmaster declined the idea, when Professor Sprout and I asked for yours and Mr. Diggory’s benefit. He said you needed to be with your dorm-mates, and your house-mates, so they could support you, and in turn, you could be encouraged to do better in the tournament with the aid of their support.”

“Well, that didn’t work out, did it?” Harry asked, with a snort.

“It did not,” McGonagall agreed. “Mr. Potter, believe me when I say I wish you didn’t have to live in these Quarters. You should feel safe in Gryffindor Tower with your house-mates. You should feel safe in your dormitory, without needing to ward your bed, or fear that things will get stolen from your trunk. Unfortunately that is not the way it has happened. I apologize, because I should have been able to do something about it before now. Giving you and Miss Granger permission to reside in your respective Private Quarters is my material proof of apology and request for your forgiveness, which I might not deserve. So please, Mr. Potter, calm an old woman’s nerves by accepting such a gift, and do not feel guilty for being in here.”

“I will try, Professor,” Harry said.

“That is all I can ask, young man,” McGonagall said. “Mr. Potter? If you need a better reason for accepting to live here, I shall tell you this. Your father lived in these very quarters during his seventh year, and your mother lived in the very quarters Miss Granger resides in. When they left this castle for the very last time as a student, your father asked your mother to marry him, popping the question at their final Leaving Feast in front of everyone in the Great Hall. Your mother accepted, of course. They married three months later.

“It would make this old woman very happy if history might repeat itself with the two very people residing in these Quarters by the time you leave this castle for the last time.”

Harry had thought his cheeks were burning off, because he was blushing so badly. He couldn’t find the right words to respond with, and McGonagall didn’t need any. She simply patted his shoulder, showing the most affection she’d ever shown him, and left the Private Quarters.

Harry blushed again, while reminiscing of that conversation.

“That might have been the best thing anybody ever told me about my parents,” Harry muttered. “Why didn’t I thank her for that?”

“I’m sure she knows, young Lion,” a voice said.

Harry turned and looked at the Portrait above the roaring fireplace in the sitting room of the Quarters. The portrait had a knight (not Sir Cadogan, thankfully) riding – not a horse – but a Lion!
“Thank you, Sir Knight,” Harry said, “What may I call you?”

“My name is Sir Leon,” the knight said.

_Leon, riding a lion_, Harry mused, _How very creative._

“It is an honor to meet you, Sir Leon,” Harry said.

“An honor to meet you, young Lion,” Leon said, “You’re much kinder than your sire, young Lion. He often liked to make jokes about me and my good steed.”

“My sire?” Harry asked. “My father? You knew him?”

“I have been residing here for centuries, young Lion,” Leon said, “I knew many a Gryffindor Head Boy. Including your sire.”

“I’m not a Head Boy,” Harry said.

“Not yet,” Leon said, “But Head Boys aren’t all they’re cracked up to be. Take the last resident in these Quarters – Percival, I believe. Wonderful name. Terrible attitude. I rejoiced when that pompous popinjay left!”

Harry snorted at the knight’s description of Percy Weasley. “I think you and I will get along smashingly.”

“Perhaps we will, young Lion,” Leon said. “According to that handsome clock over there, I believe it is nearing dinner. Perhaps you should go see if your young lass is ready to dine with you?”

“A fine idea,” Harry said, “I’ll see you soon. Perhaps you can tell me stories about my father – my sire?”

“I will try to think of some good tales of your sire,” Leon said, “I will say this. I am sorry for your loss, young Lion. He might have been a jester, but he was, at the very least, better than that Percival fellow.”

“Thank you, Sir, Leon,” Harry said, “That means a lot to me. Farewell for now.”

“Fare thee well, young Lion!” Leon said.

The knight’s steed roared his farewell as well. Harry waved at the lion, before he left the Private Quarters. Hermione was just walking out of her room as well.

“Nice timing,” Hermione said, grinning.

Harry walked over to her, wrapped his arms around her, and kissed her deeply. They kissed for half-a-minute, before they parted and proceeded to make their way onto the seventh floor corridor.

“You may kiss me like that in the Great Hall, boyfriend,” Hermione said, smiling, “I think that will do very well toward convincing everyone how serious we are.”

“I cannot deny my lady’s bequest,” Harry said.
“Bequest?” Hermione echoed, amused.

“Sorry,” Harry said, “I have a portrait Knight riding a lion as a steed as a roommate. Sir Leon seems like a pretty cool bloke. If I start speaking like a Knight, blame him.”

“Nice,” Hermione said, “I have a portrait of Victorian style Lady, named Elizabeth. I cannot ever call her Beth, or Liz, apparently. Just Elizabeth. She said an auburn-haired witch once refused to call her anything but Liz, and was quite annoyed with it.”

Harry blinked, then smiled. “My mother?”

“I think so,” Hermione smiled.

“I need to tell you something McGonagall told me about my parents,” Harry said.

He told her what McGonagall had told him. “Then she said one last thing to me. She said it would make her very happy if the two people residing in those Quarters now repeated history.”

Hermione blushed just as deep as Harry had at McGonagall’s words.

She cleared her throat. “Give me a while, and I might very much agree to repeat history.”

Harry grinned goofily. “As long as is necessary, my lady. Just don’t keep me waiting too long.”

Hermione smiled. “You mean…?”

"There's nobody for me but you, Hermione," Harry said, "I am certainly not implying it will happen any time soon, of course! Tell me when to do what my father did with my mother in the Great Hall, give me enough time to get a ring -- and let me ask your father, if you feel I must -- and I'll pop the question when the time comes."

Hermione went very quiet and simply stared forward as they walked down the corridor.

“Have I upset you?” Harry asked; after a couple minutes of silence.

“No,” Hermione said, “I’m just trying to figure out which Leaving Feast I want it to happen.”

“You figure that out between now and the end of our seventh year,” Harry said, “And I’ll be happy to make it happen.”

“You know what you’re saying, don’t you?” Hermione asked. “Harry, I’m not sure you know this, but this isn’t exactly a topic a couple has a few hours into their relationship.”

“I’m saying there’s nobody but you for me, Hermione,” Harry said. “There never will be anyone else. I said as much with Professor McGonagall. There’s no me without you. I literally wouldn’t be here without you, Hermione. It is, to me, an inevitable direction our relationship will go, even if it doesn’t happen for a few years. But, if you’ll have me, it will happen. That’s a promise.”

“My seventeenth birthday,” Hermione said, after half-a-minute. “By then I should have no doubts. Not that I – never mind.”

“I know what you mean, Hermione,” Harry said. “Your seventeenth birthday, it is.”
We could get married the following August after I turn seventeen, Harry mused, unaware Hermione had the same thoughts.

Hermione’s eyes misted over and she sniffled. “I do believe the kiss I will give you for this entire conversation will do a lot to convince everyone about how we feel about each other.”

Harry smiled but said nothing. Nothing needed to be said, and nothing more was said as the couple made their way to the Grand Staircase.

(A few minutes later)

Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry smiled from his golden throne at the Head Table as his gaze wandered the Great Hall. Most of the student population was in the Great Hall at that very moment, except a few who hadn’t arrived yet. Albus frowned when he could spot none of the Durmstrang or Beauxbatons students in attendance.

“Where are our guests this evening, Minerva?” Albus asked his Deputy Headmistress, who was sitting to his left.

“They are not dining with us this evening,” Minerva said. “Madame Maxime told me she and her students are having an evening picnic out on the Grounds, taking advantage of what might be the last nice evening before the winter snows come. Headmaster Karkaroff invited his students to Hogsmeade to dine in the Three Broomsticks. All of them accepted.”

“Damn it,” Albus muttered, “I wanted to announce the Yule Ball this evening.”

“I was under the impression that you had given me such a duty,” Minerva said.

“Well, if you wish to announce it, feel free to do so,” Albus said, “Kind of pointless for such a big announcement, without our guests here.”

“You misunderstand me, Albus,” Minerva said, “I took the opportunity to inform the students in each of my classes today about the Yule Ball. I believe those who weren’t in any of my classes, were soon informed about the Ball through the gossip mill of Hogwarts.”

Albus stared at his Deputy. “When I gave you permission to announce the Ball, I thought I had made it clear you should announce it in such a grand way like an announcement during dinner.”

“You did not make that clear, Albus,” Minerva said, “So I did as I thought was proper.”

“It wasn’t proper, though, was it?” Albus argued, “Given gossip was required to make sure the announcement got around to everyone.”

“If a piece of gossip is revealed on the Astronomy Tower,” Minerva said, “Everyone in the rest of the castle will hear it before the end of the day. Isn’t that what you told me once when I asked if you might quell certain gossips about certain students?”

Albus sighed. “I suppose so. It is a pointless endeavor to announce it here during dinner, given our guests are not coming.”
Albus moped. He had hoped he could make the big announcement, because it would be the perfect opportunity for a couple students to make their claim on two other students for the Yule Ball, before their claim was claimed by someone else. Somebody inappropriate.

He glanced toward the middle of the Gryffindor Table. His eyebrows raised as he found that Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and the youngest Weasleys had not arrived yet. He shrugged, and decided they were probably coming down to the Great Hall together. Granger probably wanted Harry and Ron to get their homework done before dinner, and it took too long. The know-it-all was predictable like that.

Suddenly, two of Albus’ targeted students entered the Hall. He narrowed his eyebrows when they were hand-in-hand. Why were Mr. Potter and Miss Granger holding hands? And where were the Weasleys? This behavior between Mr. Potter and Miss Granger had never happened before. Their friendship did not extend to holding hands. Ron Weasley would never allow it. So what had happened?

“Was Mr. Potter’s class one of the classes you announced the Ball too?” Albus asked Minerva.

“It certainly was,” Minerva said; she was smiling – actually smiling! – at Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, as she spoke – what was that about? “I also informed Mr. Potter he and his partner would be opening the Ball with the rest of the Champions. He realized he needed a date. Don’t they look lovely, Albus?”

“They?” Albus echoed.

“Mr. Potter and Miss Granger,” Minerva clarified. “Have you not heard the rumors? It happened at lunch. Mr. Potter asked Miss Granger to the Yule Ball in front of everyone who was there.. She said ‘yes’ of course.”

What?! No! No, that was not supposed to happen! Perhaps Minerva was wrong. Perhaps she had heard gossip of such a scene and had believed it.

And then something happened that drowned that theory. Miss Granger giggled, wrapped her arms around Mr. Potter’s neck, and kissed him, fully on the mouth! Albus’ internal cursing and swearing was almost as loud as the collective gasps and whispers around the Great Hall at the sight of the couple.

This was not supposed to happen! What had happened to the plan?!

Albus knew he couldn’t stop the scene in front of him. Why would the Leader of the Light object to such a wonderful showcase of love – ugh – which, of course, was the most powerful tool for the Light! He couldn’t be seen disapproving of such a relationship, especially between the Boy-Who-Lived and his best friend! Why couldn’t the little bitch have died when the troll attacked her? So many things had gone horribly for Albus’ plans because Harry had saved that girl’s life. At least Ronald had been smart enough to help save the girl. Ron had been a great help in making sure Mr. Potter and the girl weren’t too close to realize the affections they had for one another. So what had changed? Why had Ronald failed so badly?!

There was only one person who could stop this scene. He looked down the table, ready to signal Severus Snape to intrude on the scene.
And found the Potions Master missing! Where was he? He should be here to rant at Mr. Potter and Miss Granger! He should have prevented such a scene from even taking place to begin with! Miss Granger’s loud giggling which had started the whole thing would have had Snape yelling at her to stop such foolishness, before the couple even showed any evidence of affection!

“Where is Severus, Minerva?” Albus asked.

“Slytherin Common Room, I do believe,” Minerva said, still smiling at the couple, “Something about internal House business. I knew not to interfere or question.”

Damn. Of course Severus had to choose such a time to be responsible!

Albus turned to the next usual suspect: Draco Malfoy. The young man was being useless, as per usual. He was simply sitting at the Slytherin table, gaping like a dunderhead at the still snogging couple!

The blonde-haired scion of a Death Eater should have seen the scene, been disgusted by it, stood up and walked over to the couple. Then he would have insulted the couple before they could kiss for too long! Then he would have insulted their relationship even further, planting the seed of doubt between the pair about their relationship that Albus could continue to sew until it flourished!

Good help was so hard to find these days!

Albus sighed. He’d have to do something, and try to be nice about it.

“Miss Granger, Mr. Potter!” Albus said, loudly, so his voice carried.

The apparent couple – ugh! – stopped their public display of affection – ugh! – and turned to the Headmaster.

“While it is wonderful to see the seeds of new love begin to sew,” Albus said, trying to portray the Lord of Light everyone expected him to be, “Such behavior is inappropriate in such a public setting like this. Please save such… affections… for when you are alone.”

“I quite agree, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger!” Minerva said, “Detention, this Saturday, my classroom at seven in the evening!”

Albus smirked. That couldn’t have gone any better. Minerva actually punished the apparent couple, and the young Gryffindors seemed to accept their punishment without argument.

“Perhaps we should separate the two, Minerva, given their upgraded status,” Albus suggested.

Yes, put Potter in detention with Severus. Have him put doubts in Potter’s new relationship with Granger. Gah! So much damage control needed to take care of already!

“Unnecessary,” Minerva said, “Given Potter’s… upbringing, I very much doubt he even knows about the subject of safe sex.”

“Sex?” Albus asked, inwardly shivering at the very idea, “Aren’t they too young? Isn’t their relationship too new?”

“Perhaps,” Minerva agreed, “But teenage hormones run rampant and become unpredictable. As the
Head of their House, I want to make sure they know to be safe if such a moment does take place. Wouldn’t want little Potters running around Hogwarts before the couple graduates, would we?"

Albus grimaced at the idea of babies with Potter and Granger as their parents. “Perhaps you are right.”

It wouldn’t do for Potter to accidentally impregnate Granger. She was not the mother he had in mind for the future Potter baby. If Granger had a Potter baby before Ginny Weasley had one, then the Granger-born baby would be the eldest, and would gain the titles, Wizengamot seats, and most of the Potter fortune. Granger would be the Lady Regent to the Potter Heir! That could not happen!

Albus sighed. This was not good. If Minerva announced the Ball during Mr. Potter’s class, then Mr. Weasley had been in attendance as well. Why hadn’t Mr. Weasley asked Miss Granger to the Ball before Mr. Potter could? As had been discussed! How was he going to fix this?

Wait… where were the Weasleys. Why hadn’t Ronald and Ginevra arrived? They should have been here to see Mr. Potter and Miss Granger kissing. That would have set them off, and they would have contacted their mother to help them with this new roadblock!

Albus could have stepped in earlier that day, if he had known of Mr. Potter’s intentions to ask Miss Granger to the Yule Ball. If he had attended lunch with them, he could have… persuaded… Mr. Potter not to ask Miss Granger. That his best friend, his first friend, Ron Weasley already had plans to do so! Mr. Potter, not wanting to lose his good friend, especially after a dramatic affair last month which almost ended their friendship, would have allowed his friend first dibs at Miss Granger’s affections!

But he hadn’t been there! So now, the whole school knew Mr. Potter and Miss Granger were going to the Ball together. And due to that steamy kiss in the middle of the crowded Great Hall at dinner, now everyone knew how serious the new couple’s relationship was!

How could this get any worse? Where were those damned gingers?! They needed to start putting doubt in Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s heads about their relationship! Or maybe just Mr. Potter’s. They could lie to him about Miss Granger, and tell him she dosed him with Love Potion or something!

“Minerva?” Albus asked, “Two of your Lions are missing, it appears. Do you know where Ron and Ginevra Weasley are?”

Minerva pursed her lips, and Albus’ heart sank. What happened?

“The two siblings decided to insult me earlier today, Albus,” Minerva sniffed. “So I grounded them to their dormitories for the evening. They’ll have detention tomorrow night, in my classroom at seven.”

“But what about dinner?” Albus asked; he needed them to be here to begin sowing the seeds of doubt into the new couple’s minds!

“They’re eating dinner in their dormitories, because I wasn’t about to let them come down here,” Minerva said. “Not after what I heard!”

“What do you hear?” Albus asked; what had happened?!
“Mr. Weasley and his sister did not react too kindly to Mr. Potter asking Miss Granger to the Ball,” Minerva said. “I overheard them plotting in a girl’s bathroom of all places about trying to break up the new couple! Ridiculous, huh?”

Albus was confused. How was Minerva able to hear anything the Weasleys would plot about Potter and Granger? There were enchantments to prevent that very thing so nobody could know what they were doing and warn Potter and Granger! Albus then wondered… was it Minerva’s Animagus? Did that interfere in the enchantments? He hadn’t considered that!

Albus smiled weakly. “Yeah… terrible. You said they insulted you?”

“I cleared my throat, intending to inform Mr. Weasley he shouldn’t be in a girl’s bathroom,” Minerva said. “When he told me, and I quote ‘Go away, bitch! We’re talking here!’ Can you believe that?”

Albus sighed. Yes, actually… he could. Ron’s behavior was… unfortunately abominable sometimes. He could only blame that on Molly Weasley.

“When I informed the two siblings exactly who they were talking to,” Minerva said, “Mr. Weasley told me he thought I was Moaning Myrtle. He said if he knew it was me, he wouldn’t have said it.”

“Perhaps he was telling the truth?” Albus suggested, “Did you really have to ground them and give them detention?”

“It was a just punishment, Albus,” Minerva sniffed. “What would Severus do?”

Albus sighed. “I suppose you have a point.”

“Besides, how could I not punish them after hearing what I did?” Minerva said. “Can you believe Ron and Ginny Weasley – who claim to be Harry Potter and Hermione’s best and truest friends – would actually plot to break up the new and budding relationship? It is unheard of, Albus! It could become Line Theft, if their relationship becomes serious! That is beyond Hogwarts, Albus. You know that better than I do! We wouldn’t be able to stop the DMLE from investigating!”

Albus removed his glasses and pinched his nose, hopefully implying he was annoyed by the Weasleys. In truth, he wanted the Weasleys to interfere. But now… if Minerva implied the dangers of threatening Line Theft?

How could it go so wrong so quickly? How was he going to fix this? There was no way he could convince this roomful of students that they had not seen what they had between Mr. Potter and Miss Granger. No way he could convince them that this ‘new and budding’ relationship was a simple fling. For Merlin’s sake, their kiss would probably be stuff of legends for the next several months, even years, no matter how many girls around the Hall were jealous or angry about it.

Unless… no, Fred and George Weasley were there. He couldn’t blame it on Polyjuice Potion and a prank, and blame them for the prank. Damn it. Why did the useless Weasleys have to be the two siblings in attendance? If they weren’t there, he could have had that Polyjuice Prank scenario as gossip in the whole castle by the following morning!

Instead, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s new relationship would be the talk of the school for… probably the foreseeable future. There was no way he could stop this. He could not Obliviate the entire School, even with the Elder Wand. To his dismay, there were several sons and daughters of Light and Neutral Light families whose parents had taught them Occlumency, to protect family
secrets. So many highborn families – even the Light and Neutral-Light families – had books and
tomes all about Occlumency, Legilimency and Mind-Magics. Books he had removed from the
Hogwarts Library to prevent the students from learning proper Occlumency.

If Occlumency was a subject students could learn in private whilst at school, he wouldn’t be able to
look in their minds. Unfortunately, highborn, political families, those in the Wizengamot knew all
about that risk! So they taught their children Occlumency. These sons and daughters of Light and
Neutral-Light families with Occluded minds could not be completely Obliviated of any specific
memories without discovering there were gaps in their memories. They would even discover
memory modification! That was a benefit of clearing the mind and practicing Occlumency!

It was maddening! These students in particular would be the very students who would notice if
something strange happened to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s budding relationship. It was the talk of
the castle. If they suddenly broke up out of nowhere, after that legendary kiss, someone would take
notice that something sinister was in the works! Obliviations would be suspected as well as any
Potions – such as Love Potions or Revulsion Potion that the new couple could be given – and the
plot would be uncovered by the DMLE! A full investigation would open. And – if Ron and Ginny
Weasley’s negative attitude toward Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s relationship was true as Minerva
said – they would be the first suspects! Especially if they became Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s
respective love-interests!

How could it all go so wrong so fast? Harry was supposed to marry Ginny, or at the very least, get
her pregnant, sacrifice himself, and then his fortune would go to Ginevra, who would be an underage
mother. The fortune would be given to Molly and Arthur as her parents. Molly would give half of
the fortune to him! That was the plan!

The one person Albus didn’t want Harry to be romantic with – out of everyone – was Hermione
Granger. With Ron’s recent betrayal, Miss Granger had likely received a recent upgrade in her
friendship status as Mr. Potter’s best friend. This obviously led to Mr. Potter realizing his deeper
affection toward Miss Granger, which led to the events that had taken place that day! Mr. Potter
would not want to sacrifice himself now. He would want a long and loving life with Miss Granger!
Multiple children probably! If Albus even suggest he get her pregnant – just in case he died – so he
could pass on his bloodline, Harry would probably react badly.

If he didn’t react so badly, if he was willing to sacrifice himself eventually – after Albus had used the
lad for his own plans before he would set the boy on his path to his demise – Albus might have
agreed to the boy’s newfound relationship. He could always convince Miss Granger that he needed
an Heir or Heiress. He could blood-adopt her that way. She’d agree, given how she hero-worshiped
him. Being blood-adopted by the greatest wizard ever, yes she might like the idea. Then her baby
would have the Dumbledore bloodline, and he could claim the Potter fortune, since Lady Potter – of
course the girl would want to marry Harry before she gave birth – would be a Dumbledore. Potter’s
death would obviously affect Miss Granger deeply. He’d call her unstable, dose her with enough
potions to make the story believable, and place her in the Permanent Ward in St. Mungo’s. Then he
could raise the Potter-Dumbledore heir as his own! With the Potter fortune, and the Philosopher’s
Stone, he could rule the wizarding world, and then he rest of the world, in a few decades. And when
he finally passed on when he decided to do so, his heir would be his successor!

If only Mr. Potter would be so agreeable to such a thing!

Unfortunately for Mr. Potter, he wasn’t. And now Albus would have to figure out just how to get out
of the mess the Brat-Who-Lived had made for him!
Albus smirked as an idea crossed his mind. A beautiful, wonderful idea that would stop this new unforeseen problem in its tracks! The Second Task would be coming in three months. Maybe he should allow Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s relationship to flourish for a little while. After all, Miss Granger would certainly be somebody Mr. Potter would miss the most.

The boy could even prove that very thing… by mourning Miss Granger after her accidental demise during the Second Task. Due to drowning, of course. And oh, the boy would blame himself for not rescuing her in time. He would grieve, and Ginny Weasley would be there to bring him back from his grief. Albus, would too, of course. Harry might even say he wants to die, so he can be with Granger. So Albus would tell him about Voldemort, the prophecy, and how he must sacrifice himself. Harry would do it. Save the wizarding world as is his destiny, and then go be with the love of his life. Of course, putting an heir in Ginny Weasley first would have to happen.

Albus raised a glass and toasted the new couple. To Mr. Potter and Miss Granger. He would have never predicted his enemies would have paved the road to his destiny so wonderfully!

“By the way, Albus,” Minerva interrupted Albus’ premature solo celebration, “I need to make an announcement this evening.”

“What type of announcement?” Albus asked.

“In-House business,” Minerva said.

Albus sighed. In-House business. He hated those three words. Even as Headmaster he couldn’t interfere in In-House business. Which was why he had made Minerva so busy over the past four years since Mr. Potter became a Gryffindor. An overworked Head of Gryffindor couldn’t do her job properly, now could she?

So what was she up to? Something that would ruin his little celebration likely. She was good at that.

“Very well, Minerva,” Albus said, “Feel free to conduct your In-House business here in front of everyone. Is that against policy?”

“The actual business won’t be in front of everyone Albus,” Minerva said, “This is merely an announcement to inform them of the business. All of them – aside from the two youngest Weasleys - are here, after all. It is difficult to get them all in the same place aside from meals.”

“Then you may do as you please,” Albus said; he was eager to see what this was all about.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Albus sighed. He hated when she silenced the students like that. His ears were already sensitive without that annoying sound, thank you very much, Minerva!

(Meanwhile)

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Ever since their public kiss there in the Hall, Harry and Hermione had been doing their best to answer those very personal questions about their relationship in the most polite way. Angelina Johnson, who was sitting with them, as well as the rest of the Gryffindor Team, had noticed their
new bracelets. Hermione informed the curious on-lookers that she had made the bracelets for both of them, as a show of their new relationship. There was much swooning from girls around the table at that. Some jealous looks of course, but that was expected.

Everyone looked up when Professor McGonagall tapped on her glass three times, to get everybody’s attention.

Naturally every student went silent almost immediately and looked toward the Deputy Headmistress.

“Good evening,” McGonagall said, as she stood up. “Recently, I have had a great revelation about myself. Most of you know I am the Head of Gryffindor House. This is true. Unfortunately, I have recently realized I haven’t been properly doing my job in that role. That changes tonight. To my Gryffindor students in attendance tonight. All of you will remain here after dinner is finished. We are having an In-House Meeting to discuss some changes in Gryffindor House. If I discover any of my Gryffindors have left this Hall before that meeting is finished, without my permission, then I will assume you no longer consider yourself a member of Gryffindor House.”

Gasps were heard around the Great Hall, none more louder than from several students at the Gryffindor Table.

“That is all, for now,” McGonagall said, “You may resume your meals.”

Minerva sat down, and the murmurs, whispers and gossips ignited like a bomb around the Great Hall.

“What was that all about?” Dean Thomas asked.

“You weren’t in the Gryffindor Common Room about an hour before dinner, were you, young Mr. Thomas?” Fred Weasley asked.

“I was in the library working on my Transfiguration homework,” Dean said, “What happened?”

“Dramatic events, my fellow Lion,” George Weasley said.

“You had to be there,” Fred said, “It will be the talk of Gryffindor Tower for weeks to come.”

“Bigger news than our young Harry and Hermione’s two minute long snog in front of everyone here at dinner,” George said.

Harry and Hermione blushed. Okay… maybe they had overdone their “Opening Salvos” just a little bit. Maybe.

“What did you two do?” Dean asked Harry and Hermione. “Aside from kissing I mean.”

“Why do you blame us?” Hermione asked.

“When there is an incident in Gryffindor Tower,” Dean said, “you’re either responsible for it, a victim of the event, or a witness at the very least. Also when I put my book-bag up in the dormitory, I noticed your trunk was gone. Something happened, Harry. Something big enough that caused you to leave our dormitory, and for Professor McGonagall to call an In-House Meeting.

“Oh, and the biggest clue. When I arrived at the dorm, Ron was in his bed, grumbling about
something I didn’t hear. When I asked him what his problem was, he said and I quote ‘Fucking Potter!’ So I ask again. What did you do?”

“Asked Hermione to the Yule Ball at lunch,” Harry said, “Which pissed off Ron and Ginny Weasley. Which made them confront us, and attempt to attack us after we wouldn’t break up. This led to Ron and Ginny in detention tomorrow.”

“And Professor McGonagall grounded our wayward siblings to their dormitories,” Fred said.

“And confiscated their wands until, at the very earliest, tomorrow morning at breakfast,” George said.

“Wow,” Dean said, “It is always you two, isn’t it? Ron and Ginny are bloody mental to interfere in your relationship. Trust me, Potter. There may be a few jealous girls who wish they were in Hermione’s position, but the majority of the school is likely going to favor your relationship.”

“Even though I’m a Muggleborn?” Hermione said.

“The color of blood doesn’t matter, Granger,” Fred said, “The color of gold…”

“Which is gold, interestingly enough,” George said.

“Is far more important,” Fred finished.

“Gold?” Hermione asked.

“Galleons, my dear Cleopatra,” Fred said.

Dean snorted. “Queen of denial. Yep, that’s our Hermione. Harry, too, for that matter, now I think on it. Except you wouldn’t make a very pretty Queen, Harry.”

Harry and Hermione glared playfully at her fellow Muggleborn.

“A lot of gold is changing hands because of you two,” George said. “Much betting went around Hogwarts about the precise date you two would become a couple.

“Rumor has it,” Fred said, “Professor McGonagall won ten Galleons from Professor Sprout, simply betting you two would get together.”

“Professor Sprout thought Viktor Krum would ask you, Hermione,” George said.

“Something about him staring at you in the library,” Fred said.

Harry raised an eyebrow as he looked at his girlfriend. “Krum?”

“He’s never approached me, Harry,” Hermione said, “If he noticed me at all, it is because I do not approach him like the hordes of fan-girls wanting autographs.”

“Viktor Krum wants someone who isn’t a fan-girl as his romantic interest,” Fred said.

“Ergo, Professor Sprout’s bet,” George said.
“You tell me if he approaches you, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Fine, you jealous idiot,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Fred said. “We’ll defend our Golden Couple.”

“If Krum even decides to be in the same corridor or room as our dear Miss Granger,” George said.

“We’ll send Peeves after him,” Fred said. “And if he stalks her in the library again.”

“We’ll make him cause a ruckus,” George said, “Madam Pince will ban him from your girlfriend’s domain.”

“Poof… no more stalking,” Fred said.

“You two are definitely not related to Ron and Ginny,” Harry said.

“Thank you for believing us!” Fred and George said in unison.

Dean sighed as he stared at his chicken leg. “Never a dull day around Potter and Granger.”

“What about us, Mr. Thomas?” Fred asked, “Are we dull?”

“Answer correctly” George said, “Or that chicken leg will talk back to you.”

“As long as it isn’t in your voices, it can say whatever it wants,” Dean said.

“I like this one, brother of mine,” Fred said.

“He can be our brother from another mother,” George agreed. “Since we need a new one.”

“Ron is definitely a brother from another mother,” Fred said. “Or are we the brothers from another mother?”

Dean sighed. “I wonder if McGonagall’s serious about kicking me out of Gryffindor if I leave the Hall. Perhaps I should chance it.”

Harry and Hermione snickered. They had never been able to appreciate their fellow Gryffindor until now. Now that Ron wasn’t their friend anymore, they might be able to make new friends.

*Perhaps we should add Dean to that list of friendly Gryffindors,* Harry pondered, then shrugged. *I’ll decide after I figure how much he’s done to me or Hermione.*

“So who are you asking to the Ball, Dean?” Hermione asked.

“Well, I was going to ask Ginny,” Dean muttered, “But she’s suddenly become very unattractive. No offense, Thing One and Thing Two.”

“Which one of us is which?” Fred asked.

“You decide between the two of yourselves,” Dean said; that caused the twins to start whispering to each other, allowing those seated near the twins a few moments of peace. “I’ll talk to Seamus and see
if wants to ask out Lavender or Parvati. I’ll just ask the other one. That should work.”

“Good luck,” Harry said, “Here’s a little advice. Act as if you’ve stolen the courage from every other Gryffindor for a moment, so you’ll have enough courage to ask your date. That is what I did with Hermione.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Is that true?”

“Yes,” Harry said, “It definitely worked for me!”

“I might have to lower my standards and drag you into a broom closet for that,” Hermione said.

“Kind of goes against your apparent desire for public displays of affection, doesn’t it?” Dean asked, with a grin.

“Shut up, Dean,” Harry and Hermione said, in unison.

Dean looked horrified “Argh! There are four of you now!”

The new couple erupted in laughter. It was very fun finding new friends now that Ron wasn’t there to get jealous about them replacing him.

Chapter End Notes

This was a weird chapter. That last scene is a bit iffy for me. Whatever.

I know the “marriage proposal” conversation was oddly timed so early in their relationship, which is exactly why I had Hermione say that “it’s too early to talk about this” line, but I thought it was sweet, so I put it in.

Yes, Minerva lied to Albus about Ron and Ginny’s reason for “grounding”. It could be easily discovered it didn’t happen. But she knew what she was doing. She did not want Albus to learn from her about the confrontation in the room. Actually, she wanted to see what he might do, if he believe she had heard them plotting about something.

Two of the scenes in this chapter were unplanned. Dumbledore’s entire POV was at first going to be Minerva watching Harry and Hermione’s second show. But that would have been similar to the lunch show. So I introduced Dumbledore into the story. Manipulative Dumbledore plotting is fun to write.

The second unplanned part was most of the last scene. I didn’t want the Gryffindor meeting in this chapter, so I brought in Dean, and added the Twins again. They’ve become the Comic Relief in this story.

Next Chapter: The Gryffindor Meeting. That is all. It takes so long it lasts the whole chapter.
Chapter Notes

: Unsure whether or not I’ll post a chapter on Easter Sunday. As I said, I’ll be very busy! Happy Easter for everyone who celebrates it, even if it is not in the religious sense, and simply just to invite the Easter Bunny to bring those yummy eggs! (Also, for those GoT fans, enjoy the new episode, I know I will!)

This chapter finally ends the first day in-story of this story! So much happened! This entire chapter is one very long scene.

Last chapter I made a mistake, and fixed it three hours after the chapter was publish, so I am sure many readers didn’t notice the change. During the “marriage proposal conversation” scene, Hermione said “three days into their relationship” at one bit. It was less than twelve hours, not three days. So I changed it to “a few hours into their relationship.” Let’s just say I added that line when I was writing a chapter with scenes two or three days after that scene, so “three days” was on my mind. Oops! Fixed now!

Also, I noticed a very amusing but nice pattern over the past three chapters. 25 Reviews (on FFN) exactly for each chapter as of posting this chapter. Last chapter (one I thought as filler!) did it with half the views of the third chapter (stats at the time of posting this chapter)! That’s awesome. Thank you to all of my readers, especially those who puts time in to leave a review, or comment. It means a lot to me. I’d write even if I didn’t get one review, but those reviews just make doing this so much better.

Warning: Gryffindor Student Bashing, Dumbledore bashing. Manipulative Dumbledore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Thursday, December 10th, 1994)

Minerva McGonagall, Transfiguration Professor, Deputy Headmistress, and now dedicated Head of Gryffindor House, kept watchful eyes on the entire Gryffindor Table as the rest of the students from the other three Houses poured out of the Great Hall, to head back to their respective Common Rooms. Most of the students at the Gryffindor Table had different looks and expressions. Fear, uncertainty, curiosity, anger, wariness among others. Those who knew Occlumency were able to keep their expressions in the form of what Muggles called a “poker-face”. Their expressions were unreadable.

Minerva had done her best to ignore Albus Dumbledore since her speech to the Gryffindor Students. He wanted hints at what she was going to be discussing with the Gryffindor. He also asked her if she needed any assistance. She said she did not. Albus had looked most put out at that. He also looked at her with suspicious and cautious looks, but she too ignored this.

She would have tried to casually dismiss him, as this was supposed to be an In-House Meeting, but that idea was stopped before it could begin. Other Professors – former Gryffindors such as Hagrid, concerned and intrigued about what was going on in their old House – and those not in Gryffindor had remained. Pomona Spout and Filius Flitwick remained, in support of a fellow Head of House.
The only Head of House who was not there was Severus Snape. Minerva privately smirked at this. He had not shown up at dinner at all. Albus was rather furious at this and had asked her two additional times—after her first explanation about where the Potions Professor was—about when they could expect Severus back.

Minerva knew Severus was on a wild goose chase, but as the supposed investigation was the theft of a priceless family heirloom, Severus seemed dedicated to find out whether one of his Slytherins were guilty.

When Severus’ investigation turned up empty, Minerva would blame the student’s suspicions of a Slytherin being responsible on the terrible House rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin. She would tell him that, of course, she was going to investigate whether the priceless heirloom was in one of the other three Houses, because as Severus would insist—one of her own Lions probably stole it. After the news and rumors of the Gryffindor in-House meeting were discovered, Severus would likely use it as proof that there were plenty of bad seeds in Gryffindor who might steal the family heirloom.

Minerva wouldn’t argue about the “bad seed” part. Tonight’s meeting was to find out the identities of those bad seeds.

Minerva cleared her mind of these distractions, and stood up. She tapped her glass three times with her fork. Every single student present at the Gryffindor Table turned their head to the Head Table.

“Can I please have the following students line up in a row between the Head Table and House Tables?” McGonagall said.

She paused for effect and looked amongst the faces and expressions. She raised an eyebrow at the several guilty looks on many of the students. She expected they thought she knew them guilty of something, and she was about to call them up to interrogate them about whatever crime they were guilty of. Little did they know…

“Fourth years Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Harry Potter,” Minerva said.

Beside her, Albus looked alert at the mention of these three names. Did he think she had called them for a specific reason?


When no more names were called, those seated at the table looked at each of the students walking up the aisles to the front of the Hall. Some of them had frightened and wary looks again. Minerva wondered if they had figured some of what was going on. Especially once Harry Potter and Hermione Granger’s names were called.

“Aside from the First Year Students,” Minerva continued, as the students whose names she called lined up together between the tables. “What I am about to say, goes for all of you seated at the Table at this moment.”

The students now had her utmost attention.

“October 31st of this year,” Minerva continued, “Halloween. The Goblet of Fire Choosing Ceremony. You all know what happened. Harry Potter’s name was called as the Fourth Champion.”
She pointed a hand to her right and behind her, toward a corner, where a door was located.

“The Champions went in there, as did many of us staff,” Minerva said, “Headmaster Dumbledore confronted Harry Potter and asked him if he put his name in the Goblet of Fire, if he asked an older student to do it. Mr. Potter answered ‘no’ to both questions. Several adults present responded by saying he was a liar. There was a lot of arguments, before Professor Moody came into the room. Alastor? Can you tell us what you said that evening?”

Alastor cleared his throat. “The Goblet of Fire is a powerful object. It would take an exceptionally powerful person – definitely not in the league of a fourth year or fourteen year old – to Confound the Goblet to spit out more than three names. Mr. Potter could not have done that.”

“It is unknown who did it,” Minerva said, “However, Mr. Potter has repeatedly said he did not put his name in, nor did he ask anyone to do so. What many of you students may not know – and some of you could learn from – is it is very hard to constantly lie for several weeks and keep the story the same. Before too long a liar will change their story because they forgot the exact details they originally used. Students, Mr. Potter has never changed any of his story. His behavior hasn’t changed. He does not show any signs of lying.”

There were still many doubtful and skeptical looks on the faces of several students at the table.

“I will say this only once. Harry Potter did NOT put his name in the Goblet of Fire!” Minerva said, loud, clear and with a serious tone.

She glared at the students at the table, many of whom now had guilty looks on their faces.

“A little while after the Choosing Ceremony ended,” Minerva continued, “Mr. Potter entered the Gryffindor Common Room to find a raucous celebration in his name. Several students demanded answers from him, asking him how he put his name in the Goblet, or why he wouldn’t tell anyone else how he had done it, so they could do it too. Numerous times he said he did not put his name in the Goblet.

“Students present in the Hall. Raise your hand if you never once believed Harry put his name in the Goblet of Fire. Be completely honest with me, because I will discover if you are dishonest.”

Surprisingly none of the students sitting at the table raised their hand. Surprising those who were at the table, every single person standing between the tables raised their hand.

“Now you see why I called your names, ladies and gentlemen,” Minerva said to the standing students, “Harry Potter named each and every one of you as people he could trust. People who assured him that they didn’t think he put his name in the Goblet. Eight students out of – well, the rest of you – who stood firm in their support for Mr. Potter.

“Gryffindor Students, I am going to ask you the first of many questions this evening. You do not need to answer this one. Just think about it. Ponder it in your head. Come up with an answer on your own.

“The question: Whatever happened to Gryffindor Unity!”

The table was littered with guilty faces and emotional and stricken expressions.
Minerva looked at Harry. “My apologies, Mr. Potter, I know you might hate this next part. But it is needed to be said.”

Harry looked confused, but he shrugged and smiled.

“To those of you students who were raised in the wizarding world,” Minerva said, “The name Harry Potter, the moniker Boy-Who-Lived, is seen as a hero. A legend. Someone who should be revered and respected just because of what he means to the rest of us. We celebrate Halloween, and expect Mr. Potter to do the same thing with us, when in reality, he should be far away from those celebrations, because it is a reminder of the day he lost his parents. Strange things seem to happen here at Hogwarts on Halloween, and most of the time they seem to center around Mr. Potter – over the past four years at least.

“This year, on the anniversary of his parents’ sacrifice, he went to bed no longer having a best friend of three-plus years because said student betrayed him, and most of his own House had shunned him because they believed him a cheat or a liar.

“All of you seated there at the table shunned Harry Potter this year. To many of you, this young man was probably your childhood hero. Someone you wanted to grow up to be. And this is how you repay him for what he did?”

Minerva chanced a glance down at Albus, and found him with a frown on his face. She couldn’t tell what he was thinking. She simply looked back at the table.

“Prefects stand up and be recognized,” she said.

The six Prefects – two each for fifth, sixth and seventh year – stood up.

Minerva whipped out her wand, and pointed at the direction of the table. “Accio Prefect Badges!”

The Prefects gasped and cried out, as did a few other students, as the badges ripped from the Prefects’ robes and floated to Minerva’s hand.

“None of you are worthy of being Prefects anymore!” Minerva said, trying her best to keep herself from snarling, growling, or hissing – like her Animagus. “None of you stood up for Mr. Potter when he was being shunned or bullied by the rest of the House. None of you did your jobs. You simply joined in and shunned him too! There will be no Seventh year prefects for the rest of the year.”

Minerva smiled as she looked at the fifth and sixth year students in front of her.

“Fifth year Prefect Katie Bell needs a partner on her duties,” Minerva said, “Messrs. Weasley and Mr. Jordan decide who should be the honorary fifth year prefect with her.”

The twins pointed to Lee Jordan, who grinned. Katie Bell blushed in his direction.

“It would be wrong of us to split up these two,” Fred said.

“Seeing as they’re going to the Ball together,” George said.

“Congratulations, on your new role, Mr. Jordan,” Minerva said. “Messrs. Weasley, Miss Johnson, Miss Spinnet. Decide amongst you who should be male and female prefect for sixth year.”
It was decided George and Angelina – another Yule Ball couple – would be the Prefects. Fred and Alicia were also a Yule Ball couple, so it was obvious that one of two couples would be the Prefects together.

“Congratulations all of you,” Minerva said, clapping lightly.

Harry, Hermione, Neville, Fred, and Alicia joined in on the applause as did the staff. Some students soon joined after, though it wasn’t raucous.

“First Year students, please give me your attention,” Minerva said. “Mr. Potter told me each of you did shun him, but he is willing to give you a second chance.”

Albus chuckled softly at this. Minerva resisted rolling her eyes. The old man was a big admirer of second chances… and third, fourth, fifth chances and so on. Of course he’d be happy Mr. Potter was giving these students a second chance.

“For you students, this is your first year here, obviously,” Minerva continued. “You are young, impressionable boys and girls. You’re eager to make new friends, maybe even with older students. You also don’t know the ins and outs of Gryffindor House. You haven’t had time to know what it means to be a Gryffindor Lion. I also happen to believe you’re a victim of peer pressure. Meaning you were… persuaded by many of the older students to join in on the shunning of Mr. Potter, so you could look cool or supportive of your House. After all, what is more important? The whole of Gryffindor or one traitorous Lion? Is that what those students told you?”

Several of the older students looked very uncomfortable at these words. Minerva had hit the bulls-eye.

“Peer pressure, First Years,” Minerva said, “You are all victims of it. You wanted to be friends with those older students. You believed whatever they told you. What you may not know, however, is this: peer pressure is a form of bullying. Those students who convinced you of these things are bullies, my little lions.”

Several older students looked shocked, or offended at being called bullies.

“Mr. Potter has forgiven you, little lions, those of you who are first years,” Minerva said. “He just asks that you think on what you’ve done since Halloween. Think of your actions. If you promise yourselves to better from now on, he will forgive you.”

All the first years looked at Harry with small smiles, who smiled back at them. Minerva couldn’t hold back a smile at this.

“New Prefects,” she said, “Escort all the First Years back to Gryffindor Tower. Those standing here in front of me also has permission to leave. None of you have any other reason to be here this evening. However, Mr. Potter. If you feel you need to be here, as much of this meeting has to do with you, you may remain behind. Miss Granger as well, as I understand she was another target, due to her dedicated, unwavering support of you before and after the moment your name came out of the Goblet.”

Harry whispered to Hermione, who nodded. “We’ll stay, Professor. Just in case you feel you need to ask us anything for the duration of the meeting.”

“A fine idea,” Minerva said; she waved her wand and conjured comfortable chairs in front of the
Head Table. Harry and Hermione sat down in them.

“For the remainder of this meeting, students,” Minerva said, “I expect complete honesty from each and every one of you. Most of my questions will simply require you to raise your hands if the question pertains to you. If I discover you did not raise your hand, and you were one of those who should have, I will be most displeased. You are all Gryffindors. Tonight is the time to prove it. Have the courage to be honest. Be true to yourselves. If you can’t be honest to yourselves and to everyone else, why should your friends ever trust you again? Something to think about for the remainder of this meeting.

“All questions asked refer to events between Halloween and the present date. First question: Who, is guilty of using a Diffindo Charm or similar charm on Mr. Potter or Mr. Granger’s bookbags, spilling out their contents while they walked in the corridors?”

There were shuffling movements and glances around the table as a number of students across several years – third year and up – raised their hand.

“You may lower your hands,” Minerva said, “When the next question begins, those who have their hands raised may lower them until they have to raise them again. Second question. Who here attempted to break into Mr. Potter or Miss Granger’s Trunks or beds, not knowing they’ve been warded and protected since Halloween? Whether to prank their bed or trunk, or vandalize their bed or trunk.”

Again, a number of students raised their hands, including several girls – most of whom were likely guilty toward Hermione. Shockingly, Lavender Brown and Parvati Patil raised their hands, looking half-guilty, and half-embarrassed they had to admit their guilt. Both girls were deliberately avoiding Hermione’s eyes, but the bushy-haired girl wasn’t looking at anybody but her boyfriend. The pair were talking in whispers to each other, ignoring everything else.

Minerva did not ask if anyone had intentions to steal anything. Since nothing was stolen thanks to the wards, there was no actual crime aside from trying to break into the trunk. Those who tried to vandalize or prank the trunks, could be included as trying to break in.

“Next question,” Minerva said, “Who here sabotaged the toiletries in Mr. Potter or Miss Granger’s bathrooms, whether carelessly or deliberately placing their dorm-mates in the crossfire as well?”

A few students raised their hands. Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnegan, Lavender Brown, and Parvati Patil all gave looks of betrayal to those who raised their hands. Obviously they had been in the crossfire.

“Who here has worn those Potter Stinks Badges?” Minerva asked.

This was for Harry and Hermione’s benefit, and they knew it. They looked up and raised their eyebrows, when a good three-quarters of the table raised their hands. Minerva knew this already, having seen all the badges, even those hidden with charms. Harry and Hermione merely seemed to bask in the fact that everyone who raised their hands knew the new couple were looking at them – knew them all guilty --- and the perpetrators were all quite uncomfortable at the pair looking at them.

“Who here has written to Rita Skeeter or other journalists?” Minerva asked, “Giving them rumors, true or false, about Mr. Potter and Miss Granger about any topic.”

Several students raised their hands, including Lavender Brown, Parvati Patil and Romilda Vane.
Also, Minerva finally realized why Colin Creevey, one of Harry’s fan-boy from the first week of his first year at Hogwarts, was sitting amongst those students, instead of had been one of those Harry mentioned.

Colin Creevey was guilty of taking pictures of Harry and Hermione and sending them to news outlets. Minerva knew she would have to confiscate the camera, if only to see what pictures he had of Harry and Hermione for that day, pertaining to the new couple’s romantic life. She knew there would probably be a few.

Minerva then asked a bunch of quick-fire questions, pertaining to various ways of bullying. Most were minor crimes, but just as embarrassing to be seen as guilty of committing. For example, starting false rumors about Harry and Hermione among not only Gryffindor but the rest of the school, which succeeded in negative reactions toward the two. The rest were small and random, like attempting to pull down the pants or skirt of either Harry or Hermione respectively.

Minerva took a chance and asked if anyone was guilty of groping Mr. Potter or Miss Granger, or trying to touch them inappropriately. Nobody raised their hands. Minerva looked at the couple, and they nodded. Nobody was guilty of that. The closest was the attempts to pull down their pants or skirt. Minerva sighed in relief, as did most of the other Professors. At least the students hadn’t crossed that line.

“Two more questions,” Minerva said, “Both of these are rather extreme, but I have evidence both took place. The first: In the hours and days after the First Task, who here was guilty of telling Mr. Potter they either wished – during the task -- he was eaten by the dragon, or wished he summoned a white flag, instead of his Firebolt, and simply gave up like a coward?”

Minerva knew what she was doing with this one. If any of these students raised their hand for the first one, they were basically admitting they wished Harry had died during the task. Allowing hands to be raised for both options, gave them the freedom of other’s opinion, that they might simply be guilty of thinking Harry should have given up like a coward.

Except… Minerva could recognize those who looked more guilty than others. Those who did believe the dragon should have eaten Mr. Potter. Minerva closed her eyes for a moment, wishing she could just Obliviate herself of that last question and its results. To see her actual Lions actually wish another student died during such a dangerous event was maddening.

Unfortunately the next question wasn’t going to make things better.

“After the First Task, between November 24th, and today’s date,” she said, “Who here stole Mr. Potter’s Golden Egg – a crucial clue – for several days, before returning it anonymously.”

Most of the students gave gasps of disbelief. Minerva knew why too. The students knew exactly how big a crime this was, because it interfered in the Tournament. If Harry hadn’t gotten his egg back, he would be unprepared, and he might die as a result in the second task. Especially if he could have used those days he hadn’t had the egg, as crucial days to work on the Task.

Three particular students, two sixth years and a fifth year, all sitting together, raised their hand.

“Stand up you three,” Minerva said, “And explain yourselves.”

All three stood up together. The middle student, the fifth year spoke up.
“It was a d-dare, Professor McGonagall,” the fifth year said, “These two dared me to do it, to prove I was still a Gryffindor unlike a… a coward like Potter. They told me he shouldn’t have deserved to have the egg, because he should have summoned a white flag and admitted defeat at the sight of the dragon.”

“Here’s a question before you continue,” Harry said, “Raise your hand. Staff and Students, shall we? How many here would have had the Gryffindor Courage to face the Horntail, like I did.”

Harry raised his hand. So did Hagrid, Minerva, and even the tiny half-goblin, but all warrior – Flitwick. None of the students did.

“Coward, am I?” Harry scoffed. “What, I ask, do you call yourselves then? Continue, sir. Thank you for standing and speaking the truth.”

Harry’s words made the fifth year braver. “I… I stole the egg while Potter… Harry… was elsewhere, out of the Tower. Probably with his girlfriend there. I kept it for seven days – these two dared me keep it longer. I… I kept it thirty minutes longer, told them that was considered longer, then set it back on his bedside table.”

“What day was this, sir?” Harry asked.

“Last Saturday, I think,” the fifth year said.

“Wasn’t returned to me until Monday,” Harry said, “Don’t worry, I believe you. I know who took it those last two days.”

So did Minerva. Ronald or Ginny – likely Ron – probably had taken it.

“I won’t press charges, Professor,” Harry said. “I wasn’t exactly very focused on the Egg or its clue in the days following the First Task. Didn’t know it was missing for two whole days. I told Hermione recently I was going to work on it more after the Yule Ball. I probably have looked at it two or three times and haven’t opened it since the very first time. What I am trying to say is… if I hadn’t noticed it gone, simply because one of my dorm-mates wanted to see it again, I likely wouldn’t have known it was gone for a few more days. Might not have missed it at all.”

“While Mr. Potter is courteous not to press charges,” Minerva said, “Here is what could happen if he did. Stealing something from the Champion as important as the Egg is considered a crime. Could be as heavy as attempted murder.”

Several students gasped in shock. The three students who were still standing looked very pale.

“Because those days the Champion has the clue are all crucial because of clue would help the Champion,” Minerva said. “If the Champion died or was grievously injured, the thief of the clue could face charges. Because they hindered the Champion from what could have been a breakthrough during one of those days the Clue was stolen. They could have prevented the Champion that nugget of information that might have turned the tide and caused the Task to have an entirely different result in their favor – if they simply had that Egg during those days it was stolen.”

“My deepest apologies, Mr. Potter,” the fifth year said, “If I knew… no, that isn’t an excuse. All I can say is I am sorry. I should not have done it. I will accept any punishment I am given.”

Minerva smiled, as did Harry, Hermione and several members of the staff.
“The three of you may be seated,” Minerva said to the fifth year, and two sixth years.

The three students sat, still looking pale, but also it seemed they were quite regretful.

“I am not sure if any of you truly noticed while you were here,” Minerva said. “But every single one of you here, sitting at that table, raised your hand at least once when responding to one of my questions. That means you are all guilty of committing some type of crime. Be it simply insulting Mr. Potter, calling him a coward. All the way to wishing the dragon had eaten him, or stealing the egg. All of you are guilty of something. Many of you are guilty of multiple things. All of these crimes were targeted not only to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, but to two of your fellow Gryffindors. Two members of your Pride. Two of your lions.

Minerva inhaled. It was this moment that she knew Albus was about to react badly.

“It is because of all these crimes over the past few weeks,” Minerva said, “That Mr. Potter and Miss Granger will no longer be residing in Gryffindor Tower, or will ever enter past the Fat Lady’s portrait, ever again.”

Nearly all the students at the table gasped in shock. Harry and Hermione’s former dorm-mates were looking at the new couple with expressions of shocked disbelief. Parvati had tears in her eyes. Albus’ gasp was loudest. He looked at Minerva with narrowed eyebrows, then looked at Harry and Hermione, who were ignoring the Headmaster.

“This is both my choice, and their choice,” Minerva continued, “And it is entirely for their own safety. They do not feel welcomed by any of you anymore. They do not trust any of you anymore. Perhaps a select few of you might be lucky to gain their trust again. Those students who stood up earlier, and left the Hall. The students older than the First Years? They earned Harry and Hermione’s trust because decided to be true Gryffindors and support their fellow lions.

“This is your punishment. You will write two different assignments, due a week from Saturday. If those of you whom are fourth years and older, and do not turn the assignments in, you will lose permission to attend the Yule Ball.

“The first assignment. It is up to you how long the length of the assignment needs to be. You must explain on parchment what it means to be a true Gryffindor, a true Lion of Gryffindor Tower. In addition to that, you must also list every crime you raised your hand for this evening. Then explain why you did it.”

A few of the students looked disgruntled or disheartened at that. Others simply looked resigned and accepting of their punishment.

“The second assignment, you might consider much more difficult,” Minerva said. “You will write a letter – as if you were writing someone like your parents – to either Harry Potter or Hermione Granger. The topic of the letter is your choice. You could apologize for your actions or inactions toward them. You could explain why you did it. Anything you want to say. The letters will be first read by me, then given to Harry or Hermione. Both are due by next Saturday. Meeting adjourned. You are all dismissed. Mr. Creevey! Please come up here.”

Harry and Hermione both looked up as Colin Creevey stood from the table and walked toward the Head Table. He looked like he was about to cry. He couldn’t even look at Harry or Hermione.
“Mr. Creevey, do you have your camera on you?” Minerva asked.

“Y-yes, Professor,” Colin said.

“Did you take any pictures of Mr. Potter or Miss Granger during any events of the day today?”

Colin nodded. “Lunch and dinner. And earlier in Gryffindor Tower…”

“I understand,” Minerva interrupted him; she knew he didn’t want to talk about the confrontation, “Nothing else? Nothing the two might consider private. Something that shouldn’t be photographed?

Colin shook his head. “N-no, ma’am.”

“Mr. Creevey, you raised your hand once during the whole meeting,” Minerva said, “So I can assume you only committed one crime toward Mr. Potter and Miss Granger?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Colin said. “I… I took pictures of them over the past few weeks. Since Halloween. I… I sent these pictures to the Daily Prophet, the Quibbler, Witch Weekly. I… I only wanted to see my pictures published. See if I could become famous. Harry is, of course, really popular and pictures of him are on high demand. And Hermione… um… well, given she’s always with him. And now that they’re together, any recent pictures of them together, over the past few weeks, could be used now to make readers believe these are pictures that happened after the events of today, when Harry asked Hermione to the Ball, and they became a couple.”

Colin sighed and looked at Harry and Hermione, then sniffled. “My… biggest mistake is that I never asked them permission, or told them I was taking pictures of them. I did it without their permission and sent them out to news outlets. That is my crime, Professor.”

“I will return this camera to you after I process these pictures,” Minerva said. “All pictures will either be given to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, or thrown away. Mr. Creevey. I hope this has taught you a lesson. If I discover you taking pictures of people without permission, you will receive punishment. Understand?”

“Yes, Professor,” Colin said.

“You are dismissed,” Minerva said. “As are you, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger.”

“One moment, Har – Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” Albus said, “I would like to speak to you.”

“If this is about their new residences in the castle, that is an In-House Issue, Albus,” Minerva said. “They have already moved into their Private Quarters, which by the way, are separate. They do not live together. Their belongings are already in the Quarters. Only the Head of Gryffindor and any guests I invite may get into where the Quarters are. For their privacy, their security, and their current state of emotions –”

“Current state of emotions?” Albus asked.

“They’ve just become a couple, Albus,” Minerva said. “They had hoped to keep their relationship private – merely making the fact that they are each other’s date to the Ball public – until the Ball. Circumstances have changed that. They still desire some privacy, something they would never get in Gryffindor Tower. As you have witnessed over the past hour or so, most of their House-mates are guilty of anywhere between one and several crimes committed toward them.”
“You must forgive them, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” Albus said. “Only then my you find peace of mind. Your current state of emotions might have something to do with the fact that you might still find them guilty of committing these crimes to you. Forgive them, and it will feel like the weight of the world has been lifted from your shoulders.”

“We will decide whether or not to forgive them, Headmaster,” Hermione said, “Depending on the quality of the letters they write to us.”

“That is why we suggested to Professor McGonagall that they write those letters, sir,” Harry said, “So we know if any of them are truly sorry. If they still see us as traitors, cowards, and someone not worthy to be a Gryffindor. Then, and only if they deserve our forgiveness, will we give it Headmaster.”

“Completely understandable,” Minerva said, before Albus could say something. “The two of you are excused.”

Before Albus could say anything, the couple stood and hurried out of the Great Hall.

“It is imperative I know where they are residing, Minerva,” Albus said, as the other staff began leaving the Great Hall.

“Why?” Minerva asked, “So you can put eavesdropping and other charms in their Quarters like you did on both their dormitories? My elves uncovered your eavesdropping charms, Albus.”

Albus sighed. “I placed them for a reason. As we’ve witnessed today, the… new couple… were targeted, shunned, bullied by most of their House-mates. The eavesdropping allowed me to make sure nothing too extreme happened to them, especially in the privacy of their dormitories where they should feel the safest.”

“Albus, nobody but the person who resides in their Quarters can enter their Quarters,” Minerva said, “Nobody aside from me. Not even Mr. Potter can enter Miss Granger’s Quarters or vice-versa. Nobody but those I accept as worthy will be allowed in the area where the Private Quarters are. There is a small Common Room for them to hang out with each other, and any friends they decide to invite. Nobody who raised their hand today – except for perhaps, Mr. Creevey and maybe their old dorm-mates, will likely ever be allowed where they are. Nor will Mr. Potter and Miss Granger likely ever make contact with most of those people, especially since they won’t enter Gryffindor Tower again.”

“Are you sure that is wise?” Albus said, “Maybe they need the familiarity of the Gryffindor Common Room sometimes. Right now, yes, they’re reacting badly to everything that has happened. But in time…”

“In time, if they wish to visit the Common Room,” Minerva said, “It might be allowed to happen. But that will be up to them, and them only. Albus, I will not tell you where they now reside. It is my job as the Head of Gryffindor House.”

“I can have you removed from the role,” Albus said.

Minerva nearly rolled her eyes at the threat. It was a last-ditch effort to get the new couple back in Gryffindor Tower. “All three other Heads and two other Professors must vote to remove me from the role. Pomona and Filius will not remove me. Your attempt at threat in order to manipulate me into
telling you where Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, will not only not work, but it is also very predictable of you. I tell you what, Albus. I will tell you where they are under one circumstance and one only.

“Make an Unbreakable Vow with me. You will never manipulate Mr. Potter or Miss Granger. You will never attempt to break up the couple, nor influence anyone else to do so. And you will resign from your other jobs aside from Headmaster, so I know you’re dedicated as you claim to be, to your duties here. Only then, will you granted into where Mr. Potter and Miss Granger reside. And Albus? Fawkes will not be able to bring you there. No portraits there have portraits outside of that area. The only house-elves permitted there is those I give permission. And the only ghost allowed there is loyal to me as the Head of Gryffindor House. He will not betray me.”

Albus sighed. “I see we’re at an impasse for the moment. It has been a tiring day. Perhaps we can discuss this with refreshed minds on another day.”

“Only if you intend to make that Unbreakable Vow,” Minerva said. “Good evening, Albus.”

Before Albus could reply, Minerva left the Great Hall. She sagged in exhaustion, both mental and physical as she started off toward the Grand Staircase. Conversing with Albus Dumbledore was always exhausting, stressful, and will likely cause you to have at least a combination of three headaches or migraines – none induced by Legilimency. Minerva considered herself lucky she only had a mild migraine.

Unless you count the first migraine she received during the meeting with the Gryffindor students.

*I am sleeping in the Head of Gryffindor Quarters tonight*, Minerva decided.

It was a longer walk, but at least she would feel closer to her Lions.

As Lioness of Hogwarts, it was proper, after all, to sleep in the Lion’s Den.

Chapter End Notes

The Lion’s Den is another name for the area where Harry and Hermione now reside, though the first mention was the last sentence of this chapter.

Minerva’s argument with Albus there at the end, especially the threat of Unbreakable Vow, was her trying to prevent anything he might try to do to her, Harry or Hermione. She wanted to know how he would react, and if she needed to watch him and be wary around him. She now knows she needs to.

So Gryffindor has seen better days. The punishments for the guilty students might not seem harsh enough, but there was an unspoken punishment during the meeting as well. Every single house-mate at the table discovered that none of those shunned or bullied Harry and Hermione got away with it. They learned things about house-mates, dorm-mates, maybe even friends or fancies, things they might not have wanted to know. It will deeply affect them. Far more than written words.

The Chapter Title is a bit of a play on words. Pride in this case is the pack of lions, Gryffindor Lions. The Fall is their fall from grace due to their behavior toward Harry and Hermione.
Next Chapter: Ron and Ginny wake up to discover Harry and Hermione no longer reside in their dormitories. Then Ron gets even more surprising news, this time about his classes. This makes our heroes very happy. Ron and Ginny then serve an interesting detention.
Ron Weasley was a man on a mission. But first, he really needed to use the toilet. As he pissed, he started going over his mission. He was going to make Harry Potter pay for what he had done the previous night. He had spent his “grounding” in his dormitory plotting about what he was going to do to Potter and Granger for their actions the previous night. That is, when he wasn’t eating his dinner or complaining about the lack of food that had been given to him, which usually consisted of swearing at McGonagall for starving him.

Admittedly, eating, complaining and swearing did take up a lot of his time, so it didn’t give him much time to plot about Potter and Granger’s coming downfall. Wait… Potter, Granger, and that elf. If he could find the elf. Maybe he could call it. What was its name? Mallet? Marley? Mallow?

Of course, the word Mallow made him think of Marshmallows, so he had drooled all over his pyjama top as he pissed, while thinking of the yummy delight that wasn’t available at Hogwarts.

Ron lost track of what he had been thinking. He had completely forgotten about the elf, and his mind went back to Potter and Granger. Well, he couldn’t do much to Potter until the git woke up. Especially since McGonagall had his wand! So he wanted the git to be awake for what he planned to do.

So he finished pissing and pulled up his pyjama bottoms, then walked out of the bathroom. Neville, Seamus and Dean weren’t awake yet. Which he thought was odd, since he had gone to sleep after them.

He had stayed up for an hour after Neville, Seamus and Dean, went to bed waiting for Potter. During that hour, he had been cursing Potter’s name for taking so much time to get to his dormitory. The git was probably snogging and shagging that bitch Granger. Lucky Potter! Granger should have given it up to him, not Potter! Ron had gone to sleep before Potter returned, dreaming of Granger giving it up to him instead of Potter.

Potter was likely still deep asleep given the fact he had returned so late from shagging Granger. So Ron was sure he could yank the curtain, completely destroying whatever ward was on it. He gave it a great tug, and suddenly found himself tumbling onto the ground.

“What’s that racket?!” Seamus said, waking up and sitting up. “Oi! Weasley, what you doing?”

“What’s it look like?” Ron asked, grinning, “I must have underestimated my own strength pulling
that curtain off, given the wards on it.”

“There ain’t no ward on it anymore, Weasley,” Seamus said.

“Yeah, cause I just destroyed it when I pulled it down!” Ron said, grinning.

“Weasley, if the wards were still on the curtains,” Seamus said, “the curtain would have shocked you as soon as you touched it. The Wards are no longer there because Potter no longer sleeps in this dormitory.”

What?! Ron thought, then he realized Potter wasn’t in his bed! Where the bloody hell is he?!

“Where does he sleep?” Ron asked.

Did he somehow get into Granger’s dormitory? Ron thought, Is he somehow sleeping in her bed?!

“Oh, right, you weren’t there last night, I forgot,” Seamus said. “Anyway, Professor McGonagall told the rest of Gryffindor after dinner – during a big House meeting – that Potter and his girlfriend now have their own Private Quarters.”

“Like… together?!” Ron asked; his jealousy had sparked since Seamus called Granger Potter’s girlfriend.

“No, Weasley,” Seamus said, rolling his eyes, “You really think old McGonagall would let them stay together in the same Quarters? Especially since they’re together? They have separate Quarters.”

“Oh,” Ron said; well, at least they weren’t sleeping in the same bed, “So where are they?”

“Dunno,” Seamus said, “McGonagall never said. Supposed to be a big secret, I suppose.”

Ron shrugged. “I’ll wait for Potter to come to the Common Room.”

“Oh, right, he ain’t going there either,” Seamus said.

“What?!” Ron exclaimed.

Seamus nodded. “McGonagall said Potter and his girlfriend will never enter the Common Room again. She decided to move them away from Gryffindor Tower, cause of all the shite the rest of the Lions done to them since Halloween.”

“Cowards,” Ron snorted. “They call themselves Gryffindors? Nah, they ain’t real Gryffindors anymore. They aren’t welcome in the Tower, are they? No longer Lions then.”

“Whatever you say, mate,” Seamus said, “You done with the bathroom?”

“Yep,” Ron said.

Ron stood, tossing the curtains on the now-vacant bed. He paused and looked at the spot where Potter’s trunk had been. He cursed, realizing he’d never get another chance to get anything from Potter’s trunk. He sighed and walked over to his bed, then pulled out a newly-cleaned school outfit and started undressing his pyjamas.
“Weasley!” Seamus’ voice carried from the bathroom. “You didn’t flush again! That is the fifth time this week!”

“I’ll do it next time,” Ron muttered, forgetting he had promised to do that the past four times as well.

And that was only counting this week!

(A few minutes later)

Ginny Weasley yawned as she walked up the stairs toward the fourth year dormitory. She really wished she had her wand right now. That Granger bitch deserved a high-powered version of her Bat-Bogey Hex for telling – err – implying to all the students in the Common Room – that she, Ginny, wasn’t a virgin. The boyfriend-stealing hussy had basically called her a slut! The hypocrite!

Ooh, but Ginny could still remember Granger’s words when she basically told her to drop her knickers for Harry. Ginny would have done it too, if it was just Harry and her in the Common Room. But Granger knew the room was crowded. So the hussy had implied she was a slut.

She could still hear the titters and jeers that had accompanied Granger’s taunts. Those bastards. What happened to teasing and insulting Potter and Granger instead? She had hoped the students in the Common Room would react badly to Potter and Granger being each other’s date to the Yule Ball. Only a few girls were jealous and upset. Everyone else seemed to be happy about the pair. Fucking traitors! Fucking Potter and Granger!

“Peach broomstick,” Ginny muttered, “Think you’re real funny, do you, bitch? You are lucky your dorm-mates don’t have a broomstick, or I’d stick it up your arse next to that stick that refuses to come out!”

Ginny was still muttering when we reached the landing next to the fourth year’s dormitory. She peered into the room, to see if Granger was awake, and almost jumped when she saw Lavender Brown looking at her with a raised eyebrow.

“What do you want, Little Weasley?” Lavender asked.

Little?! Ginny huffed, When I get my wand, I’ll show you Little, you blonde bimbo!”

“You really dare to come up here after what you pulled yesterday?” Lavender asked. “Do you think that kind of thing is tolerated here in Gryffindor Tower?”

“If I remember right, you were just as snappish toward… Hermione, Lavender!” Ginny said.

“Excuse me?” Lavender asked. “I’m not trying to break them up! I never painted Hermione as a Potions Princess, a villain who put Harry’s name in the Goblet, and is out to poison his mind before she kills him!”

“That was my brother!” Ginny growled.

“You didn’t apologize for him, did you?” Lavender asked. “Didn’t tell him he was wrong? Didn’t stop him when he nearly attacked Hermione? You would have attacked her too. You don’t want them to be a couple, do you? McGonagall was right, your wand was out. So I will ask again. What
do you want, Little Weasley?"

“I… want to apologize to her… Hermione, I mean,” Ginny said.

“Right,” Lavender snorted, “Pull my other tit! Whatever… I hope she hexes you before you can even get a word out. She’s smart enough to know not to trust a word that comes out of your mouth. Doesn’t matter, though. You wasted your time coming here. She isn’t here.”

“How early did she get up?!” Ginny asked.

“Huh?” Lavender asked, “Oh, right, you weren’t there. McGonagall told the rest of the Gryffindors Harry and Hermione no longer reside in Gryffindor Tower, nor are they interested in ever coming to the Common Room… ever again. They have their own – separate – Private Quarters. Don’t ask me, I don’t know where. Harry and Hermione will only tell people they trust the location. Plus I bet it needs McGonagall’s approval too. Good luck trying to figure out where they live now. If their location isn’t found by dinner, I doubt it will ever be found without their permission.”

Fuck! Ginny growled, Not only is Potter in Private Quarters now, so is Granger! In fact McGonagall likely did it so Ron and I wouldn’t do anything to them. Which means she suspects us. Of course she does, the way she caught us glaring at Potter and Granger, after he asked her to the Ball. That was a mistake. Probably the reason her house-elf was watching the confrontation yesterday. If we hadn’t been glaring at them. Ah well, hindsight and all of that.

“Well, that’s… unexpected,” Ginny said, “Alright then. Thank you for the talk, Lavender. Appreciate it.”

Ginny thought of saying something else to the girl, maybe implying certain things to her, so rumors would start about her. But the girl was already suspicious of her, and knew of her desire to break Potter and Granger up. Lavender would probably tell Granger exactly who came calling to her old dormitory. She could always find Granger and…

And what? Ginny wondered, as she made her way toward the Common Room, What if that house-elf who attacked Ron is still watching us? Maybe McGonagall wants another confrontation so she can try to suspend us or something. This bears watching and waiting

Ginny stepped into the Common Room, and was about to leave the Tower, when she heard a voice.

“Hey!” a male voice said, “Weasley girl!”

She turned in the direction of the voice. The owner was someone she recognized, but never talked to before. Had he been waiting for her?

“McLaggen,” Ginny said, “What do you want?”

“I heard Potter rejected you for a Muggleborn,” Cormac McLaggen said, “Why would you want him, when you could have a Pureblood Prince like me?”

“What part were you more interested in all that drama last night?” Ginny asked, “The part where Potter rejected me? Or the part where it was implied I’m not a virgin? Or the part where…”

“Where you basically begged Potter to have you while you dropped your knickers?” McLaggen asked. “Yeah, I heard that part.”
“I didn’t beg anybody, McLaggen,” Ginny said, “That whole thing was a mess of innuendo and false rumors. Granger seems to have succeeded in whatever she had planned for me last night, if this conversation any indication.”

“My apologies,” McLaggen said, “I wouldn’t want to imply anything about you either, after all. That would be rude of me. Maybe I could make it up to you, by taking you on a date?”

“Not interested,” Ginny said.

“Are you not?” McLaggen asked, “You know, you’re a third year. You can’t go to the Ball without an older student as a date.” How many blokes are going to want to go out with you, when they hear the Boy-Who-Lived Triwizard Champion rejected you for a Muggleborn? How many will ask you to the Ball between now and then, seeing as you’re not good enough for the Boy-Who-Lived?”

“Are you asking me to the Ball?” Ginny asked.

“Depends on if you say ‘yes’,” McLaggen said.

“I need to think about it,” Ginny said.

While I am quite sure I’ll be on Potter’s arm at the Ball, Ginny said, I need a back-up plan, in case the first one fails, and Granger’s still on his arm by then. McLaggen is right. I can’t go to the Ball, unless someone older asks me. Okay, I need to see if my first plan is going to work. There are some complications already, since Potter’s somewhere hidden in the castle where I may not be able to find him.

“I tell you what,” Ginny said, “Wait until next Friday to ask me again. I promise I will accept no other offer.”

Except Potter, Ginny thought.

“I just need time to consider it,” Ginny said. “This is a big thing for me.”

“Fine,” McLaggen said, shrugging, “I’ll ask no other girl out until you accept or deny my offer next Friday, if not sooner.”

“Deal,” Ginny said. “You better leave before one of my brothers find me. They might not approve.”

McLaggen nodded. “Good point. Thanks. Especially since one of them is a Prefect.”


“One of the Twins,” McLaggen said, “George, I think. Hard to tell, really. Right, I forgot you weren’t in the Great Hall last night. ‘Grounded’, right? Anyway, McGonagall took the badges from all the original Prefects. Katie Bell in my year is one of the new fifth year Prefects. Lee Jordan, though he is a Sixth Year, is the other Prefect, an ‘honorary one’. Your brother and Angelina Johnson are the Sixth Year Prefect. There’s no new Seventh Year Prefects.”

“Well, that’s going to be… interesting,” Ginny muttered. “Thanks for telling me.”

“No problem,” McLaggen said, “You did miss an interesting dinner, and House Meeting. You’ll
probably hear all about it today. See you around.”

Ginny merely nodded. *George a Prefect, and Potter and Granger in Private Quarters! What the fuck else did I miss last night?! Damn it! I owe Cormac telling me, else I would have been in for a rude awakening if I saw George with a badge on. Cormac is rather handsome. Even when I get Potter, I might shag him once anyway just to see how he is. Potter won’t care. He’ll be too in love with me to dump me for being unfaithful. What a wonderful notion. Or would that be Potion?*

“Oi! Ginny!” Ron’s voice broke her thoughts, “You heard that shite about Potter and Granger getting their own Quarters cause they’re cowards who don’t consider themselves Gryffindors anymore?”

Ginny sighed. It was too early to put up with her moron brother.

“Tell me all about it while you accompany me down to breakfast,” Ginny said. “And in turn, I’ll tell you what I just discovered about one of our older brothers.”

*Meanwhile, Ginny thought as she followed Ron out of the Common Room, I will consider exactly how we can find Potter and Granger’s Private Rooms. Wherever they are….*

Ginny had absolutely no idea just how close the subjects of her thoughts were to her at that very moment in time.

*(Meanwhile…)*

Harry smiled as he looked at the small slip of parchment he had found on his bedside table, obviously left there by Dobby or Mallory.

The letter read:

*Mr. Potter,*

*I am sure you and Miss Granger are rather concerned about confrontation with Ron and Ginny Weasley so soon after yesterday. Do not worry, it is all handled.*

*First of all, Dobby and Mallory will be serving you and Miss Granger breakfast in the Common Room at seven-thirty. This will not happen every day, of course, but I decided you shouldn’t be in the Great Hall so soon after your performance yesterday.*

*About that, I am sorry I had to give you and Miss Granger a detention – which was obviously your scheduled dancing lessons. I feared the Headmaster would give you a more difficult punishment instead. He might have even tried to split you and Miss Granger up into two separate detentions.*

*As for the other way I am working toward preventing confrontations between you and the Weasleys. Ron will no longer be in any of your classes anymore. He is being given a new schedule that will put him in classes with whatever House Gryffindor isn’t taking classes with.*

*I know this puts a little damper on our eavesdropping mission. But I did not want to risk another confrontation. Constant Vigilance, Mr. Potter, especially around the Weasleys.*
One last note. There is a little known fact that there is no rule for students to sit at their House Tables during mealtimes. Aside from big events like Feasts, that is. So if you wish to sit at Ravenclaw or Hufflepuff Table in the foreseeable future, please feel free to do so when you’re not at a Feast. Also feel free to tell any of the students or Staff who says you can’t sit there about this. I am sure there are some students who would like to know this.

Professor McGonagall

Head of Gryffindor Tower

Harry’s smile turned into a grin. Could this day get any better? Private breakfast with his girlfriend, and no more having to deal with Ron in any of his classes anymore. Also, he and Hermione didn’t need to sit with the traitor Gryffindors anymore – even if there were some friendly ones he could trust, he and Hermione would still have had to sit with the others, including the two youngest Weasleys.

“What has you grinning like a loon today, young Lion?” Leon the knight with the lion steed asked.

“Just got a bit of good news to start the day,” Harry said, “Been invited to a private breakfast with my girl.”

“Well, I know better than to keep a young man away from his lass,” Leon said, “I bid you a good day.”

“I believe it will be a good day, Sir Leon,” Harry said.

He grabbed his knapsack, already prepared with the books for his classes today: History, Charms then Double Potions. He hated Fridays. Charms was great… but everything else. Friday was supposed to be the best day of the week. This year though….

He waved the thought away, not allowing his grim mood to ruin what would be a fine morning.

Hermione was already in their Private Common Room when he walked in. She beamed at him when she saw him. He walked over to her and sat beside her on the couch. She grabbed his arm, and brought him close and gave him a deep kiss.

“Good morning, boyfriend,” Hermione purred, after they separated from the kiss.

“Good morning, girlfriend,” Harry said, grinning.

“You’re chipper today,” Hermione commented, “I assume you got the same letter I did then? Of course you did, you’re here for breakfast with me.”

“Great news about Ron, huh?” Harry asked.

“It puts a damper in our eavesdropping mission,” Hermione said, “Since we don’t have classes with him. Means we’ll have to figure different strategies.”

“I’m sure we’ll figure out something,” Harry said.

A female elf that wasn’t Mallory appeared on the other side of the coffee table.
“Mistress bids you a good morning and hopes you enjoy breakfast,” the elf said, “My name is Sadie.”

“Good morning, Sadie,” Hermione said, “What is for breakfast?”

“Sadie asked the kitchen elves what the Gryffindors usually eat for breakfast,” Sadie said, “and made two platters for you.”

Sadie snapped her fingers and two large plates full of food similar to an English breakfast appeared, along with silverware and glasses. Jugs of Orange Juice and Water appeared as well.

“Thank you, Sadie,” Harry said, “I believe we’re all set.”

“Mistress reminds you not to be late for your first class,” Sadie said, “To be watchful for Weasleys, and to enjoy your day. Also she tells you not to expect private breakfast every day.”

“We expected no less,” Hermione said, “You’re excused, Sadie. And thank you for everything.”

Sadie bowed and vanished.

“I did deduce from the letter,” Hermione said, “that Professor McGonagall didn’t want us to be at breakfast with the Weasleys so soon after the confrontation.”

“I got that impression too,” Harry said, “So do you think Ron and Ginny’s heard about our Opening Salvos yet?”

“If they haven’t, they’ll likely hear it down in the Great Hall,” Hermione said. “If we were successful, everyone will still be talking about it. If they aren’t, we’re going to have to do another display of our devoted affection for one another, just to remind them. Can’t have them forgetting that fact if we suddenly break up for a strange reason.”

“I don’t know if I would rather be there for the Weasels’ reactions,” Harry said, “Or happy I’m not.”

“If we were down there, could I do this?” Hermione asked, then kissed him.

He grinned after ending the kiss a few moments later. “You did say we should continue to make sure all the students know our relationship is serious.”

Hermione considered this. “I suppose at lunch we could have sweet little kisses and whisper sweet nothings in each other’s ear while we feed each other.”

“Maybe not the last part,” Harry said, “Might be messy.”

Hermione snickered. “Very true. If you can stay awake longer than I expect you to in History of Magic, we’ll do everything but the feeding each other part for lunch.”

“Simply means I have to work for it,” Harry said, “I can do that.”

The couple began eating and talking of nothing and everything, while also sharing sweet little kisses – as practice for their next performance, of course.

Yes, it was a glorious morning in the Lion’s Den.
(Meanwhile, in the Great Hall…)

Ron Weasley was not having a great morning at all. Potter and Granger were nowhere to be seen in the Great Hall. When he didn’t find them at the Gryffindor Table, he remembered the fact that they might not be Gryffindors anymore and looked around at the other tables for them. He couldn’t find them. They simply weren’t there.

Then his stomach grumbled, and he no longer cared for Potter and Granger at the moment. He sat down next to Ginny at the table, and started piling food on his plate.

“Anyone seen… Harry Potter and Hermione Granger?” Ginny asked her Gryffindor year-mates.

“Probably snogging in a broom closet,” Romilda Vane said.

Ron stared at the fairly attractive exotic girl across the table. Did she say Potter and Granger are snogging? What happened to them simply being Yule Ball dates? Nobody said they were already snogging! Until now, the thought of those two snogging were just dark thoughts and visions in his head! He didn’t actually believe they were really snogging or shagging yet!

Now though… he wondered if everything he imagined in his head about those two was actually really going on! He was about to go overboard with jealousy, when he recalled what Ginny said about McGonagall watching them, and how the woman would be suspicious about their behavior toward Potter and Granger. So he counted from five – he would have counted from ten, but that was a bit difficult for him -- and calmed himself down, his jealousy lowering itself to a simmering in his belly which would soon be replaced with food.

“Snogging?” Ginny asked. “I thought they were just going to the Ball together! When did they start snogging?!”

“Right, you weren’t down here for dinner last night,” Romilda said.

“Yes, as I’m constantly being reminded,” Ginny muttered.

“Well,” Romilda said, “Dinner started off very interesting last night. Potter and Granger came in, and before they sat down for dinner they… decided to announce they were an actual couple instead of dates to the Ball. They didn’t do it vocally either. They had a two-minute long snog in the middle of the Great Hall.”

“Two minutes?” Ginny asked.

Ron swallowed his eggs, remembering what Ginny had said about his eating habits, if he ever wanted a girl like Granger to like him. He should swallow food before talking. Good advice! In fact, he might have remembered Granger advising him doing the same thing at least once over the past three years. Annoying, as she was, he was suddenly realizing she sometimes had good advice. Sometimes.

“How did they last two minutes without Snape stepping in?” Ron asked.

“Snape wasn’t here,” Romilda said. “In fact, he had not been here for the entire dinner session. Rumor is he had some type of business in the Slytherin dungeons.”
“What about Draco Malfoy then?” Ginny said, “Bet he couldn’t resist stepping in and ruining their moment.”

Ron snorted. Yes, the ferret would have done something like that.

“I didn’t pay attention to Malfoy,” Romilda said, “But I heard someone say they saw him just staring and gaping at the new couple like everyone else, instead of going over and insulting them.”

Ron grumbled. He hated Malfoy even more now, if that was possible. Why didn’t the git stop Potter and Granger from snogging in front of everyone?

“Anyway, Potter and Granger would have very likely gone on longer,” Romilda continued, “but the Headmaster stopped them.”

“He did?” Ginny said, sounding eager, “Did he punish them?”

“Well, first he said he was happy to see the seeds of a new love begin to sow,” Romilda said. “Then he said such affection was inappropriate in public like that, and that it should be done in private.”

“He… he said that?” Ginny asked, looking shocked.

Ron was shocked too. The Headmaster was supposed to be against Potter and Granger being together! Why would he be happy about them?

“I thought you said he stopped them!” Ron exclaimed.

“He did stop them, technically,” Romilda said.

“But he didn’t punish them?” Ginny asked.

“McGonagall gave them detention for tomorrow night at seven,” Romilda said.

“Brilliant,” Ron said, thinking he and Ginny might be wrong about McGonagall since she gave the gits detention! “Serves them right for snogging in front of everyone like that.”

“Why did they snog in the middle of the Great Hall?” Ginny asked, “Granger doesn’t seem to be the type to kiss in public.”

“It’s always the brainy girls,” a blonde boy in Ginny year’s said beside Romilda, a big grin on his face, “Don’t underestimate them, is what I heard. My Dad says it all the time. Brainy girls are the best. They always surprise you. Potter’s a lucky bloke with someone like that! She’s pretty hot too! I wonder when she got rid of those buck teeth of hers. She’s quite pretty now without them! Bet it makes snogging her that much better too. Potter is such a lucky bloke!”

Ron blinked. Granger got rid of her buck teeth -- when?! Ron had thoughts about snogging her last year, when he and her went to Hogsmeade together. But those buck teeth were a big turn off. They would have made his lip bloody! And now she didn’t have them, it appeared! And now Potter was snogging her!

“You know,” Romilda said, “Rumor is, that detention isn’t even real.”
“What do you mean?” Ron asked, his simmering jealousy beginning to boil, “McGonagall faked it? Why would she do that? She doesn’t do that! Does she?”

“Oh, Potter and Granger are meeting her tomorrow night at seven, according to the rumor,” Romilda said. “But not for detention. They’re meeting her… for dancing lessons.”

“That… don’t you see what she did?” Ginny asked, “McGonagall didn’t want the Headmaster to punish them for snogging in public like that! So she disguised a detention with dancing lessons that – perhaps – had already been planned?”

“Then was the… snog… planned?” the blonde boy asked. “Were they doing it to… announce they were a couple? Put on a show?”

“Potter’s proposal for Granger to the Yule Ball was quite the show,” Romilda said, “I bet that was planned too. Potter must have asked her in private first.”

“Now that’s clever!” the blonde haired boy said. “I tell you… get a brainy bird. Won’t disappoint!”

“Do you have to call it a proposal?” Ginny scowled. “You make it sound like he asked her to marry him.”

“Potter did get down on one knee,” Romilda said, with a smirk.

“Ugh,” Ginny huffed, pushing away her plate, “I’ve lost my appetite.”

Ron would have lost his appetite too, his jealousy filling his stomach at the thought of Granger marrying Potter. But he was too hungry.

“You don’t approve of them, Ginny?” the blonde boy asked. “I was under the impression you and your brother were good friends with them.”

“That is none of your business,” Ginny scowled.

The blonde boy shrugged. “Point. Mum does tell me not to butt into other people’s business. My apologies. Oh, watch out. McGonagall’s coming.”

“Ah, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “I have something for you.”

“My wand?” Ron asked, after swallowing a bite of sausage.

“After breakfast,” McGonagall said, “You have a new class schedule, Mr. Weasley.”

Ron frowned as he took the parchment she offered, and looked at it. “Professor, there must be a mistake. None of these classes are with Gryffindors.”

“There is no mistake, Mr. Weasley, I assure you,” McGonagall said, “Come see me after breakfast, Mr. and Miss Weasley.”

He frowned as he watched the Professor walk away. He stared at the parchment.

“I don’t understand,” Ron said.
“That clever… witch,” Ginny said, as she looked at Ron’s schedule, “Ron, don’t you see? You’re no longer in classes with Potter and Granger.”

Ron dropped the piece of sausage as he looked at his sister. “Is that what this means?”

“Yes, Ron,” Ginny said.

“Bloody hell,” Ron said, “Feels like I’m being punished or something, Gin.”

“No, Ron,” Ginny said, “Feels like we’re both being punished.”

“You don’t have a new class schedule, Ginny!” Ron scowled.

“Never mind,” Ginny huffed. “You don’t seem to understand.”

“Speaking of being punished,” Romilda said, “What was that about your wands? Why don’t you have them?”

“None of your business, Vane,” Ginny scowled.

“She is right, Romy,” the blonde boy said.

Romilda mumbled an apology and continued her breakfast.

Meanwhile, Ron was staring at his new class schedule. Charms to start the day off, and it was with the Slytherins. Flitwick wasn’t biased to Slytherins like Snape was, so he took that as a good thing.

Potions before lunch – ugh! He might lose his appetite! At least it wasn’t a Double class anymore, and with those Hufflepuff duffers and Ravenclaws. He could outperform those stupid Hufflepuffs, of course! No longer being embarrassed by doing worse than the snakes in class, and neither the duffers nor birds would throw stuff in his cauldron! This was going to be great, even with Snape glaring at him!

History after lunch was now a Double class. Longer time to nap, which was excellent with a full belly, and a bonus of Granger no longer nagging him to stay awake!

Huh. Things might be looking up for one Ronald Weasley!

(Friday, December 11th, 1994, 7:30 PM)

He had been wrong. Things were definitely not looking up for Ronald Weasley. At that moment, he and his sister were on their hands and knees at separate ends of the Transfiguration classroom picking up square pellets of shite by gloved hand, one at a time, dropped by the creature that the Sixth Year Class – and last class of the day – had been Transfiguring into something else Ron could barely comprehend. Ron knew one thing. Whether it was the original creature or the Transfigured creature, they shat a lot of square cubes. So many that they already had been doing this for nearly half-an-hour. At least they were almost done. The stuff stunk worse than some Potions! If he didn’t think he’d get a detention, he might have asked Snape if these cubes of shite were part of a Potion!

Something in the back of Ron’s mind told him McGonagall must have done that class on purpose,
since he and his sister would have to clean up the messy results. But that part of his mind was something he rarely listened to. Like now, he ignored it and simply picked up more cubes.

Believe it or not, picking up shite wasn’t too bad compared to the rest of his day. He was the lone Gryffindor in the three classes he attended that day, and he stood out like a broken wand. Getting stared at by his fellow year-mates, all obviously wondering why he was there with them and not with the Gryffindors was annoying as hell!

In Charms with the Slytherins to begin the day, Draco Malfoy had asked him if he had lost his way and had somehow wound up in the wrong class. When he had sat down at a desk, the Slytherins continued to jeer him. They taunted him about the break-up of the Golden Trio making it a Golden Duo.

He was being called ‘Third Wheel’ Weasley after Justin Finch-Fletchley had called him that in Potions, whatever that meant. Unfortunately it had gotten around, and several students of all years were taunting him the same name. He asked his brother George, one of the new Gryffindor Prefects – Merlin, was that a shock! – to make them stop, and George said he’d see what he could do. However, George did say he could only talk to the Gryffindors who did the name-calling. Ron would have to talk to Prefects of the other three Houses to get their House-mates to stop. Right, like he was going to approach a Slytherin Prefect to ask them! Dirty snake would likely encourage the other snakes to call him that name, and others! And the other Prefects… he didn’t even know who they were!

When he asked Ginny what ‘Third Wheel’ meant, she shrugged and said their Dad might know since it sounded Muggle. He considered asking Granger what it meant but… every time he looked her and Potter’s way at lunch, they shot him dark glare. The same glare that elf from last night had shot him, and the thought of that almost made him lose his lunch! He had not liked hanging on the wall above the fireplace like that!

Ron’s belly boiled with jealousy at the thought of what else happened at lunch. Potter and Granger had gotten permission from McGonagall to sit at another table if they wanted. So they had chosen Ravenclaw. When they weren’t glaring at him, or talking to some of the Ravenclaws they sat with, they would be talking in whispers to each other and, from time to time, shared a light peck on the lips… right there in the middle of the Great Hall! Dumbledore and Snape weren’t present to do anything to stop them, and McGonagall didn’t do a thing about them either. None of the teachers did! It was maddening watching them.

Didn’t stop him gorging himself on food though. He was a growing boy, after all!

“I think I’m finished, Professor,” Ginny said.

“Your brother is not,” McGonagall said, absently, as she read a magazine, “Help him pick up the rest.”

Ginny scowled and walked over to several pieces of cubes a few feet away from Ron.

“Merlin, Ron, what have you been doing that you’re not done yet!” Ginny scowled.

“There’s more of that stuff here than there was over there!” Ron said.

Ron raised an eyebrow as Ginny looked back at McGonagall. “What?”
“Just wondering why she hasn’t told us be quiet,” Ginny whispered.

“Don’t push our luck, Gin,” Ron said, “Let’s get this done. Maybe we can leave early if we do.”

“Doubt it,” Ginny muttered.

Ron shrugged and continued picking up the cubes and placing them in rubbish bags. It was odd. After a little while, picking up the stuff had started to become easier. Pick up cubes, put it in the bag, repeat. It was a pattern. Do this, do that, repeat. While he hoped to never do it again, he did find it easy. He wished tossing gnomes was as simple as something like this. Sure, this took longer, but shite didn’t bite your fingers.

It was about fifteen minutes later when they finally finished. McGonagall’s beady stern eyes looked around the room for a few moments, then nodded, looking impressed.

“Well done,” she said, “Now, sit down in the front row. I have a few questions I wish to ask you.”

Ron and Ginny sat down beside each other at two desks.

“Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “Recently, I’ve heard stories of you attempting to break into Mr. Potter’s trunk recently. Do not try to deny it. I matched your wand’s magic to the magic that had been used on his trunk in an attempt to break the ward around it. You tried to break into it. Mr. Potter told me there has been a history of theft from his trunk since first year. Several Galleons missing. Candy as well. My main suspect is you.”

Ron scowled. He never imagined he would have been caught. “I was borrowing that money. I would pay him back.”

“Borrowing it without permission is considered theft, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said. “You will figure out how much you stole from him, Mr. Weasley. I know it is less than twenty Galleons, but more than ten. So if you cannot give me a specific and reasonable number, you will be ordered to pay him back twenty galleons. Or… your parents will.”

“That is a lot of money!” Ginny exclaimed. “That’s… almost the cost of three wands!”

“Your brother should have considered that, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said. “You’re not out of the clear here either, Miss Weasley. In your first year, you stole that diary that just so happened to possess you back from Mr. Potter who had it in his possession!”

“Tom made me do it!” Ginny cried. “I’m innocent of that!”

“Yes, but I have to assume there is a history of you also stealing from others,” McGonagall said. “Miss Granger perhaps.”

Ginny scowled. “I didn’t need her money. Besides, she put her coins in a Biting Bag. Those things hurt worse than gnomes! I just took various books when she wasn’t looking. I brought them back to her unharmed. It was a prank more than anything. Nothing worse than what my brothers do.”

“What books?” McGonagall asked.

“How am I supposed to do know?” Ginny demanded.
“Because Miss Granger told me she has a collection of… a specific type of book,” McGonagall said. “She believes you had taken those.”

“So I heard her talking about them and was interested in them!” Ginny said, blushing. “I couldn’t risk her finding out. She might have told my mother! My mother wouldn’t have approved me reading that stuff.”

Ron simply stared at the two. What was so interesting about books Granger had? He didn’t know Ginny was such a bookworm like Granger!

McGonagall huffed. “You can be sure I will investigate theft further amongst the Gryffindors. You two will be my main suspects given your history. Perhaps you should think hard over the next few days about whether you have taken stuff from more than just Mr. Potter and Miss Granger. Because I will get answers.

“However, I am not finished. Mr. Weasley, did you take Mr. Potter’s Golden Egg at any time?”

Ron’s eyes widened. How did she know that. How did Potter know that?

“Someone else took it, Professor,” Ron said, “It was gone for more than a week.”

“I already know someone else stole it for seven days, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “However, they told me and Mr. Potter returned it two days before he was able to get it back.”

“Then they’re lying!” Ron said.

“No, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said. “I believe you are. I believe you knew it had been stolen by someone else, then when you saw it had been returned, you took it, hoping the theft would be blamed on the original thief. Mr. Weasley, that Egg is a Tournament Clue. Stealing a Tournament Clue is a Criminal Offense, and could see you in Azkaban for Attempted Murder!”

Ron’s eyes widened as McGonagall explained why it was considered Attempted Murder.

“I did it for a prank!” Ron said, “I don’t want to go to Azkaban! It was a prank, that is all! I brought it back! Besides, Potter didn’t even mention he wanted to figure out the Egg’s Clue, so why did he need it?”

“Why did you need it?” McGonagall asked. “I will find out, Mr. Weasley. I have heard rumors, you see. Of you trying to sell it to Boy-Who-Lived fans, for Galleons, hoping they would buy it as a souvenir of the Boy-Who-Lived.”

Ron’s eyes widened. How did she find out? What if she talked to those students he talked to about selling it?

“I didn’t sell it though!” Ron said, “I gave it back!”

“Yes, you did,” McGonagall said, “I will speak to Mr. Potter about this, and ask him if he wants to press charges.”

Ron scowled. “I’m doomed then.”

“Perhaps,” McGonagall said, “But then again, perhaps not. The fifth year student who was the
original thief told the truth to Mr. Potter, and Mr. Potter forgave him. While I will not allow you to talk to him face-to-face, given the confrontation you had with him, the reason you are here, I am going to ask you to write a letter to him explaining truthfully why you stole the Egg. You will write the letter, and give it to me. I’ll give it to him. It is due a week from today. If you do not do this, I am afraid you will not be permitted to attend the Yule Ball. Do you understand?"

Ron grumbled. “Yes, Professor.”

“I’m not finished, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “About your other recent attempts at theft, of Mr. Potter’s stuff. He has a theory of what you had tried to nick. Stuff you wouldn’t be able to use anymore since your friendship has diminished.”

“Been thoroughly destroyed you mean,” Ginny said.

“If you believe the Headmaster, Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said, “He says you two, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger can heal what is broken between you. I believe you can too. First it will take acceptance of the fact they now a romantic pair, instead of simply good friends as they were before.”

“It isn’t going to happen, Professor,” Ginny said. “It feels like betrayal. I spoke to Granger this summer about my intentions for him. I asked her if she fancied him, and she avoided all those questions! She wasn’t even honest with me! I will not forgive her, ma’am! I’m not the one at fault here. She didn’t tell me because she knew I’d be angry at her. Yes, I would. But at least she would have been honest with me.”

“Was there anything you kept from her regarding your affections for Mr. Potter, Miss Weasley?” McGonagall said.

Ginny blushed deeply and scowled. “It isn’t the same thing.”

“I happen to believe it is,” McGonagall said. “She knows you are keeping stuff from her about Mr. Potter. Therefore, she does not trust you around him. If you were to open up about such things, I think you’d find she would be just as open with you. But if you refuse, you cannot blame her for doing the same.”

“She didn’t tell me anything!” Ginny said, “I told her about how I felt about him.”

“Perhaps you were only telling her things she already knew,” McGonagall said.

“She might be right, Gin,” Ron said, “The fact that you fancy him was already obvious to her. She even told him last year you probably fancied him. If I recall, he said you fancied the Boy-Who-Lived, the hero who saved you from the Chamber. He said you didn’t know him. So you didn’t fancy him. You fancied the boy you imagined he was before you met him. That’s what he said.”

“He knew I fancied him?!” Ginny asked.

“You wouldn’t speak to him before your first year,” Ron said, “Explain that.”

Ginny blushed. “I fancied him then too.”

“Had you met him before that day?” McGonagall asked.

“The day he met us before his and Ron’s first year,” Ginny said.
“Did you fancy him before that day?” McGonagall asked.

“Yeah” Ginny said, “I fancied….”

“Miss Weasley,” McGonagall said, “Before his birthday that year, Mr. Potter knew nothing of the wizarding world. He didn’t know he was the Boy-Who-Lived. He had grown up raised by Muggles who didn’t want him to know about magic. So who exactly did you fancy, Miss Weasley, before you met him?”

Ginny huffed. “I don’t want to talk about it. I do not fancy the Boy-Who-Lived. I fancy him! Granger knew that, and she still said yes to him when he asked her to the Ball. She didn’t tell him about me! Or that I wanted to go out with him! She betrayed me! I will not forgive her for that!”

McGonagall tapped her hand on her desk. “Very well. We’ve gone off topic. Mr. Weasley, is there something you wanted of Mr. Potter’s that you would have stolen from his trunk just to have it?”

Ron scowled. “If I’m not his friend, I can’t fly on his broom again. I just wanted to fly on it again. And… that map of his. It used to be my brother’s.”

“I know what map you speak of, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “I confiscated that map a few times in the days when the creators who made it went to school here. One of those creators was James Potter, Harry’s father. That map is his family heirloom, Mr. Weasley. I trust you know what our society thinks of thieves who steal family heirlooms like that map, and Harry’s Cloak?”

Ron’s eyes widened. “I… hadn’t considered that, no. I just wanted to have the map. I’m… sorry.”

“It is not I who deserves your apology, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said, “Perhaps you should apologize about that too in that letter you’ll be writing. But, rumor has it, you’ve been rather poor in your attempts of apologies to Mr. Potter as of late.”

Ron scowled. He knew what she was talking about. What happened after the first task.

“Our friendship is over, Professor,” Ron said. “I’m not going to waste an apology on someone who doesn’t want to be my friend. I’ll write the letter, but I won’t care what he’ll think about it. It is pointless. I’ll do it because I want to go to the Yule Ball.”

“As I said,” McGonagall said, “Your friendship would be as strong today as it had been over the past three years if you had accepted Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s new upgrade in their relationship. However, you blew that apart, when you accused her of not only dosing him with Love Potions, but putting his name in the Goblet of Fire, and also that she masquerades as his friend just to harm him. Mr. Weasley, I do not understand where those first two accusations come from. But that latter one comes from jealousy.

“While you abandoned Mr. Potter, Miss Granger stuck by him. She became his best friend due to that, and that fueled your jealousy. Why do you blame Miss Granger for being his friend?”

“Because she stole him from me,” Ron said, “I was his first friend, his best friend. And then she comes into the train and tries to be his friend too.”

“That isn’t a bad thing, Mr. Weasley,” McGonagall said. “As you would later learn of course, you three worked well together. Why couldn’t you have done so from the very start when you met on the
train? To me, it sounds as if you were selfish. Wanting to hog the attention of the Boy-Who-Lived when you knew so many other boys and girls would want to be his friend too. Did you stop them from approaching him so they couldn’t be his friend?”

Ron’s eyes widened. How did she know that?! She wasn’t supposed to know stuff like this! The enchanted jewelry he and Ginny had on prevented her from knowing that!

“Miss Granger did not steal him from you,” McGonagall said, “She became his friend too. And when you abandoned him, she became his best friend in your place. Because she didn’t abandon him. She didn’t steal him. If anything, he stole her from you. He chose her to be his best friend, instead of you. And that has now upgraded into a romantic relationship.

“I can see this is an ugly topic for the two of you, so we will stop here and end this detention,” McGonagall said. “I will let you leave with one last piece of advice. If you feel you cannot accept their new relationship, it would be better to stay away from Mr. Potter and Miss Granger then. Because if there is a repeat of last night, you will end up in more detentions like this evening. Or perhaps… you might even leave this castle, and never return. Would you sacrifice your education over continuing to refuse to accept their new relationship? Think on that, you two. You are dismissed. I will be expecting that letter, Mr. Weasley. By next Saturday. If you do not wish to write it, you better put your name down with those students who are going home. Because you won’t be here for the Yule Ball. Dismissed.”

Ron followed Ginny out of the classroom and down the corridor.

“She doesn’t know what she’s talking about, Ronald,” Ginny said. “At all. She’s in league with Potter and Granger. I know that much. We can’t trust anything she has to say to us. That was all an act in there. She’s going to tell Potter and Granger everything we told her tonight.”

“Then why did you want us to answer her questions so honestly?” Ron asked. “I don’t understand that at all. We could have given everything away.”

“We couldn’t tell her anything crucial to our plan, Ron,” Ginny said, then lifted a necklace from under her shirt only the two of them could see.

Ron had something similar, an ankle bracelet around his left ankle.

“As long as we have these on,” she said, “Nobody will know what our plan is… at least until it is too late to do anything to stop it.”

“She knew I was trying to stop anyone else from being friends with Potter!” Ron argued.

“She didn’t need to hear that from us!” Ginny scowled, “It was obvious what you were doing.”

“I was doing what I was told to do!” Ron argued.

“Whatever,” Ginny said, “The plan continues, Ronald. As long as you don’t accuse Granger of something like you did last night. That could have ruined everything.”

“At least you don’t have to write a letter to the git,” Ron scoffed.

“Yeah, well, you better write a convincing letter,” Ginny said, “I need you to be at the Ball. If you don’t have the letter written by next Thursday, come to me and I’ll help you write one that will
convince even McGonagall. Your usual letter that says ‘Potter, I’m sorry, Ron,’ isn’t going to work this time. But you better have something in the letter written. I’m not going to do it all for you!”

Ron wanted to argue with her, but the glare she gave him, reminded her of their mother. He hated when she did that!

Chapter End Notes

So there is a hint of the plan that Ron and Ginny has. Unfortunately for the Weasleys, they don’t realize our heroes have a counter to their magical jewelry. Poor Weasels. It will come back to bite them soon. Ron was wrong about the jewelry “preventing” McGonagall from knowing or theorizing about plans and strategies he and Ginny had. He thought, just because nobody could hear his and Ginny’s conversations when they discussed secrets, that they’d not even be able to think about them or mention them. Like they would be Obliviated of that knowledge. The enchantment does not do that. It simply allows them to not be able to voice their secrets if someone else is listening besides someone who also wears an similarly enchanted piece of jewelry. Harry and Hermione’s bracelets are similar, but only in the sense they cancel out Ron and Ginny’s jewelry.

So what did you think of that detention? Everything Ginny and Ron told McGonagall was planned by the two. Because of their jewelry, they knew they couldn’t reveal any secrets to her, so they didn’t need to be cautious about what to talk to her about. They knew everything they said to her would likely get back to Harry and Hermione.

It was their responding Salvos so to speak.

Don’t worry if it seems like their punishment is lame. They’ll get their just desserts over the next several chapters.

No I don’t know who that blonde boy was talking to Ron, Ginny and Romilda. Yes, I know I didn’t give him a name. Just someone I decided to put in the conversation, so his dialogue wouldn’t be given to Romilda. He’s a dorm-mate of Colin Creevey.

Next Chapter: On the day of Harry and Hermione’s first Dancing Lesson, Rita Skeeter strikes again and Harry and Hermione receive unexpected, but valuable help from a new friend. The Dancing Lesson will be in two chapters. (I think.)
S.P.E.W (or House-Elf Liberation Front) is addressed in this chapter. Let’s just say Hermione’s had an eye-opening epiphany. Translation: I don’t want to deal with SPEW! That section in this chapter is there for that reason alone! I blame Rowling, not Hermione, for that whole mess.

Warning: Discussion of Rumors of Past Assault From A Professor, and aftermath of those rumors. Nothing bad. Actual assault didn’t actually happen. Just something Hermione mentions to Harry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Saturday, December 12th, 1994)

“Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Hmm?” Harry replied, his lips an inch away from hers. “Not now. We’re kissing.”

He kissed her again. Hermione backed away after another minute of kissing and placed a finger on his lips, then looked into his eyes.

“I want to tell you something that might shock you,” Hermione said.

When she dropped her finger, he kissed her again, then looked at her.

“As long as you aren’t about to break up with me when we’ve been snogging for the past several minutes,” Harry said, “You can tell me anything.”

Harry and Hermione’s classes on Friday had been mostly great, without Ronald in them anymore. Harry was actually able to stay awake in History, though he admittedly did it to try to impress Hermione. It had worked too! Hermione had given him a few kisses during the day, in the corridors and such, just because she was so proud of him about that and how he had a new interest in his classes now. Of course, the fact that they were also doing it to make sure the rest of the students knew they were now a dedicated and romantic couple, so it would look odd if they were suddenly not together anymore, went without saying.

Charms before lunch was also wonderful without Ron grumbling about how Harry and Hermione could do their work perfectly before he could do anything. Double Potions was always going to be bad for Harry and Hermione. However, Snape had mostly ignored the new couple, except for one single comment targeted at both of them.

“Now that the two of you are… together,” Snape said, with his usual drawling, dronish tone, “and no longer have your… Third Wheel… attached to you, dragging you down to his poor standards, I hope to see an improvement from both of you in my class. I will be most displeased if Mr. Weasley wasn’t responsible for your horrible past performance in here.”
Snape had, of course, sneered at them when he mentioned them being ‘together’, but it was
expected. The new couple had successfully completed their Potion, and Snape merely sneered at the
pair when they brought him the vials of Potion for him to grade. Also expected. What was
unexpected is that he allowed them to be partners for the day. They had thought he would split them
up now that he knew they were a couple.

The night before, just before they had separated for the evening, Hermione asked him if he wanted to
spend some private time with her on Saturday morning before breakfast. Harry had readily and
happily agreed. So they had arranged to wake up at half-past six on Saturday Morning, using Alarm
Clock Charms on their pillow, and meet in their Private Common Room.

So that is where they were now, and had been for nearly an hour. They had been kissing and
snogging, and talking about random things. Until now, their conversations hadn’t been so serious.

Hermione scowled at his response, and crossed her arms over her chest. Harry pouted at that
movement. Since it was Saturday, the students weren’t required to wear their School outfits. She was
wearing a sweater that had showed off her curves very nicely. Harry was still astounded he had been
so surprised about the fact that Hermione – his girlfriend! – had these great curves on her body. Great
curves that his girlfriend was now hiding with her arms.

“I’m definitely not breaking up with you,” Hermione said, “And I have no desire to do in the
foreseeable future. So do not joke about that, Harry James.”

“Sorry,” Harry said, sincerely, “So what did you want to talk about?”

“I’m disbanding S.P.E.W,” Hermione said, bluntly. “Or House Elf Liberation Front. Whatever it is
called now.”

“What? Really?” Harry asked, quite surprised at that statement. “How did this happen?”

“Before I went to bed last night,” Hermione said, “I was relaxing in my sitting room going over the
homework I had finished earlier in the evening. And my mind wandered about recent things. I started
thinking about Mallory and Dobby, and everything they’re doing for us. So I called for Mallory, and
she appeared. Mallory and I had a very long talk about house-elves. Their history, their behavior,
why they need to work. Did you know Dobby is looked down upon in the house-elf community
because he is free?”

“Winky mentioned that at the Quidditch World Cup, I think,” Harry said.

“Yes, I remember,” Hermione said, with a sigh. “I asked Mallory why the house-elves don’t like him
if he is free. She it is because he is lying about his freedom. Dobby isn’t free, Harry. Dobby bonded
with you the day you freed him from Malfoy. Most Masters or Mistresses and Elves need to do a
Bonding Ceremony to bond to each other. Dobby didn’t with you, because you saved him
apparently.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Dobby!”

Dobby appeared, and it was instantly obvious he had been listening to their conversation while
guarding them.

“I know you heard us talking, Dobby.” Harry said, “Is it true you’re bonded with me?”
“Yes, Harry Potter, it is true,” Dobby said. “You assisted in Dobby’s freedom. It was under the Great Harry Potter’s influence that Bad Master Malfoy was able to free Dobby. Therefore, magic made Dobby Bond with the Great Harry Potter, without need of Bonding Ceremony. But Harry Potter was so happy about Dobby being free, that Dobby decided if Harry Potter wanted Dobby be free, then Dobby be acting he be free.”

“Don’t be angry with Dobby,” Hermione said, “If he was free, Harry, he might very well be dead.”

“What?!” Harry asked.

“Remember Winky, and how she was in the kitchens?” Hermione asked, “She was acting so drunk, and we thought it was due to butterbeer. It partially is, but in truth it is only making things worse. She’s dying, Harry. She’s dying because she’s free. She does some work at Hogwarts, but she’s not bonded to Hogwarts. Working at Hogwarts without a Master or Mistress will lead to her death. The House Elf Liberation Front would kill house-elves, Harry.”

“What should we do about Winky?” Harry asked.

“I planned on going to the kitchens after breakfast and asking Winky to bond with me,” Hermione said. “Mallory told me if I did this, then Winky will need a few days to heal. She’ll slowly overcome the damage due to my bond with her. When Winky is healed, she’ll replace Mallory in her service to me, and Mallory will return working for her Mistress.”

Harry nodded, then looked at Dobby. “Is there anything I need to do as your Master?”

“Dobby can remove money from Harry Potter’s Vault at Gringotts, if Harry Potter so wish it,” Dobby said, “Dobby just be needing going to Gringotts to sort it out. Harry Potter be needing do nothing. The Goblins will recognize our Bond. Dobby simply be needing to talk with the proper Goblin.”

“I tell you what,” Harry said. “Tonight, while Hermione and I are having Dancing Lessons, how about you go to Gringotts and do whatever you need to there? If you are done before nine-o-clock, when we are still with Professor McGonagall in her classroom, you can meet us there, and let me know you’re back, and tell me what you found out. We should be safe with Professor McGonagall and Mallory watching us while you do that duty.”

“Dobby agrees with that, Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said.

“What else can you do, Dobby?” Harry asked, “I’m sorry, I know very little about having a house-elf.”

“Dobby be able to buy anything the Great Harry Potter desires when Dobby be having permission to get into Vault,” Dobby said. “Great Harry Potter be needing no Owl-Order Service. Great Harry Potter now have Dobby-Order Service!”

“Oh, wow, that’s handy!” Harry said, “Well, if I need you to buy anything, I’ll certainly tell you. If there is anything else you believe you can do for me, all you need to do is ask. I do have one rule for
you, Dobby. You will never punish yourself. If you believe you need to be punished, you tell me how we should resolve that.”

“Dobby promises to do so,” Dobby said.

“Great!” Harry said, “You’re excused to go back to guard duty now.”

“Dobby be sorry for keeping secret from Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said. “How shall Dobby be punished?”

“You’re forgiven, Dobby,” Harry said. “Your punishment is to never keep secrets from me again as long as they concern me or Hermione.”

“Dobby promises, Great Master Harry!” Dobby said.

“You’re excused,” Harry said.

Dobby smiled tearfully, right before he disappeared.

“He is so very happy to be your elf, Harry,” Hermione gushed, “I can’t believe I was trying to ‘liberate’ all the elves. If they aren’t mistreated, they lead happy lives. They love to work. Working is their fun! I feel so bad for what I did.”

“You just didn’t have enough information about them,” Harry said, “Which is so unlike you!”

“It wasn’t my fault!” Hermione huffed, “Those authors who wrote those books were biased against elves, and wrote the books just for money! As a book lover, I feel betrayed and disgusted. I should have gone straight to the proper source from the start: the elves! I was a fool!”

“No, you trust books too much,” Harry said.

“I… I do,” Hermione said, “And that is so very hard to admit. Books have always been there for me. Characters in books – heroes, villains and normal characters who had little importance in stories – were my only friends when I was little. In fact, until I met you, I had a new best friend each time I started reading a new book. The main character was my new best friend. I do trust books too much. I need to learn better than that. Books are written by humans.”

“And humans make mistakes and can sometimes be biased about information,” Harry said. “Such as history books. History is written by the victor, isn’t it?”

Hermione nodded. “It took me a very long time to realize that, Harry. In fact, sometimes I forget all that. Especially when I’m reading a book and not thinking about whether the information in it is the best available. I used to believe it was the best information available, because the book existed. It wasn’t for a long time that I realized sometimes books are written because the author wants to make money. Or that the subject might not be entirely correct, because maybe an author is biased.”

“And then there were all those books written by Lockhart,” Harry said.

“That was an eye-opener,” Hermione muttered, “I was at my worst when it came to books that year. Here I was, being taught by an author! I thought it was the greatest thing in the world.”

“And he was handsome,” Harry snarked.
“Okay, yes, he was handsome,” Hermione admitted, “He was handsome on the outside, and ugly on the inside. You know there were rumors in third year after Lockhart’s Obliviation talents were revealed the previous summer that Lockhart sexually abused female students and then Obliviated them?”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Really? Did it really happen?”

“I think Professor McGonagall would have told me if there was evidence,” Hermione said, “It certainly got me and a lot of other girls to go to Madam Pomfrey, and see if there was anything wrong with us – you know – in that way. Aside from my… feminine issues being out of whack because of me using the Time Turner, nothing was wrong with me when it came to my body. I don’t know what any of the other girls discovered. Aside from Lavender and Parvati, who said there was nothing wrong.

“If Ginny was assaulted by him – well – she blacked out so many times that year because of the Diary, that it might be impossible to tell. If Lockhart had known about it, he could have taken advantage of such a thing. But… if McGonagall has never said anything about it, I doubt the rumors were true.”

Harry had blushed when Hermione said “feminine issues”. “Th-that’s good… changing subjects now. When it comes to books, you’ve learned a valuable lesson today. I know that is one of your favorite things to do.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Hermione said, “You are just the greatest boyfriend, you know? Even if you blushed as red as the walls in here when I mentioned feminine issues.”

“Can you blame me?” Harry asked, weakly.

Hermione giggled again and kissed him lightly on the lips. “God, you are such a boy. But you are my boy. How could you think I wanted to break up with you?”

“Because sometimes I feel this is a dream and I’m going to wake up,” Harry said, “And you’ll just be my best friend again. Why would I not be scared this is a dream? Having such a beautiful girl as my girlfriend. How does that happen to me?”

Hermione grinned, her cheeks quite pink, and kissed him again. “You’re so sweet, Harry. Well, if you do wake up, ask me out again, okay? Let’s just say this is your dream. If there is a real Hermione who isn’t me, I am quite sure she feels the same about you as I do. So if you wake up, ask her.

“Until you ‘wake up’, let’s just assume this is real. I’m going to be honest with you, Harry. I’ve had the same thought once after you asked me to the Ball, and I kissed you. Only once. Then my logical side returned and I decided it wasn’t a dream. The boy I fancied asked me out, asked me to be his girlfriend. How does that happen to me?”

Harry smiled, goofily, just as he did when Hermione became his girlfriend.

You listen, Harry James,” Hermione said, “I’m not breaking up with you for the foreseeable future. That future, at the moment, is going to last a very long time. Understand me?”

“Definitely,“ Harry said, “Does the greatest boyfriend get a snog? Because I was under the impression our little date in here this morning was going to mostly be snogging and random
discussions that weren’t so… life-changing.”

Hermione giggled. “No more life-changing discussions during our little dates in there. That will be a new rule.”

“I completely agree,” Harry said. “In fact, if you start another life-changing discussion again while we are in here having these little dates, I’m going to occupy your mouth the best way I know how. Let me show you what I mean.”

Hermione was quite happy to let him show her what he meant. Their mouths were well-occupied for the next several minutes, and no more discussion was had. Soon enough, unfortunately, they had to make their way to breakfast.

But both were eager to have these little dates again… very often in fact!

(Fifteen minutes later…)

When Harry and Hermione made their way into the Entrance Hall, they found Professor McGonagall waiting there. From the way she was looking in their direction, she was waiting for them. She was also holding what appeared to be two folded newspapers.

“Good morning, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said.

“Good morning, Professor,” Hermione said; Harry echoed her.

“Rita Skeeter has struck again,” McGonagall said, “This time, she has written an article about the two of you getting together. I assume she heard it from a student here – or several. Whether they were in Gryffindor or another House, I do not know. They did, however, seem to witness both of your performances on Thursday, because they are described in the article.

“I was waiting for you here to warn you of this article, and what I expect to happen because of the article. I don’t know if it will begin as early as today, or tomorrow. But I expect you’re going to get some Howlers and maybe even dangerous hex-letters from people around Wizarding Great Britain as a result of Miss Skeeter’s article. There may be some good letters in there amongst the rubbish. However, you will receive none of it right away. Dobby and Mallory will intercept every piece of mail that comes for both of you. They will dismantle the Howlers, letter-hexes and other dangers. House-Elves also have a way to detect letters written with negative intent in mind.”

“How?” Hermione asked.

“They can sense from the letters the author’s feelings while they were writing the letters,” McGonagall said. “Well, I say feelings, I should say ‘emotions’. For example, if they sense an angry emotion…”

“It will probably be a letter full of insults or something similar,” Harry said.

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, “This is so they can warn their Master if the letters are bad news.”

“That is brilliant!” Hermione gushed.
“Indeed it is,” McGonagall agreed. “Dobby and Mallory will give me all the mail you receive after their initial sweep. I promise not to read any letters they deem as neutral or positive. Any negative letters, you might not receive unless I decide the contents are not too bad. You will not be given the Howlers. And any dangerous letters will be given to the DMLE so they can investigate them.”

“That’s great!” Harry said, “Thank you, ma’am!”

“It is my job,” McGonagall said, “In my opinion, Howlers should not be allowed here at Hogwarts, but the Headmaster never seems to agree with me. Anyway, I also have a second piece of news. A mutual friend of ours is coming to the castle today to lend me something for the Dancing Lessons. I believe they might be interested in speaking to the both of you. If this is so, I’ll have Mallory contact you, and inform you of where to meet me and my guest. It will likely be sometime in the afternoon.”

“We’ll be there,” Harry said, and Hermione agreed.

“Very good,” McGonagall said, “You can sit at Ravenclaw Table again if you wish. I promise you none of the Staff will confront you for doing so. Also, you may wish to read the article out here so you can prepare for the… reactions inside.”

“Good idea,” Harry agreed.

“Enjoy the article… if you can,” McGonagall said. “Any questions?”

“Yes, actually,” Harry said, “Has any Gryffindor written us a letter yet as is their punishment?”

“None have turned any in,” McGonagall said, “Those who truly wish to repent will give me their assignments in the next couple of days, I expect. The rest, if they do not wish for me to confront them again, will hand them to me by Saturday next, as it is due by then. Especially, since they can’t go to the Ball otherwise, those in your year and above, and even those third years who might have dates to the Yule Ball.”

“Alright,” Harry said. “No more questions.”

When Hermione replied the same, McGonagall spoke up again. “Perhaps I’ll see you this afternoon, and I’ll definitely be expecting you this evening for your ‘detention’ then. We can discuss the Weasley detention during one of those two occasions.”

Harry and Hermione promised they would be there. McGonagall gave the couple the two copies of the Daily Prophet, then headed inside the Great Hall without another word. Harry and Hermione walked over to the stairs leading to the Grand Staircase, and sat on the bottom steps. Harry opened the Daily Prophet, and discovered the article was on the front page.

As he looked at the picture below the headline, he recognized the scene. It was a Colin Creevey picture, obviously, taken before they became a couple. They were walking on the Grounds, without Ron, and laughing about something. They weren’t holding hands, but given the context of the article, it could be seen as them being together at that moment the picture was taken.

In fact… now that he looked at the picture… the depicted Hermione was looking at the version of him with an expression he only caught in the past couple of days now that they were a couple. How had he missed that… amorous, blushing expression on her face? Hermione was right: he had been very oblivious about her feelings toward him!
He began to read his copy, as Hermione did the same.

**BOY-WHO-LIVED OR BOY-WHO-LOVED? HOGWARTS TRIWIZARD CHAMPION NO LONGER BRITAIN’S MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR!**

*Written by Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet Star Reporter*

The Yule Ball, the biggest Christmas Event of the holiday season is just around the corner, taking place at Hogwarts on Christmas Day! Gossip has run rampant across Wizarding Britain and inside Hogwarts Castle itself about which lucky witches – or wizard in the Beauxbatons Champion’s case – will be on the arm of the Champions at the Ball.

The youngest – and most popular? – Champion has already found the lucky witch who he will be dancing the night away with at the Yule Ball.

That’s right, readers, The Boy-Who-Lived is now the Boy-Who-Loved! Harry Potter is no longer single, and has apparently an interest in older witches! The Hogwarts Champion has found love with his Muggleborn best friend and fellow Fourth Year, Harmony Granger, age fifteen.

Students were witnesses to two separate but intriguing events that took place between the new couple on Thursday inside Hogwarts Castle. At lunch, Harry Potter interrupted the students’ mealtime by getting down on one knee in front of Miss Granger and asking her to accompany him to the Ball. There was apparently no hesitation at all when she accepted to be his date. Was this a show put on for the students? Did Potter ask his Muggleborn friend to the Ball earlier in the day in private? Is that why accepted so quickly? Or was she afraid if she didn’t accept immediately, he might ask someone else? Someone better?

The second event was at dinnertime. Students’ mealtime was once again interrupted when the Boy-Who-Loved and Granger engaged in a stunning five-minute long snog! Professors and Students alike were so enchanted by the wonderful scene, that none of them spoke up interrupting the scene for five minutes before the couple finished. Were there nefarious charms in place, making everyone watch the scene, or was it simply wonderful magic, sweet and innocent as it was, that caused everyone to mindlessly watch the new couple without interference? Answers unknown at the current time.

Unfortunately there are no pictures of either of the events at this time, but this reporter is eagerly waiting for them from the very generous photographer who took the picture seen above! When this reporter gets those pictures, you will get them soon after!

There is no word on who the other Champions are taking to the Yule Ball, but one thing is certain: the Boy-Who-Loved will be having a very Happy Christmas
indeed, as he dances the night away with his new witch! Who is this Harmony Granger who has stolen the heart of the Boy-Who-Loved? And what does it mean for other witches who might be hoping to have a chance at romance in the future with the Hogwarts Champion? Time will tell, and I, Rita Skeeter, will be here to give you the scoop!


*Who is Harmony Granger? All we know! Page 2*

*Tomorrow’s Exclusive! Is Azkaban Fugitive Sirius Black Planning To Break-Up New Couple As A New Plot of Revenge?*

Harry laughed at that last line. He could imagine Sirius’ face when his godfather read the article.

“Harmony Granger, huh?” Harry asked Hermione, as his girlfriend finished the article.

Hermione snorted. “She probably heard my name and translated it wrong. Wouldn’t be the first time, and Harmony actually sounds nice. I could see using it for… my daughter’s name.”

Hermione grinned at Harry when Harry’s eyes glazed over at that last part.

“Earth to Boy-Who-Loved,” Hermione snarked; Harry snapped out of his fantasy of a beautiful green-eyed, bushy-haired little girl named Harmony, who looked like their mother, “There you are. Anyway, I think I’m going to read that article about me during breakfast and see what she has to say.”

“Hopefully it isn’t too bad,” Harry said.

“You should write to Sirius about us, you know,” Hermione said, “He’ll probably have a chance to read this article before you tell him. He’ll be upset to hear it from Skeeter first.”

“I know,” Harry said, frowning then grinned, “He’ll get a laugh out of tomorrow’s apparent ‘exclusive’ though. I’ll write to him after you get done with Winky. This article was actually better than I expected. I wish we had a five minute long snog that night without interruption. However, I wish she set her sights elsewhere. I know! How about the fact that Ginny Weasley, at thirteen years old – not even thirteen and a half -- isn’t apparently a virgin?”

“Harry!” Hermione scolded him.

“You were the one who implied that, you know,” Harry said.

“I know that,” Hermione said, with a frown. “I don’t know why I said all that to her. I know I was mad at her. But… those insults… I don’t normally do that, Harry. I felt really bad about it afterward, actually.”

Harry shrugged. “She certainly didn’t correct you, did she? Maybe you were more correct than you think with what you implied.”

“Either way,” Hermione said, “It isn’t proper to talk about, no matter whether we like her or not. Alright?”
“Then we won’t discuss it anymore,” Harry said, “Sorry for my bad joke.”

“Apoligy accepted,” Hermione said, and leaned toward him and pecked him on the lips. “We could have pulled off a five-minute snog that night if Dumbledore hadn’t interrupted us. You’d have earned it, and you proved you could pull it off this morning.”

Harry chuckled. “Maybe we can snog for five minutes if Dumbledore or Snape isn’t in the Great Hall in the future. Just to prove it to everyone else we can accomplish it.”

“I’ll consider it,” Hermione said, blushing; she closed the newspaper, and folded it up. “Come on, let’s get inside and face the music. Ravenclaw Table again with Padma and Luna?”

“Sure,” Harry agreed as he folded his newspaper.

Since they were avoiding Gryffindor Table at the moment – at least until those letters were delivered -- they had decided to sit at Ravenclaw Table for a while. Fortunately they found a wonderful pair of girls to sit with, the previous day at lunch: Parvati Patil’s sister, Padma, and her friend, a wonderfully odd and quirky third year named Luna Lovegood.

They had been surprised to learn that Luna used to be childhood friends with Ginny Weasley, having lived on the other side of Ottery St. Catchpole, a few miles from the Burrow. Ginny stopped being her friend, after Luna’s mother died in a tragic accident at the Lovegood home. Apparently Molly Weasley had prevented Ginny from visiting her friend, in case there were any more accidents at the Lovegood House, and she never invited Luna to the Burrow after Pandora Lovegood’s death.

Padma Patil’s family were Allies with the Lovegoods and a few other families, including the Longbottoms, Neville’s family! Padma was oddly silent about this Alliance, however. Harry shrugged it off as House Secrets between families. None of his business.

Harry and Hermione walked into the Great Hall, hand-in-hand, and ignored the stares coming their way as they made their way toward Ravenclaw Table. The Gryffindors frowned as they realized the couple wasn’t going to sit with them again. Things had changed ever since the Gryffindor Meeting, and none of it was good yet. Only a few Gryffindors were lucky enough to be able to speak to Harry and Hermione. The couple ignored the rest of them, even Dean – who looked the most regretful over what he’d done – during class, and would probably do so until they received the letters the Gryffindors had been assigned.

As Harry sat down at the Ravenclaw Table with Hermione, across from Padma Patil and Luna Lovegood, he noticed Luna was one of the very few who wasn’t reading the Daily Prophet. She did look… deliriously happy, however, for some reason.

“You’re looking cheerful today, Luna,” Hermione said.

Padma giggled at Luna’s big smile. “Neville Longbottom asked her to the Yule Ball a few minutes ago.”

Hermione gasped. “That’s great, Luna. What did you say?”

“Yes, of course,” Luna said, smiling. “I was a little surprised, but happy. We were best friends as children. So it wasn’t too big of a surprise. He was on my list of boys I would accept to the Ball if they asked me. Mostly it was him and Harry. No offense, Hermione.”
“None taken, Luna,” Hermione said.

“But… I didn’t know you before yesterday!” Harry said.

“Perhaps not,” Luna agreed, “But you were on my list anyway. Actually you did meet me once before. Did you know?”

“Uh… no,” Harry said, “When was this?”

“You probably wouldn’t have remembered,” Luna said. “I certainly wouldn’t have if my Mummy and Daddy didn’t tell me on a few occasions. I wasn’t even a day old when you met me. You see, my mother was one of your mother’s best friends. Your mother was my godmother until she died, and then Neville’s Gran became my godmother. You were there in St. Mungo’s on the day I was born. Apparently your mother introduced you to me. Mummy called you my new godbrother, and your mother was shocked, but happy to accept.”

Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand under the table. She had misty eyes. So did Harry.

“Thank you for telling me this, Luna,” Harry said, “You’ve given me a gift, a story about my mother. So… if my parents lived, I would have known you?”

“We’d have grown up together, I think,” Luna said, “Visiting each other from time to time.”

“I’d have liked that, I think,” Harry said, “Sorry I never approached you until yesterday.”

“You met me when you needed to,” Luna said, cryptically.

“I suppose so,” Harry said, “I am so sorry about your mother’s death. I would have loved to have meet one of my mother’s friends.”

“I think she knew she was going to die, you know,” Luna said. “She mentioned you a couple days before her death. ‘Get to know Lily’s son, my love,’ she said. ‘Do not see him as the Boy-Who-Lived, for he is not. He is simply a wonderful young man who might be a very good friend to you. You will meet him a time he will need you the most. I wish I could have met him.’ I didn’t really understand that until now.”

For telling such a tragic story, Luna was serenely calm.

“That is… so sad, Luna,” Hermione whimpered, “I am so sorry.”

“I was sad, of course,” Luna said, “But we both said our goodbyes to each other. The… night before she died, she spent the whole night in my bed. I didn’t know why I was saying goodbye or why she was. Not until after she died. Then I knew.”

“Why didn’t she prevent her death?” Hermione asked, “If she knew?”

“It was her time,” Luna said. “If she lived, things might have changed in ways that should not have happened. Maybe the Potion she was making when she died would have been an unknown poison. Maybe she would have tested it on me or Daddy, and we might have died instead. Whatever it was, it was meant to explode, and unfortunately, she was there when it happened. She sacrificed herself for me and Daddy. I miss her, but I love her more than ever now.”
Hermione was sniffling. “That is one of the saddest things I’ve ever heard. I am sure she was a wonderful mother to you, and wonderful woman. I would have loved to have gotten to know her. I am sorry for your loss.”

Luna merely smiled and shrugged as she continued her breakfast.

“Luna?” Harry said, “What did your mother mean? When she said you’d meet me at a time I needed you the most?”

“Maybe she knew you would need a friend,” Luna said. “Maybe I will give you opportunities you might not have had before you met me.”

“I would very much like to be your friend,” Harry said.

“Me too,” Hermione said.

“It is nice having friends,” Luna said, “I had almost forgotten that until I met Padma. We became friends, after I told her about the fall of the Mermaid Kingdom, Atlantis. Legends say the Mermaids made a horrible shrieking sound when they witnessed the Veela destroy their Kingdom. The war between the two happened because a Veela had fallen in love with a Mermaid Prince, and had stolen him from their Kingdom.

“The legends are misinterpreted, however. The Mermaids were not shrieking. They were cursing the Veela in their own language. You see, a Mermaid’s voice translates into shrieking above water. Below water, it translates into the language of whoever is listening to it.”

Harry stared at Luna, as, in his mind, he heard the shrieking wail from the Golden Egg.

“Harry,” Hermione said, “The Egg…”

“Yeah, I just thought of that,” Harry said, “Luna my Golden Egg clue. When I opened it, it made this horrible, ear-piercing shrieking sound.”

“Those horrible people!” Luna gasped, “Did they trap a Mermaid inside your Golden Egg?!!”

“I think, Luna, they copied a Mermaid’s Voice and recorded it into the Egg,” Padma said.

“Ooh, that makes much better sense,” Luna said, nodding.

“So… is that the secret of the Egg?” Harry asked. “It is a Mermaid’s Voice?”

“Put the egg in a body of water, Harry,” Luna said, “Like a bathtub! Take a bath with your egg! Funny… I’d never taken baths with eggs. I’ll have to try it. It sounds fun! Probably have to use chicken eggs. I don’t have a Dragon Egg on hand. Maybe Professor Hagrid does? I’ll ask him. Maybe we can all take a bath together with our eggs!”

Harry blushed and Hermione looked as if she was trying to hold back a giggle at the look on Harry’s face.

“Put your head underwater with the egg,” Padma continued for her distracted friend, not even phased by her last sentence, “You’ll hear whatever the Mermaid’s voice is saying.”
“Thank you!” Harry said, “Both of you! This means so much to me! I don’t think I’d have figured it out.”

“I… might have gotten it eventually,” Hermione said, in a small voice. “I didn’t even think of that.”

“Hermione, you only heard the Mermaid shrieking once,” Harry reminded his girlfriend, “I don’t blame you. Besides, you did just say ‘The Egg!’ when Luna finished her story. If I hadn’t have connected the pieces, you would have been a big help with that. Now… you can help me after I figure out what the Mermaid is saying. Because I’m going to take a bath in a little while with the Egg.”

Hermione smiled. “Thank you, Harry. I’ll be happy to help. Luna and Padma, you are welcome to help too if you wish.”

“I’ll be happy to help my new friends,” Luna said.

“What she said,” Padma said, “I don’t know what my sister did to the two of you, along with the rest of your house-mates, but she ain’t talking. So I’m going to prove to be the better one between the two of us. I won’t do whatever she did. I know what it is like to be bullied, and to see people being bullied. I…”

She sighed and looked at Luna, who was humming as she was eating breakfast. Harry and Hermione got the silent message. Padma and Luna became friends after Padma helped her with bullies.

“We understand,” Hermione said, “Thank you, Padma. This is between you and your sister, but if she won’t tell you what she did to us, you can ask us and we’ll be happy to tell you.”

“I will,” Padma said, “Simply because she… she should have known better! My father is going to be very unhappy with her! Especially since it could have…”

She blushed and frowned. “Let’s just say my father would be very unhappy about how my sister treated you, Harry. The Potters have been there for my family for many years. Parvati spat on all of that.”

“When you want to tell me what my family did for yours,” Harry said, “I will be happy to listen.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Padma said. “I will ask my father permission to tell you. Otherwise, I cannot say.”

“I understand.” Harry said.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Harry and Hermione, along with the rest of the students, turned their heads toward the Head Table. McGonagall stood up.

“Please may I have your attention,” McGonagall said. “I am sure most of you have seen the… interesting… article penned by Rita Skeeter in today’s edition of the Daily Prophet.”

She cleared her throat loudly when some students looked in Harry and Hermione’s direction. They almost immediately looked back at her.
“Some of you may not know this,” McGonagall said, “Rita Skeeter was banned from the Hogwarts Grounds a few days after the First Task, after a scathing article about the Champions. Yet, somehow, she was able to write an article describing the events that translated on Thursday, between a couple of students here. While it wasn’t accurate, due to her going rather overboard on the article, it does prove one of two things.

“The first, she has somehow found her way on the Grounds without permission. This is a security risk. If any of you see her, please inform a Professor. The second: one or more of you students have been writing letters to Rita Skeeter or other journalists at news outlets, and giving them information about the goings on of student’s personal lives that the readers of the Daily Prophet do not need to know. If I discover any of you have done this, I will be very displeased.

“I already have proof some of the Gryffindors have done something like this. I’ve discussed this with them, and if they listened, they have stopped. So, to those students in the other three Houses, if you have written anything to a journalist like Rita Skeeter, or if you speak to her or another journalist, about the goings on of students’ private lives, I will find out and you will be punished severely. That is all.”

McGonagall sat down, as whispers and chatter started again around the Hall. If Harry and Hermione looked around the Hall, they might have seen a few guilty looks directed their way.

Aside from students from all four tables staring at the new couple from time to time especially after reading the article -- though most of it did stop after McGonagall’s announcement -- nothing else much happened during breakfast. Harry thought Ron and Ginny Weasley might do something, but they were surprisingly avoiding looking at him and Hermione. Harry didn’t know whether this meant they were up to something or not, but he didn’t care at the moment. He was simply happy to spend time talking to Hermione, Padma and Luna.

He was sure the two Ravenclaws would prove to be good friends in the future. After all, he had only known them – more than fellow students – for less than a day, and they had already helped him with his Golden Egg clue, and would help him more if needed! He’d have to find some way to repay them for that wonderful assistance.

The two Ravenclaws were already far better friends than Ron and Ginny ever were. Neither were staring at his scar, or enchanted by the whole Boy-Who-Lived thing. Neither of them seemed jealous – even though Luna already said he was a choice for her to go to the Ball with – that he and Hermione were a couple. And when he asked Ron if he had any ideas about the Egg, all that bastard had said was ‘bet you could sell it for a load of Galleons!’ His only reaction to the Egg’s wailing, was to compare it to Percy’s singing! How did that help?

After breakfast, Harry and Hermione headed down to the kitchens. When they arrived at the portrait of a bowl of fruit, Hermione tickled the pear. It wiggled, and the portrait opened to reveal a doorway. Harry and Hermione stepped into the kitchens, where House-Elves bustled around as they cleaned, washed and dried dishes by magic.

Dobby appeared out of thin air and looked at Harry and Hermione. “Great Harry Potter and his Hermy, Winky be over there.”

Dobby pointed at a large pile of towels. He snapped his fingers and the towels vanished and reappeared inside a basket. Where the towels used to be was a sleeping house-elf known as Winky. She was snoring very loudly, and also hiccupping in her sleep.
“Winky, you be waking up now,” Dobby said, “You be having a new Mistress today.”

“Winky a bad girl,” Winky said, as she opened her eyes and sat up, “Winky – hic! – don’t deserve a new – hic – Mistress!”

“Of course you do, Winky,” Hermione said, soothingly; she walked over to Winky and knelt in front of her.


“Winky, I’ve learned a lot about house-elves recently,” Hermione said, “I was very wrong before. You are dying, Winky. Wasting away because you need a Master or Mistress. Be my house-elf, Winky. Bond with me. I will save you.”

Winky’s droopy eyes widened as she stared at Hermione. “Bushy-hair – hic! – mean it? Bushy-hair not be – hic! -- joking?”

“Harry Potter’s Hermy is Hermy, not Bushy-hair!” Dobby said, “Hermy be Winky’s new Mistress!”

“Winky be wanting Hermy as Mistress, then,” Winky said, forgetting to hiccups because she was so happy.

“Then bond with me, Winky,” Hermione said.

“Winky be remembering when Hermy be upset about Bad Older Master Crouch freeing Winky,” Winky said, “Winky be bonding with Mistress Hermy.”

Hermione smiled, then gently took Winky’s hand. The new Mistress and the house-elf performed the Bonding Ceremony.

“Winky, your first command is to go with Dobby and get better,” Hermione said, “No more drinking, Winky. No punishing yourself either. When you are your proper self again, you can come serve me. Okay?”

“Wink be accepting new Mistress Hermy’s orders,” Winky said.

“Dobby will return soon, Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said, “Mallory will watch Great Harry Potter and his Hermy while Dobby helps Winky settle in.”

“Take as much time as you need, Dobby,” Harry said.

Dobby bowed and walked over to Winky. He took her hand and they vanished with a pop!

”You did a good thing, Hermione,” Harry said.

“I know,” Hermione said, “Let’s go to the Owlery, so you can write Sirius. I bet Hedwig misses you. Then you can take that bath with your Egg.”

“Speaking of missing a friend,” Harry said, “We really should speak to Neville sometime. We haven’t said much to him since we singled him out as the lone fourth year we trusted.”
“Good idea,” Hermione said. “We can find him when we have free time today.”

Harry agreed, took Hermione’s hand and made their way out of the Kitchens. It was a fine beginning to what would prove to be an interesting day.

Chapter End Notes

I seriously thought about ending this with a cliffhanger with the “mutual” friend (it isn’t Sirius) showing up. Can you guess who it is? It isn’t the Healer friend either by the way.

If you’ve read some of my previous stories, you might know what is going on with Padma. I’ll give you a hint. It is a political thing.

I will say it again, just in case people need a reminder. This is simply a Harry/Hermione story. It will not be a Harry/Multi. If a Betrothal Contract happens, it will be created between Harry and Hermione, but it will be new, not an existing one. Padma and Luna are Harry’s friends, and that is all they will be. Neville/Luna could probably be an endgame ship though. Luna’s ‘bath’ talk was Luna being Luna.

That whole discussion about Lockhart was… I almost didn’t put it in. It just seemed like something Hermione might bring up to her boyfriend when Lockhart was mentioned. Something she wanted him to know, since she had kept it from him before. While such a storyline has happened in other stories, it didn’t happen in this story’s universe. The Obliviation thing just caused a really bad scare.

Sorry folks, Rita’s “exclusive” about Sirius won’t be shown. I added it for a laugh. So don’t ask!

Next Chapter: Harry and Hermione talk to Neville. Harry writes a letter to Sirius and takes a bath with his Egg. And… well… Harry is not happy with what he hears. Let’s just say Dancing Lessons will not happen next chapter. Too much is happening next chapter. It will happen in two chapters. This time I promise!
What He’ll Miss The Most

Chapter Notes

Since publishing the previous chapter, I’ve had two separate readers tell me to ‘cut down’ on Viktor Krum bashing, and Ron and Ginny bashing respectively. The latter only read the first chapter, and said ‘they aren’t villains, and Ginny is a shy girl’, which as most of you know exactly how big they are villains in this story. It is strange to get comments like these when the summary (on FFN), and the Tags (on Archive Of Our Own) clearly says this story has bashing of those three characters and others. Why are people like this on fanfiction sites if they do not know how to read?! As a guest said: “Any changes in Ginny or the story are because this is fan fiction. You can only read the original story so many times. Some of us hate Ron and enjoy bashing him.”

Sorry for another rant. Now to answer a question from a guest reader:

Q. How are you going to get around the elves protecting Harry during the tasks? It could really mess up the story.

A. Harry and Professor McGonagall will tell them they can’t interfere in the Tasks.

Warning: Language. Let’s just say Harry says the F-word a lot after figuring out the Egg’s clue. Reference to Underage Alcohol Use. Hermione mentions having a sip of alcohol once. ONCE.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Saturday, December 12th, 1994)

Harry used the Marauder’s Map to avoid unwanted encounters, as he and Hermione made their way to the Owlery. Ron and Ginny Weasley were both in the Gryffindor Common Room, and Albus Dumbledore was in his office with – interestingly enough – Severus Snape. As they approached the Owlery, Harry grinned when he found it was occupied by one Neville Longbottom.

“Looks like we’re going to get to talk to Neville sooner rather than later,” Harry commented, with a smile.

“Wonderful,” Hermione said, happily.

They entered the Owlery, and Neville jumped a bit when he heard footsteps. He looked a bit relieved when he saw Harry and Hermione.

“Oh, hey, you two!” Neville greeted them, “I’m just sending a letter to my Gran. I have some good news to tell her.”

“Is this about you and Luna Lovegood going to the Ball?” Hermione asked, smiling.

Neville’s eyes widened for a moment, then his face glowed red with blush. He grinned and shrugged, shyly.
“Right,” he said, “I did see you sitting with her and Padma Patil. Yeah, I asked her. I was rather nervous about doing it. But… well, to be honest, I was actually thinking of asking out Ginny Weasley first. But then all that… you know… stuff happened with her, Ron, and you two. So I decided to ask Luna today. I was surprised she accepted!”

“Well, perhaps you shouldn’t have been, mate,” Harry said, “She looked absolutely happy about you asking her out. She had the biggest grin on her face when we sat down.”

“Really?” Neville asked, as his face went pink.

“Yes,” Hermione said, “I believe she’s really looking forward to the Ball. She told us about how you and her were childhood friends.”

“Yeah, we were,” Neville said, smiling, “My Gran is her godmother, you see. So it was natural for us to be each other’s friends, especially since we saw each other so much. If she hadn’t accepted, or if someone had already asked her, I thought about asking Hannah Abbot. But Luna accepted, and I am happy to go with her. I’m rambling, aren’t I? Sorry.”

“No problem, mate,” Harry said, “Hey, how is it in the dormitory now, since – you know – you were singled out as one of those I trust?”

Neville smiled shyly, then shrugged. “Ron’s been annoying, of course. Yesterday morning, he actually tore down the curtains around your bed, because he thought you were still sleeping there. I think he wanted to attack you again.”

“I’m not surprised,” Harry muttered. “He hasn’t done anything to you in the past couple of days, has he?”

“No,” Neville said, shaking his head, “When I got back to the Common Room, after Professor McGonagall excused us during the Gryffindor Meeting, Fred and George offered to help me put wards up around my bed and trunk. I accepted. Apparently they put a whole slew of different prank things on the protections. If Ron touches them once, he’ll suddenly see spiders all over the floor and walls and the curtains around my bed. If he does it a second time, his hair will turn green and silver for a whole day. If he does it a third time, he’ll receive a nasty shock. Same goes on my trunk. I warned Dean and Seamus about it, and soon they had the same protections thanks to Fred and George.”

“Brilliant!” Harry said, “That’ll serve Ron right.”

“It also says you can probably trust Dean and Seamus,” Hermione said, “Er… how are those two when it comes to us?”

“They’re pretty apologetic, actually,” Neville said, smiling. “Said something about writing letters to the two of you to apologize, and how much they regretted it all. Feels like they betrayed a friend, even if you weren’t close to them, Harry. Lavender and Parvati are behaving pretty similarly, I think. I don’t know what Professor McGonagall said to them, or the rest of the Lions, but it must have been brilliant.”

“It was amazing, mate,” Harry said, “If the whole tower seems subdued, it is because of Professor McGonagall.”
“Things have been pretty quiet,” Neville said, nodding. “Some tried to be a bit… rebellious. You know, stuff like ‘I’m not going to do this assignment McGonagall wants us to do’. But when they realized their friends are not doing the same, they changed their behavior pretty quickly. Plus, it sounds like their punishment if they didn’t do it meant they couldn’t go to the Ball. So once they were reminded of that, they changed their minds pretty quickly. A few of the second years and some of the third years still have that mind-set, since they don’t have the same punishment. But not all of them. They felt pretty bad, it seems. Out of everyone it is the second and third years who seem the most subdued. The Third Years seem to blame it on Ginny, actually.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

“Yeah,” Neville said, “Seems she was the one who goaded them into doing everything they did to you.”

“Peer pressure,” Hermione said, “Same as the first years.”

“Not the same,” Harry said, “They’re old enough to know better. Even with Ginny pressuring them. They could have ignored her, or told Professor McGonagall. Well, Neville. Thank you for this talk. I’m sorry we didn’t do this earlier. We’ve been preoccupied.”

“No, I definitely understand, Harry,” Neville said, “I’ve been preoccupied too. What with classes yesterday, homework, as well as trying to get the courage to ask Luna to the Ball. Well, I’m done here. I sent the owl off right before you arrive. So, I’ll let you do what you need to do. I wouldn’t want to make Hedwig angry. We have been avoiding her.”

“HOOT!” Hedwig screeched, from one of the nests above.

He winced. “My deepest apologies, your highness. Come down here, please?”

Hedwig hooted, then dived and landed on one of the perches positioned on the floor.

“I’ll leave and let you and your Mistress talk,” Neville said, grinning, “See you later.”

“Bye, Neville,” Hermione said, “It was so nice to talk with you.”

Neville smiled, and walked out of the Owlery, after Harry said goodbye.

“Hedwig, I am sorry I’ve been ignoring you,” Harry said, turning back to his very first friend, “I’ve been very busy. I should come see you, even if I don’t have a letter to write. I shouldn’t ignore you now that I have a girlfriend.”

Hedwig hooted and looked at Hermione.

“You’ll always be his first girl, Hedwig,” Hermione said. “Now he has both of us to look after him.”

“Hoot,” preened Hedwig.

“So you approve of Hermione as my girlfriend?” Hermione asked.

“Hoot!” Hedwig said, her head bobbing. “Hoot-hoot!”

Hermione giggled. “Did she just say ‘about time!’, Harry?”
“Maybe?” Harry replied, with a grin, “I need to write a letter to Padfoot, Hedwig. I trust you know who that is?”

“HOOT!” Hedwig screeched.

“Of course you do, how presumptuous of me to think otherwise!” Harry replied, with a smile.

“Hoot,” Hedwig agreed.

Hermione giggled as Harry sighed. He walked over to one of the writing tables, collected a bit of parchment, a quill and a small jar of ink. Then he began to write his letter.

Dear Padfoot,

I am sure you’ve read Rita Skeeter’s article about me and my new girlfriend by now, and that you know I’m dating Hermione Granger now. I should have written to you before Rita’s article came out, but I was very busy. It is all entirely true. Well, some of the article has… embellished things, as is Rita’s style, of course! So let me tell you what happened...

Harry continued the letter by describing Professor McGonagall’s Yule Ball announcement, followed by telling him he needed a dance partner! Then he talked about asking Hermione to the Ball, and then to be his girlfriend. Then he talked about the show in the Great Hall of publicly asking Hermione. He followed this with the story of Ron and Ginny Weasley’s betrayal, the confrontation, and the talk with McGonagall that ended up with them in the Head Boy and Girl Quarters for the foreseeable future. Then he talked about the two – not five! – two-minute long snog in the Great Hall to let the students know he and Hermione were a couple.

So now I’m having Dancing Lessons tonight with Hermione and Professor McGonagall. I’m nervous, but I think it will be fun.

As for the Triwizard Tournament, earlier today I had a breakthrough with my Dragon Egg clue. After I send this letter, I’m going to listen to the Egg’s message and see what it says. Should be interesting.

There is more I want to say to you, Sirius, but not in writing. Maybe we can meet soon, if you can figure out something that doesn’t end up with you GETTING IN TROUBLE! Seriously, Padfoot – and don’t start with me – I am worried about you. Don’t take risks just because you feel you need to see me. We don’t need another fiasco like last year, do we? No, we don’t!

Heh. Look at me. Lecturing you. Hermione must be rubbing off on me. Not that way, you pervert! All we’ve done is kissed and snogged, and you are not getting any descriptions about that from me! Don’t ask!

I miss you, and hope you are safe,
Prongs’ Son

He thought about how to sign it, without anyone figuring it was him. But if someone intercepted it and read it, they would figure it was him, just from the letter’s contents. Like indicating his girlfriend was Hermione, and the Triwizard Tournament stuff. He decided everything from Harry to HJP and finally went with Prongs’ Son.
A grin crossed his face when he thought of HJP. He was going to have to mention this to Hermione.

He rolled the letter into a scroll, and walked over to Hedwig. He attached the letter to her leg, gave her a good long pet, which she responded with by nibbling his fingers.

“Safe flight, Hedwig,” Harry said, “By the way, if you return with a letter, don’t be surprised to be intercepted by a house-elf. Dobby and Mallory are house-elves guarding me, and one of their duties is to receive my mail first. So they’ll probably want you to give any mail to them.”

“Hoot,” Hedwig nodded, obviously understanding.

“Good girl,” Harry said, “Now go. And be safe!”

Hedwig hooted, then took off out one of the windows. Harry checked the Marauder’s Map again, found nobody who might cause trouble between the Owlery and the Private Quarters. He took Hermione’s hand and the couple headed back into the corridor.

“Hey, Hermione,” Harry said, as they headed for the Private Quarters, “I was just thinking of something. What are my initials?”

“HJP?” Hermione asked, “Why?”

“What are yours?” Harry asked, grinning.

“HJG,” Hermione said, then she rolled her eyes, “You were thinking when we get married, our initials would match.”

“Yes!” Harry said, “You know what that tells me. We were meant to be together, you and I. You are meant to be Hermione Potter.”

Hermione smiled, then said in a sing-song voice, “Seventeenth birthday, Harry. Wedding the following August.”

“A married couple during our final year of education,” Harry said, “That is our NEWT year. When will we find the time to… consummate our marriage?!”

Hermione broke up laughing. “Oh, you! I am sure we’ll be so wound up, we’ll need to find a way to relax.”

“Sounds wonderful,” Harry said.

“Harry?” Hermione asked, “Do you know what that would mean?”

“Er… what do you mean?” Harry replied.

“I’m asking, Harry, whether you’ve been given The Talk or not,” Hermione clarified.

Harry heard the uppercase letters. He stammered and coughed. “Does a Sex Education Class for one day in my final year in Primary School count?”

“You were ten, Harry,” Hermione said, “I think The Talk in your teens is different than the one in Primary School.”
“Then that would be a ‘no’,” Harry said. “I haven’t been given The Talk. Vernon would probably find it humorous if I knocked a girl up. Just another way to insult me. ‘Deadbeat Dad’, or something like that, ‘just like your father, boy! I knew you’d go the same way!’”

“One of these days you’re going to tell me everything about your home-life, Harry,” Hermione said. “I won’t pressure you to do it, though. I know better than that.”

Harry winced. “One of these days.”

Hermione sighed. “Hmm... who would be someone good to talk to you about that? Padfoot? He... might turn it into a joke. Remus, maybe, but you don’t know him well enough. Professor McGonagall or Madame Pomfrey, perhaps.”

Harry coughed. “Do we have to talk about this?”

“Yes, Harry,” Hermione said, “Because... sooner or later, there will come a time when we... have sex. It will happen if you want our relationship to last as long as possible. I’m not saying it will happen this year. But... what if it does? Not immediately or anything! But it might happen. There might come a time when we get lost in the moment.”

“All you would have to do is say ‘no, not right now’, Hermione,” Harry said, “And I would stop. I trust you know that.”

“I know that,” Hermione said, nodding, “But there will come a time when I do not say ‘no’. When I will want you. You will need to know what to do at that time.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Harry said, blushing.

So, yes,” Hermione said, “you need to have The Talk with somebody. Harry, do you want me to ask Professor McGonagall? Maybe she’ll do it, or she’ll refer you to Madam Pomfrey. Neither choice would be so bad. Madam Pomfrey would be like talking to my mother.

“My mother was very clinical when it came to The Talk. Very... descriptive. It happened this summer. It was The Talk, Part Two, actually. The first was the summer before I started at Hogwarts, because she was sure I’d start my monthlies during first year. She was right.

“I’m getting off topic. This summer, she gave me ‘The Talk” about sex. That was an awkward and embarrassing talk. But, you know me. I was a knowledge sponge, listening intently during the whole thing. Taking it all in, no matter how embarrassing it was. She actually let me have a sip of whatever type of alcohol she was drinking afterward and told me not to tell my father. Just a sip, nothing more. Definitely not enough to make me woozy or drunk or whatever. It calmed down my poor, tattered nerves, for certain!”

Harry coughed. “I’m not letting your mother give me The Talk. Nor your father!”

Hermione laughed. “Yeah, no. They would basically be talking to you about having sex with me! No, thank you. I will not let either of us have to suffer that!”

Harry sighed. “If you feel you need to ask Professor McGonagall, you can.”

“Then I will, Harry,” Hermione said. “For the sake of our relationship. Okay?”
“Okay,” Harry said. “For you.”

“Thank you, boyfriend,” Hermione said, then her eyes widened, and she looked around, wildly, “Sweet Baby Maeve! We’ve been talking about this in a public corridor! What were we thinking?!”

Harry burst out laughing. Hermione glared at him, then broke down giggling. Thankfully, nobody was around to have eavesdropped on that conversation. So with that little bit of awkwardness over, they made their way to the Lion’s Den. When they finally stepped through the enchanted, hidden doorway into the Den, the pair kissed each other and agreed to meet half-an-hour later in the Common Room. Harry promised it wouldn’t take him that long to get done with his bath. After another kiss, they went into their own Private Quarters.

Harry greeted Sir Leon, then headed for his bedroom. He retrieved the Golden Egg from his trunk, as well as a fresh set of casual clothing. He chose an outfit that wouldn’t get in the way during Dancing Lessons that evening. He laid the outfit on the bed, then headed into the bathroom.

Before today, he had only taken a couple of showers in this new bathroom, and had not used the tub.

The bathtub, while not as big as the rumored baths in the Prefect Bathrooms, was still a lot bigger than any bathtub he had ever seen before. It was like a very small swimming pool: built in-ground, deep enough to stand in and keep his head above water, and at least a dozen feet long. Harry raised a confused eyebrow at the numerous faucets, then shrugged. He turned on several of them, and suddenly the tub was filling up with comfortably hot water and various types of perfumed, soapy foam was settling on the top of the rising water.

He set the Golden Egg down at the edge of the tub, and undressed out of his clothes. Once the tub was filled enough – which took several minutes – Harry stepped into the pool-like tub, gasping and murmuring at the comfortable heat that surrounded him as he settled into the water. Knowing he was meeting with Hermione in less than thirty minutes, he decided not to waste time. He decided to listen to the Egg, decipher the message as he took a bath – as best he could without help, anyway – then get out.

With that decision made, he picked up the Egg, held his breath, and dove under the soapy surface of the water. When the Egg was well-submerged, it automatically opened before he could do anything with it! Instead of the horrid screeching and wailing sound he had heard before, it was now replaced with a chorus of eerie, melodic, voices singing:

"Come seek us where our voices sound,  
We cannot sing above the ground,  
And while you’re searching ponder this:  
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,  
An hour long you’ll have to look,  
And to recover what we took,  
But past an hour — the prospect’s black,  
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back."

He had to surface for breath, then listen to the song two more times before he could memorize it all.

“It is definitely Mermaids,” Harry said, “If there were any Mermaids anywhere, they would be in Hogwarts Lake. Probably deep in the lake.”
He splashed the water in irritation! “Fuck! I don’t know how to swim! Go over that bridge later, Harry. Okay, next. ‘We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss.’ What will I miss most? My Firebolt? My Cloak? My…”

Harry’s eyes widened and he shook his head. “No! They wouldn’t! They couldn’t! Fuck! It isn’t ‘what’ you’ll sorely miss, it is ‘who’! They’re going to take Hermione!”

Harry was panicking. He could still hear those last words in his head. ‘Too late, it's gone, it won’t come back.’

“No!” Harry growled, out loud, his voice echoing around the bathroom, “No, they will not! I will not let them! I will fight them tooth, nail and wand! I’ll – I’ll lose my magic, take Hermione and run if I have to! They will not take her!

“This… this is how Ron, Ginny, -- this is how Dumbledore is going to split us up! They’re going to use this task to kill her! Fuck you, Weasleys! Fuck you, Dumbledore! Fuck you, Ministry! Fuck you Goblet of Fire! Fuck you, YOU FUCKING EGG! FUCK!”

Harry tossed the Golden Egg across the bathroom, and it slammed to the wall with a crash, and fell onto the floor with a clatter. He inhaled and exhaled, trying to calm himself down. He needed to focus. He needed to get out of the bath, get dressed and find Hermione. They needed to leave Hogwarts. Now. They needed to get far away from the Triwizard Tournament and wizarding world in general. Somewhere they wouldn’t find him or Hermione.

“FUCK!” Harry growled.

“Great Harry Potter, Dobby commands you to calm down right this minute!” Dobby’s voice echoed around the room as he appeared; then his eyes widened. “Dobby is sorry to command the Great Harry Potter. Dobby asks for punishment.”

“No punishment, Dobby,” Harry said, “Why are you here?”

“Dobby be hearing Great Harry Potter yelling and cursing,” Dobby said, “Great Harry Potter be panicking about his Hermy. Great Harry Potter be forgetting that Dobby be promising to protect Great Harry Potter’s Hermy. Dobby be never letting bad Master Head or Bad Weasels hurt Hermy.”

“Dobby, you are the best, the bravest elf I’ve ever met,” Harry said, “But this… even this might be out of your league. I can’t risk Hermione.”

“Great Harry Potter need be calm,” Dobby said, “Great Harry Potter need Hermy’s help to be calm. Dobby be back.”

Dobby disappeared with a crack! Then a few moments later, he appeared, with a shocked Hermione standing beside him.

“What? Where – Harry James Potter!” Hermione shrieked, when she realized she was in a bathroom with Harry! “What am I doing here? Why am I in your bathroom while you’re taking a bath, and most likely naked?! I am not supposed to be in your Quarters! I am definitely not to supposed to be in here! Explain!”

“I didn’t do this!” Harry said, “Dobby did! Dobby!”
“Great Harry Potter be panicking,” Dobby said, “Great Harry Potter be needing Hermy to help. Dobby be bringing Hermy here to help Great Harry Potter.”

Hermione blinked and calmed down. “What happened, Harry?”

Harry inhaled and exhaled. Then he explained the Egg’s clue. “You are what I’ll miss the most Hermione. Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back! Don’t you see! This is how Dumbledore and the Weasleys will split us up! They’re going to cause you to have an accident in the lake! Probably drowning! We have to leave Hogwarts. NOW!”

Hermione wasn’t in the panicking state he thought she’d be in. She inhaled and exhaled, then began pacing. After a minute, she stopped.

“Mallory!” she called.

Mallory, the House-Elf, appeared.

“Yes, Miss Hermy?” Mallory called.

“Please go to Professor McGonagall, Mallory,” Hermione said, “Tell her to meet us in our Private Common Room in… fifteen minutes. We need to talk to her. It is an emergency.”

“Yes, Miss Hermy,” Mallory said, “Mallory will go tell Mistress now.”

She vanished with a crack! Hermione turned back to Harry.

“Harry, I know you’re not happy right now,” Hermione said.

“No happy?!” Harry shot back, “Is that all you have to say! I shouldn’t have asked you to the Ball. I shouldn’t have asked you to be my girlfriend. You’re going to – they’re going to – and it is all my fault!”

“HARRY JAMES POTTER, YOU STOP THIS INSTANT!” Hermione yelled; then she inhaled and exhaled. “Harry, who has been your greatest, most trusted friend, over the past month and a half?”

“You, of course!” Harry said.

“So how do you believe I wouldn’t be chosen for this if you didn’t ask me to the Ball, or to become or your girlfriend?” Hermione asked. “I’ve been your only friend. Of course I’d be chosen!”

“Hermione, you need to get away,” Harry said, “You need to leave Hogwarts, leave Britain. Go to… the farthest reaches of the world. A third-world country even. You cannot be anywhere they can find you!”

“Harry, stop,” Hermione said, “I’m not leaving you here.”

“Then we’ll leave together!” Harry argued, “Fuck my magic! I’d rather have you!”

“Harry, calm down,” Hermione said, “We’ll talk to Professor McGonagall and we’ll figure this out together. She’ll figure out what we should do. She won’t let them take me. Okay?”
“How do you know she can do anything?!” Harry asked.

“Because if she can’t, I trust her to be able to tell us that!” Hermione said. “If she can’t help us, we’ll figure out someone who can! I have a few ideas running through my head, but I need to run them by Professor McGonagall first.”

Harry inhaled and exhaled. “Fine. We’ll meet with her. If we three can’t come up with anything, we’re leaving, Hermione. Somewhere they’ll never find us. We’ll go to a third-world country or the middle of the Amazon if we have to. If only so they can’t find us! Promise me!”

Hermione sighed. “If we can’t figure out anything to prevent me from being a part of the Second Task, we’ll both leave. I promise, Harry. But we don’t need to do anything too quickly. Second Task is at the end of February!”

“Unless they find out we’re going to try to leave!” Harry said, “Then they’ll move it to the first week of January or something!”

“Harry, stop being paranoid,” Hermione said.

“It’s not paranoia when they’re really out to get you!” Harry argued.

Hermione rolled her eyes. Mallory appeared at that moment.

“Mistress be agreeing to be meeting with Harry Potter and his Hermy at scheduled time,” Mallory said, “Mistress be bringing guest Mistress be mentioning to Harry Potter and his Hermy previously. Mistress’ guest be arriving earlier than Mistress expects.”

“Excellent!” Hermione said. “Take me back to my Quarters, please, Mallory. Harry, get out, get dressed and meet me in the Common Room. If you’re there before McGonagall and her guest, I’ll snog you to calm you down. Okay?”

Harry grinned goofily and nodded. Hermione rolled her eyes, took Mallory’s hand and the two vanished.

Harry inhaled and exhaled, then stood and stepped out of the bath. He used his wand to dry himself off, then – completely ignoring that fucking Egg! – he walked out of the bathroom and back into his bedroom. He dressed into the outfit he had prepared, then walked into the main room of the Quarters.

“Are you alright, young Lion?” Leon asked. “I heard you yelling and cursing.”

“I’m not alright, Sir Leon,” Harry said, “But I’m going to be speak to my girlfriend, and Professor McGonagall about it. Hopefully they will be able to help.”

“If you need any advice from me, please feel free to tell me your troubles,” Leon said, “I might be able to help.”

“I’ll consider it,” Harry said. “Excuse me. I need to meet with my girlfriend.”

“Good luck, young Lion,” Leon said, “I hope you find the answers to these new puzzling troubles.”

“I hope so too,” Harry said, “Thanks, Leon.”
He waved to the portrait, then exited the Quarters. He walked into the Private Quarters, and found Hermione waiting for him on their chosen couch. She was not alone. Sitting in one of the chairs was Professor McGonagall.

In the other chair, smiling up at him, was Professor Remus Lupin.

Chapter End Notes

Dun-Dun-Dun.

Blame the Golden Egg and Harry’s panic attacks for the reason there not being Dancing Lessons in this chapter. Originally this chapter was going to be – eh, twice as long probably. Originally, Harry’s panic attacks weren’t going to be so dramatic. He wasn’t originally going to be like ‘fuck my magic, Hermione, you mean so much more to me, we’re leaving!’ But that scene wrote itself. Which will lead to the opening conversation of next chapter. Originally, Harry and Hermione would be having a normal conversation, reuniting with Remus, telling him about their new relationship and troubles with Ron and Ginny. Now they have another topic to discuss.

So can you guess why Remus is there? Hint: it has to do with the Dancing Lessons, and it is something that was seen in the third movie.

Next Chapter: Harry, Hermione, Remus and McGonagall have important discussions with several topics. Hermione speaks to McGonagall in private. Then Dancing Lessons. Basically, aside from the discussion about the Egg’s clue, everything that will be in next chapter, should have been in this chapter as well if it wasn’t for the panic attacks, making it twice as long!
I Don't Dance

Chapter Notes

I realized, after last chapter was published, it was odd that Harry mentioned Dumbledore, when it came to splitting up him and Hermione. I’m just going to say he was paranoid in his panic attack, and leave it there. Maybe Dumbledore’s involvement was a suspicion in the back of his mind.

There are several moments during this chapter where McGonagall’s Scottish dialect COULD show itself. I do not know how to write that type of dialect or accent. So use your imagination if you like that type of thing.

The Chapter Title is inspired by the Lee Brice song of the same title. If you’ve ever heard it, then you’ll probably agree with me that it is perfect for Harry's mind-set in this chapter, especially when it comes to dancing and romance.

Warning: Discussion of Sexual Topics – not ‘The Talk’ yet, but rather a preview. You’ll see.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Saturday, December 12th, 1994)

Harry froze in spot for a moment as he saw Professor Lupin. When Professor McGonagall had mentioned her guest being a mutual friend, he hadn’t expected it to be his third year Defense Professor. Did he consider the Professor a friend? He couldn’t say. He had certainly been the best Defense Professor, though Moody was doing his best to prove he might be better. Harry had certainly had enough interactions with Lupin, but was it enough to call him a friend, just because he taught him so much and was a friend of his parents? Harry wasn’t sure yet.

“Professor Lupin!” Harry said, as he walked over to the couch, and sat down next to Hermione, “It is wonderful to see you again.”

“As I said to Miss Granger, here,” Professor Lupin said, “I am no longer your Professor, so I think you can call me Remus. It is good to see you too, Harry. Professor McGonagall, here, was entertaining me with a wonderful story as we made our way up here. I was most surprised, but very happy, to hear the two of you have decided to explore a… ah… romantic relationship?”

“Yes, we have,” Harry said, grinning as he looked at Hermione. “She has accepted to be my date to the Yule Ball, as well as my girlfriend.”

“Yes, Professor McGonagall informed me,” Remus said, “She didn’t tell me much, because she wanted me to hear it from you. She did tell me you were now residents in the Head Boy and Girl Quarters, due to some troubles with your house-mates. I am sure she told you that your parents, Harry, lived in the very same Quarters for their seventh year.”

“She did,” Harry confirmed, smiling at McGonagall.
“Yes, well, I’m sure we can discuss that soon,” Remus said, “Apparently, there is a more important topic we must discuss first.”

“Yes,” McGonagall said, “As we were making our way up here, Mallory told me you two needed to speak to me and that it was an emergency?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “I suppose I should start from the beginning. At breakfast today, Luna Lovegood and Padma Patil helped me figure out how to obtain the clue to the Golden Egg. So a little while ago, I took a bath, brought the Golden Egg with me, and put it under the water. The shrieking sound turned out to be a Mermaid’s Voice.”

“Excellent job, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, with a rare smile, “I’m quite pleased that you could figure the clue out so soon.”

“Yes, Mermaids do make that piercing, shrieking cry if one were to hear them from above the surface of water, when they are below,” Remus said, “If you are under the water with them while they sing, their song is rather beautiful and intoxicating, and can be translated to the listener’s language. I am now regretting not teaching your year about Mermaids around the time period I taught Grindylows. You would have known about the Mermaid’s Voice, when you heard what I expect was the piercing shriek in your clue.”

“Yes, well the ‘clue’ was a song,” Harry said, “It was a song that hinted of what I should expect at the task.”

Harry recited the song from memory. He knew he wouldn’t forget that song until the task was over.

“I’m quite sure there was one line in that song that was supposed to throw us off,” Harry said, “We weren’t supposed to realize what it really said until the day of the task.”

“And which line was this, Mr. Potter?” McGonagall asked.

“‘We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss’,” Harry said, shakily, “I think we’re supposed to believe they’d take an object. My Firebolt, my Cloak. It isn’t ‘what’, Professor. It is ‘who’. ‘We’ve taken who you’ll sorely miss’. Hermione, Professor. They’re going to take Hermione.”

Professor McGonagall’s eyes widened, as did Remus. He closed his eyes, and he seemed to be inhaling and exhaling deeply from his nostrils.

“Think of the last line,” Harry said, “Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back. Professor, think about what has recently happened. What better way to permanently break me and Hermione up than…”

McGonagall stood and walked across the room, then through a door into her private Quarters. The door closed behind her, and Harry, Hermione and Remus’ eyes all widened when they heard Professor McGonagall’s voice raise as she screamed loudly in what sounded like English and Scottish Gaelic swearing. A full minute later, she walked back out and sat back down in her chair.

“My apologies for that,” McGonagall said, her lips thin. “Remus, you may be confused at the moment. I’ll sum it up for you. We happen to believe there are people actively working on breaking Harry and Hermione up nefarious purposes. Perhaps they believe these two weren’t supposed to be together. Perhaps Harry was supposed to be with somebody else in their plans.”

“May I ask who is behind this?” Remus asked.
“Ronald and Ginny Weasley,” Hermione said. “And possibly, Headmaster Dumbledore and Molly Weasley.”

One of Remus’ eyebrows raised at the mention of Dumbledore’s name.

“Ron and Ginny confronted us after they heard Harry invited me to the Yule Ball,” Hermione said, “Ron was trying to convince Harry that I had given him a Love Potion, and put his name in the Goblet of Fire, just to make him weaker in the Tournament, and get him killed. We… I… believe Ginny is trying to get together with Harry, and I am in Ron’s sights, just so I can’t be involved with Harry. We don’t know the actual plot. We don’t know if their mother or Dumbledore’s involved…”

“I do not believe Ronald and Ginevra could do this on their own,” McGonagall said, “Molly Weasley is definitely involved somehow, and Albus – he’s working against Harry and Hermione somehow. Thursday he made a show of… supporting Harry and Hermione, only after he asked me where Severus Snape was.”

“Oh, God!” Hermione said, “This was during dinner when we did that whole snogging thing for a show. I bet Dumbledore asked you where Snape was, because he expected Snape to stop our show.”

“And when Snape couldn’t, Dumbledore had to interrupt us!” Harry continued his girlfriend’s line of thought, “And then he does his whole ‘Lord of Light’ thing – ‘hey, it is wonderful to see love flourish between the Boy-Who-Lived and his best friend!’ – so he doesn’t look like he hated every second he saw us snogging.”

“I do not like this,” Remus said, “I do not like the thoughts going through my head.”

“Remus?” McGonagall asked.

“The Second Task will be in the Lake, right?” Remus said, “It certainly sounds like Hermione would be Harry’s hostage. The Mermaids, maybe. Mermaids have a tendency to kidnap their hostages and tie them up to stakes, waiting for the hostage’s friends, family, or mate to rescue them. That happens with enemy Mermaid tribes, for sure. If Hermione was tied to the stake at the bottom of the Lake, I am sure the Task handlers would make sure she was in some sort of Stasis, maybe until she reached the surface again. But if that stasis failed while she as the bottom of the lake…”

“Merciful Merlin!” McGonagall said, “She’d drown before Harry could save her! This… this could be an assassination! As you said, Harry, a permanent way to break you and Hermione up -- with her death!”

Harry wrapped an arm around a shaking Hermione and held her close.

“It would explain why the clue said ‘what’ instead of ‘who’,” Remus said, “Perhaps Dumbledore included that in the clue, so that nobody would discover the tournament Officials were kidnapping innocent students who didn’t volunteer for the Tournament before the Task could take place?”

“It makes sense,” McGonagall said, nodding.

“With Hermione’s death,” Remus said, “Harry would be grieving, of course. And in his grief, who would comfort him but Miss Weasley, wanting to become his new girlfriend – due to whatever plan they are hatching up. Hermione’s death would be ruled accidental, none the wiser, except those involved in the assassination. Harry would be free for Miss Weasley to come forth and take
advantage. I suppose it wouldn’t be impossible Love Potions to come into play at that moment in time. Since I’m under the impression Harry wouldn’t simply go with Miss Weasley’s plans without a fight.”

“Not going to happen,” Harry muttered, as he held Hermione close, “Never going to happen. Professor McGonagall. If this isn’t remedied, if there isn’t a plan to prevent this, Hermione and I will leave Hogwarts. I don’t care if I lose my magic, Professor. I will not lose Hermione. I’d sacrifice my magic for her.”

McGonagall inhaled and exhaled. “We’ll figure out something, Harry. I promise you. I promise both of you. We’ll figure out something.”

“About that, Professor,” Hermione said; straightening herself up just enough, even though she was still in Harry’s arms, to look at McGonagall and Remus, “The Daily Prophet. What if we give Rita Skeeter an interview? Front page exclusive! Tournament Officials Plan To Use Innocent Students As Hostages In Second Task! There would be a public outcry, Professor. The Tournament Officials – Dumbledore – would have to come up with something else. They’d have to go with items instead of people. They could use Harry’s Firebolt instead.”

“If that works, Hermione,” Harry said, “You will not be present the day before, and day of the Second Task. You will remain in your Quarters, or mine, if I have to watch you all day the previous day, and the following until I’m expected at the Task, I will. Nobody will take you from me. Dumbledore might even try to put you down there, while the others all have objects to rescue.”

“Good thinking, Harry,” Remus complimented. “Yes, I would volunteer to be here too. I’d even recruit others to be here to guard her as well, if I could.”

“This might just work,” McGonagall said. “We’ll do it tomorrow even. I’ll escort you off the grounds and to Diagon Alley where the Headquarters of the Daily Prophet is. I’ll make an excuse to Dumbledore, make a reason for me going off grounds. He won’t even know the two of you are gone. He doesn’t know where you’re staying. I’ll tell him you’re spending the entire day with each other in the Private Common Room near your quarters. Then we’ll go, speak to Rita Skeeter, and it will be in the newspaper on Monday morning.”

“Great idea!” Hermione gushed.

“Yeah, that sounds like it might just work,” Harry agreed, then he sobered, “However, if it doesn’t. If Dumbledore convinces the other Tournament Officials to keep the same Task. He might say the hostages will be completely safe, or something like that. Then me and Hermione will leave, Professor. The first chance we get. We’re gone. We’re not going to give them a chance to force us to stay here. I will risk losing my magic. I will not risk losing her.”

McGonagall sighed and nodded. “If we fail, I will personally help you two leave, Mr. Potter. That is my promise.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry said; Hermione echoed him.

“I might know somebody who will help you if you have to leave,” Remus said.

The look he was giving the couple told them who he was talking about.

“You can tell Professor McGonagall about him, Remus,” Harry said. “We trust her with this.”
Remus stiffened. “Are you sure?”

Harry and Hermione nodded. Remus sighed and nodded too.

“What is going on, you three?” McGonagall asked. “What are you keeping from me?”

“Minerva,” Remus said, “What I am about to tell you cannot leave this room right now. I happen to believe it has reached conspiracy level, the way things have turned out. Someone – Dumbledore, maybe, now I think on it – might be preventing things from happening. Things he doesn’t want to happen.”

“Well, if you tell me, I’ll probably have a clearer understanding of what you mean,” McGonagall said.

“Minerva,” Remus said, “Sirius Black is completely and utterly innocent of all crimes he was accused of. Peter Pettigrew is, not only alive, but he is guilty of all the crimes Sirius was accused of.”

McGonagall’s eyebrows twitched, then she simply said, “I’m listening.”

“Well, to begin,” Harry said, “I suppose I must ask if you recall a certain rat that Percy Weasley had as a pet, before he gave it to his brother, Ron?”

“Yes, actually,” McGonagall said. “I remember when Percy Weasley was a first year. He had brought the rat into Hogwarts, and I lectured him about how only cats, toads, or owls were allowed at Hogwarts, and I advised him to have it sent home. The following day, the Headmaster informed me that Percy Weasley had been given special permission to keep his rat as a pet at Hogwarts. He never made an exception for other pets.”

“Yes, that behavior does seem strange,” Remus said. “Perhaps you recall, Professor. Harry’s mother had an iguana she had brought her first year at Hogwarts. It was you, I believe, who told her she had to have it brought home. I believe it was the first day of classes when you told her too. She didn’t get an exception for that.”

“Yes, I recall,” McGonagall said, “There have been several students who brought different pets in. Anywhere from snakes, to dogs – small dogs like Crups or Chihuahuas – to parrots and ravens. There was even a couple of ferrets! None of them were allowed. Yet Percy Weasley’s rat was allowed. The following year, another Gryffindor of mine wanted to bring a different pet in. It wasn’t allowed. I asked Albus about Percy’s rat, and he simply reminded me the rat was allowed.”

“Merlin, that is odd,” Remus muttered, shaking his head.

“What is so odd about this rat?” McGonagall asked.

“It was an Animagus, Minerva,” Remus said, “By the name of Peter Pettigrew.”

“No!” McGonagall gasped, pressing a hand over her heart. “A supposed dead man posing as a rat was here all this time at Hogwarts?”

“Posing as the Weasley’s pet rat,” Remus said, nodding. “The Weasley family was extremely foolish. As Sirius once recently pointed out, ‘Scabbers’ lived with the Weasleys for twelve years. Extremely long life for a Common Garden Rat, isn’t it?”
“Perhaps they thought it was different rats?” McGonagall asked.

“Brown rats all with a missing toe?” Remus asked.

“Peter Pettigrew’s finger was the only part of his body found!” McGonagall gasped. “Merlin! How… how did you find out?”

“We didn’t,” Harry said, “Sirius did. The summer before mine and Hermione’s third year, Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge visited Azkaban. He gave Sirius a newspaper. On the front page of the newspaper was a picture of the Weasley family in Egypt, recent winners of the Lottery, or whatever that was. On Ron Weasley’s shoulder was the rat known as Scabbers.”

“Or as we knew him – Wormtail,” Remus said, “Remember the rumors about what Sirius said before he escaped?”

“’He’s at Hogwarts,’” McGonagall said, “We all thought it meant Harry!”

“He meant Wormtail,” Remus said, “Peter Pettigrew. The real Secret Keeper for James and Lily Potter – having been chosen secretly, while everyone believed the real Secret Keeper was Sirius – and the man who truly killed those twelve Muggles. The man who framed Sirius for it all.”

“That is why Sirius broke into Gryffindor Tower, Professor,” Hermione said, “He was looking for Scabbers, not Harry.”

“Merciful Merlin!” McGonagall gasped. “How did you discover all of this?”

“Remember the day Buckbeak the Hippogriff was to be executed?” Hermione asked.

Harry and Hermione began the tale from the first sight of “the grim”. They told the entire tale, with Remus commenting when we needed to. Remus recounted some of the tale he and Sirius had explained. McGonagall was shocked about Severus’ actions, and she looked like she was going to faint. Harry and Hermione told her about using the Time Turner. She was very pale when the story was finished.

“Mallory!” she gasped, “Four glasses of ice water.”

Four glasses of water appeared on the table. McGonagall took hers and took deep gulps from it. Then she inhaled and exhaled.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” she said, “Why didn’t you tell me this before now?”

“For Sirius,” Harry said, “We didn’t want anything to happen to him. We were afraid you would inform someone who would only put him in danger.”

McGonagall sagged. “I suppose I can see your point. You spoke of a conspiracy, Remus? What did you mean by that.”

“I’ll give you two important facts, Professor,” Remus said, “The first, Sirius only remembered very recently. You see, he and I have been living together in a house, and I couldn’t tell you the location, even if I wanted.”
“Fidelius?” Hermione asked.

“Indeed, Miss Granger,” Remus said. “I’d give you points if I could. A good friend of mine and
Sirius’, someone we trust for various reasons I cannot speak of, is the Secret Keeper. She’s a Healer,
and she’s been helping him recuperate. Well, recently, his memory has been coming back after years
of Dementor Exposure, and one morning he woke up with a revelation. He remembered the fact that
Albus Dumbledore was the one who performed the Fidelius with James, Lily and Wormtail!”

“He knew Sirius wasn’t the Secret-Keeper!” Harry exclaimed.

“Indeed, Harry,” Remus said. “What is worse – there were three people who placed Sirius in
Azkaban without a trial! Former Minister of Magic, Millicent Bagnold, Former Head of the DMLE,
Bartemius Crouch, and Albus Dumbledore himself!”

Hermione gasped. “Then that means -- !”

“We believe, Miss Granger,” Remus said, “That Dumbledore did not want Sirius to be Harry’s
guardian. If Sirius had been given a trial, he would have been discovered innocent of his crimes, and
would have gained custody of you, Harry. Dumbledore didn’t seem to want that.”

“He wanted me with the Dursleys,” Harry said.

“Damn it,” Remus said, “Harry, your parents, months before their deaths, expressly forbid you to
live with your mother’s sister if she and your father died!”

“Then where should I have been living?” Harry asked.

“Your parents would have picked several families before they would allow you to live with your
mother’s sister,” Remus said, “the Potters had several Allies in the wizarding world. I had hoped you
were living with one of those families. Augusta Longbottom, since your godmother, Alice
Longbottom, and her husband were… indisposed. Pandora Lovegood and her husband. Lily and
Pandora were good friends. Castor and Illiana Greengrass.”

“Greengrass?” Hermione asked. “As in Daphne Greengrass? She’s in my Ancient Runes and
Arithmancy classes.”

“She’s a Slytherin!” Harry said.

“Illiana was a Ravenclaw,” Remus said, “Another friend of your mother’s. Pandora was a
Ravenclaw too. Lily, Alice, Pandora and Illiana were all part of a study group and became fast
friends, along with a couple of other girls, who were Lily and Alice’s dorm-mates. Harry, you hear
Slytherin and you think Dark, right? The Greengrasses are Neutral. Not Neutral-Dark, nor Neutral-
Light. Completely Neutral. Yes, you would have been quite welcome raised up at Greengrass
Manor.

“You could have also lived with Amelia Bones. But I know she took in Susan when the poor girl’s
parents were murdered in an attack by Death Eaters, maybe even… Voldemort himself. So I suppose
she was one of the last choices. Certainly you’d go to her before you’d go to your mother’s sister!”

“Where would this information have been?” Hermione asked. “How did nobody discover this?”

“Your parents made a Final Will and Testament before they went into hiding,” Remus said. “I
remember they mentioned it to me, because they said I’d get a load of Galleons if they died. James joked that I better not murder him, because I wouldn’t make a fortune from his death, if I was found guilty of it. I never received any Inheritance from a Will. So it likely wasn’t opened or read.

“I’m quite sure it would explain who you were supposed to live with in the case of your parents’ deaths. It might even make a point of forbidding you from living with your mother’s sister. The Will would have been made at Gringotts, with the Potter Account Manager. They might have sent a copy to the Ministry as well. The only way it wouldn’t have been released after thirty days after their deaths, was if –”

“Was if it was sealed,” McGonagall said. “And the one person with any motive to seal the Will – would be Albus Dumbledore. Especially if it specifically said Lily’s sister was forbidden from raising you. He would not have wanted that known. There is a possibility he was a Witness to the penning of the Will."

“Which is how he would know whatever the Will says,” Hermione said.

“But the main Inheritor of the Will would have been able to have it opened,” Remus argued, “Harry, upon his eleventh birthday.”

“I’ve only met one Goblin since I been in the wizarding world,” Harry said, “Griphook was his name.”

“Definitely not your Account Manager,” Remus said, “Ragnok is his name. Ragnok the Sixth. His father – Ragnok the Fifth -- is the current Goblin Chief at Gringotts. And your Account Manager has a son – Ragnok the Seventh -- who would be your Account Manager if he died. There is no way another Goblin would be given that Account.”

“Never met him,” Harry said, “Didn’t even know I had an Account Manager. I asked my House-Elf to go to Gringotts later this evening. I suppose he would meet with Ragnok.”

“I expect this House-Elf is going to come back with a request from Ragnok to meet you, Harry,” Remus said, “Especially if you haven’t met him at all. You should have met him at eleven. It would appear Dumbledore’s been keeping a lot from you. The question is why.”

“We’ll go to Gringotts and meet with Ragnok tomorrow,” McGonagall said, “Then we can go speak to Rita Skeeter.”

“Dobby!” Harry called.

Dobby appeared a moment later.

“Have you heard what we’ve discussed about Gringotts, Dobby?” Harry asked.

“Dobby has,” Dobby said, “Dobby will speak to Goblin Ragnok The Sixth when he be visiting Gringotts. Dobby be telling him Great Harry Potter be visiting tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you, Dobby,” Harry said, “You’re excused.”

Dobby bowed and vanished.

“Seems we’ll be having a busy day tomorrow,” Hermione commented.
“Indeed it does,” McGonagall agreed. “Speaking of busy day. I have things I must do before your Dancing Lessons this evening. Remus, you’re welcome to chat with these two for as long as you wish. Call my house-elf Sadie when you wish to leave. She’ll direct you to me, and I’ll escort you out then. Thank you for letting me borrow your gramophone.”

“Of course, Professor,” Remus said.

As McGonagall stood, so did Hermione.

“May I speak to you, Professor?” Hermione asked, “In private.”

“The corridor outside this room should do,” McGonagall said, “Nobody will hear us out there.”

Hermione nodded and followed Professor McGonagall.

“Gramophone?” Harry asked Remus.

“Remember that large music box I used for the Boggart Lessons?” Remus asked; Harry nodded. “Professor McGonagall wishes to use it for your dancing lessons. Speaking of dancing, I would love to hear the entire story of how you and Hermione become a couple.”

Harry then proceeded to tell Remus *everything* that had happened in last couple of days.

(***Meanwhile***…)

Hermione stepped out into the corridor with Professor McGonagall. The Professor leaned against one of the walls, and Hermione did the same across the narrow corridor.

“What can I help you with, Miss Granger?” McGonagall asked.

Hermione cleared her throat. “I’m just going to come out and say it. Harry’s never been given ‘The Talk’, Professor. I had suggested Sirius or Remus to give it to him, but… he might not be comfortable enough with them to do so yet. I suggested you or Madam Pomfrey. I’m only bringing this up because, while we don’t have immediate plans to… do anything like that yet… I felt he needs to know just in case it happens at any point.”

McGonagall’s chuckle was not the response Hermione expected.

“This is a coincidence,” McGonagall said, “When the Headmaster wanted to split you and Mr. Potter up for detention, I gave him the excuse that I put you two together in detention, so I could give you ‘The Talk’. I told the Headmaster we wouldn’t want little Potters running around Hogwarts before the two of you graduated!”

Hermione blushed red. “No… we wouldn’t want that.”

“Would you like to be present when this takes place?” McGonagall asked.

“Er… maybe?” Hermione replied, “I’ve… well, I haven’t exactly been given the magical side of the ‘Talk’. I’ve read books, but… I’ve recently discovered they might be biased and may not be the best
“Madam Pomfrey should have a few copies of the best book on the subject if you ask her,” McGonagall said, with a smile. “I tell you what. After we return from Diagon Alley tomorrow, you, Mr. Potter, and I will sit down in my office here in the Den, and we’ll have that ‘Talk’. I’ve been telling the Headmaster we need to bring back the Sex Education Lectures, but he disagrees. He made the excuse that it would only encourage students to have sex whilst here in Hogwarts. Flimsy excuse, if you ask me. As if the lack of a proper sex education is stopping students having sex! Madam Pomfrey could have been an excellent choice for the lecture. He uses the same argument every time it is brought up. Won’t hear another word about it.”

“Maybe he expects the parents to be responsible for that?” Hermione suggested.

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, then huffed, “But as you said, Muggleborn students do not always get the best information! For example, did you know a wizard’s semen is too potent for Muggle… rubble, I think they’re called? No, that’s not it.”

“Rubbers,” Hermione corrected, “Also called condoms. Really? No, I never knew that!”

“Many a pregnancy scare happened before that message got around,” McGonagall said, “And it still isn’t universally known. That is why we witches and wizards resort to Contraceptive Charms or Draughts. Of course, the added benefit that it helps lessen the problems during a witch’s monthly is also a preferred reason to use the Draught. There’s also the fact that you only need to take it once every twenty-eight days. Not once a month, Miss Granger.”

“Not all months have twenty-eight days, of course,” Hermione said.

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, “That is why Madam Pomfrey, me and the others who volunteer for this kind of ‘Talk’, whenever someone like yourself has the courage to ask, never say ‘once a month’. Those two or three days between before the first of the month might be very crucial. Anyway, you’ll hear the rest of that ‘Talk’ tomorrow. Thank you for coming to me about this. I would be happy to talk to you and Mr. Potter about the subject.”

“You’re the only one we trust to talk to about it here,” Hermione said, “With Madam Pomfrey, it could get back to Dumbledore. If Dumbledore believes we’re… going to be intimate –”

“He might try to interfere in your relationship,” McGonagall said, her lips thinning, “Indeed. I wish I could argue against the fact that he is trying to interfere in your relationship, but after what I just heard about the second Task and the worst-case scenario? Yeah, it sounds quite believable. Well, if there are no more questions?”

“Until this evening,” Hermione said.

“Until then,” McGonagall said, “I had planned to talk to you and Mr. Potter about Mr. and Miss Weasley’s detention, but we’ll discuss that while the two of you take breaks between dancing this evening.”

“Anything we should know right now?” Hermione asked.

“They’re definitely wary of me,” McGonagall said, conspiratorially, “There was a moment when Ginny was talking to Ron in the middle of their detention, and then she looked at me strangely.”
Hermione nodded. “She wondered why you weren’t telling them to be quiet and get back to doing whatever they were supposed to do.”

“That crossed my mind too, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “I suspect she knows that I want to eavesdrop on them, and that I’m interested in whatever they have to say to each other. I must say I did make that rather obvious by the end of the detention. I’ll explain further tonight. As always, Constant Vigilance around those two. That conversation they’ll have when they finally admit their secrets will come up sooner or later, and I firmly believe you and that young man in there will be the instigators behind that conversation.”

“Something we do will make them angry enough to have an entire conversation about it, you mean,” Hermione said.

“Precisely, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Your… continued public displays of affection might just be what sets them off. They know I am wary of them, and if they step another toe out of line, they could see themselves gone from this castle. So I don’t think they’ll try to do anything physical to either of you at the moment. Definitely nothing that could lead to their suspension or expulsion. I don’t believe they’ve made any moves to their mother or the Headmaster yet. I firmly believe they’re trying to work the problem out for themselves. Probably trying to prove themselves to their mother. So they’re trying to complete their mission without assistance at the moment.”

“Until they have no choice but to get outside help,” Hermione said, nodding. “We’ll be careful and watchful of them.”

“I would expect no less, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “If that is all, I’ll see you this evening.”

Hermione simply nodded. McGonagall turned and left the Lion’s Den. Hermione exhaled. She had expected McGonagall might have known that she had been in Harry’s Quarters. But the Lioness of Gryffindor hadn’t mentioned it. She inhaled and exhaled, then returned to the Private Common Room.

“There you are, love,” Harry said, smiling as he saw her enter, “Remus was just about to tell me how Sirius reacted to the newspaper article this morning.”

Hermione went pink when he called her ‘love’. She sat down beside him and kissed his cheek. She was so used to public displays of affection – simply because she needed to be – that she didn’t even blush at the fact that Remus was watching.

“Sirius loved the article, actually,” Remus said, “Though he wouldn’t believe me when I said Skeeter liked to overexaggerate about certain things. Such as the ‘five-minute snog’.”

“It was about two minutes,” Hermione said, “But if you wish to cheer Sirius up, tell him we’re going to try to work up to a five-minute public snog in the Great Hall.”

Remus laughed so hard, he had tears in his eyes. “James would have never dared to do that with Lily, simply because Lily would have never dared to do it anyway. James might have been a joker and a prankster, but he settled down after he started dating your mother.”

“I’m not sure we’d participate in so much public affection if we didn’t feel it was necessary,” Hermione said, “I trust Harry told you about the Obliviation Theory.”

“Yes,” Remus said, grimly, “And when he explained it, I had to admit how plausible it could be.
Although it might not be well-thought out.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

“Those students who are Experts or Masters at Occlumency,” Remus said, “Are not so easily susceptible to Obliviation. They can sense lost or modified memories. I am sure several older students in this castle are Occlumens.”

“Occlumency?” Hermione asked, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a book about it here.”

“Not surprising,” Remus said, “Especially if there is an Active Legilimens – term for a complicated mind-reader, let’s say – who is trying to read the students’ minds.”

“Like Snape?” Harry asked, “I always thought he might be able to read our minds.”

“Quite possible,” Remus said, nodding, “Him, and your Headmaster.”

“Of course he’d be able to read our minds,” Harry grumbled. “I guess we need to figure out how to learn Occlumency.”

“I’ll ask around some of the more obscure bookshops in Diagon or Knockturn Alley,” Remus said, “Flourish and Blott’s rarely sell them actually. It is a mystery why.”

“It really sounds like someone – perhaps Dumbledore? – is trying to limit the wizarding world’s knowledge about the subject,” Hermione said.

“Not an easy feat,” Remus said, “Given that most families who have seats in the Wizengamot have books like them so every member of the family – at least those in line to be Heir or Heiress – can learn the subject. Again, it isn’t easy to learn, especially at a younger age. The older students, those in the aforementioned families, are likely good Occlumens. But we’re getting off subject.

“Where was I? Oh, yes. Sirius. Well, not much more to say. He was unhappy he didn’t hear it from you first, Harry.”

“I wrote him a letter telling him all about it – just an hour or so before you got here,” Harry said. “I didn’t expect an article so soon.”

“Understandable,” Remus said, “He told me that you two reminded him of James and Lily when he met you last June. He isn’t surprised at all the pair of you are together. He actually thought you were a couple last June, because you were so close. He was surprised it didn’t happen until recently. And then when he saw that ‘Tomorrow’s Exclusive’ about him ‘wanting revenge’ by breaking you up, he just laughed out loud and said – well –”

“He said what?” Harry asked.

“He said if he could put you in a Betrothal Contract together just to prove how wrong the Daily Prophet is,” Remus said, “He’d do it in a heart-beat. Just to show how much he supports you, and how happy he is for you.”

Harry and Hermione blushed.

“Betrothal Contracts exist in the wizarding world?” Harry asked; then grimaced, “I’m not… at risk to
“No, your parents wouldn’t have wanted it for you,” Remus said, “They would have wanted you to find love for yourself. James brought it up once. Only once. Then Lily brought up something that stopped James in his tracks.”

“What was that?” Harry asked, curiously.

“She said what if they had Betrothed you to a girl,” Remus said, “And it turned out you ended up attracted to the same sex instead?”

Harry’s eyes widened, then he cleared his throat. “Definitely not, but I can see why Mum would take a precaution like that.”

“Your mother did a lot of thinking about your future,” Remus said, “Especially since she was afraid her and your father wouldn’t be a part of it. Which is why I am sure there will be all kinds of plans for your placed in their Will. There won’t be any Betrothals written by them, however. Now, while I say that…

“I’d honestly think about penning one between the two of you if an opportunity pops up for you to do so. If only to protect the two of you. It’d go a long way to get those Weasleys off your backs. Even Molly Weasley and Albus Dumbledore would know not to interfere in a Betrothal Contract.”

“Could it protect Hermione from the Second Task?” Harry asked, seriously.

Remus shrugged. “I don’t know. I’d have to ask Sirius. He might have an idea. He grew up on all that Pureblood stuff, since he was a Scion of a highborn Pureblood House. So he’d know better than me. Don’t worry, you two, we’ll figure this out before the Second Task comes. Your best bet right now is the Daily Prophet interview. If Dumbledore can get past that, well, we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.”

Harry and Hermione smiled in appreciation. The couple and the former Professor talked for a while, until it was closer to lunch-time. Then Remus said he better go, before he risks someone like Dumbledore or Snape seeing him in the castle. Harry offered him to use the Marauder’s Map, but Remus waved it off.

“I’ll manage, Harry,” Remus said. “You have a far better need for that map than I do. Your father would very much favor you using that map. I think I told you, when I was your Professor, that he’d actually encourage you to use it.”

“My mother?” Harry asked.

“She’d be furious if she found out what the Weasleys – and whatever allies they have – are trying to do to you,” Remus said, “She’d probably march here to the castle and confront Ronald and Ginevra herself and get those secrets out of them, surpassing whatever magic they’re using to keep the secrets. And know this, Hermione. She would very much approve of you as her son’s girlfriend. You remind me of her, actually. Muggleborn, of course. Smart, feisty when you need to be. And loyal to your friends. And… last but not least. You could not resist but fall for a Potter.”

Hermione chuckled. “Thank you, Remus. I appreciate that.”

Remus bowed his head. “You’re very much welcome. I better get going. Good luck with your
dancing lessons, Harry.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, “Was my father good at dancing?”

“Yes, but only because he was taught by his parents from a young age,” Remus said, with a smile. “He had to be. He was the Scion of a highborn Pureblood House, like Sirius. He attended social parties and there were several daughters of Allied families he was expected to dance with, or he would offend them. That’s what he told me anyway.”

“Thank you, sir,” Harry said, “I appreciate everything we’ve discussed today.”

“You never have to thank me for reminiscing about your parents, Harry,” Remus said, “It does this old wolf a lot of good to talk about them. I will see you soon – especially if it means I must protect Miss Granger during the Second Task.”

He smiled, as Harry and Hermione gave him their farewells, then he walked out of the room.

“He is so wonderful,” Hermione gushed. “How can he believe himself to be a monster? He is one of the kindest men I’ve ever known.”

“It’s this society, Hermione,” Harry grimaced. “They’ve turned him into a monster and he believed them. He is so kind and good because of his friends – like my parents. He couldn’t be a monster around them. They wouldn’t let him, I think. Just like you help me to be ‘Just Harry’. You keep me grounded.”

“You do a lot of that yourself, Harry,” Hermione said.

“You help,” Harry said, “And I will never be able to thank you enough for that.”

Hermione smiled, then leaned in to kiss him. God, she loved this young man!

(Seven P.M.)

At precisely seven that evening, Harry and Hermione stepped into the Transfiguration Classroom. Professor McGonagall was seated at her desk, which had the large gramophone – which Harry had last seen in Remus’ old classroom – sitting on it.

“Good evening, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” the Lioness of Gryffindor said, “I do hope you didn’t eat too much at dinner. You may find yourselves uncomfortable.”

“Hermione thought of that,” Harry said, “We kept to a light meal.”

Hermione merely nodded and smiled when McGonagall looked in her direction.

“Excellent,” McGonagall said. “And a good clothing choice as well. Easy to dance in. Of course, the current outfit you have on, Miss Granger, will be much different than the one you’ll wear at the Ball, I’m sure. I imagine you’ll have a dress of some sort.”

“Yes,” Hermione said, simply, not wanting to give anything away to Harry. ‘I’m alright. I’ve practiced dancing with my parents occasionally, and been to a couple of New Years’ Social Parties
with them. Danced with a few boys.”

“Really?” Harry asked, hating the jealousy he felt right now.

“It was expected of us,” Hermione said, “The most they did was kiss my hand, which they did with every girl they danced with.”

“That type of thing is expected from gentlemen, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “That is no different between our societies. Some of our customs may be old fashioned, but they are also traditional. And tradition has a way of lasting a long time. Even to modern times in the Muggle world.”

“Er… as her boyfriend, am I expected to do something more than kissing her hand?” Harry asked.

“Certainly no public displays of affection aside from a peck on the cheek or lips if you must,” McGonagall huffed. “No five minute snogs, shall we say?”

The reference to the Skeeter article made Harry and Hermione blush. “I’m sure we’ll be doing enough that evening to convince everyone how close we are. We won’t need to prove it too much.”

“Quite,” McGonagall agreed. “We shall start off with something simple. Something I am sure even you, Mr. Potter, might favor. The slow dance. Now, as a devoted couple like the pair of you, you two would be allowed to get closer than a couple who are having their first date, so to speak. But we’ll practice both ways, shall we?”

Professor McGonagall was very good at showing Harry exactly how he needed to position his body and his hands when it came to the dances. The Professor was right. Harry did favor the slow dance. It felt so intimate, that he was embarrassed at first, but then he decided it was like an extended hug Hermione usually gave him. And when they were dancing the closer, intimate dance, Hermione even laid her head on his shoulder, or his chest – apparently deciding which was more comfortable; she favored his chest, just under his chin.

Her bushy hair got in the way a bit, but she promised she would tame it a bit for the evening of the Yule Ball, and that position would be far more easier. Harry also liked the slow spinning around of the dance, as their feet kept in tune to the music playing on the gramophone. He didn’t need to move much, and his feet shuffled mostly, so he couldn’t step on Hermione’s toes.

Then Professor McGonagall started suggesting the more complicating dances. The first: the traditional Waltz. McGonagall said it would be the dance that the Champions and their partners would do to open the dancing, so they needed to be perfect. Hermione was familiar with the Waltz, so she was able to move her feet the correct way. Harry just had to listen to McGonagall’s instructions and try not to trip and pull Hermione down with him. Fortunately for the couple – especially Hermione – McGonagall reinforced Hermione’s shoes so her toes wouldn’t be harmed if Harry stepped on them. It proved to be necessary a few times before the night finished.

Then the more complicated part of the dance came. He had to lift her up, and spin her around a bit. She wasn’t heavy – and he dared not mention anything about her weight in front of her – but it was awkward trying to pick her up by the waist. It took a few practice tries just to be able to do it. Finally he was able to do it three times in a row. By then Hermione was getting dizzy, so they sat down at one of the desks that had been shuffled off to the sides of the room.

“I promised we would discuss Ron and Ginevra Weasley’s detention while we took breaks,” McGonagall said, “So we’ll start with the simplest of things I discovered. You were correct when
you thought Ron was the one breaking into your trunk ever since your first year. He’s stolen somewhere between ten and twenty galleons, but I’d say it was closer to twenty. I advised him to tell his parents to help him pay you back.”

“I don’t even know why he wanted it,” Harry said, “Do you? The first two years we couldn’t even go down to Hogsmeade.”

“I think he wanted to take it just to say he could do it, Harry,” Hermione said. “To prove he could snatch something like that right out from under your nose. As your best friend, you might not have even suspected him.”

"I suspected a lot of people," Harry said, "Boys of all ages. Then Ginny was able to break in, and I had to add girls onto the list. Excluding you. I know you weren’t capable of that. But you’re right. I wouldn’t have suspected Ron of stealing from me. I trusted him too much, because he was my first friend. But hindsight is twenty-twenty.”

“As for you, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Ginny didn’t steal anything. According to her, she ‘borrowed’ those missing books, just so she could read them. She did it without your permission, because she didn’t want her mother to find out she was reading them.”

“That’s no excuse,” Hermione huffed, “But it is nowhere near as bad as stealing twenty Galleons or a bunch of candy, which must have been worth several Galleons combined.”

“You’re right, of course,” McGonagall said. “Then I told Mr. Weasley I knew he had stolen the Golden Egg. He tried to blame it on the first thief, even after I told him he had admitted to stealing it for only a week, and it was gone for two more days. He only admitted to doing so when I told him what the punishment was for stealing a Tournament clue. He then said he was doing it as a prank. I then told him I heard rumors of him trying to sell it off as a Boy-Who-Lived souvenir, and he looked shocked that I knew about it. Which tells me he attempted to do so. But he never was able to sell it.”

“Any prospective buyers would have realized it was a Tournament Clue,” Hermione said, “And likely realized the ramifications of having it.”

“Indeed,” McGonagall said. “I punished Mr. Weasley in a similar way to the punishments I gave the rest of the students. He has to write an apology letter – a believable one – or he cannot go to the Yule Ball. Due next Friday.”

“I suppose that is enough for now,” Harry said, with a shrug. “Until we know what they’re truly up to.”

“Then the discussion got a little more interesting,” McGonagall said, “I tried to convince them to stop interfering in your relationship, and they never agreed to it. Miss Weasley said it felt like a betrayal, due to the conversations she had with you, Miss Granger, over the summer about Mr. Potter. I remember you talking to me about that. So I asked her if she was keeping any secrets about her feelings from Mr. Potter from you. If she did, why couldn’t you do the same? She believes you should have allowed her to have a chance at him first.”

“Of course she did,” Hermione huffed, “Especially since we know she has nefarious reasons for getting with him. Whatever they are.”

“Mr. Weasley accused you, Miss Granger, of stealing Harry from him as a friend,” McGonagall said, “Going all the way back to the day you first met him. He barely listened when I said there wasn’t a
problem with you being his friend too. Then, I basically accused him of trying to prevent other students from being your friend, Mr. Potter. He had the nerve to look shocked that I knew about that. It’s almost as if… whatever these enchantments are, Mr. Weasley doesn’t know exactly what they do. I think he was surprised I knew of his plan to keep other students away from you. It is like… according to him, I wasn’t supposed to know about that.”

“He believes if you know one of his secrets, you forget about it,” Hermione said, “At least that isn’t what happens. Which means we can talk about if after we discover what the secrets are.”

“True,” McGonagall said, “Either way, it is good to discover what the limits of these enchantments are. Anyway, there wasn’t much else, aside from confirmation of him attempting to steal your broom and the Map, Mr. Potter. He thought the Map was his brother’s, which means it should be his. Until I explained it first belong to your father, and if he tried to steal it, he’d be stealing a family heirloom. Trust me, he’ll never do that again. Even he knows the crime for stealing heirlooms.”

“Well, that’s good,” Harry said.

“Indeed it is,” McGonagall said. “Alright then. Shall we continue exploring the various dances and seeing what you are both capable of as a couple?”

Harry and Hermione agreed, though Harry wasn’t as eager as Hermione. Still, he had fun over the next hour or so. He couldn’t believe how much time had passed by so quickly. It was ten minutes to nine that evening when Dobby appeared, returning from his journey to Gringotts. That basically stopped the lesson right there.

“How did it go, Dobby?” Harry asked.

“Dobby be afraid to be the bearer of bad news,” Dobby said, “The Goblins be rather angry with the Great Harry Potter. Keeper Ragnok be saying he be expecting you for three and a half years now. Since the Great Harry Potter be turning eleven. He be saying he be trying to contact you several times over the last three and a half years. He be saying recent events be the most important. He be wanting you to explain it tomorrow morning. Or he be freezing your account – he be saying it is for your own good, Great Harry Potter.”

“Angry Goblins are not something you want to experience, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“So what should I do, Professor?” Harry said.

“Tell them what I assume is the truth,” McGonagall said, “You haven’t received any correspondence from Gringotts since coming into the wizarding world. Someone is blocking your mail from getting to you, especially from Gringotts – which is quite difficult, to be honest. Which means there is only one person I believe is responsible for this.”

Harry’s fists clenched. “Headmaster Dumbledore. He doesn’t want me to meet with anyone he doesn’t approve of at Gringotts. He’s afraid of what I’m going to discover, isn’t he?”

“I truly believe that is correct, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Well, then,” Harry said, “Tomorrow, we’re going to discover exactly what the Leader of the Light doesn’t want his Boy-Who-Lived to find out.”
Well, a lot certainly happened in this chapter. I hope you liked the dancing lessons. I’m not much of a dancer myself, and describing them isn’t very easy. So I simply described a couple of the ones I used to – the two I’ll definitely use during the Ball -- and summarized the rest of the lesson without mentioning other dances. Harry and Hermione had fun, this I assure you. They learned plenty so far.

Remus is not a Dumbledore minion in this story. He lost his trust for the man when he and Sirius uncovered the conspiracy behind Sirius being in Azkaban. Then that loss of trust went deeper during his visit with Harry and Hermione. He supports Harry and Hermione completely. Of course, Dumbledore will probably try to win Remus’ trust again. It won’t work.

While some might see the gramophone as school property, I decided it was Remus’ personal item. Simply because I believe David Thewlis (who played Lupin) owned the actual gramophone used. So it is a nod to that.

Next Chapter: The Obligatory Gringotts Chapter in which Harry meets with a Helpful Goblin who does so much for him, and he receives so many surprises and revelations! Even Hermione isn’t immune from surprises and revelations! If you’ve read my other stories (Vanishing Cabinet, Ilvermorny Champion, Harem War), you already know some of the stuff that will happen. No worries, no Betrothal Contracts – except an illegal Harry and Ginny one!

The Gringotts Visit is so long, I have to split it into three – yes -- three parts! Sorry!
(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

“Candy Canes,” Minerva McGonagall stated to the Gargoyle standing in front of the entrance to the Headmaster’s Office.

The gargoyle nodded, then stepped aside, and the Lioness of Gryffindor started off up the circular staircase that led to the Headmaster’s Office.

The previous evening at the end of the Dancing Lessons, Minerva, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger had planned how to get to Diagon Alley, without Dumbledore knowing the couple had left the castle. As had been discussed, Minerva would inform the Headmaster that the couple were remaining in their Quarters, or their Private Common Room for much of the morning, to work on homework and spend time together.

Then they would be leaving Hogwarts, but not through the front door. Minerva had been rather disgruntled when she heard about the One-Eyed Witch Passage, and how exactly Mr. Potter had known about it. Mr. Potter was quite sheepish when he told her how he had snuck into Hogsmeade through the passageway the previous year. McGonagall had lectured him about this, but hadn’t taken away points, hadn’t given him a punishment, because it had happened the previous year. But in the end, she agreed that they would use the passageway – at least until it got them past the Hogwarts Wards. Then she would Apparate the couple to Diagon Alley.

The aforementioned pair were currently getting ready for their visit to Diagon Alley, before they would make their way to the One-Eyed Witch.

Minerva made her way to the door leading to Albus’ office. She inhaled and exhaled, knocked on the door, then opened it and stepped inside. Albus Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, working on paperwork and humming to himself. Fawkes the Phoenix was sitting on his perch, humming along with the Headmaster.

Albus looked up and smiled. “Minerva. An unexpected visit. What may I do for you this morning?”

“I am leaving the castle for a few hours,” Minerva said, beginning her ready-made story, “One of my older Lions – a sixth year Muggleborn – came to me yesterday. She was shaking, she was so scared. She told me believed she was pregnant, you see.”
“Did you advise her to go to Madam Pomfrey?” Albus asked.

“I did, but she declined,” Minerva said. “Said if she did, her friends would find out and ask her why she was in the Hospital. She asked me if I could help her. As you know, I know the necessary spells to detect such things. With her permission, I used the charms. She was not pregnant. However, the poor girl was terrified over the pregnancy scare. I asked her what she wanted to do. She said she wanted to tell her parents about this, but she didn’t want to go to them herself. She and her parents are very close, and she wanted them to know what was going on with her. But she didn’t want to tell them herself. She asked me if I could do it.”

This story was actually not something she had made up. She had experienced the same scenario several years ago with another student. She was simply using a real story for an excuse.

“Is that necessary?” Albus asked, “She is not with child, after all.”

“The poor girl is terrified, Albus,” Minerva said, “She needs comfort from her parents. However, she is so terrified, she doesn’t want to go herself. I am to give her parents a letter, explain to them what happened, then bring a response back.”

Albus removed his glasses and pinched his nose. “Is this supposed to be your new attempt at trying to bring back the Sex Education Lectures, Minerva? I am not amused.”

“This is about a student, Albus!” Minerva growled.

Albus sighed and returned his glasses to his face. “Fine. Will you be back by lunchtime?”

“Probably not,” Minerva said, as she considered how long the visit might be.

“You will not give me this student’s name?” Albus asked.

“I deemed it necessary to keep the situation private, Albus,” Minerva said. “I do not want it getting out into the gossip mills around here. It is the same reason she did not go to the Hospital Wing, after all.”

Albus sighed and nodded. “Perhaps that is wise. Fine. I will see you when you return.”

“One more thing I need to tell you,” Minerva said. “Harry Potter and Hermione Granger have told me they are spending much of today in their Quarters and their Private Common Room. This is the first chance as a couple for them to spend the day with each other, without being bothered by others. They will be working on their homework and simply spending time together. I am only telling you this, in case they are missing from the Great Hall for lunch.”

Albus raised his eyebrows. “The weekends are meant to be free time for the students. They can do whatever they want. I will not object to the two students keeping to themselves – as long as they are not getting up to anything they should not be.”

“There are enchantments in the rooms they are staying in,” Minerva said, “that would prevent any – coupling – from taking place.”

“I suppose that makes me feel better,” Albus muttered. “Very well. I will not object to the new couple spending time together to deepen their relationship.”
“That is very unexpected of you, Albus,” Minerva said.

Albus hummed. “Perhaps you misread my intentions after I interrupted their public display of affection in the Great Hall a few days ago? I have decided I am going to fully support Mr. Potter and Miss Granger as a couple, Minerva. I find they remind me of another Potter and his Muggleborn love. Makes me reminisce on happier times. I believe we all could use such a thing at the moment. Mr. Potter needs as much support as he can get whilst in participating in this Tournament. If he cannot get it from his house-mates, then whom better to get it from than his new girlfriend? Love – after all – is the most powerful weapon the Light has to offer.”

Minerva raised her eyebrows. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to believe this hippogriff shite. Was Albus supporting the couple for now – simply because he wanted to make sure Miss Granger was whom Mr. Potter would sorely miss? Yes, she was sure of it. He supported it now, because he believed he wouldn’t need to support the relationship after the Second Task was over.

*What an absolute monster!* Minerva thought with a huff.

“Wonderful sentiments, Albus,” Minerva said, “I happily agree with you. Well, then, I best be off. I will see you later.”

“Good luck with the Muggles, Minerva,” Albus said, “Safe journeys.”

Minerva nodded, then made her way out of the Headmaster’s Office. She immediately cast her wand over herself, checking herself for various Charms such as Trackers. She sighed in relief when there was none.

“Wouldn’t put it past you, old man,” she huffed.

She made a note to check Mr. Potter and Miss Granger for Tracking Charms before they left the Wards. Wouldn’t do to have Albus discover the couple was at Gringotts or the Daily Prophet Headquarters, when they were supposed to be holed up in the Lion’s Den.

(A few minutes later…)

Harry and Hermione made their way through the corridors on the third floor until they reached the One-Eyed Witch passageway. Professor McGonagall was already standing near the statue when they arrived.

“Do the honors, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

He took his wand from his pocket, and pointed it at the statue. “Dissendium.”

The statue slid to the left revealing a hole, with a ladder. McGonagall glanced at it, then glanced at Harry.

“You first,” she said.

Harry nodded, then made his way down the ladder. Hermione followed, then finally McGonagall.
“Mr. Potter, how long did it take to get from here to Hogsmeade?” McGonagall asked.

“Nearly an hour, Professor,” Harry said. “But I was going rather slowly. I didn’t know exactly where the passage was going. Didn’t know if I’d run into anything or anybody. So I was going rather slow and cautiously.”

McGonagall raised an eyebrow, then huffed. “Hopefully it will take half that time or less to get past the Wards. We best be going then. One moment, before we begin the journey.”

She took her wand out and waved it toward Harry. She made a sound of annoyance, then waved her wand in more complicated movements. She conjured two glasses, then pointed her wand at one of them. The same happened with Hermione. She finished by pointing her wand at the second glass. Then she called for Mallory, and the elf appeared.

“Take these glasses to the Private Common Room in the Lion’s Den,” McGonagall instructed the elf. ”Put them on the coffee table, and keep them there. Then please remain at Hogwarts. Dobby will come with Mr. Potter, Miss Granger and myself. You, Mallory, will remain and tell me if the Headmaster decides to search for these two.”

“Yes, Mistress,” Mallory said.

Mallory took the two glasses, then vanished with a crack! McGonagall pointed down the dark passageway, lit her wand with the Lumos Charm, then started off. Harry and Hermione did the same with their wands, then followed the Professor.

“That old goat,” McGonagall muttered, as they started the long journey, “My apologies, you two. You had Tracking Charms on your persons. Quite a few of them. If they remained, the Headmaster would know you would soon be at Gringotts and the Daily Prophet offices. Our missions today would be revealed before we want that to take place.”

“I suppose the enchantments around the Den makes these Tracking Charms inert?” Hermione asked.

“Indeed, thankfully,” McGonagall said, “Otherwise, the Headmaster would know you reside in the Den. At the moment, the Headmaster believes the two of you are remaining in your Quarters or Private Common Room for much of the day. We should do our best to make sure he doesn’t believe otherwise.

“Which means we must make haste. We’ll get past the Wards quicker if we focus and not get distracted with conversation. Let’s get going then.”

Twenty-five minutes passed as Harry, Hermione and the Lioness of Gryffindor walked through the tunnel. Twenty-five very boring minutes. The only sounds were footsteps and water droplets dripping from the ceiling of the passageway. McGonagall wasn’t interested in talking, and Harry and Hermione wasn’t about to start any discussion so as to not risk the Professor’s ire. Thankfully, the passage wasn’t too narrow, so the couple could hold hands, while their other hands held their lit wands. Every five minutes or so, they had to relight their wands when the light dimmed down.

Finally, McGonagall held up her free hand to stop the two students.

“We’re at the Wards,” she said. “The two of you will walk a few paces ahead, one at a time. I will keep attuned to the wards, to make sure they’re not alerting the Headmaster to you two crossing them. As Deputy, I am given limited control over the Wards. Much to the Headmaster’s ire, of
Harry inhaled and exhaled then walked ahead a few steps. Hermione followed him soon after. Minerva gave an audible sigh of relief, then walked forward.

“It didn’t pick up anything strange,” Minerva said. “We can now Apparate to Diagon Alley. Have either of you traveled by Apparation?”

She quickly explained what that meant. Hermione shook her head. Harry frowned, then he nodded.

“I think I have,” Harry said, “Once in Primary School, I was being chased by my cousin and his friends. I jumped behind a rubbish bin, and found myself on top of the school roof. Got in terrible trouble for it.”

“Apparation without a wand and at such a young age,” McGonagall said. “Impressive.”

“Wasn’t that accidental magic?” Hermione asked.

McGonagall shook her head. “It would be difficult to achieve Apparation with accidental magic, Miss Granger. I simply believe Mr. Potter wanted to be anywhere else at that moment, and it was the Determination – an important step for Apparation – that placed him on that roof. Apparation without a wand is very difficult. Most impressive.”

Harry felt his cheeks go warm, and was thankful the tunnel was so dark that the Professor couldn’t see it. But it made him feel better that he might be able to Apparate by himself in the future, if he could remember the way he felt at that moment so many years ago.

“Today we will be doing Side-Along Apparation,” McGonagall said. “Basically I will hold one of your hands, and we will Apparate to the alley between The Leaky Cauldron and the entrance to Diagon Alley. Dobby?”

Dobby appeared. “Yes, Professor Kitty?”

“You will take Mr. Potter while I will take Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “I’d take both of them, but I need my wand in one hand. I don’t know if I could Apparate back into this tunnel, so I need your help, Dobby.”

“Dobby be happy to help, Professor Kitty,” Dobby said.

Following McGonagall’s instructions, Hermione took her hand, while Harry took one of Dobby’s. McGonagall counted down and they Apparated. While Hermione felt quite breathless, as if all oxygen escaped her lungs, as she moved through what felt like a straw, Harry didn’t feel any of that. He simply vanished from the dark tunnel, and appeared in the Alley between the Leaky Cauldron and Diagon Alley. His eyes had to adjust to the sunlight, but otherwise he was quite fine. Hermione, however, was gasping, panting and coughing as she stood next to McGonagall. She also looked rather green.

“Very good, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Most people vomit the first – ahh, yes. There it is.”

Hermione had vomited onto the ground in the middle of McGonagall’s statement. McGonagall turned up her nose at the stench, then waved her wand, vanishing the vomit.
“How do you look so… calm, Harry?!?” Hermione demanded, once she had sorted herself out.

“House-Elf Travel is different from Apparation, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “I’m sure Mr. Potter simply felt as if he was at one place one moment, then here the next.”

Hermione huffed when Harry nodded. “I’ll use that form of travel next time.”

Harry grinned, and Hermione playfully glared at him.

“Dobby?” McGonagall said to the elf, who was still standing near Harry, “Inform Harry’s Account Manager we will be in Gringotts in less than fifteen minutes. We would appreciate if he met us when we arrived, but we would also be agreeable to the usual process if necessary.”

“Yes, Professor Kitty,” Dobby said.

Dobby vanished. McGonagall turned to Harry and Hermione.

“What do you know about conversing with Goblins, Mr. Potter?” she asked.

“Not much, ma’am,” Harry said, sheepishly.

McGonagall sighed. “Goblins do not like to waste time. They believe wasting time means wasting money. They do not appreciate either. I expect you, both of you, to show respect to the Goblins, and answer any question they ask honestly. Think before you speak, and do not let your temper allow itself to take control over you. Try to remain calm, no matter what information or revelation we might hear today. Do not ever attempt to reach for your wand while on Gringotts soil.

“Address Keeper Ragnok by his title and name, unless he says otherwise. He is like Royalty in the Goblin community. By Muggle standards, he is a Prince, but do not refer to him as such. Keeper is his proper title, and the title he probably respects most. While it might embarrass the both of you, I must request, Mr. Potter, you address Miss Granger as your ‘mate’ on Goblin soil. That will allow Keeper Ragnok to know exactly how you feel about each other. Refer to me as ‘Professor McGonagall, your advisor’ when introducing me. Refer to the two of us in trustworthy tones, otherwise neither of us will be allowed to attend the expected meeting.

“Miss Granger, unless spoken to or addressed, do not speak up at all. You are neither Harry’s advisor, nor do you have any other foreseen business in this expected meeting aside from being there for Harry for comfort. Speaking of comfort, do not be too amorous with each other whilst in Gringotts. The Goblins will not appreciate it. Is this all understood?”

“Yes, Professor,” Harry and Hermione said, in unison.

“There is a real possibility Keeper Ragnok will decide to be friendly toward you, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said. “I believe he and his forefathers have known the Potters for many, many years. So do not expect him to be hostile toward you for too long. Once he realizes you had nothing to do with the lack of communication between yourself, Keeper Ragnok and Gringotts in general, I believe he will not be hostile or angry toward you. I even suspect he already knows who is truly behind your lack of communication with Gringotts. Do not act guilty, but do not act defensive. You’ll come out of this just fine – and maybe even much better equipped with various pieces of information -- if you remember all of this.”

“That makes me feel better,” Harry said.
“Then we shall not waste any more time,” McGonagall said.

She walked over to the brick wall and tapped her wand on several bricks in the familiar pattern Harry had once seen Hagrid perform. The bricks changed and shaped themselves into an archway. Harry smiled widely as they stepped into Diagon Alley. He had never been in Diagon Alley during this time of the year. Christmas decorations, such as fairy lights and strands of holly, hung everywhere along the outsides of the shops and around Diagon Alley. There were several Christmas Trees placed at various spots around the Alley, complete with various decorations and fake gift boxes laid out underneath them. It looked wonderful.

This made Harry realize he hadn’t thought of a Christmas present for Hermione, nor anyone else, yet. He would have to think about this later.

It took more than five minutes to get to the large doors of Gringotts, simply because it took time to shuffle between the crowds. The marketplace was quite crowded that very few took more than a second glance at the odd sight of a Professor and two students away from Hogwarts. But nobody approached the pair as they were being escorted by the stern Lioness of Gryffindor.

The two spear-wielding Goblins guarding the doors of Gringotts only glanced at the elder witch and the two teens once as the three passed by them and stepped into the bank’s Atrium. Before the three new arrivals could move forward too much, a Goblin stepped forward.

“Mr. Potter?” the Goblin asked.

“Yes… sir?” Harry asked, calmly as he could.

“I am Keeper Ragnok the Sixth,” the Goblin said, “The Account Manager for the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. Do you trust these two women with you?”

“Hermione Granger, here, is my mate,” Harry said, remembering McGonagall’s advice, “And Professor Minerva McGonagall is my advisor. I trust them with any information I will receive today. If they weren’t attending with me, I’d likely tell them everything anyway.”

“That is satisfactory enough,” Ragnok said, “Your mate and advisor may join us. Follow me, please.”

Harry, Hermione and McGonagall followed Ragnok across the Atrium, as the Goblin led them to a door on the right of the large room. Harry soon found himself in a narrow cavern-like corridor, in which the floor, walls and ceiling were made of different types of stone. Several iron doors were seen etched into the walls on either side of the corridor. Ragnok led the three humans toward one particular door, and opened it. At Ragnok’s stare in his direction, Harry stepped through the door, followed by Hermione, McGonagall and Ragnok coming in last.

The room they entered was made of the same stuff as the corridor on the other side of the door. It was almost empty, aside from a wooden table and four wooden chairs – three chairs on the nearest side, and one on the farther side. Ragnok walked ahead of them, and sat in the lone chair, then motioned to the three chairs on the other side of the table. Harry sat in the center chair, while Hermione sat on his right, and McGonagall on his left.

Ragnok snapped his fingers, and three clay squares -- which resembled coasters used to place cups or mugs on – appeared, one in front of each human.
“Place your index finger in the center of the square in front of you,” Ragnok instructed. “This is an Identity Test and will verify your identities. You will feel a slight pinprick. Once you do, you may lift your hand.”

Harry and Hermione were cautious at first, until McGonagall did as was instructed. Then Harry and Hermione repeated the process. Harry winced at the pinprick sensation, then he lifted his hand, as did Hermione and McGonagall. The coasters transformed into three pieces of parchment, which Ragnok summoned. He looked at each of them, and whatever was on Hermione’s piece of parchment made him raise an eyebrow.

“Hmm,” Ragnok said, “Well, all three of you are whom you say you are. But this is most interesting. Miss Granger, have you ever taken an Inheritance Test during a visit at Gringotts?”

“No, Keeper Ragnok,” Hermione said, “I don’t know what that is, and nobody told me about such a thing before now.”

“Is this the first time you’ve volunteered a drop of your blood while on Gringotts soil?” Ragnok asked.

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok,” Hermione said.

“I see,” Ragnok said. “Miss Granger, have you ever heard of Hector Dagworth-Granger? He is a rather famous name in your society. He founded the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers.”

Professor McGonagall made the lightest of gasps and glanced out of the corner of her eyes in Hermione’s direction.

Hermione blinked. “Yes, Keeper Ragnok. But, I’ve never thought I might be connected to him in any way.”

“Interesting,” Ragnok said, “You see, Miss Granger. According to this, you are the only surviving Heiress of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger. It was originally simply ‘Dagworth’, before Hector became so famous, and he changed his House’s name to Dagworth-Granger. Your father, of course, is related to him, but you, Miss Granger, are Hector’s only living magical descendant.”

Hermione blinked. “I had no idea, Keeper Ragnok. I am Muggleborn, you see.”

“Yes,” Ragnok muttered, “Because of your society’s unfortunate outlook toward Muggleborn – at least in Great Britain – very few Muggleborn are encouraged to take Inheritance Tests. Even fewer Muggleborn realize that they are likely descended from a Squib, who in turn was descended from wizards and witches. Unless said Muggleborn takes an Identity Test, or requests an Inheritance Test, the Goblin Nation is forbidden – as part of the latest treaty between us and your Ministry of Magic – from offering Muggleborn Inheritance Tests, unless requested of us first.

“By coincidence, I am actually the current Vault Keeper and Account Manager for the House of Dagworth-Granger. Heiress Dagworth-Granger, after I am finish my business with Mr. Potter, I would be interested in speaking to you about your new Account here at Gringotts. You will not need your parents present for this meeting, as they are not magical.”

“What about her Magical Guardian, Keeper Ragnok?” McGonagall asked.
“If you are her advisor, Lady McGonagall,” Ragnok said, “You would be allowed to assist her.”

“Very well,” McGonagall said.

Hermione cleared her throat. “I would be most interested in such a meeting, Keeper Ragnok.”

“Very well,” Ragnok said, then he turned to Harry, who gulped. “Mr. Potter, I believe I may already know the answer to this question, but I must ask. When was the last time you received any type of communication via mail from Gringotts?”

“Never, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

Ragnok’s mouth turned up in a snarl. “Do you currently know where your Vault Key is, Mr. Potter?”

Harry groaned. “I allowed Molly Weasley to use it to get my stuff for this school year at the end of August. I don’t think she gave it back.”

Ragnok muttered in his native language, before returning to English. “And I believe the first time you entered these grounds, one Rubeus Hagrid was owner of your Key, although it is assumed he had received it from Albus Dumbledore. You have been poorly advised about your behavior whilst interacting with Gringotts in the past, Mr. Potter. But it is not your fault. I do not lay any blame on you. Fortunately, this can be easily remedied. When we are finished meeting here, I will perform an audit on your Account, Mr. Potter. I will see how much money was taken out on various dates, and figure out what it was used for. Then I will send you a list for you to confirm these transactions.

“This is necessary, because I have reason to believe Albus Dumbledore and one Molly Weasley might have stolen from you, Mr. Potter. Molly Weasley is suspected of manipulating you into allowing her to steal from you. However, that is only the case of this most recent summer, as you say. I have reason to believe she, as well as Albus Dumbledore, stole from you before you even returned to the wizarding world.”

“How is this possible, Keeper Ragnok?” McGonagall asked.

“Albus Dumbledore incorrectly believed he was named Magical Guardian of one Harry James Potter,” Ragnok said, “And therefore, he named himself such. Soon, you will know who exactly Mr. Potter’s Magical Guardian is. But there are things we must do first. What I am about to show you, Mr. Potter, was illegally penned between Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley. The only reason it is in my possession, is because I wanted you to be the one who decides whether or not to destroy it.”

Ragnok snapped his fingers and a piece of parchment appeared in front of Harry. He read the contents:

**Betrothal Contract:**

**Date Of Creation: 5 November 1981**

**Wizard: Harry James Potter**

**Date Of Birth: 31 July 1980**

**Parents: James Charlus Potter (deceased) and Lily Rose Potter ‘nee Evans (deceased)**
Harry narrowed his eyes and grimaced, then remembered McGonagall’s advice to keep his temper calm. He closed his eyes and counted down from ten. He needed all ten.

“Keeper Ragnok, you said this is an illegal Contract?” Harry asked.

“For several reasons, Mr. Potter,” Ragnok said, “The most important is that it was penned by someone not permitted to be your Magical Guardian. Albus Dumbledore’s various titles does not permit him to pen a Contract such as this. Second reason, there is no known Goblin Witness. Neither the Weasley, Prewett or Dumbledore Account Managers knew anything about this Contract. Likely due to the fact that the Goblins would all know it was illegally penned. Third, there is no provisos. No bride price, no date of wedding, no number of required children from said union. Nothing. While the latter reason isn’t too important, this may be one of the very few Contracts without those provisos.”

“Which tends to mean it was made without the actual Betrothed in mind,” McGonagall said. “Aside from attempting to pair off the two together. It is as if they were doing this, so they could use it as a tool to Mr. Potter here that only Ginny Weasley qualified as his future bride.”

“Quite possible,” Ragnok agreed. “For example, Albus Dumbledore could have lied to Mr. Potter here and said his parents had approved of this union before their deaths. But because they were in hiding, they could not pen a Contract, and he did it in their stead.”

“I… I might have believed him if he said that,” Harry said, “If I didn’t know about any nefarious intentions or motives he might have.”

“Fortunately, we were able to prevent such a manipulation,” Ragnok said, “Mr. Potter, do you give me permission to destroy this Contract?”

“Wait, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “Are there any other known copies, Keeper Ragnok?”

Ragnok waved a hand over the parchment, and he grimaced. “Two Contracts, unknown locations.”

“We must assume they are in possession of Molly Weasley and Albus Dumbledore,” McGonagall said, “We must also assume they would discover if the Contract was destroyed. Mr. Potter, I would advise you to request a copy of this Contract, so that you may present it to the Headmaster or Molly Weasley at some point in the future, informing them that you know about it. If that copy is destroyed, all copies would be destroyed.”

“I agree with my advisor, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

Ragnok grinned. “Excellent advice. I can give you a copy that would, indeed, destroy the others if yours was destroyed. Do you wish me to do so?”
“I do, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

Ragnok waved his hand, and an identical version of the Contract appeared next to original. Ragnok took the original, while Harry kept his in front of him.

“When you wish to destroy this Contract,” Ragnok said, “Simply state your name, and that you order it and all copies, to be destroyed. No incantation needed. Because your name is on it, you can destroy it.”

“Brilliant!” Harry exclaimed.

“Now that that unfortunate bit of blasphemy is finished,” Ragnok said, “It is time to reveal who Mr. Potter’s Magical Guardian is.”

“Who is it, Keeper Ragnok?” Harry asked.

“Simple,” Ragnok said, then grinned, “You do not have one.”

“Pardon me, Keeper Ragnok?” McGonagall asked.

“Quite easy to explain, Lady McGonagall,” Ragnok said. “On October 31st of this year, representatives of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, and the Wizengamot, as well as Magic itself, recognized one Harry James Potter as an Emancipated Minor – then they did not care to immediately clue him in on said information.”

Hermione let out a light gasp. McGonagall’s gasp was louder.

“The Goblet of Fire?” she asked.

“Before the Goblet of Fire was lit,” Ragnok said, “It was decided between Albus Dumbledore – both Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and various representatives of the Ministry of Magic, including Ludovic Bagman and Bartemius Crouch, the elder, that all Champions of the Triwizard Tournament were required to be of legal age.

“When Albus Dumbledore, Bartemius Crouch the elder, and Ludovic Bagman all agreed that Harry James Potter would have to be the unplanned Fourth Champion, they all – whether aware of it or not – agreed that Mr. Potter was now of legal age. The Goblet of Fire – a representative of Magic – agreed as well. Therefore, Harry James Potter – by agreement of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, the Wizengamot and Magic – is an Emancipated Minor.

“We here at Gringotts – and especially me as the House Potter Account Manager – were immediately notified of this agreement. I immediately sent a letter to Mr. Potter informing him of his Emancipation and requested him to meet with me as soon as possible. Clarify this for me, Mr. Potter, you did not receive any notifications or letters from Gringotts?”

“No, Keeper Ragnok, I did not,” Harry said, “I never have.”

“There is only one person who is closely connected to you, Mr. Potter, who is capable of blocking communication from Gringotts, thus blocking Goblin magic ,” Ragnok said, “Albus Dumbledore. Mr. Potter, I am going to be presumptuous here. Forgive me. You are seen as a celebrity in your society, ever since that fateful and tragic Halloween in 1981?”
“I am, though I do not appreciate it,” Harry said.

“And you have never received any communications humans refer to as… fan-mail?” Ragnok asked, “Communication, letters, from the various witches and wizards – young and old – around the British Wizarding Society?”

“Never,” Harry said.

“That seems to be an impossibility to me, Mr. Potter,” Ragnok said. “You probably should have received letters and gifts every year on your birthday, Yule, and possibly even Halloween – as well as any other normal day – from various individuals thanking you for what they presume you did. And you did not. Why?”

“Because someone – Dumbledore, I assume – has placed Mail Prevention Wards on Mr. Potter,” McGonagall answered, “It must be Dumbledore, because I can see him permitting what types of mail Harry would be allowed to receive.”

Hermione, knowing she wasn’t allowed to speak up without being addressed, whispered in Harry’s ear.

“What about the predicted mail you warned me about yesterday morning?” Harry asked Hermione’s question.

McGonagall pursed her lips. “He could easily turn off the enchantment when he feels necessary. Such as when it would be predictable for you to receive such letters. He could key the enchantment to a trinket of his, and turn it off and on.”

“It would certainly explain everything concerning the mail and communication problem,” Ragnok said, with a nod, “Mr. Potter, I have suspected Albus Dumbledore of keeping you from communicating with me, and vice-versa, since your very first visit here. Rubeus Hagrid is a known firm supporter of Albus Dumbledore. Hagrid, the very man who escorted you into this bank, where you spent less than half-an-hour here, and was only allowed to collect a bit of gold from your Vault. Griphook was punished most severely for that. He spent one Goblin calendar year – two human years – scooping up dragon dung, for not advising you to meet with me that day. He is… fortunate… to still be living on this very day. I wanted to personally fight him to the death for that crime. But my father, the Goblin Chief here at Gringotts, convince me to allow him to live. If Griphook still lives when I take my father’s place – he is a dead Goblin, and his brethren will be lucky if they are allowed to remain in the London branch of Gringotts.

“When you leave Gringotts today, I will be meeting with my father to request him to ban Albus Dumbledore from Goblin soil for the foreseeable future. Once I audit your Account, Molly Weasley may also be banned if my suspicions of her crimes are confirmed.”

With that grim statement in the minds of the three human guests, Ragnok snapped his finger and a metal box appeared on the table with a clunk!

“Now, Mr. Potter,” Ragnok continued, “Now that you are aware you are an Emancipated Minor, it is time for you to claim what is rightfully yours. The Lordship and control over the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

Ragnok grinned as he stared at Harry. “And the first step to removing yourself from the
manipulations and plans of one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.”

Chapter End Notes

And he will be doing exactly that! The second part of the Gringotts Visit continues next chapter!

I know I’m going to hear this theory now. No, McGonagall’s story she used as a lie to Dumbledore did not have to do with Lily Evans!

Also Next Chapter: Harry receives an Inheritance Test, reads his parents’ Final Will and Testament, and a Blood Test, in which he discovers some abilities that have been blocked. Hermione takes Inheritance and Blood Tests too.

This story will not have Hogwarts Heirs, so Harry won’t be Heir of Slytherin or Gryffindor, and Hermione won’t be Heiress of Ravenclaw. Sorry. Harry will be Lord of Multiple Houses (Two Primary, one second-in-line), but he will NOT have to marry separate witches to continue those lines. He can give the Titles to different children, as can Hermione as Lady Dagworth-Granger.
Tests And Testaments

Chapter Notes

: As per usual in my stories, James Potter’s parents are Charlus and Dorea (Black) Potter in this story. Fleamont and Euphemia are James’ grandparents.

Near the beginning of this chapter, the PoV switches momentarily from Harry to Hermione, for her Tests, then goes back to Harry.

Warning: Dumbledore and Molly Weasley Bashing; A chapter chock-full of Helpful Goblins; Emancipation; Lords and Ladies; Ancient and Noble Houses, Illegal Bindings and Bound Abilities

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

Ragnok snapped his finger and a metal box appeared on the table with a clunk!

“Now, Mr. Potter,” he continued, “Now that you are aware you are an Emancipated Minor, it is time for you to claim what is rightfully yours. The Lordship and control over the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

Ragnok grinned as he stared at Harry. “And the first step to removing yourself from the manipulations and plans of one Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Shall we continue?”

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

“We will begin with your Inheritance and Blood Test, Mr. Potter,” Ragnok said, “Then we will open your parents’ Final Will and Testament, which should have happened on your eleventh birthday. Then you will receive your Lordship Rings. Then you will receive an updated financial list, which will tell you how – shall we say – rich you are monetary-wise. It will also tell you how many Residences you own, businesses you have some percentage of ownership of, as well as other various investments. We will do the Inheritance and Blood Tests first. Would this be suitable for you, Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

“Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Ragnok said, “At this time, as Mr. Potter is going through the same process, you may also go through an Inheritance Test, and Blood Test, if you so desire.”

Hermione looked at Professor McGonagall, who merely raised an eyebrow. It was Hermione’s decision.

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok,” Hermione said, “But, forgive me, I have a question. What is a Blood Test? How is it different from an Inheritance Test?”

“A Blood Test will tell you whether you are a Muggleborn, or of… purer blood,” Ragnok said,
sneering as he said the phrase ‘purer blood’. “And also any health problems you may have. If you have any blocks on your magical core, that will also be discovered.”

“I would advise doing so, Miss Granger, and you as well, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “It would probably reveal a lot more than my Healer friend could.”

“If there are any problems,” Ragnok said, “Gringotts offers its own Healing Service that would do a great deal of remedying any problems the Blood Test may show. It would be free of charge. The Muggles aren’t the only beings in Great Britain with great health benefits, after all.”

“I will accept the Blood Test and any assistance the Gringotts Healing Service may give if necessary, Keeper Ragnok,” Hermione said.

Harry verbally agreed with his girlfriend.

Ragnok snapped his fingers and four more clay square ‘coasters’ appeared, one of each in front of Harry and Hermione. However, these were colored differently than the first Harry had experienced. The Inheritance Test coaster was gold, while the Blood Test coaster was red.

“Much like you did with the Identity Test,” Ragnok said, “A simple pinprick will be required on each of these. They will transform into separate tests: Inheritance and Blood Tests, respectively.”

Harry and Hermione repeated the same process they had done earlier, placing an index finger on each coaster. Two pinpricks later, and the coasters transfigured into two pieces of parchment for each.

Harry read the Inheritance Test first, while Hermione did the same.

**Inheritance Test – Harry James Potter**

*Date Of Birth: 31 July 1980*

*Parents: James Charlus Potter (deceased) and Lily Rose Potter ‘nee Evans (deceased)*

*Official Titles of Lineage:*

*Ancient and Noble Houses:*

*House Potter – direct descendant - father*

*House Peverell – direct descendant – father*

*House Black – second-in-line – father*

*Minor House:*

*House Evans – direct descendant – mother – second generation*

**NOTE:** Harry James Potter is an Emancipated Minor as of 31 October 1994, therefore qualifies for titles Lord Potter of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and Lord Peverell of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell.

**Inheritance Test – Hermione Jean Granger**
Date of Birth: 19 September 1979
Parents: Daniel Richard Granger and Emma Jean Granger ‘nee Puckle

Official Title of Lineage:

Noble House:
Dagworth-Granger – direct descendant – father

NOTE: Hermione Jean Granger is Heiress Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger until 19 September 1996, or date of Emancipation, when Hermione Jean Granger will qualify for Lady Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger.

Harry’s eyes widened as he looked at the third House. He was second-in-line to House Black, presumably behind Sirius. But it was the second House which confused him.

“Pardon me,” Harry said, “But what is House Peverell?”

“Do you wish to inform your pupil of this one, Lady McGonagall?” Ragnok asked.

McGonagall nodded once, then turned to Harry. “The Peverell Family is a very old and very famous family in wizarding society, Mr. Potter -- or should I say, Lord Potter. Have you ever read the book The Tales of Beedle The Bard?”

Harry shook his head, but Hermione gasped and nodded.

“Perhaps Heiress Dagworth-Granger may know then,” McGonagall said. “There is a story in that book called The Tale Of The Three Brothers. It is a retelling of the story of the three famous Peverell Brothers – Antioch, Cadmus, and Ignotus Peverell. Technically, you are related to all three Brothers, as you are related to their father. However, you are a direct descendant of the youngest brother, Ignotus. He is buried in the same graveyard your parents are buried in, in Godric’s Hollow.”

“You would have been second-in-line, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “But you technically killed the original direct descendant on that Halloween in 1981.”

“Voldemort?” Harry asked; McGonagall gasped whether at the name or the revelation.

“Do you know his real name, Lord Potter?” Ragnok asked.

“Tom Marvolo Riddle, Junior,” Harry said; McGonagall gasped again, and went pale. Obviously she didn’t know this before now.

“Half-Blood Son of a Muggle father and Squib mother, Merope Gaunt,” Ragnok said, “Grandson of Marvolo Gaunt. The Gaunts were descended from the eldest Peverell brother. When you defeated him that Halloween, you became the direct descendant and Heir of Peverell House. Today, you become Lord Peverell. You will receive your Lord’s Rings after the Will is read. Now, if you will, please look at your Blood Tests.”
Harry and Hermione did as asked.

Blood Test – Harry James Potter

Date Of Birth: 31 July, 1980
Parents: James Charlus Potter (deceased) and Lily Rose Potter ‘nee Evans (deceased)
Blood-Type: Half-Blood

Abilities:
Natural Occlumency: BLOCKED
Natural Legilimency: BLOCKED
Eidetic Memory/Perfect Recall: BLOCKED
Metamorphmagus: 75% BLOKCED; LIMITED to Hair Length
Animagus: Shadow Panther – Ability to Learn Talent: BLOCKED
Beast Speaker: LIMITED to Snakes; Other Abilities: BLOCKED
Owl Post/Mail: LIMITED

Bindings:
Magical Core: 50% Bound – 2 Bindings
Willpower: 50% Bound -- Motivation Inhibitor
Libido: 50% -- Lust/Intimacy Inhibitors
Imperius Curse Resistance: 10% (formerly 75%) – Experimental Inhibitor

Potions Dosing:

Loyalty Potion: Present (Former)
Albus Dumbledore: .5% (50%)
Molly Weasley: .5% (50%)
Ron Weasley .5% (50%)
Ginny Weasley .5% (50%)

Revulsion Potion:
Hermione Granger: 0% (10-50% Fluctuating)
Draco Malfoy: 75%
Severus Snape: 75%

There were several other names under Revulsion Potion. Many Slytherins, like Malfoy, also had 75% Revulsion. Other students had 25-50%.

Infatuation Potion:
Ginny Weasley 0% (10-25% Fluctuating)

Other Issues: Mixture of Basilisk Venom and Phoenix Tears in blood (Unknown Effects as a Result of mixture); Multiple Cases of Obliviation; Moderately Weak Bones from multiple breaks; Low To Moderate Malnutrition from Past History of Moderate to Heavy
Malnutrition;

Harry narrowed his eyes as he looked through the various blocks and bindings. He was a Natural Occlumens and Legilimens? He could have an Eidetic Memory! And what was a Metamorphmagus? A Shadow Panther Animagus sounded awesome, but his ability to learn it was blocked? He wasn’t a Parselmouth, instead he was a Beast Speaker, and limited to Snakes – which obviously made people believe he was a Parselmouth.

Then there were all those Potions. To think he had been dosed to be loyal to Dumbledore and the Weasleys! Infatuation – which he guessed was the beginning stages of Love and Lust Potions? – to Ginny, and a Reevulsion Potion to Hermione – and several other students! No wonder he couldn’t make too many friends! He wondered why the Potions were at such low percent now. Then he realized, as he noticed the 0% next to Hermione’s name under Revulsion. Had something as simple as kissing, or falling in love with Hermione, lowered these Potion doses to next to nothing?!

Maybe it had to do with his Mother’s Love – which he found odd that it was not listed in the abilities.

And those Bindings! Not just his Magical Core, but his Intelligence and Willpower? Libido? And his Imperius Resistance had been so highly bound… until he was able to break it, perhaps?

And then there was the multiple Obliviations. That almost made his temper blow. What had he been made to forget?!

Meanwhile, Hermione was having her own surprises.

Blood Test – Hermione Jean Granger

Date of Birth: 19 September 1979
Parents: Daniel Richard Granger and Emma Jean Granger ‘nee Puckle
Blood-Type: Muggleborn – Descendant of Pureblood

Abilities:
Natural Occlumency: BLOCKED
Natural Legilimency: BLOCKED
Eidetic Memory/Perfect Recall: 50% Blocked
Animagus: Lioness – Ability to Learn Talent: BLOCKED
Owl Post/Mail: 25% Blocked

Bindings:
Magical Core: 25% Bound – 1 Binding
Libido: 25% -- Lust/Intimacy Inhibitors
Imperius Curse Resistance: 75% – Experimental Inhibitor

Potions Dosing:
Loyalty Potion: Present (Former)
Albus Dumbledore: .5% (85%)
Molly Weasley: .5% (50%)
Ron Weasley: .5% (50%)
Ginny Weasley: .5% (50%)

Revulsion Potion:
Harry Potter: 0% (10-50% Fluctuating)
Draco Malfoy: 50%
Severus Snape: 50%

Like Harry, there were several other names under Revulsion Potion. Many Slytherins, like Malfoy, also had 50-75% Revulsion. Other students had 10-30%.

Infatuation Potion:
Ron Weasley: 0% (35-65% Fluctuating)

Other Issues: Multiple Cases of Obliviation; History of Health Issues Due to Long-Term Usage of Time Turner and Short-Term Petrification via Basilisk.

Hermione was just as furious as Harry. Natural Occlumens and Legilimens -- Blocked?! Eidetic Memory?! She always wanted an Eidetic Memory! The fact that it was half-blocked was understandable, since she had a good memory. But to have a perfect memory? Sure, she heard it could be a curse, but it was also very useful! And with Occlumency, she could store and arrange memories, so Perfect Recall wouldn’t be too much of a bother!

The fact that her Magical Core had a binding on it. Not surprising – Dumbledore probably did something to her. Lust inhibitor? Sure, so she wouldn’t feel her attraction to Harry… until she was able to kiss him, and it overpowered the bindings? Imperius Resistance blocked! That could only mean… Hermione suddenly had a bad feeling. The history of Obliviations made that feeling worse!

The various Potions made perfect sense, especially the Infatuation Potion. How could she otherwise fancy a disgusting pig like Ron Weasley?

“May I look at the results of your Blood Tests?” McGonagall requested.

Harry and Hermione both nodded, and handed the tests to Professor McGonagall. The Lioness of Gryffindor read through each of them, her lips pursed and eyebrows narrowed.

“Unfortunately, I had suspected much of this,” McGonagall said. “Especially the Blocks and Potions. Obliviations were also a risk. It would seem the recent events of the two of you becoming a couple did a lot of good for you. Albus is right about one thing, after all. Love is a powerful Light Magic. It probably purged you of much of these Potions. The fact that you are Natural Occlumens and Legilimens is surprising, but also excellent. Means you won’t have to be taught those, after they blocks are released – aside from, perhaps, teaching you how to control both abilities. Eidetic Memory is also a true gift.

“And your Animagus forms! Lioness suits you, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. But this Shadow
Panther?!”

“What’s wrong, Professor?” Harry asked.

“A Shadow Panther is a Magical Creature of Legend,” McGonagall said. “Magical Creatures are notoriously impossible to gain an Animagus of. But a legendary creature? This is simply incredible, Lord Potter!”

Harry blushed and smiled, as Hermione beamed at him.

“These bindings are worrying,” McGonagall said. “Magical Core bindings are predictable. But the fact that you have two, Lord Potter? That’s… maddening! You won’t possibly be able to be free of both without repercussions. One should be enough. Libido, well… that might explain why the two of you only became a couple recently. Your attraction for each other was minimized, and even more so due to the Reulsion Potions toward each other and Infatuation Potions keyed to the Weasleys. But this Willpower Block? Lord Potter, tell me, how was your education before you came to Hogwarts?”

Harry shrugged. “I was pretty intelligent, I suppose. But the Dursleys would – erm – well, they didn’t like it if I had better grades than my cousin. So I had to dumb myself down.”

“Something you wouldn’t have to do at Hogwarts,” McGonagall said, “Because your magic-hating relatives wouldn’t really care, would they? So these Inhibitors to lower your Willpower and Motivation to learn? I suspect it was put on you sometime in the days after you started your First Year.”

“Couldn’t have me perform so much better than Ron,” Harry said, with a snort. “His jealousy would have shown itself a lot sooner, because I was so much smarter. So I’m sure Dumbledore wanted me to dumb down to Ron’s levels.”

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione said, “I’m sorry. If I had known…”

Harry shrugged and gave her a soft smile.

“Fortunately,” Ragnok said, “Most of these issues can be remedied through our Health Services. Free of charge, of course. After we are finished here, I will escort the both of you to our Hospital Wing. They will aide you in removing most of those annoying issues. Though I must agree with your advisor, Lord Potter. Only one binding around your core is to be removed at the moment. I would suggest coming back next summer to remove the last. That is… if it doesn’t release on its own.”

“Can that happen?” Hermione asked, interestedly.

“Indeed it can, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Ragnok said, “Perhaps you know how, Lady McGonagall?”

“A traumatic event,” McGonagall said, with a grimace. “But only if you have one binding. Your emotions could overload the binding and your core will strengthen to one-hundred percent. The blowback is unpredictable for each wizard or witch.”

“Our Healers are skilled at removing bindings so that there is no risk of blowback,” Ragnok said, “But even they won’t risk releasing both of yours at the same time, Lord Potter.”
“I understand,” Harry said.

“Well, if there is nothing more about those Tests,” Ragnok said, “We will move on to James and Lily Potter’s Final Will and Testament. There are several Inheritors in this Will, Lord Potter. But because you are the Primary Inheritor, you are allowed to know who is listed in the Will as Inheritors.”

Harry nodded, indicating he understood.

Ragnok snapped his fingers, and what appeared to be a large metal contraption that resembled a rolling pin, appeared in his hand. He set it in front of Harry.

“Place one finger on the container,” he instructed, “You will feel a light pinprick. I assure you it is not dangerous. It will remove a dollop of your blood, then you will be healed straight away.”

Harry shivered slightly, hesitated for a moment, then pressed a finger on one container. He winced lightly at the pinprick. The container made a metallic grinding noise as it rolled backward toward Ragnok. The container formed into a scroll of parchment, which rolled flat onto the table. Ragnok cleared his throat and stated:

“I, Ragnok The Sixth, the Vault Keeper of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. am witness to the Reading of the Last Will and Testament of James Charlus Potter and Lily Rose Potter nee Evans which they collaborated on together. Mr. Potter, as the last heir of the Ancient Line, so proven by your blood, make your choice. Do you wish the Reading to be by voice or by your own eyes?”

“I will read it myself,” Harry said. “And allow Hermione and my advisor, Professor McGonagall to do the same.”

“I will provide temporary copies for Heiress Dagworth-Granger and Lady McGonagall to read,” Ragnok said; then did just as he said, as two copies of the Will appeared in front of Hermione and Professor McGonagall respectively. “They will vanish when you are finished reading them.”

Ragnok relaxed in his chair, and motioned for Harry to read the Will. Harry leaned forward and began to read to himself, as did Hermione and Professor McGonagall.

We, James Charlus Potter, and Lily Rose Potter nee Evans of able bodies and minds, claim this, our Final Will and Testament.

If James is no longer of this Earth, and Lily survives him, he leaves the contents of this Will, other than the gifts for friends listed below, to her until their son, Harry James Potter, reaches his age of majority.

If Lily Rose Potter is no longer of this Earth, at the time of this Reading, we leave these various items to the following:

Sirius Black: Our son’s primary guardian, per the Godfather Ritual. We lend you Potter Manor in Northampton until Harry comes of age. We know you don’t need money, but we give you 250,000 Galleons in assistance to help raise Harry. You can find our portraits in Potter Manor. I am sure they – we – will help you raise Harry if you need assistance, and they will be able to talk to Harry and help him learn all about us as he grows up. Sirius, I, James
Potter, also name you Leader of the Great Alliance until Harry comes of age, takes his titles, and can sit in his seat. I also name you Proxy for the Potter and Peverell seats. We love you, Padfoot, and trust you with our son’s life.

Harry’s eyes widened. Manor? He owned a Manor! And his parents had portraits there?! Portraits that could talk to him! He could talk to his parents – well, an echo, but it was better than he ever dreamed of!

And what was that about a Great Alliance?

Remus Lupin: 150,000 Galleons. You can’t give it back, so you best keep it! Get a new wardrobe, buy a great house, or maybe you can live with Sirius and help raise little Prongslet with him! Either way, we know you’ll be around Harry for as long as you live.

Peter Pettigrew: If we are dead, Peter Pettigrew is guilty of betraying us. He was our Secret Keeper at the time of our death. We made everyone believe it was Sirius, so Peter wouldn’t be targeted. Wormtail, you rat, we give you 30 Sickles. Buy a ferry to Azkaban, you traitor.

Harry recognized several familiar names listed there, including parents of his classmates and friends. Several thousands of Galleons were given as gifts, as well as a few other items.

When Harry reaches the age of eleven, and he opens this Will, we officially name him Lord Potter, the Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. We also request an official Inheritance Test for Harry so he may discover any and all titles to his name. As Lord Potter, he will gain access to the Potter Vaults, Fortunes and other Assets.

Harry scowled. He should have been Emancipated at eleven?

If we are no longer of this Earth, we name these individuals below Harry’s Official and Magical Guardians.

(In order of preference – if individual is no longer of this Earth, the next name in line becomes Guardian)

Sirius Black – Godfather, per the Godfather Ritual, family friend and ally.

Alice Longbottom, and her husband, Frank – Godmother, per the Godmother Ritual, Family friends and allies.

Pandora Lovegood and her husband, Xenophilius – family friends and allies.

Andromeda and Edward “Ted” Tonks – family friends and allies.

Castor and Illiana Greengrass – family friends and allies.

Minerva McGonagall – family friend.

Amelia Bones – family friend and ally.
Remus Lupin – family friend and ally.

Under no circumstances should Harry Potter be raised by Petunia Dursley nee Evans and her husband Vernon.

Under no circumstances is Albus Dumbledore allowed to become Harry Potter’s Magical Guardian, or given access to the Potter Vaults. Nor is he allowed to use the Potter or Peverell votes in the Wizengamot.

Harry growled under his breath. He was never meant to be placed with the Dursleys! Remus had mentioned it and here was proof! These witches and wizards – people he knew, people who were apparently friends of his parents – were supposed to be his guardians. He could have grown up with Neville, Susan Bones, who was a ward of Amelia Bones, or even Luna or Daphne! Even Professor McGonagall could have raised him!

By signing this Final Will and Testament, we vow that everything said here is true and honest,

James Charlus Potter and Lily Rose Potter
Witness: Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore
Gringotts Official Witness: Ragnok The Sixth, Potter Family Vault Keeper

“Godfather Ritual?!” McGonagall exclaimed; she spoke in that Scotland Gaelic dialect Harry recalled hearing muffled through a wall, and knew it might have been swearing. “ Curse you, Albus Dumbledore! Here is proof that Albus knew Black was innocent, and should have been given a trial! Here is proof Pettigrew was the Secret Keeper!”

“Can I have a Copy of this Will, Keeper Ragnok?” Harry asked. “We probably won’t have time today, Professor McGonagall, but if we can find an opportunity to give the Will to someone who can do something about this. It might help Sirius.”

“It certainly would help him,” McGonagall agreed. “But we must be careful. Sirius is safe behind a Fidelius Charm at the moment. We must wait to contact the DMLE – specifically Director Amelia Bones – until we can arrange to contact your godfather.”

Harry agreed with the Lioness of Gryffindor.

“Lord Potter, you are the only one permitted a Copy of this Will – aside from Gringotts and the Ministry,” Ragnok said. “Nobody who isn’t listed in this Will, will hear of it from us. When we get your permission, we will contact the various names here so we can give them their Inheritances, which has actually been sitting in a Vault your parents rented upon the Will’s creation. It has simply been sitting there, while a thousand Galleons a year are taken from your Vaults to keep the rent up. The Will at the Ministry is sealed under the order of the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.”

“Dumbledore,” Harry muttered.

“Indeed, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “So if I were to give you a copy, you must protect it. Otherwise anyone could take it and read it. I can’t place Goblin Magic on it because of the treaty between Gringotts and the Ministry of Magic. So you must protect it.”
“I will assist you in protecting it until we can use it, Lord Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Thank you,” Harry said, “I will take a Copy.”

Ragnok snapped his fingers, and an identical copy of the will appeared, then rolled up into that metallic scroll.

“To open it,” Ragnok said, “Simply press the button on one end of the scroll. Anyone can do this, Lord Potter, so you know.”

Harry nodded. “I’ll be cautious.”

“Very well,” Ragnok said, “Any more questions pertaining to the Will?”

“Yes,” Harry said, “Under Sirius’ inheritance, it says something about the Great Alliance. What is this?”

Professor McGonagall’s eyes fluttered open and closed and Harry and Hermione looked at her in alarm.

“Don’t be alarmed, young ones,” Ragnok said, “It seems when you said ‘Great Alliance’, Lord Potter, you lifted a massive enchantment of some kind. If this is the same enchantment I believe it is, several witches and wizards who once knew about your family’s involvement in the Great Alliance would have forgotten that when the enchantment was placed.”

McGonagall gasped and cursed. “Curse you, Dumbledore! That enchantment is illegal and you know it! It is illegal, because it takes so much power to do it, and a huge risk to use it too. It could exhaust your magic for several days. Albus Dumbledore could do the enchantment, but he wouldn’t do it very often. Multiple uses could ultimately turn him into a Squib.”

“What is this Great Alliance?” Harry asked, “Why is it so important that Dumbledore blocked anyone from mentioning it around me?”

“How did you know it did that, Lord Potter?” Ragnok asked. “I never said that.”

“Neville Longbottom, Padma Patil, and Luna Lovegood,” Harry said, “Their family names are listed in the Will. They referred to each other as Allies, but could never speak about this Alliance around me.”

“The Alliance they refer to is the Great Alliance!” Hermione gasped.

“Yes, families Longbottom, Patil and Lovegood are associated with the Great Alliance,” McGonagall said, “Along with Potter, Peverell, Black, Bones, Abbot, Greengrass, Boot, MacMillan and Tonks. And there was one more as well. House McGonagall. Yes, my House.

“The Great Alliance, Lord Potter, was a political powerhouse during your grandfather and father’s time. Charlus Potter created it. The Great Alliance was nigh-on unstoppable in its time. The combination of all these houses – Patil, Lovegood and Tonks were not on the Wizengamot, however, as they were not Noble Houses – piled up the votes to a point where they could approve of any Bill they wanted, and deny any they did not approve of. Of course, it helped that the rest of the Light Alliance, and some of the Neutral Alliance would vote too for much of these Bills. But even
when a small minority of the Light or Neutral Alliance voted, the Great Alliance would either win or defeat any Bill they voted for or against.

“You see, the Peverell House is the highest-level House in the Wizengamot. Most Ancient and Most Noble. If the Hogwarts Houses still had Heirs, they would have been the highest, even above Peverell, as Founding Houses. But Peverell is even above the Sacred Twenty-Eight, the modern founding families, who revolutionized the Wizengamot. As Most Ancient and Most Noble, Peverell has eight votes. Compare that to Ancient and Most Noble, which has four, or the Noble Houses which has two. The Ministry Department Heads all have one vote. Of all the families who were a part of the Great Alliance, all of those who sat on the Wizengamot were at least Ancient and Most Noble. All had at least four votes. Therefore, you can see the power they have.

“After James Potter passed, and Sirius Black was arrested, the Great Alliance lost a lot of its influence. Fourteen votes were lost in a day. That certainly neutered the Great Alliance’s power. Albus Dumbledore attempted to gain the Proxies for these three Houses, but the Seats never accepted him. I am guessing because of this, he used the enchantment to make people forget about your family’s involvement in the Great Alliance. With your return – you can assign Proxies to an ally of the Great Alliance, and that legendary power the Great Alliance once had, will return.”

McGonagall grinned. “Especially if you include the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger, giving the Great Alliance two more votes.”

Hermione blushed and smiled. “I think that would be doable.”

“Looks like I’m going to have to meet with the Heirs and Heiresses of these Houses,” Harry said.

“Also known as the Children of the Great Alliance,” McGonagall said.

Harry nodded. “No more questions, Keeper Ragnok.”

Neither McGonagall nor Hermione had questions. Ragnok snapped his fingers and two mahogany boxes appeared on the table. He opened the first, and it revealed a pair of rings.

“This box, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “was taken directly from your Family Vault. These two rings are Signet Rings. There are many of these rings that have been said to speak to their heirs through voices of their ancestors.”

“You mean... my father will talk to me through the ring?” Harry asked.

The Goblin only shrugged. “You may hear your father’s voice, but I doubt you will be able to have too many meaningful conversations. Mostly the rings are meant to give you advice concerning your title of Head of your House. The rings also signify your seat in the Wizengamot at the Ministry, as you know. “You can make the two rings blend into one or keep them as they are. Then when you need to show the ring to someone, just summon the ring to your finger. If you don’t wish to let anyone see the rings, you can ask them to vanish from view.”

“Alright,” Harry said.

He picked up the Potter Family ring, and placed it on his ring finger, then placed the Peverell Ring on the next finger, and studied them. The Peverell ring had an odd triangular shape on it, and the Potter Ring had a Griffin spreading its wings above two swords, which were pointing to the left and right of the ring. With a single thought, the two rings merged together in a flash of bright white light.
Suddenly, Harry heard a voice in his head.

“Welcome, Harry James Potter, Lord of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

Harry gasped. He recognized that voice. It belonged to his father, James Potter.

“You were right, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “When I placed the ring on my finger, I heard my father’s voice.”

“Excellent,” Ragnok said, “It is rare when it happens. Not all Signet Rings will speak to the wearer, but several do. It depends on the magic in their bloodline.”

“Is there anything else I should know?” Harry asked.

“Such as what?” Ragnok asked.

“Do I – will I have to marry more than one wife?” Harry asked. “To pass on the titles to different Heirs?”

Hermione squeaked, then glared at Harry.

“Relax, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” McGonagall said, “Lord Potter, I don’t know who told you that, but it is not true. If you and Heiress Dagworth-Granger marry, she will become Lady Potter. Then if you have three children, you can assign each one of them the Heir or Heiress to families Potter, Peverell, and Dagworth-Granger.”

Harry scowled. “Should have known Ron was wrong. He said he wanted to become Lord Weasley and Lord Prewett, so he could marry two witches and have an Heiress from each of them to pass on the names.”

McGonagall huffed. “Ronald Weasley is sixth in line for Lord Weasley, and several spots below for Lord Prewett. He can’t even be called an Heir, merely a Scion. It would take a terrible tragedy for him to gain those titles.”

“Makes sense,” Harry said, nodding, then glanced at Hermione. “Sorry, love. You know you’re the only woman for me.”

Hermione blushed and smiled. “You’re forgiven. As long as you keep that in mind.”

“Now, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Ragnok said, “It is your turn. This box –” he motioned to the other box which had been set aside, “comes from the Dagworth-Granger Vault, which had been frozen before you were revealed as the Heiress this morning. The Heir’s ring – or Heiress’, in this case -- has no real abilities, unfortunately. But it would identify you as the Heiress of the House of Dagworth-Granger.”

He placed the box in front of Hermione. She opened it, and her eyes widened in amazement at the ring in front of her. Harry glanced at it, and smiled as he looked at it. It was simplistic in design, but beautiful in its own right. It was a Cauldron with the end of a mixing spoon sticking out was the design. Hermione picked it up and placed it on her ring finger. Her eyes misted as she looked at it.

“Guess this means it is true then,” Hermione said, “I’m an Heiress. A Muggleborn Heiress of a Pureblood House.”
“Congratulations, you two,” McGonagall said, “This is very big news, I assure you.”

“Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “Something I should have mentioned earlier. Now that you are Emancipated, you no longer have the Trace on your person. You no longer are restricted from using magic outside of Hogwarts, as long as you do not do magic around ignorant Muggles.”

“That’s great!” Harry said, then glanced at Hermione, “There isn’t any way Hermione can be rid of the Trace, is there?”

McGonagall’s eyes widened, then she smiled. “There is, Lord Potter. And it might be exactly what we need for some of our recent problems that have been dealt to us. Tell me, Lord Potter, do you know what a Vassal is?”

Chapter End Notes

Yep. Visit Gringotts isn’t done yet! One more Gringotts chapter to go!

Yep! I’m bringing Vassals back from Vanishing Cabinet of Time!

For those who have read Ilvermorny Champion, I’m sure you recognize the Shadow Panther Animagus. I loved it so much I’ve brought it back. I don’t know when Animagus training will happen, but Harry and Hermione will get around to it sometime.

Yes, Harry is a Metamorphmagus. No, it won’t have a lot of importance in the story. It simply explains why he was able to change his hair-length as a child. He’ll find some uses for it, but it won’t be as extreme as my past stories.

Did you notice something missing from “Other Issues” on Harry’s Blood Test results? If you did, it isn’t a mistake. It will be revealed why next chapter.

So much revealed in this chapter! Hope you enjoyed it all!

Next Chapter: When it is discovered being a Heiress won’t protect Hermione from the Second Task, she becomes a Potter Vassal, which gives her more security. Harry discovers exactly how wealthy House Potter is. Harry makes a controversial decision that will give him even more freedom in the near future. Then he and Hermione go to the Gringotts Hospital Wing. We discover Ragnok is keeping a secret from Harry (for his own good?). Finally! The Gringotts visit ends!
We finally end the Gringotts visit, which was originally planned to be ONE chapter! No plan survives contact with the muse!

Some readers/reviewers are wondering why Dumbledore was the Witness of James and Lily’s Will. This will be explained at some point in the story. Any other answer would be spoilers. Along with the question about why they were in Godric’s Hollow, when Potter Manor was a suitable house to remain in with much better protections!

Some of you might dislike Ragnok by the end of this chapter. He has his reasons for what he is going to be doing.

Warning: Dumbledore, Severus Snape and Ron, Ginny and Molly Weasley Bashing; A chapter chock-full of Helpful Goblins; Emancipation; Lords and Ladies; Ancient and Noble Houses, Illegal Bindings and Bound Abilities; Not-so-ridiculously large, but still large, amounts of Galleons.

Additional Warning: There will be certain topics that come up after Harry leaves the Hospital Wing that might be considered dark and difficult to read. It will center around Harry and Hermione’s Obliviations. References to Past Child Abuse, including Severe Physical Assault (and Attempted Murder?).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

Harry glanced at Hermione “There isn’t any way Hermione can be rid of the Trace, is there?”

McGonagall’s eyes widened, then she smiled. “There is, Lord Potter. And it might be exactly what we need for some of our recent problems that have been dealt to us. Tell me, Lord Potter, do you know what a Vassal is?”

“Er… yes,” Harry said, “But doesn’t that end up with the Vassal a subject to a life of servitude in return to promise of protection?”

“Technically it means that,” McGonagall said, “But only if the Protector wishes to do that. You certainly wouldn’t want that with Heiress Dagworth-Granger, would you?”

“Absolutely not,” Harry said, with a smile at Hermione, who blushed and smiled back at him, “She will very likely be the future Lady Potter, after all. I’d offer protection without servitude. Why would this be necessary?”

“Because, Lord Potter,” McGonagall said, “Being Heiress Dagworth-Granger does not protect her from the perils of the Second Task. If she was Lady, then yes, it would add to the argument. But she has no reason to become Emancipated. As a Vassal of Lord Potter, she would be given official protection of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.
“We have other plans to attempt to prevent the Heiress from becoming a victim of the Second Task, but if those plans fail, then you will have no choice but to announce your Lordships, Lord Potter, your Heiress Title, Heiress Dagworth-Granger, and the fact that you would be his Vassal. Even Dumbledore wouldn’t interfere in that – not when it means he could lose a lot of respect if he places the Heiress of a long-thought dead House in danger.”

“In addition, as your Vassal,” Ragnok said, “you could remove the Trace from the Heiress, so she could assist you as your Vassal by any means necessary.”

“Well, I’m convinced, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Me too,” Harry said. “What do I need to do?”

“Listen to your rings, Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Ragnok said, “They will tell you how to complete the Vassal Ritual. You may use your wands for this Ritual.”

Guided by their rings, Harry and Hermione stood up, then raised their wands, and Harry pressed his against Hermione’s.

“Hermione Jean Granger,” Harry said, clearly, “Heiress to the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger, do you, from this day forward until I release you, accept the title and role of Vassal of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

“I do, Lord Potter,” Hermione said.

“I, Harry James Potter, Lord of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter,” Harry continued, clearly, “do accept Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress to the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger, as the Vassal of the House of Potter. In return for your proper servitude as I see fit, I offer protection of my House. I vow to defend you from my enemies and opposition with all my power. As Vassal of my House, I remove the Trace from your person so you may serve my House properly as I see fit. So mote it be!”

At once, a golden orb surrounded their wands, then moved down toward their arms. Harry’s eyes fluttered as he felt the warmth of the accepting magic engulf him. Harry and Hermione collapsed into their chairs, breathing heavily.

“Congratulations, Heiress Dagworth-Granger, Vassal to the House of Potter,” Ragnok said, “I do believe the Trace is officially removed from your person.”

“Brilliant,” Harry and Hermione said.

“Now we may move on to the next scheduled topic,” Ragnok said, “The Fortunes, Properties, Residences, and other various assets of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. Unfortunately, I must audit the House of Peverell Account before I can allow you to peruse that information. Same goes for you, Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

“I understand, Keeper Ragnok,” Hermione said. “This is more than I expected already. I am willing to wait as long as possible.”

“I am sure I am going to be overwhelmed with the Potter Account fortune, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “So I can wait for the House Peverell results.”
“Before we continue,” Ragnok said, “Lord Potter, do you wish to merge your Trust Vault and the Main Vaults. Or do you wish to keep your Trust Vault?”

Harry glanced at Professor McGonagall. “What do you think, ma’am?”

“Albus Dumbledore might be keeping an eye on your Vaults whether or not he has been able to gain access into them,” McGonagall said, “I would keep the Trust Vault available for now.”

“It is impossible for anyone not a Potter – blood or married – to open the Main Vaults without the Lord and Lady Potter rings,” Ragnok said. “The Trust Vault, however. If Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley had possession of the Key to the Vault – which will soon be remedied of course – they could remove money from it. As much as they wanted. You wouldn’t notice any money was missing, Lord Potter, as it refills each year with 25,000 Galleons.”

“So what you’re saying is – Dumbledore or Mrs. Weasley could have emptied it each year without anyone knowing better,” Harry said.

“Without a proper audit, Lord Potter,” Ragnok corrected. “Before your eleventh birthday, I thought the Trust Vault was frozen. It is not out of the realm of possibility that someone – Griphook, perhaps – could have betrayed me, and Gringotts in general, and allowed them into the Vaults. However, the audit will let me know exactly how much money was taken each year, and where most of that money went. As the Account Manager of House Potter, I have that right to track any Galleon which is placed in the Potter Vaults.”

“I appreciate it, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said. “What does this possible thievery mean for the information I am about to receive?”

“That information is up-to-date, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “For example, if you remove one Galleon from one of the Vaults, the main total of the monetary fortune will automatically drop down one Galleon.”

“Brilliant!” Harry said, “That is efficient.”

“Of course it is,” Ragnok said, with a grin. “Gringotts favors efficiency as much as it favors gold.”

He snapped his fingers, and a piece of parchment appeared in front of Harry. He began to peruse through it.

**Account Report – Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter**

**Current Owner: Harry James Potter, Lord of Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter**

**Vault 687** (Main Potter Vault – Monetary Possessions, Jewels and Gems, Misc. Monetary Documents)

**Total Monetary Fortune:**
35,734,710 Galleons, 12 Sickles, 4 Knuts

**Jewels and Gems (Diamonds, Emeralds, Rubies, Sapphires, etc.) Total Value:**
12,364,843 Galleons, 19 Sickles, 7 Knuts
Misc. Monetary Documents: (War Bonds, Liberty Bonds, Food Stamps, IOUs) Total Value: Unknown Total Due To Fluctuating Societal Changes

VAULT 713 (Harry James Potter Trust Vault)

Total Monetary Fortune: 19,345 Galleons

Note: Vault Filled To Total of 25,000 Galleons Transferred from Vault 687 on 31 July Each Year Between 1981 and 1998

Harry would have been amazed by the total amount of money, if he hadn’t noticed one important tidbit in the Trust Vault information.

“My School Supplies were nowhere near costing five-thousand Galleons,” Harry said, “I’m going to guess either Dumbledore, Mrs. Weasley, or both, stole from my Vault, and it amounted to about five-thousand Galleons.”

“That will be discovered during the audits, Lord Potter,” Ragnok promised.

Harry nodded, then continued reading. Vault 688, the neighboring Vault to the one which held Monetary Possessions, held Material and Physical Possessions. This included everything from every type of furniture, trunks, portraits and paintings and a great number of books. There was a list of the books, and Harry didn’t recognize most of those titles. There were also a couple of jewelry boxes, with a list of several pieces of jewelry. Harry smiled, as he realized he might have just discovered what he would give Hermione for Christmas. However, he was most interested in what was called a Hope Chest.

“I assume most of the furniture from the house on Godric’s Hollow is in Vault 688?” Harry asked.

“That which was salvageable, yes,” Ragnok said. “The day after your parents died, I had trusted Goblins go to the House and remove all salvageable items from there, and bring them to Vault 688.”

“Do you know what this Hope Chest is, Keeper Ragnok?” Harry asked.

“I hoped you might ask that, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “The chest once belonged to your mother – it was her school trunk, as I understand – five compartments in total, the last of which grew in size to become a wardrobe. Your parents mentioned this chest explicitly. They said they placed several items inside meant for you, and had also made a list of items that were supposed to be placed in it, if they died. For example, if you continue down the list there, you will find various properties you own. In the Chest, there are various Permanent Portkeys keyed to the Lord Potter ring, that will teleport you and anyone you allow, who uses the Portkey, to the property in question. There are also letters from your parents, I believe. And several other items they placed inside it. Mementos would be the best definition for those items.

“If you do not wish to visit your Vault before you leave today. I can bring the Hope Chest here. I was told you should take it as soon as you were allowed entrance into the Vault.”

“We still need to visit the Daily Prophet Headquarters, Lord Potter,” McGonagall said. “Then you still have your Healer Appointment to keep in mind after this meeting.”
“I will visit the Vault another day,” Harry said, “Can I get a copy of this list of my physical possessions in case I want my house-elf to get something from the vault later? Speaking of, I can have my house-elf get my Hope Chest later.”

Ragnok nodded once and snapped his fingers. A new piece of parchment appeared with the list of physical properties in Vault 688. Harry thanked Ragnok then returned to peruse the parchment.

**Properties:**

- **Potter Manor** – Northampton, England
- **Potter Cottage** – Godric’s Hollow, England
- **Beach Vacation House** – La Rochelle, France
- **Chateau Potter** – Nice, France
- **Isle Potter: Caribbean Ocean** – Otherwise Unplottable
- **Dursley Residence** -- Number 4, Privet Drive, Surrey, England

Harry scowled. “I own my relatives’ house?!”

“I believe your mother loaned the house to your Aunt as a wedding gift, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said. “I say loan, because Lady Potter emphasized that you would be able to remove them from the premises if you wished.”

Harry grinned. “I have an idea.”

“Harry,” Hermione said, “You shouldn’t kick them out. You would feel bad later. They have nowhere else to go, do they?”

“I’m giving them the means to find a place to go,” Harry said, “Keeper Ragnok, if you can proceed with my wishes, please tell me. You see, I want to give the Dursleys what amounts to 200,000 Euros. I don’t care what that amounts to in Galleons. I should be able to afford it. I am only willing to give them this money, if they will move out of the house before New Year’s Day. They are to move out of the house, and leave the country. Inform them that they are allowed to live in North America, South America, Australia, China, Japan or Russia, as long as they live a long distance away from Great Britain. Somewhere wizards – like Dumbledore – will never find them. If you can, I want you to write a Contract making them do exactly all of this. They will not refuse with the amount of money they are about to receive. But if they do, Keeper Ragnok, I want you to take the house right out from under them. Wait, can you do that literally?”

Hermione rolled her eyes at her boyfriend’s antics, but a small smile formed across her lips.

“If it comes to it, we will do exactly that, Lord Potter,” Ragnok grinned. “Two-hundred thousand Euros is a fair amount. You can certainly afford it.”

“Even so!” McGonagall huffed, “It is a lot of money! Especially for those… people. Worst Muggles imaginable, indeed.”

“It certainly is,” Hermione sniffed. “And they certainly are.”

“I do not care,” Harry said, “As long as it makes the Dursleys leave Great Britain and never return. As long as Dumbledore cannot make me return there. I now have these properties I can live in or spend a holiday in. This summer I’ll be living in Potter Manor. I won’t be going back to the Dursleys. After they leave, I will decide what to do with the house.”
McGonagall sighed and nodded. “I suppose you do make a good argument, Lord Potter.”

“I can see your reasons for it, Harry,” Hermione said. “It just seems… extreme.”

“I don’t care -- especially if it means I’ll never see them again,” Harry said, shrugging.

“It will be done, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “I will make the Contract and give you a copy of it as soon as possible, so that you may look it over. Once you approve, I will have one of our human representatives meet with your relatives, the Dursleys, to present the contract.”

Harry smiled. Now that he could think straight again, he was grinning at those residential properties he owned. Here were the places he and Hermione could escape to if they had to leave Great Britain. Isle Potter sounded the most promising. An unplottable private island? Nobody would be able to find them!

With this in mind, he then looked back at the parchment. He raised an eyebrow as he found he owned a percentage of several businesses in Diagon and Knockturn Alleys, and in Hogsmeade. He grinned when he found he owned 35% of the Daily Prophet and its sister magazines, including Witch Weekly. That would certainly go a long way. He owned 25% of a magazine known as the Quibbler, which was apparently owned by the father of Luna Lovegood. He owned 20% of the Leaky Cauldron, and the Three Broomsticks, and was on a list of VIPs to use the VIP Rooms in each location free of charge, as long as he made reservations three days in advance. That was interesting, and very useful.

He raised an eyebrow when he found he outright owned Sleakeasy company, and had heavy partnership in various apothecaries and other Potions companies. When he asked Ragnok about this, he discovered his great grandfather, Fleamont Potter, founded Sleakeasy. The Potters were well-invested in Potion businesses and Apothecaries. Harry smirked when he realized Snape had likely contributed to the massive fortune in Galleons he owned. He’d have to figure out a way to let the sour Professor know.

He also found he had several large shares in various Muggle stocks around the world, and several in the New York Stock Exchange. He grinned. Uncle Vernon had followed the various Stock Exchanges around the world, and Harry had learned a lot from him complaining or bragging about the Stock Market. So he knew a bit about what all of this was.

“Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “If you will, please review the list of Stock Market shares I own. If you, or another Goblin here at Gringotts, can give me advice on each stock I have shares in, and which I should keep, and which I should sell, please let me know. In addition, I would like to get advice on which newer companies I could invest in. Both for the Stock Market, and any new companies or businesses that have come into the wizarding world.”

“I will be happy to do all of this, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “I do not know how long it will take, but I will give you a report of all my findings.”

“Thank you, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said. “I believe I am finished with this. I look forward to all results of auditing and other reports you will have for me.”

“I do too, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “I will be most interesting.”

“Is there anything else I should know?” Harry asked, “things which aren’t listed in here?”
“Yes,” Ragnok said, “Several families – highborn and lowborn both -- owe monetary debts and
loans that have remained static due to the fact that there hasn’t been a Lord Potter available until
now. These debts and loans are now no longer frozen. I will put together a report on all of these.
Then you can do whatever you want with it. You can forgive the debts and loans – which means
you won’t order them to pay what they owe you. You can order all debts and loans to be paid. You
can do a mixture of both, after you figure out who owes you money. My advice, Lord Potter? Figure
out who your enemies are, and use this to put a big dent in their fortunes – whether massive or not.”

Harry grinned. “I will certainly consider that option, Keeper Ragnok. I could also ask you to give
letters to certain families – families of students at Hogwarts – and let them know they owe debts and
loans to me. What do you bet I’ll soon have those Heirs and Heiresses flocking to me to apologize
for whatever crimes they’ve committed against me?”

Ragnok cackled, Hermione actually seemed to approve of the plan, and McGonagall looked
thoughtful.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you were part-Goblin, Lord Potter!” Ragnok barked, “And that is the
highest compliment I could give you! If this is what you wish, I will do exactly that!”

“I am honored, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “I will make these decisions when the time comes. I
also have one more request.”

“I’m listening, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said.

“I assume you – or someone else here at Gringotts – are going to write to Albus Dumbledore
concerning my Vaults,” Harry said, “Regarding the thefts?”

“I will indeed,” Ragnok said, “Him and Molly Weasley. I am also looking forward to the possibility
– nay – probability of giving them the news that they are banned from these premises. Why do you
ask?”

“Could you put this off as long as possible?” Harry asked, “At least for Albus Dumbledore. What I
am asking is – could you put it off until there comes a time when I need him away from Hogwarts? If
it doesn’t by the end of the year, you’re free to do whatever you want with him. If I can get this to
happen, I will send you a letter with my house-elf.”

Ragnok stared at Harry for thirty seconds, and then he nodded. “I will do this, Lord Potter. But only
because this meeting has been very entertaining. It is wonderful to have a Potter across the table from
me again.”

“I am honored, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “I look forward to future meetings. They should be
most… prosperous.”

“Of course they will be!” Ragnok barked, “What a joy this meeting has been. I do believe we are
now finished, aside from your appointments with our trusted Healers.”

“Lord Potter, McGonagall said. “I would advise you to have your House-Elf take the copies of the
documents back to the Castle.”

Harry agreed and called Dobby. Dobby was happy to take the documents back to Harry’s Private
Quarters.
“If you will, I will now escort you to the Hospital Wing,” Ragnok said, after Dobby left, “Lady McGonagall, only the patients and the Healers are allowed in each respective room. You are, of course, welcome to wait for your students. It won’t take long, I promise you. You see, the rooms are behind Time Containment Runes. However long it takes for them inside the Hospital rooms, only ten minutes will pass outside the rooms.”

Hermione’s eyes widened at the pure possibilities of such a thing. McGonagall agreed to wait in the Hospital Wing for her students. Three humans and one Goblin stood, and Ragnok led them out of the room.

The journey to the Hospital Wing took five minutes. Five minutes of walking through narrow cavern-like corridors, and past Goblins who either looked at the humans curiously, or ignored them outright. Harry noticed there were no female or children amongst the Goblins that they encountered.

Soon enough, they reached the Hospital Wing, where they found two Goblins waiting for them. Harry figured Ragnok must have contacted them in some way, warning the Healers of their arrival.

“Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger, Lady McGonagall,” Ragnok said, “These are Healers Heartrod and Bulkbones, two of Gringotts most celebrated Healers, for the treatment amongst both Goblins and humans. Healer Heartrod will be your Healer, Lord Potter, and Healer Bulkbones will be yours, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Pardon me, I must address the Healers.”

Harry, Hermione and McGonagall waited as Ragnok and the Healers spoke in Gobbledygook for over two minutes. At one point, Ragnok had given the two Healers copies of the Blood Test reports Harry and Hermione had read earlier. At another point, Heartrod looked from Ragnok to Harry, then made a scowl and a grunt. Ragnok said something in harsh Gobbledygook, and Heartrod sighed gutturally, then replied in the Goblin language. The conversation went on for another minute, before Ragnok turned back to the humans.

“May I ask what that was about, Keeper Ragnok?” McGonagall asked, “Forgive me, but Healer Heartrod didn’t look very happy with Lord Potter.”

“Child abuse is heavily frowned upon, even amongst Goblins, Lady McGonagall,” Ragnok said, “Healer Heartrod was not happy with what he read in Lord Potter’s report, regarding badly healed bones and history of malnutrition.”

Healer Heartrod grunted, and Ragnok glared at the Healer, who cowed.

“Regardless, I promise Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger will receive the best service Gringotts can offer,” Ragnok said, “No matter how long they remain inside these rooms, they will return in ten minutes real-time. The two of you may now go into the respective rooms.”

Harry and Hermione exchanged heartwarming smiles – the most they were willing to do on Goblin soil, due to McGonagall’s early warning of no public displays of affection – and followed their respective Healer into the rooms.

(Meanwhile)

Keeper Ragnok the Sixth sighed as he turned to Lady McGonagall.
“Lady McGonagall,” he said, “Due to the various Blocks and health issues found on Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger, they may return a changed person. There was evidence of past Obliviations in their reports. They may come out of the rooms angry about whatever they remember.”

“Yes, that is probably likely,” Lady McGonagall muttered. “I also noticed Lord Potter is a Metamorphmagus, which astounds me! I’ve only known one before. She used to be a student in Hogwarts, and was actually in her seventh year during Lord Potter’s first year.”

“Ah yes, Nymphadora Tonks,” Ragnok said, “Interesting first name. We tried to hire her to work here at Gringotts, but she was dead-set on joining your Aurors.”

“Yes, her Metamorphmagus abilities do give her a lot of opportunities,” Lady McGonagall said. “Will Lord Potter’s full abilities be completely unlocked?”

“If that is what was blocked, then yes, it will be,” Ragnok said, “I would make sure Lord Potter is told all about what he can do with his new talents.”

“Yes, I will be sure to make that happen,” Lady McGonagall said.

“Is there anything we at Gringotts can do for you, Lady McGonagall?” Ragnok asked, “Perhaps you may feel the need to use our Healing Services. Forgive me, if my question was rude.”

Lady McGonagall considered this for a moment, before she shook her head. “Not at the moment, Keeper Ragnok. I cannot risk any changes in my behavior around Albus Dumbledore right now. Not especially with what has been revealed concerning Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

“Of course,” Ragnok said.

“There was one thing I know was discussed between the Lord and Heiress as a possibility,” Lady McGonagall said. “A possible Betrothal Contract for the pair of them. They might believe they are too young for such a thing at this moment. But I didn’t want to tell them…”

“That once it is discovered Miss Granger is now an Heiress of a once-dead House,” Ragnok said, “Some pureblood might try to take advantage of it.”

“Right,” Lady McGonagall said.

“I tell you what,” Ragnok said, “I will keep a few ears open – mine and others – around the Pureblood circle and the Ministry itself, and decide if it would be necessary to suggest a Betrothal Contract for the pair. If I feel it becomes a necessity, I will contact Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger and give them my concerns.”

“I will keep an eye on Hogwarts for the same thing,” Lady McGonagall said. “I do believe that is all I have.”

“Thank you for bringing the Lord and Heiress into Gringotts this morning,” Ragnok said, “I know how difficult it is to get them out of Hogwarts under Dumbledore’s eyes – especially Lord Potter.”

Lady McGonagall let out a quiet snort. Ragnok allowed a chuckle, as he waved her farewell and headed off back to his offices. He sighed deeply to himself, and asked the Elders above to forgive
him for what he had done a few minutes ago.

The conversation between him and Heartrod was a lot more dramatic then he had informed Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger, and Lady McGonagall of. Upon Lord Potter’s arrival into the Hospital Wing, Heartrod had almost immediately detected what Ragnok had detected when Lord Potter arrived.

Lord Potter had a Horcrux in his scar. The darkest, blackest, most foul magic known to magical kind. Ragnok had quickly deduced the dark magic had been there ever since that fateful Halloween in which the previous Lord Potter and his wife had perished, and the new Lord Potter was lucky to survive, after an attack by Voldemort, which ended in the monster’s disappearance – and rumored death.

But Ragnok and other Goblins knew Voldemort wasn’t dead. The light in Tom Marvolo Riddle’s life crystal had grown dim, but it had never completely extinguished. Now Ragnok knew why.

That devil had made Horcruxes! Probably more than one! Which was why Ragnok had done two things.

The first was that he had removed the information about the Horcrux from Lord Potter’s Blood Test Results, whilst the new Lord was distracted with his Inheritance Test. He couldn’t have Lord Potter or Lady McGonagall discover this just yet. Because they would want it removed, and Ragnok could not risk that yet. If the Horcrux was removed, there was a possibility Riddle would discover this, and therefore move to collect the other probable Horcruxes that existed. No, Riddle needed to believe those Horcruxes were protected, that Riddle was the only one who knew about them.

Which was why he had argued with Heartrod. He couldn’t let the Healer remove the Horcrux from Lord Potter’s scar, nor could he allow Heartrod inform Lord Potter of it. Heartrod, like all Healers, was angry about that. ‘Do No Harm’ – all Healers around the world held the same belief. Keeping the Horcrux in Lord Potter’s scar was the equivalent of doing harm. Ragnok had threatened to take Heartrod to his father, if the Healer had disobeyed him over this. Heartrod got the message:

“Betray me, and lose your head. Not only your head, but the heads of your family too.”

Ragnok sighed and growled gutturally, hoping Lord Potter would forgive him. He would begin the audit on the Potter Vaults as soon as he returned to his office. He would then make sure all of Lord Potter’s other requests were done. Hopefully completing these tasks would calm Lord Potter’s ire, when Ragnok would finally tell him the truth about his scar.

Or he might have to inform his son – and Seventh of his name – that he was going to get a promotion sooner than was expected.

(A few minutes later…)

Lord Harry James Potter had murder on his mind as he stepped out of the Hospital Room. Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape and Ron, Ginny and Molly Weasley were going to die. They would be slow, and painful and the bastards wouldn’t see it coming, but it would happen.

At one point in the two-hour examination – though it was only ten minutes in real-time --Healer Heartrod warned Harry that he was about to fix the Obliviations, and return all the memories Harry
had lost over the years.

That was an understatement.

There were several memories – most of which happened during those ten years on Privet Drive before Harry discovered he was a wizard – which had come back. Memories of severe beatings, a few of which could have killed him if his magic hadn’t kept him alive. The beatings were so bad, Albus Dumbledore had been forced to go to #4 Privet Drive and take Harry to the Hogwarts Hospital Wing for treatment. Harry remembered wondering why the nice old lady in a nurse’s outfit had a dizzy expression in her eyes as she helped him heal. When he had healed, Dumbledore had returned him to Privet Drive and Obliviated him of the abuse, and the visits to Hogwarts. This happened more than once.

Albus Dumbledore had visited more than just to rescue Harry – temporarily – from the abuse. Harry’s Metamorphmagus Talents had shown themselves once, but it was a memorable event. He distinctly remembered Aunt Petunia trying to hit him once with an iron skillet. His magic, anticipating the injury, had Morphed his entire body to form stone-like armor across his entire form. The bones in Petunia’s arm had shattered from the impact of the pan hitting Harry’s stone-armored body. Vernon had then come in, saw his wife on the ground reeling in pain with ‘the freak’ standing over her. He had taken a knife from the kitchen drawer, and threw at straight at Harry. The knife rebound, right into Vernon’s chest.

Albus Dumbledore had appeared with the nurse – Madam Pomfrey – again to find a stone-armored Harry, Vernon with a gruesome knife injury and Petunia with a broken arm. The results of this was Harry’s Metamorphmagus talents mostly bound – aside from growing his hair back if his Aunt cut it mostly off – and his memory of the event Obliviated. Madam Pomfrey had healed Vernon and Petunia, then Dumbledore Obliviated Harry’s relatives, and modified their memories of the event.

That event was also the last time Vernon and Petunia had become physical with Harry, aside from those times Vernon threw him bodily into the cupboard under the stairs. Dudley was still allowed his Harry Hunting and ‘rough-housing’.

After that event, Dumbledore didn’t interfere anymore at Privet Drive – at least before Harry went to Hogwarts. For example, the summer before Harry’s third year. The time between Harry escaping the Dursleys’ house and him summoning the Knight Bus was a lot longer than Harry had remembered. Simply because Harry hadn’t just met Padfoot that night. He met Sirius Black. Sirius had told Harry everything! Sirius had confessed that he was Harry’s godfather, that he was innocent of everything, that Ron Weasley’s rat was Wormtail, the real traitor. Sirius had told Harry what his plan was – to go to Hogwarts and find Wormtail.

Of course, after Sirius had left, fearing someone like Dumbledore would come by, Harry summoned the Knight Bus. And who was on the bus waiting for him, but Albus Dumbledore? Albus had used Legilimency on him, found out everything that happened between him and Sirius, then Obliviated him of it, before fleeing the bus with Fawkes.

And then there was what happened at Hogwarts. Yes, Dumbledore was going to pay. Not only him, but also Ron, Ginny and Molly Weasley. And Snape!

Harry wasn’t the only one who looked pissed. Hermione’s face was red with anger. But she wasn’t crying.

“My little Lions,” McGonagall said, “What happened? Was it something you discovered from the
“I wasn’t supposed to be in that bathroom the night the Troll attacked,” Hermione said. “I was on my way to my dormitory after Ronald insulted me. I was going to hide there all day. I was at the Fat Lady, ready to give her the password, but for some reason she was frozen. Dumbledore walked toward me, and I tried to tell him something was wrong with the Fat Lady – and he placed me under the Imperius Curse! Then he told me to go to that specific bathroom, and stay there until the Troll arrived due to the scent of Troll Lure! He knew Quirrell’s plan! He wanted the troll to kill me! And there was something else…”

“Ron Weasley didn’t go with me to rescue you that night,” Harry said, “Dumbledore modified our memories to make us believe Ron was there with me to rescue Hermione. In reality, Ron refused and told me to not worry about it. He said the troll was in the dungeons with those ‘slimy snakes’. That ‘the know-it-all bookworm’ would be fine. I told him I was going to find Hermione anyway. He refused to come with me. It was me who used Wingardium Leviosa to make the Club levitate. Only I didn’t knock out the troll.”

“You killed it, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “Dumbledore didn’t seem to like that.”

“Why weren’t you Obliviated of that, Professor?” Hermione asked.

“He had tried to Obliviate me earlier that year so I was especially wary of him,” McGonagall said. “He didn’t want me to invite you on the Quidditch Team, Harry. He tried to make me forget about the whole thing. I was able to protect myself from that. So I was quite wary of that. Albus didn’t dare do anything more to me after that, for several months at least. No, he simply told me to leave you two alone. To not speak of the incident to you. I agreed, unfortunately.”

“In reality, Ron showed up before you arrived, Professor, but after I saved Hermione,” Harry said, “On Dumbledore’s orders, I believe, so you would believe he helped us. That was a big fat lie. Dumbledore was hidden under my Invisibility Cloak during the entire scene. I could remember feeling Compulsion Charms on me, making me feel Ron was trustworthy, and that he helped me save Hermione in the end.”

“I remember feeling that too,” Hermione said, nodding.

“Dumbledore did this,” Harry said, “Because originally, I didn’t want to be his friend anymore. He was a bully to Hermione. I had finally realized what he was. There were other times when a similar thing happened. When Ron went overboard with his bullying. Dumbledore couldn’t have that. He needed me to trust Ron. I remember him telling me that exactly, before Obliviating me and modifying my memories of that night.”

Hermione nodded, the sniffled. “When I was petrified, he nearly… he tried to touch my body before Madam Pomfrey caught him.”

“Merciful Merlin!” McGonagall muttered; she sighed and groaned. “Mr. Potter, do calm down!”

Harry blinked. “What?”

“Your hair was turning all shades of colors, Harry,” Hermione said.
“Your newly unbound Metamorphmagus abilities, Lord Potter,” McGonagall said, “You need to learn how to control your emotions. Your unblocked talents of Natural Occlumens should help you. But if you become too angry or emotional, your Metamorph talents will show themselves. Don’t worry, I’ll try to figure out how to help you, both with your Occlumency and Metamorph talents. But you need to be cautious, Lord Potter. If Dumbledore discovers this, he’ll wonder why your abilities have returned.”

Harry inhaled and exhaled, and his hair returned to normal. ‘I’ll be careful, ma’am.’

“Yes, please do so,” McGonagall said with a sigh. “We’ll talk more about all of this later. We shouldn’t be discussing this here. The Goblins wouldn’t appreciate it. We need to go to the Daily Prophet, then get back to Hogwarts. Are you two still up to talking to Rita Skeeter?”

“We are,” Harry said.

“It was originally why we were coming here after all,” Hermione said, “We need to talk to Rita Skeeter about the Second Task.”

"Very well,” McGonagall said. “Let’s be off then.”

Harry and Hermione followed McGonagall as they journeyed back to the Atrium of Gringotts. It had certainly been a very long – longer in Harry and Hermione’s point-of-view – and a very interesting visit!

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about how dark and tense that last scene was. But it was necessary.

Long Author’s Note Ahead (I need to explain a lot about this chapter):

There will probably be more recovered memories discussed. However, one of the moments that were not modified at all, was Harry’s original meeting with the Weasleys. It really happened. You’ll find out why in a future chapter.

I am not sure whether I’ll have Tonks help Harry with his Metamorph abilities or not. I’ve done that in a couple of stories now, and it seems repetitive. I have other ideas for Harry to control it. We’ll see what happens.

So, it will get interesting in the next several chapters – and in-story days as Harry and Hermione try to figure out their now unlocked abilities – as well as Hermione’s fully unbound core, and Harry’s core with only one binding on it.

At first, I only had the monetary fortune value at 5 Million Galleons, and gems and jewels at 2 Million. Then I decided to add 30 Million Galleons on the monetary value, and 10 Million more for the gems and jewels. Not too excessive, but better.

So two controversial topics – aside from that whole last scene – in this chapter. Ragnok hiding the Horcrux information form Harry, and Harry giving money to the Dursleys to make them leave Great Britain. Both of these were done for important reasons pertaining to the future of the story. I can already predict complaints about the Dursleys
– “They could have killed Harry several times, and he’s giving them a small fortune?!”
Yes, he is. He just wants to be free of them. He wants them to leave, so he doesn’t have
to go back to their house. It is the only way to get away from them. Dumbledore would
“fix” things if Harry tried to put them in prison. This is the best idea for them.

Originally, in my plans, Ron hadn’t shown up at all during the Troll incident, but then I
remember McGonagall mentioning him during the rant about that Halloween. Then
when I had her say she hadn’t been Obliviated of that Halloween event, I needed to
figure out how to put Ron in the scene. So he (and Dumbledore under the cloak)
showed up before McGonagall, and the others showed up.

Next Chapter: The meeting with Rita Skeeter!
A Daily Prophet Discussion

Chapter Notes

Author’s Note: I like how some of my readers believe Dumbledore is going to be so easily cowed and defeated after everything that is soon going to be piled on him. It is pretty funny. It makes writing this story so much better! There is a reason Albus Dumbledore is the most powerful wizard in Great Britain. The majority of the sheep believes, as the Leader of the Light, he can do no evil. Eyes will be opened, of course. But will that stop Albus Dumbledore? No… no, it won’t.

There is a reason Harry wanted the Dursleys far away from England, and not simply in jail. Far away from England, Dumbledore cannot get them so easily. Do you honestly think Dumbledore will care about Harry’s Emancipation when such a thing means he would lose control over him? Why do you think he didn’t tell Harry he was Emancipated after the Goblet of Fire spat his name out?

There is also a reason Harry, Hermione and McGonagall aren’t going to go after Dumbledore immediately with everything they have. They do not want to underestimate him. They need to be prepared to fight any damage control he attempts once the information gets out. They want to be several steps ahead of him. They will soon discuss all of this in-story, of course. Their next Salvos against Dumbledore actually begins in this chapter.

If you’ve read “The Ilvermorny Champion”, you’ll recognize certain parts of this chapter when it comes to the first appearance of the Daily Prophet Headquarters.

Harry may seem… out-of-character in parts of this chapter. That is simply the results of the Motivational Inhibitors being removed from his person. He has more Willpower, and more courage to act in certain ways with certain people.

Warning: Rita Skeeter. It isn’t really Rita Skeeter bashing. It is simply Rita Skeeter. That’s all I’ll say about that!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

Harry and Hermione followed Professor McGonagall as they walked through Diagon Alley toward their next destination. However, the journey took an unexpected turn, when Professor McGonagall led them to a small alley in between a couple of shops. The Lioness of Gryffindor turned to the young pair, removed her wand from her cloak, and waved it around.

“Notice-Me-Not Charm,” she explained to her curious Lions, “We have things to discuss before we meet with Miss Skeeter. First, I must ask you: what should I address you two as from now on?”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. Hermione smiled, then cleared her throat.

“I think you better address us as if nothing had changed in Gringotts today, Professor,” Hermione
said. “At least, until we must reveal everything that happened today.”

“I agree,” Harry said.

“As do I,” McGonagall said, “I expected such a response. I will address you as Mr. Potter and Miss Granger respectively in class, and in public. I will be the only one who knows about your new titles. Those rings you now wear cannot be seen by anyone you do not wish to see them, until you summon them forth. Not even Headmaster Dumbledore, in all his boasting, can see them without you summoning those rings.”

“Well, that’s a relief!” Harry said; Hermione nodded in agreement with her boyfriend.

McGonagall smiled. “A lot of important information has revealed itself today. Should we discuss any of it with Rita Skeeter?”

Hermione glanced at Harry with a look that plainly said ‘it is up to you’. Harry sighed and thought about his answer to this question. After several moments, he looked at his girlfriend and the Lioness of Gryffindor with a mischievous grin that reminded the Hogwarts Professor of another Potter whom she had seen with that very same expression several times.

“I don’t think we outright reveal anything,” Harry said, “We can have Miss Skeeter imply one bit of information, but not reveal that we know about it.”

He further explained what he meant with that, then he continued. “The rest of the information we can hold hostage. Miss Skeeter is known to slander anybody she wants -- witch, wizard or Squib. We trade immunity of several names from her slanderous quill in return for a promise that we will give her several pieces of information over time in which she can write and publish several articles with.”

McGonagall stared at Harry for several moments, before a smirk crossed her lips.

“That, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “is an excellent idea! Even this Lioness of Gryffindor can appreciate a Slytherin idea from time to time. That idea was all Slytherin. What do you think, Miss Granger?”

“Who do we want to ask immunity for?” Hermione asked her boyfriend, curiously.

Harry listed several names, including those he knew were on the Great Alliance. Hermione then suggested a few names like their former dorm-mates – aside from Ron, of course! – and the Gryffindor Quidditch team and Lee Jordan.

When asked if she wanted any of the Professors included, McGonagall suggested Professors Flitwick and Sprout, as well as Aurora Sinistra, Bathsheba Babbling, and Septima Vector, all of whom were her close friends at Hogwarts.

“This is a lot of names, Harry,” Hermione said, “Can we promise enough information in the future to make the deal worth it?”

“It will work, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Rita Skeeter will not be able to resist temptation of what the Boy-Who-Lived might be able to give her in the future. Things she will not have to outright investigate. Things that will be freely given to her.”

“I hope you’re right,” Hermione said.
“So we’ve decided what to discuss with Miss Skeeter?” McGonagall asked, “The Second Task, along with the other idea, followed by making the deal? That is all?”

“No plan survives first contact with the enemy, Professor,” Hermione said, “So we must be prepared for the unexpected. Other than that, I’m satisfied.”

“Me too,” Harry said.

“We shall expect the unexpected then,” McGonagall said; she dropped the Notice-Me-Not Charm, “Come on, students.”

Harry and Hermione followed McGonagall further through the Alley, until they reached their destination.

The Daily Prophet Headquarters was easily one of the most noticeable buildings, if you judged by the outer décor. Only Gringotts rivaled in that category. The “Daily Prophet” logo appeared at least four different times on the building’s face, including on its front windows, and above the doorway, as well as higher up along the wall.

The most surprising décor on the front of the building – in Harry's opinion – was the “news ticker” over the large front windows, which had news headlines moving horizontally before apparently disappearing into thin air. The British wizarding world was so old-fashioned and outdated, that this “technology” was quite advanced. The ticker mostly showed off either headlines of the recent edition of the newspaper, or important tidbits in the articles. Harry grimaced as he saw “Boy-Who-Loved! Harry Potter No Longer Single!” and “Azkaban Fugitive Sirius Black Still At Large!” appear across the ticker.

Harry and Hermione stepped inside as Professor McGonagall followed them. The Entrance/Reception Room of the Daily Prophet Headquarters was rather small and simple, and resembled a waiting room at a doctor's office. There were several chairs sitting against walls nearest the front door. Vendors were selling editions of the Daily Prophet, Witch Weekly, and Teen Witch Weekly.

On the opposite side of the room, there was a reception desk, with a witch – obviously the receptionist – sitting there, reading the newest edition of Witch Weekly, and smacking her lips, as she chewed on some Drooble's Best Blowing Gum. Behind the desk, there was a door with the words “Barnabus J. Cuffe – Editor-In-Chief, The Daily Prophet” etched onto a golden plaque. There were also two other doors on the left and right side of the room.

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat. “We wish to speak to Rita Skeeter.”

The receptionist, young enough that she couldn't have been out of Hogwarts for very long, blew a bubble and popped it. She seemed familiar to Harry, but he couldn’t remember who she was. Obviously he had seen her in Hogwarts sometime over his first three years there.

“Do you have an appointment?” she asked, in a bored monotone voice – she turned a page of the magazine, not even bothering to look up at Professor McGonagall.

“Does the Boy-Who-Lived need one?” Harry asked, bluntly.

The receptionist choked on her gum, and jumped as she looked up from her magazine. Her eyes
searched until she found Harry, and a deep blush formed across her cheeks as her eyes went from his face upwards to his scar. She gave him a saucy grin, then jumped when McGonagall cleared her throat.

“Professor McGonagall!” she said, “My apologies, I did not see you there.”

“Apolgy accepted, Miss Clearwater,” McGonagall said. “I am surprised to see last year’s Head Girl working here as a receptionist.”

Harry raised his eyebrows, as he finally recognized Penelope Clearwater, one of the Petrification victims – along with Hermione -- during the Chamber of Secrets fiasco. Hermione was frowning as she looked at Penelope. Obviously the girl recognized her. Perhaps, he wondered, seeing her had brought up bad memories?

“Have to start from the bottom before I can become a journalist, Professor,” Penelope said, with a glum, yet determined, tone; she cleared her throat, “Right. Rita Skeeter. Follow me, please.”

Penelope stood, and the three new arrivals followed the former Ravenclaw Head Girl as she walked toward the leftmost side of the room. She led them through a doorway and into a long, narrow corridor. There were several doors on either side of the corridor. Penelope led them halfway down the hallway, until they reached a specific door. A brass plaque on the door read “Rita Skeeter, Reporter/Journalist, Daily Prophet”.

Penelope knocked on the door, then opened it.

“I’m busy, Pennywise!” Rita Skeeter’s familiar voice barked, “What do you want?”

Harry rolled his eyes at the obvious foul-up of Penelope’s name.

“Do you have time to meet with Harry Potter and Professor Minerva McGonagall, Miss Skeeter?” Penelope asked.

“Harry Potter? He’s here? To see me?” Rita asked, her voice transforming into a sugar-sweet tone, “What are you waiting for, then?! Invite him in, girl!”

Penelope turned back to Harry and blushed. Whether it was because of him, or because she was embarrassed at Rita’s behavior toward her, he didn’t know. She waved a hand toward the room. Harry thanked the former Ravenclaw, then led Hermione and Professor McGonagall inside.

Harry stepped into an extravagantly-looking office. Near the back of the room, a magnificent mahogany desk stood, with Rita Skeeter, dressed in blinding purple and green robes of some sort, beaming at the Boy-Who-Lived. The walls were adorned with what appeared to be articles of past Daily Prophets – all of which were obviously written by Rita herself -- as well as moving pictures all of which had Rita with several people who were obviously celebrities and VIPs in Wizarding Great Britain. Behind Rita’s desk, there were shelves filled with trophies, medals and awards.

“Harry Potter, welcome to my wonderful office, my home away from my lovely home,” Rita said, then she looked at the other guests. “And Professor McGonagall, a delight. And… oh, well, Pennywise did not announce you, Miss Granger! An unfortunate mistake of hers. Good help is so hard to find these days, you know! Wonderful to see the Boy-Who-Lived here, in person, together with his new love interest! Harmony, was it?”
“Hermione,” Hermione said, then spelled out her name, and enunciated it, “Her-my-oh-knee.”

“Is it?” Rita said, in a less-than-interested tone, “Forgive me. I must have heard wrong and put Harmony in my recent article. Tell me, loves, did you enjoy my article about the pair of you?”

Professor McGonagall cleared her throat. “I do not believe this is the time for gossip, Miss Skeeter. We are here for a very important and very serious reason.”

Rita’s smile vanished from her face as her lips narrowed. “Of course, Professor. Where are my manners?! Sit down, sit down!”

She waved her wand and a third plushy, comfortable-looking chair appeared next to the two that were already sitting on the closest side of the desk. As they did in Gringotts, Harry sat in the center, with Hermione and McGonagall sitting on either side of him.

“A little bird informed me that they witnessed the three of you stepping into Gringotts, and did not leave until a few minutes ago,” Rita said. “You were in there for a very long time. Did something important happen? Intriguing events? Something you wish to let me inform my lovely readers about?”

“In the future, perhaps,” Harry said. “But not today. We have a couple of stories for you. One for tomorrow’s front page, the next for the following day, I think.”

“Mr. Potter. Harry,” Rita said, “May I call you, Harry? Unfortunately it is not me who decides whether my articles are front-page or not. If the article has a story that is more interesting, more intriguing, more… juicy… than any of the others that are in that day’s edition, then it is given front-page rights. But as these are stories given to me by the Boy-Who-Lived, I am sure I can get them to the front page. May I take notes? It is how I work, you see.”

“As long as you do not use a Quick-Quotes Quill, Miss Skeeter,” McGonagall said, “I’ve recently discovered they have a very faulty enchantment that makes them write things they did not actually hear being said.”

Rita frowned momentarily, before a smile lit up her face. “I’ve recently made that discovery too. Perhaps you remember an article last month, Harry, which said you were twelve years old instead of fourteen? It was the Quick-Quotes Quill’s mistake. Ever since then, I’ve been very cautious with them. And recently, I’ve gotten rid of the pesky things entirely!”

Harry wasn’t sure he believed her, but he needed her to cooperate with him, in order to get her to write a couple of articles he needed to be seen by the public. So he decided to ignore her lies, for now.

Rita reached for a jar on the corner of her desk, and picked up a rather boring-looking quill that didn’t seem to have any place being seen on a desk belonging to Rita Skeeter. She flipped the sheaf of parchment in front of her to a blank piece of parchment.

“You have my attention,” Rita said.

“Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “What would you say if I told you that certain Triwizard Tournament officials are planning to break laws during the Second Task?”

Rita’s smile turned into a wide grin. “I would say that would be front-page news, Harry. But for it to
be headlining news, I would need more details. You have my complete attention, Harry.”

“I’m sure you remember the Golden Egg that was retrieved by the Champions during the First Task,” Harry said.

“I do remember!” Rita replied, “I’ve heard rumors that the Eggs have a very important clue inside. Did you decipher the clue? Did you bring your Egg with you?”

“Unfortunately, the clue does not translate well above water, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “So I could not bring it today. You see, if you opened it above water, it would emit an ear-piercing, devastating shriek that would shatter the glass of, not only your jars on your desk, but the glass on your various awards here.” Then he grinned and added, “And any bottles of Ogden’s Old Firewhiskey you might have hidden around your… lovely office. It is simply known as the Mermaid’s Voice.”

Rita stared at Harry for a moment, before she let out a nervous giggle. “Then I suppose it is a good thing you did not bring your Golden Egg with you, Harry. Mermaid’s Voice, yes, I’ve heard of such a thing. If one is below water with a Mermaid, their Voice translates to the listener’s native language. So I assume you opened the egg underwater, and listened to the clue? What did the clue say, Harry?”

Harry cleared his throat. Due to his newly discovered Eidetic Memory, thanks to the Blocks and Bindings being removed, he could remember every word, and even the tone of the song. Though he did not sing the song, he repeated it line for line, in a similar tone to the song:

“Come seek us where our voices sound,  
We cannot sing above the ground,  
And while you’re searching ponder this:  
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,  
An hour long you’ll have to look,  
And to recover what we took,  
But past an hour — the prospect’s black,  
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back.”

Rita was writing furiously on the parchment in front of her as she copied down the song. Then she read through it a couple of times.

“This is… most intriguing, Harry,” Rita finally said.

“It is,” Harry said, “But there is something you might be missing, Miss Skeeter. One specific line in that song is mistranslated. It is that mistranslation which brings me here today.”

“I’m listening,” Rita said.

“‘The song says ‘we’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,’” Harry said, “But I believe it actually says ‘we’ve taken who you’ll sorely miss.’ What this means, Miss Skeeter, is that on the day of the Second Task – or the evening before – the Tournament officials are planning to kidnap innocent students and use them as hostages in the second task. Innocent students, Miss Skeeter. Not volunteers who have agreed to be a part of the Task.

“Victims, Miss Skeeter, who will be kidnapped from their beds and placed at the bottom of the Lake. Tied to stakes, these students will be put under stasis, only to awake when they reached the surface of the water. The Champions will have to rescue them. Innocent, unsuspecting students, who did not volunteer, Miss Skeeter.”
“I also happen to believe the Tournament officials will not get permission from their parents or guardians,” McGonagall said.

Rita looked at Harry, then Professor McGonagall. Then her eyes finally rested on Hermione.

“Miss Granger would be your hostage, I assume,” Rita said, “She will be *who you sorely miss*, won’t she, Harry? Someone you can’t live without. Someone who you believe, perhaps, could be the future Mrs. Potter?”

“Please be serious here, Miss Skeeter!” McGonagall barked, making Rita sit straight up in her chair. “Do you not understand what is happening here? The possibility of illegal kidnapping! Criminal behavior! The Champions are not meant to suspect that they would have to rescue actual people, Miss Skeeter?”

“Why do you believe that, Professor?” Rita asked.

“The clue says ‘what you’ll sorely miss’, Miss Skeeter,” McGonagall said. “Not ‘who’. Think, Miss Skeeter. Use your investigational skills here, young lady! I assume you have some.”

Rita frowned as she stared at the parchment in front of her. Then her eyebrows raised.

“Somebody doesn’t want the public to know about this,” she said. “They’re clearly hoping to get away with this criminal behavior. It could be plausible. When the plot is uncovered by the public, and the accusations start flying, somebody – not naming names, of course – would simply use an excuse. ‘The victims were perfectly safe, ladies and gentlemen. There was no risk of them being harmed.’ But who would be the scapegoat here? Who would be the Voice who would reassure the sheep?

”Albus Dumbledore? His Leader of the Light persona would be a reassuring Voice. But he wouldn’t want to deal the backlash, would he? Bartemius Crouch already has a dubious past. They might put him in front of the Killing Curse Squad, so to speak. Ludo Bagman is another possibility. The buffoon is the Voice of the Tournament! He would probably be told that, as the Voice, it would be up to him to reassure everyone, without even knowing he was being used to take the fall.”

It was interesting getting an insight into Rita Skeeter’s mind. Even Hermione was watching the journalist with curious eyes. Rita realized her audience was watching her. She shook her head, then grinned.

“Forgive me,” she said, “Sometimes I lose myself in a story. Especially when it is such a *juicy* story like this. Now, let’s see. Well, I assume the reason you are here, is because you want to stop this from ever taking place to begin with. Of course, the Boy-Who-Loved doesn’t want his – future wife, future mother of his children? – to be a victim of the Second Task. So you would do anything to prevent that. Such as coming to me, Rita Skeeter, Star Journalist of the *Daily Prophet*! You want me to be your Voice! You want me to get this story out there!”

“What I want, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “is for this information to get out there. For the Tournament officials to feel so trapped that they have to change their plans. That they’ll be forced to do away with using human hostages. I want them to have no choice but to have to use the actual clue in the Golden Egg and put ‘what’ not ‘who’ we will sorely miss. A material item, Miss Skeeter. An object. Not a person, in other words. I want the public to hamstring the Ministry of Magic and the Tournament officials. I want it to be encouraged – subtly or not – for the ‘sheep’, as you say, to
begin bleating, Miss Skeeter. I want those fools who have put this Tournament together to realize they cannot get away with this criminal behavior!”

Then he sighed. “Unfortunately – unfortunate for you – I cannot be named in this article.”

Rita frowned. “I beg your pardon?”

“Allus Dumbledore is watching me, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “No, I cannot give you more information than that at the current moment. Let’s just say Dumbledore has no idea his prized Boy-Who-Lived is currently away from his beloved castle. He has no idea I am meeting with you, Miss Skeeter.”

A wide smile crossed Rita’s face. “How very… naughty… of you, Harry. Very naughty, indeed! Fine. I will make it appear as if I got this information through my usual sleuthing. In return, I wish to… imply… that Miss Granger, here, would be one of those unfortunate victims of the Second Task – along with whoever is on the arms of the Champions at the Yule Ball.”

Harry looked at Hermione, who was biting her lip, taking on a thoughtful stance. Then she looked at him and simply nodded.

“That is acceptable with us,” Harry said. “She would very likely be the hostage if the original plans for the task were used. As long as you do not imply it was any of us here who gave you this information.”

“I can agree with that,” Rita said, “You said something about not giving me information at this current moment. Which means this is not the last meeting you are planning to have with me, I assume.”

“We will discuss that soon,” Harry said, “First I will give you a teasing sample of this future information. I promise you, this will be another story so juicy that you will want to wait one extra day to publish it, so it can be yet another headlining story.”

Rita grinned. “I’m listening, Harry.”

“I will tell you,” Harry said, “But first, you must promise me one thing, Miss Skeeter. I can already foresee you being able to read between the lines about what I’m going to tell you. You will not release any actual information about me until I give you permission to do so. The information I am going to give you – I want it written as a pure speculation piece, which will have a hint of truth in it.”

“One of my favorite types of articles, Harry!” Rita purred, “I am listening with open ears.”

“This is merely speculation, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “A theory. A plausible theory, but a theory, nevertheless. Before the Goblet of Fire was lit, before the Tournament was announced, several individuals sat down to discuss this interesting new event that would take place: the Triwizard Tournament. It was being discussed for several months.

“One of the topics was the age factor. How old did the interested students need to be, to be able to put their names in the Goblet of Fire? Seventeen was assumed. But it was never mentioned implicitly. What was probably said was this: only those students of age will be allowed to be qualified as Champions.”

A knowing smile lit up Rita’s face. She already knew where this was going, Harry suspected.
“Who are the main faces behind the Triwizard Tournament?” Harry asked, “Let’s stick with the names representing the home team, shall we? Great Britain itself. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards and world-famous ‘Leader of the Sheep!’ Bartemius Crouch and Ludo Bagman – The Chosen Bigwigs of the Ministry of Magic. Representatives of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, and the Wizengamot. The reason this trifecta is so important will be revealed soon.”

“Leader of the Sheep, Chosen Bigwigs,” Rita echoed, with a cackle, “Harry, you have a journalistic mind that I had never suspected! A good apprentice of mine in the future. Something to consider.”

“Something to consider,” Harry echoed, in faux-agreement.

Translation: Not in your dizziest daydreams, Miss Skeeter!

“31 October of this year,” Harry said, “Halloween, anniversary of my parents’ tragic sacrifice. I had another terrible, horrible, no good Halloween. The Goblet of Fire – that rude representative of Magic – spat my name out of the Goblet of Fire, and I was involuntarily tossed into a Tournament I never wanted to be a part of. Dumbledore, Crouch and Bagman blathered on about the impossibilities of me being the Fourth Champion of the Triwizard Tournament. They argued for – oh, what must have been nearly an hour, with Headmistress Maxime and Headmaster Karkaroff listened and added their own opinions. Of course, I cannot forget the comment of Miss Fleur Delacour, Beauxbatons Champion, calling me a ‘little boy’. At least I think that was what she said. French accents, you know. Terribly hard to understand. So it might have been lost in translation. But I digress!

“While all this blathering happened, one particular morsel of important information never came to light. Whether Dumbledore, Crouch and Bagman never knew about it, or simply did not care to voice it, that isn’t important. It did not come to light, and I didn’t know about it until very recently.

“Long story, short, Miss Skeeter. The Representatives of Hogwarts, the Ministry, the Wizengamot, and Magic herself – through the Goblet of Fire – all agreed on one thing. I was a Tournament Champion. Therefore, Miss Skeeter, I was old enough to take part in the dangerous events. Therefore, in accordance with previous agreements made, I, from that moment forward, was considered, of age.”

“You’re an Emancipated Minor, Harry,” Rita said.

“I’m a what?” Harry said, then waved a dismissive hand, “Sorry, inside joke. Yes, I am. Unfortunately, for you, Miss Skeeter, that information cannot be made public at this moment. It would stir a hornet’s nest I would be hard-pressed to overcome at the moment, and I would have to blame you for being the reason that news was revealed. I would be very upset, if that were the case!”

Rita huffed. “I suppose you want me to simply speculate that you are Emancipated, without outright saying it?”

“Yes,” Harry said.

“Miss Skeeter,” McGonagall said, “It is quite possible this is information Albus Dumbledore does not want Mr. Potter to know. Which is why he didn’t tell Mr. Potter about it on Halloween. I happen to believe once this information comes to light through one of your… interesting… articles, Dumbledore will simply call Mr. Potter to his office, and inform him that you, Miss Skeeter, are
simply trying to cause gossip and rumors, and that the information is not to be believed. He will tell Mr. Potter that there is no evidence he is Emancipated. That it is completely wrong. Then he will go to the Ministry to try to fight Mr. Potter’s Emancipation before it could become official.”

“I assume he will be too late?” Rita asked.

“Indeed he will be, Miss Skeeter,” McGonagall said. “But that is not for Dumbledore or the public to know at this time. I am going to give you a little insight, Miss Skeeter. Recently I have come to suspect Dumbledore does not have Mr. Potter’s best interests in mind, and probably hasn’t since the night James and Lily Potter died. Several revelations have been uncovered recently. Several things that will come to light in the future. You, Miss Skeeter, could be the Quill behind the news getting out, but not today. It will come out in time, when we want it to come out. We must do damage control before that can happen, though. I hope you can understand that?”

Rita sighed. “Of course, Professor.”

“Miss Skeeter, in the future we will have more information to give you,” Harry said, “Information and stories that are more interesting than what we gave you today. When we will give you this information, is our decision. However, if you slander myself, Hermione, Professor McGonagall – or a list of names I am about to write down – the deal is off.”

Rita stared at Harry for several moments, then finally nodded. “I can agree to this. Write down the list of those you wish to be immune from my slander, Mr. Potter.”

Harry did, Rita gave him writing materials, and he wrote his name, Hermione and her parents and Professor McGonagall to start off. He continued with more names, including all members of the Great Alliance – Lords, Ladies, Heirs and Heiresses. Sirius Black and Remus Lupin were included. After a thought, he added Dobby, Winky, Mallory and Sadie as house-elves, just in case. Then he put down Rubeus Hagrid, just because the man was his friend, even if he trusted Dumbledore too much. He then added those names Hermione and Professor McGonagall had suggested.

He finished the list after that, made two copies, and gave one to Rita. The journalist glanced at the list, her eyes going wide at the amount of names there. She pouted for several moments as she perused the list. Then her eyes lit up.

“I do not see Albus Dumbledore or those Weasleys who seem to be your best friends, Harry,” Rita said.

“Neither Albus Dumbledore, nor Ronald, Ginevra or Molly Weasley have my trust any longer,” Harry said.

“That sounds juicy!” Rita said, grinning. “Will you tell me more?”

“In time, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, with a smug grin. “Maybe even sooner than you think. But not today. When we get our revenge against all of them, we will give you the inside scoop. Then you can slander them all you want. As long as it looks favorable to us and those whom are on the list, you can include us in those articles.”

“Why is Sirius Black on this list?” Rita asked.

Harry winked. “Forget you asked me that, and I promise you’ll find out before the end of the year.”
Rita raised an eyebrow, then she smiled. “Forget what, Harry?”

“I see we understand each other, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said.

“We do, Harry,” Rita said. “I look forward to what should be a very favorable partnership.”

“As do I, Miss Skeeter,” Harry said, “I believe we are finished here. We look forward to your article about the Second Task.”

“It will be the headline tomorrow morning,” Rita said, “I assure you. The… Emancipation Speculation article – shall we say? – will be the headliner for Tuesday.”

“We’ll be waiting,” Harry said.

Harry stood up, and Hermione, McGonagall and Rita followed. After brief farewells with Rita gushing about how it was a delight to be meeting with the Boy-Who-Lived again, Harry led Hermione and McGonagall out of the office.

“Anyone else as uncomfortable as me?” Hermione asked, when they left the building.

“Yes,” Harry said, “But I bask in the comfort that will be coming our way, knowing that our discomfort is nothing next to what Dumbledore and the Tournament Officials will soon be feeling.”

“Quite,” McGonagall agreed. “I look forward to all of it. Especially if it means watching the Headmaster squirm in his golden throne tomorrow at breakfast!”

Harry and Hermione laughed at that.

When she stopped laughing, Hermione looked at her boyfriend, curiously. “You were very… suave… in there with Rita, Harry. Very uncharacteristic of you. What was that all about?”

“Part of it was trying to do my best to convince Rita to agree with writing those articles,” Harry said.

“And the other part?” Hermione asked.

“Those blocks and bindings forced on me altered my personality, Hermione,” Harry said. “Let’s just say I’m going to be going through some changes soon. One of those changes may upset you.”

“Which one?” Hermione asked, with a frown.

“The one where I become your rival for the top spot in our year in classes, Miss Granger,” Harry said, with a grin.

Hermione grinned. “I don’t think that would upset me as much as you believe it does, Mr. Potter.”

“I look forward to this new you, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “But we must be getting back. We’ll leave the Alley, and I’ll have Dobby and Mallory bring you back, so you do not have to Apparate. Where should we arrive at?”

“The Shrieking Shack,” Harry said, grinning.

McGonagall pinched her nose between her fingers. “I’m going to regret this. I just know it.”
*giggles and cackles* That was one of the most enjoyable chapters I’ve ever written. I don’t know which was funnier, the last couple of lines, or the fourth-wall-breaking ‘inside joke’ Harry made. I hope most of my readers were able to figure out that inside joke. I loved writing Rita Skeeter in this chapter. Probably the best I’ve ever written her. And Harry’s behavior was fun to write too. Not sure I’ll keep up Harry’s behavior all the time. He was kind of showing off, to get Rita to go along with what he was telling her – even if it was the truth.

Originally, the receptionist was going to be a nameless girl. But I decided to have her be Penelope Clearwater, the Ravenclaw Head Girl and Percy Weasley’s (ex?) girlfriend. She likely won’t be in the story anymore, unless we go back to the Daily Prophet Headquarters in the future. Just a cameo. Rita called her Pennywise, because I couldn’t figure out a good last name for her to get confused with.

Additional Note for those of you who complained about the Euro being in my story: Just imagine one of those Rita Skeeter articles hanging on the wall with a headline that says “Wizards discover Euros six years earlier than Muggles intended; Muggles confused, but delighted – blames extraterrestrials!” Then stop complaining about it.

Next Chapter: Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall return to Hogwarts, and get some unwelcome news about Viktor Krum. They receive a mirror from Sirius and talk to him. Harry, Hermione and McGonagall will also be talking about a few things – such as their next moves against Dumbledore.

Unfortunately, the ‘Talk’ I’ve been teasing won’t happen, at least in the next few chapters. I really wanted it to happen next chapter, but I’m having trouble with it, and I don’t want it to delay the rest of the story for one particularly difficult scene. The delayed discussion will be explained in-story, though.
(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

The Whomping Willow, which had been trying to swat a branch at a grey tabby cat who had shown up out of nowhere froze in place, as the cat pressed a knot in the tree’s trunk. Harry Potter and Hermione Granger crawled out of the hidden passage underneath the Whomping Willow, and the cat followed the couple as they walked away from it. Then the grey tabby transformed back into Professor McGonagall.

“This is where we part for now,” McGonagall said, “I must go back the same way we arrived, and go back to the front gate, then take a carriage, so the Headmaster doesn’t get suspicious about my return trip. Tempus!”

Numbers appeared out of thin air.

“It is a little past one-o-clock,” McGonagall said, “We made very good time. I am sure the two of you are hungry?”

“I had some refreshments in the Hospital Room after my appointment,” Hermione said.

“As did I,” Harry said, “But it wasn’t enough to keep me until dinner this evening.”

“When you return to the Den, ask Mallory for a platter of leftovers from today’s lunch,” McGonagall said. “I will meet you around two, or two-thirty, in the Private Common Room, and we can talk about what happened today.”

“Are we also going to have the other discussion, Professor?” Hermione asked.

McGonagall looked from Hermione, to Harry, then back to Hermione. “I tell you what, Miss Granger, I’m going to give you and Mr. Potter each a copy of that book I mentioned. I’ll get them from Madam Pomfrey. I want the both of you to read these books, and then we can set aside a date to discuss them when you are finished.”

“If you think it would be best, Professor,” Hermione said.

“It will make my job easier,” McGonagall said. “As you know, my fellow Professors and I have end-of-term exams for all our students to deal with. So I have to focus on that.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Professor!” Hermione said, “With everything that has happened, the exams have been the last thing on my mind! Oh, goodness, I haven’t done any studying at all this weekend!”
“I think you’ll do just fine, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Perhaps we can arrange it so we can have that discussion after your dancing lessons next Saturday?”

“That would be perfect, Professor,” Hermione said.

“I will deliver those books to you when I meet you in an hour or two,” McGonagall said.

Harry was rather confused about the discussion that had been going on between his girlfriend and the Lioness at Hogwarts. He watched Professor McGonagall as she transformed back into her tabby cat, and ran back into the hidden passage under the Whomping Willow. He took Hermione’s hand and the pair started off toward the castle.

“What was that about, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Remember what we discussed after we left the Owlery yesterday?” Hermione replied.

Harry’s new eidetic memory allowed him to picture said moment in time. He blushed lightly.

“The Talk?” Harry asked, “Really? We’re going to have ‘The Talk’?! With Professor McGonagall??”

“I spoke to her while you were talking to Remus yesterday,” Hermione said, “And she told me about the best book in the subject. Madam Pomfrey is in possession of those books. So it looks like we’ll have to read those books over the next week or so. In addition to preparing and taking for the exams, as well as everything else that will come up this week! How will we find the time?!”

“I am sure you can come up with a good schedule, Hermione,” Harry said, squeezing her hand, “You’re very good at that. Wait. Are you going to take part in that discussion too?”

“There are some things I do not know when it comes to the magical side of ‘The Talk’,” Hermione said, “And she told me about the best book in the subject. Madam Pomfrey is in possession of those books. So it looks like we’ll have to read those books over the next week or so. In addition to preparing and taking for the exams, as well as everything else that will come up this week! How will we find the time?!”

“I am sure you can come up with a good schedule, Hermione,” Harry said, squeezing her hand, “You’re very good at that. Wait. Are you going to take part in that discussion too?”

“There are some things I do not know when it comes to the magical side of ‘The Talk’,” Hermione said, “I’ve tried to find the information in the library, but Professor McGonagall informed me I was reading the wrong books. That is why she is going to be loaning us a couple copies of the proper books. Are you okay with discussing it with me there too?”

“It will make things even more awkward then they already will be,” Harry muttered. “But I guess it would be better to learn it together. You know, since we’re going to –”

“Start having sex together at some point in the future,” Hermione finished. “Not immediately. This ‘Talk’ is not an invite for you to get me in bed, Mr. Potter.”

“Of course not, Vassal Granger,” Harry said, with a smirk.

Hermione went pink at that. “Which reminds me. I need to go to the library sometime and see if there is a book about Vassals there. Just another thing I need to do this week!”

“There’s my loveable bookworm,” Harry said, “I was wondering where she was.”

“Oh, you!” Hermione said, rolling her eyes.

“Hermione?” Harry asked, “Is there anything we should talk about -- I mean, about what happened today?”
“Not right now,” Hermione said, “Especially not outside of the Den, Harry. I imagine we’ll be talking about all of this with Professor McGonagall. There may be some things I might want to talk to you about without her being there too. I’ll consider this while we head up to the Den.”

Before they reached the castle, Harry removed the map from the pocket of his jeans, then opened it up. Ron was in the Gryffindor Common Room, Ginny was in the Library, and Snape and Dumbledore were in their respective offices. Harry kept the map handy as he and Hermione entered the castle. As they entered the castle, and headed toward the stairs that led from the Entrance Hall to the Grand Staircase, Fred and George Weasley walked down the stairs.

“There you two are!” Fred exclaimed.

“We’ve been looking for you everywhere!” George said. “We looked for you at lunch…”

“But you weren’t there,” Fred said.

“We were spending time together at a private spot we found on the Grounds,” Hermione said. “We decided to skip lunch.”

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked.

“Before we tell you,” Fred said, “Look at your map.”

“And tell us where Viktor Krum is,” George said.

Harry raised an eyebrow, then shrugged and opened the map once again. He searched and finally found Krum’s name.

“He’s in the Hospital Wing,” Harry said, “With his Headmaster and Madam Pomfrey. What’s he doing there?”

“We put him there,” Fred said, “Well, in a way. At lunch, we heard rumors that Krum has been looking Hermione all day.”

“Then near the end of lunch,” George said, “Viktor Krum came into the Great Hall, and walked over to our table.”

“He asked where Hermione was,” Fred said, “At least, we think he did.”

“He badly pronounced your name wrong, Granger,” George said.

“Several times,” Fred agreed,

“Even called you Harmony like Skeeter did,” George said.

“Well, George and I decided to follow Krum after he left,” Fred said.

“You didn’t!” Hermione gasped.

“We confronted him,” Fred said, nodding, “We asked him what he wanted with you.”
“He said he was going to take you to the Ball,” George said.

“We told him you already had a date,” Fred said.

“And a boyfriend,” George said.

“That idiot decided to tell us that he was a better choice than the Boy-Who-Lived,” Fred said.

“We took that as a personal insult,” Fred and George said.

“So what did you do to him?” Harry asked.

“Used a special Compulsion Charm on him,” Fred said.

“Made him believe every girl he saw was Hermione,” George said.

“Last we heard, he got hexed by three girls who were walking down a corridor together,” Fred said.

“He had apparently tried to ask one of them out,” George said. “It nearly worked, since she was a fan-girl of his.”

“Then he called her Hermione,” Fred said, “Or whatever name he jumbled up trying to call her that. That made the girl refuse.”

“Then he asked another girl in the group out and called her Hermione too,” George said, “All three girls hexed him with different hexes.”

“So he’s now in the Hospital Wing,” Fred and George said.

Hermione cracked up laughing, and Harry chuckled and shook his head.

“Seriously,” Harry said, “We need to do something about him. Something that will make him leave you alone, Hermione.”

“We already have an idea,” Fred said.

“But we won’t explain it here,” George said.

“Follow us,” Fred and George said.

The twins led the couple up the stairs and onto the Second Floor. They walked over to a portrait of three dogs playing poker.

“Ace in the Hole,” Fred said.

All three dogs barked, and the portrait opened. It led to a hidden staircase.

“This goes all the way up to the seventh floor,” George said, as the four Lions walked through the portrait hole.

“And ends up a couple corridors away from the Gryffindor Common Room,” Fred said.
“No need to walk up those pesky moving stairs that sends you anywhere but the destination you want to go to,” George said.

“So how do you want to humiliate Krum?” Fred asked, “Simply embarrass him?”

“Or get him banned from the library?” George asked.

“Both!” Harry exclaimed.

“We hoped you’d say that,” Fred and George said.

Fred and George laid out their plan as the four Lions traversed the stairs toward the seventh level. They were finished by the time they made it to the top of the stairs. Harry and Hermione were laughing by the time the twins were finished.

“I suppose that means you approve?” Fred asked.

“Yes!” Harry and Hermione said.

“Excellent,” George said, “When should we do this?”

“Tomorrow,” Hermione said, “After classes but before dinner. Krum will likely be there if he’s looking for me, since he apparently thinks I’m always there in my free time.”

“Perfect,” Fred said.

“We’ll see you then,” George said, “Here we are!”

They had arrived at what appeared to be the back of a portrait. Fred pushed the portrait forward, and the Lions stepped out of the portrait-hole, and onto the seventh floor. Harry and Hermione split off from Fred and George, as the twins headed in the direction of the Owlery. Harry kept the map open while he and Hermione headed for the Lion’s Den. When they arrived, they stepped into the Private Common Room. Mallory appeared as soon as they sat down on their couch.

“Harry Potter has received a package from Mr. Padfoot,” Mallory said. “It be clear of any bad enchantments.”

She snapped a finger, and a yellow envelope appeared on the table. Harry picked it up, then Mallory snapped her fingers twice as a large platter of food – leftovers from lunch – appeared on the table, along with plates, utensils and glasses. Jugs of water and pumpkin juice appeared as well.

“Thank you, Mallory,” Hermione said, “This all looks great. Have we received any mail due to Rita Skeeter’s article yesterday?”

“Harry Potter and his Hermy be getting lots of mail,” Mallory said, “Mallory and Sadie be sorting it while Mistress take Harry Potter and his Hermy to Diagon Alley. Some be good, some be bad, some be very bad. Howlers, hex-letters, letters that be insulting Harry Potter or his Hermy. There be some good letters, but Mistress be wanting to go through them first, just in case.”

“Thank you for your help, Mallory,” Hermione said. “You may return to your duties.”

“Dobby!” Harry said.
Dobby appeared. “Yes, Great Harry Potter.”

“You were present while we met with Ragnok, is this correct?” Harry asked.

“Yes, Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said, nodding.

“Please go to Vault 688 and bring me back the Hope Chest that Ragnok described,” Harry said, “Then bring me the documents I asked you to bring to my Quarters.”

Dobby’s whole trip took less than a minute. Soon Dobby returned and snapped his fingers. A large trunk appeared on the floor next to the table, and the documents appeared together on an empty portion of the table.

“Thank you, Dobby,” Harry said.

“Dobby, how is Winky?” Hermione asked.

“Resting and relaxing, Harry Potter’s Hermy,” Dobby said, “Dobby be thinking three days more rest before Winky be fit for duties.”

“Thank you, Dobby,” Hermione said, “If you see her, tell her I’m thinking about her.”

“Dobby be doing so,” Dobby said.

“You may return to your duties,” Harry said.

Dobby bowed and vanished.

Harry and Hermione put together some plates of lunch. While he dined, Harry opened the large envelope. Inside was a small scrap of parchment, and what appeared to be two compact mirrors. Harry took the parchment and read it aloud:

“Prongslet,” he read, “Instead of having to suffer the hassle of writing letters back and forth, wouldn’t it be better if we can talk face to face? These mirrors I’ve given you are called communication mirrors. Your father, Moony and I used mirrors similar to these to talk to each other when we were in detention while in school, and we also used them after we finished our education.

“One of these mirrors is for you Prongslet, the other is for your girlfriend. Simply hold the mirror and say the words ‘Padfoot’, or ‘Moony’ to speak with Remus or me. If you wish to speak to Hermione if aren’t together, say ‘Girlfriend’, and she can do the same by saying ‘Boyfriend’. Moony and I will always have these available. So you can talk to us whenever you want. Love, Padfoot.”

Harry grinned at Hermione, whose eyes were sparkling as she looked at the mirrors.

“These are brilliant!” Hermione said, “I’m going to have to interrogate Padfoot or Moony sometime to figure out how I can make one of these mirrors for my parents!”

Harry took his mirror and opened it up, revealing the mirror on the top inside cover, and a make-up pad on the bottom. Hermione giggled when she saw the make-up pad.

“I guess they look like that so they can pass as make-up mirrors,” Hermione said.
“Yeah, like that isn’t going to get questions asked my way if someone sees me with it,” Harry said.

“So don’t get caught with it,” Hermione advised.

“Yeah, thanks,” Harry said, then cleared his throat. “Padfoot!”

A few moments later, Sirius Black’s face appeared in the mirror’s reflection. He still looked a little gaunt, and while he still had a beard, it was no longer long and scruffy. But he was grinning as he looked at Harry.

“Harry!” Sirius exclaimed, “I see you got your early Christmas gifts?”

“Yeah, these are brilliant!” Harry said. “Hermione wants to interrogate you and Remus about them, so she can make one for her parents.”

“Where is the future Lady Potter?” Sirius asked. “Is she there with you? Wait! Harry, set the mirror on a surface that is directly across from you, then state ‘enlarge stage four’.”

Harry did as asked, placing it on the couch on the other side of the table. Then he said the phrase as Sirius instructed. The compact mirror grew in size, big enough to reach the top of the couch it sat on.

“Excellent!” Sirius said, as Harry sat back down beside Hermione, “How do you do, Miss Granger?”

“Please, call me Hermione,” Hermione said, “I am doing well. And I am pleased to see that you seem to be doing well yourself.”

“Better than the last time you saw me anyway,” Sirius said, smiling. “Lots of good food, good company, a nice place to sleep, shit, shave and shower.”

“Sirius, language!” Hermione scolded.

Sirius shuddered visibly. “Damn, girl, you remind me so much of Lily! Always trying to get me to improve my language too. It never happened with her, and it won’t happen now!”

“Then I guess I will have to keep scolding you when you cuss,” Hermione said, with a grin.

“As long as you know it won’t work,” Sirius said, with a wink. “Damn, pup, you got a good girl there. And what is this about you two only getting together a couple days ago? I thought you were a couple when you rescued me in June!”

“Couldn’t have told us that back then, could you?” Harry asked.

“I’m afraid I was a bit out of it back then,” Sirius said, “Even then, I could still tell how well the two of you worked together. So what does that tell you?”

“That I was an oblivious idiot until a few days ago?” Harry asked.

*Or under Potions,* he mused.

“And I was unsure about Harry’s feelings about me until he asked me to the Yule Ball,” Hermione
said. “So I wasn’t about to ask him out instead!”

Sirius laughed. “Well, at least it only took three and a half years for the two of you to get together. James and Lily took six years to see they were perfect for one another.”

“Professor McGonagall told us all about those times when my Dad pranked the boys interested in my mother,” Harry said.

Sirius barked a laugh. “I was right beside him helping him prank those blokes too! Good times…”

“Where’s Remus?” Hermione asked.

“Grocery shopping,” Sirius said, “He’ll be sorry he missed you.”

“Too bad,” Harry said, “We had a very interesting day today. We visited Diagon Alley with Professor McGonagall, and went to Gringotts and the Daily Prophet.”

“Remus did mention you had plans to do all that,” Sirius said. “But I can wait to hear all about it until Remus and I can talk to both of you together. Anything I should know right now?”

“I learned today that I became Emancipated when the Goblet of Fire spat my name out,” Harry said.

“So what does that mean?” Sirius asked. “Wait… that means you’re technically of age now! So that means --!”


Sirius huffed. “Maybe first-in-line, pup. I don’t know if my little buddies work well enough to give me a future heir.”

“Little buddies?” Hermione echoed with a snort.

“Semen, jizz, cum, little swimmers, tadpoles, baby batter!” Sirius belted out.

“Sirius Black!” Hermione scolded, her face a deep red from blushing so bad.

“You asked,” Sirius said, with a smirk; then he sighed, “Fortunately, Remus and I have a trusted Healer friend that is going to come by one of these days for an appointment with me. I can test all that stuff then.”

“Wouldn’t Harry’s Inheritance Test have said he was direct descendant if you couldn’t have children?” Hermione asked.

Sirius’ eyes widened, and he grinned. “That… I hadn’t thought of that. It is possible. Still means I’d have to find someone sire a Heir with. Can’t do that while I’m a fugitive, can I?”

“Yeah, about that,” Harry said, “I read my parents’ final Will and Testament. It said that you are my Godfather through the Godfather Ritual, and that Wormtail was the Secret Keeper.”

Sirius’ expression brightened. “That… that might be enough. Have you given that information to the DMLE?”
“Not yet,” Harry said, “We’re trying to be careful at the moment, you see. Remus told us all about how Albus Dumbledore was working against you. What if he doesn’t want you to have a trial?”

“So we can’t do it while we’re here at Hogwarts,” Hermione said. “But…”

“It can wait until the summer,” Sirius said.

“But!” Hermione said, “Just because we have to be here for the Yule Ball, doesn’t mean we can’t go to London for Christmas Break the following day. I’m considering writing to my parents, and asking them if they’d be willing to celebrate a late Christmas with me… and Harry.”

“You’ve kept that silent!” Harry said.

“I… I haven’t exactly told them we’re a couple, Harry,” Hermione said, “I’m going to write them tonight and tell them about you. Then I’ll ask them if I can invite you to my home, so my parents can officially meet my boyfriend.”

“I didn’t even know their names until I saw your Inheritance Test today!” Harry said.

“You took an Inheritance Test, Hermione?” Sirius asked, curiously.

“I did,” Hermione said, “You’re looking at the Heiress and last magic descendant of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger.”

“I know that name,” Sirius muttered.

“Hector Dagworth-Granger was the founder of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers,” Hermione said.

“Damn, girl!” Sirius said, grinning, “That’s an impressive ancestor to be related to! That almost makes you a pureblood in the eyes of society. At the very least a highborn half-blood, like Harry!”

“Like I care about that, Sirius,” Hermione huffed.

“I didn’t say you did,” Sirius said, with a smile, “Anyway, I’ll be patient for now. You can contact the DMLE during Christmas Break. Maybe I’ll get a Trial before you’re back at Hogwarts!”

“We can hope,” Harry said. “Anyway, I also learned my parents apparently have Portraits! And that they are currently in Potter Manor in Northampton. According to the Will, you and I were supposed to live in Potter Manor together while you raised me if my parents died.”

Sirius sighed. “If only. I should have never gone after Wormtail that night, pup. Other than not agreeing to be your parents’ Secret Keeper, it was my biggest regret.”

“We can’t live our lives on ‘what ifs’, Sirius,” Hermione said.

“You’re right about that, Hermione,” Sirius agreed. “Whatever. Well, if we can get you away from those horrid relatives next summer, we could live in Potter Manor like we were supposed to!”

“We won’t have to worry about the Dursleys, Sirius,” Harry said.

He explained what his plan was to get himself away from his relatives. Sirius cackled.
“That is an amazing prank!” Sirius said, “Not on the Dursleys, but on Dumbledore! Especially when he discovers those supposed protections around the Dursley’s house are gone!”

“If you aren’t free by summer,” Hermione said, “Dumbledore would probably try to get Harry to stay with someone else. Like the Weasleys.”

Harry and Sirius growled and it almost sounded the same. They looked at each other and laughed.

“Remus told me all about those traitors!” Sirius growled, “I can’t believe I gave that red-headed traitor an Owl! No wonder Wormtail became that boy’s pet. A traitor meeting another traitor!”

“Yeah, well,” Harry said, “We’re working on dealing with him, his sister and their mother. Sirius, I was wondering something. Maybe you know. Why were my parents and I living in Godric’s Hollow instead of Potter Manor? Or one of the other residences?”

Sirius frowned. “I… I don’t know, Harry. They never told me. I remember feeling strange about it. But I never asked them.”

Harry frowned as a thought crossed his mind. But he decided not to voice the thought right now. Maybe he was wrong, and it was just a symptom of Sirius’ continuing recovery from Dementor Exposure.

“That’s alright,” Harry said, “I was just curious.”

“Don’t feel bad, pup,” Sirius said, “It is a good question. It might have just been that your parents wanted to raise you in a small house. Maybe the Godric’s Hollow cottage wasn’t well-known to most people. It could be anything. Maybe we’ll never know. I do get why you’re asking. If they had remained at Potter Manor, you might have your parents today. But, as your wonderful girlfriend said, we shouldn’t focus on ‘what-ifs’. I’ll ask Remus if he knows something.”

“Thanks,” Harry said.

Harry and Hermione spent the next half-hour talking to Sirius about inconsequential things, such as some of the things that had happened over the past few months that didn’t have to do with the Triwizard Tournament, or Dumbledore and the Weasleys. The conversation ended when Sirius yawned and told the couple regrettably that he needed to go and take a nap – which was apparently part of his recovery plan. Harry and Hermione promised they would to speak to him soon, and would do everything they could to see him a free man. Sirius then ran Harry and Hermione through the details of how to control the mirrors, like change their size and what-not. Then they said their farewells and Sirius vanished from the mirror.

Harry stood and walked over to the mirror, shrunk it to its original size, and pocketed it in his jeans. Hermione decided to pass the time until McGonagall came to visit them going over possible topics that their end-of-term exams. So they discussed those topics and nibbled on the remainder of their lunch over the next several minutes, before Professor McGonagall entered the room. She looked rather angry about something.

“Something wrong, Professor?” Harry asked.

“I’ve just been meeting with the Headmaster,” McGonagall said, “I need the two of you to come with me. Headmaster Dumbledore wishes to speak with the both of you.”
Uh-oh! What does Dumbledore want to talk to our heroes about? Does he know what they've been up to?

Next Chapter: Harry and Hermione speak to Dumbledore, then have a discussion with Professor McGonagall to discuss the events of the day.
A Parley and Plotting

Chapter Notes

I love all the speculation about what Dumbledore wants. Some are hilarious! Like him trying to get Hermione to go to the Ball with Krum instead? Ha! That’s funny! I may have added something about this, just to appease those of you who thought about that. I don’t think anyone actually figured out what he really wants to talk to them about!

I hope you love this chapter as much as I loved writing it. (Which is a lot!)

Warning: Dumbledore and Molly Weasley Bashing; Manipulative!Dumbledore plotting!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Sunday, December 13th, 1994)

Harry and Hermione followed Professor McGonagall as they made their way through the third floor corridor toward the Headmaster’s office. They had left the Lion’s Den ten minutes ago, deciding to keep Harry’s Honor Chest, the Gringotts documents and the two Sex Ed books – which Professor McGonagall had delivered to them after giving her message about the Headmaster’s request – in the Private Common Room, as they would return to the same room after their unplanned meeting with the Headmaster.

Before they left the Lion’s Den, Professor McGonagall spoke to the couple.

“I do not know what the Headmaster wishes to speak to the two of you about,” she said, “so expect the unexpected. He did not look angry with me, nor the two of you, but that might have been to throw me off. As he does not know about your unbound Occlumency talents, do not look in his eyes. Look over his head, behind him if you must appear looking in his direction. Do not lose your tempers, because it could lead to him being able to get something out of you unintentionally.

“Unfortunately I cannot give you a quick lesson on how to control your Occlumency talents, or I would teach you how the skill can help you control your emotions. If he says something to anger or offend you, count down from ten, and you’ll find you’ll calm down easier. He will attempt to dismiss me, but I am prepared for that. Just remain calm and answer as honest as you can without revealing anything too important, and I believe we’ll come out of this unharmed. Understand?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry and Hermione said, in unison.

“I do not believe he knows you left the premises, or Mallory would have told me,” McGonagall said, “So this might not be about our adventures today. Let’s get going then.”

That was ten minutes ago. Since then, Harry and Hermione were doing their best to practice keeping calm. Both were familiar with the term ‘poker face’, and they were trying to achieve such an expression. They were so focused on this, that they almost didn’t notice the Gargoyle stepping aside from his post in front of the stairs that led to the Headmaster’s Office, after McGonagall gave the password.
They followed the Lioness of Gryffindor up the stairs. As soon as they arrived, the door to the Headmaster’s Office opened on its own. Focusing on keeping themselves cool, calm and collected, Harry and Hermione followed McGonagall inside.

Albus Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk, smiling up at his three guests as they entered. Fawkes, the Phoenix, gave them a greeting in song, and on its shelf above a trophy case where the Sword of Gryffindor lay, the Sorting Hat looked at the scene curiously. Many of the former Headmasters and Headmistresses, who were sleeping or staring off into space with a bored look, suddenly awoke and became interested in the events.

“Harry, Miss Granger!” Dumbledore greeted them, “Come, sit down! I hope you are having a wonderful afternoon on your free day off! Thank you, Minerva. You’re excused.”

“As the Head of Gryffindor, I think I better stay, Headmaster,” McGonagall replied. “I believe Miss Granger’s parents would hamstring me if I left her alone with a geriatric old man.”

Dumbledore blinked in surprise. “Really, Minerva!”

“I am here in my duties as the Head of Gryffindor, Albus,” McGonagall said, subtly showing her disapproval of his use of her first name, “I am trying to improve my behavior in said role. My message to my Lions a few days ago would be dismissed by most of Gryffindor House if I left two of its students unchaperoned during a meeting. Chaperoning a meeting like this is one of my duties, of course.”

Dumbledore let out a put-upon sigh. “As you wish, Professor.”

He waved his wand, and three cushy chairs appeared on the nearest side of his mahogany desk. He motioned to it, and the three guests sat down in the same way they had sat down together in the previous two meetings that day – Harry in the middle and McGonagall and Hermione on either side of him.

“Headmaster, may I ask a question?” Harry asked.

“Of course, Harry,” Dumbledore said, “You may ask me anything, and I will do my best to answer. That is part of my job, after all.”

“Why do you – and other Professors – address me as Harry?” Harry asked, “When you address all the other students by their surnames? Professor McGonagall addresses me as ‘Mr. Potter’, but others – and yourself – seem to use my first name on occasion. Snape – sorry, Professor Snape – simply addresses me as ‘Potter!’”

Dumbledore blinked and frowned. “My apologies, Mr. Potter, for being so casual with you. I wish you would have come to me about this over the past three years. I would have realized my mistake, and given you the same answer I will give you today.”

He pointed his wand to a bookshelf and summoned what appeared to be a portrait. He caught the portrait in his empty hand then set it up on the desk. Harry frowned as he looked at the picture. It was a picture of the Headmaster standing in between his parents, when they appeared to be seventh years, perhaps. The Headmaster, James Potter and Lily Evans were all switching back from grinning or laughing as camera flashes appeared off-picture. His parents had ‘HB’ and ‘HG’ badges attached to their school robes. Harry recognized the first badge when Percy Weasley wore it the previous year.
“You may not know this, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore continued, “but I – and several other members of my staff – were very close to your parents during the last few years of their life. They were two of our most popular Head Students we’ve ever had. They even began the tradition of Head Students taking part in some Staff Meetings during the school year – those in which we discuss various students and their behavior and performance. Your parents made the suggestion, and I very much approved of it.

“Due to the close, personal time my fellow staff and I spent with your parents, we become good friends with the two of them. We were very close to them. Enough that they allowed to call us by their first names a couple months into their final year as students. We were all delighted when they became a couple, and it was the staff and I who were the first to applaud after your father asked your mother to marry him – in which she accepted his proposal -- at their final Leaving Feast.

“A few of my staff, and I, were lucky to be invited to the wedding in August that summer. It was a big event with many guests. The event of the summer, I believe the general gossip would refer to it as in the days, weeks and months afterward. There was a lot of security surrounding the wedding and reception, because of the threat of Voldemort and his followers, but we were all very fortunate they decided not to interfere with the lovely day. That fortune did not follow us in the months and years after, unfortunately. Those were sad times.

“But, I am happy to say, there was several occasions of light to overcome the many moments of darkness. Love flourished, couples formed and married, babies were born – all of those students in your year, and a couple years above you, all born during those dark times. As for you, Mr. Potter…

“When we heard Lily was pregnant, my staff and I all celebrated with firewhiskey during the following staff meeting, toasting to your mother’s good health, wishes for a good, healthy pregnancy, and toasting the newest Potter that would come forth into our world. Whether they would have a son or daughter was unknown at the time, so there was good-natured betting about whether you would be a boy or girl. I won enough Galleons to afford a good five years of lemon drops when I bet you would be a boy!

“When you were born, I led a party of staff members to St. Mungo’s so that we could meet you. We felt very close to you, Mr. Potter and -- I believe it goes without saying now -- your parents. I’m sure you heard this dozens of times – especially from my staff – but you look so much like your father. And those eyes – my goodness, I remember your mother looking at me with the same eyes.

“I believe I speak for the rest of my staff – those who speak casually to you – when I say that you remind us of better times when your parents graced this castle. We were casual with them, and it has spread to you. But if you wish for us to be formal with you, then I will acquiesce to your request and will also pass the message along to my staff. I apologize again for this mistake.”

“Thank you, Headmaster,” Harry said.

“You are most welcome,” Dumbledore said, “Let’s begin with the first reason you are here. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, I feel I need to clarify my reasons for why I stopped your – ahem – public display of affection on Thursday evening during dinner in the Great Hall. It was an understandable error on your part, of course. In your time here as students, such an event like that display hasn’t happened before. So, perhaps, you didn’t know it was rule-breaking.

“Before I continue, I will say, however, it was a ingenious way of letting everyone in the castle know about this new upgrade in your relationship. But, perhaps it was a little bit too much. I believe I told you at the end of your first year, Mr. Potter, that any secrets inside Hogwarts tend to get around
the castle at an impressive speed. If you had decided to have a show of affection in the Gryffindor Common Room to announce your new – ahem – romantic relationship, instead of the Great Hall, I am quite sure the news would have reached everyone by the time the next mealtime came around. As I am sure you know, public displays of affection are quite common inside the Common Rooms, and therefore we do not punish such a thing.

“If you had done this, you could have avoided the detention Professor McGonagall gave you. That is why I had to put a stop to your display in the Great Hall. I needed to send a message to the student body that such a display wasn’t acceptable in the Great Hall, and unfortunately, you two were in the crossfire. I didn’t want to make you believe I was against such a thing, which is why I did not take points from you. New love is such a wonderful thing, especially in such dark times as your unfortunate participation in the Triwizard Tournament. I would dare not wish you to believe I am like a few particular students around the castle, who are rather – shall we say – vocal against your new romantic relationship. I am quite supportive of it, let me assure you of that.”

Harry had enough of this blatant lying. He raised his hand, hoping to change the subject.

“You have a question, Har -- Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore asked.

“Yes, Headmaster,” Harry said. “About my ‘unfortunate participation’ in the Triwizard Tournament. Have you made any progress into figuring out who put my name in the Goblet of Fire?”

Dumbledore sighed and shook his head. “Very little progress, unfortunately. It is a most difficult investigation. Let’s just say it seems this was a premeditated plot. Whoever Confound the Goblet seems to have done so before the Goblet came here to Hogwarts. You may not know this, but the Goblet was on display in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic for the entire months of August and September, so the public could see it for themselves. Good publicity, as Ludo Bagman said when he suggested such a thing. Perhaps I should have suggested that only the Triwizard Cup be in view for the public. It would have achieved the same publicity. My mistake. You know what they say about hindsight, though!

“I am working on the possibility that the paper that had your name on it was placed in there through a Switching Spell. An ingenious plan. Someone as far as the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade could have used a Switching Spell on a piece of parchment between the hours of the Goblet being lit, to the Choosing Ceremony, switching a blank piece of parchment already inside the Goblet with the parchment that had your name on it.”

“But I thought it was my name from one of my assignments?” Harry asked.

“I had assumed it was,” Dumbledore said, “Now I wonder if it could have been from a letter you wrote to somebody. Did you write to anybody in the weeks before the Choosing Ceremony?”

That conniving bastard! Harry mused, He’s trying to get me to blame this on Padfoot! He is trying to make me suspicious of him, trying to make me lose trust in my godfather! That… well, that is a smart tactic, I’ll give him that.

“Mr. and Mrs. Weasley,” Harry said, deciding to turn Dumbledore’s idea against him. “I was trying to get my Gringotts Key back. I gave it to Mrs. Weasley, so she could do my booklist shopping for me while I was at the Quidditch World Cup. She still hasn’t given me that Key back, you know. I need it, so I can get money for Christmas shopping.”

He made a stricken expression. “Do you… do you think Mrs. Weasley cut my name from the letter
and used it with a Switching Spell? What do you think, Hermione?”

He glanced toward Hermione, who was doing her best not to burst out laughing. Obviously she knew what he was doing.

Dumbledore frowned. “I do not think someone as good as Mrs. Weasley would do that to you, Mr. Potter. You’re sure there isn’t anyone else you’ve been writing to?”

“I wrote to you during the summer, Headmaster,” Harry said, “I’m sure you remember. About my nightmare, and my scar?”

Dumbledore blinked, then cleared his throat. “I remember, Mr. Potter. I assure you, it was not me who put your name in the Goblet. Any other possibilities?”

Harry shook his head. *I wrote to Sirius, Hermione and Ron. I’m not going to accuse any of them, old man! But only because Ron is too dumb to have done this!*

Dumbledore sighed. “Well, there goes that theory then. Thank you for helping me in closing one theory, among many that are still possible. I will get to the bottom of this. I assure you. If you have any theories, I’d love to hear them.”

“What about Professor Moody?” Harry asked.

Dumbledore’s eyebrows raised. “Your reasoning behind this accusation?”

“Quirrel tried to steal the Stone and kill me,” Harry said, “And let’s not forget Voldemort on the back of his head. Lockhart tried to Obliviate me and stop me from saving Ginny. Professor Lupin, bless his heart, tried to either eat me, turn me into a werewolf, or kill me. I don’t have the best history with Defense Professors, Headmaster. Don’t get me wrong, Professor Lupin was an excellent teacher, as is Professor Moody. But… well, I am sure you can see my point.”

Dumbledore cleared his throat. “Your reasoning is sound. I can see why you are suspicious of the Defense Professor this year. I can only apologize for my Defense Professors in the past, Mr. Potter. But I assure you, Alastor Moody is one of my dearest friends, and I trust him with my life. He has nothing to do with any of this.”

“I hope you won’t be offended if I continue to keep Constant Vigilance on him, Headmaster,” Harry said.

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled. “I believe Alastor would be most ashamed if you did not continue to suspect him, Mr. Potter, giving your past history with Defense Professors! He would probably fail you for the entire year if you did not! Simply because that is part of what he is teaching you, Mr. Potter. To be suspicious of everything. I do not tend to follow his beliefs and paranoia, of course, but he isn’t the oldest living Auror for nothing! He might not be guilty of putting your name in the Goblet, Mr. Potter. But he might plan to attack you by the end of the year, just to see if you learned anything from his class.”

He winked. “But that goes for all of his students, Mr. Potter. Not just you. I’m sure you’re not the only person he intends to attack as an example of his teaching.”

Harry snorted. “I’m not that lucky, Headmaster.”
“Let us hope that is not true,” Dumbledore said, “Given your current situation. Speaking of that! Have you made any progress with that beautiful Golden Egg of yours.”

Harry sighed. How should I go about this? Lie to him? Give him a white lie?

“I have, sir,” Harry said, “I’ve figured out what that horrid screaming was, and listened to the Mermaid’s clue. Now I am just trying to figure out what the Mermaids are going to steal from me. My Firebolt, maybe? It does say ‘what’ you’ll sorely miss. Not ‘who’. So I’m not about to accuse you and the other Tournament officials of making me save a person, sir!”

McGonagall cleared her throat. “I am certain I would complain if that was true, Mr. Potter. As you can see, I have not reacted so badly to your suggestion. So I do not think they’ve considered doing something as serious as that.”

Dumbledore sighed. “Your Firebolt does seem like the right kind of hostage for you, doesn’t it, Mr. Potter.”

“It does,” Harry agreed. “After all, I wouldn’t have survived the First Task without it. Now I just need to figure out how to survive under water for an hour. I’m sure that will come to me.”

“If I may make a suggestion,” Dumbledore said, “Ask your friends and fellow students, Mr. Potter. You never know whether or not they might have a suggestion for you.”

“Luna Lovegood and Padma Patil did promise to help me with it,” Harry said; he smiled at his girlfriend, “As did Hermione.”

“And what of your fellow Gryffindors?” Dumbledore asked. “Aside from Miss Granger, of course.”

“Aside from a few individuals,” Harry said, “I’m not sure if I can trust them to give me good advice. They did, after all, tell me I should have summoned a white flag and surrender for the First Task, Headmaster. They would probably only make a similar suggestion if I asked for their help.”

“You never know, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore said, “While we are on that subject. I hope I can try and change your minds, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger. Perhaps not about moving back to your dormitories. Not so soon anyway. But you should think about visiting the Gryffindor Common Room from time to time. If anything, it might give you an upper hand at the Second Task, having the moral support of your fellow Lions, as they cheer for you. They might not have been very supportive outside of the First Task, but they did cheer for you during the Task.”

“Were they cheering for me, or for the Dragon, sir?” Harry asked, with a deadpan tone. “In my opinion, most were cheering for the Dragon. But that is my opinion.”

“I have a question, Headmaster,” Hermione said, raising her hand.

“Yes, Miss Granger?” Dumbledore replied.

“It sounds like Harry and the other Champions are going to be under the lake, and at the bottom of the lake during the Second Task,” Hermione said. “As a spectator of the event, I must ask. Where are the spectators going to be during the Event? Are we only going to see the Champions until they dive into the lake and after they resurface? Or are we going to be able to see them while they are under the surface of the lake?”
Dumbledore cleared his throat. “That is currently being discussed, Miss Granger. I am sure we’ll figure out a way for you to view the Champions when they are under the water.”

“Yes,” McGonagall said, “Isn’t Minister Fudge discussing attending the event? Along with a few other important Ministry individuals? And perhaps some French and Bulgarians as well! Wouldn’t want them staring at the lake with nothing to see until the Champions reemerge. Good Merlin, we would be the laughingstock of the wizarding world in general, Headmaster! Can you imagine the bad publicity that would get for Magical Britain and Hogwarts in general? So much for International Cooperation, eh, Headmaster?”

Dumbledore frowned. “Yes. That would be most… embarrassing. It will be discussed amongst the proper individuals between now and the Second Task, I assure you. Well, I believe I am finished here. Is there anything you wish to tell me, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger? Any more questions on your mind?”

“Several, old man, Harry mused, but those can wait until we’re prepared to ask them.”

“No, sir,” Harry said.

“Nothing, sir,” Hermione said.

“Very well,” Dumbledore said. “I suppose I have one last thing. While I do support you being in these Private Quarters you’ve been generously assigned to, I do not want you to overextend such a welcome, and spend so much time confined to those Quarters. I am sure your friends and the rest of the students missed speaking to you, or seeing such a wonderful, new couple walking around the castle and grounds.”

“More like they missed the gossip, Headmaster,” McGonagall said.

“Quite,” Dumbledore chuckled, his eyes twinkling.

“If I may, Headmaster,” Hermione said, “The reason for our.. confinement, is because we were preparing for our end-of-term exams this week. I am sure you can agree with me when I say how important they are.”

“Of course, Miss Granger,” Dumbledore said, “I hope I didn’t sound so accusatory. It was merely a suggestion. You’re excused, so you can get back to those studies. Thank you for taking time out of your planned day of privacy and studies to come meet with me. If you need anything of me, in the future, please come see me. If you need the password for my guardian, ask Professor McGonagall. She should have the available password for that time period.”

Harry and Hermione merely nodded, and stood with Professor McGonagall. She led her students out of the office, and none of them dared say a thing as they walked back toward the Lion’s Den. The Lioness of Gryffindor did check for any Trackers on the three of them, when they reached the Grand Staircase. She huffed in annoyance when she found them. Like earlier that day, she transferred them to random objects and had Mallory send them back to the Lion’s Den, which made them inert.

(Ten minutes after Harry, Hermione and McGonagall left the Headmaster’s Office)

Albus Dumbledore sighed as he emerged from the Pensieve in his office. He had watched the
memory of his meeting with Minerva, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger to see if he had missed anything crucial. He had picked up a few things he had missed. Like the fact that Mr. Potter and Miss Granger never made eye contact with him. They almost always looked at the wall above his head and behind his desk – aside from the moment the pair looked at the photo of James Potter and Lily Evans when the pair were seventh years.

This meant that they knew – or at least suspected – that he had a habit of using Legilimency on students. Was this act of deliberately avoiding his eyesight because they had something to hide from him, or was it just a fear of him using Legilimency on them? Something he needed to ponder. He also needed to speak to Severus about their future behavior toward the Potions Master, so he could discover whether or not they would deliberately avoided his eyesight.

He had also reviewed the questions Mr. Potter and Miss Granger asked, thinking about the reasons behind them. In addition, he also reviewed the answers the new couple had given him to his own questions. It was interesting listening to what they were saying a second time. Or rather, what they weren’t saying.

The most worrying part about the entire conversation was that Mr. Potter was worried about his Gringotts Key. He needed to convince Molly Weasley to deliver the key back to Mr. Potter, or things could boil over with that issue quite quickly. He couldn’t afford Mr. Potter attempting to go to Gringotts to get a new copy of the Key, so the old key could be defaulted. That would quickly point the boy to his Account Manager, something Albus had been trying to avoid since Mr. Potter’s eleventh birthday!

The fact that Mr. Potter’s mind had gone to Molly so quickly when Albus tried to lead him on, on trying to find a scapegoat to blame for putting his name in the Goblet of Fire. That was particularly worrying. If Mr. Potter didn’t trust Molly, that would create a lot of problems for Albus when it came to him controlling Mr. Potter’s future romance with Miss Weasley.

Albus had attempted to get Mr. Potter to believe Sirius Black had something to do with putting his name in the Goblet. He had hoped to get the boy to lose trust in his godfather, because now Black was back in the boy’s life, and that was something Albus couldn’t have. But Mr. Potter wasn’t having any of it. He was deliberately doing everything not to mention Black’s name! Possibly because Minerva was there, and she knew nothing about Harry’s close connection to Black? Or did he just not want to imply that he blamed Sirius for anything? Either way, this was a problem.

Albus had tried everything to get Black out of the boy’s life. Having Mr. Potter and Miss Granger rescue Black had backfired on Albus. He had wanted Black to escape, so he could still be a fugitive. He wanted Black to escape Great Britain and go far, far away, out of Mr. Potter’s life, and especially his influence. But Black had remained on the isles.

When he realized Black was still in Great Britain. Albus had hoped to lure Black back to Hogwarts after Mr. Potter’s name came out of the Goblet. He wanted to suggest to Black that he be nearby in case his godson needed him, or got in trouble. It would have given Black another opportunity to get caught and – if not killed or Kissed – sent back to Azkaban at the very least. But Black was hiding behind a Fidelius Charm, possibly recuperating from his time in Azkaban. So Albus couldn’t convince the man to come to Hogsmeade! How infuriating!

Albus snorted as he realized he was constantly calling Harry ‘Mr. Potter’ in his thoughts now! His mind went to that particular part of the conversation.

Mr. Potter’s question to him about why he, Albus, referred to the young man by his first name was
unexpected. But Albus had not become what he was today without being able to prepare for anything, and expect the unexpected. He had planned for the day Mr. Potter decided he was tired of his Headmaster and Professors calling him by his first name. The story he had told Mr. Potter about his parents was entirely true. He couldn’t risk lying what with Minerva in the room. After all, she had been one of the ‘staff’ Albus had alluded to during the entire story.

Minerva’s demand to stay in the office during the meeting was annoying, but predictable. This new change in her – this new persona as the Lioness of Gryffindor – was going to become problematic before very long. But he had not been able to stop it before it started. The Gryffindor House-wide meeting in the Great Hall had been a thing of genius on Minerva’s part. All the Gryffindor students – and likely the rest of those in the castle – now expected her to be the Lioness of Gryffindor. There was nothing he could not do about convincing her to cease this new mission she had toward Gryffindor House, not without harming his own reputation. So, unfortunately, he could not deny her wish to remain during this most recent meeting.

And he was still annoyed by her ‘geriatric old man’ comment.

“Really, Minerva?! In front of the students!” Albus huffed, with a frown.

So thanks to Minerva’s presence during the meeting, Albus had to be very careful with what he asked and explained to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger. He wanted them to believe he was on their side, and that he was supportive of their new relationship. Thank goodness they seemed to accept his reasoning for interrupting their display in the Great Hall on Thursday evening. He didn’t need them doubting his view of their relationship. Not now, not when he had a plan for Miss Granger during the Second Task.

Harry’s progress with the Golden Egg and the clue was rather surprising, and quite a quandary as well. Albus had hoped Mr. Potter wouldn’t figure out the clue until mid-February so he would be scrambling and panicking for answers on how to complete the second task. He would be so distracted, he wouldn’t even consider that ‘what you’ll sorely miss,’ actually meant ‘who you’ll sorely miss’. But now… Albus had listened closely, inside the Pensieve during that tidbit. Was he merely joking about the ‘who’ part, or had he really figured out the true message inside the Golden Egg? His suggestion to use the Firebolt, followed by his statement that he didn’t want to accuse him and the other Tournament officials that they would kidnap people for the task. It was rather worrying. Minerva’s follow up statement that she would complain if it was true, but she didn’t believe they’d do anything so serious was also worrying. He would have to ponder over this more.

Then there was Miss Granger’s question about the Second Task, asking about how the spectators were going to view the Task, if the Champions would be underwater for the most part. Albus didn’t need Minerva’s lecture about how much bad publicity it would be if spectators were only looking at the surface of the lake for much of the task. He had known about these problems for several weeks now. Madame Maxime and Ludo Bagman had also voiced their opinions and worries about this very thing. That idiot Bagman brought up about how boring it would be if he couldn’t comment about the Task if he couldn’t see the Champions underwater.

Now that Miss Granger and Minerva – and likely Mr. Potter! -- were all concerned about the spectators being able to see the whole task, Albus was quite sure these concerns would reach the whole of Hogwarts – as well as the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students – by dinner! The backlash would be quite vocal! But what he could he do? If the entire task was spectated by the audience, it would be most difficult to pull off Miss Granger’s ‘accidental’ assassination!

His expression brightened. “Unless I could make it look like one of the Champions – either the Veela..."
or Krum – had a part in it. But which one? The Veela? She would already have enough problems with the Merpeople due to their heated long-term vendetta with the Veela population. Maybe he could play off the chaos of Delacour trying to get her hostage, and in the confusion, make it appear she was responsible for Miss Granger’s tragic ‘accident.’ Maybe if he could confound whatever the viewer was seeing. Hmm…

And then there was Viktor Krum. Aside from his education in the Dark Arts, which could already cause him to be blamed for such an accident, there was another situation brewing that might make him seem guilty of Miss Granger’s demise.

He had heard the rumors about Viktor Krum’s persistent quest to take Miss Granger to the Yule Ball. How Krum believed the Boy-Who-Lived didn’t deserve Miss Granger. Yes, there was a rivalry – and a possible love triangle – boiling into creation. There were already rumors of Mr. Potter’s fierce protection toward his girlfriend when it came to Viktor Krum.

When he heard first heard about this, he had a passing thought about trying to convince Mr. Potter to allow Krum to take Miss Granger to the Ball, but did away with that, after he realized just how popular the news around the castle of Mr. Potter and Miss Granger’s new romantic relationship had become. The young Lions would be the stars of the Yule Ball, the talk of the night. He needed that to happen so he could put Miss Granger at the bottom of the lake as Mr. Potter’s hostage.

When he had considered trying to get Miss Granger as Krum’s date, he had also considered having her as the Bulgarian’s hostage, and placing Ron Weasley as Mr. Potter’s hostage – if only so it could possibly repair Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley’s broken friendship. But he had quickly realized nobody would believe Miss Granger could possibly qualify as Krum’s hostage instead of Mr. Potter’s. He had done away with both ideas almost as quickly as he had thought of them. He could figure another way to repair the friendship between Mr. Potter and the Weasleys.

“If I could blame it on Krum, the backlash between him and Mr. Potter would become quite chaotic,” Albus pondered. “It might even spark a duel between the two. Then I could see what Mr. Potter’s skill range was at the moment, especially against someone like Krum, who studied the Dark Arts Durmstrang loves to boast about. It would also make sure that Mr. Potter’s views on the Dark Arts were anything but good. Which would help make sure that he would do anything to not go down such a path, if the Horcrux in his scar tried to influence him.”

He was amazed how well things were going with his plans, all thanks to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger becoming a couple. The new couple could have their fun until the Second Task. Because after the Task, it would be Albus Dumbledore who would be enjoying himself!

(Meanwhile…)

While Albus Dumbledore was plotting the Second Task, with no clue how his plans concerning said Task would soon become quite difficult to accomplish, Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall were sitting in the Private Common Room, going over the meeting they had just finished.

“You both did very well in the Headmaster’s office,” McGonagall said. “I am quite proud of both of you. Mr. Potter, your idea to implicate Molly Weasley as the one to put your name in the Goblet of Fire, when the Headmaster was obviously trying to get you to blame your godfather, was inspiring. Miss Granger, your question about the audience being able to spectate the Second Task was masterful. Both of these very valid points caused the Headmaster problems without actually creating
any backlash toward the two of you.

“It is going to be sending him into tailspins, especially your question, Miss Granger. It will only add onto the Headmaster’s problems once Miss Skeeter’s article comes out tomorrow morning. Mr. Potter, I think the Headmaster is going to tell Molly Weasley to give you back your Gringotts Key as soon as possible. Can you tell me why?”

“Because if I didn’t get it back by the time I want to do Christmas shopping,” Harry said, “I’d have to go to Gringotts, the very place Dumbledore doesn’t want me to be, especially without a chaperone he can trust to escort me exactly where he wants me to be, and to bring the details of my visit back to him.”

“Precisely, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, in an approving tone. “I also believe he wants Molly to give you back your Key, because he doesn’t want you to lose your trust in her. You can’t be the future boyfriend of Molly’s daughter if your relationship with the mother isn’t very good, now can you?”

Harry snorted. “Thank heavens that isn’t going to actually happen.”

“Agreed,” Hermione muttered.

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, “Now, I believe we should discuss other events of this day aside from the unplanned meeting with the ‘Leader of the Sheep’, as you so quaintly coined him, Mr. Potter.”

Harry smiled, while Hermione giggled at the reminder of her boyfriend’s use of the title.

“Since the Headmaster is already on our minds, regrettably so,” McGonagall said, “Let’s begin with a question that has been on my mind ever since the topic of the question took place. You made a request to Keeper Ragnok, Mr. Potter, to delay the letter to the Headmaster that would inform him of his crimes against the Potter Vaults, and the news that he was banned from Gringotts.”

“When Dumbledore receives that letter,” Harry said, “he is going to run out of Hogwarts and into Gringotts like the Hungarian Horntail was on his coattails. That will give us a few hours to do whatever we want without him being here to intrude. For example, that hopefully soon-to-happen meeting between Ron and Ginny in which they reveal their plots and secrets while Hermione and I eavesdrop. When this happens, we would meet with you to discuss what we discover. You could confront the Weasleys the following day. The evening before you confront them, I would give Ragnok the request to send Dumbledore the letter the following morning.”

“Giving me a free run on the Weasleys without the Headmaster’s interference,” McGonagall said, nodding.

“We would discover, through them, what Dumbledore’s part in the plans are,” Harry said. “That will give us the opportunity to make our next move. Whether it be contact the DMLE, or whatever we decide.”

“I don’t know how much time we would have with Dumbledore out of the castle,” Hermione said, “But I must believe that Harry’s accounts at Gringotts is quite a big deal to Dumbledore. Especially given how much we discovered today. Dumbledore must know exactly what you might discover, Harry. Everything from your Inheritance, to the Will, to all the Blocks and Bindings. I think he’s going to be at Gringotts on that day for quite a while.”
“Unless he decides he’s not going to accomplish anything,” Harry said.

“If that happens, he’s going to go to the Ministry, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “He would try to get a Ministry Order to make Keeper Ragnok give him exactly what he wants. Yes, I truly think he would be very busy that day.”

“We already know he is likely going to be headed to the Ministry after he discovers the contents of the next two headlines in the Daily Prophet. If we could add him going to Gringotts on top of either of those – maybe the Emancipation one? -- that would get him out of Hogwarts even longer.”

“No plan survives contact with the enemy, Hermione,” Harry echoed her statement from earlier that day. “I don’t think we’re going to be lucky enough to add the Gringotts visit on top of the articles. But perhaps we shouldn’t count on that. Having him out of Hogwarts at least three days this week. It would cause problems for him.”

“It will certainly make him flustered,” McGonagall agreed. “He would also miss out on any gossip or other events taking place inside Hogwarts. He hates not knowing what is going on inside Hogwarts. But he won’t be able to avoid that if he wants to do damage control toward these articles over the next two days. Yes, it is going to be a very busy week for one Albus Dumbledore. We can be sure of that.”

“Well, then,” Harry said, grinning, “We’ll have to figure out exactly how to take advantage of that!”

Chapter End Notes

Harry, Hermione and McGonagall discussed a lot more than what was shown, but I didn’t want to include everything, because it would give up plots I am looking forward to in the future. Just know that they were basically having a war meeting, discussing events of the day and planning their next moves.

So what did you think of the meeting with Dumbledore? Did you really think I was going to have Dumbledore discover ANYTHING about what happened that day – at least this early? Nope. It would ruin a lot of my very fun plans for Dumbledore.

Next Chapter: The Article about the hostages in the Second Task arrives during breakfast. Dumbledore’s about to have his first of several chaotic days in the near future! Then, if I can fit it into the chapter, the Viktor Krum library prank! (I’ve actually had the scene written for a few days now!)
Dumbledore's Bad Day, Day 1

Chapter Notes

Lame title, I know. But I couldn’t figure out what else to call it.

Warning: Dumbledore and Viktor Krum Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Monday, December 14th, 1994)

Rita Skeeter’s forthcoming article, and the end-of-term exams were on the minds of Harry and Hermione as they stepped into the Great Hall on Monday morning for breakfast. Headmaster Dumbledore was already sitting at the Head Table, dining on breakfast, as was several members of the staff, including Professor McGonagall, who tipped her head in Harry and Hermione’s direction when they entered. A good majority of the student population were already seated in the Great Hall, though not everyone had arrived yet.

Harry and Hermione walked over to the Ravenclaw table and sat across from Padma Patil and Luna Lovegood. They had not sat at the Ravenclaw Table at all yesterday – due to the fact they had a very early breakfast, before they had gotten ready for their Diagon Alley trip, and they had eaten dinner at the Gryffindor Table with Harry’s fellow members of the Gryffindor Quidditch Team. So Padma and Luna were happy to see them as the couple sat down.

“Good morning, girls,” Hermione said, as she and Harry prepared their breakfast plates.

“Good morning,” Padma said, “Luna and I were just wondering whether or not you two would eat with us today. We wanted to know if you had any luck with that Egg, Harry?”

“I did,” Harry said, smiling. “You girls were right. It was a Mermaid’s Voice, and I was able to hear what the clue was. Now I just have to figure out how to swim underwater for about an hour while holding my breath.”

“You know, I think there is a type of plant that might be able to help with that,” Padma said, “But I can’t think of the name of it. Luna?”

“Herbology isn’t my specialty, unfortunately,” Luna said, “Plants just aren’t as interesting as Magical Creatures. Perhaps Neville might have an idea? He’s amazing at Herbology.”

“I’ll ask him later,” Harry said, “Thank you, girls.”

Just then, a familiar sound of a great rush of wings was heard as dozens and dozens of owls entered through the rafters of the Great Hall. Two owls dropped new editions of the Daily Prophet in front of Harry and Hermione, who caught the newspapers before they could land on the plates. As Harry unrolled his newspaper, he chanced a glance toward the Head Table, where owls dropped editions of the newspapers in front of Dumbledore, McGonagall, and a few other members of the staff.
Harry smirked as he glanced at the front page of the Daily Prophet. A large photo of the Hogwarts lake, with the school in the background, was seen. The large bold title above the article read:

SECOND TASK SHOCKER: ARE TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT OFFICIALS PLANNING TO KIDNAP INNOCENT STUDENTS TO USE AS HOSTAGES FOR CHAMPIONS TO RESCUE?

Knowing others were probably watching for his reaction, Harry took on a shocked, angry expression on his face as he began reading the article. Inside, however, he was laughing his arse off.

Written by Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet Star Reporter

“Come seek us where our voices sound,
We cannot sing above the ground,
And while you’re searching ponder this:
We’ve taken what you’ll sorely miss,
An hour long you’ll have to look,
And to recover what we took,
But past an hour — the prospect’s black,
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back.”

That, readers, is the clue inside the Golden Egg that four Triwizard Tournament Champions had to retrieve during the First Task in late November. An anonymous fan of mine, who overheard one of the Champions talking about the clue’s message, was kind enough to send me the details of said clue. They also informed me that the clue was sung by a choir of Mermaids!

According to the clue, the four Champions will have to brave the cold waters of the Hogwarts Lake, in late February, and make their way into a Mermaid Village in order to recover “what they’ll sorely miss.”

But does the clue really mean that? Does it say “what” when it really should be saying “who you’ll sorely miss”? After all, if the Champions had to rescue simple objects, such as a stuffed animal, or a photograph, that wouldn’t exactly be very exciting, now would it? But what if the Champions had to rescue actual living victims? Not just any ordinary victims, but someone they would sorely miss? Such as a significant other, a best friend or a family member?

Last weekend, this journalist gave you the exclusive story that the Boy-Who-Lived has a new girlfriend, Hermione Granger – this journalist apologizes to the young witch for misnaming them in the previous article – who is also his date to the upcoming Yule Ball on Christmas Day. Is Miss Granger going to be a hostage victim for Harry Potter to rescue?

Here’s the questions that must be asked in light of this news. Will Miss Granger and the other hostages be given a choice whether or not to participate in the
Second Task? Or will they be kidnapped in the middle of the night, only to end up unconscious in the middle of a Mermaid Village? Will their parents be given the option to accept or deny their son or daughter’s part in the Task? How safe would these hostages be, especially when it appears that none of them will have voluntarily signed up for such an event.

Let’s not forget the most important question: is any of this legal at all? Will the officials behind the Triwizard Tournament be found culpable of kidnapping and other crimes if they were to go through with this? Is this legally, and morally, right?

In this journalist’s opinion – and I am sure many of you agree, dear readers -- Albus Dumbledore, Bartemius Crouch, and Ludo Bagman should be found guilty of kidnapping of innocent, suspecting students, if they continue to go through with these plans. Perhaps they should already have charges brought forward, just for thinking of such an idea! Especially when they could simply go through with what the true message of the clue says and use ‘what’ not ‘who’ our Champions would sorely miss, such as items like photographs.

Will Albus Dumbledore, Bartemius Crouch, Ludo Bagman and the other officials behind the Triwizard Tournament do what is right? Or will they risk the lives of innocent students simply because of entertainment? What will Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge’s response to this article be? How about Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones?

Time will tell, and I, Rita Skeeter, Star Reporter of the Daily Prophet, will be here to give you all the juicy news!

Who Are The Triwizard Tournament Champions? Page 2
Dumbledore, Crouch and Bagman, the Voices of the Tournament! Page 3
Will the Audience Be Able To Watch The Entire Second Task? Page 4

Harry was surprised – and a bit relieved – that there was no “preview” line about – as Rita Skeeter called it – the “Emancipation Speculation” article. He didn’t need Dumbledore getting a hint that another damning article for him was to come tomorrow.

Harry chanced another glance at the Head Table, and could barely hold back laughter at the look on the Headmaster’s face.

The expression ‘egg on his face’ didn’t do Albus Dumbledore justice.

(Meanwhile…)

If someone had cracked an egg on Albus Dumbledore’s face, there was a good chance it could have fried just from the heat on his face. But the Headmaster of Hogwarts wasn’t blushing. He was steaming mad!

Albus didn’t know what question to ask first. How did Rita Skeeter get this information? Who was
this ‘anonymous fan’ that had given Skeeter the clue? How dare Skeeter publish such an article like this that not only spoiled the Golden Egg’s clue for those Champions who might not have gotten the clue solved yet, but also revealed the true message behind the clue that nobody but the Triwizard Tournament officials was supposed to know about!!

The article was quite damning. His name had been mentioned more than once, and Skeeter was already questioning whether or not he and the other officials should be brought up on charges for considering placing innocent students as hostages in the Merpeople Village. He didn’t care if Crouch or Bagman were affected after this, but how dare it even be implied that he should be seen as a criminal for something like this?!

Who gave Skeeter this information?! Albus looked toward the Hufflepuff Table, and found Cedric Diggory looking pale and shocked as he read the headlining article. Albus then glanced over to the Gryffindor Table, but didn’t see Harry Potter. He soon found the boy sitting at the Ravenclaw Table. The boy looked shocked, of course, but also very angry. Obviously he wasn’t very happy about this news, or the fact that his girlfriend had been named as a possible hostage of the Task. As soon as Harry caught him staring, the boy’s eyebrows narrowed in a glare at him.

Albus knew he needed to get out of, not only the Great Hall, but the castle, before the entire student body read the article and started yelling at him. He needed to get to the Ministry of Magic to figure out some damage control due to the article. He cleared his throat and stood up.

“I am going to be away from the castle for a few hours, Minerva,” he said to his Deputy. “You’re in charge until I return.”

“Of course, Headmaster,” Minerva said. “Perhaps we can discuss Miss Skeeter’s article when you return?”

Albus grimaced. “If I am not exhausted from my travels, I will invite you for a discussion. If I can talk about it, that is, of course. I am going to go to the Ministry to see what the response about the article should be.”

Before Minerva or any of the other Professors could speak up, Albus walked around the table, then started off toward the large doors. Suddenly there was chaos from the students, as they saw him leaving.

“Is this article true, Headmaster?!”

“We’re not in danger of becoming hostages, are we?”

“You’re not putting Cho at the bottom of the lake, Dumbledore!” Cedric Diggory’s voice said.

Harry Potter stood up as Albus neared where he was sitting.

“Nor are you putting Hermione down there!” Harry growled, “She was personally mentioned by Skeeter! I believe we discussed this yesterday, Headmaster! I did not accuse you yesterday of doing this, but I am accusing you today! Tell me Skeeter’s wrong about this!”

Before Albus could say anything, fireworks were heard from the Head Table as Minerva stood.

Thank you, Minerva, Albus sighed in relief, as he hurried past Mr. Potter and the rest of the students, many of which were still glaring at him. Growling inwardly at the disrespect these childish students
were giving him – **him! Their Headmaster! The Leader of the Light! How dare they disrespect him?!** – and damning Rita Skeeter for putting himself in this position, Albus pushed the large doors open and stepped into the Entrance Hall. Instead of heading out of the castle, he headed in the direction of his Office. As Headmaster, he was able to use the Floo in his Office to travel outside of Hogwarts. It would be the quickest way he could get to the Ministry of Magic.

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**(Moments before...)**

*I am so glad Severus decided not to show up for breakfast this morning,* Minerva mused as she watched Harry Potter questioning Albus. *He would certainly be making a bigger mess of this than it already is, especially with Harry ranting. Oh, Merlin. I need to stop this before Albus decides to attack the boy with Legilimency and finds his Natural Occlumency abilities have been unbound.*

Minerva McGonagall raised her wand and sent loud, bright fireworks shooting toward the ceiling above her. That made Harry and the rest of the students quiet down. As Albus used the distraction to escape the Hall, Minerva stood up. It took two more minutes before things calmed down and the students were once again sitting back at the tables.

“I know many of you have questions thanks to Rita Skeeter’s new article,” Minerva said, “I have many questions of my own. I do not have many answers for you at the moment. I can, however, give you this promise. Champions Diggory and Potter, I am going to give you my guarantee that no person – be they Miss Chang, Miss Granger, or anyone else – will be used as hostages for the Second Task. If I am wrong, I will personally hand in my resignation as Deputy, Head of Gryffindor and Transfiguration Professor an hour after the Second Task.”

Several students, and even some staff gasped in shock at this declaration.

“That is how serious I am about making sure none of this comes to pass,” Minerva said, firmly. “If I have to, I will personally swim down to the Mermaid Village myself on the day of the Second Task to make sure the ‘hostages’ are objects, not people.”

“As will I!” Pomona Sprout said, standing up.

“As will I!” Filius Flitwick said, as he stood too.

Minerva smiled Harry, Hermione and Cedric Diggory began a round of applause that soon echoed around the Great Hall. The Lioness of Gryffindor sat back down, inwardly cursing Albus Dumbledore and the other Triwizard Tournament officials for putting her in this position.

*I sincerely hope you have a very bad day today, Albus Dumbledore,* Minerva mused, *Maybe we’ll be lucky and you won’t be returning to the castle today.*

Somehow, Minerva McGonagall knew she was definitely not that lucky.

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**(Twenty minutes later…)**

Albus Dumbledore stepped out of the Floo, and into the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic. He walked over to the Security Desk, where Eric, the Welcome Wizard, smiled at him.

“Welcome, Headmaster,” Eric said, “I have a message from Minister Fudge for you.”
“If he wishes to see me,” Albus said, “He will have to wait until after I meet with Bartemius Crouch and Ludo Bagman.”

“He told me you might say that,” Eric said, “Which is why he wishes to meet all three of you in Meeting Room 2 on Level 1.”

Albus sighed. “Very well. Thank you for informing me.”

Eric ran Albus’ wand through the usual steps, and handed the Elder Wand back to Albus with a smile.

“The VIP Lifts are under maintenance today,” Eric said, “I’m afraid you’ll have to use the public lifts.”

Albus sighed, hiding his frustration and thanked the Welcome Wizard. He then made his way through the crowds of Ministry workers who were bustling around the Atrium. Soon enough, Albus was in one of the lifts. He frowned as he noticed that a three of the workers in the lift with him were reading the Skeeter article that was the reason he was here in the first place. Luckily, nobody looked at him with disapproving or curious looks, and he didn’t have to wait long before the lift reached the first floor. He followed two other wizards out of the lift, and headed down the corridor. Soon, he reached a door with a sign above it reading: “Meeting Room 2”.

He opened the door and stepped inside to find that the room was filled with more people than he expected. Bartemius Crouch and Ludo Bagman were there, as was Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge. But there were three others which Albus was not expecting: Dolores Umbridge, the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic; Rufus Scrimgeour, the Head of the Auror Department; and Amelia Bones; Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

"Ah, Albus!” Cornelius greeted him, "Good morning! I see you got my message!"

“I did,” Albus said, “However, I was not told there would be so many people here.”

“Yes, well, I am afraid Madam Bones and Auror Scrimgeour insisted on being here when they heard what the meeting would be about,” Cornelius said, “And Madam Umbridge accompanied me. Please, sit, so that we may begin!”

Albus sat at one end of a long meeting table, while Cornelius sat at the other end. Scrimgeour and Bones sat on one side, while Crouch, Bagman and Umbridge sat on the other side. Albus noticed that Bartemius Crouch was looking rather poor in health. He had bags under his eyes and his face looked pale.

“Bartemius, old friend,” Albus said, “Perhaps I might suggest you take some time off for your health?”

“I was just telling Minister Fudge this very thing,” Bartemius said, “I informed my assistant Weatherbee, before I came here that he is going to be in charge of my usual duties for a couple of weeks. This is my last meeting before I leave until the New Year. Unfortunately that means I will not make it to the Yule Ball. Weatherbee will be there in my stead.”

“Well, I think I speak for everyone here that I hope you feel better, my friend,” Cornelius said, with a smile. “Moving on. Has everyone seen Rita Skeeter’s article in the Daily Prophet this morning?”
Everyone acknowledged that they had. Umbridge cleared her throat.

“Everyone acknowledged that they had. Umbridge cleared her throat.

“Yes, Dolores?” Cornelius asked, with a smile.

“I have a question for Albus,” Umbridge said, in her honey-sweet voice, as she looked from the Minister to Albus, “Miss Skeeter said in her article that she got the information from an anonymous source, a fan of hers. I can only assume that this source is a student of yours, as the article stated this source heard one of the Champions speaking of the clue.”

“I believe I would agree with your assumption, Madam Umbridge,” Albus said.

“Do you have any idea who it might have been?” Umbridge asked, “Perhaps it was one of the Champions themselves. Maybe they were upset about what they discovered, and wrote to Miss Skeeter? Harry Potter, perhaps? His and his – ahem – Muggleborn girlfriend’s names were mentioned exclusively in the article. I am sure the young man is already rather angry about being in the Tournament itself. Perhaps this crossed the line for the young Champion?”

“Trust me, Madam Umbridge,” Albus said, “The thought crossed my mind. However, I do not believe the source was Mr. Potter or Mr. Diggory. You see, during breakfast today in the Great Hall at Hogwarts, when the articles arrived, both Mr. Diggory and Mr. Potter looked shocked at the news. Mr. Potter looked particularly angry with what the article implied.”

“Excuse me,” Amelia Bones said, “Did you say ‘implied’? Does this mean Miss Skeeter was completely wrong with what she said? You’re not actually going to use human hostages for the Second Task, are you?”

Unfortunately, before Albus could speak up, Ludo Bagman decided he needed to be heard.

“That was the idea, Madam Bones,” Bagman said, smiling, “We figured we could see who the Champions brought as dates to the Yule Ball, then use their dates as human hostages for the Second Task.”

“With their permission, I assume?” Amelia asked, “And the permission of their parents?”

“Well, no,” Bagman said, nervously, “The hostages wouldn’t be notified about their part in the Task, until moments before we placed them under stasis. We didn’t want them to get word back to the Champions, you see. The Champions weren’t supposed to know they were going to have to rescue human hostages.”

“Why not?” Amelia asked.

“Because it was believed it would be more dramatic,” Bagman said, smiling, “Which is why we had the clue say ‘what you’ll sorely miss’, instead of ‘who’.”

“So you weren’t going to get permission from the hostages’ parents or guardians?” Amelia asked.

Albus decided to come in for the rescue. “It was assumed that the hostages in question would be seventeen, therefore of age, and therefore it wouldn’t be necessary to get permission from their parents.”

“But what about Mr. Potter’s girlfriend?” Amelia asked, “She’s not seventeen, is she?”
“No,” Albus said, “She is not.”

“Mr. Bagman, you said the hostages wouldn’t be told until moments before they would be put under stasis. Would they get a choice then? What if they said ‘no’?”

“We – ahem – hadn’t discussed that yet,” Bagman said.

“You haven’t discussed it,” Amelia said, “Because you had no plans to ask their permission. I happen to think Miss Skeeter’s article is a lot more truthful than her usual articles are. Here’s what I think. I think you were going to kidnap these hostages and put them immediately under stasis, so you could avoid the trouble of the possibility that they would be against being a hostage for the Task. After the Task was said and done, I am sure you would pay them a generous amount of Galleons to keep quiet about the fact that they had no choice in volunteering for the task.”

“That… is quite the accusation, Madam Bones,” Albus said, sternly.

“Do you have proof that none of this is true?” Amelia asked. “Gentlemen, I’m going to need the memories of you discussing the Second Task. Since it sounds like you’re not allowing the hostages to decide whether or not they want to be a hostage, none of you get to decide whether or not you get to give up a copy of those memories.”

“Cornelius, surely you don’t approve of this?” Albus asked.

“I’m afraid I do, Albus,” Cornelius said, “I would like to get to the bottom of this, after all. Today, before it gets out of hand.”

Bagman stammered and cleared his throat. “Surely there is something we could do to avoid all of this, Madam Bones?”

Madam Bones smirked then whispered something to Auror Scrimgeour. He looked at her for a moment, then nodded. Amelia grinned and looked back at Bagman, then at Crouch and Dumbledore.

“If all three of you promise not to use human hostages for the Second Task,” Amelia said, “Perhaps if you were to, say, use some type of object that the Champions would sorely miss, then I’ll stop any idea of a formal investigation toward all three of you for conspiracy to commit kidnapping and attempted murder.”

“Attempted murder?!” Albus asked, in disbelief.

“The hostages could die in the task, Albus,” Amelia said, “Just the possibility of them dying is attempted murder, because you would have put them down there against their choice. If they did die, then it would be raised to murder.”

“They would be perfectly safe, I assure you, Madam Bones,” Albus said, “The stasis spells would hold until they broke the surface.”

“You don’t know that, Albus!” Amelia growled, “Anything could go wrong in the Merpeople village. For Merlin’s sake, one of the Champions is a Veela! The Veela and the Merpeople already have a bad history. It could escalate into chaos down there, and not only would Champion Delacour be in danger, but so would the other Champions and the hostages! The least I can do – the least you
can do is eliminate the threat to the hostages. By making sure there aren’t any hostages down there in the first place!”

“So, Albus, Bartemius, Ludo? Raise your hand if you agree to forego any ideas of using hostages for the Second Task. If you do not raise your hand, I will put you in chains right now for conspiracy to commit kidnapping and attempted murder!”

Albus was about to complain to Cornelius that Amelia was committing something similar to extortion. But Cornelius looked like he wasn’t going to agree. Bagman instantly raised his hand. Bartemius coughed and raised his hand next. Albus grumbled under his breath as he raised his hand. He would agree – for now. He still had over two months to figure out how to get around this.

“Very good, gentlemen,” Amelia said, “Auror Scrimgeour, what do you say to keeping these men honest? You could have a group of Aurors in the lake to make sure no human hostages are used anyway?”

“I was already considering this idea, Madam Bones,” Scrimgeour said, “I would say that is a fine idea.”

Albus frowned. That just made things worse!

“Then it would seem my job is finished here,” Madam Bones said. “If you want my advice, Cornelius, you better get word out to the Daily Prophet and Miss Skeeter herself before your office, and these gentlemen are swamped with Howlers complaining about the accusations Miss Skeeter voiced.”

Umbridge looked most put out that someone else was giving the Minister advice. Cornelius, however, was simply smiling and nodding in agreement.

“That is a wonderful suggestion, Madam Bones,” Cornelius said, “Thank you! Dolores, please schedule a press conference for the next hour or two?”

“Of course, Minister,” Umbridge said, with a false smile.

“Then go… make haste, Dolores!” Cornelius said.

Umbridge and Madam Bones left, but Scrimgeour remained seated at the table.

“Was Madam Bones truly going to go through with her… threat to arrest us, Rufus?” Bagman asked.

“If you didn’t believe her, you don’t know her all that well then, Ludo,” Scrimgeour said. “She takes her job seriously. As do I. I will find a good group of Aurors to keep watch during the Second Task to make sure everything goes smoothly. I will keep each of you up to date with how that goes.”

“Thank you, Auror Scrimgeour,” Cornelius said, “Any help you can give us would go a very long way. This I assure you.”

“I’ll do all I can to make sure this Tournament goes off smoothly,” Scrimgeour said, “It is already hell in a handbasket with Potter being an unexpected champion. Any leads on that, Albus?”

“Nothing concrete, Rufus,” Albus said, “But I assure you, I am doing everything to find out who placed Mr. Potter in the Tournament.”
“As much as I do not want to pressure you, Albus,” Scrimgeour said, “As much as I respect you and your various positions, and everything you have done for Magical Britain, I find it necessary. I want to see some progress before the Second Task, or I will order a couple of Aurors to go to Hogwarts to assist you in your investigation.”

“Well, I already do have assistance from an Auror,” Albus said, his eyes twinkling, as he hoped he could dissuade the Auror from this direction.

“Alastor Moody,” Scrimgeour said, “Ex-Auror, Albus. He would not be included in assisting me with my investigation, apart from answering a few questions.”

“He would be a suspect?” Albus asked, in shock.

“He was there when the Goblet was lit and when Mr. Potter’s name came out of the Goblet,” Scrimgeour said, “So he’s a suspect. Believe me, Albus, knowing Mad-Eye as well as I do, he would curse me if I didn’t include him in my list of suspects. He would tell me I shouldn’t not include him on my list of suspects because I know him as a friend and former colleague. He’d probably place himself in a list of suspects if he was doing the investigation!”

Cornelius chuckled. “He would, indeed! I approve of this move, Auror Scrimgeour. If Albus hasn’t progressed any further in getting answers about Mr. Potter’s unfortunate inclusion in the Tournament, you have my permission and support to send an investigation team to Hogwarts. I am sure Madam Bones would say the same thing if she was still in this meeting.”

“Thank you, Minister,” Scrimgeour said. “I believe I am done with my reasons for being here. Good day.”

Cornelius and Bagman gave their farewells to Scrimgeour, while Albus merely nodded. Crouch said nothing. Scrimgeour stood and left the room.

“Is there anything more on the agenda, gentlemen?” Cornelius asked.

“I have something,” Bagman said, “Aside from Miss Skeeter’s front-page article, there was another article from her about the Second Task. It regarded the – ahem – spectators part of the Task. The audience. She – ahem – implied that the audience wouldn’t be able to see most of the Second Task, apart from when the Champions dove into the lake, then resurfaced later. They wouldn’t see anything when it comes to the events under the surface of the lake.

“Miss Skeeter even suggested I, myself, would be bored out of my mind because I wouldn’t be able to comment throughout the Task, like I did with the First Task! I didn’t even consider this until I read her article! This is terrible, gentlemen! I firmly believe we need to do something about this!”

“Interestingly enough, Harry Potter’s girlfriend, Hermione Granger, actually mentioned this very thing to me yesterday,” Albus said, with a chuckle.

“She did?” Cornelius asked, impressed, his eyebrows raised, “And this is one of the young Muggleborn students?”

“It is,” Albus agreed, “She’s the top student in her year, actually. She’s said to be the smartest witch of her age. A very logical thinker, Miss Granger is. I believe you actually met her this past June, when you visited Hogwarts. She was with Mr. Potter in the Hospital Wing.”
Cornelius frowned as he considered this. “That bushy-haired young girl? One of the students along with Mr. Potter who were victims of a Confundus Curse?”

Albus smirked and nodded. He had to give it to Severus for coming up with that ingenious lie.

“Indeed, Cornelius,” Albus said.

“Oh, yes, her,” Cornelius said, chuckling. “She’s quite the girl. And she had concerns about the spectator part of the Second Task?”

“She basically implied most of which Skeeter did in her article,” Albus said.

“Logical thinker indeed!” Bagman exclaimed. “Perhaps I could speak to this young lady. Maybe she might have some ideas as to help us improve the spectator’s views.”

“I will ask Miss Granger if she would agree to meet with you – or I should say, us as the Tournament committee,” Albus said, “So that she could bring forth any suggestions she might have.”

“I would love to see what she comes up with!” Cornelius said, “She might impress us all! Yes, this spectator part of the Second Task is definitely something that should be discussed in the coming weeks before the Task takes place.

“I, myself, will be in attendance for the Task. Gentlemen, I do not want to be staring at the surface of the lake for an hour, not knowing what is happening in the depths below! I believe the Ministers of France and Bulgaria may also be there. As the Minister of Magic of the country hosting this tournament, I do not want to look like a fool in front of my peers! Do not make me look like one, gentlemen!

“Fix this! No human hostages and no forcing the spectators to stare at the surface of the lake for an hour. Fix it! I am about to reassure the press and the public that there won’t be any human hostages at the bottom of the lake! Do not make me look like one, gentlemen!”

“Yes, Minister!” Bagman blustered, “We will certainly endeavor to do so!”

Cornelius cleared his throat and stood up. “I wish you the best of luck, gentlemen. I will leave you to discuss how to fix the Second Task.”

Albus sighed in relief as he watched Cornelius walk out of the room. Now he could finally take charge of this disaster. Suddenly he heard Cornelius exclaim, and he turned around and watched the Minister backstepping back into the room. The very large and very imposing Madame Olympe Maxime, Headmistress of Beauxbatons, ducked under the door and stepped into the room. She was followed by Igor Karkaroff, Headmaster of Durmstrang.

“What is zees about ‘uman ‘ostages, Minister Fudge!” Madame Maxime boomed, “I did not agree to using ‘umans as victims! Am I being lied to, Minister Fudge?! Did I not ‘ear of zees because I objected to ze idea of an underwater task in ze first place, because one of my students is a Veela, and could ‘ave been a Champion? Well, she eez a Champion now, Minister Fudge! I already ‘ave to warn ‘er against the Merpeople! Do not make me tell ‘er she ‘as to rescue a ‘uman!”

Albus sighed as he decided to save the blustering Minister. “It is currently in progress of being remedied, Madame Maxime. We were just discussing doing away with the human hostages. Why
don’t you, and Headmaster Karkaroff come in and we can discuss this? However, we must let Cornelius leave. He has some – ahem – duties as Minister to get done.”

“I ‘ope ‘e does a better job at his ozzer duties than ‘e ‘as done as ‘osting Minister of zis Tournament!” Maxime boomed.

Cornelius squeaked and ducked out of the room, before the large woman could threaten him anymore. Meanwhile Madame Maxime walked over to the chair at the opposite end of the table, and used several spells to make the chair larger, and more enforced for her. Then she sat down. Karkaroff snorted and sat down, but remained as silent as he had been since he entered.

Albus cleared his throat. “It seems we have been very remiss in our duties as the officials behind the Triwizard Tournament, especially when it comes to the Second Task. Miss Skeeter’s – ahem – delightful article merely brought that to light which we should have already considered. Let us try to remedy the situation, gentlemen, Madame. And let us not hope we will be here all day. Questions? Suggestions?”

Albus sighed as he relaxed in his chair as more than one voice started speaking up, wanting to be heard first. Today’s events had brought many complications to his plans for the Second Task. But he would simply press on. He simply needed to figure out a way to work around these unfortunate complications.

Albus Dumbledore really wished he had one of his lemon drops at the moment. The Calming Draughts in them would be a lovely remedy to the headaches and migraines he was getting as day progressed.

(That evening, an hour before dinner…)

Viktor Krum was currently making his way through the aisles of bookshelves, casually glancing at different books so he wouldn’t look suspicious about his true quest.

He was looking for Her… me… own? Now that wasn’t her name. Harmony? No, that wasn’t it either, that was an invention of the Skeeter reporter. Her… mine? Perhaps not, but it sounded quite fine to Viktor Krum either way.

Because she should be mine, the stalker – ahem – Seeker mused, She will discover I am better than that spectacle-faced little wannabe. How can someone as pathetic as that little boy be the Boy-Who-Lived? British propaganda trying to make them better than everyone else! Of course they brag about a Boy-Who-Lived, who defeated the second greatest Dark Lord next to that bastard Grindelwald. They wanted pathetic sheep to believe their Dark Lord was dead, so they created a scapegoat and made him out to be such a little hero. And the boy they’ve chosen be the hero? He’d piss his pants at the first sight of their Dark Lord.

That Beauxbatons Veela Champion had said it perfectly didn’t she? A little boy competing in a big man’s tournament. Viktor, of course, believed the boy didn’t enter his name into the Goblet. A coward like him wouldn’t dare. Someone – likely from the British Ministry – wanted the world to discover their pride and joy, the Boy-Who-Lived, so they made him compete in the Tournament.

Poor Potter, Viktor mused, Pathetic boy probably doesn’t realize they are using him like a back alley whore, before he is discarded like all scapegoats. He’ll die by the time the tournament is over. Her-mine, you just simply dump him now, and save yourself the inevitable grief when he dies in a
few months. That crackpot old Auror was wrong. The boy isn’t going to die because of the Ministry’s whims. He’ll die because he’s too stupid to survive this tournament. Come to me, Hermine. I will cherish and love you long after that boy you believe loves you has left this world.

Viktor sighed, annoyed. Where was she? He had seen he come in to the library! But she didn’t sit at her normal table.

“Oh, Hermione, that’s so good,” a voice moaned. Potter’s voice!

_Hermione, that’s what her name is_, Viktor mused, _Potter, what are you doing to her?! You do not deserve her! I’m coming, my Hermine!

Before he could even leave the aisle of bookshelves, he heard a crashing sound and turned toward the noise. Another crashing sound made him turn back around. His eyes widened. Every single book around him had fallen off the shelves.

“What is going on here?!” the voice of the Hogwarts Librarian shrieked, “What happened to my books. You! I knew you were bad news! I don’t care if you are a Champion in this blasted tournament. You come in here with your flocks of girls, making all kinds of noise, disrespecting my library! And now you’ve made a mess of my books! Out! You are banned from my library! Never return!”

“Um… ma’am, I… I didn’t do this,” Viktor said.

“Do you honestly think I can understand a word you are saying?” The librarian growled. “Out! Now! You are banned! Shoo!”

Before he could say another word, the librarian summoned a book. Viktor’s eyes widened as he saw the Monster Book of Monsters scurrying right toward him. He turned and hurried toward the main area of the library, then ran out into the corridor, as the book continued to chase him. The book stopped at the doorway of the library, and Viktor looked back at it. Then he saw several teenagers, including very good-looking women all pointing and laughing at him!

_I am ruined!_ Viktor thought, horrified, _How am I supposed to research for the Second Task if I am no longer welcome in the library! Even worse, these… Englishmen are laughing at me. Hermine will certainly discover what happened to me. She’ll see me as a laughingstock! Especially if her Champion boyfriend does better than me now that I won’t be able to research! I am ruined!

Viktor stalked off, down the corridor, grumbling as he could still hear the roaring laughter that was all directed toward him.

(Meanwhile…)

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were laughing in the library too. However, they had not moved from the private table they had been sitting at. Fred and George Weasley were also there, grinning like loons.

“Honestly, Harry,” Hermione said, “Did you have to make it sound like we were shagging when he got too close to finding us?”

“If he believes we’re shagging,” Harry said, “He’ll realize it will be a lot harder than he assumed to
“break us up.”

Hermione huffed. “You’re lucky nobody else heard us.”

“Not luck, my dear Cleopatra,” Fred said.

“We made sure only Viktor heard you and Casanova,” George said.

“So when he did hear you,” Fred said, “He’d run right to the exact aisle we wanted him to be at.”

“The aisle you sabotaged,” Harry said. “Very nice, boys.”

“Thank you, boys,” Hermione said, smiling.

“Don’t mention it,” Fred said.

“We promised we would get rid of the Stalking Seeker,” George said.

“And we did so,” Fred said.

“And now he can’t do any more research about the Triwizard Tournament,” George said.

“An added bonus,” Fred said, “And it gave you a better chance to win the whole thing.”

“Not that we think that duck-footed idiot could beat you,” George said.

“But we wanted to make sure you’d humiliate him since he even dared look at our Cleopatra,” Fred said.

“Thank you, boys,” Harry said, “I will never forget this.”

“Did you have to harm so many books to pull off your plan?” Hermione asked.

“We placed protection charms on all the books before we made them tumble,” Fred said.

“We knew you’d never forgive us if we hurt your precious books,” George said.

“Thank you, boys,” Hermione said, “You’re so thoughtful.”

Fred and George saluted then walked off.

“See?” Harry said, “I told you the plan would work. And now the Stalker Seeker will never bother you again.”

“You really think this is the last we’ll hear of him, Harry?” Hermione asked.

Harry sighed. “Knowing my luck? Damn it. Back to the drawing boards.”

Hermione giggled and leaned toward Harry and kissed him. Harry kissed her back.

“My hero,” Hermione said, as she backed away. “Far better than some Boy-Who-Lived.”
“Only for you, Hermione,” Harry said.

“You’re really trying to take advantage of these snogging corners, aren’t you?” Hermione asked.

Harry gasped dramatically. “I thought they were private reading corners! How naughty of you! Is this why you wanted me to go to the library with you all those times? Even when we were first years?”

“In your dreams, Potter,” Hermione said.

“You bet!” Harry said, grinning.

“Mm, mine too,” Hermione said with a smirk.

Harry cuddled closer to her. “And just what happens in these dreams? Can we reenact them?”

“Not unless you want to get us banned too!” Hermione said.

“Would it be so bad?” Harry asked.

“Consider who you are talking to, boyfriend,” Hermione said, raising an eyebrow.

“Okay… then shall we reenact one of your tamer library dreams?” Harry asked.

Hermione blushed. “That would still get us banned.”

“Oh, you are a naughty witch!” Harry said.

Hermione giggled, then squeaked as Harry pulled her in for another long kiss.

Chapter End Notes

I’m not sure how I feel about this chapter. Let’s just say it sounded better in my head. Oh well, hope you liked it anyway!

Next Chapter: Dumbledore has another bad day when another Rita Skeeter article appears as the headline of Tuesday’s edition of the Daily Prophet! What kind of damage control will Dumbledore have to do with this one? It begins with a meeting between Dumbledore and our hero!
I feel I need to apologize for Rita Skeeter’s use of First Person style whilst writing the article in this chapter. I couldn’t figure out a way to word the article without using this style. This is probably the only time I’ll ever write an article in First Person like this.

The surname Blishwick is one of the many surnames seen on the various Potter Wiki websites. I’ve used it in a couple of stories before this one. The name has some importance in this chapter, and will have plenty of importance in the future of this story.

The Winter Solstice Wizengamot Session is something I’ve used in a couple of stories as well. It is mentioned in this chapter, and it will be seen in the story. However, in this story, it won’t be as dramatic as it was in Ilvermorny Champion. In 1994, the Winter Solstice was on December 21st. So, it takes place time-wise, a week after the events of the previous chapter.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

(Tuesday, December 15th, 1994)

Knowing that the Headmaster would likely request their presence – or Harry’s at the very least – in his office, and possibly before class, Harry and Hermione decided to get an early breakfast that morning. However, as they stepped into the Great Hall, they found that a lot of students also had the same idea. Perhaps they hoped Rita Skeeter would have another article, maybe a follow-up of yesterday’s article about the Second Task. It was known that the Headmaster had spent much of Monday in the Ministry of Magic, likely doing damage control due to Skeeter’s article. So it was assumed there would be something just as juicy in the Daily Prophet today.

Harry smiled at that thought, as he and Hermione made their way over to the Ravenclaw Table again. There would definitely be something juicy in the Daily Prophet. But it wasn’t just going to be the aftermath of the previous day’s article – nor would that article be the most important.

Harry and Hermione found an unexpected additional Gryffindor sitting with Padma and Luna, as they sat down. Neville Longbottom was sitting next to Luna, his date to the Yule Ball.

“Morning girls, Neville,” Harry said, as he and Hermione began filling their plates.

“Good morning,” Neville said, after the two Ravenclaws greeted the newcomers, “Luna was just telling me about your problems with the Second Task, Harry.”

“Yeah, she did mention that I should speak to you,” Harry said, “I was planning on coming to you about that, yesterday. But with the exams and everything, Hermione and I have been rather busy.”

“Not to mention the rumors about your part in Viktor Krum being banned from the library,” Padma
said, grinning. “You couldn’t tell us whether or not you two did have a part in that, did you?”

“I did not know you were as much into gossip as your sister, Miss Patil!” Hermione commented, with a grin.

Padma rolled her eyes. “I’m going to allow that change of subject. Keep your secrets, Miss Granger!”

Harry cleared his throat. “So, Neville, here’s the thing. I need to spend about an hour underwater, while swimming in the Hogwarts Lake for the Second Task. Any ideas you have that can help me? Anything, big or small, could be a lot of help.”

“Well, you could always use Gillyweed!” Neville said, his eyes brightening as he grinned.

“Gillyweed?” Harry asked.

“Yeah, you put a clump of it in your mouth and swallow it,” Neville said; he rubbed a hand against his throat. “You’ll get gills, in your throat, like a fish for about an hour or so. Your hands, legs and feet will transform in some way -- similar to Merpeople, though you won’t get a tail exactly -- to assist you in swimming too. The length of time has been debated, however, when it comes to freshwater versus saltwater…”

“Where can I get this Gillyweed?” Harry asked, before Neville was lost in his thoughts.

“Well, some apothecaries might have some,” Neville said, “But it won’t be fresh, unfortunately. The fresher, the better. It will guarantee you getting more time to spend underwater. There might be some on the shores of the Hogwarts Lake. I tell you what. I’ll do some exploring along the shores and see if I can find anything.”

“You don’t need to do it anytime soon, mate,” Harry said, “Especially if I need it fresh. I just need it by the day of the Second Task.”

Neville shrugged. “Doesn’t hurt to make sure it is there now, you know. If it isn’t, you might need to figure out how to get some fresh samples from somewhere else.”

“True,” Harry said, “Thanks, Neville. Thanks a lot!”

Neville blushed. “You’re welcome, Harry. Oh, look! Post is here!”

Sure enough, the very familiar sound of rushing wings was heard as the flocks of owls once again made their way down from the rafters. Like the previous day, a couple of owls swooped down to Harry and Hermione, dropping two copies of the new edition of the Daily Prophet, which the couple caught before the newspaper landed in their plates.

Schooling his expression so as not to reveal how humorous he found the article he knew was on the front page, Harry unrolled the newspaper. The picture on the front page this time was the Goblet of Fire in all its glory, lit with blue flame.

**TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT CONTENDERS REQUIRED TO BE ‘OF AGE’ TO QUALIFY FOR CHAMPION. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR HARRY POTTER?**

*Written by Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet Star Reporter*
In order to get more acquainted with the Triwizard Tournament so as to write better articles for my readers, I did a lot of research into the Triwizard Tournament, and the plans which brought the legendary Tournament back after a very long hiatus.

While researching the creation of the Tournament, I came across a few interesting details that were discussed by the Tournament’s officials in the British Ministry of Magic. These officials are Albus Dumbledore, Bartemius Crouch, and Ludo Bagman. Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge is credited with some mentions when it comes to the details forming the newest Tournament, but was not included in most of the work.

Therefore, I must deduce that Minister Fudge designated Bartemius Crouch, and Ludo Bagman as the official representatives of the Ministry of Magic. Why is this important? It will be made clear soon enough.

One of the most important details I found was very interesting, especially when it came to how it was worded. It was decided that all interested contenders, whose names were entered into the Goblet of Fire, in hopes of becoming Champion, had to be considered ‘of legal age in accordance to the laws set by the British Ministry of Magic’. Interesting to note that the Ministry of Magic is mentioned, and not the International Confederation Of Warlocks. Another interesting note was that ‘of legal age’ was specifically mentioned and not ‘seventeen’ as is the age in which ‘legal age’ is defined by Ministry of Magic standards.

So what does this mean for the unexpected Fourth Champion, the Boy-Who-Lived Harry Potter? Harry Potter is fourteen years old, and yet the Goblet of Fire chose him as a Champion. It is interesting to note that the Goblet of Fire is also referred to by artefact experts as ‘a true representative of Magic’.

It is relatively unknown what happened during the several minutes after Harry Potter’s name came out of the Goblet of Fire. We do know that every single Tournament official, along with several Hogwarts Staff Members, were present in the antechamber of the Great Hall of Hogwarts, along with Harry Potter and the other three Champions. It is known that nothing was done to prevent Harry Potter from competing in the tournament. It is due to this that I must come to this stunning conclusion.

Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and Ludo Bagman and Bartemius Crouch, the representatives of the Ministry of Magic all agreed that Harry Potter must compete in the Triwizard Tournament. Technically, the Goblet of Fire, the representative of Magic, also agreed with this decision. Therefore the representatives of Hogwarts, the British Ministry of Magic, the Wizengamot, and Magic herself all agreed -- whether vocally or not – that Harry Potter was to be considered ‘of legal age in accordance to the laws.’

What does this mean for Harry Potter? Simple answer, readers: Harry Potter should now be considered an Emancipated Minor. What does that mean? As an Emancipated Minor, the Boy-Who-Lived now has all the benefits and privileges of being an ‘of age’ wizard. Harry...
Potter is the last living Heir of an Ancient and Most Noble House. Therefore, as an Emancipated Minor, Harry Potter should now be seen as Lord Potter of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.

Does the Boy-Who-Lived know about these details? Does he know he is an Emancipated Minor? If so, has he taken on the title of Lord Potter? If this is true, why hasn’t this news been revealed to the masses yet? The only explanation I can give is that Harry Potter does not know about this information.

This means that somebody is actively preventing Harry Potter from discovering this information, which should be considered not only illegal, but also immoral, as being a Lord of a very important Ancient and Noble House is a privilege in today’s society.

The only remaining questions I have are: who is keeping secrets from our hero and savior: the Boy-Who-Lived, Lord Harry Potter? And why?

Minister Cornelius Fudge: “No Human Hostages Will Be Used In Second Task”, Bottom, Front Page
The History of the Ancient of Most Noble House of Potter, Pages 2 and 3

Harry sighed and resisted banging his head in his plate of food. This wasn’t exactly how he had hoped this article would go. Obviously Rita Skeeter wasn’t happy with having to wait for whatever it was Harry had discovered whilst inside Gringotts on Sunday. She wanted this information soon, and it seemed the best way to do that was to imply that he, Harry, needed to learn this information as soon as possible!

Harry did not dare look at the Headmaster this time. He did not want to risk Dumbledore attempting to use Legilimency on him.

“Well, then,” Harry muttered, “I think we can bet that the Headmaster is going to want to see me in his office before the end of the day.”

“Before our first class, I’d wager,” Hermione said.

“We have History of Magic first, Harry,” Neville said, “I reckon if the Headmaster wanted to meet with you between now and our first class, you could get away with showing up late, and Binns would likely say nothing about it.”

“But what about our exam?” Hermione asked.

“We have another History of Magic class on Friday, Hermione,” Neville said, “I don’t think we’re taking our exam for that class until then. Today is probably either going to be revision or another lecture.”

“Lecture,” Padma said, “Binns doesn’t care about revision.”

“Very true,” Hermione said, “So you should definitely count on having to meet with the Headmaster between now and class, Harry.”

“Will you go with me?” Harry asked.
“If I am allowed, I will,” Hermione said.

“Hermione Granger is going to miss class to spend more time with Harry?” Padma asked, with an expression of mock-shock. “You really do got it bad, girl!”

Hermione’s blush was epic.

(Meanwhile…)

Albus Dumbledore was inwardly seething. He didn’t think Rita Skeeter’s article could be any worse than it was yesterday. He had been very, very wrong. He had been worried that the revelation of the Second Task and the plans to use human hostages would be devastating for him. That problem was *simple* compared to the revelations that Miss Skeeter had wrote about today. When Rita had not written about Harry’s possible Emancipation in the week after the Choosing Ceremony, Albus thought he was in the clear of that particular problem. So he had not planned for it to come out any later. He had been focused on other problems, most of which circled around the Triwizard Tournament, Harry Potter, and the signs of Lord Voldemort’s probable return before the following summer.

Now, it was coming back to bite him in his pale, wrinkled backside.

Of course, Albus Dumbledore knew that Harry Potter was an Emancipated Minor! It had dawned on him during the post-Choosing meeting in the antechamber. Rita Skeeter, annoying as she was, had been correct. Representatives of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, the Wizengamot, and Magic herself had all decided Harry Potter was to be the Fourth Champion in a tournament which was made for ‘of legal age’ contestants! On top of that, Albus was a representative of the International Confederation of Warlocks, so the ICW was also a representative in the decision to keep Harry Potter in the tournament! Therefore, the highest authorities of magic had decided that Harry James Potter was an Emancipated Minor.

Albus knew having three important jobs at the same time was going to come back to bite him sooner or later. He just didn’t know it would be this bad!

Albus had *never* planned on informing Harry Potter of the history of his family, and the privileges and benefits that came with it. He was planning on Potter being dead before his seventeenth birthday, so the boy would never become Lord Potter! He never planned on Harry Potter discovering any of this. In fact, he had removed all important tomes and books about the very thing from Hogwarts Library when he realized Harry Potter’s friend was a dedicated bookworm who would probably be able to find the correct books quite quickly and inform Potter of what she had discovered!

Even thirteen years later, Albus was still reeling about the fact that James Potter had the gall to refuse Albus Dumbledore the right to proxy the Potter and Peverell seat if he had passed on before his son could take the seats in the Wizengamot. Albus Dumbledore had been sitting feet away from James Potter when he penned the very words in the Will that prevented this! Because Gringotts knew about this declaration, Albus could not claim proxy because he couldn’t use the Lord Potter and Peverell rings! Ten votes he could have used in revenge against the Great Alliance for every damnable law had helped create over the two decades prior to James Potter’s passing.

He had done everything to prevent Harry Potter from learning about his future titles and the
privileges and benefits that came with his Ancient and Most Noble House. Not only had he removed the relevant books, he had also used a rather Dark enchantment to prevent Allies of the Potters, and others, from informing the Heir of any of that information, including anything about the Great Alliance. He had even stopped all communication between Harry Potter and Keeper Ragnok the Sixth, the Potter’s Account Manager at Gringotts.

And now, thanks to Rita Skeeter’s damnable, infuriating article, Harry Potter was getting all this information for himself. No! He needed to stop this before it could go any further. He needed to meet with the boy as soon as possible and assure him that Rita Skeeter knew nothing about what she was talking about. That she was simply speculating things, and had gotten all the wrong information. Of course, the boy would want to know when he could learn about his House, and know about all the responsibilities he would have to handle as the future Lord of his House. Albus had a ready-made answer for that too!

He also needed to get to the Ministry to see if he could stop Potter’s Emancipation now that the information had gotten out. But first, he needed to speak to Harry.

“Minerva,” Albus said to his Deputy, “Please inform Harry Potter that I wish to meet him in my office in half-an-hour.” After a thought, he added. “Please bring Hermione Granger too. I need to speak to her about a few things regarding the Second Task.”

“Of course, Albus,” Minerva said, “You know, we never did get around to the discussion about the Second Task.”

“IT is all being handled, Minerva,” Albus said, “We will have that discussion once the details are handled. As you can see from today’s Daily Prophet, Minister Fudge himself has promised that there will be no human hostages used during the Second Task. Details are being made that will ensure this is handled.”

“Very well,” Minerva said, “I’ll let Mr. Potter and Miss Granger know. I will be there as chaperone again. I have no class first period.”

“Will Mr. Potter and Miss Granger need a pass?” Albus asked.

“The Fourth Year Gryffindors have History of Magic first period,” Minerva said, “I doubt Cuthbert will even know, or care, if two of his students are late.”

Albus chuckled. “I am of the same opinion. Very well. I will see you and your two Lions then.”

Albus stood and made his way to the door that led to the same antechamber, ironically the very place that started the journey that led him to his predicament today. He did not want to have to deal with questions from students today like he had to experience yesterday during breakfast. He had deliberately remained at the Ministry for lunch the previous day, and had his dinner in his office, just to prevent all the attention that might come his way from the students.

“If I didn’t believe it wouldn’t bite me in the arse in the future,” Albus said, “I’d offer a bill up to make libel and slander in the media illegal! But I am going to need that libel and slander in the future.”

With these and other thoughts going through his exceptionally large mind, Albus made his way to his office to prepare for what would be another very long day.
Miraculously, nobody had brought up the article to Harry during breakfast. Not even Padma, Luna and Neville, whom Harry knew now were Allies of his family. He wondered if this was some type of social etiquette thing to not discuss such topics in public areas like a crowded Great Hall. He’d have to bring this up to Hermione or Professor McGonagall later.

Speaking of Professor McGonagall, the Lioness of Gryffindor walked up to Harry and Hermione at the Ravenclaw Table.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “The Headmaster would like to see you in his office. He wishes me to assure you that you will receive passes in case you get to class late.”

“Both of us, ma’am?” Hermione asked.

“Both of you, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Come with me, please.”

Harry and Hermione said temporary farewells to Neville, Padma and Luna, then stood up and followed Professor McGonagall out of the Great Hall.

“If you wish to ask me anything, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Please remember where we are about to walk into.”

Harry and Hermione both heard the silent message: do not speak of anything important concerning the truth behind Rita Skeeter’s latest article in the Grand Staircase, where there are dozens of portraits who might be used as spies for the Headmaster.

“I forgot to tell you, Harry!” Hermione said, as the three Lions walked onto the Grand Staircase, “Mallory gave me a letter from my parents this morning, a reply to the letter I sent them on Sunday night. I am to formally invite you to spend the shortened Christmas Break at my parents’ house. We would meet them on Boxing Day at King’s Cross.”

“Great!” Harry said, smiling, “Please tell them I would be happy to accept!”

“Of course,” Hermione said.

“I will sign the both of you up for the shortened Christmas Break then,” McGonagall said.

“Thank you, ma’am,” Hermione said.

After that short conversation, the three Lions were silent as they made their way to the Headmaster’s Office on the third floor. Like Sunday afternoon, the young couple were practicing their calming manner, in order to keep the Headmaster from discovering their Occlumency Talents.

When they arrived at the gargoyle, Professor McGonagall gave the guardian the password (“Candy Canes!”), and the stone statue nodded its large head and stepped out of the way. The Head of Gryffindor escorted the two students up the stairs and the door automatically opened when they arrived. They stepped into the Headmaster’s Office, where Dumbledore was waiting for them at his desk. Like Sunday afternoon, there were three chairs there on the nearest side of the desk.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, Professor McGonagall,” Dumbledore greeted them, “Please be seated.”
The three Lions did as requested.

“I trust you two have read Miss Skeeter’s headlining article in this morning’s edition of the Daily Prophet,” Dumbledore addressed the two students.

“We have, sir,” Harry said, “Is what she said true?”

“Half of it is true,” Dumbledore said, with a sigh, “And half of it is Miss Skeeter’s usual dramatic flair. When you are seventeen, you will be named Lord Potter, Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. That much is, indeed, true.”

“But what about this Emancipation thing?” Harry asked.

“Miss Skeeter was wrong about that, Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore said, “You recall how she suspected that I, and my fellow Tournament officials, decided that the Champion contenders had to be ‘of age’? No, we specifically mentioned ‘seventeen or older’. Yes, if we had done as Miss Skeeter said, you may have ended up an Emancipated Minor as a technicality. Your placement in the Tournament was an accident, one we could not remedy, but are still investigating who did the deed – as I mentioned to you on Sunday. There were no other unspoken repercussions after your name came out of the Goblet of Fire. If there were, trust me, you would have heard it from me in the week following the Choosing Ceremony.”

Harry knew the old man was lying through his teeth. Professor McGonagall had been right when she told Rita Skeeter. Dumbledore was simply saying all this, so he could go to the Ministry to try to overturn Harry’s Emancipation, before Harry could do anything to solidify it. Unfortunately for Dumbledore, the old man was already too late.

“I see,” Harry said, “When were you going to tell me about this Lord Potter business and what it means for me? Skeeter’s article was the first time I ever heard anything about the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. Nobody here at Hogwarts ever told me a thing about it.”

A white-lie and a stretch of the truth. If Dumbledore could do it, so could Harry.

“I had plans on arranging those types of lessons for you during your sixth year of education here at Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said, with a smile. “With these lessons, you will be quite prepared, by the time you turn seventeen, for the role, privileges, benefits, and expectations of becoming one of the Lords of our society, an esteemed position. Until then, you have nothing to worry about, Mr. Potter. Please, if may suggest, focus on your studies, the Triwizard Tournament, and – if I may be so bold – your new relationship with Miss Granger here. Anything more on your plate would make it quite full, and unnecessarily so.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said, in the dutiful manner Dumbledore would expect of him.

Not a chance, old man, Harry was really thinking, I am Lord Potter now, and I am going to use it to make sure you have no control in my life anymore.

“Excellent!” Dumbledore said, with what might have been a genuine smile, “I have one more task here for this meeting, and then – well, perhaps we need not have worried Professor Binns on you being late to class today! Miss Granger, on Sunday afternoon, you mentioned your worries about the spectators’ part in the Second Task. I am sure you recall this.”

“Yes, Headmaster,” Hermione said, “Is something wrong? I was most surprised when I saw Miss
Skeeter’s article about such a thing. I hope you don’t believe I told her anything about that.”

“No, no, I do not believe you did,” Dumbledore said, smiling. “No need to worry about that. When I was at the Ministry yesterday, taking care of the – ahem – unfortunate backlash of Miss Skeeter’s headlining article, the spectators issue of the Second Task came up, and I mentioned that you had worried about such a thing as well. Mr. Ludo Bagman and Minister Cornelius Fudge himself were very interested in this.

“We were wondering whether or not you might have some suggestions that might help you and your fellow spectators have a better time during the Second Task. As a Muggleborn, perhaps you have some insights into some – ah – Muggle ideas we might be able to use to solve this problem.”

Hermione looked genuinely surprised at this request. “Nothing comes to mind right now, sir. But I am sure I could come up with something before the Second Task comes around.”

“If you come up with anything,” Dumbledore said, “Please let me know. I can arrange a meeting between yourself, and the Tournament officials and I.”

“As long as Miss Granger does not have to travel to the Ministry of Magic, Headmaster,” McGonagall said. “Such a meeting would have to take place here, so as to not cause too much interference in her studies and education.”

“Of course, Professor,” Dumbledore said, “I would not suggest otherwise.”

“I would be happy to agree to that,” Hermione said, “If I can come up with some ideas. I will try to do so before the end of January.”

“That would be wonderful, Miss Granger,” Dumbledore said. “I believe that is all I needed to say. Enjoy your day, my students, and good luck with your exams today. You are excused. If you make haste, you should make it to your first class on time.”

Harry and Hermione stood, as did McGonagall, and the two students followed the Professor out of the Office. Once again, McGonagall checked the three of them for Tracking Charms. Once again she found them on Harry and Hermione, and she immediately did away with them. They made their way down the corridor, where McGonagall led the pair into an unused classroom. McGonagall cast her wand around the room and used several enchantments.

“I’ve cast a few anti-eavesdropping and privacy spells,” McGonagall said, “And also made sure there are no Portraits or other eavesdropping artifacts here, of which there are not. We may speak freely.”

“It happened exactly as you predicted, Professor,” Harry said, “Dumbledore tried to make me believe that the Emancipation wasn’t real. I assume he is going to the Ministry now to try to prevent my Emancipation from happening?”

“I believe so, as well,” McGonagall said, “And like we told Miss Skeeter, I do not believe he will succeed without a lot of trouble.”

“Do you believe he will discover anything today?” Hermione asked, “Will he find out Harry is now Lord Potter?”

“I believe he is going to seek out the official record books,” McGonagall said. “If I recall, the records
will inform him that Mr. Potter is Emancipated, and qualifies for the titles of Lord Potter and Lord Peverell. But I also believe Keeper Ragnok planned for this very thing and has prevented the Headmaster from discovering exactly what happened on Sunday, until you reveal it yourself – either to the Headmaster, or to the public in general. I do not believe Dumbledore will find out today that you are, in fact, Lord Potter.”

“I hope you’re right, ma’am,” Harry said. “But I wonder if we should prepare for the unexpected. Maybe I should write a letter to Keeper Ragnok, for Dobby to deliver at a moment’s notice.”

“Do so, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “Just to be on the safe side. Expect the unexpected. Remember, you’re still waiting for the opportunity when the Weasleys reveal their secrets.”

“We might have some ideas about that already, ma’am,” Hermione said, “We’re just working out the kinks.”

“Well, if your ideas are anything as good as your prank on getting Champion Krum banned from the Library,” McGonagall said, with a rare smile, “I believe you just might succeed.”

Harry and Hermione blushed.

“You know about that, ma’am?” Hermione asked.

“Of course I do, Miss Granger!” McGonagall said, “Irma Pince may be a strict taskmaster of the Library, but she is also a gossip. I’ve heard all about Viktor Krum’s unwelcome interest in you, lassie. Getting him banned from the library was a wise idea and will hopefully put him off his inane quest to try to… woo you, or whatever he seems to think he’s doing. Now I believe I am taking up much of your time. Be off, with you now. Have a wonderful day.”

Harry and Hermione echoed the Professor’s statement and left the unused classroom.

(Fifteen minutes later…)

For the second day in a row, Albus Dumbledore found himself on Level 1 of the Ministry of Magic, however the Meeting Rooms were not his intended destination today. He soon found himself standing in front of a door, which had a sign on it reading “Hall of Magical Records.”

He pushed open the door and walked into the small room, an entrance room that was an office, mainly for the Secretary of Records. The said witch was sitting at a small desk, reading the Daily Prophet. Behind the desk was another doorway that, Albus knew, led to a warehouse of records dating back centuries. Only high-ranked officials had permission to peruse the records, and as one of the elite members of the Wizengamot, Albus had that permission.

“Yes, what do you need?” the witch said, in a bored tone, her attention still on the newspaper. She looked up and blushed in embarrassment. “Oh, Headmaster Dumbledore! I’m sorry for my rudeness.”

“No apology necessary, Lady Brown,” Albus said, smiling, “I just need to visit the Hall of Records.”

“Of course, Headmaster,” Holly Brown, mother of Gryffindor fourth year, Lavender, said, “You have open permission, of course.”
A jingling was heard as Lady Brown took out a large, brass keyring from a desk drawer. She stood up, walked over to the door and unlocked it, then opened it. Dumbledore bowed his head in thanks and walked into the room.

The Hall of Records was a large room three-fourths the size of the Great Hall at Hogwarts. Aside from the Atrium, it was one of the biggest rooms in the Ministry. There were several enchantments and runes that made the room larger than it actually should be. When nobody was in the room, it shrunk to the size of any normal room in the Ministry, yet nothing inside the room was harmed.

Albus could have simply asked the witch at the desk to summon the records for him, but he didn’t want her to know he was looking for the records for Harry Potter. Much like her daughter, Holly was a known gossip.

Albus whistled a tune as he made his way through the large room. His destination was not toward the ‘P’ section of the room, but toward a special area for VIP names. It had been decided after the events of that fateful Halloween that Harry Potter, as the Boy-Who-Lived, qualified for having his records in such an area, so that not just anybody could peruse his records. Even though only the elite in the Ministry had permission to enter the room, only the top of the elite, such as Albus, could gain entry into the VIP section of the Hall.

Albus made his way into the VIP section and found Harry Potter’s name on a drawer. He placed his hand on the drawer, feeling the magic as it accepted him, and the drawer opened automatically. He took out the first folder in the drawer and opened it up.

Name: Harry James Potter  
Date Of Birth: 31 July 1980  
Parents: James Charlus Potter (deceased) and Lily Rose Potter ‘nee Evans (deceased)

Official Titles of Lineage:

Ancient and Noble Houses:
House Potter – direct descendant - father  
House Peverell – direct descendant – father  
House Black – second-in-line – father

Minor House:
House Evans – direct descendant – mother – second generation


Albus frowned as he closed the folder and placed it back in the drawer. It was exactly as he had thought. Harry Potter qualified for the two titles, but he hadn’t been given the titles automatically after he had been Emancipated. No, he would need to go to Gringotts and meet with his Account Manager to do that.

But there was also a surprise here. Harry was second-in-line for the title of Lord Black, not third-in-line. Draco Malfoy was not Lord Black yet. So this meant…
“Sirius Black did not lose his ability to reproduce due to the affects of Dementor Exposure,” Albus said to himself, “It also means that Sirius Black has also already proclaimed that Harry is his current Heir. If he had not made such a proclamation, Draco Malfoy would be second-in-line. That is unexpected, but not too complicating. Lucius Malfoy would be most upset if he learned about this, however. He might even decide to take out such anger on Sirius Black. Hmm…”

A Cheshire smile formed across Albus’ face as many ideas crossed his mind. All he needed to do was prove that Harry Potter wasn’t qualified, nor ready, for the troubles that come with being a Lord. He could get the Emancipation overturned.

He needed to speak to Cornelius.

(Ten Minutes Later...)

Albus stepped into the welcome area of the Ministerial and Support Staff Offices. He made his way over to the Minister’s personal secretary, who was working at her desk. She looked up at Albus, and smiled at him.

“Welcome, Headmaster,” the secretary said.

“Good morning, young Isabella,” Albus said, “Is Cornelius available to see me?”

“I believe so,” Isabella said, “Let me just check.”

She stood up and walked over to the door behind her desk, which led into the Minister’s Office. She knocked on the door, then opened it slightly and poked her head in. A few words were heard, then she turned around.

“Minister Fudge will see you now, sir,” Isabella said, she picked up a vase of flowers on the desk. “Follow me, please. I was just about to deliver these flowers to the Minister anyway.”

Albus bowed his head in acknowledgement. “Thank you, my dear.”

He walked past the secretary and made his way into the Minister’s office. Cornelius was, miraculously, the only person in the room. Albus half-expected Dolores Umbridge to be there, as she usually was when he spoke to the Minister. Umbridge loved butting her head into conversations, adding her own opinion.

“Albus! Good morning!” Cornelius greeted, standing behind his magnificent desk, “Oh, those are beautiful flowers, Isabella. Are these from you, Albus?”

“No, my type, I’m afraid,” Albus said, chuckling.

“These are from an anonymous fan, Minister,” Isabella said, “But something tells me they are from Widow Widdershins. She’s always giving you flowers at least once a week.”

“The Widow is still alive?” Cornelius asked, “Dear me, I think she’s older than Albus here! Well, put them on the mantle, dear, as per usual. The Widow will tell all her Allies to vote for my opposition next election if she hears I’ve denied a gift from her!”
Isabella bowed, then walked over to the mantle above the Floo and placed the vase in the center. She bowed again, then walked out of the Office and closed the door.

“I’m going to assume you’re here for the same reason you were here yesterday, Albus,” Cornelius said, as he sat down, “Rita Skeeter’s newest article. Was she right, Albus? Is Harry Potter Emancipated? Is he the new Lord Potter?”

“He is, indeed, Emancipated, Minister,” Albus said, with a sigh, “But he has not yet gained the Lord Potter title. Not until he goes to Gringotts and meets with his Account Manager.”

“Well, you don’t need my permission, Albus!” Cornelius said, “Take the boy and let him meet the Goblin!”

“Do you not think he is too young for such a role, Cornelius?” Albus asked.

“The Goblet of Fire – the representative of Magic – didn’t think so, did it?!” Cornelius said, with a deep sigh. “The law is absolute, Albus. The boy is Lord Potter. He will need a Proxy for his seat, of course. But aside from that, he has all the privileges and benefits of such a title now. Two and a half years early, dear me.”

“Exactly, Cornelius,” Albus said, “I do not believe he is ready for such a burden. Not until he is seventeen. We need to overturn it, Minister.”

“I cannot do it myself, Albus!” Cornelius said, “And neither could you! Such a thing would need approval from the Wizengamot!”

“The Winter Solstice Session is next Monday, Cornelius,” Albus said, “I believe that would be the right time to get it overturned.”

“Well, I wish you the best of luck, Albus,” Cornelius sighed. “Once the Great Alliance hears that the Lord Potter seat is about to return to the Wizengamot, they will do everything in their power to make sure it happens. I doubt they would agree with you, when it comes to the fact that Potter isn’t ready to take up the mantle.”

“At the moment, they’re not at their full power,” Albus said, “It was the Potter and Peverell seats which gave them their power.”

“Yes, well, thank goodness the Peverell seat is forever dark,” Cornelius said.

“Harry Potter would also qualify as Lord Peverell, Cornelius,” Albus said.

Cornelius’ eyes widened. “Are you sure? Goodness me! That would mean… yes, yes, you’re right. The boy’s Emancipation must not happen until he is truly ready! You have my support. We’ll put this through the Wizengamot during the Winter Solstice Session!”

Albus smiled. “I will voice the Bill myself, Minister. Thank you for your cooperation.”

“You just make sure the boy doesn’t go to Gringotts before the Solstice Session, Albus!” Cornelius said, “If he obtains the Lord’s Rings, you’ll never be able to stop him from being Lord Potter and Lord Peverell!”

“Mr. Potter will remain at Hogwarts, Cornelius,” Albus said, “Of this, I am sure. At the moment, he
doesn’t even know he has an Account Manager, or the Potter Vaults. Only a Trust Vault.”

Cornelius sighed in relief. “Thank Merlin for small miracles. Thank you for informing me of this. Is there anything else?”

“I have spoken to Hermione Granger about your interest in her assistance for the Second Task,” Albus said. “She has promised to consider ideas for the Spectators before January. She would be agreeable to meet you and the Tournament officials at Hogwarts in the near future after she has accomplished her ideas.”

“I look forward to it!” Cornelius said, smiling. “Might even give her an Order of Merlin if she helps us! At the very least an award for Services to the School!”

“I am sure she would be happy to hear it,” Albus said, “I believe that is all I have for now.”

“I will see you on the Solstice if not before then,” Cornelius said, “Let us hope Miss Skeeter has no more… interesting revelations.”

Albus certainly agreed with that!

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(Meanwhile…)

The Minister of Magic’s personal secretary, Isabella Blishwick, smirked as she waved her wand around her ears, and cancelled the eavesdropping charm she had placed on the vase of flowers. She may have told a bit of a lie to the Minister. The vase was not from Widow Widdershins, but from her eldest sister, who just so happened to be Illiana Greengrass, the wife of Lord Castor Greengrass, a member of the Great Alliance.

Isabella Blishwick was the youngest daughter of the Noble House of Blishwick. Before James Potter’s death in 1981, the House of Blishwick had been in talks with Lord Potter to join the Great Alliance. But such talks were stopped when Lord Potter had died. Well, Isabella and her father Lord Isaac Blishwick had been invited to Greengrass Manor this past Sunday evening for a family dinner. Lord Castor had a special announcement. Sometime late Sunday morning, Lord Castor suddenly and unexpectedly remembered the relevance of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and their connection to the House Greengrass and the Great Alliance. Lord Castor had suspected a Dark enchantment had been in play for many years.

He had also suspected that Albus Dumbledore, the Leader of the Light, had been behind this nefarious enchantment. The enchantment had been broken, and Lord Castor had suspected he knew why. He believed that Harry James Potter had gained the title of Lord Potter, and maybe even Lord Peverell.

So Lord Castor had come up with a plan. It was no secret Isabella was the Minister’s personal secretary. He had suspected that Albus Dumbledore would soon find out something about Harry Potter and his new Lordship, so he asked Isabella for a great favor. In return, if the plan was successful, Lord Castor would do his best to convince Lord Potter to bring the Noble House of Blishwick into the Great Alliance.

Isabella’s father, Lord Blishwick accepted immediately, then demanded to his daughter to go through with the plan as soon as possible.
Which was where the vase of flowers had come in. It had eavesdropping enchantments built into it, as well as a Notice-Me-Not Charm hiding said enchantments. When Albus Dumbledore came to meet with the Minister in his office, Isabella simply needed to deliver the vase as a gift from an anonymous source. Then she would activate the enchantments and listen to the conversation.

She got exactly what her father and Lord Greengrass had been hoping for. Albus Dumbledore knew Harry Potter was Emancipated, but he did not know the young man was now Lord Potter. He was working on trying to overturn the Emancipation, and was planning on doing so at the Winter Solstice Session.

Isabella smiled the same Cheshire smile Albus had done many minutes before. Albus Dumbledore, the so-called Leader of the Light, was going to get quite a surprise next Monday.

Isabella whistled and continued her work, eagerly waiting for her lunch break, where she would write a couple of letters to her father and her eldest sister’s husband, to give them the news of her successful mission.

Chapter End Notes

Can you believe that last scene didn’t come to my mind until I began this chapter? Isabella might not be an important character in the future of the story, but House Blishwick will be, as a part of the Great Alliance.

So I hope you liked this chapter!

Next Chapter: It is time for the our heroes to discover exactly what the Weasleys are up to! Things are about to get very exciting!
(Tuesday, December 15th, 1994)

Harry was walking up the Grand Staircase hand-in-hand with Hermione on Tuesday evening, when Hermione squeezed his hand and leaned closer to him.

“I think Ronald and Ginevra are following us,” she whispered.

“I think they want to try to figure out where our Quarters are,” Harry said.

“I have an idea,” Hermione said, “Walk casually for now. We’ll go out on the fourth floor. There are a couple of unused classrooms, but mostly it is Private Quarters. They haven’t been used for a few years, according to what I’ve heard, but have been used in the past for married students. If Dumbledore spoke to Ron and Ginny about his guesses concerning the Private Quarters, he’ll probably think we’re on the fourth floor.”

When they reached the fourth floor, Hermione led Harry down a corridor. She stopped outside a door halfway down the corridor.

“Take out the map and tell me when they turn the corner and are able to see us,” Hermione said, then pointed to the door. “Then we’re going in here.”

Harry nodded, took out the Marauder’s Map from his robes, used the password and opened it. He soon found the corridor they were in. As soon as he saw Ron and Ginny’s footsteps turn the corner, he waited one moment, then he looked at Hermione. Hermione opened the door, and pulled him inside the room – which turned out to be a broom closet.

“Now what?” Harry asked.

“They probably think we’re in here to snog,” Hermione said.

“Well, we shouldn’t upset them then,” Harry said, grinning.

Hermione rolled her eyes and smiled. “So, we snog for a couple of minutes. Then we’ll open the
door a little bit, and see what they do. Either one of two things will happen. They’ll come to us, and we’ll confront them. Or they’ll run off, so, in their minds, we believe nobody caught us. If they run off, we use the map, and see where they go. We’ll turn the tables, spy on them, and maybe, finally, we can discover what their so-called master plan is.”

Harry nodded. “I like it.”

He folded the map, pocketed it, then leaned toward Hermione and kissed her. Hermione backed up against the wall, pulling her toward him. They kissed and snogged for a couple of minutes. When they had to part to catch their breath, Harry took the map and opened it. He grinned when he saw Ron and Ginny’s footprints still in the same corridor.

“They’re still there,” he said, “Open the door. I’ll watch their dots.”

Hermione walked over to the door, and slowly opened it enough to where Ron and Ginny would see it. Harry watched the Weasley siblings’ footprints. They turned and scurried off down the corridor in the opposite direction.

“They’re running,” Harry said. “But they’re heading in the direction of those two unused classrooms, not toward the direction of the Grand Staircase.”

“They’re going to have the discussion we’ve been waiting for,” Hermione said, “We’ll use the map to follow them and eavesdrop on what they’re talking about. Time to see if these bracelets work! Come on!”

Harry nodded and followed Hermione out of the closet. The couple hurried off toward the direction of where Ron and Ginny had gone. As they turned a corner, they saw the siblings enter an unused classroom. They hurried down the corridor, and crept toward the classroom. Harry took his Invisibility Cloak from his pocket and put it over him and Hermione. Harry and Hermione suddenly felt their bracelets warm up, and suddenly, Ron and Ginny’s voice carried – unknown to the siblings – toward Hermione and Harry. The couple grinned. The bracelets had worked!

“… your fault, Ronald!” Ginny growled.

“How is it my fault!?” Ron asked.

“If you would have asked her to the Yule Ball,” Ginny said, “Harry wouldn’t have been able to do so! Then we wouldn’t be in this position being spied on by McGonagall! That damned interfering woman is watching us too closely now! And we can’t go to Dumbledore about her, because McGonagall is much too cautious around him, for him to do anything to her!”

“Harry asked Granger almost immediately after McGonagall’s announcement!” Ron shot back, “How was I supposed to know he’d do that? I had no idea he liked her already! He never mentioned it!”

“Well, obviously he lost his trust in you, Ronald!” Ginny growled, “Even after you ‘apologized’ to him! Your poor apology probably made it worse. Worse than when you accused him of putting his name in the Goblet, when it is plainly obvious he didn’t!”

“You told me to do that!” Ron retorted. “Because you wanted everyone to believe he cheated and put his name in, so he’d be alone and friendless!”
“Yes, but only because I thought Granger would believe the same thing!” Ginny said, “But no, she had to choose now to be a loyal and true friend! I was counting on her abandoning Harry so I could come in for the rescue, and take her spot of his loyal and true friend. Then he’d ask me to the Ball! But now, thanks to her being so loyal, Harry decided to ask her to the Ball, before you could! Do not lie to me, Ronald! You told me you had an opportunity to ask her before he did, and you didn’t take it!”

“I… it was after McGonagall told us about the Ball,” Ron said, “I asked Hermione to come with me, but she wanted to wait for Harry. If she had come with me, I would have asked her. But the bitch refused!”

“So you left her be,” Ginny growled. “You left her, instead of staying with her. If you had stayed with her, Harry wouldn’t have asked her to the Ball! YOUR FAULT, RONALD!”

“I thought Viktor Krum was going to ask her!” Ron growled, “If he asked her, then as her friend, I could have become his friend and gotten to know him. I’d be the friend of the Boy-Who-Lived and a Famous Seeker!”

“Krum would never be interested in being your friend,” Ginny said, “He doesn’t like fan-boys and fan-girls, which is why he was interested in Granger. She wouldn’t care a whit about Quidditch if Harry didn’t play.”

“Well, if Krum asked her, then Harry couldn’t, could he?” Ron asked, “I never expected Harry to ask her, and especially not so quickly! Besides I was planning on asking Fleur Delacour to the Ball!”

“Figures,” Ginny muttered, “You screwed up the whole plan, screwed up our relationships with Harry and Granger, and put us under McGonagall’s watchful gaze, all because you got captured in the Veela bint’s Allure, when she was obviously using it on somebody else! But because you’re so stupid and susceptible to Veela charms, you were foolish enough, like most other boys in this school, to believe she’d say yes to a date with you!”

“Hey!” Ron growled.

“You know it’s true, you idiot!” Ginny retorted, then scoffed. “When I tell Mum, she’s going to blame the whole thing on you!”

“Why me?” Ron asked.

“Why do you think Mum told us about the Yule Ball this summer, Ronald??” Ginny growled, “So if Harry got interested in the Mudblood, we could cut it off before it got serious! She told you to watch them! If it looked like they were going to get together, you had to ask out her in front of Harry! Why didn’t you do it after McGonagall’s announcement?!”

“Sorry,” Ron muttered.

“Fuck you and your fucking apology, you fucking moron! That’s your name now! Moron!” Ginny growled; Harry’s eyebrows raised at the level of language from Ginny. He might have laughed if the situation wasn’t so serious. “You knew the plan, and you failed. If Harry thought you were interested in her at all, he wouldn’t want to intrude on your relationship. He’s predictable like that! He’d leave the two of you alone, so you can have some privacy. He’d be looking for other friends to spend time with. That would give me an opening to get close to him!
“Now you’ve gone and ruined it all! Mum didn’t want to use Love Potions until next summer, but now it looks like she hasn’t got a choice! She’s probably going to tell us to go to Dumbledore, so he can Obliviate the two of them of any romantic feelings they have of each other!”

“The whole school knows they’re going to the Yule Ball together, Ginny!” Ron said, “What happens when that suddenly doesn’t happen?”

“Then we’ll spread rumors about them like we always do when we want to sully their reputation!” Ginny said, “It’ll be easy, given how we were able to convince most of the school how Harry was a cheat and showoff after his name came out of the Goblet, and how he wanted to steal the glory from Hufflepuff. We did it with the Gryffindors didn’t we? One minute they were cheering for Harry, the next they were cursing his name because they realized he’s a reluctant Champion.”

“I did that!” Ron said, “I told Neville those exact words, and Neville parroted them to Harry and he got the idea to tell everyone that he was a reluctant Champion. That was me!”

“So you have one braincell in that head of yours,” Ginny said. “Good for you. The rest is up to me! Because you are too stupid to do it yourself without fucking it all up… again! Because of me, once we break them up, everyone will soon believe they got in a big fight and canceled their date to the Yule Ball. That is when we come in and take advantage of it. If it works right, we might be able to prevent damage control, and not have to use Love Potions until this summer as planned!

“Then we can finally get the plans underway and I can convince Harry to make a Will, so he leaves the Potter fortune to us when he dies sooner or later. Before he turns seventeen, if Dumbledore is right. Of course, Harry doesn’t know anything about the Potter fortune, besides what is in his Trust Vault. Dumb idiot doesn’t realize that isn’t his only vault, or that the gold in his vault refills each other. Better for us. Can’t believe he was dumb enough to give Mum his key, and not ask for it back afterward. He basically gave her permission to steal from him! But what am I complaining about? I’ll be marrying him for his fortune, not his brains. If he was as smart as the Mudblood, he might not die when he’s supposed to.

“The question is… how are we going to pull this off with McGonagall watching us? She’s so close to Potter and Granger now! Fucking pussy who thinks she’s a lioness! Fucking Boy-Who-Won’t-Die and his bitch Mudblood!”

“You don’t want him to die yet, remember?” Ron asked, “I thought you wanted his baby in your belly first!”

“Shut the fuck up about my belly, Moron!” Ginny growled. “That’s none of your business! Mention it again, and your bogies will be bats!”

Harry and Hermione had heard enough. They now knew the truth they had been waiting for. They now knew Ron and Ginny’s secret plot against them.

Harry saw that Hermione was near tears, and he didn’t want her to break down here, and have Ron and Ginny discover them. He took her hand and led her down the corridor, back to the same broom closet they had been in. When they entered, Harry closed the door, and cast a Silencing Charm on it. He hugged Hermione against his chest, as she started sobbing. He wanted to cry too, but he knew he needed to be strong for her.

As Hermione cried, Harry wondered how long this betrayal had been going on. From the beginning?
This thought made him look back – using his eidetic memory -- to the first time he met the Weasleys.

“Oh, god,” Harry muttered, “How could I be so stupid?! It was a set-up from the beginning!”

Hermione backed away from Harry. Her eyes were red, her cheeks were blotchy and she was sniffling. But she still was coherent enough to look at him curiously.

“What do you mean ‘from the beginning’?” Hermione asked.

“Hagrid told me absolutely nothing about how I was supposed to get through the portal at Platform Nine-And-Three-Quarters,” Harry said, “He just gave me my train ticket, and told me to ‘stick to it’. That’s it! Nothing else!”

“Professor McGonagall told me and my parents how to get me onto the Platform!” Hermione said, “It was a detailed explanation!”

“I am sure that is how it is supposed to be for all Muggleborn and Muggle-raised,” Harry said.

“So why didn’t Hagrid?” Hermione asked, then her eyes widened, “He didn’t set you up, did he?”

“No, but if he was ordered not to tell me the detailed explanation by somebody like his boss,” Harry said, “His boss ‘the great man, Dumbledore’ whom he looks up to and trusts explicitly.”

“Oh gods,” Hermione muttered, “He’d do whatever Dumbledore asked him to.”

“Without a second thought,” Harry agreed. “No questions asked. So, there I was at King’s Cross between Platforms Nine and Ten, wondering what the hell I was supposed to do next. Then all of a sudden, I hear Molly Weasley talking loudly about Muggles, and how the platform is always crowded. Then… she asked Ginny what number the Platform was?”

“What?!” Hermione asked, “Harry, the Platform’s never changed since its debut! It said so in Hogwarts, A History! So why didn’t she…?”

“Know?” Harry asked, “She did. By the way, the way she was speaking so loudly about Muggles, and the odd Platform number, she could have gotten in a lot of trouble for breaking the Statute of Secrecy. But I knew nothing about that at the time. However, I did recognize the words ‘muggle’ and ‘Platform Nine and Three Quarters’.”

Hermione gasped. “Somehow she knew you’d be there lost and looking for the Platform. Yes, this does sound like a set-up! Dumbledore didn’t want Hagrid to tell you how to get onto the Platform, so you would be there lost and worried about getting on the train, and you would go to the first person who said something that would help you get there!”

“Yes, and it gets worse,” Harry said, “Did I ever tell you how Ron and I officially met? I was sitting alone in a carriage, and Ron shows up at the door of the carriage, and says ‘Can I sit here? Everywhere else is full?’”

“That liar!” Hermione growled, “there were at least two empty compartments on the train car you were sitting in! I passed them by! Also, if Ron couldn’t find a place to sit, I am sure Fred and George would have let him join them!”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t know that,” Harry said, shrugging, “It gets worse, though. As soon as I told
him my name, the first thing he says to me is ‘Do you have the scar?’”

Hermione frowned. “That proves right there that he never wanted to be a friend of ‘just Harry’. He wanted to be the friend – the best friend – of the Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter.”

“There’s also the fact that – until that Halloween – he was pretty much rude to anybody I wanted to talk to,” Harry said, “Especially you. And Neville, now that I think of it.”

“He was rude the first time he ever met me… when I met you,” Hermione frowned.

“Yeah, because you wanted to be my friend, and he knew that,” Harry said, “Because after he met you, he said ‘Whatever house she’s in, I hope I’m not in it.’. He hoped you were in a different house than him and I, because he knew you would try to be my friend, and –”

“And it is difficult to make friends with students in other Houses!” Hermione gasped. “Most of the time, those friendships were made through inter-house Study Groups.”

“And Ron isn’t the type to join one of those, is he?” Harry asked. “If I had known about those study groups, he’d convince me not to join, because it would be ‘mental’ or something.”

“He would have known you’d probably make other friends in these groups, including me,” Hermione said, “You’re the Boy-Who-Lived after all, you could have made easy friends with anybody on that factor alone. Then there is the Children of the Great Alliance. Even if they couldn’t remember House Potter’s part in the Great Alliance, they might still have wanted to become your friend.”

“Hey, you’re right,” Harry muttered, “I might not like being famous, but you would think others would approach me to try to be my friend, even if it was just to get to know me because of that.”

“Right,” Hermione said, “Ron wanted to be your only friend. He was actively being rude to me, trying to prevent me getting close to you. I’m sure he was doing that with others too! And the reason nobody has told you about this, is because Ron’s probably made them all think you’d be mean to all of them, that you wouldn’t want to be their friend. We already know he’s apparently been spreading a lot of negative rumors about you.”

“I was being rude and mean to you too, Hermione,” Harry said frowning, “Until that Halloween.”

“Because of Ron’s influence, Harry,” Hermione said, soothingly. “You saw him being mean to me, and you wanted to be his friend, so you did the same, so you wouldn’t lose his friendship.”

“I still shouldn’t have done it,” Harry said, “Looking back, he was a real bully. I should have been discouraged away from bullies, because of my cousin, Dudley. But, as you said, he was my first friend, and I didn’t want to lose that.”

Then he realized something else. “That must have been around the time I was dosed to be loyal to Ron! It is why I forgave him so easily, even though I would normally be affected by his bullying so much! And those revulsion Potions must have put me off attempting to even try making friends with others!”

“There’s something else, I think,” Hermione said, “Another reason he was trying to get you to avoid me. Okay, we just discovered Ginny has been concocting plans and plots with her mother. She wants to marry you, to gain the Potter fortune, because for some reason, they think… they think you’re going to die sometime soon.”
“Well, Dumbledore said it earlier today, didn’t he?” Harry said, “He thinks I’ll be Lord Potter at seventeen. Ginny even said Dumbledore thinks – or hopes -- I’ll be dead by seventeen.”

“That bastard!” Hermione growled, “This is not just about Ginny having your baby, and gaining the Potter fortune. This is also about the Potter and Peverell seats on the Wizengamot!”

“Right,” Harry said, “They are pretty powerful pieces in the Wizengamot. Which is why the Great Alliance was enchanted to forget about me and my House until recently. Though I am not sure whether or not the Children of the Great Alliance know about it yet. They haven’t mentioned it to me. Not even Neville, Padma and Luna, who we know are Children of the Great Alliance, even though we’ve been sitting with them.”

“Harry,” Hermione said, “What if the Weasleys – and Dumbledore -- had this plot before Ron even started at Hogwarts? What if he was ordered to keep you from being friendly with any girls, because they could ruin Ginny’s plan of being your future girlfriend and wife, if you became romantic with any of them… including me?”

“Sounds right,” Harry scoffed. “Now we know why they’re jealous you and I are a couple. I bet that was planned all along.”

“Well, remember what Ginny said?” Hermione asked, “Ron was supposed to ask me to the Yule Ball, likely in front of you. Seeing such a thing was supposed to discourage you from any romantic feelings you might have for me, because you wouldn’t want to mess up anything that could happen between me and Ron. I am sure Ron was encouraged – ever since the three of us became friends – to slowly make it seem as if he had a serious fancy for me. I am sure he’d subtly make suggestions to you about him fancying me, so to convince you not to interfere in any possible romantic relationship he and I could have had.”

“It would have worked, you know?” Harry frowned, “I wouldn’t have wanted to mess up our friendship over something like that. If I thought Ron fancied you, I wouldn’t want to ask you on a date. I’d probably do anything to make it look like I didn’t fancy you, just so you wouldn’t get suspicious, and it wouldn’t create drama between you and Ron. I’d probably do something like say you’re like a sister to me, someone I could never fancy.”

“Harry, you’ve never had a sister,” Hermione said, “How would you know what having a sister was like?”

Harry shrugged. “I still probably would have used the excuse if Ron asked me if I fancied you, and it seemed you and him were going to be a couple. It’d be a lie, of course. But I’d do it. If only because I wouldn’t want to lose my friends. Plus there were all those Potions trying to make you and I avoid any romantic feelings toward each other. Ginny’s right, though. I am predictable.”

“Maybe a little,” Hermione said; she smiled after he emitted a sad snort, “But none of that matters now. None of that happened. Their mad plan failed. So did the Potions. You and I are together. I know how you feel about me, Harry James. You don’t need to tell me. I know. I love you too, okay?”

Harry smiled, then leaned toward her and kissed her again. The couple kissed for a couple minutes before they had to regain their breath.

“Mallory!” Hermione said, suddenly.
Mallory appeared in the broom closet.

“Please ask Professor McGonagall to meet us in the Private Common Room in the Lion’s Den,” Hermione said, “Tell her we’ve discovered what the Bad Weasels are planning.”

“Mallory be doing so, Harry Potter’s Hermy,” Mallory said.

She vanished with a pop. Hermione turned back to Harry.

“Harry, I can’t tell the future,” Hermione said, “But I don’t see a time – unless I am influenced by something sinister – when I’m not going to be in love with you. Even if that happens, I will still be your friend. I will never hate you or be repulsed by you. Not under my own power anyway.”

Harry choked and felt tears in his eyes. “Same for me.”

“Harry listen to me,” Hermione said, “If I ever say I do not love you. If I seem to be suddenly infatuated or in love with someone else. If I behave as if I’m repulsed by you, or if I hate you, do not believe me, Harry Potter. Not without getting me checked out for mind-influencing magic. Promise me, Harry Potter. Even if I resist you, or try to get away from you. If this happens, you have my consenting permission from now on to do everything you can to get me help, because I’d likely not be in my right mind. Stun me if you have to.”

“I promise, Hermione,” Harry said. “I know how you feel about me. I can’t not believe you don’t love me, without good enough explanation. I would make sure you’re one-hundred percent yourself if that ever happens. Even if you are one-hundred percent lucid, I’d still probably try to convince you I’m still in love with you, and that you deserve my love, and that I deserve yours. I probably don’t, but that isn’t my choice. I love you too much.”

Hermione smiled, tearfully, and cupped Harry’s face between her hands then kissed him soundly. Harry returned the kiss, praying, hoping beyond hope this wouldn’t be the last time he would be able to kiss her. They continued kissing, with closed and open mouths, and tongues, as their cheeks became wet with the combination of each other’s tears.

When they separated, both panting from loss of breath, Harry took the Map from his pocket and opened it up. First, he looked for Ron and Ginny who were no longer in the unused classroom or the same corridor they were in. He soon found their dots. They were traveling toward the Gryffindor Tower.

“They’re probably looking for us,” Harry muttered sourly.

“Or they’re going to write a letter to their mother,” Hermione said. “If so, then they’ll be headed to the Owlery soon enough. At least they aren’t going to Dumbledore yet. But that might be because they need to ask their mother if they should go to him first. They probably need her permission first. That might actually help us!”

“How?” Harry asked.

“Molly Weasley’s overbearing attitude might actually prevent Ron and Ginny from doing anything without her permission,” Hermione clarified, “She is so controlling, especially of her youngest two children. Especially if she believes she needs to be paranoid and cautious about any plans she has for you. She wouldn’t want Ron and Ginny to mess up any of her plans, so she would want them to ask
“Asking Dumbledore to Obliviate us of romantic feelings for each other probably qualifies,” Harry said with a snort.

“Yes,” Hermione agreed, “In fact, I am sure she would want to ask him herself, instead of having Ron and Ginny do it.”

“Even if it means Dumbledore could Obliviate us today instead of tomorrow?” Harry asked.

“Harry, we’ve been together for nearly a week,” Hermione said, “We’re lucky it hasn’t happened yet! Which means Ron and Ginny probably know they can’t go to him without asking their mother.”

“So why haven’t they done it yet?” Harry asked.

“Ginny said that, didn’t she?” Hermione said, “McGonagall has been watching them too closely. But now it seems they’ve decided they have no choice.”

“So they’ll write to their mother,” Harry said, “And she’ll talk to Dumbledore. That might be good news for us. Especially if he doesn’t get the message until tomorrow at the earliest. That will give us plenty of time to figure out what to do tonight. Where is Dumbledore anyway?”

He checked the Map again, and looked for the Headmaster.

“In his office, pacing like he usually does,” Harry replied; then he looked for Professor McGonagall. “McGonagall’s on the floor below us. Come on! We might be able to meet her on the way to the Lion’s Den.”

With that in mind, they left the closet, and made their way through the castle. But only after kissing each other again, both hoping that wasn’t their last kiss. They were still using the Map so they wouldn’t run into anyone who they didn’t want to meet. As soon as they stepped out onto the Grand Staircase, they found Professor McGonagall. She saw them immediately, and noticed the panicking looks on their faces.

“Come with me, you two,” she said, calmly.

Harry and Hermione nodded and followed the Transfiguration Professor up the Grand Staircase. Ten minutes later, they stepped into the Private Common Room and sat down in their usual spots.

“Before we begin,” McGonagall said, “Tell me this. Is what you’re going to tell me serious enough that we may need to contact the Department of Magical Law Enforcement?”

“Honestly, Professor, I think that would be for the best,” Hermione said.

McGonagall grimaced, then nodded. “Mallory!”

Mallory appeared once again. “Yes, Mistress?”

“Find Pomona Sprout,” McGonagall said, “Have her find Susan Bones and escort them both here, and to do her best not to run into the Headmaster. Escort them both here if you must. They will both have permission to come in here.”
“Yes, Mistress McGonagall!” Mallory said.

The house-elf bowed, then vanished. McGonagall turned back to her students.

“Susan Bones has a similar communication mirror like Sirius gave to you,” McGonagall said, “She uses it to contact her Aunt, Director Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, in case of emergencies.”

“We’ll be able to use her mirror to contact Director Bones!” Hermione said.

“Correct,” McGonagall said, “Now, if you will, please tell me everything you discovered about Ron and Ginevra Weasley.”

So Harry and Hermione began telling the story, beginning with them discovering the youngest Weasley siblings following them from the Grand Staircase, up to them retreating from the unused classroom. Harry also told her about his suspicions regarding the first time he met the Weasleys.

“It certainly sounds as if the Weasleys – Ronald, Ginevra and their mother at the very least – have been planning this for quite a while,” McGonagall said.

“I believe the Muggles would refer to it as a ‘long con’,” Hermione said.

“We believe Ron and Ginny either have sent – or are in the process of sending – a letter to their mother informing her about us,” Harry said.

McGonagall sighed. “I wish I could have stopped them from doing this, but only the Headmaster has the power to stop owls from leaving the castle. Any idea what they’re going to ask their mother? Aside from – as you said -- their idea to ask her about giving you Love Potions?”

“We think they want her to ask Dumbledore to Obliviate us of our relationship,” Harry said.

“I don’t think he’s going to agree to that plan,” McGonagall said. “For a couple of reasons. First, was our plan to make sure the whole school knows how serious your relationship is. That has been working quite well. Especially with Rita Skeeter’s articles. Second, was Dumbledore’s plan for the Second Task.”

“He wants me to be the one Harry misses the most,” Hermione said, “So he could… assassinate me when I’m a hostage, and make it look like an accident.”

“But I thought the hostage plan has been scuppered,” Harry said.

“There’s still two months between now and the Second Task, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “Dumbledore may truly believe he can still arrange for there to be human hostages for the Second Task. Therefore, I am sure he wants the two of you to be close and romantically involved right up to the Second Task.”

“None of the Weasleys will like that,” Hermione said, “Especially Ginny. She’ll probably demand her mother uses the Love Potion plan, if she hasn’t done so tonight.”

“Which, of course, wouldn’t work thanks to our house-elf security service when it comes to the post,” Harry said.
“If she fails to send you Potion-filled gifts through the post,” McGonagall said, “She could still do through other ways, I am sure. Luckily, we are now well-warmed of such a plan. We can tell all of this to Director Bones, and she can take care of it. I’ll also make plans to have my house-elves check any post that comes for a Weasley. If Ron and Ginny know I’m watching them, they might get their mother to send it with Fred and George’s post. I am sure she could figure out how to get it to her two youngest children through the twins’ post. For now, we’ll ask Madam Bones to help us so Molly Weasley won’t even be able to get the Love Potions to Hogwarts in the first place. The question is what should we request of her, aside from that?”

“I think we need to get Ron and Ginny out of Hogwarts,” Hermione said. “If they discover their plan is going to fail, they might do something else out of desperation. Something we might not be able to predict, or stop before it happens.”

“Especially if their mother is arrested for possession of restricted and illegal Potions,” McGonagall said, “They would no longer have her as a sounding board to bounce ideas off of. I agree. Therefore, I believe we should invite Director Bones to Hogwarts to speak to Ronald and Ginevra.”

“We can talk to her about Sirius then!” Harry exclaimed. “It isn’t something we should do via mirrors. Especially since I can show her my copy of the Will. And the fake Betrothal Contract between me and Ginny!”

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, “We should arrange for her to meet with the two of you here at Hogwarts. Which means we need the Headmaster out of the castle.”

Harry grinned. “If Director Bones agrees to come to the castle tomorrow morning, I’ll send the letter to Keeper Ragnok with Dobby tonight, and have him send his own letter to Dumbledore tomorrow morning! That will get him out of the castle long enough for Director Bones to be here to do her work, without his interference!”

Mallory appeared a moment later.

“Missus Sprout and Miss Bones be here outside the door to this room, Mistress,” Mallory said.

“Invite them in, Mallory,” McGonagall said.

Harry smiled when Hermione squeezed his hand. He looked at her and found she was just as nervous as he was. For a good reason. They needed this meeting with Director Bones, and hoped Susan could help with this request. This war with the Weasleys needed to be finished before it became too dangerous!

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I did just end it there! Sorry, if I had Susan Bones in this chapter, I wouldn’t be able to find a good way to end the chapter before the discussion with Amelia. Next chapter will focus around Amelia Bones.

My apologies for how short this chapter is, by the way. I thought the first half – up to before Harry and Hermione meet with McGonagall – was a lot longer than it was.
I had the entire chapter up to before Hermione calls for Mallory in the broom closet written for several days now. Originally this chapter was going to go much different. Originally, Harry and Hermione was going to decide it was too much of a risk to go to McGonagall with Dumbledore in the castle. Instead, they would have found Susan and asked her if she had a way to contact her Aunt. McGonagall would have had no part in that. But that was before I wrote much of this story. Let’s just say my original way wouldn’t have been too believable, because McGonagall is so supportive in this story. I might put the original version of the first half of this chapter in a deleted scene at some point. You’ll see just how different it was.

Next Chapter: Harry, Hermione and McGonagall speak to Director Bones. Then Amelia meets with a few Aurors and decides a plan of attack against the Weasleys.
A Late Night For All

Chapter Notes

For those readers of mine interested in news about my other work, my profile on Fanfiction.net (search for my real name, Vance McGill) has been updated with information.

Warning: Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron and Molly Weasley Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Tuesday, December 15th, 1994)

Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall stood up as the door to the Private Common Room opened. Professor Pomona Sprout stepped into the room, followed by Susan Bones.

“Good evening, Professor Sprout, Miss Bones,” McGonagall said, “Thank you for coming.”

“Professor Sprout said you wanted to see me, ma’am?” Susan asked.

“Yes, Miss Bones,” McGonagall said. “Am I correct when I say you have the means to contact your Aunt, Amelia – other than owl post, of course?”

Susan looked surprised, but she nodded. “Auntie Amelia gave me a communication mirror in case of an emergency.”

“Well, unfortunately, I have an emergency and I need to speak with Director Bones,” McGonagall said. “It is the type of emergency I can’t use the Floo Network for. I must ask if I can borrow your mirror to speak with your Aunt. I can have a house-elf give you the mirror back when I am finished speaking to your Aunt.”

“Can I call my Aunt and ask her?” Susan asked, sounding a little nervous. “I need her permission.”

“Of course, Miss Bones, I understand,” McGonagall said.

Susan walked over to a private corner of the room and removed a small, compact mirror from her robes, then opened it. She talked in whispers with whom Harry figured was Director Amelia Bones.

“This sounds rather serious, Minerva,” Professor Sprout said.

“I’m afraid it is,” McGonagall said, nodding. “It is something we cannot let Albus know about. If all goes well, Director Bones may have to come here herself, tomorrow morning.”

“Albus won’t appreciate that,” Sprout said.

“Let’s just say I have a plan to have him out of the castle when Amelia visits,” McGonagall said.
Professor Sprout nodded. She glanced at Harry and Hermione, and smiled nervously.

“Why, when anything happens around here, it is always you two?” she asked, obviously trying to put a little humor in the tense situation.

“Honestly, Professor,” Harry said, “We’ve been trying to answer that for ourselves since Halloween of our first year here.”

The Herbology Professor gave a nervous chuckle, in response. Susan walked back over to the two Professors and two Gryffindors.

“Auntie Amelia would be happy to speak to you,” Susan said, “I realized the three of you probably wish to speak to her, so simply tap your wand on the mirror and say ‘Size Four’. It should be large enough for all of you to see my Aunt when you speak to her.”

“Thank you, Miss Bones,” McGonagall said, “I would give Hufflepuff points for this, but questions might be asked.”

“Twenty-five points to Hufflepuff for assisting a Professor in their time of need,” Professor Sprout said, cheerfully, “Now, let us get you back to the Hufflepuff Common Room.”

“Mallory?” McGonagall called.

Mallory appeared a moment later.

“Miss Bones, this is Mallory, my house-elf,” McGonagall said, “She will give you your mirror back when we’re done.”

“Mallory be happy to do this,” Mallory said.

“I’ll wait for you, Mallory,” Susan said.

McGonagall thanked the young Hufflepuff again, and Professor Sprout led her back out of the room. McGonagall then placed the mirror on the couch opposite of where Harry and Hermione sat. She used the command to make the mirror grow, and soon it reached the top of the couch. Then McGonagall sat down on the other side of Hermione.

Amelia Bones appeared in the mirror. She had the same dark-red hair as her niece, and a monocle over her left eye glistened in the reflection of the mirror. When Harry had pictured the Director of the DMLE, he had thought she’d be much older, but she didn’t seem much older than Sirius and Remus.

“Director Amelia Bones,” McGonagall said, “Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. Amelia Bones, this is Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, this is Director Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.”

“Thank you for meeting with us, ma’am,” Harry said, “Please call me Harry.”

“You can call me Hermione, ma’am,” Hermione said.

“It is nice to finally see you again, Harry,” Amelia said, “You were a baby when I saw you last. You have permission to call me Amelia. I suppose we should finish the pleasantries, however. This sounds serious, Minerva, especially if you had to contact me through my niece’s mirror instead of the
“Floo Network. Sometime tells me you didn’t want a certain Headmaster to know about this conversation.”

“I’m afraid you would be right, Amelia,” McGonagall said. “I was trying to decide what would be a good point to begin this conversation. I suppose I should begin with this. Harry, Hermione and I have uncovered a conspiracy that began not a week after the deaths of James and Lily Potter.”

Harry realized McGonagall wanted to start with the illegal Contract. When she looked at him, he knew it was his turn to talk.

“On the fifth of November in 1981,” Harry said, “An illegal Betrothal Contract was penned between Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley. Albus Dumbledore, falsely posing as my Magical Guardian, placed me in an illegal Betrothal with Molly’s daughter, Ginevra. We discovered this information recently. I actually have a copy of said Contract, which I can show you, if we were to meet face-to-face instead of simply having a conversation through this mirror.”

“Molly Weasley and Albus Dumbledore are also believed to have copies,” McGonagall said, “Though we do not know where they are.”

“An illegal Betrothal Contract is certainly enough to start the investigation,” Amelia said, “Now I just need more information.”

“Even though most of what we have is he said/she said and hearsay?” Hermione asked.

Amelia smiled. “I can see why you’re known as the smartest witch of your age, Miss Granger.”

Hermione blushed at this compliment, and Harry smiled at her.

“If you didn’t have that illegal Contract,” Amelia continued, “I might have had a bit of difficulty starting an investigation from hearsay. That is true. But this illegal Contract gives me enough proof that what you’re going to tell me is true enough to work with. You may continue, knowing that I will not simply toss out anything you tell me.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Harry said, “Before we discovered the Contract, we already had suspicions of a conspiracy that had to do with some of the Weasley family. We weren’t sure of Dumbledore’s involvement at first. After the news broke out that Hermione and I were a couple, and going to the Yule Ball together, Ron and Ginny Weasley attempted to do everything in their power to break us up. We had no real idea what their true plan was until this evening.”

“Ronald and Ginevra Weasley had been using enchanted jewelry, you see,” McGonagall said. “The enchantments would stop the two youngest Weasleys from blurring out secret information to anyone who shouldn’t know about it. They couldn’t even speak of it if the enchantments detected somebody eavesdropping.”

Amelia whistled. “I’ve heard of these enchantments, of course. They are Class Seven Restricted Enchantments. Only Top Level Ministry officials are allowed to use the enchantments, but only in the case of Top Secret information. The enchantments are difficult to use and can cause magical exhaustion if used by less-than-adequately-powered individuals. You say two students are using them?”

“We believe Albus Dumbledore gave them jewelry with these enchantments,” McGonagall said.
Amelia nodded. “He would certainly be authorized and have the ability to use such enchantments. However, he would never be allowed to give it to two students. How were you able to surpass these enchantments?”

“Counter-Enchantment Jewelry,” McGonagall said, with a sigh, “I understand if such a thing might be restricted or illegal, but its use was necessary to uncover whatever the Weasleys were hiding.”

“I can understand that, Minerva,” Amelia said, nodding. “Thank you for telling me this. If I have to end up interrogating Ronald and Ginevra Weasley, I’d certainly need to know about the jewelry. I might be able to arrange immunity for you for using such counter-enchantments, as it was used to uncover criminal behavior, worse crimes than the use of Counter-Enchantment Items. Okay then. Please tell me what you discovered that was so important it had to be hidden using Class Seven Restricted Enchantments.”

“The first bit of information we figured out wasn’t something we heard from Ron and Ginny,” Harry said. “I just figured it out after we heard their conversation.”

Harry told Amelia the story of his first time getting onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters, meeting the Weasleys, and meeting Ron officially for the first time.

“Well, that certainly does sound like a premeditated set-up,” Amelia said. “Threatening the Statute of Secrecy is a fine start on bringing charges against Molly Weasley, in addition to the illegal Betrothal Contract. I’m going to assume now she is one of the masterminds behind whatever information you uncovered tonight.”

“We believe Molly and Albus are the masterminds, yes,” McGonagall said.

“Ron and Ginny do seem to be pawns,” Harry said.

“Willing pawns, Harry,” Hermione said, “They were certainly agreeable to their part of the plan. Especially Ginny.”

“Alright, you two,” Amelia said, “You have my complete attention here. Please tell me what you’ve uncovered.”

Harry, with Hermione’s help, told Director Bones everything that had happened that evening – everything from realizing Ron and Ginny were following them, to the entire conversation they had eavesdropped on.

Amelia Bones was rubbing the wrinkles in her forehead by the time they were finished.

“You were right to contact me through my niece’s private mirror,” she said. “I am sure Albus has the means of eavesdropping on any Floo Network communication that happens inside Hogwarts. Is Albus Dumbledore truly planning on Obliviating the two of you, in order to get you to forget your… feelings for each other?”

“We believe that may have been his original plan,” McGonagall said, “But it was one of the things we had predicted very early on. Something we made moves against. The reason the entire school knows – the reason Rita Skeeter wrote that article about Harry and Hermione, though that part was an unplanned blessing – was because we were trying to counter any possibilities of Obliviation before it happened.”
“You wanted the entire school to know how serious Harry and Hermione were as a couple,” Amelia said, nodding, “So it would look strange if they were suddenly not a couple anymore. An inspiring maneuver. You say it was his original plan. Any theories as to his current plans?”

“We have a theory that may sound extreme,” McGonagall said, “But we believed it enough to do everything we could to prevent it. We believed he was going to use Hermione as a hostage for the Second Task. During the Second Task, he would arrange her assassination and make it looked like she drowned at the bottom of the lake.”

Amelia blinked. “It was you three, wasn’t it? You leaked the information about the use of human hostages to Rita Skeeter.”

“Yes, that was us,” McGonagall said, with a small smirk. “Like I said, we needed to prevent human hostages from being used for the Second Task.”

Amelia laughed. “Well, you certainly seemed to fool even Albus. Dolores Umbridge accused you, Harry, of being the one to give Rita Skeeter the information, and Albus, himself, denied such a theory.”

“Probably because of how shocked and angry I appeared to be when reading the article,” Harry said, grinning. “I also might have ranted at Dumbledore, accusing him of planning to place my girlfriend at the bottom of the lake.”

“I would have liked to have seen that,” Amelia said, chuckling; then she cleared her throat and became serious again. “Okay, so Albus’ plan of Obliviation wouldn’t work. So he would try to split you two up, permanently, by assassinating you, Hermione. But how would this work for his and Molly Weasley’s plans?”

“We had a theory that Ginny Weasley would attempt to comfort me in my grief,” Harry said, “Which she would try to use as a relationship starter between the two of us.”

“But since we’re having very public issues with the Weasleys,” Hermione said, “Ginny would have issues getting close to Harry in the first place. Unless…”

“Unless she were to dose you with Love Potions, Harry,” Amelia said, nodding.

“And as we heard Ginny say when she was speaking to Ron,” Hermione said, “Molly Weasley planned on dosing us with Love Potions starting next summer, even though the original plan was for Ron to ask me to the Yule Ball, and Harry to end up going with Ginny. I suppose the public perception of us going with the Weasleys to the Ball, would have made it easier for the Weasleys to pass off our affections for them starting next summer, due to the Love Potions.”

“There is something else as well,” McGonagall said, “But I do not feel safe discussing this with you even over a simple mirror. Nobody except the three of us knows this particular information.”

Harry realized exactly what McGonagall was referring to. The Blood Tests he and Hermione had received during the Gringotts visit. The reports of the bindings and Potions.

“I’ve already decided go to Hogwarts tomorrow morning to talk with Ronald and Ginevra Weasley,” Amelia said, “I can meet with you three, and you can give me this other information in person. The only issue I have is… what about Albus? He’s going to have a real problem with me being there.”
“Don’t worry about Albus,” McGonagall said, “I already have plans for him to be out of the castle.”

“Another Rita Skeeter article?” Amelia guessed, raising an eyebrow.

“Good guess,” McGonagall said, “But no. Again, it is something we cannot discuss over the mirror.”

Amelia sighed. “Very well then. When should I plan to be at the castle?”

“I believe Albus will discover his reason for leaving the castle tomorrow during breakfast,” McGonagall said. “I firmly believe he’ll be leaving Hogwarts immediately after he gets the information. Harry, Hermione and the two youngest Weasleys will have to be excused from first period, but this is more important.”

“It is,” Amelia agreed. “Alright then. I’ll plan to arrive between eight and nine then.”

“I’ll let Hagrid know I’m expecting a guest,” McGonagall said.

“If there is nothing else that cannot wait until tomorrow,” Amelia said, “I have some work to do. I think I’m going to arrange for an Auror squad to visit the Weasley residence this evening.”

“Probably a good idea,” McGonagall said, “Molly might react rather badly to Ron and Ginevra’s letter. You might even catch her in the middle of brewing those Love Potions, if you’re lucky.”

“If we’re lucky,” Amelia agreed.

Harry and Hermione said they had nothing else until they would meet face-to-face. Amelia gave them all a farewell, and the mirror went blank.

“You want us to show Director Bones the results of the Blood Tests, don’t you?” Harry asked the Head of Gryffindor.

“More evidence against the Weasleys and Albus,” McGonagall said.

“I didn’t get a copy of my test on Sunday,” Harry said, “But I think that can be easily remedied. Dobby!”

Dobby appeared a moment later. Harry reached into the pocket of his robes and pulled out a scroll of parchment. This scroll was the letter for Keeper Ragnok he had been holding onto all day.

“Give this letter to Keeper Ragnok, Dobby,” Harry said, “And also, please ask him if Heiress Dagworth-Granger and I can get copies of our Blood Tests before we were healed.”

“Dobby be doing so, Great Harry Potter!” Dobby said.

Harry handed Dobby the scroll and the elf vanished with a pop!

“Do you think Ron and Ginny will be arrested tomorrow, Professor?” Hermione asked.

“I very much hope so, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “But I’ll tell you this. I will do my best to see them expelled if they aren’t arrested. I promise you that.”

Harry and Hermione smiled, nervously, as they squeezed each other’s hand and looked at each other.
The next Salvo in the war against the Weasleys had been made. Now it was up to Director Amelia Bones.

(Meanwhile in the Director’s Office of the DMLE Headquarters)

Amelia scribbled several notes in her personal notepad, summarizing the discussion she had with Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Professor McGonagall.

“Samantha!” she called out to her secretary.

The door to Amelia’s office opened, and a young, blonde woman stepped into the room.

“Yes, Director?” Samantha, Amelia’s personal secretary, asked.

“First, I wish to apologize for keeping you here so late,” Amelia said, “I have two more tasks for you to do. Then you are excused to go home. Unfortunately, for me, I am likely to be here all night. Something serious just came up.”

“What can I do for you, ma’am?” Samantha asked.

“Rufus Scrimgeour should still be in his office,” Amelia said, “Go meet with him and ask him to gather four of his Aurors, two of them should be Senior Aurors. Have Auror Scrimgeour and his chosen Aurors meet me here as soon as he finds them. After you give him this message, go to the Portkey Division of our Headquarters, and tell them I need a password-keyed Portkey with the destination of the Weasley residence in Devon, otherwise known as the Burrow. I am going to need that Portkey in half-an-hour to an hour at most, if possible. If they can give it to you, please bring it to me, then you are excused for the evening.”

“Yes, ma’am!” Samantha said.

She bowed her head and left the office. Amelia sighed as she relaxed back in her comfortable chair. She really wanted to pull out her bottle of Ogden’s Old Firewhiskey, from her secret stash, and down a cup or three, but she needed a clear mind for what was about to happen.

She stared at her notepad, and looked through each detail. She then frowned as a thought crossed her mind.

Early Sunday afternoon, she had been relaxing in the sitting room of Bones Manor, during a rare day off, when she was suddenly overcome with what could only be described as the effects of a Minor Flushing Draught. After this feeling had passed, she suddenly remembered a detail she hadn’t thought of in over thirteen years:

*The Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter is the founding House of the Great Alliance, and the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell is the most powerful seat, not only in the Great Alliance, but in the Wizengamot itself!*  

Her inquisitive, Auror and DMLE-trained mind had immediately realized what had happened. A Dark and very illegal enchantment had been used to hide this information from her very thoughts. She had theorized that Albus Dumbledore was behind the enchantment, simply because he was powerful enough to pull off such an enchantment. But she didn’t have any evidence.
Until tonight. This conspiracy between three of the members of the House of Weasley and Albus Dumbledore, toward Harry Potter – and through Harry, Hermione Granger – was very troublesome. If Albus Dumbledore could concoct a plan like this, which – if it had succeeded – would end with the death of Harry Potter, and Ginny Weasley pregnant with the Heir of the House of Potter, and also the new owner of the Potter fortune.

“But someone like Ginny Weasley wouldn’t possibly have a use for the Potter and Peverell votes in the Wizengamot,” Amelia said, “She wouldn’t be Lady Potter unless she and Harry were somehow married before his death. So she wouldn’t be seen as Regent, even as a mother of a future Lord Potter. Albus Dumbledore would use this to take the votes for himself. Could this be the real reason Albus Dumbledore wants Harry Potter to end up romantically involved with Ginny Weasley? Simply for more votes in the Wizengamot? There has to be more to that. But perhaps it isn’t connected to the Weasleys at all.”

Amelia shook her head. “Focus on the new investigation for now, Bones. Use the information you have for now, and perhaps it could open more doors later. Alright, Bones, what charges are the perpetrators looking at? Let’s start with the Weasleys.

“Molly Weasley first. Creating an Illegal Betrothal Contract. Threatening the Statute of Secrecy. Possession and Use of Class Seven Restricted Enchantments – two counts. That will be tricky, as it is her children who are in possession of such items, but she had to know about their use. Maybe Conspiracy to Use instead of Possession and Use? Possession and Conspiracy to Use Restricted and Illegal Substances, including Love Potions. That will depend on what we find at the Burrow this evening. Conspiracy to Commit Line Theft – two counts: Potter and Peverell.


“I am sure I can find more against all four of them. But this is enough to start with. It might be enough for the three Weasleys. But Albus Dumbledore? No, I definitely need more concrete information, or he could get away with all of it.”

Amelia smiled as she wondered at the possibilities of what McGonagall, Potter and Granger didn’t want to discuss with her over the mirror. She knew this information they were keeping hold onto was going to be more important than anything she heard tonight.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, Minerva,” Amelia muttered, “I hope, for your sakes and mine, that this is really good information.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Amelia made the official documents that would make it perfectly legal to go to the Burrow for a search and seizure of any incriminating evidence. She had evidence of an illegal Betrothal Contract, though she would not get physical proof until the following morning. She also had evidence of a breach of the Statute of Secrecy, which was enough to bring Molly Weasley in for questioning, simply because she had breached the most serious law the wizarding world – not just the British wizarding society, but the wizarding world in general – had in the books.
She had just finished completing the documents, when she heard a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Amelia called out.

The door opened, and Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour walked in to Amelia’s office, followed by four Aurors: Senior Aurors Kingsley Shacklebolt and John Dawlish, and Hestia Jones and Nymphadora Tonks. Nymphadora was an odd choice, as she was a Rookie, just finishing up her training in Brighton Auror Academy a couple months prior. But Amelia figured either Shacklebolt or Dawlish had her under their wing as a mentor.

“You asked to see me and a team of Aurors, ma’am?” Scrimgeour asked, as Auror Jones – the last to walk in – closed the door.

“Yes,” Amelia said, “I have discovered a Breach of the International Statute of Secrecy which happened in early September of 1991. Before you ask, we are only hearing about this now, because the witness who saw the Breach was uneducated about such a thing at the time, and had no knowledge of what was happening. The witness did not realize anything was wrong until today, when they contacted me.

“The perpetrator of this Breach is one Molly Weasley, wife of Arthur, the Head of the Minor House of Weasley. Her five youngest children are also suspected of being part of this Breach, as they were there when it happened, and did nothing to report any wrongdoing. The eldest of these five, Percival Ignatius Weasley, is currently working here at the Ministry, as an assistant to Bartemius Crouch in the Department of International Magical Cooperation.”

“I can have an Auror see whether or not he is still here this evening,” Scrimgeour said, “If not, we’ll bring him in tomorrow.”

“Agreed,” Amelia said, “As for the four youngest Weasley children, all of whom are currently at Hogwarts, I am already planning on going to Hogwarts tomorrow. I need two Aurors here to accompany me.”

“Senior Auror Shacklebolt and Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks,” Scrimgeour said.

Amelia held back a smirk when she noticed Rookie Auror Tonks wince lightly at the mention of her first name.

“That is acceptable,” Amelia said, “Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks, I wish to arrive at Hogwarts tomorrow morning somewhere between eight and nine in the morning. Please meet me here fifteen minutes before eight-o-clock. Prepare to interrogate minors. I plan to have permission from their father by the end of the evening. I will give you more information about this tomorrow morning. Until then, you are dismissed if Head Auror Scrimgeour has nothing for you.”

Shacklebolt and Tonks nodded, and turned to Scrimgeour.

Scrimgeour turned to Shacklebolt. “Senior Auror Shacklebolt, bring Rookie Tonks with you and find out if Percy Weasley is still in the Ministry. If he is not here, then you are dismissed for the evening.”

Kingsley bowed his head lightly in acknowledgement, and he and Tonks left the room.
“Forgive me, Director,” Scrimgeour said, “But it sounds as if you plan on visiting the Weasley residence this evening. Something tells me this Breach of the Statute isn’t the only reason for your visit.”

Amelia sighed and shook her head. “I have evidence – though the physical evidence of it won’t be available until tomorrow morning – of an Illegal Creation of a Betrothal Contract going back about thirteen years. Also, I have suspicions of Possession and Conspiracy to Use Restricted and Illegal Substances, including Love Potions. Molly Weasley is suspected of both. There is a real possibility she is planning on delivering these substances to her victims as early as tomorrow. There are also other possible crimes she may be suspect of, but I won’t get such information until tomorrow when I visit Hogwarts.”

Scrimgeour grimaced and nodded. “So the Breach in the Statute of Secrecy is merely a key to get you into the Weasley residence. Which will lead to a search and seizure, due to suspicion of Illegal Contracts and Substances?”

“That is correct,” Amelia said, “I wish for Senior Auror Dawlish, and Auror Jones to accompany me to Weasley residence, also known as the Burrow, this evening. My secretary is currently obtaining a Portkey for the Burrow.”

“Very well,” Scrimgeour said, then turned to his Aurors, “Dawlish, Jones, you’re to accompany Director Bones this evening. Prepare for a possible arrest of one or more suspects, and seizure of possibly volatile substances.”

“Yes, sir,” Dawlish said, and Jones echoed him.

“When you are finished with the mission,” Scrimgeour said, “Report back to me. I will be waiting for you.”

Dawlish and Jones acknowledged this as well. Scrimgeour turned back to Amelia.

“I wish you good fortune this evening, Director,” Scrimgeour said.

“Thank you, Auror Scrimgeour,” Amelia said, “Dismissed.”

Scrimgeour bowed his head lightly, then left the office.

“Come sit, Aurors Dawlish and Jones,” Amelia said, “We’ll go through what is expected to happen this evening, while we wait for my secretary to return with the Portkey.”

(Meanwhile…)

Keeper Ragnok the Sixth smiled as he finished the letter for Albus Dumbledore, which he would deliver to the Headmaster of Hogwarts via Gringotts Owl early tomorrow morning. Earlier that evening, he had received a letter from Lord Harry Potter, via the house-elf Dobby, a most curious fellow. Ragnok grinned toothily at the memory of the letter. Lord Potter and his mate, Heiress Dagworth-Granger had apparently had a very interesting evening which had ended with Director Amelia Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in the Ministry of Magic beginning an investigation that might just see a grim fate for not only Albus Dumbledore, but three Weasleys as well.
Ragnok had, of course, expected Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger would request copies of their Blood Tests eventually to give to someone like Director Bones. So he had kept the results, and he was glad he did. Dobby had come to collect copies of the Tests, on order of his Master ‘the Great Harry Potter’. Ragnok was happy to hand the copies over. Especially if it meant Albus Dumbledore would finally get what was coming to him.

Albus Dumbledore was a tricky fellow. Very slimy. Normally, Goblins like Ragnok would approve of such an individual. But Albus Dumbledore had committed several crimes against Gringotts, including using one of the Goblins as a spy and traitor. Ragnok actually hoped Albus Dumbledore would slime his way out of a one-way trip to Azkaban. Because if he did, then Gringotts would come after him with everything they had. Ragnok was perfectly happy to agree with Lord Potter’s idea of distracting Dumbledore, so the man would be far away from Hogwarts when things happened that the venerable Headmaster wouldn’t be able to interfere in.

Yes, Ragnok would do his part the following morning to make sure Dumbledore was far away from the castle for a few hours.

“Maybe a couple hours inside one of our cells to let the old man cool off would do for a start,” Ragnok said, with a feral grin. “I am quite sure he will be steaming when he realizes he is under investigation for the crime of theft. He will be angry when he comes to Gringotts, so he’ll need some time to calm down. A couple hours inside a cell – which not even a Phoenix could break into – sounds like a fine remedy for an angry individual.”

His musings were interrupted by a knock on his office door.

“Come in!” he growled.

He smiled when he saw his son, Ragnok The Seventh – affectionately known as Seven – step into the room. Seven was Head of one of the Security teams in Gringotts.

“Greetings, son,” Ragnok said, in Gobbledygook, “How may I assist you this evening?”

“My team has found what you have asked us to search for,” Seven said, “A Horcrux. It is in the Lestrange Vault. We have not removed it yet.”

Ragnok growled at this. He had suspected there might be a Horcrux inside Gringotts, after he discovered Lord Harry Potter had similar dark magic inside his scar. However, he had hoped he had been wrong. But here was proof.

“Bring me the Lestrange Account Manager, son!” Ragnok growled. “Tomorrow morning, you and your team will accompany me, to meet with your Grandfather, the venerable King Ragnok the Fifth. We will speak further on this matter then. Dismissed.”

He would not have the Horcrux removed from the Vault yet. But he would instruct the Lestrange Account Manager to keep an eye on the Vault, and the other eye out for anyone who might have interest in said Vault. He would also get permission from his father for his son, Seven, and a team of Goblins to begin an investigation into the rest of the Horcruxes.

Seven bowed and left the office. Ragnok closed his eyes, attempting to calm down. He needed something to distract him. He snapped his fingers and summoned the House Potter Account Documents. He decided to focus on the Contract meant for Lord Potter’s vile Muggle relatives, the Dursleys, that would see the Muggles with deeper pockets, and far from Great Britain. He would
send a copy of the completed Contract to Lord Potter the following morning, with intentions of having a human representative of Gringotts meet with the Dursleys the following weekend.

“Much to do,” Ragnok said, “Going to be a late night again. I’m getting too old for this!”

Chapter End Notes

Odd ending, I know. Ragnok’s scene was a last-minute addition because I couldn’t figure where else to place it in the story. I suppose I could have placed it before Dumbledore comes to Gringotts, but this seemed like a good place. The scene only exists, because some of my readers wanted to know if the Goblins are going to do anything about the Horcruxes. Mostly the Horcrux hunt – including the mentioned meeting with King Ragnok the Fifth – is going to be a behind-the-scenes thing for now. I have one idea that might lead into a scene with the Goblins during the hunt, but I’m not sure.

Also, I suspect some readers won’t like that Harry isn’t directly involved in the Horcrux Hunt. That’s been done before! I wanted something different that I’ve never done before. Thus… Goblins hunting Horcruxes… though are they the only ones?

Next Chapter: Amelia and the Aurors visit the Burrow. Molly Weasley has a bad night, and Albus Dumbledore has a very bad start to the following morning.
In the Author's Note at the end of the chapter, there is a SPOILER for the future of this story below the "Next Chapter" preview. Do not read below the preview if you do not want to be spoiled. It has to do with Dumbledore, and some of the events that happen in this chapter.

Warning: Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron and Molly Weasley Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Tuesday, December 15th, 1994)

Molly Weasley hummed along with Celestina Warbeck, as the singer crooned “A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love” over the wireless. She was currently stirring a long metal spoon around a Cauldron, which was in the process of brewing the latest batch of Love Potion. Her husband, Arthur, was in his garage tinkering on various Muggle objects. Molly had placed a Compulsion Charm on her husband to keep him in, or near, his garage, for a couple hours, so he wouldn’t walk in on her brewing the various Potions she would be working on

An hour ago, Pigwidgeon – the miniature Scops owl who belonged to her son, Ronald – had delivered two letters. One of the letters was personally addressed to her, whilst the other was written for both her and her husband. The second letter was simply a cover letter, so that her husband wouldn’t want to read the first. Molly’s explanation that the first letter mostly had to do with Ginny’s feminine issues had put her husband off of reading the letter, rather quickly.

The letter, penned by Ginny, was actually much more serious than a letter asking for a care package to deal with her latest feminine problems. No, this letter had to do with the big secret plan that her husband had no knowledge of, and had no business knowing about. The secret plan that would eventually lead to her daughter, Ginny, being pregnant with the Heir and future Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. This would also see the Minor House of Weasley escalated to a Noble House, and owners of the Potter’s vast fortune.

This plan had run into a few complications recently. Last Saturday, Molly had woken up to a new edition of the Daily Prophet, whose headline had a very interesting article. Arthur had been quite happy with the news, saying the two deserved such happiness. Molly had ignored him, while doing her best not to give him a scathing reply.

She had originally scoffed at Rita Skeeter’s article boasting about Harry Potter and Hermione Granger being a couple. She had originally thought the hag was lying about the information. After all, Skeeter had been writing many scathing articles recently about Harry Potter, including one where she had mistaken his age as twelve instead of fourteen! The article about their supposed romantic relationship even had misnamed Hermione as Harmony! She simply thought the journalist hag was spouting off rumors and lies.

Then yesterday morning, Skeeter had another headlining article about the upcoming Second Task
which would take place in February. There was another mention of Harry Potter and his girlfriend, Hermione Granger. The original article also had a reprint in the newspaper as well. Molly had begun to get quite concerned about the entire thing. She had attempted to contact Albus Dumbledore through the Floo but he had been out of the castle. Then this morning’s newspaper had another damning article. Rita Skeeter had theorized that Harry Potter was Emancipated! This could not be true! Molly had tried to contact Albus again, but he was once again out of the castle!

Molly was about to try to contact Albus again, when Pigwidgeon had entered the Burrow’s kitchen. She had read Ginny’s letter and had been just as upset as her daughter sounded in the letter. Rita Skeeter had not been lying! Harry Potter had not only asked Hermione Granger to the Yule Ball, but the pair was a serious couple who had been snogging in the middle of the Great Hall, as well as broom closets. Ginny and Ron had witnessed the couple going into a broom closet just that evening! What had happened to the original plan?!

Ginny had explained that too. Harry had asked Granger to the Yule Ball only a few minutes after the Ball had been announced to Harry by Minerva McGonagall. Ron hadn’t even been near the pair when Harry had asked Granger! If he had been there, he could have asked Granger first, or interrupted Harry’s attempt somehow! But he had not been there!

Ginny had requested to Molly that she speak to Albus, and ask him to Obliviate the couple of any knowledge of their relationship and even attraction to each other. But Molly had decided against doing such a thing. After all, with Rita Skeeter’s article out there, it would look suspicious if Harry and Granger suddenly broke up unexpectedly. It would likely be noticed by students first, if Ginny’s hints about how public Harry and Granger had been with their displays of affection!

Molly had hoped she wouldn’t need to use Love Potions until the following summer. She had hoped Ron would ask Granger to the Ball, and her son could convince Harry to ask Ginny. With this evidence of their date at the Yule Ball, Molly could then give Harry and Granger Love Potions keyed to her children, and when it came out that the two were dating Ginny and Ron respectively, it wouldn’t come out as strange. Nobody would suspect the Love Potions then! It would simply be a natural romantic relationship that had evolved during the summer due to their date at the Yule Ball.

Now Molly had to change her plans. Before she could even give Harry and Granger Love Potions, she needed to give them dosages of other Potions that would gradually make Harry and Granger break up their relationship – and make it look believable. This Love Potion she was currently brewing would not be keyed to Ginny or Ron. She planned to deliver the Potion to Ginny with implicit directions to summon a hair from another student – an attractive male – and put it in a dose of the Potion. Ginny would then give this Potion to Granger. Granger would be found publicly snogging this attractive male, and hopefully Harry would see them. Neither Ron nor Ginny would be suspected of this, since they would have no connections to whoever Ginny chose as the scapegoat.

This would begin rumors of the troubled relationship between Harry and Granger, and the many students around Hogwarts would no longer believe the pair was a ‘serious couple’. Then she would give Harry and Granger other potions that would separate the two further and further until they were no longer best friends. Once that worked, she could then direct the pair toward her own children. At the very least, she would direct Harry toward Ginny. Granger was only a slim possibility, depending on how her friendship with Harry ended up. If Granger was still in Harry’s life – which meant she would be in the Weasley’s life -- then Molly would direct her toward Ron.

Unfortunately, this won’t work in time for the Ball, Molly sighed, But if Harry and Granger are seen accompanying Ginny and Ron on a date or two to Hogsmeade, then their relationship beginning next summer – due to Love Potions – would be seen as more believable. While I would hate for
Ginny to be pregnant before she takes her OWLs, unfortunately it might have to happen. So that would mean Lust Potions should be given to both Harry and Ginny the summer before Ginny’s OWL year begins.

Molly was so lost in her thoughts, and the wireless’ music was so loud, that she did not hear the sounds of a Portkey’s arrival at the top of the long driveway.

Her husband, however, did.

(A couple minutes prior…)

Fierce gusts of wind whipped around Amelia’s head as the Portkey transported her, Senior Auror John Dawlish, and Auror Hestia Jones. Fortunately for the three law enforcement officials, they were all quite used to Portkey travel, and all of them were able to land smoothly on their feet on the gravel road as the trip ended. The Portkey – which was a two-way Key – would also be used to transport Amelia, the Aurors, and anyone else that might accompany them, such as someone under arrest. The Portkey calmed down and went temporarily inert until activated again.

Amelia pocketed the jump-rope Portkey in her robes, then looked around at her destination. They were standing on a gravel road at the beginning of a long gravel driveway that led to one of the most peculiarly-built houses Amelia had ever seen. It seemed to be built with magic, and Amelia momentarily wondered if a powerful Finite would knock the entire house down. As Amelia and the two Aurors started off down the driveway, she saw Arthur Weasley walking toward them. Then, he did a rather peculiar move, and turned around and walked back toward the small building that neighbored the larger house.

“Auror Dawlish,” Amelia said, “Check up on Arthur Weasley for any negative Charms and other spells. He seemed to wish to greet us, but he then turned back around. His behavior seems strange.”

“You’re right, boss,” Hestia Jones said, “I did expect him to greet us and welcome us into his home, at the very least. Arthur has always been a courteous gentleman, for as long as I’ve known him. For him to not greet us is certainly odd behavior.”

“I’ll see what’s wrong with his behavior, boss,” Dawlish said.

Arthur once again walked out of the smaller building and walked in their direction. This time Amelia saw the peculiar look on the man’s face as he stepped a few feet away from the building, before he attempted to turn back around. Dawlish cast a charm that made Arthur remain where he stood.

“Apologies, Arthur,” Amelia said, as Dawlish started running diagnostics around the Head of House Weasley, “You were behaving rather peculiarly, and I couldn’t ignore it.”

“There seems to be a lot of negative spells and other things affecting Weasley here, boss,” Dawlish said, “However, the most recent seems to be a Compulsion Charm. If I were to guess, it is a Compulsion keeping the man in or around this building here. Someone didn’t want him going back in the house.”

“His wife, perhaps?” Hestia suggested. “Which makes me wonder. Where is she? I thought she would have noticed our arrival now. She’s always struck me as a busybody. I would have thought she’d come out and demand to know what we were doing. Where could she be? And what could she be doing?”
Amelia wondered the same thing. She also wondered if Molly Weasley had been doing something inside the Burrow, and was trying to hide it now.

“Jones, remain here with Arthur!” Amelia said, “Dawlish, with me. Wands out!”

Amelia and Dawlish hurried down the driveway and through the front door of the Burrow. Molly Weasley was currently standing in the middle of the kitchen levitating a Cauldron in the direction of a closet of some type.

“Freeze, Molly Weasley, DMLE and Auror Department!” Amelia ordered.

As Molly turned toward Amelia and Dawlish, the Cauldron she had been levitating had nearly crashed to the floor, along with the contents inside. Amelia, however, used her wand to levitate it and bring it back to the table. The contents sloshed in the Cauldron, but none had dripped out. It was odd that the contents were still there. Why hadn’t Molly Vanished it?

“What are you doing in my house?!” Molly shrieked. “You have no right to barge into my house, Amelia Bones! I know my rights!”

“Do you?” Amelia asked. “So if I were to tell you that you Breached the Statute of Secrecy, would you be able to tell me exactly when such an event happened?

“I would never!” Molly shrieked.

“September 1st, 1991, King’s Cross Station,” Amelia said, smirking when Molly’s eyes widened in obvious panic, “You led your children across toward Platform Nine-And-Three Quarters talking loudly about the place being crowded with Muggles. You also seemed to be rather confused about where the Platform was, Mrs. Weasley. Had you recently been Obliviated of such information? Why did you have to ask your daughter where the Platform was? Why were you speaking loudly about such things in a platform while surrounded by Muggles, who wouldn’t know these terms, therefore risking a breach of the Statute of Secrecy.”

Molly had collapsed onto one of the chairs at the kitchen table halfway through Amelia’s statement.

“What has you so quiet, Mrs. Weasley?” Amelia asked, “Wondering how I could possibly know of such information? Thinking you were in the clear about such an event, as you trusted that your children would never turn you in.”

“They didn’t!” Molly growled, “Did they? Who was it? I bet it was Percy! He’s been trying to get a step up in the Ministry. Would he be desperate enough to betray his family just for a good promotion?”

“None of your children told me,” Amelia said. “They’ll be in trouble for that, however. They should have reported such a Breach to the proper authorities.”

“You can’t do this!” Molly cried. “They’re children!”

Amelia ignored her. “There was one other witness there, however. Somebody who, on that day, didn’t know that what you were doing was illegal. He had very little knowledge about the wizarding world, and the legal ins and outs, that he wouldn’t notice anything strange about you yelling about Muggles and the Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters. No, he was just so relieved that someone just so
happened to be yelling out a couple of words that he actually recognized, so he could finally get on
the Platform, and get on the train to Hogwarts.”

Molly’s eyes widened again, as she realized just who Amelia was talking about.

“If you ask me, that seems a little suspicious,” Amelia said. “I mean, there is one reasonable
explanation for you asking about the Platform. Before September 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1991, I am sure you used the
Floo Network to get onto the Platform like most normal wizarding families do. So perhaps you might
have been a little confused about where to go. But how would your daughter know something you
wouldn’t? Why were you asking her?

“And why did you continue to use the Muggleborn route the following years, unless you were trying
to keep up some kind of charade? Is that why you’re always nearly late onto the Platform? Because
you’re not used to getting onto the platform the Muggleborn way? But you can’t use the wizarding
route anymore, otherwise Harry Potter would question why you didn’t do that in ’91? You probably
didn’t want him to become suspicious of your… motives… for being there on the Muggle side that
day in the first place.

“Oh, don’t worry about explaining those motives right now. You can explain that back at the DMLE
Headquarters.”

“You have no real reason to bring me in!” Molly growled. “All of that is speculation and hearsay!”

“Actually, Mrs. Weasley,” Dawlish said, grinning malevolently, “We do have a reason to bring you
in.”

Molly’s expression turned aghast as she turned to the Senior Auror, who was standing over the
Cauldron on the table.

“Director Bones, this is Love Potion – a Restricted Substance,” Dawlish said. “And that closet
behind me? Warded with charms, spells and even runic enchantments that hide the area from anyone
who isn’t looking for it. It has several ingredients, as well as vials that are, I suspect, filled with
several various illegal or restricted substances.”

“You searched that illegally!” Molly shrieked, “I will have your jobs! You shouldn’t have been in
here in the first place! You wouldn’t have found any of that if you hadn’t illegally come in here!”

“What about the Compulsion Charm on your husband to keep him from coming in here while you
brewed these Potions?” Dawlish asked. “Think we wouldn’t have found that?”

“You wouldn’t have known about it if you hadn’t been here in the first place!” Molly said, with a
smug smirk.

“Your suspected Breach of the Statute of Secrecy is the reason we’re here, Mrs. Weasley,” Amelia
said. “Even suspicions of breaking the most important law we have in our world gives us reason to
be here. I also have evidence – of which I will receive physical proof tomorrow – of an Illegally
Created Betrothal Contract penned back in ’81, for your daughter, Ginevra, and Harry James Potter,
dated less than a week after his parents’ deaths! Their bodies were barely buried when you decided
to make decisions with their son’s life!”

“How did you – that Contract is not illegal!” Molly growled, “It was legally penned between a
Parent of one child and a Magical Guardian of another!”
“Albus Dumbledore isn’t Harry Potter’s legal Magical Guardian, Molly,” Amelia said. “If Albus told you that, he lied to you. Molly Weasley, you are under arrest for Breaching the Statute of Secrecy, Illegal Creation of a Betrothal Contract, Possession and Conspiracy to use Illegal and Restricted Substances, and the use of a Compulsion Charm on one Arthur Septimus Weasley. More charges may be laid against you in the future. Anything you say will be used against you in front of the Wizengamot, for all your peers to hear.”

“Fine! Arrest me!” Molly growled, “Albus Dumbledore will get me out! Then he will make sure you no longer have a job!”

“We’ll see about that,” Amelia said, “We’re going to be speaking to him soon enough. Oh, by the way, we’re also going to Hogwarts to speak to your children.”

Molly growled and stood up. “You leave my children alone, bitch!”

She whipped out her wand, but Amelia was quicker. Molly Weasley crashed to the floor with a heavy thud, due to a Stunner.

“Well, looks like we can add Attempted Assault of a Law Enforcement Officer, boss,” Dawlish said, grinning malevolently.

“Yes, it does,” Amelia said, shaking her head at the unconscious body of the stupid woman, “Collect all the evidence of the illegal substances, Senior Auror Dawlish. You now have a reason to search for the Illegal Betrothal Contract. If you can find it, bring it to the DMLE. If you happen to find anything else here that might be illegal, please collect it too.”

Dawlish smirked. “Yes, boss. I’d be delighted to.”

“I’m going to collect Molly Weasley,” Amelia said, “And Auror Jones and I will bring her and her husband back to the DMLE Headquarters. Arthur needs a check-up for those negative effects his body has been placed under. Report to me about your findings when you return, then you can report back to Auror Scrimgeour.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Dawlish said, then proceeded to do as ordered.

Amelia levitated the unconscious woman and brought her outside where Arthur Weasley was sitting down against the wall of the smaller building, whilst being watched by Auror Jones.

When Arthur saw his unconscious wife, he broke down and started crying.

(Half-an-hour later)

Amelia Bones sat across from Molly Weasley, whose arms and hands were shackled to the table they were sitting at. They were in one of the Interrogation Rooms located in the DMLE Headquarters. Hestia Jones was standing a few feet behind Molly, while another Auror, Proudfoot, was standing at the door of the Interrogation Room. Arthur Weasley was now a patient in the DMLE’s Hospital Wing, being checked over by a Healer specially registered with the DMLE.

Senior Auror John Dawlish had met with Amelia a couple minutes before Amelia had entered the room and had given her a preliminary report on what he had found at the Burrow. He had also found
the copy of the Illegal Betrothal Contract. He had also found a Gringotts Key inside the closet – he was quite sure it did not belong to Molly.

“The Contract and the Key had been in that same closet where the various Potions and ingredients were stored,” Dawlish reported. “The closet was littered with various runes that prevented anyone from even knowing about it, if they didn’t have permission to do so. There was a Permission Ward. Molly Weasley and, oddly enough, Albus Dumbledore were the only names written on the Permission Ward list.”

Amelia placed a large bag on the table and opened it. She removed her notepad, a roll of parchment, and Dictation Quills which also had Self-Inking Charms. She set the Quill on top of the parchment.

“Test,” she said clearly.

When the Quill wrote the same word on the parchment, Amelia vanished the word with her wand. She then brought out a couple vials filled with Potion. She lifted one of the vials up and waved it in front of Molly.

“Recognize this?” Amelia asked, “I am sure a Potions Mistress with your vast knowledge in the subject should be able to figure out what this is. Veritaserum. The Truth Serum. I know what you’re thinking, Molly. Statements given under the influence of Truth Serum aren’t admissible in front of the Wizengamot. That is true. But so is this: you’ve already committed enough crimes that will see you in Azkaban for at least a few years. That is alright with me.

“The Veritaserum is only necessary because I need to know your whole plan. I need to know who is involved in this plan, and who the plan endangers. I need this information to protect people. I don’t need it to place any more charges against you.

“Auror Proudfoot, point your wand at Madam Weasley, please. Auror Jones, use your wand to open her mouth and keep it open while I give her the Truth Serum.”

The two Aurors did as asked, and soon Molly’s mouth was forced open. Amelia uncorked the vials and placed three drops of Veritaserum on Molly’s tongue. When Amelia backed away, Hestia released the enchantment, and Molly’s mouth closed with a snap.

Amelia removed her pocket-watch from her pocket and opened it up, then glanced at it.

“It is nine-forty-seven on the evening of the fifteenth of December in the year nineteen hundred and ninety-four,” Amelia said. “Interrogation Room B. Interrogator: Director Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Prisoner is Molly Matilda Weasley ‘nee Prewett, Matriarch of the Minor House of Weasley. Aurors Hestia Jones and Derek Proudfoot are witnesses of the Interrogation. Molly Weasley has been given three drops of Veritaserum. The three questions to confirm Veritaserum is working will begin now. Question one: Molly Weasley, what are the full names of your eldest and youngest child?”


“Question two,” Amelia said, “What is the affectionate name of the residence in which you live?”

“The Burrow,” Molly said.

“Question three: lie to me, Molly,” Amelia said, “What is the date of your birth?”
“30 October 1950,” Molly said.

“Molly Weasley has answered all questions truthfully,” Amelia said, “We will now move onto the main portion of the Interrogation.”

Amelia took the Gringotts Key – which Dawlish had given her – from her pocket and showed it to Molly.

“This Gringotts Key was found in your hidden supply closet,” Amelia said, “Who does it belong to?”

“Harry Potter,” Molly said.

“Why do you have it in your possession?” Amelia asked.

“I asked Harry if I could do his booklist shopping while he was with my family at the Quidditch World Cup,” Molly said.

“That was in August,” Amelia said, “You did not give Harry his Key back? Why?”

“He did not ask for it,” Molly said. “Not until a few days ago. Albus Dumbledore wrote me a letter and asked me to give Harry Potter his Gringotts Key back. I have not arranged to do so yet.”

Amelia sighed. She made a mental note to return the key to Harry Potter tomorrow.

“You did not offer to give it back in August,” Amelia said, “Why?”

“I decided to keep it in case I needed to take more money from Harry’s Vault,” Molly said.

“How much money did you steal from Harry Potter since August that wasn’t used for Harry?” Amelia asked.

“Five thousand Galleons,” Molly said. “I did not steal it! Albus Dumbledore said I should feel free to use some of Harry Potter’s money, because he is Betrothed to my daughter! The money will be ours eventually.”

“Yes, this Illegal Betrothal Contract,” Amelia said, “please describe the events that led to the Illegal Creation of the Betrothal Contract between Harry James Potter and Ginevra Molly Weasley, created on 5 November, 1981.”

“On 5 November, 1981,” Molly began, “Albus Dumbledore spoke with me at the Burrow. He told me that James and Lily Potter had named him Harry’s Magical Guardian. He also said that James and Lily Potter had been planning on arranging a meeting with me and Arthur to discuss a possible Betrothal Contract between Harry and my daughter, Ginevra. Albus asked me if I would still be up to such a Contract. I agreed almost immediately. Albus then told me Arthur did not need to be involved in the creation of the Contract. Albus and I penned the Contract on that very day. We did not fill out any provisos, which I thought was peculiar at the time. Albus then promised he would take the Contract to Gringotts to meet with a Goblin and make the Contract official. He gave me an official copy of the Contract two days later.”

“Did Albus explain his reasons behind the Creation of the Betrothal Contract at that moment in
“He did not explain his reasons for nearly ten years,” Molly said.

“Explain the details of the conversation when Albus explained his reasons behind the Creation of the Betrothal Contract,” Amelia said.

“Albus Dumbledore visited the Burrow on August 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, during Ginevra’s tenth birthday party,” Molly said. “Albus wished to speak to me in private. I agreed. He asked me if I still had the Betrothal Contract between my daughter and Harry Potter. I told him I did. He then told me if everything worked out, then in a few years, Ginevra would be pregnant with Harry Potter’s Heir, but Ginny would never marry Harry. Albus said Harry would be dead by his seventeenth birthday. With Ginny as the mother of the Potter Heir, she would gain the Potter Fortune. However, when the Heir was born, Ginny would be underage, and therefore I would have control of the Potter Fortune until Ginny’s seventeenth birthday.”

“Did you agree to cooperate with Albus Dumbledore’s plan?” Amelia asked.

“I did,” Molly said, “It was too good a deal to pass up.”

“When you agreed to the plan,” Amelia said, “What did Albus Dumbledore ask you to do after that?”

“Albus told me that Harry Potter had recently returned to the wizarding world on his eleventh birthday,” Molly said. “He said Rubeus Hagrid was in charge of introducing the wizarding world to Harry, and that he had helped Harry with his booklist for his first year at Hogwarts. Albus said that Hagrid had made a big mistake. Hagrid had not told Harry how to get onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Albus told me that it would be my job to make sure Harry got onto the Platform. Albus assured me that Harry would be near the portal to Platform Nine and Three Quarters, trying to figure out how to get onto the Platform. If I helped Harry get onto the platform, Albus said it would make sure Harry would begin to trust me and my children.”

“How were your children involved in this plan?” Amelia asked.

“Albus told me that my son, Ronald, would become Harry Potter’s best friend,” Molly said, “All Ron would need to do was find Harry on the Hogwarts Express, where Ron would ask Harry if he could sit with him. Ron simply needed to tell Harry that all the other carriages were full. Ron would also be required to convince Harry to join Gryffindor House, and also keep other students from wanting to introduce themselves to Harry. Albus said if Harry met any girls, then such friendship may risk the future relationship between Ginny and Harry.

“A few days before the first of September, I asked Ginny if she would like to meet Harry Potter. Ginny was quite happy to agree. I told her that I had heard rumors she would be able to meet Harry on the Muggle side of the portal to Platform Nine and Three Quarters. All Ginny needed to do on the first of September was answer ‘Platform Nine and Three Quarters’, when I asked her what the Platform number was, and do so quite loudly, so Harry would hear her. Then he would find her and meet her.”

Amelia checked the parchment to make sure the Quill was recording the whole conversation. After verifying that it was, Amelia continued with her questions. Even though she would soon discover, through the DMLE Healer, what exactly was wrong with Arthur, she asked Molly what she did to Arthur. The answer: dosed with various Potions, and enchanted with Compulsions and other various
enchantments for several years.

This discussion would lead into Molly being asked what Potions she was brewing and had been planning on brewing that evening. Which lead to the revelations of Molly’s plans for Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, when it came to Ronald and Ginevra Weasley. This lead to another question:

“Did you have anything to do with the Secrecy Enchantment Jewelry Ronald and Ginevra currently wear?” Amelia asked.

“Albus told me he feared that Ronald and Ginevra – both of whom knew all about the plans for Harry Potter and Hermione Granger – would give up the secret plans without meaning to,” Molly said, “He then told me he knew of a way to prevent it.”

“So you were knowledgeable about the jewelry,” Amelia said, “but had nothing to do with their creation?”

“That is correct,” Molly said.

Amelia smiled. There was verification of the Conspiracy to Use Class Seven Restricted Enchantments – two counts. She continued the interrogation for several more minutes, getting Molly to spill all her plans she had for Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, including the back-up plans she had if the first plans did not work.

By the time she was finished, she had plenty of things to discuss with Ronald and Ginevra Weasley, and Albus Dumbledore. Molly Weasley would be spending a few nights in the Holding Cells while Amelia arranged for a trial the following weekend. She was quite sure Molly Weasley would soon be a prisoner of Azkaban for a few years. Now she just needed to make sure Albus Dumbledore didn’t discover the Weasley Matriarch was behind bars.

But first, she needed to meet with Arthur. She needed to get his permission to speak to his four youngest children and also, just in case, use Veritaserum on the youngest two.

“Give her the Antidote and let her stew in here for a little while,” Amelia said. “I’m going to arrange for a private holding cell that even Albus Dumbledore won’t be able to find.”

Aurors Jones and Proudfoot both smirked at this declaration, then nodded in acknowledgement of the order. Amelia then walked out of the office in direction of the DMLE Hospital Wing.

(Wednesday, December 16th, 1994)

Albus Dumbledore was sitting in his golden throne at the Head Table in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, enjoying his usual breakfast, when the flocks of owls flew down from the rafters. Praying he wasn’t about to receive another edition of the Daily Prophet with more bad news from Rita Skeeter, he glanced up at the owls. He saw an owl flying in his direction and he sighed in frustration.

However, a new edition of the Daily Prophet did not drop in front of him. What did drop in front of him was far more disturbing: a black envelope from Gringotts. Albus’ hands trembled as he picked up the envelope and broke the Gringotts seal. The envelope transformed into a piece of parchment. Albus steeled himself as he read the letter.
Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,

I, Keeper Ragnok the Sixth, Account Manager of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter, find you culpable of theft, in the amount of G250,000, from the Vaults of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. It is believed you have transferred portions of said money to the Private Vault belonging to one Molly Matilda Weasley ‘nee Prewett.

You are also accused of using Griphook, an employee of Gringotts, to spy for you, and betray Gringotts and the Goblin Nation under your orders. Under your orders, Griphook betrayed the Ancient and Noble House of Potter by not informing one Harry James Potter to meet with I, Keeper Ragnok the Sixth.

You are also accused of blocking communication and correspondence between Gringotts and Harry James Potter.

If you do not step into the London Branch of Gringotts by ten-o-clock this morning to answer to these charges, you will forever be banned from stepping into Gringotts or Goblin Soil ever again, and your Gringotts Account will be forever closed. I will make sure your entire fortune be given to Harry Potter.

May your feet guide you on your necessary path,

Keeper Ragnok the Sixth

Account Manager & Vault Keeper of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter

It was only Albus’ mastered abilities in Occlumency that kept him from blowing his top right there in the middle of the Great Hall. How dare that filthy beast do this to him? Him! The Leader of the Light! It was thanks to him that the Ministry of Magic hadn’t marched into Gringotts and destroyed the damnable Goblin Nation! The Goblins should be bowing on their knees in front of him, and thanking him for all he had done for them!

Albus knew exactly who this Ragnok the Sixth was. Not only was he Harry Potter’s Account Manager, but he was also the son of the Goblin King. Well… if Ragnok did not drop every single one of these charges, the Ragnok line in Gringotts would be extinct by the end of the day! He would strike down every Goblin that stopped him from destroying the King if Ragnok the Sixth denied his demands!

“I am going to be away from Hogwarts for a while,” Albus said, to Minerva, “I do not know how long I will be away. I hope to return by lunchtime.”

“I will handle everything until you return,” Minerva said. “Safe travels, Albus.”

Albus did not reply, as he stood up and marched out of the Great Hall, keeping his head high. This time he did not go up to his office. He would step out of the Hogwarts Gates and Apparate onto the front steps of Gringotts just to prove he could.

He marched out through the large front doors of the castle, and made his way over to one of the carriages. It did not have a Thestral attached to it, but he did not need one. He waved the Elder Wand
at the carriage, then stepped into it. The carriage started moving down the long driveway. When it arrived ten minutes later, he stepped out. He was so focused on what he was about to do, he did not notice Hagrid preparing a carriage for apparent guests. He didn’t even hear Hagrid when the large man called for him. He simply walked through the gates, then Apparated.

He arrived on the steps of Gringotts, landing on both feet. Immediately, he realized his mistake, as the two large Goblin guards, shocked by his sudden arrival, approached him and pointed their large halberds at him. Before Albus could say anything, they stepped toward him, and he backed up down the stairs and onto the cobblestone path of Diagon Alley. One of the guards whistled and the doors of Gringotts opened. Suddenly, eight more large Goblins stepped out and quickly surrounded Albus.

Before he could say anything, one of the Guards threw a large chain at him. The chain wrapped around Albus before he could counter it, then all of a sudden, Gringotts and Diagon Alley vanished in front of his sight, soon to be replaced with stone and rocky walls and floors.

And several iron bars on one side of the room. He immediately knew where he was. He had visited the Goblin Holding Cells a few times over the years. But he had always been on the other side of the cells.

“Let me out of here!” Albus growled as he stepped up to the bars. “Do you know who I am! I am Albus –”

“Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,” a voice said, “Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards and world-famous ‘Leader of the Sheep!’”

Albus’ eyes widened as a Goblin walked up to the other side of the bars. He knew who this was.

“How do you know who I am?” the Goblin asked, “I am Keeper Ragnok the Sixth, the reason you are here in this cell.”

“I demand you let me out now!” Albus growled.

“Oh, I apologize, but I will not be doing that right now,” Ragnok said, “It is Gringotts policy for any unruly guests of Gringotts to spend a couple of hours in our Holding Cells cooling down before they will become more cooperative. If they become angry or unruly whilst inside the Holding Cell, we add another hour onto their time. How long will you be in there, Mr. Dumbledore? I do not know. However, I will tell you this. It will be a lot longer if you continue to threaten me, my family and my father, the King of the Goblin Nation if I do not drop the charges against you.”

Albus’ eyes widened. How did the infernal Goblin know about that?! He reached to his robes to grab the Elder Wand… and found bare skin. He glanced down at his body and found that he was completely naked, bare of any clothing.

“Your clothes and Wand will be given back to you when your time in here is finished, Mr. Dumbledore,” Ragnok said.

“Fawkes!” Albus shouted.

Nothing happened, aside from the Goblin laughing harshly.

“Did you really believe we wouldn’t enchant the Cells against Phoenix Travel?’” Ragnok asked.
“These cells were built to keep someone like you inside them.”

“I’m honored,” Albus said, through gritted teeth.

“Don’t be,” Ragnok said, “Another hour has been added onto your ‘sentence’ for your attempt to escape through Phoenix Travel. I will see you in three hours, unless you add more time onto your ‘sentence’. Then we can talk about why you are here. I will see you soon, Albus. If you are good.”

The Goblin cackled as he walked away from the cells. Albus growled under his breath and turned around. There was a metal can in one corner of the cell – a toilet, he realized. There was also a raised stone formation built into a wall. A bed… a very uncomfortable looking bed. Albus sighed and walked over to the bed, then gingerly sat down on it. He shivered at the ice-cold feeling of the stone beneath his bare skin.

“Damned rotten inhumane Goblins!” he cursed; then his eyes widened when he realized he had said that loudly.

“That’s another hour, prisoner!” a Goblin – who wasn’t Ragnok – growled, “That’s four!”

Albus pouted. He wasn’t going to make it back to Hogwarts for lunch. It was Shepherd’s pie day.

Albus Dumbledore loved Shepherd’s pie.

Chapter End Notes

I very much hope you enjoyed this chapter!

I was going to add a final scene with a very short Rubeus Hagrid PoV frowning as Albus vanished, and saying he was going to tell Albus about Minerva’s expected guests. But I decided against it.

Next Chapter: Amelia, Kingsley, Tonks and Arthur Weasley arrive at Hogwarts, where they talk with the Weasley children and Harry and Hermione.

SPOILERS ABOUT DUMBLEDORE’S GRINGOTTS DILEMMA BELOW! DO NOT READ IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE SPOILED!

Do not expect Ragnok to do much against Dumbledore in terms of any charges for crimes… yet. His letter was mostly to get Dumbledore out of Hogwarts. Dumbledore will be quite confused about Ragnok’s motives. But Ragnok wants Dumbledore to be paranoid of the Goblins for now. He wants the old man to feel fear toward Gringotts. Ragnok wants to see what the Ministry can do against Dumbledore first. If they can’t do much, then Gringotts will go after Dumbledore. I have a funny scene in mind similar to what happened to Dumbledore here with the security goblins. But we’ll see what happens.
Aurors At Hogwarts, Part 1

Chapter Notes

Yep, this is only Part 1 of what will be two parts. It was always going to be two parts, because of what I planned for this chapter. Let’s just say this ends with an evil cliffhanger.

I’ve had questions concerning whether or not one of the Goblins now owns the Elder Wand. When Dumbledore was Portkeyed to the Holding Cell, the Elder Wand and Dumbledore’s clothes simply vanished off Dumbledore and appeared in a box near the Holding Cell. No Goblin actually handled it or took custody of the wand.

As you’ll see in the warnings, there is a mention of a background/minor Fem-Slash relationship. Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Davis are mentioned as going to the Yule Ball together. This won’t have much importance to the storyline as a whole. Just a background relationship that might be mentioned from time to time, as Daphne – and possibly Tracey in the future – is a member of the Children of the Great Alliance.

Warning: Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron and Molly Weasley Bashing; Mention of a Background Fem-Slash relationship.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Wednesday, December 16th, 1994)

Amelia Bones glanced through the window of the Thestral-drawn carriage, admiring Hogwarts Castle, as it came ever closer as the carriage closed in on its destination. She could still remember the very first time she had seen the castle, crossing the Hogwarts lake in a four-person boat, with Rubeus Hagrid leading the pack. That was nearly a quarter of a century ago. She sighed and shook her head.

“Something wrong, boss?” Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks asked.

Amelia shook out of her musing. Rookie Auror Tonks was sitting across from her, with Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt sitting next to the young Rookie. Arthur Weasley was sitting to Amelia’s right. She noticed that Arthur’s face held the same troubled expression that had crossed his face many times, since his wife had been arrested the previous evening at their home. He had been so distraught over the results of the test the DMLE Healer had given him, that he hadn’t even gone home the previous evening. He had spent the night in one of the private bedrooms in the Auror Department, where Aurors sometimes stayed after a late night, when they were too exhausted to travel home. Now, the man was going to have to be present when Amelia interrogated his children. He certainly wasn’t having the best couple of days.

“Nothing, Tonks,” Amelia answered, “Just a wave of nostalgia at seeing the old castle again. Don’t get too many opportunities coming here these days. Even though my niece and ward spends nine months a year here.”

Tonks nodded, sympathetically. “I finished my education in ’91, and I still catch myself waking up on the first of September thinking I am supposed to be heading to Platform Nine and Three Quarters
for another trip on the Hogwarts Express.”

Auror Shacklebolt chuckled. “I’ve been out of Hogwarts almost as long as Director Bones here, and I still feel that way sometimes, Rookie.”

“Oh, Merlin, you’re making me feel old now, Shacklebolt!” Amelia said.

Kingsley and Tonks chuckled at that. Amelia glanced at Arthur, hoping she might see a trace of a smile light up his face. The man was still staring out the carriage window, as he had been since he entered the carriage.

Amelia cleared her throat. “Alright, listen up. As much as I hate to do this, we’re here during a time when the students are taking their end-of-term exams. The students we’re here to meet are being let out of their first period, missing what might be an important exam. They will have to make up these exams sometime this week.”

*That is, if Arthur’s youngest two aren’t leaving the castle today,* Amelia mused.

“Let’s do our best to make sure they don’t miss too much of their lessons,” Amelia said. “I am going to be talking to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger first. Minerva McGonagall will be their chaperone during the meeting. Kingsley, Tonks, you’re to accompany Arthur here and remain in a room with his four children. I do not want you to interrogate Ronald and Ginevra, that is my job. As for the older two, the twins, Fred and George. They only have one charge against them. The Breach of the Statute of Secrecy. Ask them about their point-of-view during that day at King’s Cross on the first of September in 1991. When they are finished, excuse them back to their classes. I will decide what, if anything, to charge them with, once I hear your reports.

“As for Ronald and Ginevra, as I said, do not interrogate them. Arthur is allowed to speak to them. However, I want both of you to check them for illegal items. As I understand it, Ginevra is wearing a necklace, and Ronald is wearing an ankle bracelet. These are enchanted with Level Seven Restricted Enchantments. Remove them from their persons. They will likely complain about it. Arthur will be there to calm them down. Arthur, look at me.”

Arthur sighed and turned to Amelia.

“I need your permission to allow my Aurors to Stun Ronald and Ginevra if they resist my Aurors,” Amelia said. “I also need your permission to possibly use Veritaserum on the two of them. I suspect they might resist giving me information, because they are involved in criminal activities.”

Arthur’s bottom lip wobbled, then he cleared his throat. “You have my permission to do what you must. I will be there every second, of course. If Ron and Ginny complain, I will tell them to cooperate. If they don’t, your Aurors may Stun them. If they don’t believe you about the Truth Serum, I will tell them you have my permission to use it. I’m afraid to say Ron and Ginny’s behavior over the past few years have been rather suspicious. Especially when it comes to Molly, and also Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. If… I –”


She did understand what Arthur did not want to say. If he hadn’t been dosed up on illegal and restricted Potions, and enchantments, he might have been able to prevent all of this. Which is exactly why Molly had done what she had. Now Arthur only wanted to understand just what his two youngest children were capable of.
“While I cannot give my reasons why at this moment in time,” Amelia said, “I want us to be done with all of this and leave Hogwarts before Albus Dumbledore returns to Lord over the castle. Whether that means we’re leaving with Ronald and Ginevra Weasley or not… well, I suppose we’ll know that by the time we leave today.”

Kingsley merely nodded firmly, while Tonks looked a little confused at the mention of Dumbledore’s name. Neither Auror had been informed of Dumbledore’s suspected involvement in any of this yet. They would likely discover some of that information before they were finished today. Arthur’s only response was a shuddering sigh, probably at the thought of his two youngest children being placed under arrest.

Amelia suddenly realized something. She had not asked the Aurors about Percy Weasley. She had been so busy, she had forgotten she had asked them to find Arthur’s third oldest son.

“Aurors Shacklebolt, Tonks,” she said, “Were you able to get in contact with Percy Weasley?”

“We were.” Kingsley said, “We asked Eric, the Welcome Wizard in the Atrium, to inform us if and when Percy arrived today. About half-an-hour before we met with you, Percy Weasley arrived and we met with him in Bartemius Crouch’s office, in the Department of International Cooperation, where he is currently proxying in Mr. Crouch’s absence.

“We asked him about that September incident at King’s Cross. He told us about his point-of-view of what happened that day. He told us he was rather confused as to why his mother wanted to take the Muggleborn route to get to Platform Nine and Three Quarters, as they had never done so before. He said he was quite shocked when he heard his mother loudly talking about Muggles and asking his sister about the Platform which she had dutifully answered. Percy had wanted to lecture both his mother and sister right there about risking a breach in the Statute of Secrecy. But he said he didn’t want to cause a scene. He said he wrote two letters the first night at Hogwarts that term, and sent them to his father and mother.”

He glanced at Arthur. “He wrote to his father about the incident, and asked why his mother and sister had risked a breach in the Statute of Secrecy, why they had to use the Muggleborn route. He knew nothing at the time about Harry Potter going over to his mother and siblings. He said he never got a response from his father.”

Arthur sighed. “I don’t remember ever receiving a letter about such a thing from him. I now believe Molly might have prevented me from receiving the letter.”

“Percy said he wrote to his mother about the scene,” Kingsley continued, “and the breach. He asked her why she had done such a thing, and encouraged her own daughter to break the law. He said he received a letter the following morning from his mother. His mother said that there had been no risk to the Statute of Secrecy, that she had taken care of it, and that he should mind his own business. His mother told him to not mention any of it to his siblings, or he would face ‘severe repercussions’ from his mother. He said his mother had threatened him with removal of his Prefect Badge, and the chance of becoming Head Boy if he ever spoke up about it. If he did tell anyone, the Headmaster would surely find out and he wouldn’t become Head Boy, and he certainly wouldn’t be able to have a good job at the Ministry.

“I suspect we’re going to hear this from Fred and George. Percy said the twins asked him about what had happened at King’s Cross, and why they hadn’t used the Floo Network to go to the Platform. Percy said he told his brothers to mind their own business, and that he would take care of it. They
never brought it up to him again.

“He told me and Tonks that he ‘deeply regretted’ the incident and he would accept any punishment. He knows he should have reported the incident to someone at the Ministry. He told us he had tried to write many letters, but he had thrown them all away before he would finish them. He said he was selfish and wanted the Head Boy title and a job at the Ministry.”

Amelia sighed. Percy Weasley was clearly a victim of emotional manipulation from his mother. She highly suspected it wouldn’t be the last case of this with the Weasley children.”

“Thank you for your report,” Amelia said, “I will decide what to do about Percy by the time we return to Headquarters.”

A few moments later, the carriage stopped and Amelia inhaled and exhaled. It was time to get some very important answers to many questions she had asked herself over the past several hours.

(Ten minutes later…)

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were eating the remainder of their breakfast, and happily chatting away with Padma Patil, Luna Lovegood and Neville Longbottom at the Ravenclaw Table. Hermione had been right about Padma. She was a gossip like her sister, though she wasn’t obsessed by it.

“Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott now have dates to the Yule Ball,” Padma said, “Susan is going with Terry Boot, a fellow Ravenclaw of mine. Hannah is going with her fellow Hufflepuff house-mate, Ernie MacMillan.”

All members of the Children of the Great Alliance, Harry realized, Inter-Alliance relationships, like Neville and Luna.

“You didn’t hear it from me,” Padma said, lowering her voice, “But there are rumors Daphne Greengrass has decided to take her best friend Tracey Davis as a date.”

Harry blinked. “As friends or…?”

“I do not know,” Padma said, shrugging. “Could go either way. It is possible they just don’t want to go with any blokes. That will certainly make a few Slytherin males mad. I heard Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott are interested in them.”

“What about you, Padma?” Hermione asked, “Do you have a date to the Ball?”

“Still looking,” Padma said, smiling.

“I’m sure you’ll find someone to go with,” Hermione said, smiling, “Someone you’ll like.”

“Thanks,” Padma said.

Harry smiled as conversation continued. He mused about what had gone on that morning so far. Earlier that morning, minutes after he awoke, Dobby had delivered a large package from Keeper Ragnok. Not only did it have the two copies of Blood Tests – his and Hermione’s – it also had a
Harry had read it over, and was quite happy with the results. He wrote a letter to Keeper Ragnok, confirming his approval and wished the representatives good luck with the Dursleys, knowing they would need it. Then he asked Dobby to deliver the letter to Ragnok.

About twenty minutes ago, the Owl Post had come. Harry had gazed up at the Head Table, where he had witnessed Albus Dumbledore receive a black envelope, which had turned into a piece of parchment. Whatever the parchment said, it made Albus stand and leave the Great Hall immediately. Harry had suspected the letter was from Keeper Ragnok. Whatever his Account Manager had written, he had succeeded in getting Albus Dumbledore out of the castle, which was exactly what Harry had wanted.

Now, Harry was just waiting for the arrival of Director Amelia Bones. Professor McGonagall had left the Great Hall a few minutes prior, and Harry suspected she would soon return and ask him, Hermione and the Weasleys to join her.

As if his musing had been heard from the higher powers, the doors to the Great Hall opened. Three loud sounds, like firecrackers, were heard, and everyone went silent and turned toward the sound, not from the Head Table but from the large doors at the opposite end of the Hall. Professor McGonagall was standing there.

“Messrs. Frederick, George and Ron, and Miss Ginny Weasley,” McGonagall said, loudly, “Please step out into the Entrance Hall, immediately. All will be explained shortly.”

Harry turned to the Gryffindor Table. Fred and George stood up immediately, then walked down the aisles. When they met up with Ron, who was still stuffing his face with food, they each grabbed an arm of Ron’s and pulled him from the table. The students around him groaned in disgust at the mess caused by the plate of food that Ron had dragged off the table with him. A house-elf appeared for a brief moment and vanished the mess before disappearing. Ginny stood up when her brothers reached her and followed them out into the Entrance Hall.

Meanwhile, Professor McGonagall walked over to Harry and Hermione.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Come with me, please.”

“Yes, ma’am,” “Yes, Professor,” Harry and Hermione said respectively.

The couple stood up and followed McGonagall out of the Great Hall. As they arrived in the Entrance Hall, they found Director Amelia Bones waiting for them. Harry then noticed the four Weasley siblings were being led up toward the Grand Staircase by two adults. Harry was surprised to see Arthur Weasley following them.

“The Weasleys are being led to one of the abandoned classrooms on the fourth floor,” McGonagall explained, as she noticed her Lions looking at the family of gingers. “We’re heading to my Office on the first floor.”

“Keeping us separated from the Weasleys, ma’am?” Hermione asked.
“That was my decision, Miss Granger,” Director Amelia Bones said, “I asked your Professor to ask for the Weasleys to leave the Great Hall first, so they wouldn’t know the two of you are speaking to me.”

“Probably best,” Harry agreed. “Nice to meet you face-to-face, Director Bones.”

“Please, Harry,” Amelia said, “You, and Hermione, can call me Amelia. If your parents had lived, Harry, you might have affectionately known me as Auntie Amelia, like my niece, Susan.”

“I’ve recently learned exactly how close our families were, Amelia,” Harry said.

“Have you?” Amelia asked, raising an eyebrow. “I assume this is something we’re going to be discussing today?”

“One of a few things,” Harry said, nodding.

“Do you need anything from the Den, Mr. Potter?” McGonagall asked.

“I brought all the important documents with me today, ma’am,” Harry said, indicating the knapsack on his back.

“Very well,” McGonagall said, “Follow me, please. I will, of course, be your chaperone during this meeting.”

Harry and Hermione had already predicted this, so they merely nodded in acceptance, and followed the Head of Gryffindor with Director Bones following behind them.

(A few minutes later…)

Arthur Weasley frowned as he followed his four children and the two Aurors into an unused classroom on the fourth floor of Hogwarts. When Ron and Ginny had first seen him, they asked him what was going on. Then they saw Kingsley and Tonks, dressed in Auror garb, and started panicking. They panicked more when the two Aurors summoned all four of his children’s wands to them. Arthur ordered them to calm down and do whatever the two Aurors asked them to do. Since then, all four of his children were silent as they had followed the two Aurors. However, he did notice that Ronald had a mixture of panic and anger on his face, and Ginny simply looked angry.

He knew at once that they were hiding serious secrets, and they were both reacting to the Aurors being there.

“Fred and George,” Kingsley said, “Sit down in two of the chairs in the front row. Ronald, come here. Ginevra, you are to stand in front of Auror Tonks, here.”

Arthur frowned as he watched his children. Ron and Ginny both hesitated visibly. They only moved when Fred and George sat down in two neighboring seats. Arthur watched as the two Aurors ran their wands over the bodies of his two youngest children.

“Your necklace has suspicious enchantments on it, Miss Weasley,” Tonks said, “You will remove it at once.”
“How did you – it is a family heirloom!” Ginny cried, “I know my rights. You cannot take heirlooms from me!”

“That necklace is not an heirloom, Ginevra,” Arthur said, “It was given to you by Albus Dumbledore. Remove it at once, like Auror Tonks requested of you.”

“Daddy?” Ginny whimpered.

“The Aurors have been ordered to Stun you if you resist, Ginny,” Arthur said. “I have given them permission to do so.”

Ginny huffed, angrily and removed the necklace, then threw it on the ground.

“Remove the ankle bracelet, Ronald,” Kingsley said.

“Do not mention the words ‘family heirloom’, Ronald,” Arthur warned his youngest son. “Do what the Auror asks of you.”

Ron grumbled and knelt on one knee. Then he removed the bracelet and gave it to Kingsley.

“You two may sit down in the back row,” Kingsley ordered the two youngest siblings.

“How did they find the jewelry?” Arthur heard Ron whisper to Ginny, “I thought they weren’t supposed to be able to find them!”

“Shut up, Ronald!” Ginny hissed, “They can hear us now that we no longer are wearing the jewelry! Be silent! Say nothing! They have nothing on us. They know nothing. We’re completely innocent. Do not say a word, or I swear to Merlin when I get my wand back...”

Arthur merely sighed and shook his head. He walked over to Fred and George.

“Boys, I want you to cooperate with these two Aurors and answer their questions as honestly as you can,” Arthur said, “Do not do that twin-speak stuff. Speak full sentences and only speak one at a time.”

Fred and George nodded in unison. Even they knew when to be serious. Arthur turned to the Aurors.

“You have my permission to question them,” Arthur said. “I do not believe you’ll need to resort to Veritaserum. As for my youngest two... I can’t say the same.”

Ginny had heard what Arthur had said. He saw the expression of shocked disbelief cross her face, before it turned to anger.

“Fred, George,” Kingsley said, “I want you to describe the events of September 1st in the year 1991, when you were on the Muggleborn side of King’s Cross, going to Platform Nine and Three Quarters.”

Arthur looked back at Ginny, who’s eyes widened at the question. She had the look of disbelief on her face again as she shook her head.
“That was a bizarre start to the day, wasn’t it, George?” Fred asked, “We were all ready to use the Floo Network to get to Platform Nine and Three Quarters, like we usually do. Mum said that we weren’t using the Floo Network this time. She said our Floo was malfunctioning, and that we would have to use the Muggleborn route to get to Platform Nine and Three Quarters. None of us had never done that before. Mum said we were going to use Dad’s Ford Anglia. I was surprised Mum knew how to drive!”

“When we got near London, I asked Mum why we weren’t going to the Leaky Cauldron to use their Floo,” George said. “Mum said it would be much too busy, and it would be quite the hassle bringing five children to the Platform. I reminded her that Ginny didn’t actually need to get onto the Platform. She could say goodbye to us in the Leaky Cauldron. Mum told us we were already in London, and this was a wonderful learning experience, to use the Muggleborn side. She said Dad would be proud of us.”

“I asked why Dad wasn’t coming with us,” Fred said, “He had usually come with us to see us off in prior years, you see. If we were going the Muggleborn way, Dad would definitely have taken off work – just like everyone else did on September 1st of each year, to see us off. She said Dad had an emergency at work.”

Arthur frowned. He remembered that morning in question. Molly had told him she had gotten a message through the Floo Network from Perkins, his assistant in his Department, that there was emergency at work. He would have to go in, and wouldn’t be able to see his children off to Hogwarts. When he had arrived at work, Perkins said there was no emergency, and he certainly didn’t remember using the Floo Network to speak to Molly.

“Anyway, we arrived with only a few minutes to spare,” George said, “Fifteen minutes maybe. Percy was panicking about being late to his Prefect’s meeting. He was fussing about being the last one to the meeting, and how embarrassing it would be for his very first day as Prefect. Then all of a sudden, as we get close to Platforms Nine and Ten, Mum goes… weird.”

“She started talking about the crowds, and how it was always crowded,” Fred said. “She had been talking rather loudly, and had even called the people ‘Muggles’. That was a magical term, and I remembered wondering why Mum was using such a term quite loudly. It was already weird how she sounded as if she had been to the Muggleborn side of King’s Cross before.”

“Like she had been there many times,” George said, nodding. “We don’t recall her ever being there on the Muggle side. She’s always taken us through the Floo Network, even from Bill’s first year. We always used the Floo to go home too each time we returned to London. Then it just gets stranger.”

Fred looked over his shoulder at Ginny, who was glaring at her brothers. “Mum asks us what the number of the Platform was. Like… how could she forget? It doesn’t change. She’s been there dozens of times. We were just about to ask her how she had forgotten the number, when Ginny pipes up, rather loudly in a crowd of Muggles, ‘Nine and Three Quarters!’. She said it loudly. She didn’t say it quietly, even though there were all these Muggles around. We were taught to respect the Statute of Secrecy.”

“That is why you’re talking to us, isn’t it?” George asked. “Mum and Ginny breached the Statute of Secrecy that day, and we did nothing to stop them. So we’re pretty much guilty too. We were supposed to report such behavior to authorities and we didn’t do it.”

“A few days after it happened, we asked Percy about it,” Fred said. “He told us to mind our own business, and that he was taking care of it. We never brought it up to him again. We… I remember
looking up the Statute of Secrecy in the lawbooks in the library. We also asked Madam Pince, the librarian about what we should do. She said we should write a letter to the Ministry about it.”

“We actually did write a letter to the Ministry,” George said. “We thought they would handle it. We never got a response about it, so we thought we were in the clear. I’m starting to believe our letter never arrived to the Ministry. Especially if you’re here asking us about it.”

“Thank you, gentlemen, for your honest answers,” Kingsley said. “I will give this report to Director Bones, and she will inform you about any repercussions you may face. However, we do understand you did try to do something about it. We will keep that in mind.”

“Well done, boys,” Arthur said, “I’m sorry for what you had to endure. I will explain later what actually happened that day, and why your mother wanted to use the Muggleborn route.”

Arthur looked at Ginny, who’s eyes were wide in panic again. She knew that he knew exactly what had happened that day.

“You’re excused for now, boys,” Kingsley said.

“Good luck on your exams,” Tonks said.

“Thank you, Nymphadora!” Fred said.

“And may we say, Nymphadora,” George said, “How lovely it is to see you again!”

“The outfit suits you,” Fred said.

“You look hot, Nymphadora!” George said.

Fred and George stood then ran out of the room.

“Don’t call me Nymphadora!” Tonks growled after the twins; she then blushed and turned back to Kingsley. “Sorry, sir.”

Kingsley merely sighed and shook his head. Then he looked at Ron and Ginny.

“The two of you will remain seated there until Director Bones comes to ask you questions,” Kingsley said, “Anything you say, we will report to Director Bones, for use in your Interrogations.”

Ron pouted as he rested his head in his arms on the desk. Ginny merely crossed her arms and glared in her father’s direction.

“Mum is going to be so upset with you, Dad,” Ginny said. “Where is she? Why isn’t she here too?”

“Your mother is in a Holding Cell in DMLE custody, Ginevra,” Arthur said, “I’m sorry to say she may be going to Azkaban for a few years.”

Ginny and Ron’s voices echoed throughout the fourth floor:

“What?!”
(A couple minutes earlier…)

Harry followed Professor McGonagall and Hermione into the Transfiguration Professor’s office, as Director Bones followed them. McGonagall conjured two seats on the nearest side of her desk, joining one that was already there.

“Director Bones,” McGonagall said, “You may sit in my chair, so that I may sit with my students.”

“I would be honored, Minerva,” Amelia said, with a smile.

The DMLE Head took McGonagall’s usual chair while Harry sat in the middle chair with Hermione and McGonagall sitting on either side of him.

“I suppose I should begin this meeting by catching you up with what I’ve already discovered,” Amelia said, “I can’t tell you everything, but I can tell you enough.”

“We understand some of it may be confidential information, ma’am,” Hermione said.

“Indeed it is,” Amelia said, then she bluntly said, “Molly Weasley was arrested last night on multiple charges, and is currently residing in a special Holding Cell in the DMLE Headquarters. The Holding Cell is behind various enchantments that can only be accessed by myself and a few other individuals whom I have confirmed are loyal to me. Albus Dumbledore knows nothing about this special Holding Cell, and I may have said too much already to the three of you.”

“Can you tell us what charges Molly Weasley was given?” McGonagall asked.

“I can tell you a couple,” Amelia said. “Some of the charges are still pending. The first was that she did indeed breach the Statute of Secrecy that September day in King’s Cross in 1991. That is the most serious of charges. She also confirmed knowledge of the Enchanted jewelry Ronald and Ginevra possessed. Conspiracy to Use is what we have her on for those.”

She then removed a piece of parchment from her robes, and set it on the desk. Harry recognized it as a copy of the Betrothal Contract – identical to a copy he had. Then she set down a large brass key as well.

“My Gringotts Key!” Harry said, recognizing it immediately.

“She had it in her possession,” Amelia said, “She said Dumbledore had asked her to give it back to you and that ‘she just hadn’t gotten around to it.’ She confirmed stealing 5000 Galleons from you since August. Would you like me press charges against her for this?”

“I’ll let Gringotts punish her for that one,” Harry said.

“Very well,” Amelia said, she motioned to the copy of the Betrothal Contract. “She is also charged with the Illegal Creation of a Betrothal Contract. We found her copy of it in the Burrow. We also caught her in Possession, with intent to use illegal and restricted substances.”

“Love Potion,” Harry muttered.

“As well as several others,” Amelia said, nodding. “She had a rather interesting plan involving the Love Potion she was making. Interestingly enough, she wasn’t going to use the Love Potion to make
you fall in love with Ron and Ginny. Not yet, at least.”

“That sounds ominous,” Hermione muttered.

“The original plan was for Ronald to ask you, Hermione, to the Yule Ball,” Amelia said. “Ron would then convince you, Harry, to ask Ginny to the Ball. That would serve the initial purpose – the public view of you two on a date with the two youngest Weasleys. This would give Molly the opportunity to continue her plan next summer, when she would dose you with Love Potions keyed to Ginny and Ron respectively. As you would have been seen as accompanying the Weasleys to the Yule Ball on dates, nobody would bat an eye to the fact that you two were in serious relationships with Ginny and Ron respectively. In reality, you would be under the influence of Love Potions, and nobody the wiser of any suspicious behavior with your relationships.”

“That sounds very plausible,” Hermione muttered. “Thank goodness you asked me to the Ball before Ron got the opportunity, Harry.”

“Thank goodness for Professor McGonagall encouraging me to find a date rather quickly,” Harry said, smiling at the Lioness of Gryffindor.

“I was happy to help,” McGonagall said, “You said this was Molly’s original plan, Amelia?”

“Indeed,” Amelia said, “Her original plan was ruined of course, as Harry had asked Hermione, not only to the Ball, but also to be his girlfriend. Your plan to make your relationship public and well-known worked quite well. Molly had to change her plan. Ginny wrote her a letter last night, and asked her to convince Dumbledore to Obliviate you, as you had assumed. But she was against the plan, because your relationship is so public. She couldn’t risk anyone being suspicious about a sudden break-up. So she concocted another plan.”

“Let me guess,” Hermione said, “She was going to make it look like we were arguing and stuff. Then the public would see us have relationship problems.”

“It is a little more complicated,” Amelia said. “That Love Potion she was caught brewing? She was going to deliver it to Ginny. Ginny would have to summon a hair from an attractive male. She’d place the hair in the Potion, and give it to you. You were supposed to snog this attractive bloke in public, hopefully where Harry would catch you. This would spark arguments and problems between you. Then Molly would deliver various other Potions like Revulsion Potions and such which would further break up your relationship and even your friendship. Then she would give you Infatuation Potions keyed to Ron and Ginny respectively. Ron and Ginny would ask you on dates to Hogsmeade, and you’d say yes, because of the Potions.”

“A couple dates in Hogsmeade,” Harry said, “would be enough to convince the public of our pending relationship, and Molly could use her Love Potion scheme next summer, where nobody would notice our evolving relationship with Ginny and Ron.”

“Precisely,” Amelia said.

“Oh, God,” Hermione gasped, “It was Molly! She did it!”

“What do you mean, Hermione?” Amelia asked, “What did Molly do?”

“We visited Gringotts on Sunday, ma’am,” Hermione said, “We met with Keeper Ragnok The Sixth, Harry’s Account Manager.”
Amelia raised an eyebrow. “Were you in Gringotts between ten and eleven in the morning?”

“We were there for quite a while,” Hermione said, “I would assume so. Why?”

“I’ll tell you in a little bit,” Amelia said, “Continue your thought.”

“In addition to the Illegal Betrothal Contract, among other things,” Hermione said, “We each took Blood Tests. We have a copy of the results for you.”

Harry and Hermione took the documents from their knapsacks and passed them to Amelia, who looked through them.

Amelia raised an eyebrow almost immediately. “Descendant of Pureblood, Miss Granger?”

Hermione blushed. “I am the Heiress of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger.”

Amelia blinked. “That… is an unexpected revelation. We’ll get back to that. Let’s see. Merciful Merlin! All these Blocks! And Bindings! These are extremely illegal! Who is responsible for all this?”

“We believe Albus is responsible for most of the Blocks and Bindings,” McGonagall said.

“However, those Potions,” Hermione said, “What if Mrs. Weasley made those?”

Amelia frowned as she looked through the Tests. “I will certainly be asking Molly Weasley about this. I beg your pardon, you two, but according to these Tests, both of you are victims of Multiple Obliviations. I believe I need to know about these incidents. I assume the memories were restored.”

“We predicted you would ask us that, ma’am,” Harry said. “We each wrote statements summarizing our memories we regained.”

He and Hermione pulled out another piece of parchment each from their knapsacks and handed them to the DMLE Head. She looked through them, her eyes wide.

“What is this about the Dursleys, Harry?” Amelia asked. “As in Lily’s sister and her husband? Harry, either my memory is shady, or I distinctly remember your mother saying your Aunt would never be allowed to be your guardian!”

“So we’ve recently discovered,” Harry muttered. “We’ll discuss that soon enough.”

“Indeed we will,” Amelia muttered, “Because it certainly looks like they should be arrested for attempted murder! You could have been killed if… if Dumbledore and Poppy Pomfrey hadn’t shown up and healed you!”

“The Dursleys are being dealt with, ma’am,” Harry said.

Seeing the look on the Director’s face, Harry quickly explained his plan for the Dursleys. Amelia rubbed the wrinkles in her forehead by the time he finished.

“Let me get this straight,” Amelia said, “Instead of turning them over to Muggle authorities, you’re giving them money and making them leave Great Britain?”
“Director Bones?” Harry asked, “Do you honestly think Albus Dumbledore couldn’t get them out of police custody, or even Muggle prison, and put me back in the Dursleys’ custody, if he wants me back there so badly? If the Dursleys went to America or Australia or any other English-speaking country, Dumbledore couldn’t find them. Especially in the middle of a large Muggle population.”

Amelia sighed. “As much as I dislike it, you have a good point. However, I am sure I could have done something to prevent such a thing.”

“Where were you the last thirteen years?” Harry asked, in a deadpan tone.

“Mr. Potter!” McGonagall scolded her student.

“He’s right, Minerva,” Amelia said, “He has a right to be upset. Let’s move on for now. What is this about a troll during Halloween of your first year?”

Harry and Hermione explained the incident – the real incident, and the false incident they were made to believe. Amelia glared at Minerva when the students were finished.

“A Troll invaded Hogwarts and nearly killed a young first year three years ago,” Amelia said, “And this is the first I hear about it?”

McGonagall sighed. “I’m afraid the Troll was just one of several incidents that Dumbledore has gone through much trouble to keep anyone outside of Hogwarts – especially the DMLE and Aurors – ignorant of such happenings.”

“Surely if there was anything serious, Susan would have told me these things?!” Amelia demanded.

McGonagall winced. “Recently I’ve questioned everything that has happened over the last three and a half years. I firmly believe all students leave Hogwarts each holiday with the firm belief that nothing serious happened at Hogwarts – nothing out of the normal, nothing serious enough to speak to their parents or others about.”

“That would explain why I’ve told nothing about these events to my parents,” Hermione said. “I’ve just never felt the necessity to tell them about any of the… troubles at Hogwarts.”

“Dumbledore is responsible for this, isn’t he?” Amelia asked; she growled when McGonagall nodded. “You will tell me everything, Minerva, once I am finished with these two and Ron and Ginny. I want to hear everything about these ‘troubles’.”

“Of course, Amelia,” McGonagall said. “I would of course happily agree to that.”

Amelia sighed and pushed away the statements about the Obliviations.

“I will look at the rest of that later,” Amelia said, “I have a feeling I’m only going to have more questions. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, let me be completely open with you. We’ve been teasing each other back and forth about certain things during this entire meeting. Let me be more clear with you. Sometime between ten-o-clock and eleven-o-clock on Sunday morning, I suddenly – out of the blue – remembered that Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter was a lot more important than I believed over the past thirteen years. The same happened with the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell. You said you went to Gringotts on Sunday. I don’t need to be good at Maths to add two and two. What happened at Gringotts?”
“My house-elf Dobby had plans to go to Gringotts to confirm his role as my new house-elf,” Harry said, “That was Saturday evening. He returned and told me that Keeper Ragnok, my account manager wanted to see me and was rather angry with me. So Hermione, Professor McGonagall and I – without Dumbledore knowing – went to Gringotts on Sunday. When we arrived, Keeper Ragnok was waiting for us. The first thing he asked me was why I hadn’t been answering his communications he’d been giving me over the years. Turns out Dumbledore was blocking such communications.”

Harry continued, and Hermione added a few comments as well, including her discovery of being the Heiress of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger. They explained taking Inheritance Tests and Blood Tests.

“Then Keeper Ragnok wanted me to unseal my parents’ Final Will and Testament,” Harry said.

“I wasn’t aware they penned a Will,” Amelia said.

“Albus Dumbledore sealed the Ministry’s copy using his Chief Warlock title,” Harry said, “He couldn’t seal the Gringotts one. I was supposed to open the Will on my eleventh birthday. Turns out I was deliberately kept away from ever meeting Keeper Ragnok until recently. Anyway, so I opened the Will. I have a copy here that you are allowed to read, as your name is mentioned in the Will.”

Harry pulled out the large metal scroll from his knapsack. He pressed the button at the end of the scroll and it opened into a long sheaf of parchment. He placed the Will in front of Amelia. Then he braced himself, because he knew what Amelia was about to discover.

“What the bloody hell is this about Sirius Black, Mr. Potter?!” Amelia demanded.

“Exactly what it says,” Harry said, “Sirius is my sworn godfather, through the Godfather Ritual. Look at Peter Pettigrew’s inheritance message.”

Amelia looked back at the Will. “‘If we are dead, Peter Pettigrew is guilty of betraying us. He was our Secret Keeper at the time of our death. We made everyone believe it was Sirius, so Peter wouldn’t be targeted.’ Bloody Merlin’s bloody ball-sack! Sirius is innocent!”

“Amelia Bones!” McGonagall scolded, “Language, young lady!”

Amelia blushed, and Harry and Hermione grinned at the intimidating Director looking so embarrassed.

“Apologies,” Amelia said, “Forgive me for my assumptions, but I must ask. Mr. Potter, are you currently in contact with Sirius Black?”

Harry’s eyes widened. He looked at Hermione, who looked frozen. Then he turned to McGonagall, who shrugged and nodded.

Harry gulped and turned back to Amelia. “I am. I have a communication mirror similar to the mirrors you and Susan have.”

“Mr. Potter,” Amelia said. “I apologize for what I am about to request. But I must ask you to contact your godfather. I would very much like to speak to him. Now.”
My apologies if the last scene seemed all over the place. I have a distinct schedule of topics for them to discuss. Such as the Great Alliance, which was what sparked Amelia’s revelation on Sunday which led to her questions here. It happened at the same time Minerva realized the information on Sunday in Gringotts. That discussion will happen next chapter.

Also next Chapter: Amelia speaks to Sirius, finishes the meeting with Harry, Hermione and McGonagall, then speaks to Ron and Ginny. What will happen to Ron and Ginny? You’ll see!

Unfortunately, her conversation with McGonagall about the ‘troubles’ over the past few years at Hogwarts will be off-screen, because we know all about those of course. Amelia will go over her reactions in her thoughts at some point in the close future.
Aurors At Hogwarts, Part 2

Chapter Notes

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now present to you my favorite fanon relationship in the entire Harry Potter fanfiction fandom! (Harmony is canon, not fanon, of course! You won't hear different from me!). Sirius Black and Amelia Bones are absolutely perfect together, and I will not listen to any argument against it. That goes especially for you, Sirius/Remus Moonstar shippers!

In my universe, Amelia Bones went to Hogwarts in the same year as Lily and the Marauders. Deal with it. I really love her backstory in this chapter.

Warning: Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron and Molly Weasley Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Wednesday, December 16th, 1994)

“Mr. Potter,” Amelia said. “I apologize for what I am about to request. But I must ask you to contact your godfather. I would very much like to speak to him. Now.”

Director Amelia Bones watched as Harry looked uncertain for a moment, before a look of resignation crossed his face and he nodded.

“I need to speak to Sirius in private, ma’am,” he said. “I need to explain what is going on. I’ve already told him that I had plans to speak to you about him. So he shouldn’t be too surprised… or concerned.”

“Very well, Harry,” Amelia said.

Harry stood then walked across the room and over to a private corner, and removed a small, compact mirror from his pocket. Amelia sighed as she relaxed in the chair and rubbed her forehead. When she had planned to speak to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger today, she had never suspected she would be getting information about Sirius Black.

Thinking about Sirius Black was painful for Amelia Bones. She had been in the same year-group here at Hogwarts as Sirius Black, James Potter, Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, Lily Evans and Severus Snape. Even though she had been the lone Hufflepuff in a group of Gryffindors and Ravenclaws, Amelia had been a part of an all-girl study group with Lily Evans, Pandora Pressley, Illiana Blishwick, and Alice Smythe, among others.

These four aforementioned witches were all in serious relationships with their boyfriends halfway through their seventh year, and would go on to get married to their respective lovers just a few months out of Hogwarts. Amelia remembered thinking she would be the next one to get married. She had been seriously dating Sirius Black starting in their seventh year, after he had asked her to Hogsmeade for that year’s Halloween Hogsmeade weekend.

During James and Lily’s wedding reception in August, three months after finishing their Hogwarts
education, Amelia asked Sirius if he ever considered getting married. Sirius, of course, knew what she had been implying. He said he wanted to wait until the war with Voldemort was over. Amelia also realized he wasn’t going to propose to her until after the war was over. She remembered thinking at the time that he might have been afraid he wouldn’t make it out of the war alive, by the time it was over, and he didn’t want to give her too much hope. Amelia also remembered thinking why she and Sirius couldn’t be like their friends and get married because they might not make it out of the war alive. She never voiced this thought, however.

The war continued. Soon, her friends had gotten pregnant: Lily Potter, Illiana Greengrass, and Alice Longbottom. Even her brother’s wife had been pregnant with her niece, Susan. Pandora Lovegood would be the last to become pregnant, but only several months after her friends’ babies were born.

But not Amelia. But that had been her fault, mostly. She could have gotten pregnant if she really wanted to. Miss a Contraceptive Draught one month, it would have been that easy. But due to the war, she and Sirius were dedicated to their roles. She had decided it would be too risky for her to wind up pregnant and not be able to fight in what could be the most important months of the war.

Sirius was dedicated to the Order of the Phoenix, something she refused to join, because she didn’t want it to interfere with her job as an Auror. Alastor Moody had been in the Order, and he had tried to convince her to join. But because Sirius, and even James, had decided against becoming Aurors, and simply just be a part of the Order, Amelia didn’t join for the exact opposite reason.

Even though the Auror and MLE Departments never collaborated with the Order, Amelia’s relationship with Sirius still flourished, even as their friends married and started families. They were still lovers — as close to husband and wife, or engaged at the very least — without the actual titles.

Then that Halloween in 1981 came. Before she knew it, James and Lily Potter was dead, as was Peter Pettigrew — though Amelia had doubts about that one even now — and Sirius Black was in Azkaban for Pettigrew’s murder, and betraying the Potters to their deaths. Amelia had been distraught. So distraught, she hadn’t even been paying attention to what happened to Sirius Black between the death of James and Lily, to the time he had gone to Azkaban. Sirius had been in Azkaban before she knew it. She had been forced to take a paid holiday from her job as an Auror because she was too close to all the terrible events.

Now she couldn’t even recall if Sirius had been given a proper trial.

Then Frank and Alice Longbottom had been attacked and tortured into insanity at Longbottom Manor. A couple months later, Susan’s parents had been killed while Amelia was babysitting Susan. Her babysitting job had turned into a full-blown job as Susan’s guardian. Amelia had resigned as an Auror and decided to join the DMLE instead. She would go on to become the youngest Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

But Amelia Bones had never forgotten about Sirius Black. Something had always rubbed her the wrong away about Sirius being in Azkaban. He and James were like brothers. Family. Sirius considered James’ parents as closer family to him than his own parents had been. How could he have betrayed them? Sirius had been accused of being a Death Eater. But… how was that possible? Amelia had made love with Sirius two nights before that Halloween and… there was no Dark Mark on his arm.

Yet there had been no other proof of his innocence. No Dark Mark wasn’t proof. There were rumors of several unmarked recruits in the final years of the War.
Now here was proof she could have used a long time ago. Proof in James and Lily Potter’s Final Will and Testament that should have been released thirty days after their deaths.

Amelia’s eyes narrowed as she looked down at the bottom of the Will.

“That bastard,” Amelia snarled. “Albus Dumbledore knew Peter Pettigrew was the Secret Keeper. Knew Sirius Black was Harry’s sworn godfather. He was witness to this very Will. Yet, he was responsible – along with Millicent Bagnold and Bartemius Crouch – for putting Sirius in Azkaban.”

“Sirius and Remus Lupin believe there is a conspiracy here,” McGonagall said, nodding. “They believe Albus put Sirius in Azkaban so he couldn’t be Harry’s guardian. Look at that list of guardians, Amelia. You’re on it! So am I! The Dursleys were never supposed to be his guardians! And yet he’s lived there since James and Lily’s deaths! Albus Dumbledore sealed the Official Will so nobody would discover any of this information!”

Amelia snarled as she looked at the list of Guardians. Oh, yes. Albus Dumbledore was going to pay dearly. Not just for what he had done to Harry Potter. But for what he had done to her and Sirius Black. Amelia had never been in another romantic relationship since Sirius had gone to Azkaban. She was still faithful to him. Now she blamed Albus Dumbledore on her never having been able to have a proper family, outside of her niece and ward, Susan.

Her musing was interrupted as Harry walked back over to the desk.

“Director Bones,” Harry said, “Sirius has agreed to talk to you. He’s – erm – rather nervous about speaking to you, though.”

“I don’t think he’s nervous about the whole fugitive thing, Mr. Potter,” Amelia said, with a smug smirk. “He’s nervous about speaking to his old lover. We would have been married if things had gone better.”

Harry and Hermione’s eyes widened comically. Minerva merely smiled, as if she had known all along. Harry then chuckled and gave the mirror to Amelia.

“That is why I would have called you Auntie if things had gone differently,” he said.

“Correct, young man,” Amelia said, with a smile. “Sirius was as good as your Uncle, as well as your godfather.”

“How about we give Amelia some privacy?” Minerva suggested.

Minerva stood up and conjured a table and three chairs in the middle of the empty floor between the desk and the door. Her two students joined her as she sat down at the table.

Amelia inhaled and exhaled, then looked into the mirror. She blinked back tears as she saw Sirius Black’s face looking at her. He was unrecognizable. No longer was there evidence of that roguish, young face she had fallen for so many years ago. Twelve years of Azkaban had done its damage to Sirius, but he seemed to have regained back some of his health, and she thought he still looked handsome.

“Amelia Bones,” Sirius said, obvious emotion in his voice, “You are a sight for sore eyes. Aside from the memories of Prongs and Lily, my godson, and Moony, memories of you kept me sane in Azkaban, love. I have never forgotten you.”
"Hello, Sirius," Amelia said, "Why haven’t you ever contacted me since you escaped Azkaban?"

"I thought you considered me guilty, like everyone else did!" Sirius muttered.

"Sirius," Amelia said, frowning, "I –"

"What was I supposed to think, Amy?" Sirius asked. "You’re the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement! You did nothing to make sure I got a trial! I thought, out of everyone, it would be you that would visit me in Azkaban, tell me you knew I was innocent, and that you had finally gotten me a trial. But you never did!"

"I didn’t you know you didn’t have a trial, Sirius," Amelia said. "You must understand. I wasn’t allowed in the Auror Department for nearly a month after that Halloween. I was completely distraught and depressed during that month. My friends were dead. The love of my life was in Azkaban, apparently responsible for betraying my friends. Alice and her husband was attacked only days after that Halloween… and then my brother and his wife. I’ve been raising my niece for the past twelve years, Sirius. I… believe me, Sirius, if I had any inkling of your innocence, I would have done something. Unfortunately, it seems that the proof was well hidden. Until now. James and Lily’s Final Will and Testament. It should have been opened a month after their deaths.”

"But Dumbledore had it sealed," Sirius growled, "Because the bastard wanted me in Azkaban! He didn’t want me anywhere near my godson! Harry was never supposed to live with Lily’s sister! He had several preferred guardians, if I couldn’t do the job!"

"I know this, Sirius," Amelia said, "I’m looking at James and Lily’s Will. I was on a list to be his guardian. But I never knew."

"How could you?" Sirius asked. "You and I weren’t married, or even engaged. Which is completely my fault and one of my biggest regrets. James and Lily were almost always behind a Fidelius in Godric’s Hollow. My cousin, Andie, Andromeda Tonks, she’s a Healer, and they had her over at the cottage at a few times so she could check up on Harry. They wouldn’t risk going to St. Mungo’s.

"They only left the cottage once. To go to Gringotts to apparently pen that Will. They thought, if they had died, the Will would have been opened. Their son would be living with me, unless I died. Then there would be others who could raise them. James and Lily had plenty of allies. You were one of them, of course. So I suppose it isn’t a surprise you’re on the list of Guardians along with many of those Allies.”

"The Great Alliance," Amelia said, nodding.

"Harry told me I was supposed to be the Proxy Leader in James’ place if he died,“ Sirius muttered. "Why me? Augusta Longbottom or Castor Greengrass seemed like the better choice. Certainly the two most mature members of the Alliance.”

"He trusted you more than anyone, Sirius," Amelia said, then she sniffled. "Merlin, I am sorry, love. I should have known you would have never betrayed him! You considered him your brother! You loved him more than you loved me!"

"I forgive you, Amy,” Sirius said. “If I can’t forgive you, who can I forgive?”

"Sirius, I need you to tell me everything,” Amelia said. “I need to know so I can get you a proper
“I suppose I should start a couple weeks that Halloween,” Sirius said, “Even though they had been living in Godric’s Hollow, James and Lily didn’t use a Fidelius on the house until it was nearly too late. They decided to go through with it two weeks before that Halloween. Wormtail, Dumbledore and I were invited to the cottage. Remus wasn’t invited because –”

“You thought he might be a traitor,” Amelia said, “I remember your theories back then.”

“Remus has forgiven me for that, but I still feel horrible for it,” Sirius said, “If I hadn’t accused him – never mind. Anyway, James and Lily wanted me to be the Secret Keeper. I kind of figured this was going to be what they wanted of me, so that is why I brought Wormtail along. I suggested that bastard be the Secret Keeper! Thought it would be safer if it was him. Nobody would suspect him, everyone would think it was me. Yeah, that worked out a little too well. Wormtail did seem a little too eager to accept the role, now that I think on it.”

“That must be why James and Lily blamed him for their deaths in their Will,” Amelia said.

“Oh, Merlin,” Sirius sniffled, “I didn’t know they had doubts! Why didn’t they tell me?! Unless… Amy, what if Dumbledore knew Wormtail was shady even then? What if he had something to do with me encouraging Wormtail to be the Secret Keeper? What if he had something to do with James and Lily accepting Peter as the Secret Keeper?”

“If he influenced James and Lily, they wouldn’t have voiced their issues about Peter in their Will, Sirius,” Amelia said, shaking her head, “They certainly wouldn’t have voiced their issues with Albus in the Will, if he had any influence over them.”

Sirius sighed. “So many questions. Anyway, before I left Godric’s Hollow that night, I placed a runestone underneath the welcome mat on the front step of the house. It would warn me if there were nefarious spells or curses, or whatever, in the vicinity. That Halloween, the alarms keyed to the runestone went mad.”

Amelia listened as Sirius struggled with the rest of his tale. Everything from confronting Rubeus Hagrid who was already at the cottage – which Amelia found strange. Especially when Sirius said Hagrid refused to give Harry to him, which he should have done, as Sirius was his godfather. Amelia found it quite suspicious that Dumbledore wanted to see the boy, when his rightful guardian was already there. Sirius then continued, describing watching Hagrid leave with Harry on Sirius’ old motorbike.

Then he described going after Peter. How he had confronted Peter. How Peter accused him, then cut off his finger, blew up a pipe – which caused the explosion that killed all those Muggles – and transformed into a rat before he scurried down a sewer.

“Oh, Merlin,” Amelia sighed, “It all makes sense now. If Pettigrew had lost his finger due to the explosion, there would certainly be a lot of other body parts there from the explosion as well! Yet his finger was the only thing found! How the bloody hell did the Aurors or the DMLE investigators not figure this out?! This sounds like gross negligence and…”

“Conspiracy,” Sirius growled. “Conspiracy between Dumbledore, Crouch and Bagnold! Voldemort was gone, they needed a living scapegoat, Amelia. They chose me! I was in the Holding Cells for three hours. No Interrogation Room, no questions asked. They gave me a glass of water, and I took it, thinking they were about to ask me questions, and I found it was a Portkey to the beach where the
boat to Azkaban was docked. I was then Stunned on arrival and woke up in a cell in Azkaban. No trial. No interrogations. Nothing!”

“Oh, Merlin,” Amelia muttered. “I am so sorry, Sirius.”

“You were a low-level Auror back then, Amy,” Sirius said, “Sounds like you were given paid-time-off by Crouch himself, because he knew you and I were close. He didn’t want you interfering in anything!”

“Fuck!” Amelia growled, making Minerva, Harry and Hermione look over at her, concerned. “It all makes perfect sense now. Heads are going to roll, Sirius. But it won’t be yours! I’m getting you a trial. I promise you. If it is the last thing I do, you will be free before the New Year!”

Sirius smiled. “Thank you, love. I knew I could count on you. I’ve never lost my trust in you. I figured you were being blocked in every direction until now.”

“I’m sorry I lost trust in you, Sirius,” Amelia said. “I will make it up to you. I promise.”

“I know you will,” Sirius said, “I forgive you, by the way. Do not worry about me being angry at you. I’ve lost too much to lose you just because of anger. I should have gotten off my ass, married you around the same time Prongs and Lily did, and we could have had a baby of our own when the rest of our friends were having babies. I made many mistakes back then, and that was one of worst, putting off everything until the war was over.”

“We can discuss that more after you’re free,” Amelia said, “What is the runic array for your mirror? I’m going to add it to my own mirror so I can get in touch with you without having to use Harry’s mirror again.”

Sirius quickly went through the array information as Amelia jotted it down.

“Thank you, Sirius,” Amelia said, “I must say goodbye for now I have too much to do to just sit and talk with you. I will contact you as soon as possible, though.”

“I’ll be waiting impatiently,” Sirius said, grinning.

Amelia smiled. “See you soon, you old rogue.”

Sirius blew a kiss at her then vanished from the mirror.

*I should have told him I still loved him,* Amelia thought, unaware Sirius was thinking the very same thing.

“Alright,” she said loudly, to Minerva, Harry and Hermione, as she closed the mirror, “I’m finished with Sirius.”

Minerva, Harry and Hermione quickly returned to the desk.

“Albus Dumbledore has a lot to answer for, I’ll say that right now,” Amelia said. “I need your permission, Harry, to meet with your Account Manager and get a copy of this Will from him.”

Harry nodded, then took writing material from the desk and wrote a message, then passed it to Amelia. She read it, and her eyes widened at the signature.
“You’re Lord Potter and Lord Peverell?!” Amelia asked, “How?!”

Amelia’s eyes widened as Harry held up a hand, and two Lord’s Rings appeared on his finger.

“Did you see Rita Skeeter’s article yesterday?” Harry asked.

“Of course,” Amelia said, “She said – you’re Emancipated?!”

“Everything she said was right,” Harry said, “Of course it was. I told her all the information she wrote in the article. Told her to speculate the information and not to actually verify it. But everything she said was true. Because Dumbledore, Crouch, Bagman and the Goblet of Fire all agreed I was to be the fourth Champion in the tournament, it was decided I was old enough to be of age. Therefore, I am Emancipated.”

“I certainly never expected that,” Amelia said. “I assume you only learned this on Sunday, even though you should have learned it during the week after Halloween?”

“Yesterday morning, after Rita’s article came out, Dumbledore called me to his office,” Harry said, “Then he proceeded to lie right to my face. He said Rita was completely wrong, and if I was Emancipated, he would have told me during the week after the Choosing Ceremony.”

“Then he left the castle and went to the Ministry,” McGonagall said, “Where I firmly believe he attempted to stop Harry’s Emancipation.”

“He wouldn’t be able to do it without…” Amelia said, then her eyes widened, “Of course! The Winter Solstice Session in the Wizengamot! It takes place next Monday! He’s going to try to convince the Wizengamot to override your Emancipation next Monday!”

“He thinks he’s going to succeed anyway,” McGonagall said, a smug smile crossing her face, “I’ve put a certain amount of thought into this. Albus does not know Harry knows about his titles. He does not know Harry’s already taken possession of his Lord’s Rings.”

“You want Harry to reclaim his Wizengamot seats on Monday at the start of the Session!” Amelia said.

Minerva nodded with a smirk. “Heiress Dagworth-Granger, here, could also use her Heiress Ring to claim the Dagworth-Granger chair. They would simply need to assign proxies for all three seats.”

“You have a seat, don’t you, Professor McGonagall?” Hermione asked.

“I do,” Minerva said, “I usually only attend the Solstice Sessions, unless I am summoned for any other important sessions. The Solstice Sessions are when all the big laws are created, disbanded and debated.”

“Would you be willing to be the Dagworth-Granger Proxy?” Hermione asked.

Minerva blinked, then smiled. “I would be honored, Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

“I assume you have a seat on the Wizengamot, Director Bones?” Harry asked.

“I am Regent in place of my late brother until my niece reaches majority,” Amelia said, then her eyes
widened, “Harry – Lord Potter, I – are you asking –”

“I wish for you to be the Proxy for the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter,” Harry said, “And the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell. I know you are one of my family’s Allies. I know all about the Great Alliance.”

Amelia sighed and cleared her throat. “I will accept for the role of the House of Potter. I cannot for the House of Peverell. I’m afraid the Great Alliance would not approve of me holding two Proxies belonging to the Leader of the Great Alliance. We already have a rather shaky foundation, as a proxy Leader has never really been decided.”

Harry nodded, then he took on a look of concentration. “What about House Longbottom? Neville’s a good friend of mine.”

“While I would normally approve of this, because Augusta Longbottom is a masterful politician,” Amelia said, “I’m afraid she might not accept. House Peverell is a Neutral House. We only have one other Neutral House in our Alliance: House Greengrass. I would suggest asking Lord Castor Greengrass. He is Lord of one of the three original Houses of the Great Alliance, aside from Peverell. Potter, Longbottom and Greengrass. Your grandfather originally created the Great Alliance with these two Houses.”

Harry nodded. “I will consider this. If he doesn’t agree, I can always ask Neville’s Gran.”

“How many students are you close with, in the Children of the Great Alliance?” Amelia asked.

“Neville, Padma Patil and Luna Lovegood,” Harry said, “Though the latter two is a newer friendship. Why do you ask?”

“Because I would suggest thinking about holding a meeting with all the students here who are in the Children of the Great Alliance, Lord Potter,” Amelia said. “You need to let them know Houses Potter and Peverell is officially back in the Great Alliance, so they can contact their families about it.”

“Do I need to ask Daphne Greengrass if I can speak to her father?” Harry asked.

“Not for a Proxy request,” Amelia said, “Message him directly. I would suggest doing this before this weekend, so you can exchange a couple letters back and forth to confirm Proxy. I would also suggest holding a Children of the Great Alliance meeting this weekend too. I will contact Lord Greengrass before Monday to tell him I am Proxying for House Potter.”

Harry nodded. “I will write to Lord Greengrass, and consider the Children meeting for this weekend. However…”

“You’re thinking about Dumbledore, aren’t you?” Minerva asked; Harry nodded. “I will find you a good room to hold the meeting in. We might be able to use the Den, if the elves can resize the Private Common Room. It will be risky bringing so many students into the Den, however.”

Harry nodded. “I will consider this by the end of the day.”

“Well, unless you three have anything else I need to know about – aside from our other discussion, Minerva,” Amelia said, “I need to go meet with Ron and Ginny Weasley. If you do not have a class, Minerva, perhaps you could be there too? Arthur is there as their chaperone, though.”
“I will go with you,” Minerva said, then grimaced, “In case I need to expel Mr. and Miss Weasley.”

Amelia ignored the gleeful and hopeful looks on Harry and Hermione’s faces.

“We have nothing else, ma’am,” Harry said, “You can keep those copies of the Blood Tests, though. I am sure you’ll find a use for them.”

She thanked him, then collected the two Blood Tests, and placed them, and the letter he had given her earlier for Ragnok, in her bag. Then she stood up, as did Minerva and her students.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” Amelia said, “I will certainly make good use of all of this information.”

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Director Bones,” Hermione said, and Harry echoed her.

“Yes, thank you,” Minerva said, “Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, you are excused. I believe your first class this morning is Charms?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Hermione said.

“Professor Flitwick won’t mind if you’re late,” Minerva said, “but I’ll write an excuse for the both of you just in case it is necessary.”

Minerva wrote two quick notes on slips of parchment, then handed them to her students and excused them. Harry and Hermione said their farewells and left the office hand-in-hand.

“Am I the only one who sees James and Lily in them?” Amelia asked. “Even though she looks nothing like Lily, she’s so much like her in personality.”

“Several of my fellow staff – and myself – have said the very same thing,” Minerva said, smiling. “I believe that young lady is the future Lady Potter.”

“Good, it isn’t just me then,” Amelia said, “Let’s be off, Minerva. We still have much to do.”

Minerva nodded and the two ladies headed off out of the office.

(Ten minutes later…)

Amelia and Minerva entered the unused classroom, where her Aurors and the three Weasleys currently were. Ronald and Ginevra Weasley were looking rather angry, but also nervous, as they sat at a pair of desks. Arthur Weasley was leaning against a wall behind his children, and he looked rather emotional. Minerva walked over to Arthur, while Amelia walked over to her Aurors.

“Any issues?” Amelia asked Kingsley.

“A couple,” Kingsley said, “Miss Weasley was rather – disapproving – of having to be removed of her necklace, but her father convinced her. Once she gave up the necklace, her brother followed easily and gave up his ankle bracelet. We have them in evidence bags here. Several minutes later, Arthur wound up telling them that their mother was in a DMLE Holding Cell, and will probably end up in Azkaban. They didn’t react very well to that. Tonks and I had to stun the pair when they stood up and started ranting. We only woke them up a couple minutes ago. They’ve been sitting there
“quietly ever since.”

“What about their twin brothers?” Amelia asked.

“Here is the report and transcribed interrogation,” Kingsley said.

Amelia took the offered piece of parchment and looked at it. “They reported the incident but never got a response back about it?”

“I believe Albus Dumbledore blocked the letter from ever leaving the castle,” Kingsley said, “But I have no proof of that.”

“Believe me, I think you’re quite correct with your suspicions,” Amelia said. “We can’t legally do anything to them if they tried to give reports of the incidents to authorities. That is exactly what they were supposed to do. It isn’t their fault, if the reports were intercepted. This sounds like they were fully cooperating, and weren’t hiding anything. I can easily confirm all of this with their mother anyway. We’ll leave Fred and George alone for now unless something else comes up that counters their statements.”

“I believe that is the correct path, boss,” Kingsley said.

“As do I,” Tonks said. “I know those two. Even though they were a few years behind me, we were friends, because I was friends with their elder brother, Charlie. I got to know them through Charlie. They seem like a good pair of young men. I believe their statements to be the truth.”

“Very well,” Amelia said; she cleared her throat and turned to Ron and Ginny. “Ronald, Ginevra, please come up here and sit in the center of the front row.”

The two Weasley siblings stood and walked to the front row where they sat down. Arthur and Minerva sat down on either side of them.

“We know our rights,” Ginny said, “You have nothing on us!”

“What an ironic coincidence,” Amelia said, “Your mother said those very words to me last night. She now resides in a Holding Cell until her criminal trial. Do you honestly think I’m going to accept such a defense from you? It seems to me you’re parroting what your mother told you to say in a situation like this.”

Ginny winced, then caught herself and changed her expression to a glare.

“We already have the both of you on two charges,” Amelia said. “Possession and Use of Class Seven Restricted Enchantments – one count for each of you. I am sure you recall the jewelry you were using. The enchantments on them are only legally used by the highest level Ministry representatives. I am only speculating here, but I believe Albus Dumbledore placed those enchantments on the jewelry, and ordered you to wear them so you wouldn’t give up any information of any secret plans you had. The Headmaster has permission to use those enchantments. He does not have permission to allow you to use those enchantments.”

“We didn’t know that!” Ginny defended herself and her brother.

“Then you should have gone to your father, or Professor McGonagall about the jewelry,” Amelia said, “Your mother would have simply told you to use the jewelry. She has already admitted to
agreeing to Dumbledore giving the jewelry to you. I wonder what information your mother and Headmaster wanted you to hide so badly? We’ll get to that soon. Because you agreed to use the jewelry, and benefitted from the enchantments, you are charged with Possession and Use of Class Seven Restricted Enchantments.

“The second charge – the breach of the Statute of Secrecy.”

“You can’t charge me with that!” Ron said, “I had nothing to do with it! If you let Fred and George go, you have to let me off of that charge!”

“You benefitted from the Breach more than Fred and George did, Mr. Weasley,” Amelia said.

“What do you mean by that?!?” Ron demanded.

“Can I sit here? Everywhere else is full.”” Amelia said. “Do you remember saying those words?”

Ron’s eyes widened comically.

“But you lied to Harry Potter, didn’t you?” Amelia asked. “There were open carriages. According to statements I’ve heard, there were two in that very car Mr. Potter was sitting in. Your year was smaller than normal. Not all the carriages were filled because of this. Also, if you had not gone through with your mother’s plan to manipulate and trick Harry into meeting your family, you would have been on the Hogwarts Express, before Harry would have gotten onto the train. You would have already been sitting with somebody, Mr. Weasley. You benefitted from your mother breaching the Statute of Secrecy, therefore you are guilty of breaching the Statute of Secrecy.”

“How the bloody hell do you know all of that?!” Ron demanded. “Did Potter tell you!”

“Of course he told her, Moron!” Ginny exclaimed, “How else would she know?”

“Yes,” Amelia said, “He told me. He told me everything. He didn’t realize until recently exactly how you and your mother fooled him that day at King’s Cross. He didn’t realize until recently he was set-up. But he knows why you and your mother set him up!”

“It wasn’t a set-up!” Ginny growled. “Mum wanted to introduce him to his Betrothed and his future family!”

“Betrothed?” Amelia echoed; she removed the Betrothal Contract from her bag and set it in front of Ginny. “Do you mean this Betrothal Contract?”

“How do you have this?!” Ginny demanded. “There are only two copies!”

“Your mother’s and Albus Dumbledore’s I presume?” Amelia asked. “Wrong. Harry Potter also owns a copy. He owns the very copy that – if destroyed – will destroy this one. This is your mother’s copy by the way. One of my Aurors found it last night, in your mother’s private stash, along with Harry Potter’s Gringotts Key, and a large stash of illegal and restricted substances and Potions.”

Ginny was stuck on one part of her statement. “How does Harry Potter have a copy of this?! He wasn’t supposed to know about it yet! Not until he and I were a couple for a few months! Then Mum and I would let him know about it!”

“After a few months of being dosed up on Love Potions, I assume?” Amelia asked, raising an
eyebrow. “Let’s not forget the Lust Potion your mother would eventually use on you and Mr. Potter, so he would impregnate you so you would have his Heir after he died before his seventeenth birthday!”

Ron and Ginny’s eyes widened comically.

“Wondering how I know about that?” Amelia asked. “Did you know there are counter-enchantments to that jewelry you were wearing?”

“Do you recognize the room we are sitting in, Mr. and Miss Weasley?” Minerva asked.

“I told you that wasn’t a coincidence, Ginny!” Ron growled, “We’re in the same room we were in last night when –”

“When you discussed your entire arsenal of secret plans with each other,” Minerva said, smugly.

“How do you – no one could hear us!” Ginny growled, “We had the jewelry on!”

“Harry Potter and Hermione Granger knew about the jewelry, Miss Weasley,” Minerva said. “They had bracelets on with counter-enchantments, so they could get past your enchantments and hear all your secrets. Last night, you fell for their trap. Remember that broom closet they went into? They were there, because they knew you were following them. They followed you here and listened to all of your plans. Then they told me all about them.”

“Then they told me,” Amelia said.

Ginny shrieked loudly and stood up. “Harry Potter and I are destined to be with each other! He saved me in the Chamber of Secrets! We are Betrothed! You cannot break that! If I am guilty of anything, it is planning to get that bitch away from my Betrothed! She shouldn’t even be with him! The Mudblood is guilty of Line Theft and stealing from a Pureblood! I order you to arrest her, Director Bones!”

Amelia pointed her wand at Ginny and placed a Calming Charm on the irate girl. Ginny calmed down instantly and sat down.

“First of all, Miss Weasley,” Ginny said, “That Betrothal Contract. Illegally created. James and Lily Potter expressly forbid Albus Dumbledore from ever becoming Harry Potter’s Magical Guardian. Therefore, he had no right to pen that Contract! Therefore, the Contract was void from the beginning.

“Second, if anyone is guilty of Line Theft, Miss Weasley, it would be you, your mother and your brother.”

“Me?!” Ron asked. “I wasn’t planning on marrying Potter!”

“You were planning on dosing Hermione Granger with Love Potion, Mr. Weasley,” Amelia said. “Not only is Miss Granger the leading candidate for Lady Potter. She is also the leading candidate for Lady Peverell. She is also Heiress Dagworth-Granger and future Lady of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger.”

Ron and Ginny’s eyes widened at this news.
“In our society, Miss Weasley,” Amelia said, “Heiress Dagworth-Granger has more of a right, than the seventh child of a Minor House, to marry a Lord of an Ancient and Most Noble House. She is descended from a Pureblood, by the way. One of the most famous Purebloods in our society.”

“Arthur, I have enough information to charge your son and daughter. They will be coming back to the Ministry with Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks. You are, of course, welcome to go with them.”

“Of course, Director,” Arthur said.

Amelia steeled herself and cleared her throat. “Ronald Bilius Weasley, you are under arrest on the charges of Breaching the Statute of Secrecy, Possession and Use of Class Seven Restricted Enchantments – one count. Conspiracy to Use Illegal and Restricted Substances, and Conspiracy to Commit Line Theft – three counts.

“Ginevra Molly Weasley, you are under arrest on the charges of Breaching the Statute of Secrecy, Possession and Use of Class Seven Restricted Enchantments – one count. Conspiracy to Use Illegal and Restricted Substances, and Conspiracy to Commit Line Theft – three counts.

“Anything you say will be used against you in front of the Wizengamot, for all your peers to hear. Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks, put them in manacles. Mr. and Miss Weasley, I would not attempt to resist arrest, or you will be charged with assaulting a law enforcement individual on top of your other charges. I am not afraid to Stun either of you. Stand up, Mr. and Miss Weasley.

“Minerva, if you will help escort them from the castle, we can have the other conversation afterward.”

“Of course, Amelia,” Minerva said.

Amelia watched as her two Aurors placed magic-blocking manacles on Ronald and Ginevra’s wrists. Ron looked resigned to his situation, but Ginny still looked defiant.

“You still believe Albus Dumbledore can get you out of these charges, don’t you, Miss Weasley?” Amelia asked. “You’re right, he might be able to do it. But that would show that he is worried about what would happen if the charges got out to the public. He wouldn’t want to risk that. Besides, the next time he sees me, he isn’t leaving the Ministry, unless it is on a boat to Azkaban to join you two and your mother.

“March you two. You’re lucky class is still in session or you’d be going on a walk of shame in front of the whole student body.”

Arthur led the group as Ron and Ginny walked out of the classroom. Kingsley and Tonks followed just behind them, their wands pointed at the pair of siblings. Amelia and Minerva followed behind the group.

(Twenty Minutes Later…)

Minerva McGonagall stepped out of the castle with Amelia Bones, following the Aurors and Weasleys as they walked toward a carriage. She still had one last thing to say to Ronald and Ginevra Weasley. Just as the group reached the carriages, she spoke up.
“Wait a moment, please!” she called out.

The entire group stopped in their tracks. Minerva walked up to the chained Weasley siblings.

“Ronald and Ginevra Weasley,” Minerva said, “I, Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry -- in my position of Proxy Headmistress in the Headmaster’s absence - expel you from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, for the Breach of the Statute of Secrecy, our most important law.”

She then physically ripped the Gryffindor and Hogwarts crests from Ron and Ginny’s robes and threw them on the ground.

“If I could snap your wands, I would,” Minerva said, “But that is up to the Wizengamot – of which I have a seat on. So I would be happy to witness such an event!”

She turned and walked back over to Amelia, leaving her windswept former students staring at the Gryffindor badges on the ground.

Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks nudged the siblings, and the two Weasleys stepped into the nearby carriage.

“Place them in a Holding Cell together,” Amelia said, “Rookie, I want you to watch them, but remain outside of their room. They might talk if they don’t know anyone is listening.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Tonks said.

“Arthur, you’re allowed to remain with them,” Amelia said, “However, I advise you not to enter the room with them. They’re likely very angry with you.”

Arthur cleared his throat. “Of course, Director. Thank you for allowing me to remain with them.”

“My pleasure,” Amelia said. “I am sorry for all of this.”

“Don’t be, Amelia,” Arthur said, “None of this is your fault. You’re doing your job.”

Amelia smiled. Arthur returned the smile, though it was weak, and he followed the Aurors into the carriage. Amelia pointed her wand at the two Thestrals, who neighed and started off down the long driveway, pulling the carriage with them.

“Do you really believe the expulsion will stick, Minerva?” Amelia asked.

Minerva grimaced. “No. Albus would never allow it. I just wanted to terrify them for betraying two of my favorite Lions. Do you believe you can put them in Azkaban?”

“I don’t know,” Amelia said. “They’re minors after all. But I will do my best to see they never step foot back in that castle. The Statute of Secrecy Breach should see their magic bound and wands snapped at the very least. I would consider that a victory if I can get it.”

“Me too, Amelia,” Minerva said. “Come on, then. Back to my office. I have a very long story to tell you. You’ll probably find a few more charges to stick Albus with by the time I finish. However…”

“Yes?” Amelia asked.
“I fear you may stick me and my fellow staff members with charges too,” Minerva said.

With that grim statement, she lead Amelia back into the castle, which was short two students.

For now, especially if a certain Headmaster had his way.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't resist that last line. Relax, at the moment, I have good idea about what I'm going to do to Ron and Ginny. But Dumbledore is a tricky individual, and he has never expelled a student before. Newt Scamander and Hagrid were expelled by other Headmasters. I don't think he wants to start the trend now.

So which scene satisfied you more? Sirius and Amelia's discussion? Ron and Ginny's arrest? Ron and Ginny's expulsion? Seeing this wretched, cliched chapter end? Have to include that last option for the flamers and trolls, of course!

Next Chapter: Albus Dumbledore returns from his stay at Motel Gringotts, and gets some rather bad news. Then Molly Weasley makes a deal when she realizes what has happened to her children. And more!
A Mother’s Plea, A Director’s Disbelief

Chapter Notes

Pay attention to the Bold Parentheses in this chapter. The chronology goes back and forth a bit. This chapter begins with an Amelia POV, then goes back in time an hour with two Dumbledore POVs. Then the return of another PoV we had earlier in the story. Then it finishes with another Amelia PoV.

There is a hint to another Femslash relationship in this chapter. It won't have any major significance in the story, and both characters are Original Characters, so I'm not going to list it among the pairings.

I have a feeling I could lose readers due to this chapter. Let me reassure any of you who have doubts because of this chapter, that the events of this chapter is simply a roadblock, and things will get better.

Warning: Dumbledore, Ginny, Ron and Molly Weasley Bashing; Mention of a Femslash relationship.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Wednesday, December 16th, 1994)

Director Amelia Bones rubbed at her eyes as she sat behind her desk in her office. She had just finished going over the various reports and transcriptions of interviews, from her investigations at Hogwarts. She hadn’t gone home the previous evening, having had a late night after Molly Weasley’s arrest and preparing for her visit to Hogwarts today. So she had slept in one of the private bedrooms meant for DMLE and Aurors who had late nights on the job, much like Arthur Weasley had done. Even then, she had only gotten about four hours of sleep.

It had been a very long day. After watching Ron and Ginny Weasley leave Hogwarts, for what was likely their final time, she and Minerva McGonagall had returned to the Professor’s office, where she and Minerva had a discussion lasting about an hour that had shocked the DMLE Director to her core. At that thought, Amelia glanced over at the Dicta-Quill transcription of the discussion between her and Minerva about the ‘troubles’ that had plagued Hogwarts over the past three-and-a-half years. ‘Troubles’ was an understatement.

Trolls. Cursed broomsticks. Baby dragons. First years having detention in the Forbidden Forest! A Cerberus behind a locked door that an Alohomora Charm could open! An obstacle course from hell guarding the Mirror of Erised that held Nicolas Flamel’s Philosopher’s Stone inside! The Obstacle Course was used as bait for – Voldemort, whom Albus Dumbledore believed was still alive and was trying to prove it by baiting him! Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were involved in most of the troubles that had been described! Three first years had beaten an obstacle course meant to give Voldemort a hard time?!

Amelia had been in shocked horror and audacity at the entire thing. And that was just Harry Potter and Hermione Granger’s first year.
Then Minerva’s tale had just gotten worse. Harry Potter had once again been involved with most of the trouble of that year. A year full of Petrified Students – which included Hermione Granger – which had all culminated in Harry Potter having to fight a Basilisk to save Ginny Weasley’s life in the legendary Chamber of Secrets!

There was one moment of the Chamber of Secrets story Amelia had a real problem with above all others. Her own niece, Susan, had been one of the students who had shunned Harry, believing him to be the ‘Heir of Slytherin’. Believing him responsible for opening the Chamber of Secrets and attacking Muggleborns! His own mother and best friend – at the time – were Muggleborns! How could she have believed such a thing?

She had accused this of her own ally! Worse, the new leader of the Great Alliance! When Amelia had suggested Harry meet with the Children of the Great Alliance, she never realized Harry already had a bad past history with some of those Children, including her own niece! Of course, there was that whole nefarious enchantment that had made the Great Alliance forget Harry’s connection to them, but even so. This just made things worse! Yes, she was definitely going to talk to Susan about this! And soon!

Third year. The Sirius Black fiasco. Sirius had been believed to be going after Harry Potter in Hogwarts, when he was actually going after Peter Pettigrew, who was a rat Animagus. And worse? The rat was Ron Weasley’s pet! Then there were all those troubles with the Dementors. Harry had almost been kissed several times, first of which was on the Hogwarts Express before first term of the year had even started! Dementors invading Quidditch games. Dementors going after innocent students! It was a DMLE nightmare!

And yet Amelia hadn’t known of any of these things. Nothing that had happened over the past three years! None of it!

“It almost makes me want to resign just from the shame of it all,” Amelia had moaned after Minerva had finished her story.

Minerva had been against that of course. “You still have so much to do! Help Sirius, make sure Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley never touch Harry and Hermione again. Make Dumbledore pay for all of this. How are you going to accomplish this if you resign?”

Amelia had, of course, agreed with that. And it had only firmed her resolve harder to make sure Albus Dumbledore paid for everything he had done over the years. Susan could have been mixed up in any part of these troubles Harry Potter had gone through. She could have been Kissed by a Dementor!

“Dumbledore has indirectly caused me more pain than even Voldemort himself did,” Amelia muttered. “Yes, I am going to see him pay for all of this if it is the last thing I do!”

Amelia glanced over at her copy of James and Lily’s Final Will and Testament she had received from the House Potter Account Manager, Keeper Ragnok, at Gringotts when she had visited the bank after leaving Hogwarts. She had not yet gone to the Minister of Magic about this yet. But she would. Soon.

“One just doesn’t walk into the Minister of Magic’s office and demand him of anything,” Amelia mused with a snort, “Well, unless your name is Albus Dumbledore.”

Not for the first time, Amelia wondered where Albus Dumbledore had been all day. She had
expected him to turn up at any moment at Hogwarts, but he had not. Now, she was expecting him to burst through her door, and demand she release Molly Weasley and her children. He had not done so, but there were still several hours of the day. But she wouldn’t give up the Weasleys. No, not until they were in front of the Wizengamot. She would be assigning their trials for this Saturday. And if she could, she would also try to arrange a trial for Sirius Black on the same day!

Ron and Ginny were now in two cells neighboring on either side of their mother’s, in a secret area of the DMLE which only she and a few of her most loyal DMLE co-workers and Aurors of choice could access. She had done several tests against these chosen few to make sure they would never give up the hidden area. It had been created so certain unnamed individuals -- Albus Dumbledore -- couldn’t simply free the prisoners themselves, while waiting for their criminal trial. Sirius Black certainly wouldn’t have been sent to Azkaban by Portkey, without a trial, if he had been in one of those Holding Cells.

Thinking of Sirius Black made her think of her earlier conversation with him. She really needed to add the runic array for Sirius’ mirror into her own, as soon as possible, so she could talk to him again. There was a feeling in her heart again that she hadn’t felt for thirteen years. She really needed to see Sirius again. She needed to tell him what she couldn’t tell him before. How much she still loved him.

Her musings were interrupted by a knock on the door.

“Come in,” she called.

The door opened and her personal secretary, Samantha, stepped into the room.

“What can I do for you, Samantha?” Amelia asked.

“Auror Shacklebolt just sent me a memo,” Samantha said, “Molly Weasley requests to see you. All Auror Shacklebolt said is that Molly wants to make some kind of deal – apparently it is for her children.”

Amelia nodded. Kingsley was one of the few Aurors who knew about the hidden holding cells. He was one of her closest friends in the DMLE and it was due to her recommendation to Rufus Scrimgeour, that he had been promoted to Senior Auror. Even though he could have been doing other important duties as a Senior Auror, Kingsley had volunteered to be one of the Aurors on duty watching the Weasleys. Normally, guard duty wasn’t one of the duties for a Senior Aurors, but he had volunteered freely.

He had been assisted Amelia in transferring Ronald and Ginevra from the Interrogation Room they had been in before Amelia had arrived, to the private Holding Cells. Amelia could still remember Molly Weasley’s reaction of seeing her children being brought in under arrest. First she had asked Ron and Ginny if they were okay, then she had ranted to Amelia and Kingsley about their arrest, then had wailed when Amelia wouldn’t answer her about what her children had been charged with. Kingsley had volunteered to tell her about her children’s charges, and Amelia had happily accepted his request. She had walked out of the Holding Cells before Kingsley had started the explanation.

That was two hours ago.

“I’ll head to the private Holding Cells then,” Amelia said, “Samantha, could you do me a great favor and get us both some dinner from the Leaky Cauldron. My treat, I’ll pay you back when you return. Get me this evening’s dinner special.”
After I meet with Molly, Amelia thought to herself, I am going to see if I can meet with Minister Fudge before he leaves for the day. He doesn’t know anything about the Weasleys’ arrests yet. I also need to show him James and Lily’s Will, and proof that Sirius is innocent. After all that, I’ll definitely be hungry!

“Sure, Amelia,” Samantha said; Amelia’s secretary knew better than to call her ‘Director’, or ‘Boss’, or ‘Madam Bones’; Amelia appreciated the girl too much for that, “I’ll try to have it back by the time you return.”

“I am heading to the Minister’s Office after I finish with Mrs. Weasley,” Amelia said, “So you don’t need to be too hasty.”

“You know me, ma’am,” Samantha said, with a soft smile.

Amelia smiled. Samantha would be as hasty as she needed to be to do this for her boss.

“Of course I do,” Amelia said, with a chuckle.

Amelia stood and walked out of her office with Samantha following her. After saying a temporary farewell to her secretary, Amelia headed off for the Private Holding Cells.

(An hour earlier…)

“Tempus,” Albus Dumbledore pointed the Elder Wand at the wall of the Holding Cell he had been in for…

Eight hours?! It was four-o-clock!

“You’re lucky to have that Wand back, Dumbledore,” Keeper Ragnok the Sixth said, “Technically the Wand belongs to the last Peverell descendant. You know who that is, I know you do. But due to the odd phenomenon of wand allegiance, you are allowed to the owner. I wonder if the last Peverell could take that wand back by simply summoning it from you? Maybe he would have an easier time taking the wand from you than other wand-users would.”

Albus glared at the Goblin. He didn’t need the wretched beast to voice his thoughts on all of this. Albus had pondered all of this before. Of course he knew who the last Peverell was! It was one of his main priorities to make sure the last Peverell never knew himself! If he took the Elder Wand from him, Albus’ plans would go down the toilet faster than a load of shite!

He placed the Elder Wand in his Wand Holster, then put his boots on and tied them.

“I’ve been here for eight hours?!” Albus asked.

“The last three hours were voluntary,” Ragnok sneered, “You fell asleep. Then there was the hour for when you ranted about the unsanitary method you were given to use the bathroom. Do I need to continue?”

“No,” Albus scowled, “Am I free to go?”

“After I am finished,” Ragnok said, “A total of 255,000 Galleons have been taken from yours and
Molly Weasley’s personal Vaults. The amount that was stolen from the Trust Vault of one Harry James Potter. As of a few hours ago, Harry Potter is once again in possession of his Gringotts Key. If the Key is given to anybody besides Mr. Potter, or those he gives explicit and signed permission to, there will be more than Galleons to pay. Do you understand me, Dumbledore?"

“Yes,” Albus said, through gritted teeth.

“Now that we have confirmed that you have blocked correspondence between Harry James Potter and Gringotts,” Rangok said, “We have taken counter-measures into making sure this never happens again. If you, or one of your… minions… interferes when Harry James Potter is summoned to meet with me in the future, there will be punishment – far worse than a few hours in a Holding Cell. Am I understood?”

Albus hissed out a ‘yes’. During his… stay… in the Holding Cell, he had feared that Ragnok would soon be contacting Harry Potter. He didn’t know when it would happen, just that it would. He feared the day that would come. Because a lot of secrets would probably be discovered, secrets he had been hiding for a very long time.”

Ragnok snapped his fingers and a wooden cup appeared on the ground in front of Albus.

“This Portkey will take you to the gates of Hogwarts,” Ragnok said, “Be thankful I do not want to see you anymore today, or you wouldn’t be receiving this gift from me. You’ve been warned, Dumbledore. Heed my warnings and interfere no more in Gringotts business. You’re lucky you could afford to pay the Galleons you had stolen. Otherwise, you’d be a feast for our dragons this evening. Take the cup, Dumbledore, and be thankful you have not been banned from stepping onto Gringotts and Goblin soil.”

Albus ignored the Goblin and grabbed the cup. He felt the familiar pull of his navel as he disappeared from the cave-like room of Gringotts. As he landed on his feet in front of the Hogwarts Gates, he breathed in that delicious fresh air.

He looked around and grumbled to himself, when he found no Thestral-drawn carriages waiting for him. He shook his head and scowled. There was no way he was going to walk up the long driveway to the castle.

“Fawkes!” Albus called.

The beautiful, majestic phoenix appeared in front of him, hovering in mid-air.

“Take me to the front doors of the castle, my friend,” Albus said.

Albus held out his arm, and Fawkes flew over to him, then wrapped his talons around Albus’ arm. Albus felt that familiar, safe warmth of Phoenix flame travel and soon he was standing at the large front doors of the castle. To his surprise he found that the castle doors were open and Minerva McGonagall was standing there, with her hands on her hips.

“I was notified by the wards that you had arrived,” Minerva said, “I was about to ask Hagrid to bring a Thestral Carriage down to you, but I should have figured Fawkes would bring you here.”

“Good afternoon, Minerva,” Albus said.

“You missed lunch,” Minerva said, “The shepherd’s pie was most delightful.”
Albus ignored this last part; he knew she was teasing him because she knew how much he loved shepherd’s pie.

“Did anything interesting happen during my absence?” Albus asked, as he walked into the Entrance Hall, “Aside from another day of end-of-term exams?”

“Yes, actually,” Minerva said, “Director Amelia Bones and two Aurors visited the castle. Actually they arrived a few minutes after you left.”

“What?!” Albus asked, turning back to Minerva.

“Did you not hear Hagrid calling for you just before you left?” Minerva asked. “He was going to tell you that we were expecting guests.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before I left?!” Albus said.

“Ironically, I received post from Director Bones about her arrival moments after you walked out of the Great Hall,” Minerva said, “I had sent a Patronus messenger to Hagrid to let you know about her arrival. But apparently you ignored him.”

“What did the good Director want?” Albus asked.

“Apparently Molly Weasley was arrested at her home last night,” Minerva said, “Charged with a Breach of the Statute of Secrecy among other things. Molly’s statement made Amelia come here to speak to the four Weasleys. Arthur Weasley came with Director Bones.”

“Find the four Weasley siblings, Minerva,” Albus said, “I would like to speak to them.”

And get their memories of their meeting with Amelia and her Aurors, Albus thought.

“I’m afraid only two of the Weasleys are still here, Albus,” Minerva said.

Albus swore under his breath. He knew exactly what she was about to say.

“Amelia placed Ronald and Ginevra Weasley under arrest for Breaching the Statute of Secrecy, amongst other things,” Minerva said, “Apparently the Aurors found Class Seven Restricted Enchantments on jewelry the two Weasleys had on their persons.”

Albus gulped.

Minerva continued. “From what I could figure out, the Breach of the Statute of Secrecy was something that happened on September 1st, back in 1991, at King’s Cross.”

Albus winced. He should have seen that coming.

“Did Amelia want to speak to me?!” Albus asked.

“She’s interested in meeting with you,” Minerva said, “According to her, you’re the only one close enough to Ronald and Ginevra who could have given them the jewelry with that level of Enchantments on them.”
Which meant that would allow Amelia to open a full investigation on Albus further. Amelia Bones wasn’t the youngest Head of the DMLE just because she was an attractive witch. She was very, very good at her job. With enough time and dedication into investigating him, she would find a lot of things about Albus that he didn’t want her to discover.

“There’s something else, Albus,” Minerva said. “I had to expel Ronald and Ginevra Weasley from Hogwarts.”

“What?!” Albus asked; his voice so loud that a few students who were walking through the Entrance Hall turned to look at him.

“Move on, students, no eavesdropping,” Minerva said.

Albus removed his glasses and rubbed his nose between his fingers.

“You had no right doing that, Minerva,” he muttered.

“I am proxy Headmistress in your absence,” Minerva said, “You leave Hogwarts enough to know that well enough! Albus, Ron and Ginny breached the Statute of Secrecy. Our most important law. Their arrest is soon going to get around our society. If I did not expel them, we would get a lot of bad media coming our way. I did not think you wanted that in the middle of the Triwizard Tournament!”

Albus sighed. “While I disagree with your methods, and believe you should have waited to expel them until I returned – the Weasleys didn’t need to be here for them to be expelled, Minerva – I will agree that you are right about the bad reactions that would have come our way. Minerva, never expel another student without my say-so. It doesn’t matter whether you are my proxy or not.”

“Of course, Albus,” Minerva said. “I imagine you are going to try to overturn their arrest?”

“Do you disagree?” Albus asked.

“I do,” Minerva said, “Amelia’s already suspicious of you for those class seven restriction. You don’t need to make her any more suspicious by trying to protect the Weasleys – whether they be your friends and students, or not. At least not before their trials. You can say whatever you need to in your defense. But, in my opinion, If you do anything outside of their trial, Amelia will set her sights on you. Do you want that? What if she discovers about what happened here at Hogwarts over the past three and half years? What if the parents of our students find out?”

Albus sighed and pinched his nose again. He hated to admit it, but Minerva was right. He couldn’t protect the Weasleys right now. If Molly Weasley had been detained since last night, and her youngest children detained for a few hours, Amelia and the Aurors could have already gotten plenty of information from them. Things about him! Things about the plans they had concocted together! No, he needed to protect himself right now!

And he knew exactly how to do it.

“I hate to do this to you, Minerva,” Albus said, “But I need to go to the Ministry.”

“Weren’t you just there?” Minerva asked, raising her eyebrow. “I am surprised you didn’t know about Molly already. I thought that is why you had left Hogwarts!”

“I was. Indisposed elsewhere,” Albus said, cautiously; he refused to tell her he had been detained in
a Gringotts Holding cell, while completely naked, for eight hours!

“Are you well?” Minerva asked, concerned.

“You don’t need to worry about me, Minerva,” Albus said, “I will be fine.”

*Once I speak to Cornelius, I’ll be fine!* Albus said.

“I must go,” Albus said, firmly.

Without another word, Albus headed off toward the Grand Staircase. He would use the Floo Network once again to get into the Ministry. He wasn’t going to Apparate into the Ministry again, and he definitely wasn’t going to let Fawkes bring him there. He had learned his mistakes that morning!

(Half-an-hour later…)

As he had done over twenty-four hours ago, Albus stepped into the welcome area of the Ministerial and Support Staff Offices. He made his way over to the Minister’s personal secretary. Isabella Blishwick looked up at him in surprise.

“I didn’t expect to see you so soon, Headmaster!” she said, “I assume you need to speak with Minister Fudge again?”

“Yes, my dear,” Albus said, “It is rather urgent this time, I’m afraid.”

“You’re lucky he’s still here, sir,” Isabella said, “He normally goes home around this time. I think he’s working overtime because of the upcoming Winter Solstice Session. I’ll see if he can see you.”

Albus smiled. Isabella stood up, then walked over to the door behind her desk. She knocked on the door, opened it up, then said a few words. Then she turned back to Albus.

“He would be happy to meet with you, sir,” she said.

“Thank you, dear Isabella,” Albus said.

He walked past the secretary, then stepped into the office. Unlike last time, the secretary did not follow him inside. Instead she shut the door behind him.

“Albus, good evening!” Cornelius Fudge said, from behind his desk, “What brings you in this evening?”

“Good evening,” Albus said, “Have you heard anything about the wife and youngest children of Arthur Weasley being detained by Director Amelia Bones and Aurors?”

“I have not!” Cornelius said, “Aren’t her two youngest children your students?”

“Third and fourth year students respectively,” Albus said. “However, my Deputy – in my stead, as I was away from the castle today – expelled them today.”

“Whatever for?!” Cornelius asked.
“Breaching the Statute of Secrecy,” Albus said, “Apparently she heard a tale about an incident in King’s Cross back on the first of September in 1991.”

Cornelius grimaced. “I’m afraid I can’t drop those charges too easily, Albus. My apologies. If the ICW heard that I dropped the charges without them being in front of the Wizengamot to tell the tale, I would be removed from office by this time tomorrow.”

“I’m not asking you to drop the charges,” Albus said. “I’m afraid I’m here for another reason. Amelia seems to be investigating me about something. Maybe several things.”

“I can’t stop that either, Albus,” Cornelius said, chuckling nervously.

“I am not asking you to stop it,” Albus said, “I’m asking you to delay an investigation. For the sake of my magic and my health.”

“Whatsoever do you mean, Albus?” Cornelius asked.

“Is it not obvious, Minister?” Albus asked. “As Headmaster of Hogwarts, I am just as involved in the Tournament as the four champions. My oath is tied to the Goblet of Fire as much as theirs is. If I am not an active participant in the Triwizard Tournament – when it comes to decision making and judging, for example – the Goblet of Fire might punish me. I might lose my magic… or my life.”

“You want me to ask Amelia to delay any investigations she may have on you,” Cornelius said, “Until after the tournament is over?”

“For the sake of my magic and my health – my very life,” Albus said. “The moment the tournament is over, she can open any investigation she wants against me. I would do my due diligence to defend myself, of course.”

Cornelius frowned. “You’re not trying to get out of this, so you can have a good defense by time the Tournament is over, are you?”

Albus sighed. “As long as she does not arrest me or risks my magic and life during the Tournament, she is welcome to investigating me however she wishes. She can arrest me once the Tournament is over, Minister.”

Cornelius tapped his fingers on his desk, then nodded. “I’ll give the order to Amelia. I cannot ask her what she has on you, however. Do not expect me to give you any inside information about her investigation.”

Albus nodded; he could get the information elsewhere “I will not burden you with such troubles, Minister.”

“Very well,” Cornelius said, “I will forbid her to arrest you, or risk your life and magic, before the Triwizard Tournament is over. June 24th, is that correct?”

“It is,” Albus agreed.

“I hope you’re ready by then, old friend,” Cornelius said, “Amelia is – well – even I am wary of crossing her, you understand.”
“She is an impressive young lady,” Albus agreed. “I’ll be prepared by then.”

“Well, if that is all then,” Cornelius said, “I’ll see you on Monday. Unless you find another reason to visit me between now and then.”

“Hopefully it doesn’t come to that,” Albus said. “Good evening, Cornelius.”

“Good evening, Albus,” Cornelius said, “Ask my secretary to meet with me, please.”

Albus bowed his head and turned around.

(Meanwhile…)

Isabella Blishwick waved her wand over her ear cancelling the eavesdropping charm on the vase that was still on the mantle in the Minister’s office. She could barely hold back a grin about what she had just heard. Albus Dumbledore was being investigated by Amelia Bones, and it seemed Dumbledore was quite worried that he might very well be arrested for it! Maybe even go to Azkaban for whatever charges Director Bones could come up with! Now, the old man was trying to delay it for a while so he could come up with a good defense! And he was using his Tournament participation to do it!

This was absolute gold, and something her father needed to know!

As the door opened, and Albus Dumbledore stepped out of the office, Isabella stood up.

“Minister Fudge wishes to see you, my dear lady,” Albus said.

Isabella resisted emitting a healthy snort. Bet Albus felt raw being the Minister’s gopher!

Now you know I feel sometimes, old man! Isabella thought.

“Of course, sir,” she said, “Good evening, sir.”

“And a wonderful evening to you,” Albus said, “Say hello to your father, the Lord Blishwick, for me the next time you see him. Been a while since we last spoke.”

“You might see him before I do, I’m afraid,” Isabella said, “Unless he visits me before the Solstice Session. Sorry, sir, I must meet with Minister Fudge.”

Albus bowed his head in acknowledgement, and Isabella retreated into Fudge’s office.

“Ah, Isabella, there you are!” Cornelius said, smiling, “Please do me a huge favor and find Director Amelia Bones for me. Ask her to meet me as soon as possible!”

“Of course, Minister,” Isabella said. “I will go right now.”

Cornelius smiled and waved her off. She bowed lightly, turned around and headed out of the office. She smiled to herself, as she started off toward the DMLE Headquarters. Things were getting very interesting around here!

“Might have to write to my little brother, Ivan,” Isabella said, “He’s still in Hogwarts. He could start rumors about these investigations and let the whole school know about it!”
Among her four siblings, her fifteen year old brother was the only one younger than her. However, as her father’s only son, he was also first in line for the Head of House Blishwick, so she made sure to keep close with Ivan. After all, if her father got around to trying to arrange a marriage for her, only her little brother could convince her father this was a bad move.

Only her little brother knew that his youngest sister was attracted to witches more than wizards. And only her little brother knew she had a girlfriend.

Who just so happened to be Amelia Bones’ personal secretary, Samantha!

(Fifteen minutes later)

Director Amelia Bones stepped through the door and made her way to the group of Private Holding Cells. Three neighboring cells were currently occupied. Molly Weasley was in the center one, while her daughter, Ginevra, was in the cell to her left, and her son, Ronald, the cell to her right. The cells had iron bars spaced out so that the prisoners could see each other. Kingsley Shacklebolt was seated in a chair.

“Director, good evening,” Kingsley said.

“You’re still here, Kingsley?” Amelia asked. “When are you going home?”

“In a little while, once my replacement comes,” Kingsley said.

“How are they behaving?” Amelia asked. “Any new information?”

Kingsley shook his head. “Any time Ron or Ginny seems to say something – or should I say rant about something – their mother shuts them up. I think she’s afraid of them saying something we don’t know about. She apparently wants to make a deal concerning them, and she doesn’t want them to risk the deal she has in mind. So now, Ginny only sulks and talks to her mother about inconsequential things, and Ron simply complains that he is hungry. I’d be concerned, but he’s mentioned it about five times an hour. Even after he finished his lunch, he said he was hungry fifteen minutes later. I think he’s just bored.”

Amelia resisted rolling her eyes. “Maybe he should have thought about that a long time ago. I am sure both Ron and Ginny are thinking about everything they have done. Which is exactly what we want to happen. I’ll see what Molly wants.”

Amelia walked over to Molly’s cell then conjured a chair a few feet back from the cage’s front and sat down. Molly saw her and stood up from the bed she had been laying in. She walked over to the front of the cell.

“I’m told you wanted to see me, Madam Weasley?” Amelia asked.

“I want to make a deal, Director Bones,” Molly said. “My children are fourteen and thirteen. They do not need to be here. They do not need to go to Azkaban.”

Amelia huffed. “Well, you should have thought about that before you got them involved in a get-rich-quick scheme, Madam Weasley. You should have thought about it before you signed your daughter away in a Betrothal Contract, whether it was illegal or not. You shouldn’t have filled her
head with tales of Harry Potter and the Boy-Who-Lived to a point where she can’t tell the difference between who Harry really is, and who the character in those children’s books is. She’s obsessed with the Boy-Who-Lived, Molly. Because of you. Harry looks so much like that character, that she believes he is the Boy-Who-Lived.”

“So does every other magic-raised child in our society!” Molly huffed.

“Not everyone,” Amelia said, “My niece, Susan, mourns James and Lily Potter and thanks them for their sacrifice every Halloween. She thanks them for protecting their son. She doesn’t believe he had anything to do with… You-Know-Who’s downfall. She once asked me, when she was – oh, six, or so. She goes, ‘Auntie Amelia? What did Harry do to that mean man? Did he throw his nappies at him? Is that why everyone believes he defeated the mean man?’ Tell me, Molly. Who do you believe was more responsible for his downfall? Harry Potter? Or his mother? Think about it What if Ron or Ginny were in that crib? Would it be one of them who defeated him? Or you? I’m sure you know enough protection spells to put around them to save them from certain death.”

“I don’t know what happened that night,” Molly said, “Nobody does. Except maybe Dumbledore.”

“I’ve questioned just how much everyone – including Dumbledore – knows about that night, you know?” Amelia asked. “We have all these history books and stories about what happened in that house in Godric’s Hollow. And yet the only surviving witness was Harry Potter – a fifteen month old baby, who maybe said a handful of clear words at the time. Do you really believe he told anybody about what happened, at fifteen months old? How did anyone know Harry Potter had that scar? Albus Dumbledore probably knew. As did Rubeus Hagrid. He was there that night.”

“Hagrid can’t keep a secret,” Ginny said; she and Ron had been listening in. “He probably got drunk and told everyone.”

“And yet he wasn’t there to see the demise of You-Know-Who,” Amelia said, “So how do you know Harry did it?”

“He did it,” Ginny said, “He saved me from the Chamber of Secrets. That proves he did it that night.”

“If my niece was down there in the Chamber of Secrets, do you believe Harry would have saved her?” Amelia asked.

Ginny frowned. “Maybe. But he saved me.”

“He did,” Amelia asked. “Because you didn’t turn the diary into Dumbledore or McGonagall, and you ended up down there. My niece would have given the diary to me or to Professor Sprout.”

“I doubt it,” Ginny muttered. “You don’t know what it was like, having that diary.”

“Enough!” Molly growled, “I asked you here so I could make you a deal, not to interrogate my children!”

“I’m listening,” Amelia said.

“I will make you a deal,” Molly said, “I know you can’t dose me with Veritaserum in front of the Wizengamot. You can’t use the statements I made under Veritaserum either.”
“I have enough of your testimony and evidence to put you in Azkaban for several years already,” Amelia said, “Without that testimony I got under Truth Serum.”

“I am willing to give my whole testimony – all of it – all the information you got from me,” Molly said. “I am willing to tell the whole truth to the Wizengamot. In return, my children do not go to Azkaban.”

Amelia thought about this. “I will drop every charge against your children, but the Breach on Statute of Secrecy. The ICW would have my job and the Minister’s job if I dropped that charge, as it is our most important law. It would end up with Ron and Ginny’s magic bound with four bindings. That would give them twenty-five percent of their magic left. Enough that they can survive. I will not break their wands. Their magic will be bound until their seventeenth birthday. Since they will not be allowed back in Hogwarts, they will be home-schooled.”

“Arthur wouldn’t be able to stay at home all day!” Molly said, “However… my Great-Aunt, Muriel Prewett. She’s babysat them before. She can stay at home with them. She can home-school them. She’s well-qualified for such a thing.”

“They will not be able to learn practical magics,” Amelia warned, "Only book studies, Potions, and Herbology. With enough studies, they could pass their OWLS and qualify for a seventh year education by the time they turn seventeen.

Molly frowned and considered this. She nodded, after a full minute. “Fine. I agree to this.”

“Molly,” Amelia said, “I’m warning you now. You have more than enough charges against you to place you in Azkaban for several years. If you somehow are able to avoid Azkaban, I will not agree to any deal. Your children will go in front of the Wizengamot, and our society will know exactly what they are guilty of. How do you think society will react to the crimes against Harry James Potter, their hero and savior?”

“They’ll know anyway with my statements!” Molly said.

“Maybe they will,” Amelia said, “Maybe Azkaban would be better for them. They wouldn’t have to deal with the Dementors. They would only have to deal with the atmosphere of Azkaban and the solitude. But at least they would be away from a society who worships the very young man they attempted to manipulate and steal from.”

Molly sighed and shook her head. “My babies cannot go to Azkaban. I will be completely honest with everything I’ve done. Just as long as they do not have to suffer the same as me.”

“If I am satisfied with the results of your trial,” Amelia said, “Then we have a deal. Your children will be in custody of your husband and Great Aunt, and they will be allowed to be home-schooled. But their magic will still be bound, and they will not be allowed to use a wand until their seventeenth birthday.”

“Agreed,” Molly said. “Thank you, Director Bones.”

“Thank me by convincing the Wizengamot to put you in Azkaban for a few years,” Amelia said, “Your children will be staying in these cells until your trial is finished. The results of the trial will decide where they go next. Your trial should take place this Saturday, two days from tomorrow.”

“Fine,” Molly said.
Amelia smiled, stood up and vanished her chair. She walked back over to Kingsley.

“I just got a note from Samantha,” he said, “Isabella Blishwick is outside your office with her. She wants to see you.”

“Oh, good Merlin,” Amelia said, “I better go before those two start snogging outside my office.”

Kingsley chuckled. The relationship between Amelia’s secretary, and the Minister’s secretary was well known around the MLE and Auror Departments.

“Ten Galleons says you’ll catch them snogging when you arrive,” Kingsley said.

“No bet!” Amelia said, then left the Private Holding Cells.

She arrived outside her office five minutes later. Thankfully, the two ladies weren’t snogging. They were simply sitting together, whispering – whether it be sweet nothings, or something else, Amelia didn’t know.

She cleared her throat, and the two women stood up.

“Director Bones,” Isabela Blishwick said, “Minister Fudge wishes to see you in his office… as soon as possible, he said.”

“What a coincidence!” Amelia said, “I was on my way to meet him! Give me a few moments, and let me collect a few things and we can be off. Samantha, keep my food warm until I return.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Samantha said.

Amelia stepped into her office, collected James and Lily’s Final Will and Testament, stuck it into her robes, then walked back out. She followed Isabella out of the DMLE Headquarters.

Ten minutes later, Amelia followed Isabelle into Minister Fudge’s office.

“Amelia, come in!” Cornelius said, “You’re excused, Isabella.”

Isabella bowed and left the room.

“You wished to see me, Minister?” Amelia asked.

“Several minutes ago, Albus Dumbledore came into my office and we had a discussion,” Cornelius said.

Amelia resisted rolling her eyes. “Let me guess, he wants Molly Weasley and her children released from my Holding Cells?”

“So Arthur Weasley’s wife and youngest children are being detained?” Cornelius asked. “Is it true they breached the Statute of Secrecy?”

“Among other things,” Amelia said, “Molly will have a trial on Saturday.”

“Tell me about the breach,” Cornelius said.
“King’s Cross Station, Muggleborn side of Platform Nine and Three Quarters,” Amelia said, “September 1st, 1991. Molly Weasley and her five youngest children – ages ranging from ten to fifteen at the time – decided to take the Muggleborn route to get onto the Hogwarts Express. Molly Weasley loudly talked about Muggles, in a crowd of Muggles, where anybody could hear her. Then she asks her children about the platform, and her youngest, Ginevra Weasley, age ten at the time, pipes up very loudly, ‘Platform Nine and Three Quarters’.

“I’ve learned that Percival, Frederick and George Weasley all complained about the breach, but was blocked from reporting it by outside sources, be it their mother or someone else. Ronald and Ginevra Weasley did nothing to report the breach.

“This was three and a half years ago, and I only learned about it yesterday,” Amelia said, “The witness was a Muggle-raised student who didn’t know about the Statute of Secrecy at the time, and didn’t know any laws had been broken. They reported it to me yesterday. Cornelius, this a Matriarch and youngest child of a Pureblood Minor House, who broke this law. Molly Weasley should have raised her children, teaching them to never risk a breach in the Statute of Secrecy. And she did it on her own, and influenced her own children to do the same! Her youngest daughter was a part of it!”

“Good Merlin, this is terrible,” Cornelius said, “And you said there are other charges?”

“Charges that will be brought forward during the trial,” Amelia said. “Charges which, if she is found guilty, could see Molly Weasley in Azkaban for many years.”

“Go forward with her trial!” Cornelius ordered, “She should know better!”

“Yes, Minister,” Amelia said, “There is something else. Something about her children. It just happened a few minutes ago.”

She explained the details of Molly’s deal that had been made only minutes earlier.

“Magic bound and no use of wands until seventeen for a thirteen and fourteen year old?” Cornelius asked, “I’ll allow it, but only if their mother agrees to her part. If not, those children will be in front of the Wizengamot. The ICW would ruin me if we messed any of this up, Amelia!”

“Completely agreed, Minister,” Amelia said, “Now, what is this about Albus Dumbledore?”

“He is under the impression you are investigating him on a few charges,” Cornelius said.

Amelia sighed. Damn it. She should have known Albus would have heard about it. She wondered if Minerva McGonagall had told him. Ah well, it was bound to come up sooner or later.

“More than a few,” Amelia said.

“Amelia, I must ask you to do me a very big favor,” Cornelius said, “I will owe you big. Stop this investigation.”

“What?” Amelia asked, her voice louder than she intended.

“Only for a few months!” Cornelius said, “Only until the end of the Triwizard Tournament!”
“Are you trying to save face on International Cooperation, sir?” Amelia asked.

“No,” Cornelius said, “I’m trying to save a man from a terrible fate. More terrible than Azkaban. Amelia, Albus Dumbledore is connected to the Goblet of Fire, just as the Champions are. If he is not actively involved in the entire Tournament, he could lose his magic, and maybe even his life. Probably his life! He’s an old man of course, very old!

“Do not misunderstand me. Begin the investigation. Do as much as you can with it. But do not arrest him until the Tournament commences on the evening of June 24th next year! Arrest him June 25th if you must! Just as long as the Goblet of Fire doesn’t kill him!”

Amelia couldn’t believe this. Only Albus Dumbledore could have come up with something like this. He was trying to find a way to get her to stop her investigations on him. He wasn’t going to interfere with the Weasleys. He wanted to be free, so he could have enough time to fight Harry’s Emancipation, and try to find a way to break up Harry and Hermione! Once he got rid of Hermione, then he’d likely try to save Ron and Ginny – or Ginny at the very least! Or he’d find another Boy-Who-Lived fan-girl scapegoat, just to put Harry’s Heir in her belly! He wanted to do all this before Amelia could arrest him!

However.. Cornelius did say he would owe her a big favor. She smirked at that.

“I will do this, however – that big favor is going to have to happen immediately,” Amelia said.

“As long as it doesn’t have to do with Dumbledore, I’ll be open to it,” Cornelius said.

“Earlier today,” Amelia said, “I was given a copy of James and Lily Potter’s Final Will and Testament which was opened early.”

“They penned a Will?” Cornelius asked, blinking. “Of course they did. An Ancient and Noble House – it would almost be required of them! I assume there was something in the Will you want me to know about.”

Amelia removed the Will from her robes and walked over to Cornelius’ desk. She spread the Will out then placed it in front of him.

“Skip down to the Guardianship for Harry James Potter,” Amelia said, “First name.”

Cornelius did and his eyes widened as he read the information.

“Sirius Black?!” Cornelius asked, “Godfather… per… what?!”

“Godfather, per the Godfather Ritual!” Amelia said, “I trust you know what that means?”

“It means… he couldn’t have betrayed the Potters or their son!” Cornelius said, “But.. then.. what happened?”

“Look up at the list of Inheritances,” Amelia said, “Peter Pettigrew’s name.”

“The poor man,” Cornelius muttered, then his eyes widened. “Wait… this says.. no!”

“Sirius Black wasn’t the Secret Keeper, Minister,” Amelia said, “Peter Pettigrew was. Minister, did you know Sirius Black was never given a trial?”
“What?!” Cornelius asked, “He a Pureblood of an Ancient and Most Noble House! If word gets out that he didn’t get a trial!”

“The Purebloods would have a fit,” Amelia said. “Minister, you are not to blame here. Remember who was in charge when this happened. Bagnold was Minister, Bartemius Crouch was in my role. And the Chief Warlock, of course, was –”

“Albus Dumbledore,” Cornelius said.

“Look at the bottom of the Will, sir,” Amelia said, “Look who the Witness of the Will was.”

“Albus Dumbledore,” Cornelius echoed. “He.. he knew Sirius wasn’t the Secret Keeper. Is this why you’re investigating Albus?”

“Among other things,” Amelia said, “Harry Potter lives with Muggles, Minister. Vernon and Petunia Dursley. Petunia is Lily’s sister. Look at the bottom of the guardian list.”

“They forbid the Muggles from raising him,” Cornelius croaked, “Merciful Merlin, Amelia!”

“I have it on good authority this Will was sealed after James and Lily’s deaths,” Amelia said, “By Dumbledore himself. Sir, I could have raised Harry Potter. However, Sirius was first in line. Look at all those good citizens who could have raised Harry Potter! And he was raised by Muggles. Albus Dumbledore put Harry Potter on the Muggle’s doorstep himself!”

“I assume my favor I owe you is to withdraw the Dementors Kiss-On-Sight Order on Black,” Cornelius said, “So you can give him a trial?”

“I will get the word out, so it is in the Daily Prophet tomorrow,” Amelia said. “He could have a trial on Saturday. After Molly Weasley’s even! If we can find him, if we can convince him to come in for his trial by then!”

She smirked. Let’s see what Dumbledore has to say about this!

“Do it!” Cornelius said, “Make sure the article says I am trying to correct a terrible mistake!”

“And what will you do if Dumbledore tries to fight It before Saturday?” Amelia asked.

“I’ll tell him if he fights the trial,” Cornelius said, “I’ll let you march up to Hogwarts with ten Aurors and arrest him. He can have a trial after Sirius Black!”

“Then I agree to not arrest him until either June 25th, or you tell me otherwise,” Amelia said.

“Agreed,” Cornelius said. “Thank you, Director Bones.”

“Always a pleasure, Minister Fudge,” Amelia said.

“Goodness me,” Cornelius said, as he watched Amelia collect the Will, “For some reason, I feel I need to apologize to Harry Potter after reading that Will.”

“He’s done so much for us,” Amelia said, “He could have been a citizen of our society his entire life.”
“Goodness me,” Cornelius said. “If I see him again, face-to-face, I am going to apologize to him.”

“Something tells me you’ll see him sooner rather than later,” Amelia said.

“I hope so!” Cornelius said. “Goodness me…”

“I’ll see you later, sir,” Amelia said.

“Yes, yes, dismissed,” Cornelius said, dismissively.

Amelia smirked as she walked out of the Minister’s office.

Albus Dumbledore wasn’t the only one who could manipulate the Minister of Magic.

Chapter End Notes

I am aware this is probably the last thing my readers wanted when it came to Dumbledore, Ron and Ginny, but this seems to me the obvious way to go. Dumbledore keeping himself out of Amelia’s sights for a while, and Molly protecting her children. Remember, Dumbledore knows nothing about Harry being Lord Potter and Lord Peverell. He's still focused on removing Harry's Emancipation. He can't focus on that with Amelia on his arse. He'll soon discover how bad his plans are failing.

Minerva’s interactions with Dumbledore in this chapter may seem odd – what with her warning Albus about Amelia. But what she was trying to do was get his thoughts away from Harry Potter and Hermione Granger at the moment. Which is, of course, why she didn't tell Albus Amelia had spoken to those two as well. She also was trying to prevent Albus from doing anything about Ron and Ginny, like reversing their expulsion and him bringing them back to Hogwarts by the following morning! No, she wanted him focused on Amelia, and his own selfish desires to keep himself protected from Amelia's investigations. I hope that makes sense.

Next Chapter: The Children of the Great Alliance (and the Great Alliance) story arc begins as Harry receives an interesting letter. Then he gets some helpful advice from Dobby, with almost immediate results! Then he speaks with Neville, Padma and Luna about the Children of the Great Alliance. Then he reads another interesting article from Rita Skeeter – one he had nothing to do with!

How will Dumbledore react this time? Hint: he gets a letter from Cornelius Fudge, before he reads the newspaper, that makes him very fussy! And more!
Letters, Discoveries and Warnings

Chapter Notes

This story has officially passed the 2000 Followers and 1000 Review Milestones on FFN! Once again, thank you for all the reviews and comments you have left in my story. It makes me so happy to read each and every one, and happier that 90-95% are good reviews!

Can you believe it took us 24 chapters to get through a whole week? As you can tell – and perhaps it was obvious already due to my previous stories? – I like slow-burn plots. Meaning that it takes a long time to get through several days in-story. However, saying that, I hope to get to the Yule Ball by Chapter 30. Definitely before Chapter 35!

As for what will happen after the Yule Ball. Well, I am happy to tell you my current plans…

Book 2: Tournament Drama! It will all happen in this same story. There will not be separate sequels. All chapters will be in the same story. Book 2 will go a lot quicker through the year, with time-skips in between various plots. Book 2 will end at the end of the Triwizard Tournament. Book 3 will begin the summer before our heroes’ fifth year. Book 3 is unnamed at the moment, though I am considering it to be ”Order Drama”, or ”Dark Lord Drama” or something like that. We’ll see. Depends on what the plot is like by then.

So as you can see we have a long way to go in this story! I do not know how long it will last – whether it lasts through 7th year, or whatever. So do not ask me how long it will be. I will point you to this author's note.

Warning: Dumbledore and Severus Snape Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Thursday, December 17th, 1994)

As Harry Potter made his way into the main area of his private quarters, after he had finished his morning ablutions, Dobby appeared out of thin air with a scroll of parchment.

"The Great Harry Potter's owl friend, Hedwig, be returning with a response from Lord Castor Greengrass," Dobby said, "Dobby be checking letter over for bad hexes and curses, and there be none."

"Thank you, Dobby," Harry said, as he took the scroll from the house-elf.

He opened the letter and started reading:

To Lord Harry James Potter,

I was very surprised to receive a letter from you the previous evening, and even more surprised by the contents of said letter. However, your letter couldn't have come at a better time. I was already planning on writing to you before this coming weekend anyway.
On Sunday morning, I suddenly remembered some very crucial information that had been kept from me for several years. I remembered the importance and significance of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell. I quickly realized this must have had something to do with you, my Lord. I realized that I – and several friends of mine – were under some rather nefarious enchantments and somehow you had been able to break those enchantments!

Your letter answered some crucial questions I've been asking myself over the past couple of days.

Tuesday evening, I received some information that I believed you needed to know. Rita Skeeter's article about your possible Emancipation angered your Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. Lord Potter, I must warn you. Do not trust Albus Dumbledore. His suspected plans for you would only lead to your ruin, and, perhaps, the ruin of many others, especially your friends and Allies. On Tuesday, after Rita Skeeter's Article came out, Albus Dumbledore met with Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, and plotted to remove your Emancipation. He had planned to do this next Monday at the Winter Solstice Session in the Wizengamot Council. I was going to warn you about this very thing before this weekend.

However, it seems – owing to your letter – you're already on top of this! Very good, Lord Potter. Very good, indeed! Reclaiming your seats at the start of the Wizengamot Council meeting on Monday will stop Dumbledore's plans for blocking your Emancipation before he can even begin them! I trust you have the Lord's Rings of Houses Potter and Peverell. Very good, My Lord. If you had not claimed them, Dumbledore might have had an opening to block your Emancipation. But with your Lord's Rings accepting you at your age, there is no substantial evidence that your Emancipation should be taken from you! Your Rings are proof that you are ready for the responsibilities of being not one, but two Heads of House!

As for your decisions for your Proxies. Amelia Bones is a fine choice for the Proxy of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. She is a very trustworthy witch, very good in the political circle and somebody you do not want to mess around with! She's a wonderful Ally to have, but if you make her your enemy, she can be worse than Voldemort sometimes!

As for the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell, I would be most agreeable, and most pleased, to be the Proxy. Thank you for giving me this honor, even if you do not know me as well as you would have if your dear parents had survived that Halloween night. When you ask me to be your Proxy, officially, during the Wizengamot Council meeting, I will be happy to officially accept!

As for your plans for the Children of the Great Alliance, I happily agree with your idea to meet with them. However, I would also make this request of you. If you will, please invite Ivan Blishwick, a Fifth Year Ravenclaw, and Tracey Davis, a Slytherin in your year, and best friend of my daughter, Daphne. Houses Blishwick and Davis would have been in the Great Alliance if your father had not passed away that tragic Halloween night. There were already talks in place for both Houses to join the Alliance. If you need proof of this, simply ask Professor McGonagall, who is also a member of the Great Alliance. She would know that Houses Blishwick and Davis were in talks to join the Great Alliance. It was public knowledge with most of the Great Alliance, prior to your parents' deaths.

With your return as Lord Potter, and leader of the Great Alliance, we can once again reopen talks to bring those Houses into the Great Alliance. Inviting Ivan Blishwick and Tracey Davis to the Children of the Great Alliance meeting will allow them to give their fathers, the Lords of their Houses proof that you are agreeable to welcome them into the Great Alliance. Simply ask my daughter, Daphne, to invite Ivan and Tracey to the meeting. Ivan, my wife's youngest sibling and only brother, is Daphne's Uncle, and is next-in-line for Lord Blishwick.
Lord Potter, I was a very close friend of your parents. My father and your grandfather were two of the Founders of the Great Alliance. Your father and I grew up together. My wife and your mother were very good friends in Hogwarts. If you had grown up with your parents, we would have known each other well by now, and you would have been good friends with both of my daughters by now, as well as the rest of the Children of the Great Alliance.

Even though my daughters are in House Slytherin, as is Tracey Davis, I want you to know that you can trust all three of them. I know this might be difficult, given you are a Gryffindor and there is a legendary rivalry between the two houses. But my daughters have given me their word that they have never bullied you, or shunned you, like other Slytherins they mentioned, such as Draco Malfoy. Both assured me that neither of them wore badges that insulted you. You probably know what they mean more than I would. You can consider them your Slytherin Allies, and perhaps you could even consider them friends in the near future. I give you my word.

I miss your parents and your grandparents very much, and I think of them often. My wife and I, and much of the Great Alliance, took part in a Period of Mourning for an entire month after your parents died. We think about them, and you, every Halloween. Even if we did not know they were Allies of ours, because of those nefarious enchantments, they were our friends. We knew you as a baby, and I look forward to reuniting with you again. Perhaps that will come this Monday.

Wishing you well in all your endeavors,

Lord Castor Greengrass

Head of the Most Noble House of Greengrass

Harry closed the long letter and smiled. Lord Castor Greengrass sounded like a wonderful man. Somebody he would be happy to call a friend and Ally. Now that he thought of it, Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Davis were never part of the Slytherin students that bullied him and Hermione. They mostly were neutral toward him. Now, they could be his Allies and friends.

"If only I figure out how to solve where to hold a meeting with the Children of the Great Alliance!" Harry grumbled.

Since Amelia had made the suggestion to meet with the Children, he had been trying to come up with a better option than having to bring all the Children into the Lion's Den. But he couldn't figure out a good place where someone like Albus Dumbledore or Severus Snape couldn't walk in on them. Dumbledore definitely wouldn't appreciate him meeting with this particular group of students.

"Dobby is sorry he be dropping eaves," Dobby said, "But the Great Harry Potter be needing a room for a meeting with students?"

"A secret meeting, Dobby," Harry said, "One that Dumbledore or Snape can't stick their large noses in."

"Dobby knows the perfect place, Great Harry Potter!" Dobby exclaimed. "Dobby heard tell of it from the other house-elves when he came to Hogwarts, sir. It is known by us as the Come and Go Room, sir, or else as the Room of Requirement!"

"Why?" Harry asked, curiously.

"Because it is a room that a person can only enter," Dobby said, seriously, "when they be having real need of it. Sometimes it is there, and sometimes it is not, but when it appears, it is always equipped for the seeker's needs. It is located on the same floor as the Lion's Den, in front of the portrait of the
dancing trolls! Dobby can show it to Great Harry Potter and his Hermy, before you be on your way to Great Hall for breakfast!"

"Great!" Harry said, "Let's get going then!"

He placed his letter from Lord Castor Greengrass in his knapsack and shouldered the bag. Then he walked out of his Quarters. Hermione, as per usual, was already waiting for him.

"Ready for breakfast?" Hermione asked, "I'm eager to hear if everyone knows Ron and Ginny got expelled. I couldn't believe it when Professor McGonagall told us last night! I thought everyone would have known about it at dinner! I thought we'd be hearing about it from Padma!"

"I am ready," Harry said, "But we need to make a pitstop first."

"Oh?" Hermione asked, curiously.

"Dobby has found us a good room for our planned Children of the Great Alliance meeting," Harry said, "Apparently it is here on the seventh floor. Something better than the Private Common Room!"

"Brilliant!" Hermione said.

Harry took Hermione's hand and they headed off out of the Lion's Den. They made their way down the seventh floor corridor, and soon found the portrait of the dancing trolls. Dobby appeared a moment later.

"Alright, Dobby," Harry said, "Where is this room?"

"There!" Dobby said.

Dobby was pointing at a blank wall.

"Erm… Dobby?" Harry asked.

"Great Harry Potter must be walking in front of this wall," Dobby said. "He be walking back and forth three times while thinking of what he wants the room to be."

Harry looked at Hermione, who shrugged with a very skeptical look on her face.

"Erm…okay," Harry said, "If you're sure."

"Dobby be sure," Dobby said. "This be where Winky be staying over the past few days."

"Is Winky still there?" Harry asked.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you!" Hermione said, "Mallory showed up with Winky this morning! Winky is very healthy and ready to work for me!"

"Excellent!" Harry said.

He released Hermione's hand, then walked over to the wall.

*I need a secret meeting room to meet with several students – maybe a dozen*, Harry thought as he walked back and forth in front of the wall, three times.

Just as he was starting to feel very stupid, he heard Hermione emit a loud squeak. He looked at her, and found her looking at the wall behind him. He turned and found there was no longer a wall but
very large double doors. Harry reached for the doorknobs, gulped, then opened them. He walked in the room, followed by Hermione and Dobby.

His eyes widened as he looked around. It looked like a large meeting room in a business office of a big corporation. There were plushy chairs sitting around a long mahogany table. Two large candelabras were hanging over the table.

"This is amazing!" Hermione gushed.

"Brilliant!" Harry said, "Absolutely brilliant!"

"And this room can do anything, Dobby?" Hermione asked.

"Within reason, Dobby be thinking," Dobby said, "Dobby suggest you be experimenting with it sometime to see its limits."

"Harry, we could make a swimming pool here!" Hermione said, "So you can learn to swim for the Second Task!"

"It can be doing that, Dobby be believing," Dobby said.

"Does Dumbledore know of this room?" Harry asked.

"According to the Kitchen Elves, Dumbledore be finding this place once," Dobby said, "But he thought it was a bathroom and had never come to this place again. Great Harry Potter simply need be telling room not to let Dumbledore or Greasy Bat be finding room."

Harry and Hermione snickered at Dobby's description of Snape.

"Brilliant!" Harry repeated. "Thank you, Dobby! For all of this!"

"Dobby be happy to be helping!" Dobby exclaiming. "But Dobby be thinking Great Harry Potter and his Hermy be needing to go to breakfast."

"Right!" Harry said, "How do you cancel the room's enchantments?"

"Just walk out of the room," Dobby said, "It will cancel itself when the door closes, as long as nobody be standing inside the room."

Harry nodded, then led Hermione out of the room. He quickly realized something. They were not standing on the seventh floor anymore.

"Where are we?" Harry asked.

"This be the first floor," Dobby said, "Great Harry Potter be thinking he need to get to Great Hall quickly for breakfast, and the Come and Go Room be giving him what he needs. Unfortunately, Dobby be fearing the enchantment only works this way from the inside. To be getting inside the room, you must be on the seventh floor across from the dancing trolls. There be no other entrance, only many exits."

Harry turned and found a bare wall. "That's brilliant!"

"You're saying that a lot today, Harry," Hermione said, giggling.

"I am," Harry agreed, "Come on, I'll tell you about Lord Castor Greengrass' letter I got earlier while we go to the Great Hall."
Hermione smiled. "I had wondered if Lord Greengrass had replied yet."

Harry told her all about the letter's contents as they walked hand-in-hand toward the Great Hall. She rolled her eyes at the confirmation of Dumbledore working to overturn the Emancipation, but since they already had figured he would be doing that, she didn't react too badly. She was quite happy when he told her that Lord Greengrass happily accepted to Proxy House Peverell. Then her eyes widened when Harry told her about Houses Blishwick and Davis, and she smiled when he told her of Lord Greengrass' opinion of his daughters and Tracey.

"Lord Greengrass is right, you know," Hermione said, "Daphne and Tracey have never bothered us. In fact, both of them are always pretty nice to me in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. I truly believe they'll be good friends to us if we give them the chance. I don't know anything about this Ivan Blishwick though. Maybe Padma and Luna knows more, if he's a Ravenclaw and was already a possible contender for a Child of the Great Alliance?"

"We'll ask them at breakfast," Harry said, "I was already going to get their advice about the Children of the Great Alliance."

Hermione agreed with this. "It is a fine idea."

Harry smiled and squeezed his girlfriend's hand. Soon, they stepped into the Great Hall and walked over to the Ravenclaw Table once again. Even though Ron and Ginny were expelled, there were still issues with Gryffindor House. Professor McGonagall hadn't given them any of the letters from those Gryffindors who were expected to write apologies. Then again, the letters were due by Saturday at the latest, and Professor McGonagall had been rather busy all week. So, in reality, there could have been a great pile of letters and essays already turned in by the Gryffindors. Those letters just hadn't made their way to Harry and Hermione yet.

Even then, Harry needed to talk to Padma Patil and Luna Lovegood, so he and Hermione, once again, decided to sit at the Ravenclaw Table. Neville Longbottom was sitting with Luna, like he had been over the last few days. When Harry and Hermione sat down across from Padma, Luna and Neville, they noticed Padma looked very happy.

"Get some good news, Padma?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know if she's happy about Ron and Ginny Weasley's expulsion from Hogwarts," Luna said, "Or that she finally has a date to the Yule Ball."

"Oh?" Harry asked, "Who is the lucky man who gets to accompany you to the Ball, Padma?"

"Ivan Blishwick," Padma said, "He's a fifth year and fellow Ravenclaw."

Harry blinked. Well that was quite the coincidence. "Ivan Blishwick?"

"Yes," Padma said, "Do you know him?"

"Let's just say I received a letter today in which he was mentioned in it," Harry said, then cleared his throat. "Padma Patil, Luna Loveood, and Neville Longbottom, you're looking at the new Leader of the Great Alliance."

Padma and Neville's eyes widened. Luna's wide eyes were normal, so Harry wasn't sure how she had reacted.

"I am planning a meeting with every member of the Children of the Great Alliance," Harry continued, "To take place this Saturday sometime between breakfast and lunch."
"That's… unexpected," Padma said. "I had no idea you knew about the Great Alliance. Wait… how did I not remember until now that House Potter was the Founding House of the Great Alliance?"

"All will be explained at the meeting, Padma," Harry said.

"Why have you never brought this up before, Harry?" Neville asked.

"I just discovered it recently, Neville," Harry said. "I was trying to figure out when I could arrange a meeting with the Children. Three days before the Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot Council sounds like a proper time. It will give you enough time to contact your parents and guardians about the topics we will discuss during the meeting. The letter I received today advised me that I should invite Ivan Blishwick and Tracey Davis to the meeting as well. Houses Blishwick and Davis were in talks to join the Great Alliance before my father died.

"The letter I received was from Lord Castor Greengrass. Ivan Blishwick is his wife's youngest sibling, and Uncle to Daphne and Astoria Greengrass. He asked me to speak to Daphne and ask her to invite Ivan and Tracey to the meeting. Unless… you would like to ask Ivan, Padma?"

Padma shook her head. "Daphne knows him better than I do. It was a surprise when he asked me. But maybe he knew about his family's possible connections to the Great Alliance."

"I'm going to assume the three of you are close with the members of the Children of the Great Alliance?" Harry asked.

"We are," Neville said, "We grew up together. When the Great Alliance held meetings, we Children always spent time together in what is known as an Heir's Room. An Heir's Room basically describes a room where all the children – the sons and daughters of the Lords and Ladies in attendance for meetings or parties - spend their time, when not having a meal. So yes, we're all quite familiar with most of the Children of the Great Alliance."

"Would you three be willing to tell most of the Children about the meeting I'm planning?" Harry asked. "Simply tell them to meet me on the Seventh Floor across from the Portrait of those dancing trolls, on Saturday at nine-o-clock in the morning."

"Astoria Greengrass probably won't be here," Luna said, "She's a first year this year. She'll probably be going home."

"Her sister would probably consider her too young to take part in a meeting anyway," Padma said.

"I'll speak to Daphne about the meeting," Harry asked. "So that I can talk to her about Tracey and Ivan."

"Are you sure?" Neville asked. "She is a Slytherin. Will you even be able to approach her? You know, without attracting attention from Snape, Malfoy and the rest of the Slytherins? She and I are House Allies and even I am sometimes terrified to approach her. Even outside of Hogwarts!"

"Daphne and I are… acquaintances… in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes," Hermione said, "She'll let me approach her. I can then ask her to meet with Harry, and tell her this is Great Alliance business."

"You're not a Child of the Great Alliance, Hermione," Padma said, "This could be seen as committing a social faux-pas, you know?"

"Let's just say she's in the same situation as Tracey Davis and Ivan Blishwick," Harry said, cryptically. "All will be explained on Saturday."
Padma frowned and considered this. "It might work if you tell that to Daphne, I suppose. Say, why did you two not look so surprised about Ron and Ginny Weasley's expulsion?"

"Professor McGonagall told us about it last night," Harry said. "It was after dinner, so we couldn't spread it around at dinner."

"Yeah, well, someone spread it around between dinner and breakfast," Padma said.

"Fred and George, maybe?" Harry asked, "Professor McGonagall said she informed them."

"It could be them," Neville said, "Though they did seem… quieter than usual. Maybe they told Lee Jordan and he started the rumor?"

"How did Seamus and Dean react?" Harry asked. "They must have found it odd Ron wasn't in the dormitory?"

"We've been mostly ignoring Ron over the past several days since you left the dormitory, Harry," Neville said, shrugging. "We got tired, real quickly, about his grumbling about the two of you. Seamus told him to shut up, and it started a big argument between Seamus and Ron. Then Dean got in the middle of it. Ron soon shut up once he was being double-teamed, and then we all ignored each other. You know, now that I think on it, they did seem rather happy last night. Didn't tell me why. Maybe they heard Ron had been expelled."

"Do you know why he and his sister were expelled?" Padma asked.

"Something about breaching the Statute of Secrecy," Harry said, vaguely.

Padma blinked then whistled. "Yep, that would do it!"

"Definitely," Luna said, "Seems odd Ginny would do that though. I know her parents taught her to respect the Statute of Secrecy. I remember one day, back when we were friends, that she was rather paranoid about walking through the Muggle part of Ottery St. Catchpole, because she didn't want to risk breaching the Statute of Secrecy. We were about seven then, I think. What would have made her breach it, I wonder?"

Before anyone could reply to Luna's question, the familiar sounds of hundreds of owls arriving with post was heard and everyone looked up as the Owls flew down to various students and staff. Two owls made their way to Harry and Hermione and dropped two copies of the newest edition of the Daily Prophet toward them. Harry and Hermione caught them before they could land on their breakfast plates.

Harry unrolled the newspaper and nearly yelled in shock at the sight of Sirius Black's wanted poster on the front page of the Daily Prophet. For a mere moment, he had thought Sirius had done something stupid after talking with Amelia, like going out to meet with her and had been caught. Therefore he was quite relieved and happy after reading the title of the article.

**SIRUS BLACK: NOT AS BLACK AS HIS NAME? BLACK TO RECEIVE NEW TRIAL IN FRONT OF THE WIZENGAMOT, THIS SATURDAY! KISS-ON-SIGHT ORDER DROPPED! 'NEW EVIDENCE' PLACES SIRIUS BLACK'S GUILT IN QUESTION!**

*Written by Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet Star Reporter*

Thirteen years ago, Sirius Black was put in Azkaban after charged with leading James and Lily Potter to their deaths, and the murder of Peter Pettigrew and
massacre of twelve Muggles. But is he truly guilty of these crimes?

Director Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, in a written statement given exclusively to this journalist, says 'no'.

"New evidence has been brought to light that questions whether Sirius Black is truly guilty of the crimes he was accused of committing thirteen years ago after the terrible events of October 31st, 1981. It has also come to light that Black might have never actually received a trial. This is a travesty!"

A travesty indeed. Sirius Black is first-in-line for consideration of Lord Black, the Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black, which currently actually has no active Head of House. What does this mean for other Heads of House when the threat of getting arrested, only to end up in Azkaban without a trial?

Which brings up another question. What does this mean for the other Azkaban prisoners whose guilt might be in question. Did these prisoners receive trials? Or are there more residents of Azkaban who may be innocent and have needlessly suffered under the terrible effects of the Dementors?

While Sirius Black's whereabouts are unknown at the time, Director Amelia Bones hopes that Black will turn himself in before Saturday, so he can receive a trial at the pre-arranged date and time. Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge has revoked the Kiss-On-Sight order and has ordered all Dementors to be returned to Azkaban.

"It is the mistake of the previous administration which caused Sirius Black to be placed in Azkaban without a trial," Minister Fudge said in a written statement, clearly ready and willing to throw former Minister Millicent Bagnold under the bus, "I have asked Director Bones and our good people in the DMLE and Wizengamot to give Sirius Black a chance he didn't receive thirteen years ago. A chance to go in front of the Wizengamot and give his defense and story about what truly took place during those terrible events on Halloween of 1981. I am doing this in hopes to make up for the past mistakes of a previous administration, and to assure that this kind of thing will never happen again."

This reporter has discovered that former Minister, Millicent Bagnold, isn't the only one to blame for these mistakes. Bartemius Crouch, former Head of the DMLE, and current Head of the Department of International Cooperation, and Albus Dumbledore, the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, among his many other titles, are also said to be considered responsible for placing Sirius Black in Azkaban without a proper trial.

Bartemius Crouch, who is reported to be taking a few sick days from his important job, and Albus Dumbledore, were unavailable to comment.

Sirius Black’s trial – if he shows up – will take place on Saturday afternoon in front of the entire Wizengamot in Courtroom 10.

Readers can be sure that the results of the Trial, with all the juicy details, will be available on Sunday!
Harry grinned as he closed the newspaper. He knew telling Amelia Bones about Sirius' innocence would get answers, he just didn't know it would happen so soon! Of course, before yesterday, he knew nothing about how close Sirius and Amelia were. It certainly sounded as if they could have been married – maybe even had one, or more children by now - had things gone better back then. Harry hoped their old romance could be rekindled once Sirius was a free man. Both Sirius and Amelia deserved it.

Harry looked up toward the Head Table, wondering what Dumbledore's reaction would be to Rita Skeeter's article and he nearly laughed out loud. Albus was looking wild-eyed, but not at the Daily Prophet. He was staring at a post owl which was offering him a letter.

Whatever was in that letter was bad news for the Headmaster. Apparently the Headmaster knew it, without having to open the letter. Oh, how he wished he could know what the letter said.

(A couple minutes prior…)

Albus Dumbledore slammed the newest edition of the Daily Prophet down on his half-empty plate of breakfast. Aside from Minerva emitting an annoyed huff, none of the other staff reacted to this. Most were just used to the antics of the Headmaster.

Albus had expected Rita Skeeter to have an article in today's Daily Prophet that would set his teeth on edge, but he thought it would be about the arrest of Molly Weasley and her youngest two children, or perhaps their expulsion from Hogwarts.

He certainly did not expect it to be about a question of Sirius Black's guilt, a withdrawal of the Kiss-On-Sight Order and a scheduled trial for the man! Out of all of the recent Rita Skeeter articles, this was the most damning for him. Neither the 'Second Task Human Hostages', nor the 'Emancipation Speculation" article had been as damning as this!

Aside from Amelia's apparent investigation against him, nothing was more worrisome or more stressful than this! Not even the arrest of Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley was this damning, even though they could give up a lot of information about him! While Amelia couldn't arrest him until the end of the Tournament, she was still allowed to investigate him.

It was in that instant he realized… Amelia Bones was responsible for this new problem in his life. He remembered that Amelia Bones and Sirius Black had been involved in a deeply romantic relationship. They could have been married – even had kids – like many of their friends, if they had decided not to put it off until after Voldemort had been defeated. After all, it had been Albus who had influenced Bartemius Crouch to put Amelia on paid-time off after James and Lily's deaths, so she wouldn't be involved in Sirius Black's investigation.

Now it seemed Amelia had decided to open up old wounds. Somehow she had discovered Sirius hadn't had a trial. But how? Of course… as the Head of a very important Department, she would be allowed to search the VIP files in the Hall of Records. She must have gotten curious about Sirius and had found out he hadn't had a trial! Albus had tried to cover this up back then, by trying to add a record into the file making it appear Sirius did have a trial. But the record would always vanish itself, because it wasn't 'factual'. So Sirius Black's file had ended up in the VIP files. He hadn't counted on Amelia Bones, the one person who could one day decide to investigate Sirius Black's files, to do exactly that!

He needed to get to the Ministry again. He needed to speak to Cornelius again. He was about to turn to Minerva to tell her he'd be away from the castle again, when suddenly an owl landed in front of him on the table. Albus' left eye twitched, behind his spectacles, as he stared at the owl. He
recognized the owl, of course. It was Cornelius Fudge's personal owl. Cornelius never sent him a letter during the breakfast run. It was always early in the morning or after breakfast.

This meant bad news. This meant the Minister had waited to do it until now. This meant he had done it for a specific purpose.

Albus untied the scroll of parchment and unrolled it. The owl flew away, which unsettled Albus more. The Minister didn't want a response to the contents of this letter. He began to read the letter.

_From The Office of British Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge_

Albus,

If you haven't read Rita Skeeter's headlining article in the Daily Prophet today, put this letter down and read it.

I will assume from this point that you have read this letter. I have already predicted you would likely wish to meet with me in my office again, so I decided I would stop you before you left the castle.

Albus, do not try to convince me to stop Sirius Black from receiving a trial. I will give you two reasons why.

First, is the fact that Sirius Black never received a trial after his arrest. When you, and Millicent and Bartemus decided to throw Black into Azkaban without a trial in '81, did you even think of the precedence it would have when it was discovered! Lucius Malfoy stepped into my office today, and I thought he was going to try to block Sirius Black's trial, because his son is in line for Lord Black. He did not stop it. He actually supports it, Albus! Can you believe that?! Do you know why? Because if Sirius isn't given a trial, it will create a fear in Purebloods. Not just Purebloods, but Lords of Noble and Ancient Houses, Albus! The most important citizens in our society! If I did not agree to give Sirius Black a trial, I should just resign now because I would be harassed for the rest of my time in office from my peers in the Wizengamot about this very topic! The trial will happen! Do not try to stop it from happening!

Second reason. You did not tell me why Director Bones is investigating you. She said there were many reasons. This was the one reason she gave me! I was shocked when I discovered you were responsible for this! I did not expect this of you! I am starting to regret telling Director Bones she needs to delay arresting you.

Listen to me, Albus, and listen good! If I get any inclination that you are purposefully trying to stop a Lord of an Ancient and Most Noble House from being given his Ministry-given Rights, I will personally order Director Bones to take ten Aurors to Hogwarts and arrest you, then put you in front of the Wizengamot, where we will discover just what Director Bones is investigating you for!

You're lucky I'm allowing you to attend the trials of, not only Sirius Black, but Molly Weasley as well. I should just tell you to remain at Hogwarts and prepare for the Winter Solstice Session on Monday. But I want you to attend Sirius Black's trial. I want you to know that I know why Amelia Bones is investigating you. I won't tell you anymore today. You'll have to find it out when everyone else does!

I'll see you on Saturday,

Cornelius O. Fudge

British Minister of Magic

Albus resisted ripping the letter into shreds. How dare Cornelius defy him like this? If it wasn't for
him, Cornelius wouldn't have lasted a year in office as Minister! Damn Fudge and Damn Amelia Bones. Amelia had told Cornelius something about Sirius Black. But what?! What did Cornelius know that would come out on Saturday during Sirius Black's trial? Wait… was it possible? Did Amelia somehow discover that Sirius Black was not only Harry Potter's Godfather, but had participated in the Godfather Ritual with James, Lily and Harry Potter? If she knew about this, she would have realized Sirius Black could not have been Secret Keeper, and have given up the Secret. He would have been dead before he could confront Peter Pettigrew.

"Minerva, when Director Bones was here yesterday," Albus asked, "Was Sirius Black ever mentioned by her, or to her?"

"I do not know, Albus," Minerva said.

"Were the events that happened here at Hogwarts surrounding last June ever brought up?" Albus asked.

"Not in my presence," Minerva said, "However, Ron Weasley was involved in those events. But if she had gotten it out of Ronald Weasley, while here at Hogwarts, she would have spoken to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, as they were also involved in those events. Maybe Director Bones got it out of him during his interrogations at the Ministry?"

Of course! How could he be so stupid! Of course that is how she found out. Ron must have told her about Scabbers, Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black – and all those events at the end of third year. Somehow Amelia had been able to overcome the enchantments in the wards that stopped any student from discussing certain events that happened in the school! Somehow she had been able to get Ronald Weasley to give up the story! She must know Peter Pettigrew is alive, and therefore she must have come to realize what really happened back in '81!

And Albus couldn't do a thing about it. He had to take Cornelius' threats seriously. Cornelius was obviously angry at him for being responsible for a Pureblood of an important house being put in Azkaban without a trial. Especially since he was friends with Lucius Malfoy. Albus wasn't so surprised that Lucius had complained. The man could have been in Azkaban if he hadn't been able to use the Imperius Defense in front of the Wizengamot. He was obviously quite worried that his investigation might be reopened. He was trying to save his own face, instead of trying to get his son to be the new Lord Black.

Then there was Cornelius' threat. The threat that Amelia Bones could show up at any time – even before the end of the Triwizard Tournament, and arrest him and put him in front of the Wizengamot! Albus knew he was trapped. Amelia wouldn't pass up such an opportunity. Especially if she had gotten a lot of crucial information from Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley, as he suspected.

Wait… why did Cornelius mention Molly's trial and not Ron and Ginny's trials? What was going on with the two youngest Weasley children? Were they being let off, because they were minors? No, Cornelius wouldn't allow it, since they had been arrested for Breaching the Statute of Secrecy. He had just said that the previous day hadn't he?

There was no way he could find out at the moment. He was forbidden from meeting the Minister. And he wasn't about to demand answers from Amelia Bones! None of his connections in the MLE and Auror Departments had given him any information about the Weasleys. Which meant Amelia might have suspicions about him having possible spies inside the Ministry, which would make her hackles rise and make her become very cautious about who she gave certain information to. This meant he was going to have trouble in the future as well, when it came to finding out what she was investigating him on. Damn it!
He cleared his plate of breakfast, then stood up and headed out of the Great Hall, before someone like Harry Potter – who would surely be curious about his part in blocking Sirius Black from originally getting a trial – would begin asking him questions he didn't want to answer.

When he stepped into the Entrance Hall, he stopped in his tracks when he saw Severus Snape leaning against a wall and staring at him. The front page of the Daily Prophet, including the depiction of Sirius Black's screaming face, was staring at him. Severus' normally pale face was red and purple.

"Tell me you can prevent Black from getting a trial, Albus," Severus growled. "Tell me you're about to go to the Ministry to tell Fudge to stop this farce of a trial from ever taking place, Albus."

"I am not, Severus," Albus said. "Cornelius sent me a letter, which I only received minutes ago. He expressly forbid me from interfering in Black's trial. He even threatened to order Amelia Bones and ten Aurors to come here and arrest me if I even attempted to interfere. I already had to request the Minister to stop Director Bones from arresting me. I couldn't stop her from investigating me, unfortunately. But she cannot arrest me – without Cornelius' permission – until after the end of the Tournament."

"Let me guess," Severus sneered. "You used the Goblet of Fire as an excuse. You made the Minister believe you would be... punished... if you were somehow parted from your Tournament responsibilities."

"Indeed, I did," Albus said, "Well done, Severus."

"Yes, well done," Severus said, "Until Bartemius Crouch's sickness continues to prevent him from showing up for his responsibilities and he continues to live, even after missing such responsibilities."

"Perhaps, sometime, you can visit Bartemius to see if he is well," Albus said.

"Perhaps," Severus sneered. "Just tell me when I should arrange to visit your old friend to... check up on him."

"I'll consider when such a time is necessary," Albus said.

_Bartemius has already announced he won't be attending the Yule Ball, _Albus mused. _Which, of course, is one of the responsibilities of a Tournament official. Perhaps Severus should give the man a Christmas gift he'll never forget. Some type of... Potion maybe? To cure the man's sickness, of course._

"I am sorry I cannot prevent Sirius Black's trial, my boy," Albus said, "However, it might present new opportunities. I have been considering bringing back the Order of the Phoenix. Perhaps, if he becomes a free man, I can... convince him to go on a mission or two for me. Maybe try to recruit some new members for the Order."

"Maybe Black and Lupin can go find some... werewolves... to convince," Severus said. "If they succeed, good for them, and good for us. If they were to perish... it would certainly be a tragedy."

"That it would," Albus agreed. "Good day, Severus. I am sure you need to prepare for your first lesson of the day."

"Good day, Headmaster," Severus said.

He turned and, with billowing cloak, headed back toward the dungeons. Albus sighed and headed in the direction of the Grand Staircase. He needed to work on damage control.
At least there was a silver lining in the grey clouds that had been raining on him over the past few days.

His plans to block Harry Potter's Emancipation were, thankfully still in play. Nobody who would oppose such a thing had discovered that yet.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Albus, if only that were true!

And so begins the story arc of the Children of the Great Alliance, and the Great Alliance itself. And we finally find out who Padma's going with to the Yule Ball. Yes, it is an Original Character, as I couldn't figure out who else she could go with. Besides, at least her date has some significance in the future of the story, as a fellow Child of the Great Alliance.

So there's the answer for those of you wondering how Albus' Goblet of Fire defense was going to slip up when it came to Bartemius Crouch missing out on his responsibilities. The answer: it isn't.

So Severus Snape finally gets a big scene in this story! Sorry I haven't had much to do with him in this story yet. He'll get more significance sooner or later.

Next Chapter: Harry and Hermione find out from McGonagall – who found out from Amelia Bones – what the fate of Ron and Ginny will be. Then Harry and Hermione finds a way to speak to Daphne Greengrass without those pesky Slytherins finding out. Then we skip to Saturday morning, and the start of a very busy Saturday! Maybe we'll have a fluffy, romantic scene between Harry and Hermione somewhere.
A Question of Betrothal

Chapter Notes

Unfortunately, the busy Saturday does not begin in this chapter. McGonagall's discussion in this chapter paved way for – well – you'll see. There's a reason the chapter is titled this way!

Happy Mother's Day to all mothers, especially my own. In honor of this holiday, I introduce you to one of the better mothers in this fine story! By coincidence, the in-story date this mother is introduced just so happens to be my own mother's birthday.

Warning: Fem-Slash (Brief Kissing Scene)

(Thursday, December 17th, 1994)

Harry Potter couldn't believe the difference a week made. One week ago, he was sitting there at this very spot in the Transfiguration Classroom, while transfiguring a guinea fowl into a guinea pig. One week ago, at this point in time, Hermione Granger was simply his best and most faithful friend. One week ago, at this time, he still considered Ron a friend, if only a fair-weathered friend. Now, here he was in the Transfiguration Classroom, relaxing, having finished his end-of-term Transfiguration exam ten minutes ago. Hermione Granger was now his girlfriend and date to the Yule Ball. And Ron Weasley? His ex-best friend was sitting in a DMLE Holding Cell, no longer a Hogwarts student.

Yes, what a difference a week made.

He looked over at Hermione, who, ever since she had finished her own Transfiguration exam fifteen minutes ago, had been going over her notes for the Defense exam that would take place after lunch. Even though her recently-unblocked eidetic memory made the need to study for a test unnecessary, she still believed she needed to study for the exam.

He blushed pink when he noticed her looking at him, with a thoughtful smile.

“What?” she asked.

“Just thinking what a difference a week made,” Harry said, “At this time last week –”

“You were still my best friend instead of boyfriend and date to the Ball,” Hermione said, grinning. “Yes, that very thought did cross my mind after I had finished my exam.”

“You too, huh?” Harry asked. “Feels like the last week has been longer than normal.”

“Well, so much has happened,” Hermione said.

“Yeah, I was just thinking about all of it,” Harry said.

“No regrets?” Hermione asked.
“Aside from the regret that I hadn’t asked you out months ago?” Harry replied, then shook his head, “No, not really. Even being in the Triwizard Tournament has brought good things. I might not have asked you so quickly, if I hadn’t been a Champion, and wasn’t expected to have a partner to open the Ball with. By the time I did get around to asking you --”

"I might have already had a date,” Hermione said, she bit her lip, looking thoughtful; then she smiled. “Or maybe I would have waited, hoping you would ask me.”

“Or maybe Ron and Ginny’s plans would have gone into fruition, and we would be falling for their traps,” Harry said, raising an eyebrow.

“True – I hadn’t considered that,” Hermione said, frowning; then she smiled again, “Yes, I suppose there are some good things about you being stuck in a dangerous tournament.”

Harry smiled, but any reply he had was interrupted by Professor McGonagall clearing her throat loudly.

“I do believe the last exam has been turned in,” McGonagall said. “Very good, all of you. I believe all of you in here aren’t leaving for Christmas Break until the day after the Yule Ball, so there is no need for any well-wishes for those of you going home this Saturday. I will just say to enjoy yourselves over the next couple weeks of your break, and to come back expecting to work just as hard as usual in my class. We’ll be moving on to more difficult subjects. I do hope these exams prove that you are ready for such subjects. Mr. Potter and Miss Granger, remain behind for a few minutes after the bell rings.”

Harry and Hermione nodded their agreement. The bell rang moments later, and most of the students collected their bags and knapsacks, then bustled out of the classroom chatting away with their friends.

Professor McGonagall walked over to Harry and Hermione.

“I received a letter from Director Amelia Bones this morning,” McGonagall said. “She gave me three messages she suggested I should pass on to you. The first, Mr. Potter, is that Director Bones has already predicted that the Headmaster would likely attempt to prevent you from attending Sirius Black’s trial – whether it be as a witness, or as a spectator. Therefore, she is working her defense for Sirius around your parents’ Will and the original events surrounding that Halloween in 1981. Therefore, you do not need to be concerned about attending your godfather’s trial.”

“Does she need a written statement from me about my parents’ Will?” Harry asked. “Something that shows proof I allowed her to read the Will?”

“She does not,” McGonagall said, “She said she’s going to tell a white-lie to the Wizengamot and say she received the Will from Keeper Ragnok the Sixth. Technically it is the truth.”

“She just won’t be telling them I gave her permission to do so,” Harry said.

“Indeed,” McGonagall said, “Can you figure out why?”

“Because the Headmaster will be there,” Harry said. “She doesn’t want him knowing I visited Gringotts yet – not until I claim my seats at the start of the Wizengamot Council Session on Monday.”
“Very good, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “The Headmaster is already suspicious of Director Bones when it comes to your godfather. He asked me if Director Bones had said anything about Sirius Black whilst she was here yesterday. Let’s just say I’ve told him my fair share of white lies about what really happened yesterday. The Headmaster knows Director Bones visited with a couple Aurors – but he only believes she was here to speak to the Weasleys.”

“Definitely a good thing,” Harry said.

“The Headmaster hasn’t seen past your lies yet, ma’am?” Hermione asked.

“I’ve known the Headmaster a very long time, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “I know him better than most – aside from, perhaps his eldest friends and his brother, Aberforth, who is the owner of the Hog’s Head in Hogsmeade. I know how to tell him stories when I don’t want him to know certain truths.”

Harry had been rather surprised about the revelation that Albus had a brother, and that his brother owned a bar in Hogsmeade. But he decided not to ask anything about that.

“As for Director Bones’ second message,” McGonagall said. “She gave me an update about Ron and Ginny Weasley and what is going to happen to them.”

“Aren’t they going to have trials on Saturday along with their mother and Sirius?” Harry asked.

“No, there will be no trial for Ron and Ginny,” McGonagall said; before Harry and Hermione could react more than a gasp of shock, she raised a hand to stop them. “Molly Weasley made a deal for her children. Molly Weasley agreed to fully cooperate during her trial on Saturday. She will be completely honest about her crimes and everything she’s done. In return, if she proves to complete this deal, Ron and Ginny will neither have to go through criminal trials in front of the Wizengamot, nor will they be going to Azkaban.

“Instead the will be in custody of Arthur Weasley, and Molly’s Great Aunt Muriel Prewett. Ron and Ginny will have their magic bound with four bindings – five is the limit – and banned from using a wand, until their seventeenth birthday. They will be home-schooled learning non-practical magical subjects. Transfiguration, Charms and Defense while only reading books. And they can also learn Potions and Herbology. Amelia believes that, with enough study, they can pass their OWLS and qualify for their seventh year of education by their seventeenth birthdays.”

“I doubt Ron will do well with that at all,” Harry said, “He absolutely hates reading books that aren’t comic books or about Quidditch.”

“And absolutely no using magic either,” Hermione said, “Yeah. Ron’s going to be horrible with all of it. I suppose home-schooling, and having their magic bound, does seem like a suitable punishment.”

“Do you know Muriel Prewett, ma’am?” Harry asked.

“I do,” McGonagall said, “She used to be a Professor here when I was a student.”

“So a very long time ago,” Harry teased, with a grin, making Hermione emit a shocked giggle.

“You little scamp!” McGonagall retorted; then she sobered. “Muriel Prewett is an excellent teacher.
However, she is also rather strict and someone you don’t want to cross.” She raised an eyebrow. “Someone like me I suppose you can say if you so wished to, Mr. Potter.”

“I would never!” Harry said, with a mock-gasp.

McGonagall pursed her lips and shook her head. “Just like your father sometimes, Mr. Potter. I fear what you’re going to be like next year with a full summer of hanging about with Sirius Black!”

“I’ll be there to make sure he behaves, Professor,” Hermione said, grinning.

“Well, if Lily Evans could tame her group of boys,” McGonagall said, “I am sure you can tame Mr. Potter here.”

“A difficult task, I am sure,” Hermione teased, grinning at Harry.

Harry rolled his eyes. “What was Director Bones’ third message for us?”

“I should call it a piece of advice,” McGonagall said, “It was something I have been giving some thought to ever since our visit to Gringotts. In fact, Keeper Ragnok spoke to me about this very thing when you were with the Goblin Healers. Director Bones, Keeper Ragnok and I, all firmly believe the two of you should consider penning a Betrothal Contract between the pair of you.”

Harry stammered and couldn’t find a good response to this.

“It seems a bit early, doesn’t it?” Hermione asked.

“Not for this purpose, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “You see, on Monday, the magical society of Great Britain will discover your new titles as Lord and Heiress respectively. Every single Noble Lord and Lady in our society will know there is young Lord and Heiress newly available for them to attempt to get closer to. As the Great Alliance is well-known to be a close-knit group, these Lords and Ladies would need to find other ways to attempt to get close to you.”

“Offers of Betrothal,” Hermione muttered.

“One of the most common strategies, aside from offers of Alliances,” McGonagall said, with a nod, “Even though the two of you being a couple is well-known -- thanks, not only to our strategy, but also Rita Skeeter’s articles -- you shouldn’t believe this will stop the Lords from not believing your relationship is a forever kind of thing, whether it is or not. You are young, after all, and most Lords and Ladies will not know the quality of your relationship. They will make their own opinions, which tend to be selfish sometimes.

“Therefore, I believe you two will still be swamped with Betrothal offers coming to either both of you as well as, perhaps, Keeper Ragnok, as your Gringotts representative. If you announce a Betrothal between the pair of you, that would certainly go a long way to prevent this.

“Now, the Betrothal Contract doesn’t need to be binding. It doesn’t need to mean that you will have to get married. You could cancel it in the future if you wish. Given that you are a Lord and Heiress of three well-known Houses, it wouldn’t be considered a faux-pas for you to have a Betrothal Contract between the two of you. Our society would believe it to be real -- whether you want it to be or not.”

“Don’t I need my parents to agree to this?” Hermione asked.
McGonagall shook her head. “You are Harry’s Vassal. Technically, he is your Magical Guardian and therefore only he needs to be your representative for the Betrothal Contract.”

“I still feel I need to speak to my parents about this,” Hermione said. “I can stress the fact that this wouldn’t be official, just a preventative measure. I haven’t even told them I am Heiress of a Pureblood House yet!”

“Well, the two of you do not need to decide this just yet,” McGonagall said, “But you need to make the decision by the time you claim your seats on the Wizengamot. I believe Keeper Ragnok is already prepared for this, in case you decide to meet with him.”

Hermione bit her lip and took on a thoughtful expression as she looked at Harry. He coughed and cleared his throat.

“We have time to discuss it between now and Monday, Hermione,” Harry said.

Hermione smiled. “I’ll write to my parents tonight. Their opinion about all of this will help me make my decision.”

“I think that is a good idea,” Harry said.

“Me too, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Let us change the subject for the time being. Mr. Potter, have you given any more thought as to the location for your meeting with the Children of the Great Alliance?”

“Oh, I found a place, Professor!” Harry said.

Harry then explained how Dobby had led him to the Room of Requirement, and what it did.

“A blank wall across from the dancing trolls on the seventh floor?” McGonagall said, “So that’s what that was! I’ve always wondered.”

“You’ve encountered this room before, Professor?” Hermione asked.

“I believe I have,” McGonagall said, “Several years ago, I caught a certain pair of students coming out of a broom closet I had never encountered before. When I came back to record the location in my notes, the broom closet was no longer there.”

“This couple wouldn’t have been my parents, would they?” Harry asked, curiously.

“Close, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

Harry snickered. “Sirius and Director Bones?”

McGonagall’s smirk made Harry chuckle. “It was odd seeing Miss Bones so far away from her own Common Room in Hufflepuff. Turns out he had followed her on one of her rounds. She was a Prefect, he was not. I still can’t say if it was a planned meeting or not. And no, I do not know if either one of them knew about this Room of Requirement. They certainly said nothing to me.”

“It isn’t on the Marauder’s Map,” Harry said. “So I’m not sure if Sirius, nor my Dad, really knew what the room was.”
“Well, it does sound like the perfect room to have your meeting in,” McGonagall said, “When will the meeting take place?”

“Saturday around nine in the morning,” Harry said.

“Well, then,” McGonagall said, “I will do my best to keep the Headmaster or Professor Snape from discovering that a certain group of students are gathering together. Perhaps I can encourage the Headmaster to leave for the Ministry of Magic early on that day.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Harry said.

“Well, I am sure you have things you must need to do before lunch,” McGonagall said, “So, unless you have any questions, you may be excused.”

“I assume our dance lessons for Saturday evening is still on?” Hermione asked.

“Depends on how late I am at the Ministry for the trials, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “We can always postpone until Sunday evening if necessary. Mostly, we will just be going over the dances I taught you last Saturday. A refresher course for the Ball. I will let you know when I know, whether or not it needs to be delayed until Sunday.”

Alright,” Hermione said. “That is all I have.”

Harry echoed his girlfriend, and the Professor excused the two of them.

“Should I search for Daphne on the Map?” Harry asked, as they stepped out of the classroom.

Hermione agreed, and Harry removed the Map from his pocket. He opened it up and searched for Daphne Greengrass. He soon found her name.

“It looks like she’s headed for one of the Greenhouses with Tracey Davis,” Harry said. “They’re not going there for a class, because Professor Sprout is with another group in another Greenhouse. Shall we go then?”

Hermione agreed. Harry kept the Map handy in case the two Slytherin girls changed their destination. Fifteen minutes later, they reached the Greenhouse where, according to the Map, Daphne and her friend were currently inside. Harry pocketed the Map and led Hermione into the Greenhouse.

They were met with a scene they were not expecting. Tracey Davis was leaning, almost submissively, with her back against a wall, while Daphne was leaning against her, snogging her. Harry blushed and was about to leave with Hermione, when Daphne spoke up.

“As you can clearly see, Potter,” Daphne said. “This Greenhouse is occupied. Take your girlfriend elsewhere.”

Harry cleared his throat and turned back to the Slytherins. Tracey Davis looked rather embarrassed at having been caught in such a compromising position, but Daphne had her arms crossed over her chest and was staring at Harry and Hermione.

“Yes that any way to speak to the leader of the Great Alliance, Heiress Greengrass?” Harry asked. “I
wonder what your father would say if I wrote to him about this. I am sure he is expecting a reply to
the letter he wrote me this morning, after all.”

Daphne’s eyes widened in shock. Then she cleared her throat and took on a rather submissive stance,
bowing her head and looking at the ground. This action from the Slytherins shocked the two
Gryffindors.

“I apologize for my slight, Lord Potter,” she said.

Harry checked his hand. His rings were still invisible. He looked back up at the Slytherin.

“How do you know I am a Lord, Heiress Greengrass?” Harry asked.

Daphne looked back up at him. “You said you are the Leader of the Great Alliance, my Lord. You
wouldn’t have been able to take such a role had you not been a Lord. It would be considered a faux-
pas, in our society, to do so otherwise.”

Harry raised an eyebrow, then he nodded. “Well reasoned. Heiress Greengrass, I apologize for my
girlfriend and I walking in on such a private moment. I was… informed you were here, and I needed
to speak to you. If I had known about what was taking place in here, I would not have barged in.”

“Apology accepted, my Lord,” Daphne said, “What did you need to see me about? I was not aware
you were in contact with my father.”

“I am Lord of two Houses,” Harry said, causing Daphne and Tracey’s jaws to drop, “Lord Potter of
the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and Lord Peverell of the Most Ancient and Most
Noble House of Peverell. House Peverell is a Neutral House. I was informed House Greengrass is
the only other Neutral House in the Great Alliance – for the moment, at least."

Houses Davis and Blishwick were Neutral Houses, after all.

“I wrote to your father last night,” Harry continued, “to ask him if he will be the Proxy for House
Peverell. He graciously accepted and said he was honored.”

“It is quite an honor you have given to my father and my House, my Lord,” Daphne said, “I thank
you.”

“I also told your father that I am planning on arranging a meeting with the Children of the Great
Alliance,” Harry continued. “He suggested to me to add a couple of names who may qualify as a
member of the group in the near future.” He glanced at Tracey, whose eyes widened. “Tracey Davis,
here, and your Uncle, Ivan Blishwick. Houses Davis and Blishwick – if all goes well – will soon
take their long-awaited place in the Great Alliance.”

“Th-thank you, my Lord!” Tracey said, “This means a lot to me… and my father, I assure you!”

“I invite the both of you to a meeting of the Children of the Great Alliance on Saturday morning at
nine-o-clock,” Harry continued, “Meet me on the seventh floor near the portrait of the dancing trolls.
I ask that you extend this invitation to your Uncle, Ivan, as well, Heiress Greengrass.”

“I will pass along the invitation, my Lord,” Daphne said, “We will be there, I assure you. None of
the Children will miss this, you can be sure of that. To do so would insult our Lord Fathers – or
Regents in Heir Longbottom and Heiress Bones’ cases -- and our Houses. Especially now that the de
facto leader of our Alliance has revealed himself. Although, my sister…”

“Your sister is a first year and has no reason to be here when she can otherwise spend Christmas Break with your parents,” Harry said, “She is excused from the meeting.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” Daphne said.

“I look forward to officially meeting all of my Allies,” Harry said, “Especially the Children. I have a few… questions about their behavior towards me in the past, of course. However, neither of you have to worry about that. I am aware the both of you have been neutral toward me – unlike the majority of your house-mates in our year -- and I can only hope, in time, we can upgrade our relationship from neutral acquaintances to friends.”

“I believe I would favor that,” Daphne said, “If I can make a request, my Lord. I trust what you – erm – walked in on will be kept secret. I know of the rumors going around of us going to the Ball together. That is true. But everyone believes we’re just friends.”

“Nobody will hear of the truth of your relationship from me, Heiress Greengrass,” Harry said, then glanced at Hermione, “Nor from my girlfriend. I will keep the secrets of my Allies, as long as those secrets are not harmful to myself, my friends, or the Great Alliance.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” Daphne said; Tracey echoed her, meekly.

“Of course,” Harry said, “We will leave you now. I will see you in class.”

The four students exchanged farewells, and Harry and Hermione left the Greenhouse.

“That was so awkward,” Hermione said, as they walked hand-in-hand away from the Greenhouses.

“Unfortunately the Marauder’s Map doesn’t tell us if someone is snogging,” Harry said, grinning, “Though their footprints on the map were rather close to each other now that I think about it.”

“I didn’t mean that,” Hermione said, “Well, that was awkward too, of course. I mean – it was awkward to feel like I shouldn’t be a part of the conversation.”

“I’m sorry, Hermione,” Harry said, squeezing her hand, “They do not know about your title, and I wasn’t about to refer to you as my Vassal just yet either. In their point-of-view, you had no reason to be a part of that meeting. You will be a part of the meeting on Saturday, however. House Dagworth-Granger will be a part of the Great Alliance, therefore you are in the same position as Heir Blishwick and Heiress Davis.”

“Technically, Tracey isn’t an Heiress,” Hermione said, “During one of my rare conversations, I learned Tracey has an elder brother, out of Hogwarts. Her brother is the Heir. She’s third-in-line. Now that I think on it, she’s probably destined to be the wife of a Lord. That’s going to be an issue, since…”

She nodded her head in the direction of the Greenhouses, and Harry knew what she meant.

“We’ll support them with whatever issues they may have in the future, Hermione,” Harry said, “As Daphne is our Ally, and Tracey soon will be, we shouldn’t consider otherwise.”

“I agree,” Hermione said, “Harry, you did brilliantly in there. Acting all Lordly like that! It was
“It was rather awkward,” Harry said, “But it just felt like the right thing to do. Though the start of the conversation…”

“Was exactly what you needed to do,” Hermione said. “You needed to speak to Daphne, and she needed to know of your position as the Leader of the Great Alliance.”

“What was that with her being so submissive?” Harry asked.

“I think it had to do with how she was raised,” Hermione said, “When she realized you were a Lord, she treated you like the rest of the Lords she knows. Calling you ‘my Lord’ and all that. It is probably what she was taught to do. You and Daphne may be her age, but you are a Lord now. She recognizes that. You should probably expect more of that from the other Children. Especially if you go through with your plans to… address their behavior with you over past issues.”

“I can’t do otherwise, Hermione,” Harry said, “It must be addressed, so I can know where I stand with my Allies, especially as we will be spending many years with each other as Alliance members, if they wish to remain in the Great Alliance.”

“You’re right, of course,” Hermione said; then she grinned. “It is a fine day. How about we go to our private spot on the Grounds, my Lord, so I can reward you with a long snog for your wonderful performance with the Slytherins.”

Harry smiled. “I would be happy to do so, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Lead on.”

Harry and Hermione were a little late, but looking quite satisfied, as they arrived in the Great Hall for lunch.

(Edwardo, December 18th, 1994)

Emma Granger yawned, as she walked across the bottom floor of her elegant two-story home in Crawley, and stepped into the kitchen, planning to make breakfast for her and her husband, Daniel, as she usually did before they headed off to their dentistry practice. She stopped in her tracks, just as she entered the combined kitchen/dining room.

A snowy owl was perched on top of a chair at the dining table, staring at her. Emma knew who this owl was, of course. Her name was Hedwig and she belonged to her daughter’s best friend, Harry Potter. Wait… he was her boyfriend now. That’s right! Hermione’s boyfriend had given her permission to borrow this beautiful owl whenever she wanted to send letters home from Hogwarts. Speaking of letters, Emma spotted a scroll of parchment tied to Hedwig’s leg.

“Well, good morning, Hedwig,” Emma said, brightly. “I trust you have another letter from my daughter for me?”

Hedwig barked, and nodded her head. Emma was used to the owl’s behavior, so she wasn’t too surprised at this.

“I assume she wants a reply?” Emma asked.

Hedwig nodded again.
“Very well then,” Emma said.

She walked over to the chair and untied the letter from the owl’s leg. Then she sat down in a neighboring chair. She unrolled the scroll and began to read her daughter’s letter.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Sorry for not writing more lately. I’ve been very busy, and several things have happened recently. I will be explaining most of this when I come home with Harry on Boxing Day. Harry is very much looking forward to staying with us for Christmas Break, and he is looking forward to officially meeting both of you.

The last day of end-of-term exams is today, and then I’ll be spending a few free days simply enjoying spending time with my boyfriend and friends who are remaining at Hogwarts for the Yule Ball, before heading home for a shortened Christmas break. I am sure my boyfriend and I will find something to do. Relax, Daddy, I’m just teasing you. We haven’t done anything beyond snogging yet.

Now for the reason I am writing this letter. There was something I left out of my last letter to you. I recently found out, Daddy, that you and I are descended from Pureblood wizards! The last magical descendant in our family was Hector Dagworth-Granger, a very famous wizard in magical society. He founded what is known as the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers, which is a pretty big deal here in the wizarding world as I understand. Apparently a good number of modern Potion recipes were created by the members of this society!

So what does this mean for me? I am officially known, in magical society, as Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress Dagworth-Granger, the future Lady of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger. This basically means that when I turn seventeen years old I will be seen as a Noble Lady in magical society. As a Muggleborn, this is a rather rare thing. There may be some rather bad reactions to this in the future, but it is also expected that there will be some very good reactions.

Unfortunately, there is bad news for both of these cases. Because I am simply a Heiress right now, there could be threats of somebody taking advantage of my title for their own selfish means. So, to counteract this, Professor McGonagall – who I am sure you remember as the woman who visited us to originally tell us that I was a witch – advised me to do two things.

Before I can reveal this, there is something else I need to reveal. My boyfriend, Harry Potter, has recently discovered he is a Lord of two different Houses. The Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell. This is a pretty big deal – even bigger than Harry simply being known by that ridiculous moniker ‘The Boy-Who-Lived’. Now, you may be wondering why he is a Lord, even though he is fourteen years old. Let’s just say there are circumstances beyond his control that caused him to become a Lord already.

Now, because I am a Muggleborn, and because my boyfriend is a Lord, there were certain things that were able to take place. Recently I agreed to become a Vassal of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. Now, this doesn’t sound as bad as you might think it does, Mum and Dad! This isn’t about servitude! It is simply a way for me to be protected in magical society. Harry has become my Magical Guardian, replacing my Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. I cannot tell you why until we return home, but believe me. This is a very good thing!

Yesterday, Professor McGonagall gave me and Harry another piece of advice. This is bigger than
the whole Vassal thing. Do not react too harshly before I am finished with this explanation.
Professor McGonagall has suggested that Harry and I become entered in a Betrothal Contract.
Now, the Betrothal doesn’t have to become official, technically. It would be seen as official, but it
would be an open contract. Meaning I can back out of the contract if I find it necessary to in the
future.

But there is a good reason for this Contract. In a few days, the magical society is going to learn
about mine and Harry’s titles. In a society of Noble Lords and Ladies, this is going to be a very big
deal. These Noble Lords and Ladies are going to try to take advantage of there being a new Lord
and Heiress – and future Lady – in the magical society. Professor McGonagall has warned us that
one of the strategies these Lords and Ladies are going to use is to try and offer Harry and I
Betrothal Contracts. So the best way to prevent any of these Lords and Ladies from believing we’re
going to be open to these offers, is for Harry and I to pen a Betrothal of our own.

As I said, the Contract would be open-ended. It won’t be official unless we make it so. However,
Mum, Dad, there is a real chance I might want this to be official in the future. I really do love Harry,
and I firmly feel as if I am in love with him. Yes, you might believe it is too early in our relationship.
Yesterday marked the end of our first week together a couple, after all! But we’ve been best friends
for three and a half years or so. I know my heart, and I know there will be no way I will drop out of
being in love with Harry Potter. He is it for me. I know it may sound like something an immature
teenager might say. But I promise, I am being honest with my feelings here. I do see myself being
with him for the rest of my life. I see us raising a family together.

The reason I am talking about the Betrothal Contract in a letter, instead of face-to-face is because
we believe we may need to create the Contract, and announce it to the magical society in the next
few days. Like, before Harry and I see you on Boxing Day.

Because you are simply seen as Muggles to magical society, you have no actual say in my Betrothal
Contract. Technically, as my Magical Guardian, Harry is the only one required to approve of my
Betrothal Contract, which is an irony in itself, but there you go. But I need to know you support this,
if only so we can use the Contract as a precaution to prevent contracts other Noble Lords and
Ladies.

Even if you do not support this, I might have to go through with it anyway. For my own good, and
the good of my boyfriend. Especially since most of those girls Harry will get Betrothal offers for are
our fellow students here at Hogwarts!

I will be looking forward to your letter,

Your loving daughter,

Hermione

Emma set the letter down and stared forward, thinking about what her daughter had just revealed to
her. How had her daughter found herself in a position like this? When she had first seen Hedwig, she
thought Hermione might simply be writing her to gossip about her first week of having a boyfriend.
At worst, she expected the girl to brag and gossip about how good a kisser the boy was or whatever,
even though she clearly knew her father would be reading the letter.

But this?
“What have you gotten yourself into, my dear girl?” Emma said.

“What was that?” Emma’s husband, Daniel, asked, as he stepped into the kitchen/dining room. “Oh, hello, Hedwig! Did she bring a letter from Hermione?”

“She did,” Emma said, glancing down at the letter, “And she can understand you.”

Hedwig barked at Daniel in annoyance.

“My apologies, you beautiful lady,” Daniel said.

Hedwig hooted and preened herself.

“I think she forgives you,” Emma said, “Yes, our daughter wrote us… a very long letter. And… well… I’ll let you read it. Then we can discuss the contents of it.”

“Is it that bad?” Daniel asked, then he narrowed his eyes. “That Potter boy is treating her right, isn’t he? He hasn’t taken advantage of her?”

“Daniel Granger!” Emma scowled, “I told you to cut down on your protective father act by Boxing Day, and it looks like you’ve gotten worse! Harry Potter is a fine boy!”

“He hasn’t formally introduced himself to us, has he?” Daniel asked, “He’s always in the background when we’re around. I don’t even think he knows our names! And then there is his –”

“Don’t you say one word about the state of his clothing!” Emma retorted, “Hermione’s given us all kinds of theories about why he wears those kinds of clothes – and about that family of his he lives with!”

“Wait… Potter… that isn’t the ginger-haired boy?” Daniel asked, then he smacked his forehead, “Ah, damn it. No, he is the one with the glasses… and that scar.”

“Daniel Granger,” Emma scolded, “You’re ranting about him not knowing our names and here you stand getting the names of Hermione’s friends confused!”

“Damn, now I feel I need to apologize to the young man,” Daniel said. “I thought he was that poorly mannered boy who hated Crookshanks. The one who definitely doesn’t deserve to be our daughter’s boyfriend.”

“And what about Harry?” Emma asked.

“He’s… better than the ginger,” Daniel allowed. “He does deserve my apology. I’ll say that.”

“Yes, well, you keep that in mind when you read your daughter’s letter,” Emma said.

“It is one of those letters?” Daniel asked.

“I’m going to get your coffee ready,” Emma said.

“It is one of those letters,” Daniel said, sighing. “Great.”

Emma simply stood, walked over to Daniel and kissed him on the cheek. Then she walked over to
the kitchen. By the time the coffee was beginning to drip into the pot, Daniel had finished the letter. Now he was simply staring at Emma with wide eyes.

“You read this entire letter, right?” Daniel asked.

“Yes, dear, I did,” Emma said.

“So, this… Betrothal Contract thing?” Daniel asked.

“Sounds just like she said,” Emma said, “A Preventative measure to stop others from taking advantage of her… and her newfound fame, apparently.”

“I’ve never heard of the name Hector,” Daniel muttered, “Dagworth sounds slightly familiar. Where have I heard that name?”

“Hector was a wizard, dear,” Emma said, “Not exactly fine conversation amongst us Muggles, you know. From what I can gather from the conversations we’ve had about her world over the past three years, it would seem that you and Hermione are descended from a… Squib… I think it was. Non-Magical member of a magical family. This Squib had non-magical children and then when we had Hermione, she became the first magical child in a few generations. Now that I think on it, this might be more common among Muggleborns then the wizards and witches believe. Especially when you consider genetics. I mean… how can pure non-magical people without a magical background produce a magical child? There must be a magical descendant in most, if not all, Muggleborn families. Are you listening to me, Daniel Granger?”

“Hmm?” Daniel asked, staring at the letter, “Yes, I’m just trying to decide if I should write a letter solely to our daughter’s boyfriend.”

“Your daughter would read the letter anyway,” Emma said.

“We’ve taught her better than that!” Daniel retorted.

“He’s her boyfriend, and he would be getting a letter from one of us,” Emma said.

“Damn, you’re right,” Daniel said.

“It could be worse, Dan,” Emma said.

“How?” Daniel asked.

“She could have said she was sexually active with the boy,” Emma said, “Or pregnant with his child.”

Daniel winced. “I had to ask, didn’t I?”

“Just you being you, dear,” Emma said, “So… how do we respond?”

(That evening before dinner…)

Harry and Hermione were in their Private Common Room in the Lion’s Den, celebrating the end of their end-of-term exams with – according to Harry – well-deserved snog. Hermione had simply
rolled her eyes at his comment, but had agreed and kissed her boyfriend. They had been snogging for the past several minutes, taking breaks every couple of minutes to get a breath of fresh air. Harry’s hands were in Hermione’s own hands, just so they wouldn’t move anywhere they shouldn’t be. As Hermione had said in her letter to her parents, they had not gone beyond snogging yet.

Speaking of letters…

Their snogging session was interrupted with a loud crack as Dobby appeared in the middle of the room. Harry pouted when Hermione backed away. He would have jokingly scolded Dobby for interrupting their snogging, but the house-elf would have probably taken it too seriously and wanted to punish himself.

“Great Harry Potter’s owl friend Hedwig has returned with a letter from Hermy’s parents,” Dobby announced.

"Thank you, Dobby!” Hermione gushed, as she took the offered letter, "I didn't think I’d get a reply until tomorrow morning.”

“You’re excused, Dobby,” Harry said.

The house-elf bowed and vanished. Harry watched as Hermione proceeded to read the letter. He couldn’t read her facial expressions, so he couldn’t figure out whether the letter was good news or bad. He only spoke up when she put the letter on her lap.

“Well?” Harry asked.

“They have agreed to support us if we decide to pen a Betrothal Contract,” Hermione said.

Harry nodded. They hadn’t really discussed the idea of the Contract since Professor McGonagall had spoken to them about it the previous day. They had been waiting for Hermione’s parents to reply to her letter about the subject.

“So what should we do?” Harry asked, “This is entirely your decision.”

“We should go through with it, Harry,” Hermione said, “If only as a preventative measure for now. We’ve already discussed the moment you would propose to me, you know. By the way, Betrothal or not, I am still expecting that proposal on my seventeenth birthday, Harry James. This doesn’t mean we’re engaged. This just means – what does it mean?”

“It means two things, I suppose,” Harry said, “We’re agreeing that marriage is something that could happen in the future. And we’re also making sure everyone else knows that too.”

“Yes, it does mean exactly that,” Hermione agreed.

“So should we visit Ragnok Monday after we claim our seats and choose proxies?” Harry asked.

“Should we pen a Betrothal Contract?”

“Yes, Harry,” Hermione said, softly, but firmly, “I very much believe we should definitely do that.”

“Good,” Harry said, “Because I’ve thought the very same thing since lunchtime yesterday.”

“I decided we should when we were relaxing and snogging out at our spot on the Grounds,”
Hermione said.

“This is not a competition, dear,” Harry said.

“It is not,” Hermione agreed. “Harry? Even if my parents said ‘no’, I would have agreed to pen a Betrothal. Their opinion didn’t matter, not in this case. My letter was simply to tell them what was going to happen, and my hope that they did support me.”

“Which they did,” Harry said.

“Yes,” Hermione said, “I think that means my parents approve of you, Harry.”

“I’m honored,” Harry said, “Especially since I’ve only known their first names for less than a week.”

Hermione giggled. Then she squeaked as he pulled her toward him, and they once again resumed their snogging session as if they had not been interrupted at all.

Chapter End Notes

So there's a fairly fluffy chapter – along with a couple of important conversations – some of my readers have been wanting between Harry and Hermione for a while now.

I absolutely loved writing the conversation in the Greenhouse, and the Granger parents scene. The letter was a lot longer than I planned, but oh well. Hermione does seem like the type to write monstrously large letters to her parents.

Next Chapter: The beginning of a very busy Saturday! The Children of the Great Alliance Meeting… and the Dursley’s perfectly normal Saturday morning are interrupted by a representative from Gringotts Bank!
Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994)

Vernon and Petunia Dursley, of Number Four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were having a perfectly normal start to their Saturday morning, thank you very much. Petunia Dursley was dining on her breakfast, which she had personally cooked, while endlessly talking about the numerous gifts for her son, Dudley which she had already bought from various stores over the past few days. Her husband, Vernon, was reading the newest edition of the Saturday Times while chewing on his food and nodding at various moments to let his wife know he was listening to her. Whether he was or not, was up for debate.

“Vernon, are you listening to me?” Petunia asked.

Vernon cleared his throat and set the newspaper down, then smiled at his wife, who was looking at him, while pointing a fork in his direction.

“Of course I am, my dear,” Vernon said.

“I was up in the attic yesterday unpacking the Christmas decorations,” Petunia said, “I noticed our Christmas Tree is looking rather thin. It is definitely improper for a festive Christmas. I do believe we need to buy a new one. Should we buy another fake tree, or a real tree this time? I was considering going out to purchase one after we picked up Dudley at the train station.”

“Don’t you think that should be Dudley’s choice?” Vernon asked.

Petunia smiled. “I was just going to offer up such a suggestion.”

“It is settled then,” Vernon said; then he took another healthy bite of his wife’s cooking – so much better than that freak’s cooking! “My Pet, we’re not going to go back on that pansy diet since Dudley’s home for Christmas, are we? Christmas is a time for good food! And good family, of course! Besides, Marge would never approve of such a dietary dinner!”

“I am sure Smelting’s will understand it,” Petunia said, “if we allow Dudley to indulge himself during Christmas break.”

“Of course they will!” Vernon said. “I tell you, Pet! Smelting’s was never like this when I was a student there. I was certainly never asked to go on a diet!”

Suddenly, the gonging sound of the doorbell echoed around the house. Vernon, purely on instinct, was about to order the freak to get the door, when the coherent part of his brain reminded him that the boy wasn’t there. He brushed the grease, from his half-eaten breakfast, from his impressive
moustache with a napkin, and stood up with a grunt. He made his way into the front hallway and walked over to the door, and opened it.

He found a man in a grey buttoned-down business suit and slacks, complete with a briefcase in his right fist, standing there. Vernon forced a smile on his face.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

“Vernon Dursley?” The man asked, “My name is Samuel Preston. I am a representative of Gringotts Bank in London. I am here to do some business with you and your wife.”


“Gringotts, sir,” Mr. Preston corrected him. “I believe your wife may be familiar with my bank. Is she here?”

Vernon frowned and wondered how his wife would know about a bank he had never heard of.

“She is,” Vernon replied, “Come in then. Don’t need to do such business here at the front door, do we? Wipe you feet on the doormat, or my wife will complain.”

“Of course, sir,” Mr. Preston said.

The… banker?… wiped his shoes on the doormat, then stepped into the house. Vernon shut the door behind the man, then led him down the hallway and into the kitchen.

“Who was it – oh! Hello!” Petunia said, as she saw the man accompanying her husband; she stood up and smiled politely. “Welcome to our wonderful home, Mr…?”

“Samuel Preston, Mrs. Dursley,” Mr. Preston said, “I represent Gringotts Bank.”

Vernon did not notice the wide-eyed, horrified expression on Petunia’s face until he sat back at the table. She was sitting again, and was staring at the man.

“Pet?” he asked, “What’s wrong? What is this Greygoth bank?”

“Gringotts,” Petunia corrected him, “It is… their bank, Vernon. My sister told me about it a few times.”

Vernon stared confusedly at his wife for a moment, then he realized exactly what she was referring to.

“You mean this the freak’s bank?!?” Vernon growled, then turned to Mr. Preston, “You get out of my house! We don’t need one of you freaky people ruining our perfectly normal Saturday!”

“Vernon!” Petunia cried, “Be polite!”

Vernon grumbled and sighed as he relaxed in his chair.

“My apologies, Mr. Preston,” Petunia said, “You must understand we haven’t had very good experiences with… your kind.”
“I was well-informed of your views on magical society,” Mr. Preston said, “May I be seated?”

Vernon’s left eye twitched at the word ‘magic’. “I’d rather you stand, sir. Who told you about our… views? My… nephew?”

Mr. Preston sighed. “I’m afraid I do not know how my employers received their information about you, Mr. Dursley. However, perhaps I can ease your mind. I am what my kind refer to as a Muggleborn. Your wife’s sister was a Muggleborn too. This means my parents are like you – perfectly normal, as you say. They cannot perform magic. In fact, my father and my grandfather are both bankers like myself. My father is a very important manager at a bank in Northampton. I chose to work at Gringotts to follow in my father and grandfather’s footsteps.”

“So why do you work at… their bank?” Vernon asked, “And not for someone like your father?”

“Because if Gringotts did not have someone like me,” Mr. Preston said, “You would be having this meeting with a Goblin, Mr. Dursley. I am employed there because, since I lived for nearly eleven years without knowing about magic, I am perfectly suited to meet with Muggles – usually with parents of Muggleborn or Muggle-raised wizards and witches, like your nephew, for example. Though I have not had the honor meeting your nephew.”

“Honor?” Vernon snorted.

Petunia, noting the offended expression on Mr. Preston’s face, spoke up before Vernon could continue to insult the man – or her nephew.

“What can we do for you, Mr. Preston?” she asked.

“Your nephew has recently opened the Final Will and Testament of his parents, James and Lily Potter,” Mr. Preston said. “As far as I can tell, the Will should have been opened a month after their tragic deaths.”

“I assume my sister gave me an inheritance in her Will?” Petunia asked.

“She did not,” Mr. Preston said, “In fact, according to their Will, your sister expressly forbid you to raise your nephew.”

“Then why was he here?” Vernon demanded. “Why did that… Dum-Dum fellow toss him off to us with nothing but a letter and a blanket and never so much as a by-your-leave?!”

“I do not know the answer to this, Mr. Dursley,” Mr. Preston said, “I do know that what he did was illegal. Albus Dumbledore was apparently the Witness of James and Lily Potter’s Will. He knew you were not supposed to raise your nephew. According to what I was told, a lot of lines were crossed illegally when he placed your nephew here. He had numerous guardians in the magical society that should have raised him.

“But Albus Dumbledore sealed your sister’s Will, Mrs. Dursley. It wasn’t until this past Sunday that it was finally opened by your nephew. Until Sunday, your nephew didn’t know much about his inheritance or about the Potter Family. He had no idea his parents even created a Will. It is believed Albus Dumbledore kept him from these things.

“Mrs. Dursley, are you aware who the true owner of this house is?”
“We own it!” Vernon growled, “It is in my wife’s name!”

“It is not, Vernon,” Petunia said, softly. “Do you not remember? When Lily and her husband – fiancéé at the time – met us for a dinner out at a restaurant a month before our wedding? We were living in that flat back then, after I moved out of my parents’ house. Do you remember the gift Lily gave us?”

Vernon frowned and racked his brain to think. Then his eyes widened.

“The contract?” he asked.

“I am not sure you read the fine print, Vernon,” Petunia said, “I did. My sister or her children could take the house out from us under at any time if they felt it was necessary.”

“Is that why you’re here?!” Vernon asked, standing up and knocking back his chair, “The freak is kicking us out of our house?!”

“I’m afraid it is a bit more complicated than that, Mr. Dursley,” Mr. Preston said, calmly, even though Vernon was raging. “He is giving you an opportunity to move far away from the threat of us… freaks, as you say. He is even willing to give you money for it.”

“We have no use for your money!” Vernon growled.

“Your money, Mr. Dursley,” Mr. Preston said, “We can convert our money into your kind, you know.”

“How much?” Vernon asked.

“200,000,” Mr. Preston said, “Converted into any type of currency you may need.”

Petunia gasped in shocked surprise. But Vernon was having none of it… yet.

“What’s the catch?” Vernon asked, “There’s always a catch with these things.”

“There is,” Mr. Preston said, “You will move far away from Great Britain. You will move to any English-speaking country and find a nice place to settle down. Your nephew has given you the necessities to do so. The biggest catch is you must move out by New Year’s Day.”

“And if we refuse?” Vernon asked. Truthfully he was just doing it to be difficult; he wasn’t going to outright say he was willing to go along with his freak nephew’s demands.

“Then I am to report back to my superiors,” Mr. Preston said, “And by this time tomorrow morning, this house will literally disappear out from around you, though all of your belongings will still be here. Believe me, Mr. Dursley, my superiors have their ways to make it happen, without any Muggles knowing anything is different.”

“The freak won’t be here until June!” Vernon said, “Why does he want us out by January first?!”

“Your nephew has recently become Emancipated,” Mr. Preston said, “But Albus Dumbledore doesn’t support it. If Dumbledore had his way, your nephew would be back here by next June. Your nephew does not want that. Therefore, he requests that you go somewhere far from Great Britain where Albus Dumbledore – who knows very little about the modern Muggle world – could find you
and force your nephew to come back here and live with you. He wants you gone now, so he doesn’t have to worry about it between now and next summer.”

“This is a very good deal, Vernon,” Petunia said. “We could find a good place for you to work. We could get Dudley into a good school. We could find a good house. We’re getting a lot of money here.”

Vernon huffed. He was about to argue and say they could get more money if his nephew was truly desperate. But then he remembered the freak banker’s threat about what would happen if he disagreed with the deal.

“Fine,” he grunted, “We agree to the deal. I assume there is a Contract of some type.”

“There is,” Mr. Preston confirmed.

“Then tell us where to sign so we can say good riddance to you and your freaks!” Vernon huffed.

Samuel Preston smiled.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 8:50 AM)

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were hand-in-hand, leaning against a wall near the portrait of Barnabas the Barmy, who was ignoring the couple as he continued to teach the trolls inside the portrait how to dance. Even though Barnabas was ranting and cursing at the trolls for not doing very well at their task, Harry and Hermione simply ignored him as they waited for the other members of the Children of the Great Alliance.

They didn’t have to wait very long for the first arrivals. Luna Lovegood was skipping down the corridor, leading an amused-looking Neville Longbottom and the Patil twins, Padma and Parvati, who were interlocking arms as they walked toward their destination.

“Long time, no see, Hermione,” Parvati quipped, as she arrived.

“Is this about Harry and I not sitting at the Gryffindor Table lately?” Hermione asked, “Or me no longer being your dorm-mate? We’re in every class together, after all.”

Parvati sniffed. “You’re denying Lavender and I some juicy gossip about you and Harry – excuse me, Lord Potter, should I say? We had to hear about Ron and Ginny Weasley’s expulsion from a friend of the twins! I am sure you were caught up in the middle of the Weasleys getting expelled. Ron was your friend, after all.”

“‘Was’ is the keyword there,” Hermione said.

“No doubt,” Parvati said, “Especially after all that drama last week! And I thought your past arguments with Weasley were epic! The mouth you had toward his sister!”

Hermione blushed. “I felt rather bad for what I said.”

“Why? It was brilliant!” Parvati exclaimed, “See, this is stuff I should have known days ago! Wait… what are you doing here anyway? You’re not one of the Children.”
“All will be explained, Heiress Patil,” Harry said, “Wait… which one of you is the Heiress of your House?”

“Neither of us,” Parvati said, “We have a few siblings. Not as many as the Weasleys. But we’re far from being next-in-line for Head of House.”

“I didn’t know that!” Hermione said, “I thought Padma was your only sibling.”

“We’re the youngest of our siblings,” Padma said, “All of our other siblings are in their twenties and early thirties, and married with their own families. Our eldest brother has a son of his own.”

“So neither of us will qualify as Heiress,” Parvati said, “Lady of our future husbands’ Houses, sure! But not Heiress of our own.”

Harry nodded, as he tried to follow along with all of this. Thankfully, his focus was elsewhere, as more arrivals were headed their way. Susan Bones and Terry Boot walked hand-in-hand toward them, as did Hannah Abbot and Ernie MacMillan, though they weren’t hand-in-hand even if they were apparently going together to the Yule Ball.

Upon arrival, Terry Boot and Ernie MacMillan looked at Hermione oddly, but neither of them said a thing to her. In fact, they were mostly ignoring Harry and Hermione and talking to the others. Harry was quickly reminded he and Hermione were the… newbies here among this group. He suspected even Tracey Davis and Ivan Blishwick were more acquainted with this group. Especially since Ivan and Padma were going to the Ball together. There had to be some history there, aside from the fact they were both Ravenclaws.

Speaking of Tracey Davis and Ivan Blishwick…

Daphne Greengrass approached the group, accompanied by – but not hand-in-hand with – Tracey Davis. Behind them was a young man who must be Ivan Blishwick. He had black hair in a style that sort of resembled Draco Malfoy’s usual hair-style, but Heir Blishwick seemed to pull it off much better. The only hint that Ivan Blishwick and Daphne Greengrass were related was the fact that they had the same exact eyes, and eye color.

“Looks like we’re all here then,” Ernie MacMillan spoke up, then looked around; “As well as a few tagalongs it would appear.”

“Everyone who is here has been invited to be here, Heir MacMillan,” Harry said, “All will be explained soon.”

Ernie shrugged. “So where are we headed then? We’re not meeting here in the middle of the seventh floor corridor are we?”

Harry smirked then walked over to the wall across from the portrait. He ignored the snickers from Parvati, Ernie, Terry and Ivan, as he walked back and forth along the wall. These four were the first, and loudest, to gasp in surprise when the large double doors appeared in the wall.

“Welcome, Children of the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “To the Room of Requirement!”

He pushed the doors open, and they opened by themselves. Gasps, exclamations of awe, and other murmurs were heard around the group as they stepped into the room.
“The Room of Requirement, also known as the Come and Go Room,” Harry said, “Will form into almost any type of room you request of it. Today, as you can see, I have requested a corporate-style meeting room. Please be seated everyone. Who was considered the leader of this little group before I came along?”

“Daphne’s the eldest of us,” Susan said.

“Daphne, please be seated at this end of the table,” Harry said, pointing at the chair on the nearest end of the table. ”I’m at the other end. Hermione is to be seated on my right, Neville, I ask that you sit on my left. The rest of you can choose your seating.”

Neville looked shocked at this, but he accepted. Tracey Davis sat down on Daphne’s right, while Ivan Blishwick sat down on her left. Harry stood at the opposite end of the table, while Hermione sat to his right and Neville on his left. Luna sat next to Neville. Instead of sitting next to Luna, as Harry expected, Padma sat next to Ivan – which told him she might be his girlfriend, and not just his date. Parvati sat next to her. Susan and Terry sat down on one side of the table, and Hannah and Ernie sat across from them.

Harry remained standing. “Dobby!”

Dobby appeared a moment later.

“Pitchers of ice-cold water, glasses and the packs of butterbeer I asked you to purchase from Hogsmeade, please,” Harry asked Dobby.

Three pitchers of water appeared at three spots at the table. A glass appeared in front of everyone. Three packs of butterbeer appeared next to the pitchers. Harry motioned to the beverages, and the various students each took their choice – most chose Butterbeer. Harry thanked Dobby, who vanished, then he picked up a bottle of butterbeer, and opened it.

“Good morning,” Harry said, as he held his bottle of butterbeer in front of him. “You probably know my name, but let me formally introduce myself. I am Lord Harry James Potter, Lord Potter of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and Lord Peverell of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell.”

Most who did not know this news either dropped their jaws or stared at him in surprise.

“Until last Sunday,” Harry continued, “I knew nothing about the Great Alliance. I knew nothing about the Children of the Great Alliance. I expect before last Sunday none of you – nor any of your parents and guardians – knew or remembered that the House of Potter and the House of Peverell were a part of the Great Alliance. This was due to nefarious enchantments in place that, as far as I can tell, made every single witch, wizard and Squib in Great Britain – aside from a select few – forget this particular information.

“Until last Sunday, most of you were simply fellow students of mine. Some of you were closer than others. Aside from Heiress Lovegood and Heir Blishwick, the rest of you were simply my fellow classmates. Most of the time we were simply neutral acquaintances, aside from a few of you. Until last Sunday, when I realized what connections we have when it comes to House Alliances.

“Over the past several days, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking when it comes to the Great Alliance, and this particular group, also known as the Children of the Great Alliance. I knew I needed to announce myself to all of you.
“So here I am. I, Lord Harry James Potter, from this moment forward, claim my position as the de facto Leader of the Great Alliance and the Children of the Great Alliance! So mote it be!”

“So mote it be,” the rest of the students at the table said, whether it be in mutters or more clearly.

Harry took a long swig of his butterbeer, and the rest did the same. Then he sat down.

“Three of you in front of me, are like me,” Harry said, looking at Hermione, then down to Tracey and Ivan, “Until today, we weren’t officially considered as Children of the Great Alliance. That changes today.”

He winked at Hermione. “Sorry, love. Saving the best for last.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, but smiled and nodded.

“Ivan Blishwick and Tracey Davis,” Harry said, looking at the wizard and witch in question, “Lord Castor Greengrass recently informed me that the Houses of Blishwick and Davis were in talks, with my father, to join the Great Alliance before that tragic Halloween in 1981 when my parents were betrayed, murdered, and sacrificed their lives for me. I will reopen these talks with your Lord Fathers in the near future. But, for now, consider yourselves unofficial members of the Children of the Great Alliance.”

Daphne Greengrass began a round of applause that was echoed around the table. Harry turned to Hermione.

“My love?” Harry asked Hermione, “Many of our friends here think they know who you are. Why don’t you introduce yourself and tell them who you really are.”

Hermione smiled then stood up. “Greetings. I am Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger. I am also Vassal to the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

Wide eyes, and gasps of shock were the reactions to this news. A once-thought extinct House – one of the more well-known Houses in British wizarding society – was alive and well here in a fifteen year old Muggleborn.

“House Dagworth-Granger is the newest House in the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “Heiress Dagworth Granger is the newest member of the Children of the Great Alliance.”

Luna was the first to applaud and that set off applause around the rest of the table.

“Monday morning, during the Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot Council,” Harry said, “Heiress Dagworth-Granger and I will claim our three chairs in the Wizengamot. Lady Minerva McGonagall will be Proxy for House Dagworth-Granger. Lady Regent Amelia Bones will Proxy House Potter –” Susan’s eyes widened at this news. Her Aunt had not told her this news. “Lord Castor Greengrass will Proxy House Peverell.

“Afterward, I will personally announce House Dagworth-Granger, House Blishwick and House Davis as the newest members of the Great Alliance.

“My fellow Children, beginning Monday the Great Alliance will once again be the political
powerhouse it once was during the time of my father and my grandfather!"

Cheers and applause broke out around the table. Obviously nearly everyone – aside from Hermione, perhaps – knew exactly what this meant for the Great Alliance.

“After this meeting,” Harry continued when the cheers and applause settled down, “I want all of you to write to your Lords, parents and guardians and inform them that I have reclaimed leadership of the Great Alliance and that – with their help -- the rest of the Wizengamot and the Noble Lords and Ladies will know that we are back!”

There were a few more cheers. Then they stopped when Harry cleared his throat.

“Now we move onto the more difficult part of my plans for this meeting,” Harry said.

He noticed grimaces from a few members around the table. Obviously some of them knew what was going on.

“Before I begin,” Harry said, “There are a few of you who should know that nothing I am about to speak about should qualify for you. Heir Blishwick, today is the first time I’ve ever met you, and unless you tell me otherwise, none of what I am about to say should have anything to do with you. Heiress Greengrass and Miss Davis, I’ve already explained this to you – both of you have always remained neutral toward me. You are not targeted toward what I am going to say.”

He turned to Neville, who was seated to his left. “Heir Longbottom. Neville. Had things been different, you and I should have been friends from the moment we met on the Hogwarts Express, instead of Ron and I. Miss Padma Patil and Heiress Luna Lovegood, over the past week or so, you’ve been very good friends to Hermione and I. I do not hold any grudges against either of you.”

He looked at the rest of those seated at the table, who looked uncomfortable.

“As for the rest of you,” he continued, “Whether it be during the Chamber of Secrets fiasco, after I was revealed to be a Parselmouth.” He knew he wasn’t truly a Parselmouth, but that was too difficult to explain right now, “or after my name came out of the Goblet to Fire, your behavior and attitude toward me – and Hermione, sometimes – was far worse than the neutrality Heiress Greengrass and Miss Davis showed me.

“Miss Parvati Patil, we are already clear with each other what happened between us after my name came out of the Goblet of Fire. I’ve recently discovered you’ve decided to show signs of remorse. Whether it was because of a choice you made, or something your Lord father or sister told you, it doesn’t matter to me. Remorse is good. I can work with that, and we can start anew as Allies.”

Parvati, who looked nervous to the point of fear, suddenly looked relieved. “I would like that, my Lord.”

Harry nodded, then looked at Terry Boot. “Heir Boot, I believe I saw you wear those ‘Potter Stinks’ badges now and then.”

“Cedric Diggory is my cousin, my Lord,” Terry said, “I had to show my support with him. I do regret the insults, but…” He cleared his throat. “My lord, there is something I must tell you.”

“Speak Heir Boot,” Harry said. “I’m listening.”
“Lord Potter,” Terry said, “My Lord Father was considering – over the summer – to drop our House out of the Great Alliance and join the Alliance that House Diggory is in. I do not know what his opinion is, now that Houses Potter and Peverell have returned. It was my father’s influence that made me support Cedric. Unfortunately I chose to wear the badge to show the support.”

“I suppose your House’s future in the Great Alliance lays with the decision of your Lord Father then,” Harry said. “Until then, I will speak no more of the grudges between you and I.”

Terry nodded. “Thank you, my Lord.”

Harry nodded once. Then his gaze turned toward the three Hufflepuffs whose gazes were not on him.

“Heir MacMillan, Heiress Bones and Abbot,” he said. “I don’t think I need to remind you what your treatment toward me was like during the Chamber of Secrets fiasco after my Parselmouth secret was revealed. We all remember, don’t we? Malfoy’s summoned snake just so happened to go toward Justin Finch-Fletchley. You could not understand me, but I told the snake to leave Justin alone. Soon after, Justin just so happened to become Petrified.

“Now here is what I do not understand about all of that. Did the three of you really not think about what evidence there was that made me the Heir of Slytherin? How about the evidence that proved I was not the Heir of Slytherin. The Heir was targeting Muggleborn! My mother was Muggleborn, my best friend is Muggleborn!

“Oh, yes, let’s not forget. The rumors that I truly despised my Muggle relatives. Perhaps that is true. But here’s the thing. You’ve never met them. Hermione’s never met them and yet she still hates them. I do not like them because of what they did to me. Because of what I had to suffer for ten years with them. That doesn’t make me a Muggle hater. That doesn’t make me hate Muggleborn.

“Then there’s the more obvious piece of evidence. Why would I Petrify Justin, when all of you thought you saw me try to attack him with a snake? I would have to be a pretty poor villain if it was really me. No… the true villain made me an easier scapegoat because you thought I attacked Justin during the Dueling Club.

“Common sense, people. I practice that all the time. I implore you to do the same if you wish to have a part to play in the future of this Alliance.”

Hermione leaned toward Harry and whispered something to him. Harry’s eyes widened.

“Heir MacMillan, Heiresses Bones and Abbot,” Harry said, “Did Ron Weasley ever try to give you any evidence that I was the Heir of Slytherin?”

“He blamed you for what happened to Mrs. Norris and Colin Creevey,” Ernie MacMillan said. “Honestly, my Lord, I could never see what you saw in that idiot!”

Harry closed his eyes for a moment and cursed Ronald Weasley to hell.

“Forgive me then,” Harry said, “I recently learned Ronald and Ginny Weasley were never really my friends. I am sure everything will be more clear after news of their mother’s trial comes out tomorrow morning. Let’s just say there is a reason I never approached any of you, just as an offer of friendship, or simply to talk. Ron and Ginny Weasley made it their mission to keep me in solitude. Ron Weasley didn’t want another person to steal his spot as the best friend of the Boy-Who-Lived, and his sister –
she didn’t want me to fall in love with another girl, because she believed she was meant to be Lady Potter.”

“My Lord, I apologize, but I must speak,” Susan said.

“Speak openly, Heiress Bones,” Harry said, “You’re the reason I was able to contact your Aunt. Your Aunt assisted me and Hermione in a great many things recently.”

“It doesn’t really matter that Ron Weasley influenced or pressured any of us to openly oppose you about anything, my Lord,” Susan said. “None of us may have known exactly how Houses Potter and Peverell were connected to the Great Alliance, that may be true. But that doesn’t excuse us. Allies or not, we should not have treated you in such a way.

“My Aunt gave me a great lecture a couple nights ago about my past behavior toward you. I lost a lot of sleep that night, because I realized just how right she was. Hufflepuff stands for loyalty. I am supposed to be a loyal person. Today, starting now, I will be more loyal to you, and to the Great Alliance, then I will be to even Hufflepuff House. If we can’t be friends, I will consider us Allies. That is my vow as the future Lady Bones.”

“I’m not as vocal as my friend here,” Hannah Abbot said, “But I agree with her. I apologize for my past behavior toward you, my Lord. I vow to be Allies, if we can’t be friendly.”

Ernie cleared his throat. “Your grandfather saved my grandfather’s life before either of our fathers were born, my Lord. I would literally not be here if it wasn’t for the bravery and courage of House Potter. I had forgotten that until my father reminded me in a letter last night. I deeply apologize to you, my Lord. In honor of our grandfathers, I pledge my vow to be loyal to Lord Potter and the Great Alliance from this day forward.”

Harry smiled and raised his bottle of butterbeer. “I accept your vows and apologies. Now that our dirty laundry has been aired and discussed, I want it to be forgotten and forgiven. From this day forward, we start fresh. From this day forward, the Children of the Great Alliance stand united.”

Cheers of approval broke out around the table. Hermione smiled at him as she, too, applauded. She obviously approved of his choice to have a clean slate toward all the Children.

“Now we can move on to the real meat and potatoes of this meeting,” Harry said, “Look around you. I am sure you’ve already considered this before. We are future of the Great Alliance. Misses Padma and Parvati Patil, Miss Davis, none of you may be Heiresses of your Houses. Your older siblings may be the Heirs, but I do not know them. I know you – or at the very least, want to get to know you better. There is a reason this group exists. There is a reason the Children of the Great Alliance was formed. Because we are the future of our Alliance.

“As Lord of, not only the Children, but of the Great Alliance itself, I can use the ideas and decisions we make here, and bring them forth to the Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance. We are not just the future of this Alliance. We are here now. We have a Voice now. I am that Voice. Help this Voice speak, my friends. I want to hear your ideas for the future of the Alliance. I want to hear any important news you might have. For example, thanks to Padma here, I am rather familiar with just how close some of you are, especially when it comes to who is pairing up for the Yule Ball.”

Padma blushed as several others snickered at her. Obviously they knew how much of a gossip she truly was. Harry glanced at Hermione, and she nodded. She knew what he was silently asking her. They had discussed this earlier that morning before breakfast.
“Here is a bit of gossip for you that Padma doesn’t even know,” Harry said, “Because it is about Hermione and I, and we haven’t revealed it until now. Monday after we claim our seats at the Wizengamot Council, Hermione and I are going to visit Gringotts. When we leave, we will be a Betrothed couple.”

Padma and Parvati were the first to gasp in surprised shock. Harry grunted as Neville slapped him on the back in apparent congratulations. He and Hermione blushed as applause once again burst out around the table.

“Thank you… however!” Harry said, loudly, as the applause finished, “Our Betrothal is going to be an open contract. We can cancel said Contract in the future if we decide it is necessary. The reason we are penning a Contract is so the Noble Lords and Ladies of our good society don’t get the impression that Hermione and I are open to Betrothal offers from anybody else.”

Daphne Greengrass gave a healthy snort Harry could hear from his end of the table.

“You do realize that won’t stop some Lords or Ladies from offering Contracts?” Daphne asked.

“As long as I do not receive one from your father, good Heiress,” Harry joked.

Daphne glared playfully at him, and blushed deeply, as raucous laughter erupted around the table.

“Touché, my Lord,” Daphne said.

The meeting continued as a few of the Children voiced various issues they felt should be explored more in the future – perhaps not the near future – but between now and the time they left Hogwarts. Most of these were simply existing Bills and laws they wanted modified, or disbanded. Some voiced possible Bills they could create in the future. Harry soon realized that a lot of these issues and ideas were things that the Children had never spoken of with their parents and Lords or Ladies of their Houses. But as Harry was their peer, in addition to being de facto Leader of the Great Alliance, they felt more comfortable speaking about these things to him.

It was nearing eleven when Harry decided the meeting needed to be finished.

“We’ve been here for a while now and voiced many topics we should discuss more of in the future,” he said, “There will be more future meetings between all of us. The next one probably won’t happen until sometime next term. I remind you, I want you all to contact your parents and inform them of whatever details of this meeting you feel you need them to know.

“I do not believe I really need to voice this, since it is probably clear to all of you. But needs must and all of that. I trust that everything we discussed here will be kept private and only between the members of the Great Alliance, I don’t need to warn you off of telling any of your friends, who aren’t a part of this Alliance, about any of this, do I?”

There were murmurs and heads shaking, which told him they would keep everything secret inside the Alliance.

“Then, with that, I conclude this meeting of the Children of the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “Thank you for taking part in this meeting, all of you. It means a lot to me. It means a lot that I know we can continue this meetings and move forward with this Alliance. So thank you.”
This special Room we are in has a brilliant function. While we can only enter it from the seventh floor, it can let you out anywhere you wish in the castle. I imagine a door will open somewhere where nobody will see you walking out of. Feel free to use this function. Heiress Greengrass, can I speak to you, before you leave? Miss Davis, you may remain behind as well. I am sure you know you can stay too, Hermione.”

Daphne and Tracey nodded. One by one, or in groups, the others left the Room of Requirement into various parts of the castle. Harry and Hermione walked over to Daphne and Tracey.

“I apologize for what I am about to ask the two of you,” Harry said. “Do your parents know of your relationship?”

Daphne and Tracey shook their heads, their eyes wide.

“Relax, I will not tell them, of course,” Harry said; to obvious relief from the Slytherins, “I just want to know if there is going to be any issues with this relationship of yours when it comes to your futures.”

“You mean our probable future of being Lady to a Lord husband?” Daphne asked.

“Yes,” Harry said.

“It is something we’ve considered and discussed, my Lord,” Daphne said, “For now, we’re going to just be girlfriends. We do not know where the future will take us.”

“Do you truly believe your fathers will want you to be married to Lords or Heirs in the future?” Harry asked.

“It is likely, my Lord,” Daphne said. “We’ve grown up knowing our… purpose. We are to be mothers of the next generation’s Head of our House. Why do you ask?”

“As Leader of the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “Please know that if an issue ever comes up between you two and your Lord fathers, I will do whatever I can to make sure the issues end positively for the two of you – and hopefully your families as well.”

Daphne smiled. “Thank you, my Lord. I am sure we won’t have to deal with this for quite a while. We are very private with our relationship. You two… you’re the only ones to have found us in such a… compromising position. Nobody, aside from Uncle Ivan knows about or relationship.”

“Let me tell you a secret,” Tracey said, “There is a good reason we don’t need to worry about Uncle Ivan’s opinion about our relationship being negative. Aunt Isabella – our youngest Aunt – is also in a relationship similar to ours.”

“Wait,” Hermione said, “I’m missing something. Ivan is your Uncle too?”

“Our mothers are eldest of the Blishwick siblings,” Daphne said.

So Daphne and Tracey are first cousins and they’re… together, Harry mused, Nope, not going there! Not going to bring that up!

The look on Hermione’s face told her she was thinking along the same line of thought.
“At the Yule Ball,” Daphne said, “we will only act as best friends who decided to go the Ball together, because we didn’t want to go with boys.”

“Will that work?” Hermione asked. “I’ve heard Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott are interested in going with you to the Ball.”

Daphne rolled her eyes. “We’ve taken care of it. It isn’t an issue now. There is a reason Tracey and I were able to remain neutral with the two of you over the past three years. Nobody messes with us in the Slytherin dungeons. Pansy tried, and – let’s just say she ended up convincing Draco and his… minions, that we weren’t somebody to be messed with. That was the first week of first year, and they haven’t messed with us since.”

“As for whether it will work,” Daphne said, then she winked, “It is known Tracey and I are cousins. Most people around here don’t want to even consider that Tracey and I could be in that type of relationship. Which is perfectly fine for us.”

“Right!” Harry said, “Well, I think that is all I needed to say.”

“We’ll see you later then,” Daphne said, then she winked again, “Try not to walk in on us again, please.”

Harry coughed and Hermione chuckled. Both Daphne and Tracey grinned, then said farewell and left the Room of Requirement.

“Those two are so unlike every Slytherin I’ve ever met,” Harry said.

“Wrong,” Hermione said, “They’re more Slytherin than any Slytherin you’ve ever met.”

Harry considered this, then nodded in agreement. “Hiding their relationship in plain sight, due to the fact that they’re cousins? Yeah, that’s pretty Slytherin!”

“Yeah,” Hermione said, “Come on. Let’s go back to the Den. I want to see if we can contact Sirius before his trial. Wish him luck and all that.”

“Good idea,” Harry said.

He took her hand and they stepped out of the Room of Requirement and onto the seventh floor. Then they headed off back to the Lion’s Den, less nervous then they were when they had left it that morning. The meeting they had been dreading had turned out to go a lot better than they had thought!

Chapter End Notes

When I originally decided on including House Blishwick into this story, it was my idea for Daphne and Tracey to be cousins, with their Mothers as Blishwicks. Then I forgot about that detail when I put them together as a couple. Then I remembered the detail in this chapter and decided to keep my original plans. So… um… they’re kissing cousins?

Let me be honest. I dreaded this entire chapter. Both meetings in this chapter were
something I was struggling to figure out before I began writing it. But I am happy with everything I've come up with here.

I hope I didn't disappoint too many readers with how I settled the past issues between Harry and some of the Children. I didn't want to break up the Children, so cleaning the slate after a discussion about it all seemed to be the best way to do it.

The main reason I summarized all the "issues and ideas" part of the meeting was so I wouldn't have to keep faithful to any ideas I might have put down in this chapter for the future. I could come up with such ideas in the future, and it would seem as if they were voiced here.

Next Chapter: A Siriuus Black PoV as he speaks to Harry and Hermione and prepares for his trial. Then Molly Weasley's Trial. Siriuus Black's Trial should be in two chapters.
Chapter Notes

I will only say one thing about this chapter. I did not add every warning I should have at the beginning of this chapter. The reason why will be obvious by the end of the chapter, but will be explained in the end Author's Note.

Warning: Dumbledore and Molly Weasley Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 11:15 AM)

Sirius Black was currently relaxing on the couch in the sitting room of the cozy little cottage he and Remus had been staying in for the last few months. The cottage was a rental, belonging to his cousin Andromeda Tonks. Before she had gotten married, she had lived in this cottage for two years. After she had married her husband, Ted, she had rented it out to various people over the years.

Andromeda had offered it to her and Remus, after Sirius had contacted her a week after his escape on Buckbeak the hippogriff from Hogwarts, this past June. She became the Secret Keeper for the cottage. Andromeda was also a Healer, who worked in St. Mungo’s, and she had helped him heal, from his time in Azkaban, over the past several months. Ted Tonks was a lawyer with the DMLE, and he was going to be Sirius’ defense representative during his trial later that day.

Andromeda and Ted were expected to arrive at the cottage within the hour. Apparently, Andromeda wanted to make sure Sirius looked presentable for his trial. Apparently ‘Looking presentable’ had nothing to do with his health. She wanted to dress him up fancy in order to make a good impression.

“Everyone has seen you as a villain, Death Eater, and the betrayer of James and Lily Potter over the past thirteen years, Sirius,” Andromeda had said, during a mirror call earlier that morning, “You need to look like Lord Sirius Black, not like the ‘Prisoner of Azkaban’ when you walk into the courtroom today.”

Sirius had just finished up a mirror call with Amelia Bones. She basically wanted to confirm that he would be there for his trial. He promised her he would be. She looked very happy a bit relieved to hear that. Then she told him he needed to be at the Ministry by one-o-clock in the afternoon.

“Your trial will be the second of two trials today,” Amelia had said, “The first trial takes place at noon, and I am not sure how long it will take. Your trial will begin a half-hour after the first trial finishes. Unless I tell you differently, I want you to arrive at one-o-clock this afternoon. Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt and Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks will be escorting you when you arrive, and you can meet them near the Security Desk in the Atrium. If the first trial is still going on, then you can wait in a separate room, located near the courtroom, with the Aurors, and Ted Tonks. Even if you have to wait an hour or two for your trial, it is better to wait near the courtroom, so you can be ready.”

Sirius had, of course, agreed to meet Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks in the Atrium at the scheduled
time. He thought it was ironic that Ted and Andromeda’s daughter would be involved in the escort. All three members of his cousin’s small family was taking a part in helping him today.

Remus Lupin was currently in the kitchen, cooking lunch for the two of them, and Ted and Andromeda, so they could eat something before they needed to be at the Ministry. Sirius smiled as he recalled the moment Remus had read Rita Skeeter’s article in the Daily Prophet earlier this week that confirmed Sirius would be getting a trial. Remus had been more emotional than Sirius, his eyes full of tears of happiness and relief that his only living best friend in the world would be getting a chance at freedom once again. No longer would they have to hide in this cottage, with Sirius barely getting any sun, except to lounge around in the backyard either in his Animagus form, or relaxing in a hammock, when the weather was nicer.

Sirius’ musing was interrupted as the compact mirror on the coffee table in front of him vibrated, alerting him that someone was calling him. He picked it up and opened it, thinking it was either Amelia or Andromeda, therefore was very happy to see Harry Potter and Hermione Granger’s faces looking at him. They were sitting on a couch together, as they had the first time he had spoken to them over this mirror.

“Harry! Hermione!” Sirius said, grinning, “I was wondering if you would contact me before my trial today.”

“We wanted to wish you good luck, Sirius,” Harry said.

“Not that you need it,” Hermione said, “You’re simply getting the trial you should have gotten thirteen years ago. Just be honest about everything and don’t let them intimidate you, and you should be fine.”

Sirius chuckled. “You sound like Remus, Amelia, and my cousin and her husband. Which is basically everyone else I’ve talked to today about my trial. They’ve basically all said the same thing to me.”

“Your cousin?” Harry asked.

“Andromeda Tonks,” Sirius said, “My favorite cousin. Though, when you realize my other cousins are Narcissa Malfoy and Bellatrix Lestrange, I suppose it is easy to pick a favorite. Technically, your father was my second cousin or something, but we considered each other more like brothers.”

“You’re related to Draco Malfoy?!” Harry asked.

“So are you,” Sirius said, “Your grandmother was Narcissa’s Great-Aunt, and mine. Don’t let it get to you, Harry. Most purebloods and half-bloods in Britain are related at some branch of the family tree if you search through the tree long enough. The Blacks are also closely connected to the Weasleys, through Arthur Weasley’s mother.”

Harry and Hermione’s faces twisted in disgust at the mention of the Weasleys. Sirius couldn’t blame them, given their recent history with a few members of the Weasley family.

“What about Muggleborns descended from Purebloods and Half-bloods?” Hermione asked. “I am a Dagworth-Granger descended from a Pureblood.”

“The two of you are probably related in some branch of the family tree,” Sirius said, “Fourth, fifth cousins, maybe more. The closest connection to the Potters and Dagworth-Grangers is their love for
creating Potions, and the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers, of which your great-grandfather, Fleamont Potter, was a member of. He created the Sleakeazy’s Hair Potion and various products, among others. So you don’t need to worry about all that if you two crazy kids decide you want to get married sometime.”

“Well, now that you mention it,” Harry said, “Hermione and I have decided to pen a Betrothal Contract together after we claim our seats in the Wizengamot Council on Monday. For now, it is a preventative measure, to prevent other Noble Lords and Ladies from believing we’ll accept Betrothal Contracts from them.”

“That is a brilliant idea!” Sirius said, “Who suggested it?”

“I think there’s an insult in there somewhere,” Harry joked. “Actually it was a combination of advice from Amelia Bones, Professor McGonagall and – apparently – our Account Manager, Keeper Ragnok, though he only gave the advice to Professor McGonagall.”

“Well, you received very good advice,” Sirius said, “I would have given you the same advice. Betrothal Contracts you don’t have a hand in can be a very messy business.”

“Yeah, tell me about it,” Harry said, “I still haven’t destroyed the illegal Contract that was penned between Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley for me and Ginny Weasley. Amelia doesn’t want me to destroy it until after today’s trials.”

“So Molly Weasley is the other one on trial today?” Sirius asked. “I was told mine is the second of two trials today.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “We firmly believe she’ll be in Azkaban for a few years by the end of the day.”

Sirius shuddered. “I wish her luck, no matter what she might have done to you. She doesn’t strike me as someone who is going to come out of Azkaban bright and shiny like me!”

“You weren’t bright and shiny when you left Azkaban, Sirius,” Hermione said, frowning.

“Precisely,” Sirius said, “Molly’s probably going to end up like my dear cousin, Bellatrix. Insane and ranting and barely recognizable.”

“That’s horrible,” Hermione said, frowning, “Even for someone like Molly, who was planning to do so much to us.”

“I didn’t know Molly very well,” Sirius said, “But I knew her twin brothers, Fabian and Gideon. A good pair of boys. I knew them well. Killed in a skirmish with Death Eaters, but from what I’ve heard, they fought and defended themselves well. Went down together, but brought a few of the bastards with them. They didn’t talk much of their sister, which either means they didn’t like talking about her, or… well, I don’t know what else it might be. They loved her, don’t get me wrong. But it might have been tough love.”

“She loves her children,” Hermione said, “But I think she loves them too much. She’s so overbearing with them. She was overbearing with us too! We had to conform to her rules whenever we were in her house. She acted like we were her children. But given that she wanted us to end up married to her youngest two children, I suppose it makes sense with how she treated us that way. Still… it was pushy, overbearing and rude. I have a mother, after all. I don’t need another one. Oh, Merlin, Harry… I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”
He cut her off by pecking her on the lips. Sirius smiled at the touching scene.

“I know what you mean, love,” Harry said. “Yes, she tried to be like a mother to me. But… I didn’t want her to replace my mother. Everything I remember about my mother, tells me she was the best mother I could have had.”

“Lily was definitely the best mother, Harry,” Sirius said, smiling. “I still remember the look on her face the day she and James announced she was pregnant. It was only topped when I saw her holding you the first time I met you – a few hours after you were born. Besides you, and perhaps your father, in that moment there was nobody else in the room, even though there was me, Remus and a lot of our friends coming in and out of the hospital room. To Lily, it was just her, you and your father when she looked at you. Never doubt she loved you. She loved you the moment she knew you were inside her. Believe that.”

Harry’s eyes were misting over, and he was grinning. “Have I told you recently I have an eidetic memory? The ability was blocked, probably something Dumbledore did to me. I’m sure if I focus on my parents, I can come across so many memories. Maybe even the day of my birth in that hospital room.”

Sirius chuckled, then it evolved into a howl of laughter.

“What is so funny, Sirius?!” Harry asked.

“Harry, you were either asleep or latched onto your mother’s breast during that first day in the hospital room,” Sirius said, grinning. “I don’t know if you even want to try to picture that day.”

Hermione giggled at the look on Harry’s face, which set Sirius off again. Harry was blushing hot red after Sirius’ statement.

“I suppose there is a reason we shouldn’t be able to remember things when we were so young,” Harry said.

“Harry, if you really do want to see that day,” Sirius said, “Then sometime we’ll find a Pensieve and visit the memory of that day.”

“What’s a Pensieve?” Harry asked.

“ Basically a large enchanted bowl with special liquid inside it,” Sirius said. “You use a spell, while pointing your wand at your forehead, and thinking of a specific memory. Then you pull out a silvery strand, which is the memory, and put it in the Pensieve. You then dip your head inside the bowl, and suddenly you’re inside the Pensieve with the memory playing around you.”

“That’s brilliant!” Harry said, “Can you use something like that at your trial?”

Sirius shook his head. “You can fake memories in a Pensieve. Therefore it isn’t permitted in a Courtroom. Same goes with Veritaserum – the truth one person believes might not be the actual truth. So it isn’t permitted either. Believe me, my trial would be a lot easier if I could use such a strategy.”

“You do have a good strategy, though, right?” Harry asked. “Amelia said I didn’t need to be there for the trial. I could be there, and give my witness statement of what happened last June, you know.”
“It isn’t necessary, Harry,” Sirius said, “You’ve done enough just by opening James and Lily’s Final Will and Testament. Combined with my story of the events surrounding that time, we have a great strategy.”

“Alright,” Harry said, “I just wish I could do more.”

“I appreciate it, Harry,” Sirius said. “I tell you what. Once my trial is over, I’ll let you know what happened.”

“If you can actually talk to me after your trial, then I’ll know it went well,” Harry said. “Because otherwise –”

“It won’t happen,” Hermione said, firmly. “I have faith you’re going to walk out of the trial a free man, like you should have thirteen years ago.”

“You’re right, love,” Harry said; smiling at his girlfriend, then looking back at Sirius. “There’s nothing to worry about. In a few hours, you’ll be a free man.”

“Of course I will be!” Sirius said. “I wouldn’t be leaving the safety of my current residence if I didn’t believe I’d be a free man.” He cleared his throat. “I better end this here and now. My cousin and her husband will be here soon to make me ‘look presentable’ for the trial.”

“We’ll be with you in spirit, Padfoot,” Harry said, “And I know my parents will be there too.”

Sirius smiled, blinking back tears. “That is all the support I need, pup. Can’t go wrong with that support on my side.”

“Be well, Sirius,” Hermione said, “We’ll see you in a few hours.”

Farewells were exchanged, and Sirius shut his mirror. He inhaled and exhaled then wiped the tears from his eyes. Then he looked up at the ceiling.

“Your son found a good woman there, Prongs and Lily,” Sirius said. “They remind me of you so much. If she had auburn hair, I might have said I was going mad. Because it would be like I’m looking at the pair of you all over again.”

He cleared his throat and stood up. He needed to stop sitting on his bum, and prepare for the last day of his incarceration.

Self-imposed or not.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 11:50 AM)

Director Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, gripped the briefcase firmly in her hand as she stepped into Courtroom Ten. She made her way over to the Prosecution Table, smiled at her assistant, Samantha, who was sitting in a chair behind her, before she sat down at the table. She opened her briefcase, then started placing the documents and parchment which was inside it on the table in front of her. Enchantments on the table prevented anyone not seated at the table from seeing what was on the table, so she needn’t worry about having the documents and parchment out in the open.
Sitting across the aisle to her left, at the Defense Table was Dedalus Diggle, Molly Weasley’s defense lawyer. According to a memo she had received earlier that day, Albus Dumbledore had paid for Diggle to represent Molly Weasley. Amelia held back a snort at the thought of Molly needing a Defense Lawyer. If she wanted to prevent her youngest two children from being given a trial and probably sent to Azkaban, Molly was going to have to go through with her deal and basically admit all her crimes for the Wizengamot to hear.

Sitting in the row behind the Defense Table, Amelia found Arthur Weasley, sitting in between two young men, whom she guessed was Arthur and Molly’s eldest sons, William and Charlie.

Amelia turned and looked up toward the Wizengamot Council. Both Molly Weasley and Sirius Black’s trials were to be presented in front of the entire Wizengamot Council. House Bones’ vote was being Proxied by Augusta Longbottom today, as Amelia would be Prosecutor for Molly Weasley’s trial, and Chief Interrogator for Sirius Black’s trial. The difference between Prosecutor and Chief Interrogator was simple: Amelia wasn’t prosecuting Sirius, and he already had a Defense Lawyer in Ted Tonks.

Members of the Wizengamot were still making their way toward their chairs. Amelia smiled as she saw her friends and allies in the Great Alliance as they made their way to their own seats. Aside from Castor Greengrass who was seated in the Neutral Seats, the Great Alliance sat together during Council Meetings. Albus Dumbledore and Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, had yet to arrive yet, but Amelia expected they would be the last of the Council to arrive.

Amelia smirked privately at the thought of Albus Dumbledore being present. He wouldn’t be happy with her opening Salvo for the trial. Of course, he wasn’t going to be happy at all, she knew, given how many skeletons of his would be coming out of the closet after the two trials today were over.

Amelia looked over her shoulder and found that the representatives of the media were filing into the room. Very little about this first trial had been seen in the various media sources. The fugitive – and possibly innocent -- Sirius Black was a far better topic than a Matriarch of a Minor House. Of course, if the media knew just what Molly Weasley had done to the Boy-Who-Lived, the hero and savior, Harry Potter, today’s trial might have been discussed more. But it all would be revealed soon.

Amelia had a sudden revelation as she looked back at Diggle. What if Albus Dumbledore had asked Diggle to defend Molly Weasley for a specific reason. Maybe he was trying to prevent Molly from mentioning certain things during her defense – such as anything to do with Albus Dumbledore?

She narrowed her eyes and stood up, then walked over to Diggle and sat down in the chair meant for Molly. Diggle blinked as he looked at her.

“May I help you, Director Bones?” he asked.

“What has Albus Dumbledore asked you to do in defense of Molly Weasley, Mr. Diggle?” Amelia asked.

“I beg your pardon!” Diggle exclaimed, “This is most inappropriate! I am not about to give you my strategy!”

“You don’t need to give me your strategy,” Amelia said, “I already know it. Dumbledore has asked you to make sure Molly Weasley doesn’t mention Albus’ name at all today. Hasn’t he? He doesn’t want his secrets to come out today. Well, too bad. I’m going to give you a tidbit of my strategy,
Diggle. My prosecution begins with Molly Weasley meeting Albus Dumbledore one day. This meeting began the journey that lead Madam Weasley to this trial today. Dumbledore isn’t going to get his way today, Diggle. Molly Weasley has already promised me – for the sake of her two youngest children – to be completely honest about all of her crimes. Otherwise, her two youngest children will be sitting here for a trial too.”

Diggle stammered. “Y-you can’t do this, Director B-Bones. M-Minister of Magic Cornelius F-Fudge has stopped you from –”

“From placing Dumbledore under arrest,” Amelia finished. “That is all. He has not ordered me to stop investigating the man. Nor has he said I cannot open Dumbledore’s closet of skeletons for everyone to witness. Dumbledore’s trapped you, Diggle. He knows you’re going to lose. He hasn’t hired you to defend Molly Weasley. He’s hired you to stop her from saying his name. Think about it, Diggle.”

Amelia didn’t wait for Diggle to respond. She stood up and walked back over to her chair and sat down. She shook her head in pity for Dedalus Diggle. The man didn’t realize that he was nothing but a pawn in Albus Dumbledore’s chess game. Dumbledore cared little – if at all – for the man or how his career would likely suffer due to this trial. This much was obvious. He was simply a tool for Dumbledore to use for his own means.

Speak of the devil. Albus Dumbledore stepped into the Courtroom, walking amongst other individuals such as Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour, the Minister’s Undersecretary, Dolores Umbridge and Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic himself. Amelia frowned at the sight of Dolores Umbridge. She had only been notified earlier today that the woman would be her replacement as Interrogator. Amelia was usually an Interrogator during trials when she wasn’t the Prosecutor.

Amelia did her best to keep the smirk off her face as she watched Albus sit in the chair that was meant for the Chief Warlock. The chair that was raised higher than the others, as if it was a golden throne. Albus looked around at everyone, as if they were the subjects of his Kingdom and Court. Then his gaze fell on her and she stared at him, provoking him, daring him to attempt to use Legilimency on her.

However, he looked away from her, and she held back a smirk again.

Enjoy your few minutes in your throne, ‘Lord of Light’, Amelia mused, You’re not going to be in charge of either of these trials. I’m going to make sure of that.

Her musing was interrupted as Dumbledore smacked his gavel on the surface three times in front of him.

“Bring in the Accused!” Albus ordered.

Amelia looked over her shoulder as the doors of Courtroom Ten opened. Auror Hestia Jones led Molly Weasley into the room, who was followed by Senior Auror John Dawlish. Molly’s hands were bound in magic-blocking manacles, and she was wearing what appeared to be one of her own hand-sewn outfits – which had obviously been delivered to her by one of her family members. Auror Jones led her to the Defense Table, and motioned to the empty chair. Amelia noted Molly Weasley glaring at Dedalus Diggle as she sat down in the chair.

She found this interesting. Most interesting.
Jones and Dawlish then walked over to a row of chairs meant for witnesses. As arresting Aurors, they may be required to answer questions or make statements, therefore they were considered witnesses.

“Chain the doors!” Albus ordered.

Amelia didn’t turn around this time, but she knew the doors were now crisscrossed with enchanted steel chains resembling spider webs.

“So begins the Criminal Trial on this, the nineteenth day of December in the year nineteen ninety-four,” Albus said, “The Accused is identified as Molly Matilda Weasley ‘nee Prewett, Matriarch of the Minor House of Weasley.”

“Representatives for the Wizengamot,” Albus continued, “Chief Prosecutor: Amelia Susan Bones, Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Representative for the Defense: Dedalus Damien Diggle, Interrogators: Chief Warlock Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore; Rufus Scrimgeour, Head of the Auror Department, and Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic. Court Scribe...”

Amelia waited patiently for Albus to finish naming off the various names. Then he asked the question she was waiting for.

“Are there any opening remarks from the Prosecution or Defense before we begin?” Albus asked.

Amelia raised her hand, as did Molly Weasley.

“Prosecutor Bones,” Albus said, “Stand and be heard.”

“Minister Fudge,” Amelia said, as she stood up, “I object to Chief Warlock Dumbledore as Interrogator. As a close personal friend of the Accused, I consider him too close to the Accused. Therefore, I argue that he will not be an unbiased Voice as an Interrogator.”

Albus narrowed his eyes at her, as murmurs and whispers were heard around the Courtroom.

Minister Fudge whispered to Scrimgeour and Umbridge for a few moments, then he cleared his throat and stood up.

“The Interrogators accept the Prosecution’s recommendation,” Fudge said, “Chief Warlock Dumbledore, you are excused from your duties for the remainder of the trial, but will be allowed to take your chair amongst the Wizengamot, as the representative for the House of Dumbledore. I, British Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge will replace Chief Warlock Dumbledore as Interrogator in his stead.”

Albus did not move for thirty seconds. He merely looked back and forth between Fudge and Bones. Then he sighed, stood up and made his way to his chair in the Light Alliance section of the Wizengamot. His eyebrows narrowed further as Amelia smirked up at him.

“Do you have any other objections, Prosecutor Bones?” Fudge asked.

“No, Minister, thank you,” Amelia said, as he sat back down.
Fudge smiled, then turned to Molly.

“Molly Weasley, the Accused,” Fudge said, “You have something to say before we begin with your trial?”

“I do not wish to be represented by Dedalus Diggle, Minister Fudge,” Molly said, “During our meetings preparing for this trial, Mr. Diggle did nothing to support my suggested strategy. Instead he dismissed everything I had to say. Therefore, I cannot agree to his representation in my defense.”

“Do you have a suggestion as your Defense Representation, Madam Weasley?” Fudge asked.

“I wish to represent myself,” Molly said.

Amelia looked up at Dumbledore’s whose eyes were wide and face was pale as he stared down at Molly. There were gasps, whispers and murmurs around the Courtroom before Fudge raised his hand to stop them.

“This is most abnormal, Madam Weasley,” Fudge said, “Are you sure about this?”

“I am, Minister Fudge,” Molly said.

Fudge turned to Scrimgeour and Umbridge and the three Interrogators whispered amongst themselves. Finally, Fudge turned forward.

“While this decision is abnormal, Madam Weasley,” Fudge said, “It has been decided that we will support your decision. Mr. Diggle, you are excused.”

Amelia smirked at the man as Diggle stood up. He stared at Dumbledore for a moment, then picked up his briefcase and walked over to an empty chair on the Defense side of the aisle. Amelia smiled lightly at Molly. It seemed she, like Amelia, had realized exactly why Dumbledore had wanted Diggle to represent her. She was having none of it, especially if it meant Diggle’s representation would probably break her deal with Amelia.

“I assume you have no other objections, Madam Weasley?” Fudge asked.

“No, Minister,” Molly said.

“Prosecutor Bones,” Fudge said, “You may begin with your opening statements.”

Amelia stood up and cleared her throat. “Minister Fudge, Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot Council, representatives of the media and other concerned citizens sitting amongst us. To most of you, Molly Weasley may appear to be a respectable, law-abiding citizen of British magical society. A loving wife, a dedicated mother of seven children, a Matriarch of a lowly Minor House. Her only job is a housewife, even though she has nobody but her husband to look after while her four youngest children are students at Hogwarts for nine months of the year.

“The truth of who Molly Weasley is, and what the Accused has done, is far Darker than this Matriarch of a Light Family wanted you to know. The Accused may want you to believe she is a dedicated mother, but she has concocted a plan that not only endangered her victims, but also caused her two youngest children to follow in her misdeeds, which has not only caused them to be expelled from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but also – through her own nefarious plans – caused them to risk a breach of the Statute of Secrecy – our most important law!”
“Her crimes are so nefarious and so Dark that she dared to ensnare, manipulate and steal from one of our most respected and loved citizens, Harry James Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived!”

Gasp, whispers and jeers erupted around the Courtroom. Albus Dumbledore stared at her with narrowed eyes. She simply smirked at him, as Fudge slammed the gavel on the surface in front of him to stop the commotion.

“Yes,” Amelia continued, “Harry James Potter. The Boy-Who-Lived. Our savior and hero. It will be proven today that the Accused’s plans for Harry James Potter started five days after that tragic Halloween in which James and Lily Potter lost their lives after sacrificing themselves for their son, Harry Potter. Five days. James and Lily Potter were barely buried six feet under before Molly Weasley decided to begin a nefarious plan concerning a young baby boy who was barely fifteen months old at the point in time.

“The Accused’s plan weaves through many paths, but it led to the same destination: a plan to make Harry Potter – through any means necessary – end up married to her daughter, Ginevra Weasley, so she could steal the Potter fortune for herself. Any means necessary. Those means will be revealed today.

"The Accused, Molly Weasley, is guilty, Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot. There is no defense against her crimes. The Accused is guilty of not only breaching the Statute of Secrecy, but also guilty of a great number of crimes. I am here to see the Accused in Azkaban by the end of the day – for a very long time.”

Amelia sat down to murmurs and whispers around the room. Fudge smacked his gavel.

“Do you have an opening statement, Madam Weasley?” Fudge asked, after the room silenced.

Molly stood up, as the manacles around her arms banged against the table.

“Prosecutor Bones was correct in much of her statement, but not all of it,” Molly Weasley began, “I am guilty of many things. I do deserve to go to Azkaban. Perhaps, even, for a long time. Perhaps for the rest of my life. But the Prosecutor is wrong about one thing. I am a dedicated mother. I am a mother who wanted her children to have everything in life. I wanted them to have a better life than I have had. I wanted them to have everything they wanted.

“My daughter, Ginny Weasley, dreamed of one day being Lady Potter, the wife of the Boy-Who-Lived. I wanted to make her dreams come true. My youngest son, Ron Weasley, wanted to be the best friend of the Boy-Who-Lived. I helped him do that. I was willing to do anything to give my children what they wanted. And because of this, they now sit in a Holding Cell… because of me. Because I wanted them to have everything they wanted. Because I promised they could have everything they wanted. Because they believed I could give them what they wanted, and they agreed to help me get it for them.

“I am guilty of my crimes. My children are not. They do not deserve Azkaban. They do not deserve to be blamed for anything you may hear about them today. Please do not blame them. Blame me. Today I am here for them. Because I am a dedicated mother who only wants the best for my children.

“I am guilty of my crimes. But I am not the only one. There is one other who should be seated here beside me. I hope that one day, he will be seated here. Because he – like me – deserves Azkaban.
“And all the horrors that come with it.”

Molly Weasley sat back down and stared forward. As whispers and murmurs were heard around the room, Amelia looked up at Albus, who was staring with wide, fearful eyes at Molly Weasley. Amelia wanted so badly to stand up and applaud Molly Weasley. The woman knew she was guilty of everything she did. But she also knew who started her on a path that brought her here.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” a voice roared.

With quick, Auror-trained reflexes, Amelia slipped off her chair and ducked down. Panic ensued around the Courtroom, and Amelia looked on horrified, as Molly Weasley fell out of the chair, her heavy form slumping over onto the floor, obviously dead of a Killing Curse. Amelia then stood up, summoned her wand from her holster and looked around. Her eyes widened as she saw who the perpetrator of the Killing Curse was.

Dedalus Diggle was pointing his wand where Molly Weasley had just been sitting, breathing her last breaths of her life. His eyes were blurred and hazy. Symptoms of the Imperius Curse – Amelia recognized it immediately. The Aurors around the room pointed their wands at Diggle. Moments later, Diggle pointed his wand at the side of his head.

“Expel –” Amelia began, but she was too late.

“Confringo!” Diggle shouted.

Amelia looked on in horror as Dedalus Diggle’s head exploded in brains, blood and gore, which sprayed around on several people who were closest to him. His headless corpse dropped to the ground like a bag of bricks.

Arthur Weasley’s wail of devastation echoed around the room as an equally devastated Bill and Charlie Weasley held him back from running over to their dead mother.

Amelia turned and looked around in Dumbledore’s direction. He was standing, staring wide-eyed in horror at Molly Weasley’s corpse. Amelia narrowed her eyes at the man. She wasn’t falling for it.

Albus Dumbledore was guilty of two unnecessary deaths today. He didn’t want Molly Weasley naming him in her statements. She knew it.

And she couldn’t arrest him for seven months.

Chapter End Notes

Yep. That just happened.

I must apologize for not putting "Character Deaths" and "Graphic Violence" in the warnings. It would give away the ending of the chapter. I did not want to give any hint to the end of it. I knew most of my readers might be upset if I did.

When Amelia Bones was speaking to Dedalus Diggle before the trial, I do not consider
this intimidation. She was warning him that Dumbledore was manipulating him to do something that benefits nobody but Dumbledore.

Next Chapter: The Aftermath of the ending of this chapter. And Sirius' Trial! Yes, it will take place even with the horrors of this chapter! I promise it won't have the same results. I wouldn't do that to you.
Aftermath

Chapter Notes

Thank you for such an amazing response to the previous chapter. So many reviews and comments, many of which were made less than three hours after the chapter was published! That has never happened for me before!

Just for this amazing response – and the fact that this chapter does not have Sirius Black's Trial – I am giving you a second chapter today. You'll get another chapter tomorrow, which will be Sirius' trial! I promise! The reason it isn't in this chapter, is because the aftermath of the last chapter took too long to get done. So much happens in this chapter!

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 12:15 PM)

The flash of a camera from one of the Daily Prophet cameramen, followed by several more camera flashes, as the cameramen from several media representatives started taking photos of the horrifying scene in Courtroom Ten, brought Amelia Bones’ focus from Albus Dumbledore and back at the task at hand.

“Aurors!” Amelia yelled, “Summon those cameras! Now!”

The cameramen and other representatives of the media shrieked in protest as the cameras were zoomed over the heads of everyone in the room and toward the various Aurors.

“You cannot do this!” Rita Skeeter shrieked, as she marched over to Amelia, side-stepping a bit of Dedalus Diggle’s blood as she crossed the room.

“I just did, Miss Skeeter!” Amelia growled, “Those photos are evidence! If you, or any of your peers, argue further, you will be in Holding Cells instead of sitting here, reporting the next trial when it takes place.”

Rita blinked. “The next trial is still going to happen.”

“Yes,” Amelia said, firmly, “It is.”

She wasn’t going to let this tragic disaster delay Sirius Black from becoming a free man. Rita raised an eyebrow, then she grinned and walked back over to the media.

“Hem-hem!” a voice coughed somewhere in the Wizengamot; Amelia ignored it for now.

“Aurors!” Amelia said, “Nobody leaves the room. Line everyone not in the Wizengamot up against the walls, get their statements and check their wands! Leave Arthur, William and Charlie Weasley alone for now, please.”
“Hem-hem!” the same voice coughed.

Amelia rolled her eyes and turned around. Dolores Umbridge was standing at her chair and looking right at Amelia. Amelia sighed, and walked over to Umbridge.

“What can I do for you, Madam Umbridge?” she asked.

“Director Bones, I must have misheard you,” Umbridge said, “Did you just say the next trial is still going to happen after – well – what just happened in here?”

“Yes,” Amelia said, “It will happen. The man in question has been waiting for this trial for a long time. We will not delay it any further than necessary. If we have to, we will move it to another courtroom. Do you not agree, Minister Fudge, Head Auror Scrimgeour?”

“I certainly do agree,” Scrimgeour said, “However this room is now a crime scene. We must move it elsewhere.”

“I agree – Sirius Black’s trial must take place today,” Fudge said. “Has he arrived, Director Bones?”

“I wrote him a letter which his Defense Lawyer confirmed he received,” Amelia said, “He has agreed to arrive around one-o-clock. I have asked Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt to escort him. If we can figure out where the trial will take place, I can give the message to Auror Shacklebolt.”

“Courtroom Nine next door,” Fudge said, “It is set up for the Wizengamot Council meeting on Monday. So we can borrow it for Black’s trial. However, this time we will have a select few media representatives and only those people closely involved with Sirius Black and the surrounding events as spectators. Dolores, when I am finished with Director Bones, I will give you a list of the media I wish to invite. You’ll meet with them and explain what is going on. You’ll have to dismiss the rest. After telling them I will give a statement later about today’s events.”

“Of course, Minister,” Umbridge said, “I just have one more question, Director Bones. Why do you need witness statements? We saw what happened. Dedalus Diggle was obviously angry that he had been dismissed as the Accused’s lawyer, and he killed her, then killed himself so he wouldn’t have to suffer the consequences in Azkaban.”

“I’m afraid that is not all what happened,” Amelia said.

“Mr. Diggle was under the Imperius Curse,” Scrimgeour said, “I could see it in his eyes from my chair.”

“Merciful Merlin!” Fudge gasped, holding a hand over his heart. “Who could have done this?”

Amelia opened her mouth, but was interrupted by someone clearing their throat. She narrowed her eyes when she saw Albus Dumbledore standing nearby.

“The perpetrator who put the Dark Mark in the Sky at the Quidditch World Cup has not been apprehended,” Albus said, “Perhaps they are the culprit here.”

“It is possible,” Scrimgeour said, nodding, “Which means it is someone in this room.”

“Could even be someone sitting in one of the Wizengamot chairs,” Amelia said, her eyes on
“Director Bones, I am shocked at your blatant accusations!” Umbridge said. “The Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot are fine, respectable, law-abiding individuals!”

Amelia resisted a healthy snort, but it was a very close thing.

“Obviously Director Bones is stressed after the tragic events that just took place,” Albus said, “Perhaps she should take the rest of the day off. We can choose another replacement for her place as Interrogator in Sirius Black’s trial.”

“I disagree,” Scrimgeour said, “Director Bones has always been cool under pressure. I am quite sure she will perform well with the rest of today’s events.”

“Agreed,” Fudge said, “Besides, Director Bones is the Chief Interrogator in Black’s trial today, Albus. She will not be replaced from her role.”

Albus frowned. Amelia resisted glaring at the man, but it was close. Obviously Albus was afraid of what she could do as the Chief Interrogator of Sirius’ trial. She knew what he wanted. He wanted her out of the trial, because without her, he might be able to arrange for Sirius to be found guilty.

“You thought me out of this trial, Albus,” Amelia said, “You thought that without me, you could get Sirius Black to be found guilty. You thought wrong, Albus. You thought very wrong.”

Albus frowned. Amelia resisted glaring at the man, but it was close. Obviously Albus was afraid of what she could do as the Chief Interrogator of Sirius’ trial. She knew what he wanted. He wanted her out of the trial, because without her, he might be able to arrange for Sirius to be found guilty.

“Of course,” Albus said, “My apologies. I was only looking out for Director Bones’ health — mental, physical or otherwise.”

“I am perfectly capable of doing my tasks today, Chief Warlock,” Amelia said, “Now if you excuse me, I must get back to that task.”

“Of course you must, Director Bones,” Fudge said, smiling, “I wish you luck investigating this terrible crime. Pardon me. I must give my condolences to Arthur and his sons. Terrible!”

Amelia turned and found Samantha walking over to her.

“Did you speak to one of the Aurors, Samantha?” Amelia asked.

“They spoke to me first,” Samantha said, “Obviously, they know I am your secretary, and that you might have need for me.”

“I do, as per usual,” Amelia said, smiling, “Kingsley Shacklebolt and Nymphadora Tonks are not here in attendance. Find them and tell them that Sirius Black’s trial will now be next door in Courtroom Nine. Otherwise, they should still follow their orders as I gave them earlier.”

“Yes, Amelia,” Samantha said.

Amelia turned and found John Dawlish standing over Diggle’s headless body, while trying to keep out of the blood and gore surrounding the body.

“Auror Dawlish!” Amelia said.

Dawlish turned and walked over to Amelia. “Yes, boss?”

“Your initial findings?” Amelia asked, “I assume that is why you were studying Diggle’s body?”
Dawlish cleared his throat. “I noticed Diggle under the symptoms of the Imperius Curse before he… blew off his head. Obviously, given the… manner of his death, we can’t prove it. His wand his covered in blood and gore, so I dared not pick it up yet. Aside from the obvious… there isn’t anything else yet. Unfortunately, because of the panicking, I do not know who was sitting around him. Especially directly behind him. If he was put under the Imperius Curse, it could be whoever was directly seated behind Diggle. They could have pointed their wand at his back and nobody would have noticed.”

“Something I hadn’t thought of yet,” Amelia said.

She now had another lead – what if Dumbledore used a scapegoat to place Diggle under the Imperius Curse, so his wand wouldn’t show the Imperius Curse on it? Obviously if the person was caught, Dumbledore would do everything to make sure he had no connections to the culprit.

Amelia resisted cursing out loud. She really hated when the culprits were very good at hiding their tracks. Worse, her main suspect was quite powerful, magically and politically, in British wizarding society. And just as popular with a good majority of British wizards and witches. He could easily hide his tracks with a few well-planned maneuvers. She needed to be several moves ahead of him.

“Perhaps someone here will know who was sitting behind Mr. Diggle,” Amelia said, “Obviously the culprit wouldn’t be the one to tell us who they were. Very good, Auror Dawlish. I have a task for you, Auror Dawlish. Please let Samantha here out of the Courtroom. She has tasks she needs to do for me.”

“Of course, Director,” Dawlish said, “Come on, Miss. Let’s get you away from this horror show.”

Samantha nodded, nervously, then followed Dawlish across the room. Amelia sighed and looked around the room. Most of the Wizengamot was still in their chairs, talking to their neighbors. Albus Dumbledore was with the Weasleys. Cornelius Fudge, who had just been speaking to Arthur and his two eldest sons, turned and walked back toward the Wizengamot Council seats. Amelia walked over to the Weasleys.

“Arthur,” Amelia said.

A red-eyed Arthur turned toward her, as did his sons and Albus.

“Excuse me, Chief Warlock,” Amelia said, “I wish to speak to Arthur and his sons in private.”

Albus bowed his head. “Once again, I am terribly saddened by your loss. Please, if you need anything, I will always be available for you.”

“I appreciate it, Albus,” Arthur said.

Albus smiled, then turned and walked back toward the Minister of Magic.

“I promise you, and your children, that I will find out what truly happened here,” Amelia said, “I did not want this to happen to your wife. Please believe that. I firmly believe she was guilty of her crimes, and should have been in Azkaban. But I do not believe she deserved what happened to her.”

Arthur sniffled and nodded. “Thank you, Director Bones. That means a lot to me. What – what is going to happen to Ron and Ginny?”
Amelia had expected this question. She knew she might regret her decision later, but it was the only thing she could do at the moment. It ruined a few of her plans, when it came to Dumbledore’s investigation, but she didn’t want to cause any more grief for a family who had suffered so much recently.

“I will honor your wife’s agreement as if it had been completed,” Amelia said. “You, along with Molly’s Great Aunt Muriel Prewett will be their guardians. Their magic will be bound with four bindings and they will not use wands until they are seventeen. However, I am told Muriel Prewett is well qualified to home-school them.”

“She was a Hogwarts Professor several decades ago,” Arthur said, “I believe she taught Minerva McGonagall.”

“Impressive,” Amelia said, nodding, “Then she is well-qualified. I will have Ron and Ginny released into your custody before the end of the day. I will try to have your wife’s body in your custody in the next few days as well, so you can give her a proper goodbye. Would you like to see your two youngest children now?”

Arthur nodded. “Yes. I-I need to tell them what happened. Do you need any statements from my sons and I?”

“No at the moment,” Amelia said, “I might ask to speak to you later.”

“Of course, Director Bones,” Arthur said, “I would be happy to cooperate with whatever you need of me. You could have placed my son and daughter on trial instead of gone through with my wife’s plea. Thank you for doing this.”

“You’re welcome, Arthur” Amelia said; she didn’t want to tell him she was second-guessing herself at the moment, “Auror Jones!”

Auror Hestia Jones turned from the witness she was speaking to, then made her way to Amelia.

“Yes, Director?” she asked.

“Take Arthur and his two sons and escort them to the Ron and Ginny Weasley’s Holding Cells,” Amelia said, “Remain with them please. I will release Ron and Ginny into their custody after Sirius Black’s trial.”

“Yes, Director,” Auror Jones said; then she addressed the Weasleys; “Follow me, please.”

Arthur and his sons took one last, long look at Molly’s body, then they followed Auror Jones across the room.

Amelia sighed and turned back toward where she had last seen Albus Dumbledore. He was no longer speaking to the Minister. In fact, as she looked around the room, she could no longer find him. Where was he? How did he escape the courtroom!

“Minister!” Amelia growled.

“Yes, Director Bones?” Fudge asked.

“Where is Chief Warlock Dumbledore?” Amelia asked, “I thought he was talking to you. Now he
isn’t here! Nobody was to leave before we checked their wands!”

Fudge looked around wild-eyed. Then he bustled over to her and whispered to her.

“Y-you can’t possibly believe Albus did this, Amelia!” he whispered, “I know you’re investigating him, but this – he couldn’t have done this!”

“You didn’t give him permission to leave, did you?” Amelia asked.

“Of course not!” Fudge said, “But I certainly wasn’t going to keep an eye on him and make sure he stayed here!”

“Albus Dumbledore was involved in Molly Weasley’s crimes, Minister!” Amelia whispered, harshly. “He helped her create an illegal Betrothal Contract between her daughter and Harry Potter! He was the reason Molly Weasley did everything she was in court for! Who else besides Albus Dumbledore had better reason to place Diggle under the Imperius Curse, so he could silence Molly Weasley?! Albus Dumbledore hired Diggle, so the man could take charge of Molly’s trial, so Molly wouldn’t mention a word about Dumbledore and implicate him in her crimes! Molly made a deal with me, in order to save her children from trial, to tell the Wizengamot everything! That is why she didn’t want Diggle to be her lawyer!”

Fudge blustered and stammered. “Amelia, I… it sounds… well, if you believe all this, you need to get proof! But you cannot arrest him until next June!”

“Minister!” Amelia hissed, “You’re still honoring his deal?! Do you not see what Dumbledore’s doing here?!”

“I don’t know what is happening here, Bones!” Fudge whispered harshly, “It is your job to find out what happened! Speaking of your job! Whoever did this wouldn’t have been able to do it if the Aurors hadn’t allowed spectators to have their wands in here today!”

“Perhaps this is something to be discussed on Monday during the Council Meeting?” Amelia asked, “Better enforcement of wands during Wizengamot Council meetings and trials? We’re extremely lucky this is the first time something like this has happened!”

“We are,” Fudge said, nodding. “I’ll consider it. However, I am making an emergency decision now. Nobody gets to keep their wand, without my permission, during Black’s trial today! Hackles are already raised. We don’t need to make things worse!”

“Dumbledore cannot be an Interrogator for Black’s Trial,” Amelia said, “You saw the Potter’s Will. He was involved in Black’s – well, there is no better way to put it – illegal incarceration.”

“I’ll do you one better,” Fudge said, “You’re correct that he is partially to blame for Black going to Azkaban without a trial. Therefore, he has no business being involved in Black’s trial today. Albus Dumbledore will be barred from the courtroom during Black’s trial. Will that appease you for now?”

Amelia sighed in relief. “Yes, Minister. It would.”

“Good,” Fudge said, “Director – Amelia – I… I really don’t know what to think about Albus and these accusations you have against him. All I can tell you is if you truly believe he is responsible for what happened here, you need to prove it. Until then, keep quiet about it! After all, it could be someone else who did it! We don’t need a witch hunt after today’s events! There’s already going to
be enough blame heading our way because of this!"

“I know this,” Amelia said, sighing, “I will prove it was him, Minister.”

“Good luck, Director,” Fudge said, “If that is all, I need to prepare for Black’s trial. Tell the Aurors not to allow Albus into Black’s trial today. On my orders.”

“Believe me, I will,” Amelia said, firmly.

Fudge nodded and walked away from her. Amelia cursed Albus Dumbledore to hell, and vowed she would see him pay for what happened today – on top of everything else she knew he was guilty of! She was going to find out how he was able to leave a room full of Aurors, who was watching everybody! If it was the last thing she did!

With that in mind, she resumed her tasks, eager to get them done so she could be ready for Sirius Black’s trial.

Nothing but Sirius’ freedom would make getting out of bed today worth it.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 12:55 PM)

When Sirius Black stepped out of the Floo and into the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic, he did not expect the scene he had walked into. It had over thirteen years since he had stepped into the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic – he did not want to think about the last time he was here – but he had never seen it as he did at that moment. Normally there would be a cacophony of sounds – chatter, laughing, and other sounds – from various witches and wizards as they walked, ran, and bustled through the Atrium.

Today, there was no cacophony. It was like walking into a funeral. The only sounds were whispers and murmurs around the various visitors, as they spoke to each other. He thought it might have been because of him, but the coherent side of his brain made him realize that the reactions to his arrival couldn’t have been *that* quickly. Almost nobody was looking in his direction.

He jumped as someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned and found Remus, who had just arrived. Sirius cleared his throat and walked over to Ted and Andromeda Tonks, who were standing with their daughter, Nymphadora, who was dressed in Auror garb, and – Sirius almost didn’t recognize the man – Kingsley Shacklebolt, whom he had been friendly with in Hogwarts, also in Auror garb.

“What funeral are we attending?” Sirius joked; Andromeda’s harsh glare in his direction made him wince. “Um… bad phrasing?”

“There was an incident in Courtroom Ten,” Kingsley said, in a low voice, so it wouldn’t carry to eavesdroppers, “Dedalus Diggle, apparently a victim of the Imperius Curse, murdered Molly Weasley then killed himself.”

“Merciful Merlin!” Sirius gasped, hoarsely. “Me and my big mouth. You should just arrest me now for me being so tactless.”

“You did not know,” Remus said, soothingly, “Still, you’re right that it was tactless.”
“Sorry, Mr. Black,” Kingsley said, “If you have a wand on you, I need it. And I need to magically bind your arms.”

“I understand,” Sirius said, grimly. “I did not bring a wand with me today. I promise.”

“As do I, as his lawyer,” Ted Tonks said.

Kingsley nodded. Sirius held his hands together in front of him and he grimaced as the magical bindings were placed on his arms.

“Has the incident in the Courtroom changed anything about my trial?” Sirius asked, concerned.

“Only that it has been moved to Courtroom Nine,” Kingsley said, “It will still be in front of the entire Wizengamot, and Director Bones will be Chief Interrogator. She was apparently quite adamant that your trial go on as scheduled.”

“Of course she was,” Sirius said, “She wants to see me become a free man today. Shall we get going so I can become a free man?”

“Rookie Auror Tonks,” Kingsley said, “Lead this group to the lifts, please. I will remain beside Mr. Black.”

“Nymph!” Sirius exclaimed, “I thought that was you! You look hot in that outfit, don’t you think so, Remus?”

Sirius glanced at his best friend. Remus glared at him, but Sirius did notice the man was blushing a bit. Sirius cackled. His best friend had a fancy!

“Don’t call me that, cousin!” Tonks growled.

“Nymphadora,” Andromeda said, “Ignore your cousin and do your job like a proper Rookie Auror should.”

“Yes, Mum,” Tonks muttered, then cleared her throat. “Come on, you lot!”

Even though the atmosphere in the Atrium was grim, there were a few people Sirius passed who did double-takes as they saw him. Their wide-eyed stares followed him as he made his way toward the lifts with the Auror escorts and his friends. Thankfully, there was no jeering or bad-mouthing him. Nobody calling him a traitor or a Death Eater. Rita Skeeter’s article earlier this week seemed to ease a lot of people’s doubts about him. It seemed they were waiting to find out – after his trial – if he was truly guilty or not. He was quite thankful for that.

He stepped into the lifts and looked out at the crowd, who was still staring at him. Soon, his group was inside the lift, and the doors of the lift closed. He jumped slightly as the lift began moving. All of a sudden, it was thirteen years ago, in November, and he was in one of these lifts as Aurors – and nobody else – transported him to a Holding Cell. He would be in that Cell for only a few hours, before he would be given a glass of water that would transport him to Azkaban. Soon after, he was in a Cell in Azkaban, and he wouldn’t leave for twelve years.

Sirius blinked and he shook himself. That wasn’t going to happen this time. He was getting a trial. He would be a free man. He could see his godson soon, as a free man. Maybe he and Amelia could reignite their romance.
Yes. He had to believe it would be true. It was the reason he had left the safety of the Fidelius Charm after all.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 1:55 PM)

Amelia Bones knew she should be in Courtroom Nine already. She should be there before Sirius Black would step into the Courtroom. But she refused to follow normal protocol. Not today. Not after what happened in Courtroom Ten. Nothing was going to happen to Sirius Black. Not on her watch.

So here she was, with Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt and Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks, leading Sirius Black, and Ted and Andromeda Tonks toward Courtroom Nine. A few minutes ago, she had reunited -- outside of calls through mirrors -- with the man she had fallen in love with seventeen years ago. The man whom – if things had gone better – she should be married to. The man whom she should have a family of her own with. All of which had been taken from her. From her and Sirius Black. Harry Potter, as well. And so many others.

Amelia narrowed her eyes, as she saw the man who she put all the blame on for not being able to spend the last thirteen years with the man she loved. Albus Dumbledore was standing near Aurors Savage and Proudfoot, who she had ordered to stand outside Courtroom Nine and bar Albus Dumbledore from getting inside. She stopped fifteen feet from the scene ahead of her.

“Shacklebolt, Tonks,” Amelia said, “Remain here with Sir – Black. Do not let Albus Dumbledore get near him.”

“Yes, boss,” Shacklebolt said; Tonks echoed him.

Amelia walked forward toward Dumbledore.

“What are you doing out here, Albus?” Amelia said.

“Director Bones,” Albus said, “These two Aurors are preventing me from getting into the Courtroom. Please tell them to let me pass.”

“I cannot do that, Albus,” Amelia said. “Minister Fudge has barred you from attending this trial.”

“I beg your pardon?” Albus asked.

“You were partially to blame for Sirius Black going to Azkaban without a trial, Chief Warlock,” Amelia said. “Be happy you still have that position after these recent revelations of your corruption toward justice. Not only has the Minister barred you from being Chief Warlock for this trial, he has barred you from even taking your seat on the Council today. He has barred you from stepping into the Courtroom. Return to Hogwarts, Headmaster Dumbledore. Or I will arrest you – and ignore the Goblet of Fire and its bindings on you! I should arrest you right now for leaving a crime scene! Leave now, or these two Aurors will escort you to a Holding Cell, and I can find out later why you left the crime scene!”

Albus frowned and gave her his best ‘I-am-disappointed-in-you” stare.

“Very well, Director Bones,” Albus said, “However, I can ease your mind on why I left the
Courtroom. I am an old man, Director. I needed to use the restroom. I wanted to return, but nobody would allow me back inside. As you can see, I am here. I did not flee the Ministry.”

“Just go, Albus,” Amelia said. “Go back to your castle. The majority of your students are still in the castle, preparing for the Yule Ball. You should prepare for the Ball too, Headmaster. Wouldn’t want the Goblet of Fire to decide you aren’t doing your job, would we?”

“I will see you at the Council Meeting on Monday, Director,” Albus said. “It should be one to remember.”

“Yes,” Amelia said; as she was reminded of what Harry Potter and Hermione Granger’s plans were for the Council Meeting, “I am sure it will be. Farewell, Albus.”

“Farewell, Amelia,” Albus said.

Amelia walked back over to Sirius, and blocked Albus from getting anywhere near him.

Albus did stop as he reached the group. He smiled at Sirius. “Good luck, Mr. Black, on your trial today.”

Sirius said nothing. He simply narrowed his eyes at the man. Albus’s smile turned into a frown at Sirius’ reaction. He gave a sad sigh and started off down the corridor.

“I do not understand that man,” Sirius muttered. “It is like he doesn’t realize I blame him for everything that has happened to me since Wormtail became James and Lily’s Secret Keeper.”

“We’ll make sure everyone knows what he did to you, Sirius,” Amelia said. “Come on. Let’s get you your freedom back.”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for not having the trial in this chapter, but it didn’t feel right including it with everything else that had happened.

I hope my readers are okay with what I decided to do with Ron and Ginny. Amelia decided to honor Molly’s deal. If only for the sake of the innocent Weasleys who are suffering so much right now.

Next Chapter: Finally! Sirius Black’s trial! There will be no cliffhangers, no splitting up chapters. It will happen in one sole chapter!
**The Trial Of Sirius Black**

Chapter Notes

I'm going to be clear right now. Even if I lose readers because of this. Albus Dumbledore is not going to fall soon. There is still a long way to go with this story. He is the main Antagonist. The main villain. Dumbledore is, at this point, more of a main villain than Voldemort in this story! This story would become dull if I get rid of him so soon. I promise you that. I do not want that, and I am sure neither do you. I have a wonderful plan for his demise, but it won't happen anytime soon.

Yes, he will be thwarted many times, yes, he is being investigated throughout the entire story until his arrest. However, he is also countering these maneuvers. He has made a deal with Fudge so he won't get arrested for a while. He's trying to stop his secrets from getting revealed. Some secrets will be revealed. Some of his respect will be lost. But he will not fall because of these two things alone. He is too powerful for that. He has come a very long way and built himself up long before the events of this story, to fall so soon in this story.

I would ruin his character in this story, and I would ruin my story, if I got rid of him too soon. I am sorry if some of my readers disagree with this.

Also, due to what Amelia said about the Ball, some readers have mistakenly thought the Yule Ball is taking place the night of the trials. It is not. It takes place on the next Friday in-story. Amelia simply meant that Albus should focus on that for the next week. Sorry for the confusion.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 2:00 PM)

Amelia stepped into Courtroom Nine, followed by Nymphadora Tonks, who was leading Sirius into the room, with Kingsley Shacklebolt following behind him. Ted and Andromeda Tonks, and Remus Lupin, followed at the back of the group. Amelia narrowed her eyes at the group of flashing cameras – muttering curses about how Minister Fudge had asked her to give the cameras back to the media. At least, this time, the media was limited to half-a-dozen journalists and their cameramen.

There were also very few spectators seated in the chairs, as had been ordered by Amelia herself. Andromeda Tonks and Remus Lupin walked ahead of Amelia and the others, and sat in the front row behind the Defense Table. Ted Tonks sat down at the Defense Table, and Amelia walked toward the Wizengamot Council. Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, was seated where Albus Dumbledore would normally be seated, as Chief Warlock. Fudge frowned as he looked down at her.

“You were supposed to be here before the Accused, Director Bones,” Fudge said, with a sigh.

“I wanted to personally escort Black myself, Minister,” Amelia said. “It was a good thing I made such a decision. Albus Dumbledore was trying to get past the two Aurors I placed outside the
Courtroom to prevent him from getting in. I told him off and sent him on his way back to Hogwarts."

“Excellent,” Fudge said, “Hopefully that will be the last of today’s… complications. I assume you
will still be Chief Interrogator, replacing the need for a Prosecutor?”

“Yes, sir,” Amelia said, “I do not consider myself Prosecution today. Because I do not believe the
Accused is guilty.”

“Understandable,” Fudge said. “Let us begin then.”

Amelia bowed and walked over to the table usually reserved for the Prosecution. Her secretary,
Samantha, had already laid out the documents and notes for her. She smiled at Samantha, who was
sitting in the front row behind the table, and silently thanked her. Samantha smiled in reply.

Fudge smacked his gavel three times on the surface in front of him. Everyone went silent.

“Well, the doors!” he ordered.

The spiderweb of crisscrossed enchanted steel chains covered the exits of the Courtroom.

“Before we begin this trial,” Fudge spoke loudly, as he stood up, “I have two things to say. The first
is that I wish to personally give my promise, that the events that took place earlier this afternoon in
Courtroom Ten will be fully investigated and the persons responsible for such a horrible tragedy will
be found, apprehended and punished to the fullest extent of the law! I have spoken to Arthur
Weasley and his two eldest sons, who were, unfortunately, present during the incident to witness
such a horrifying tragedy. I have given them my personal condolences.

“Second. Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore has been barred from this trial, due to speculations that
he was partially responsible for preventing the Accused, Sirius Black, from having a trial thirteen
years ago. As such, I, Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, will be Proxying as Chief Warlock for
today’s proceedings. It is my desire to make sure that justice truly prevails today, whether the
Accused is innocent or guilty. If only to make up for my predecessor’s mistakes.”

He smacked the gavel again.

“So begins the Criminal Trial on this, the nineteenth day of December in the year nineteen ninety-
four,” Fudge said, “The Accused is identified as Sirius Black, the Lord Apparent of the Ancient and
Most Noble House of Black. The Crimes of the Accused are as stated: Breaching the Statute of
Secrecy; Conspiracy to Commit Murder of James and Lily Potter; Conspiracy to Commit Attempted
Murder and Assault of Harry Potter; Murder of Peter Pettigrew and Twelve Muggles; and escaping
Azkaban.”

Amelia nodded at this. Fudge called Sirius ‘Lord Apparent’, because he couldn’t be a Lord as long
as he was a criminal. It was the law.

“Representative for the Defense: Theodore Edward Tonks,” Fudge continued, “Law Officer of the
Department of Magical Law Enforcement.”

“Representatives for the Wizengamot. Chief Interrogator: Amelia Susan Bones, Director of the
Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Secondary Interrogators: Minister of Magic Cornelius
Oswald Fudge, Rufus Sebastian Scrimgeour, Head of the Auror Department, and Dolores Jane
Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic. Court Scribe...”
After he finished the list a few minutes later, Fudge cleared his throat and looked at Ted Tonks.

“Law Officer Tonks,” Fudge said, “Do you have any opening remarks before you make your opening statement?”

“Oh, only that I wish for the Wizengamot to drop the charge against my client for escaping Azkaban,” Ted said, “As my client was never properly sentenced, he was merely a resident of Azkaban and not a prisoner. Therefore, when he left his *self-imposed* incarceration, he did it completely within the law.”

Amelia frowned at this. If Sirius’ unregistered Animagus charge came up during the trial, it could be said Sirius should have indeed spent five years – and only five – for such a crime. But as he spent more than five years in Azkaban for such a charge, she was sure Ted would likely mention such a thing if it was brought up. He could simply say that Sirius spent seven years of – as Ted called it – *self-imposed* incarceration instead of twelve.

Fudge moved to Scrimgeour and Umbridge and whispered to them. Whatever they were saying, Umbridge seemed to be quite disagreeable with it. Then she looked disappointed as Fudge walked back to his seat.

“Very well,” Fudge said, “We agree that, as the Accused was never sentenced to Azkaban by the Wizengamot, the charge of escaping Azkaban has been dropped.”

“Thank you, Minister Fudge,” Ted said.

“Your opening statement please,” Fudge said.

Ted stood up and cleared his throat. “Minister of Magic Fudge. Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot. Media representatives. My client, Sirius Orion Black, should not be here. This trial should have taken place thirteen years ago. Sirius Black should not have been here. This trial should have taken place thirteen years ago. Sirius Black should have never spent twelve years in Azkaban. Just like we will prove today, it would have been proven thirteen years ago that Sirius Black is, indeed, innocent of all charges he is facing.

“My client spent twelve years suffering the horrors of Azkaban due to negligence and misrepresentation of justice. He has suffered greatly for his time in Azkaban, due to Dementor Exposure. He has recently begun treatment for what he suffered, and if – when – he gains his freedom today, it will go along way to make sure my client can heal – if not completely – from the injustice he has had to suffer.

“When this trial is done and over, it will be clear exactly what happened in the events surrounding that tragic Halloween in 1981. An innocent man, who has been wrongly and falsely accused of horrendous crimes, will hopefully be welcomed back into the society which has cursed his name for the past thirteen years, and has kept him from having the life he deserves with those he loves.”

Amelia allowed a small smile as Sirius looked at her, after Ted’s final line. Ted’s part was mostly done and over with. Now it was her turn.

“Thank you, Law Officer Tonks,” Fudge said, as Ted sat back down, “Chief Interrogator Bones, if you are ready, you may begin.”

“I am, Minister,” Amelia said. “Minister Fudge, Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot, media
representatives and concerned citizens. A couple days ago, I learned that, in the weeks before their death, James and Lily Potter created a Final Will and Testament. In the days after their death, Albus Dumbledore – in his role as Chief Warlock – sealed the Ministry’s copy of James and Lily Potter’s Will. Why? Those answers will be revealed soon. It starts with one fact. Albus Dumbledore was the Witness of James and Lily Potter’s Will. So he knew exactly what was listed inside the Will. Things I believe he didn’t want revealed to certain individuals in our society.”

Whispers and murmurs were heard around the Courtroom. Fudge looked confused, as if he wasn’t sure whether he wanted to frown or not at Amelia’s ease of blaming Albus. His expression turned neutral just as quickly, however.

“The copy of the Will in the Ministry wasn’t the only one,” Amelia continued. “There was another at Gringotts, where the Will was penned and made. Last Sunday, Harry James Potter opened the Will, and discovered what was inside. A couple days ago, he gave me a copy of said Will. That is when I discovered that the Accused, Sirius Black, may not be guilty of the crimes he has been accused of.”

Amelia walked over to the table and picked up the metallic scroll. She then pressed her thumb against the button on one side of the Will. It opened, revealing the Will as it unrolled.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the Final Will and Testament of James and Lily Potter,” Amelia said.

As murmurs and whispers were heard around the Courtroom, Amelia brought the Will over to Minister Fudge.

“Minister,” Amelia said, “Would you please read – aloud -- the first name – and what follows -- under the Official Listed Guardians for Harry James Potter, in case of his parents’ deaths?”

“It says,” Fudge said, as he found the very line in the Will, “‘Sirius Black – Godfather, per the Godfather Ritual, family friend and ally.’”

Several gasps and murmurs were heard around the Courtroom.

“Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour,” Amelia asked, “For those who do not know what the Godfather Ritual is, would you please explain it for the Court?”

“The Godfather Ritual – otherwise known as the Godparent Ritual,” Scrimgeour stated, “Is similar to the Unbreakable Vow. A father and/or mother of a child is present at the ritual, along with their child, and the individual in question who has been chosen to be the child’s godparent. The Ritual creates a Vow, for the Godparent, in which the godparent must promise to never betray the parents and child in question. If the Vow is broken, it will kill the godparent in question. There is no chance of survival for this broken Vow.

“The Ritual is controversial in nature, but not Dark. It is merely rare in its use, because of the possibility that the parents of the child might harm the child, and the godparent would not be able to report such an incident. Because they would be betraying the parents, while trying to protect the child. Therefore, because of this risk, the Godparent Ritual is rarely ever used. Godparents are still named and chosen, but many do not participate in a Ritual. However that does not mean it is illegal. The Godparent Ritual is a completely legal and acceptable Ritual, even if it is risky to use it.”

“So how is Sirius Black sitting here with us today if he took part in this Ritual?” Amelia asked.

“If he betrayed James, Lily, or Harry Potter,” Scrimgeour said, “He would not be sitting here today.
He would have been a corpse to be buried in the ground, thirteen years ago.”

“So he couldn’t have been the Secret Keeper for the Potters?” Amelia asked.

“He could not have revealed the Secret of the Potters’ location and lived,” Scrimgeour said, “There are only two explanations for this. The first is the possibility that the information in James and Lily Potter’s Will was false. But as the Will was penned at Gringotts – and such documents are usually written with Blood or Honor Quills – it is highly improbable that the information in the Will is false. The only other possibility is that Sirius Black was not – as was rumored – the Secret Keeper for James, Lily and Harry Potter.”

“Minister Fudge,” Amelia said, “Peter Pettigrew is listed under the Inheritances in James and Lily Potter’s Will. Would you please read what it says?”

“Of course,” Fudge said; then he found the line in question, “If we are dead, Peter Pettigrew is guilty of betraying us. He was our Secret Keeper at the time of our death. We made everyone believe it was Sirius, so Peter wouldn’t be targeted. Wormtail, you rat, we give you 30 Sickles. Buy a ferry to Azkaban, you traitor.”

More gasps and murmurs were heard as Fudge finished reading.

“Due to obvious private reasons, Minister Fudge,” Amelia said, “I cannot submit the Will into evidence.”

“As long as the evidence seen today can be recorded by our Scribe,” Fudge said, “I will allow it.”

“Of course,” Amelia said.

Fudge nodded, and Amelia walked back to his chair and took the offered Will from the Minister. She walked back over to the table and set it down. Then she walked over to Sirius’ table and stood a few paces away from it.

“Sirius Black,” Amelia said, “We will begin with the Godparent Ritual. Please begin, where you feel it is appropriate, to explain how you became Harry Potter’s Godfather, through the Godparent Ritual.”

“Of course, Director Bones,” Sirius said; then cleared his throat. “I suppose it begins on 31 July 1980, the day of the birth of my godson, Harry James Potter. I visited the Hospital Room at St. Mungo’s where Lily was a patient, after giving birth to her son, Harry. I will always remember that day. The Dementors couldn’t take it from me. When I first saw Harry, he was sleeping, curled up against his mother as she held him. James – he saw me enter the room and he stood up and embraced me. Lily then asked me something I’ll never forget.

‘Would you like to hold your godson, Sirius?’ she asked me. I couldn’t believe it at first. But James was quick to assure me. There was no one better for the job. I did not accept immediately. Not until I held Harry in my arms. He… he opened his eyes a few moments after I started holding him, and I saw his beautiful eyes. I fell in love with the boy. That was when I accepted to be his godfather. I even told James and Lily I would agree to participate in the Godparent Ritual. So they could know that I would never let any harm come to that boy.”

Amelia blinked back tears. Although she had visited James and Lily on the day of Harry’s birth, she had not been there to witness them naming Sirius as Harry’s godfather. But she could see the
Hospital Room in her mind, as Sirius told his tale.

“A couple weeks later, James and Lily invited me to their home at –” Sirius suddenly choked, then he cleared his throat. “I… I’m afraid I cannot reveal its location due to the effects of a Fidelius Charm. I did not know it was still active.”

“I understand, Mr. Black,” Amelia said, “You may continue your thought.”

“I visited James and Lily at their Manor,” Sirius said, “This was well before they moved to Godric’s Hollow. We participated in the Godparent Ritual that day. James held Harry as he said his part in the Ritual, then Lily did, then I did. Harry was a little champ through it all. He was perfectly calm, even though the magic was visible and wind whipped around the room as the Ritual continued and finished. He didn’t cry once. I remember he smiled at me when the Ritual finished and I was officially his Godfather-by-Vow.

“The Ritual allowed one Test to make sure it worked. James and I stepped into the back yard. I drank a Draught that made me unconsciously angry at James. I pointed my wand at him, wanting to attack him, and I collapsed, unconscious immediately. I remember waking up, feeling exhausted and feeling as if my heart was ready to explode. I couldn’t even do magic for twenty-four hours. That is what the Ritual allowed me to experience, if only to warn me about what would happen if I betrayed James, Lily or Harry ever again. I would never betray them. I would kill myself before that happened. It is why I agreed to do the Ritual.”

“Any questions from the Secondary Interrogator about the Godparent Ritual?” Amelia asked.

“Who suggested the Godparent Ritual?” Scrimgeour asked.

“James Potter did,” Sirius said, “He found it in one of his books in his family library.”

Dolores Umbridge coughed. “Mr. Black? Were you forced to take part in the Ritual?”

“I believe I said I agreed to the Ritual, Miss – who are you?” Sirius asked.

Snickers and murmurs were heard around the room as Umbridge frowned at Sirius.

“Dolores Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge,” Umbridge said.

“Undersecretary?” Sirius asked, then shrugged, “Never heard of it. Anyway, I agreed to the Ritual, Madam Umbridge.”

“Were you told before you took part in the Ritual that there would be risks?” Umbridge asked.

“I was and I still agreed,” Sirius said, “If there is ever a moment I would betray James, Lily and Harry Potter, it would be under coercion, probably an Imperius Curse.”

Umbridge looked satisfied with this. “No more questions.”

“You may continue, Chief Interrogator Bones,” Fudge said.

“Mr. Black,” Amelia said, “Were you witness to Peter Pettigrew becoming James and Lily Potter’s Secret Keeper?”
“I was,” Sirius said, then he snarled, “As was Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore was the one to bind the Fidelius Charm! I wanted to do it, but he insisted!”

There were more gasps and murmurs around the room as it was realized that Albus Dumbledore not only knew Sirius wasn’t the Secret Keeper. But also that he knew who was the true Secret Keeper.

“The event happened two weeks before that fateful Halloween,” Sirius said, “Dumbledore was already present when Peter and I arrived. James and Lily asked me to be the Secret Keeper. Obviously they knew I’d die if I betrayed them. But I refused. I said I would be the obvious choice. I suggested Pettigrew be the Secret Keeper.”

“Why?” Rufus Scrimgeour asked

“Aside from the fact that I felt I would be the obvious choice,” Sirius said, “I cannot remember why I suggested Peter. There were others I could have suggested. We had plenty of friends – Allies – who would agree to the role. I do not know why I was so firm in my decision to suggest Peter.”

Amelia suspected she knew the answer. Albus Dumbledore coerced him somehow.

“In their Will,” Scrimgeour said, “James and Lily Potter seemed to already mistrust Pettigrew. In fact, they called him a traitor. Gave him thirty Sickles, thirty pieces of silver. The traitor’s reward. Why did they agree to your suggestion?”

“I don’t know,” Sirius said. “They never explained it to me, nor did they express any mistrust in him to me. Perhaps they were getting paranoid in their self-imposed incarceration in the Godric’s Hollow Cottage. I know how that feels. So I cannot blame them for that.

“I also felt mistrust in Pettigrew and I am glad I did. Because it allowed me to place an alarm rune under the doormat on the front step of the cottage. It would let me know if any Dark curses or other spells were used in the vicinity. It paid off two weeks later.”

“Please,” Amelia said, “Continue that line of thought. Tell us what happened that Halloween night.”

“I was lounging around my flat in Diagon Alley on Halloween night,” Sirius said, “I was waiting for a friend to come over. So we could spend the night together.”

“Who was this friend, Mr. Black?” Umbridge asked.

Sirius looked at Amelia, who smiled and nodded. It was no secret.

“Director Bones,” Sirius said, “We were a couple for four years at that point.”

Amelia rolled her eyes and nodded. “He is telling the truth. Our relationship wasn’t a secret.”

Umbridge cleared her throat. “Minister, I must insist that we –”

“Continue your story, Mr. Black,” Fudge interrupted, before Umbridge could imply that Amelia was too closely involved with Sirius to take part in the trial. “You won’t be interrupted. I understand if this is difficult.”

Umbridge huffed and Amelia smirked at her.
“My Alarm Rune that was keyed to the Rune under James and Lily’s doormat suddenly started going berserk. I realized something was very off at James and Lily’s House. I tried to Apparate, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t even Apparate from my flat. So I had to use my motorcycle. It has a flying enchantment on it, and an invisibility enchantment, so no Muggles could see me. I flew to Godric’s Hollow and landed in front of James and Lily’s cottage. The whole time I knew I would be too late.

“And I was. When I arrived, I came to an odd scene. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts, walked out of the house, holding little Harry in his arms, tears rolling down his cheeks. Little Harry was fussy and crying too. I asked Hagrid where James and Lily were. He told me they were dead. That was when I saw the hole above where I knew Harry’s nursery was at. Smoke was billowing out of the roof. I ran inside yelling for James and Lily. I nearly collapsed when I saw James… dead… dead on the floor at the bottom of the stairs. I yelled for Lily and ran up toward Harry’s nursery. She was there on the floor, dead. There was some type of ash on the ground. It definitely wasn’t dust, or the debris of the ceiling. I could tell it was ash of some type. It was in front of Harry’s crib.

“I made my way back out of the house and told Hagrid to give me Harry. I told him I was his godfather, and he was now my responsibility. Hagrid refused. He outright refused to give me my godson. He said Albus Dumbledore ordered him to bring Harry to him. I… I don’t know why I agreed to that. But I did. I even gave Hagrid permission to use my motorcycle. As soon as Hagrid and little Harry vanished into the sky, I… I went mad with grief and rage.

“I knew at that moment that Peter Pettigrew was a traitor. I knew he had betrayed by best friends. I wanted to find him.”

“Did you want to kill him?” Scrimgeour asked.

“No!” Sirius insisted, “I wanted to bring him in! I wanted to contact Amy – Director Bones. She was an Auror at the time. She would be able to bring him in. But I wanted to be the one to find him. So I apparrated to the road where I knew his flat was. I made the next of several mistakes. I screamed his name, calling for him. My voice echoed around the neighborhood. Muggles started coming out of their houses, wondering what the commotion was. If I hadn’t screamed for him… those Muggles might be alive today.

“All of a sudden Pettigrew came walking down the road toward me. Then he started screaming at me.

“‘James and Lily are dead, Sirius Black!’ he screamed. ‘You betrayed them! How could you do it?!’

“It was then I realized – he was framing me. How could Peter Pettigrew pull a prank… on me? Then I watched in horror as he sliced off a finger on his hand, with his wand, then pointed his wand at the road between us. Next thing I knew there was a loud explosion, the Muggles were screaming and the road had blown up. Debris was flying everywhere. But I was focused on searching for Pettigrew. That was when I saw him. He transformed into his Rat Animagus and scurried down into the sewer like a coward. I looked around at the scene. Muggles dead or dying. Other Muggles crying for their loved ones. Then cracks of Apparation from Aurors and others.

“That was when I started laughing, I think. Laughing because Peter Pettigrew framed me. He pranked me. The biggest prank he had ever done. Not just to me… but to the world.”

“Are you telling us,” Fudge asked, “That Peter Pettigrew is alive?”
“The last time I saw him,” Sirius said, “Peter Pettigrew was certainly alive. Still didn’t have that middle finger of his.”

Amelia smiled. An excellent answer. It was the truth too.

“Did you say Peter Pettigrew is a Rat Animagus?” Scrimgeour asked.

“He is an unregistered Rat Animagus,” Sirius said, “A fat brown rat with a bald tail.”

“I looked through the Auror reports of the crime scene at that road,” Amelia said, “Rufus Scrimgeour, you were a Senior Auror at the time, were you not?”

“I was,” Scrimgeour said, “I was not on the scene, however.”

“If you were, you might have come to the same conclusion I have,” Amelia said. “Tell me this, Auror Scrimgeour. If Peter Pettigrew was killed in the explosion that day, why did the Aurors only find a finger? Where was the rest of his body? Blood, brain matter, gore, other body parts?”

Scrimgeour closed his eyes and sighed and shook his head. “I am truly sorry that I had never questioned this. I am truly sorry that the good people of my Department never questioned this.”

“I find something else very odd,” Amelia said, “Tell me, Auror Scrimgeour. The Aurors who were on the scene at the time. The Aurors who are noted as placing the Accused under arrest. Where are they now?”

Scrimgeour shook his head. “Three are dead. Killed in action somewhere between six weeks and eighteen months after that Halloween night. A fourth is dead too. He was on Guard Duty at Azkaban a year after that Halloween. Freak accidental victim of the Dementor’s Kiss.

“One is a resident in the Permanent Ward in St. Mungo’s, a few beds away from Aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom. He screams at me and calls me his dead brother’s name when I visit. His brother’s family – wife, son, and two daughters, including a baby, were murdered six months after that Halloween. He had a mental breakdown when he came upon the crime scene. He tried to Obliviate himself. It didn’t work. It just made him what he is today.

“The final one was a Muggleborn who lost the love of his life eight months after that Halloween and begged to be Obliviated of his magical knowledge so he could go back to Muggle society and live out his life.”

“There are no Aurors who were on the scene that day that could be available to report the findings?” Amelia asked.

“None,” Scrimgeour said, “Before you ask, yes I find it odd. I don’t know what to say.”

“What happened after your arrest, Mr. Black?” Amelia asked.

“I was taken to a DMLE Holding Cell,” Sirius said. “Wasn’t there very long. I remember being offered a glass of water. I asked if I was going to get a trial soon. The Auror told me to drink up and stop asking questions. I grabbed the cup, and it turned out to be a Portkey. I arrived on the beach where the boat was that brought prisoners to Azkaban. I was stunned immediately, and woke up in a Azkaban Cell. I didn’t leave for twelve years.”
“Yes, explain why you escaped, please,” Amelia said.

“One day, Minister Fudge visited Azkaban and walked to my Cell,” Sirius said, “He gave me a newspaper, said he wanted me to see what I was missing out on.”

Amelia turned to the Minister, who stammered.

Fudge cleared his throat. “I believe I do remember doing that.”

“On the front page of the Daily Prophet was a family – the Weasleys,” Sirius said, “It announced they won a Draw of some kind and were in Egypt on holiday. There, sitting on the youngest son’s shoulder, was a rat. Not just any rat. Peter Pettigrew.”

“The youngest son is Ron Weasley,” Amelia clarified, “Pettigrew was posing as Ron Weasley’s rat?”

“Yes,” Sirius said, “Article said Ron Weasley was a Gryffindor and dorm-mate of Harry Potter, my godson. I realized the traitor was sleeping in the same dormitory as my godson. I had to save my godson from the traitor! I am told I said ‘He’s at Hogwarts’ in my sleep. I am told you believed I meant Harry Potter. I meant Peter Pettigrew.”

“I am not going to allow the details of your… leaving Azkaban to be revealed today,” Amelia said, “Because those charges have been dropped.”

“I’ll allow it,” Fudge said. “Mr. Black, do you know if Peter Pettigrew is still the rat of Ron Weasley?”

“I can answer that,” Amelia said. “Ron Weasley said he lost his rat sometime in June. He witnessed it running away into the Forbidden Forest.”

“So it should be assumed Peter Pettigrew is alive and well,” Fudge said, “And a fugitive.”

“I believe it should,” Amelia said. “I am finished with my questions. Secondary Interrogators? Any questions?”

“Where have you been since your escape from Azkaban, Mr. Black?” Umbridge asked.

“As the escape from Azkaban charges were dropped,” Ted Tonks said, “I am not allowing my client to answer that question.”

“I agree,” Fudge said. “Any other questions?”

Umbridge frowned and shook her head. Scrimgeour shook his head too.

“Law Officer Tonks,” Fudge said, “You may begin your closing statements.”

Ted Tonks stood up from his chair and looked up at the Wizengamot.

“Minister of Magic Fudge. Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot. Media representatives and concerned citizens,” Ted began, “Let us go over the charges my client is accused of. The Crimes of the Accused are as stated: Breaching the Statute of Secrecy; Conspiracy to Commit Murder of James and Lily Potter; Conspiracy to Commit Attempted Murder and Assault of Harry Potter; Murder of
Peter Pettigrew and Twelve Muggles.

“Let us begin with the Breach of the Statute of Secrecy. It is assumed this is because of what happened when my client confronted Peter Pettigrew that night my client was arrested. It has been explained that Peter Pettigrew is the one who used magic in front of the Muggles, and blew up the street. Therefore my client is not guilty of the Breach, Peter Pettigrew is. Peter Pettigrew is apparently alive, as my client has stated. Therefore his murder charge should be dropped. Peter Pettigrew is responsible for murdering those Muggles, not my client.

“Conspiracy to Commit Murder of James and Lily Potter; Conspiracy to Commit Attempted Murder and Assault of Harry Potter. As Godfather per the Godparent Ritual, my client could never have committed these charges. He was not James and Lily Potter’s Secret Keeper. If he was guilty of these charges, we would not be here today. Because my client would be dead.

“Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot. My client is innocent of all charges. He should be cleared of all charges. He should be a free man, and he should have been a free man thirteen years ago. I humbly request to the Council that you do what is right by my client. Correct the serious miscarriage of justice that my client has suffered.”

“Thank you, Law Officer Tonks,” Fudge said, “Chief Interrogator Bones, you are finished with your duty, you may be seated in your chair on the Council.”

Amelia bowed and made her way to the Bones chair amongst the Great Alliance, sitting between Augusta Longbottom and Minerva McGonagall.

“Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot,” Fudge continued, “You have ten minutes to make your decision and go over the evidence and statements that has been given today. We will reconvene in ten minutes.”

“You did a fine job today, Amelia,” Augusta said.

“Thank you, Augusta,” Amelia said, “I still have much to do after today. Arthur Weasley is still with his youngest two children.”

“Oh, Merciful Merlin,” Minerva said, “I know Ronald and Ginevra have done so much to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, as did Molly Weasley. But… they didn’t need this. Molly didn’t need to die. Even if she was going to Azkaban.”

“No,” Amelia said, “She did not. Do you think Hogwarts already knows about what happened?”

“While I would rather say I hope not,” Minerva said, “So that I could tell Fred and George Weasley, and give the news to Harry and Hermione, I truly believe I will enter the castle and find out everyone already knows. Harry and Hermione were supposed to have a Dancing Lesson tonight to prepare for the Ball. Now, I don’t know. Will they even want to participate? They knew Molly, after all. They were close to her, no matter what she did to them.”

“Then it should go on, Minerva,” Augusta said, “They need something to distract themselves, the poor dears.”

Minerva said, nodding. “I suppose you have a fine point. Very well. Amelia, something you should know. Harry led his first Children of the Great Alliance meeting today. I imagine you’ll either receive a letter or mirror call from Susan about it sometime soon.”
“That should be interesting,” Amelia said.

Especially since she knew Harry would probably voice his issues... with her niece. Her treatment during the Chamber of Secrets fiasco and after weeks after the Choosing Ceremony come to mind.

“So, Amelia,” Augusta said, smiling, “I seem to remember you and Sirius Black were quite close before that tragic Halloween. My son and his wife talked about it all the time. They always wondered when you and Sirius would get married and have some babies of your own.”

“You old gossip, Augusta!” Amelia said, smiling, “What are you asking? What do you wish to know to tell your knitting club for the next meeting?”

Augusta huffed playfully, then smiled. “If - sorry, when - Sirius regains his freedom. Can we expect wedding bells and baby showers in your future?”

Amelia blushed. “We’ll see.”

“Oh, Amelia,” Minerva said, smiling, “You know if he asked you to marry him, the moment Fudge says he’s a free man, you’d say ‘about time!’”

Amelia’s blush went deeper. “We need to go on a few dates first.”

“So you aren’t inviting him to go home to the Ossuary with you tonight?” Minerva said, “To celebrate?”

“Are you part of Augusta’s knitting club, Minerva?” Amelia asked.

Minerva scoffed and playfully slapped Amelia’s knee. “We only want you to be happy, Amelia. You deserve it. So does Sirius. Get married, Amy. Give Susan a few cousins. Give Lord Black a heir. Before it is too late and you regret it.”

“Can he even give me children?” Amelia asked. “He might be –”

“Sterile?” Minerva asked. “Harry Potter wouldn’t be second-in-line for Lord Black if Sirius was sterile. He’d qualify for the title of Lord Black.”

“She’s right, Amelia,” Augusta said, “However, who knows how long he’ll still be capable of giving you babies. Take our advice: give him a child, Amelia. Before you both lose that chance.”

Amelia sighed and nodded. “I’ll talk to him about it. When the chance comes up.”

A few minutes later, Fudge smacked his gavel three times.

“Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot,” he said, “It is time to make a decision. Raise your hand if you believe Sirius Black should be cleared of all charges.”

Amelia immediately raised her hand as did most of the Light Alliance around her, including all of the Great Alliance. Most of the Neutral Alliance raised their hands, and so did a few of the Dark Alliance, surprisingly. Cornelius Fudge raised his hand. Lucius Malfoy hesitated for a moment, before he raised his hand. Minerva’s cry of glee wasn’t necessary. Amelia already knew what it meant. So, too, did Lucius Malfoy... he had raised his hand when he realized there was a majority.
“Raise your hand if you believe Sirius Black is guilty of any or all charges,” Fudge ordered.

Dolores Umbridge raised her hand, as did most of the Dark Alliance, and a few members of the Neutral Alliance, who had Dark leanings.

“By an obvious majority,” Fudge said, “Lord Sirius Orion Black, Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black, is cleared of all charges!”

Amelia stood up immediately and applauded, as did most of the Wizengamot, and several people on the floor. Sirius hugged Ted quickly, then turned and hugged Andromeda Tonks, then Remus Lupin the longest. Remus was obviously emotional as he hugged his friend.

“Lord Black!” Fudge said, smacking his gavel once.

The room silenced as Sirius turned back to Fudge.

“As Minister of Magic,” Fudge said, “I believe I speak for the majority of the Wizengamot, the Ministry, and our society in whole, when I say I deeply apologize for the pain and suffering you had to endure because of the clear miscarriage of justice. This will never happen again. 1,300,000 Galleons will be placed in a Vault of your Choice – 100,000 Galleons for every year you have suffered under this miscarriage of justice. I know it is can never be enough to make you completely forgive the Ministry of Magic. But I hope it will be enough to help you move on.”

“Thank you, Minister Fudge,” Sirius said, “Thank you for giving me what your previous administration did not.”

Fudge looked relieved as he smiled and started a round of applause. Amelia rolled her eyes, knowing Fudge was applauding the fact that Sirius was basically not putting any blame on him.

“Go see him, Amelia,” Minerva said. “Go see your man.”

Amelia smiled and didn’t need to be told twice. She hurried down the steps and made her way over to Sirius. He stared at her for a moment, then a smile crossed his face. Amelia caught a sob in her throat, then lunged forward, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him square on the mouth. Sirius kissed her back as camera flashes erupted around them.

Amelia did not care. She was finally able to be with the man she loved again. And she would never let him get away from her again.

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it! What did you think?

Next Chapter: We return to Hogwarts and get Harry and Hermione's – and Hogwarts' – reactions to the news of the incident in Courtroom Ten, then they speak to Sirius. And so much more. I am planning a few POVs. I don't know what all will happen. I am quite sure there will be a Dancing Lesson. Even if it just a short scene. I know I have a pattern of promising things that don't end up in the following chapters. I just have so much in
my mind for what could happen on the remainder of this long Saturday.
Dancing Away With My Heart

Chapter Notes

Like my last chapter with dancing lessons, this chapter is too titled from a song, of the same title, by Lady Antebellum.

My readers wanted me to punish Dumbledore a bit? Dumbledore's scene in this chapter is for you!

Warning: Molly Weasley bashing – yep, even after death! Dumbledore bashing too. Brief non-descriptive Nudity – it is adults in this chapter, not teens! Hints of sex between adults, but no actual sex.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 2:55 PM)

Harry stepped into the Private Common Room, and found Hermione laying, curled up in one of the chairs. Her eyes and face were red, evidence of the fact that she had been crying off and on for the last half-hour. She was absent-mindedly petting her cat, Crookshanks, while staring at the enlarged compact mirror, obviously waiting for Sirius Black to contact them.

Half-an-hour ago, Professor Sprout – who still had permission to visit the Lion’s Den, since she had first visited escorting Susan Bones last Wednesday – had been escorted by Winky into the Private Common Room, where Harry and Hermione had been spending time together waiting for word about Sirius’ trial. Professor Sprout had looked emotional, and Harry and Hermione soon discovered why. When the Herbology Professor told them of the incident in Courtroom 10 at the Ministry of Magic – of which she had received news about in a letter from Professor McGonagall, who was on the Wizengamot Council during the trials – Hermione broke down in tears and allowed Harry to hold her.

When Harry asked if she knew if Sirius Black was still getting a trial, Professor Sprout said that Professor McGonagall confirmed he would be getting one, and that it had been scheduled for two-o-clock that afternoon.

Relieved about this news, Harry had thanked Professor Sprout for informing them about the news, then the Head of Hufflepuff had left. Hermione did not say anything for fifteen minutes; she simply allowed Harry to hold her and let her cry. Harry just sat there holding her, and then she had stood up and simply wanted to find her cat. She asked him to see if Fred and George were still in the castle.

Harry had agreed and left the Lion’s Den, then had gone to the portrait of the Fat Lady. He asked Dobby to find Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet and Katie Bell. Fred and George’s friends had met him outside the Gryffindor Common Room. The three girls were tearful and emotional, while Lee Jordan told them that Fred and George had left a few minutes prior, being escorted by their older brothers Bill and Charlie, whom Harry was familiar with as he had met them the previous summer. None of the elder Gryffindors knew if Fred and George would return for the Yule Ball.
Now Harry was back in the Private Common Room. Hermione turned and looked up at Harry.

“I’m worried about Sirius,” Hermione said, “It is nearly three-o-clock. The trial started at two.”

“The trial could still be in session, Hermione,” Harry said.

Hermione shrugged and nodded. “I suppose so. I just keep expecting him to show up in the mirror at any moment. Fred and George?”

“According to Lee Jordan and the Gryffindor Chasers, they left with Bill and Charlie,” Harry said, “They don’t know if Fred and George will be back for the Yule Ball. But something tells me they will be here.”

“Really?” Hermione asked.

“I think they’re going to want to get away from all the drama and grief at the Burrow,” Harry said, “What better way to do that than to dance the night away with their dates and spend time with their friends?”

“I think you’re right,” Hermione said, “Besides they’ll likely be going back home for the shortened Christmas Break. I’m sure they’ll come back for the Ball, if only to get away for a day or two.”

“How are you, Hermione?” Harry asked; he sat down on the couch and looked at her, as she sat there in the chair with her cat. “Be honest with me.”

Hermione frowned and looked down at Crookshanks, who was sleeping in her lap.

“I want to hate her, Harry,” Hermione said. “It was more than just the illegal Contract and the Potion plots. More than the manipulation with you from the day you met her and the Weasleys. More than the fact that she probably stole from your Trust Vault, same as Dumbledore probably did.

“She was so overbearing. Not just with you and I. But with her children. Is it any wonder Bill decided to go off to Egypt, and Charlie to Romania? Is it any wonder Percy decided to leave his home as soon as he finished his education here? From what I can tell, he bought a flat just days after the end of last term. Do you realize how much money he would have had to save? How long it would take? It all culminates into the fact that… he wanted to get away from her for so long.

“Fred and George want to follow their dreams of opening a joke shop. It is why they made all those joke sweets and whatever. All that stuff Molly caught them with before we went off to the Quidditch World Cup Campground? It had taken them all summer to make those batches of candy. The money they would have had to save. All of that work and research lost, because she wanted to control her children. She didn’t want Fred and George to follow their dreams. She wanted them to work at the Ministry, like their father, and like Percy. I’m quite sure she was pretty disappointed in both of them, because neither got the Prefect badge, like their older brothers.

“Is it any wonder Ron and Ginny are like they are, with her as their mother? Ron’s eating habits must have come from some part of how he was raised. How did his mother never stop those habits? She must have noticed it! What kind of mother doesn’t correct those kinds of habits?

“And Ginny… she’s the very example of her mother’s nurture. Raising her to be the future Lady Potter, raising her to hero-worship the Boy-Who-Lived, which – if you recall – most of which was a fantasy tale. Encouraging her – both of her children – to break laws and bully others who wanted to
be friends with you. Encouraging them to scare girls like me away from you who might be interested in being your girlfriend. All because of her master plan to steal your fortune.”

Hermione sniffled and shook her head. “I want to hate her so bad. I want to stand up and cheer that she is gone! Yet, I feel bad about having just spent a couple minutes bad-mouthing a dead person. I have been crying about her death for the past half-hour. I should be happy. She’s no longer around to plot against us. But she never deserved to die like that. Yes, she deserved Azkaban, however long she would have been sentenced. Maybe more than that! But to die, struck down by someone under an Imperius Curse. No… she didn’t deserve that.”

“I don’t know what to feel,” Harry said, “I mean… I just wanted to know that she was never going to be in my life anymore. But… for it to happen like this? It feels strange, I suppose. You know what I don’t like, however?”

“What?” Hermione asked.

“That, after my parents,” Harry said, “she was the first person – whom I cared about at some level, at least for a while – who has died. I never got a real opportunity to mourn my parents, you know. Sure, I thought about them – even when I didn’t know who they were. I mourned them and cried when my relatives told me they died in a car crash. But I didn’t know them. But this is the first person who I know – who I cared a little about at one time – who I spoke to many times, who has died. Don’t get me wrong! I mean, I am happy that nobody else I care for has died. I just hate that it has to be her who I have to mourn first. Especially after I now know what she did. Is that weird?”

“No, it isn’t, Harry,” Hermione said. “Because it does sound like you never learned how to mourn or truly grieve for somebody. It isn’t weird that you feel horrible that it has to be someone who has done you wrong -- even though you did know her closely, and come to call her a friend, for a while. You’re conflicted about how you feel, and it is perfectly fine to feel that way. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

“Harry, when I was about seven, my grandmother – my mother’s mother, whom I was very close to – passed away. I still don’t know if it was a disease or old age. I remember telling my mother when she told me, that I hated my grandmother. I hated that she had to die, that she had to leave me. I hated that I wouldn’t get to see her again. That I wouldn’t get to smell her perfume when she hugged me. That she wouldn’t be able bake me my favorite treats she made for me.

“I expected my mother to get angry, to yell at me. She said it was okay for me to feel that way. It was my way of grieving, or mourning for her. And she was right. Two weeks later, I told my mother I wanted to visit my grandmother’s grave again. So we did. I apologized to my grandmother for saying I hated her. That was my very first experience of truly mourning someone.

“So for you to feel conflicted about this is your way of mourning her. Sooner or later, you’ll figure how you truly feel. Perhaps you’ll up writing letters to the rest of the Weasleys, those who were innocent in all of it. Maybe you’ll tell them how you really feel about her. Maybe you’ll decide to lie to them, and say you’re sorry for their loss. Whatever you decide, is how you’ll cope with it.”

“I don’t think I want to talk about this anymore,” Harry said.

He was still feeling very uncomfortable about all of this. Mourning someone who was plotting against him was weird. It was like mourning Voldemort or something.

“Then we can change the subject,” Hermione said; “How much of that sex education book have you
Harry winced. He had read much of the book, and it was awkward and weird, and he had hoped Hermione and McGonagall would forget about it.

“This is what you want to talk about?” Harry asked.

Hermione smiled through her tear-stained face. Harry thought she still looked so beautiful even with a red and blotchy face. She could still smile even when she had been crying for half-an-hour.

“Just trying to lighten up the mood,” Hermione said, “What do you want to discuss?”

“Do you think we’re still going to have dancing lessons tonight?” Harry asked.

“I think so,” Hermione said, “I imagine Professor McGonagall knows we’re going to be dealing with all of the stuff that happened today. Molly’s death, Sirius’ trial. She’ll want us to distract ourselves, so we can think about something else.”

“Dancing with you – even just practicing those slow dances,” Harry said, “Would be a nice distraction.”

He really loved holding her, and that is what the slow dances usually consisted of.

“You want to practice now?” Hermione asked, shyly.

“I think Crookshanks might get jealous,” Harry teased, grinning.

Hermione laughed as she looked at her sleeping cat. “Perhaps you’re right. It is why I am still sitting here and not with you.”

“I thought we were rid of all the jealous gingers in our life,” Harry joked.

Hermione laughed. “Harry James! Honestly!”

“Sorry,” Harry said, though he was still smiling.

“Oh, you,” Hermione said, shaking her head; she sighed and looked toward the mirror. “I’m really starting to get nervous about Sirius now, Harry.”

“He’ll call us soon,” Harry said, “I am sure there is a reason he hasn’t yet – where it be he is still in Court, or he’s delayed elsewhere. Though I cannot imagine what might be delaying him. He did promise to call us as soon as the trial’s over.”

(A few minutes prior…)

“Oh, crap!” Sirius Black cursed.

Amelia Bones backed away from Sirius and sat back on top of the desk. She glared at him and crossed her arms over her chest.

“I know it has been over thirteen years since you’ve kissed me,” Amelia said, “But I can’t recall you
ever reacting that way.”

“It was more snogging than kissing, love,” Sirius said, grinning.

“We are in our mid-thirties, love,” Amelia said, “We’re too old to call it snogging. What’s wrong? Given that we’ve been kissing and… snogging… for a while, I don’t think you’ve forgotten how to kiss me.”

Sirius and Amelia had been behaving rather… badly… ever since they had stepped into Amelia’s office in the DMLE. Whilst they hadn’t done anything but kissed and snogged, it was some heated snogging. Amelia had led him over to the desk, and instead of letting her sit down at her chair, so they could talk, Sirius had grabbed her, lifted her up and sat her down on top of her desk. Then he had pressed his lips to hers, and since then they had been kissing and snogging.

That was roughly ten minutes ago or so.

“I – erm – sort of promised my godson and his girlfriend,” Sirius said, “that I’d mirror call them after my trial. So they could – you know – know whether I am a free man or not. I can imagine they’ve been waiting for me to call them.”

“I suppose that is a good reason for cursing in the middle of kissing me,” Amelia said, dryly; she sighed and jumped off the table. “I need to go find Arthur Weasley – I expect he is still with his children. I did tell him I would release them soon. Which means I need to get their magical core bound.”

“How many bindings?” Sirius asked.

“Four,” Amelia said, frowning.


“It was the deal I made with… with their mother,” Amelia said, “It is taking all my resolve to keep Molly Weasley’s last wish. I really would like to put Ron and Ginny Weasley in front of the Wizengamot, so they could tell them everything Molly was going to tell them. So they could reveal more of Dumbledore’s skeletons. But I promised their mother.”

“Sounds rough,” Sirius said, “Sorry.”

“Yeah,” Amelia said, then her eyes widened, “Oh, crap!”

She opened the top drawer of her desk and pulled out a box.

“Thirteen years since we’ve been together and I’m still rubbing off on you, Bones?” Sirius asked, grinning.

“Well, I was about to give you your wand back,” Amelia said, “But now I’m having second thoughts.”

“It wasn’t snapped?” Sirius asked.

“Crouch wanted to snap it,” Amelia said, “Somebody – not me – talked him out of it. Scrimgeour, maybe.”
“Where is that old bastard anyway?” Sirius asked, “Why wasn’t he at my trial? Did he die and do the world a favor?

“He is on sick leave,” Amelia said, “He’s probably at home.”

Sirius snorted. “Probably didn’t want to be present during the trial. Probably afraid I’d hex him or something.”

“He took sick leave before I discovered the evidence that you were innocent, Sirius,” Amelia said.

Sirius grunted. “He didn’t show up to the trial, did he? He’s a coward.”

Amelia merely rolled her eyes. She then opened the box and took out a thinner, longer box and handed it to Sirius. Sirius inhaled and exhaled, then opened the box. His eyes misted over as he saw his wand resting in the box. He gently grasped it in his fist and exhaled as he could feel his magic sing.

“I feel… complete again,” Sirius muttered; he looked at Amelia. “Thank you. Thank you for this.”

“It is yours,” Amelia said. “I just removed it from evidence, because I had hope you would get to reunite with it.”

“You knew I’d come out of the trial a free man, love,” Sirius said.

“I had hope,” Amelia said. “Sirius, there are two teenagers who are also hoping you walked out of the Courtroom a free man. Two teenagers who don’t know you’re a free man.”

“Crap,” Sirius said, “You’re distracting me, beautiful.”

Amelia smiled. “Come home with me tonight. We can… continue what we couldn’t finish here.”

“I need to go to Gringotts and get my Lord’s Ring,” Sirius said, “And do other stuff.”

“Don’t leave the Ministry without telling me first, okay?” Amelia asked. “Don’t leave my office until I come back.”

“I won’t,” Sirius promised.

“Thank you,” Amelia said; she looked into his eyes, “I love you, Sirius Black.”

Sirius smiled. “I love you, Amelia Bones. I’ve loved you… since the moment you first kissed me, I think. Can’t remember. There was a lot of kissing.”

Amelia laughed. “Well, if you do remember, please tell me. For now, you need to break the news of your freedom to two nervous teenagers. And I need to go… make the lives of two other teenagers worse than they already are.”

Sirius smiled and leaned back toward her and kissed her. “Good luck, Amelia.”

“Thank you, Sirius,” Amelia said. “I think I’m going to need it.”
She smiled, kissed him again, then proceeded to leave the room. Sirius sighed and collapsed into Amelia’s office chair. He removed the compact mirror from his pocket, and said ‘Harry Potter’. The mirror turned on, showing Harry Potter sitting on a couch Sirius had seen him on a couple times before.

“I’m really starting to get nervous about Sirius now, Harry,” Hermione’s voice said, somewhere away from the view of the mirror.

“He’ll call us soon,” Harry said, “I am sure there is a reason he hasn’t yet – where it be he is still in Court, or he’s delayed elsewhere. Though I cannot imagine what might be delaying him. He did promise to call us as soon as the trial’s over.”

Sirius winced. Sorry, kid. Got delayed because I was kissing and snogging my girlfriend! I am sure the same has happened to you a few times recently!

“I did promise you that, didn’t I?” Sirius said.

“Sirius!” Harry said, in an obviously relieved tone.

Suddenly, there was a meowing and hissing sound, and Sirius laughed as he realized it was a good friend of his -- Hermione’s cat, Crookshanks. Hermione appeared on screen and plopped down on the couch next to Harry.

“Sirius!” Hermione gushed, happily.

“Hermione!” Sirius echoed, grinning, “Sorry, you two. I’ve been a bit busy over the past few minutes. Lost track of time. Only remembered a couple minutes ago I was supposed to call you.”

“So,” Harry said, “Does that mean –?”

“I’m a free man!” Sirius said, “Cleared of all charges! In fact, they’re giving me one-point-three million galleons to make up for not giving me a trial thirteen years ago!”

Sirius laughed as he watched Hermione squeak and jump on Harry and kiss him. He cleared his throat, after their kissing went on for about thirty seconds. They backed up and blushed.

“Sorry, were just so happy and relieved!” Hermione exclaimed.

“It is alright,” Sirius said; he then noticed her red eyes and blotchy face, “You’ve been crying. That worried about me, Hermione?”

Hermione sniffled. “We heard about Molly Weasley.”

“Oh… shite, yeah,” Sirius muttered, “I heard about that too. Bad deal, that was. You seem to have taken it pretty badly for someone who – well – wasn’t her crimes against both of you the reason she was at trial today?”

“She was,” Hermione said. “But…”

“Neither of us wanted her to die, Sirius,” Harry said, “Wanted her in Azkaban – maybe even in your old cell. Sure! But dead, murdered like that? No… we didn’t want that.”
“You’re both good kids then,” Sirius said, “I don’t think I would have felt the same if it was someone like Wormtail. Don’t say it isn’t the same. From what you’ve told me, Molly and her two youngest children are traitors to you, just like Wormtail betrayed me, you and your parents, Harry. Where would you be if she had succeeded with her plots, you two? Hmm?”

“Probably Potioned up and the boyfriend and girlfriend of Ginny and Ron respectively,” Hermione said.

“You see then?” Sirius asked. “It is a good thing she was in that Courtroom. Do not even think about blaming yourself, Harry, for any of that.”

“Oh, Merlin,” Hermione said, “I didn’t even consider that! Is that why you’re confused about mourning her, Harry? Because you feel responsible for her being in the Courtroom?”

Harry stammered. “Um… maybe a little? I mean, sure… would she have been arrested, and been in Court if we hadn’t spoken to Director Bones?”

“Stop it, kid,” Sirius said, “Molly Weasley was there because of Molly Weasley. Nobody else.”

“Except maybe Dumbledore,” Harry muttered, “Her plot began because Dumbledore offered her to pen an illegal Betrothal Contract.”

“Then blame Dumbledore!” Sirius said, “Not yourself. I blame him for what happened to me. Dumbledore knew Wormtail was the Secret Keeper. Dumbledore is the reason Hagrid didn’t give you to me that Halloween night. I wouldn’t have gone after Peter if I had custody of you, kid! Dumbledore is to blame for all of this! Do not blame yourself! Do you hear me?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said.

Sirius rolled his eyes. “I am not a sir, Harry.”

“Sorry,” Harry said. “Fine. I’ll blame Dumbledore then. Privately, not publicly. Can’t really do that when he’s around here every day.”

Sirius sighed. “Yes. Amelia – Director Bones – told me she can’t just go and arrest the old man right now. Apparently Minister Fudge is blocking her right now. Something about his involvement in the Tournament.”

“The Goblet of Fire,” Hermione said, “If he’s not involved in judging and planning for the Tournament, he could lose his magic or his life, apparently.”

“His life, probably,” Sirius said, “Non-Magical people don’t live as old as he is. Without magic, he’d probably die. It is why losing magic is so scary for witches and wizards. It is why Squibs are so looked down upon. Because they have no magic, but were born from magical parents. That is just scary to us witches and wizards.

“It is why your ex-friends, Ron and Ginny – why their punishments are just as bad as going to Azkaban. Putting four bindings out of five on their magic? As teenagers? Preventing them from using their wand until they’re seventeen? Yeah, that’s… it is a serious punishment. Don’t ever believe they are getting off easily, you two. Just because they aren’t going to Azkaban, doesn’t mean they aren’t going to suffer.”
“Nobody has explained it like that before,” Hermione said, “Not even Professor McGonagall.”

“Because it is scary to even consider, forget discussing it out loud,” Sirius said, “I think that is why Amelia has agreed not to arrest Dumbledore, which she is very conflicted about, believe me. She doesn’t want to be responsible for him losing his magic and life, because of consequences beyond her control.”

“She told you all that?” Harry asked.

“Not all of it,” Sirius said, “Even though I haven’t been with her in thirteen years, before today, I can still read her better than I can read anybody else. I just know her. I am sure you can say that about Hermione, even though you’ve only known each other since you were eleven.”

Harry blushed as he looked at Hermione, who smiled. “I think I know what you mean.”

“Me too,” Hermione said, “I can read Harry better than I can read my own parents.”

“That is a bit scary,” Harry admitted.

“It can be,” Sirius said. “But a lot of things about romantic relationships and… love… can be scary.”

“You’re right,” Harry said, nodding. “I didn’t know you were so wise.”

“Oi!” Sirius joked, “I can be wise! I just choose not to be most of the time. But I am a free man now. You may be Emancipated, but I am still your Godfather. Time for me to truly act like it.”

“You acted like my Godfather the day you broke out of Azkaban, Sirius,” Harry said, “And every day since then.”

Sirius smiled. “That means a lot, Harry. Thank you. Now, do you want to hear about my trial?”

“Yes!” Harry and Hermione exclaimed in unison.

“Then sit back and relax,” Sirius said, “Because it is a thrilling tale.”

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 3:15 PM)

Albus Dumbledore blinked his eyes open and found himself lying on his front in what appeared to be a bed in the Hospital Wing.

He tried to move and found that he couldn’t move a muscle below his neck.

“Poppy?” Albus muttered, turning his head toward the direction of the Hogwarts Healer’s office.

“You’re awake, are you?” Madam Poppy Pomfrey said, as she appeared moments later by his bed. “I am rather surprised. I expected you not to wake until dinnertime, at the very least. But you are a stubborn old fool, aren’t you?”

“What’s going on?” Albus asked.
“From what I can tell your Phoenix had a burning day right after he transported you with his flame-travel,” Poppy said, “Luckily, Hagrid was preparing the carriages for you and Minerva’s return from the Ministry. He found you, unconscious at the Gates, and summoned a house-elf. Several house-elves brought you to me. You had severe burns on your back, buttocks and the back of your legs. The clothes you were wearing were ruined, of course. I had to lay you on your stomach, in order to begin healing you. Luckily, there will be minimal to no scarring due to how quickly I was able to treat you. But you’ll be here for at least through the entire weekend.”

“I have a Wizengamot Council Session on Monday!” Albus growled.

“I am aware of this Albus,” Poppy said, “Frankly, I’m not sure if I should allow you to leave on Monday. However, if you cooperate fully between now and then, I will see what I can do.”

“I have things I need to do!” Albus grumbled.

“Yes, you do!” Poppy said, “Like getting better! Minerva can handle your duties as Headmaster. She does it all the time. I don’t know what you think you have to do to prepare for the Wizengamot Council Session on Monday. But unless you have someone who can assist you, you aren’t going to be doing much between now and then.”

Albus grumbled. The most important thing he needed to do was find out what happened at Sirius Black’s Trial. He needed to know if anything was revealed about him! He was quite sure there would be. But he didn’t know what that information would be, aside from him being blamed more for not giving Black a trial thirteen years ago. He hoped Black’s time in Azkaban had cost him a few of his memories – such as the Godparent Ritual, and Albus being the one to perform the Fidelius Charm on the Godric’s Hollow House with Pettigrew as Secret Keeper.

He also hoped Sirius didn’t remember being blocked from Apparating to Godric’s Hollow that night. He had gone to extreme lengths to make sure Sirius would have to use his motorcycle, and get their after James and Lily were dead. He also hoped Sirius didn’t come to wonder why he was so angry with Pettigrew after Hagrid left with Harry.

Yes, Albus had been on the scene that night. He had been under James Potter’s invisibility cloak – and how ironic that was! – having showed up just after the events in Harry’s nursery had taken place. He had seen the wispy phantom that was Voldemort fleeing the scene and screaming as he did so. He had investigated the crime scenes before Hagrid arrived. Had used an ancient, almost forgotten enchantment that let him see the last few moments of a person who had just died. He had seen James Potter attempt to battle Voldemort, without a wand – really?! – and fail miserably. He had seen Lily Potter’s pathetic attempt to save her son. But he hadn’t been able to see whatever spell or enchantment she had used on her son and his crib to protect him. He suspected it was some type of rune maybe, which would form the scar on Harry’s forehead. After all, Killing Curses left no evidence, so how could Harry have gotten the scar because of that? To this day, he still couldn’t figure out what it was. He suspected it was a Potter or Peverell Family spell from their Grimoires, the very books that he had never been able to find!

Then he had used Legilimency on little Harry, found the toddler’s ability to remember such a scene clearly – though he still couldn’t find what Lily had done to her son. He suspected Harry had been asleep at the time. He also realized Harry had the ability of an eidetic memory. This had been good information in later years when he needed to block the ability so Harry wouldn’t be too smart. He had seen the moment Voldemort had tried to kill Harry.

And that was how he was able to create the famous moniker of the Boy-Who-Lived, and give the
story to various writers, both for history books and fictional books, the latter which would one day make Ginevra Weasley obsessed with Harry Potter.

He had left the house, rather disappointed, having not been able to find the rumored Portraits James and Lily had mentioned while penning their Will. He realized they were in Potter Manor already, which he still couldn’t get into!

He had watched as Rubeus Hagrid arrived, heard the man’s emotional howling and wailing at seeing James and Lily’s bodies. Then Sirius arrived a few minutes later. He had witnessed the whole scene between Hagrid and Sirius, confound Sirius to agree to let Hagrid take Harry. Then he used a Compulsion on Sirius to make him irrational when it came to Pettigrew.

Of course, he knew there would be some questions about certain events back then that might be brought up. Like why Rubeus Hagrid was on scene so soon after the Potters were murdered. He hoped nobody made the connection to the Aurors investigating the crime scene of the murdered Muggles, and their tragic fates in the following months. He wouldn’t have had to do what he did, if none of them had questioned why Pettigrew’s finger was the only thing found instead of brains, blood and other body parts! He had no use for competent Aurors when he needed them to be incompetent! He had gone to a lot of lengths to get their reports thrown out. He couldn’t modify them, just like he couldn’t show that Sirius actually did have a trial instead of being thrown in Azkaban without one!

Aside from Sirius’ trial, he needed to contact his Allies, and others in the Council – especially in the Dark Alliance -- to get them to support blocking Harry Potter’s Emancipation! It would be easy. With his Emancipation – and with the Potter Account Manager at Gringotts gearing up to contact Harry Potter at some point – Harry would soon discover he would be two Lords! As Lord Potter and Peverell, he could claim his Council Seats, join the Great Alliance again, and the Great Alliance would become a powerhouse again! The Dark Alliance would not want this!

But here was, apparently stuck in bed until at least Monday morning. Damn that bloody phoenix!

He had been so lost in his musings that he had lost track of where Poppy was. He heard her talking to somebody, and recognized Minerva McGonagall’s voice.

“Minerva?” Albus muttered.

Minerva McGonagall walked over to Albus. “Oh, Albus, I just heard from Poppy what happened. I thought your robes were fireproof?”

“Phoenix fire on a Burning Day,” Poppy said, “Extremely hot. Hotter than their flame travel, which Albus is immune to because Fawkes is his familiar. He doesn’t seem immune to the heat of a Burning Day. Albus unfortunately got caught up in it.”

“Never happened before today,” Albus muttered. “Never thought it could happen. Fawkes is always several feet away from me when he has a Burning Day. This time, he didn’t have a chance to get away or warn me, I suppose.”

“You’re lucky Hagrid was there!” Minerva exclaimed, “You could be dead! What would we do without you?!”

“I am sure the world I leave would be able to prosper on without me,” Albus said.
“Give me a bit of privacy will you, Poppy?” Minerva asked.

“Very well,” Poppy said, “Not like he can move and make his injuries worse. I made sure of that.”

“Thank you, dear Poppy, for saving my life,” Albus said.

“You will be a good patient if you don’t want me to consider calling in a life debt!” Poppy said.

“Healers can’t claim life debts!” Albus said. “It is in their vows!”

“Damn,” Poppy huffed, “He remembered that.”

She winked at Minerva, and walked off.

“Oh, Albus,” Minerva said, “Can you even make it to the Council Meeting on Monday?”

“I must, Minerva,” Albus said, “It is highly important that I am there.”

“Well, then you better cooperate with Poppy!” Minerva said.

“I will,” Albus said, sighing, “What happened at Sirius Black’s trial. I know you attended as Lady McGonagall.”

“Cleared of all charges,” Minerva said, smiling, “He is now Lord Black, and gets one-point-three million Galleons in compensation for the miscarriage of justice.”

Albus winced at the news, and tried to cover it with a moan of pain. Minerva looked concerned.

“I’m fine,” Albus said, “Not exactly comfortable in my position, you know. Tell me about the trial.”

“I will not – not until you’re better,” Minerva said, “In fact, if you behave, I will give you a memory of the trial for your viewing pleasure after the Council Meeting.”

“Why can’t you summarize it?” Albus asked.

“I did… he was cleared of all charges,” Minerva said. “And he is Lord Black. If I told you more, it would only stress you out.”

“Was I implicated in anything?” Albus asked, “My name mentioned! Tell me that, at least!”

“There were some concerns about why you did not give Sirius a trial back then,” Minerva said. “I am sure the media believes you’re hiding a few things because you weren’t in attendance.”

“Because I was barred from the Courtroom!” Albus exclaimed.

“Calm down, Albus,” Minerva said, “You do not want to make Poppy keep you here during the Council Meeting! You were barred because you didn’t give Sirius a trial thirteen years ago. Maybe you can learn from this, hmm?”

“Always the Professor,” Albus grumbled.

“You’re lucky you were my Professor and not the other way around, old man!” Minerva scowled.
“Of course I am,” Albus said. “As I have said in the past whenever you give me that threat. Do you know, by chance, what happened to Ronald and Ginevra Weasley?”

“Their mother – Merlin bless her soul – made a deal with Director Bones,” Minerva said, “If she cooperated and told the Wizengamot everything she had done – all of her crimes, and was completely honest, Ronald and Ginevra would not suffer a trial or Azkaban. They will have four out of five bindings on their magic and their wands taken away until they are seventeen. And they will be home-schooled by Muriel Prewett.”

“A fine Professor, if memory serves,” Albus said.

“Yes, she was,” Minerva said, “One of my favorites when I was a student. Anyway, according to Director Bones, Ronald and Ginevra should be going home by the end of the day.”

“Very good,” Albus said, “What about Frederick and George Weasley?”

“I wrote a letter to Pomona to inform Fred and George about their mother,” Minerva said. “Pomona said she was able to tell them before their eldest brothers, William and Charlie came to Hogwarts to pick them up. Pomona believes we might be lucky enough to have the twins here for the Yule Ball. Which is a good idea. It would make for a fine distraction from this tragedy.”

“I suppose it would,” Albus agreed, “Does the rest of the school know about what happened in Courtroom Ten?”

“If one student knows, so does the rest, Albus,” Minerva said, “You know that. I… I was planning on visiting Mr. Potter and Miss Granger after I finished speaking to you, to see if they know what happened. They’ll likely want to know about Sirius Black too.”

“I hope they feel some remorse for Molly Weasley,” Albus said, “She may have committed, or was planning to commit crimes against them, but she did care for them.”

“I wondered just how much you knew of what she did, Albus,” Minerva said, “She barely was done with her opening statement before she was killed, after all!”

“If Ronald and Ginevra are guilty of doing anything against Mr. Potter and Miss Granger,” Albus said, “Then their mother had something to do with it too. They didn’t go to sleep without Molly Weasley’s say-so, if you recall.”

“She was a rather overbearing mother, wasn’t she?” Minerva asked.

“Minerva!” Albus scolded, “You know better than to speak ill of the dead!”

“Yes, you are right,” Minerva said, “May Merlin bless her soul. I apologize, but I need to speak to Mr. Potter and Miss Granger about Sirius Black.”

Before Albus could even say goodbye, Minerva stood and left.

Albus sighed and cursed that damn phoenix. If he didn’t know better, the bloody bird had done this on purpose!

Of course he did. Likely to punish him for what he had done that day.
“I named my Order after you and you pay me back like this?” Albus muttered, darkly.

Bloody immortal chicken!

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 7:15 PM)

Harry and Hermione were in the middle of the Transfiguration Classroom, slow dancing as Remus Lupin’s record player played a suitable song for their dance. Professor McGonagall simply sat on the edge of her desk and watched them.

Professor McGonagall had been correct earlier when she had told them why the Dancing Lesson was still on for that evening. They needed the distraction. Whether it be from the tragic news of Molly Weasley’s death. Or the distraction that Ron and Ginny Weasley were back at the Burrow, with bindings on their magical core. The magic they could use now was only enough to keep them from getting too exhausted while experiencing each day in a magic-filled house. Still, McGonagall had told Harry and Hermione that for a while, until they were used to the limited magic in their bodies, they would likely sleep for long periods of time, and only be awake for less than eight hours a day.

They also needed a distraction after learning that Director Bones basically had gone outside of her strategy and told the entire Wizengamot Council and media that Harry had opened the Will last Sunday!

Thankfully, Albus Dumbledore hadn’t know about this yet, or it could have ruined their plans for the opening minutes of the Wizengamot Council meeting on Monday! Harry and Hermione were shocked when McGonagall told them what happened to the Headmaster, but then they were just happy and thrilled. Being stuck in the Hospital Wing with very limited information (read: whatever Minerva decided to tell him), he wouldn’t find out much about Sirius’ trial, nor would he be able to prepare very much for the Council Meeting. This worked out very well.

“Professor?” Hermione asked, looking at Minerva, while she laid her head on Harry’s chest, “I know we’re dancing to distract ourselves, but I just thought of something. What if Professor Snape tells the Headmaster of what happened at Sirius Black’s trial? Surely he’ll find out the information.”

“Nothing to fear, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said. “Professor Snape is out of the castle this weekend, and out of the country. He uses the beginning days of holiday breaks to wind down from teaching ‘dunderheads’ as he says, and to replenish his stocks of Potion ingredients. Potion ingredients are cheaper in certain European countries and he has connections in several of them. He rarely buys ingredients in Great Britain unless they are ingredients he needs permission from the Ministry of Magic to use. He’ll, unfortunately, be here for the Yule Ball, and that is all I know about when he will return.

“Continue your – ahem – ‘practicing’ for a little longer, you two. Then we will make sure your Waltz is ready for the opening dance next Friday.”

“Yes, Professor,” Hermione said; Harry echoed her.

Harry smiled as Hermione hummed along to the tune on the record player.
“By the way,” McGonagall said, “As the only students in the castle at the moment are third years and up, I am allowing a special Hogsmeade visit for everyone tomorrow. I announced it at dinner, but you weren’t there of course.”

Hermione hadn’t wanted to go to dinner in the Great Hall that evening. She was still too caught up on all the events of the day, and didn’t want to discuss them with any other students.

“Hermione?” Harry asked, “Would you do me the honor of accompanying me on our first official date in Hogsmeade tomorrow?”

Hermione squeaked and raised her head from Harry’s chest. She kissed him deeply on the lips, then blushed as she remembered where she was.

“I would love to, Harry,” Hermione said, “Sorry, Professor.”

“Miss Granger, I believe a kiss was a most proper response to his question,” McGonagall said, “Therefore, there is no need to apologize. Really… I think we should use the second half of this dancing lesson to teach you the proper protocols and manners for a social event like the Yule Ball.”

Harry winced. “Really, ma’am?”

“It is either that discussion, or the sexual education discussion, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

Harry winced again and Hermione giggled.

“Proper manners it is then,” Harry said.

“So be it,” Minerva said, with a smirk. “I trust you’ll finish reading that book sooner rather than later, Mr. Potter. Since you have no other homework, it should be easy to complete. Unless Miss Granger wish to practice dancing in private, of course.”

“That sounds good,” Hermione said. “We might have to do that. Dobby or Winky can clear a space in the Private Common Room.

“I’ll finish the book soon, Professor,” Harry said. “And I would be happy to practice dancing a bit more during the week, Hermione.”

“Very good, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said.

“Hmm,” Hermione said, as a grin crossed her face, “I wonder if Sirius and Amelia’s evening is as good as ours.”

Harry smiled. He knew exactly what she meant, recalling something Sirius had told them during their conversation earlier.

“I expect we’ll hear about it soon,” Harry said.

“Me too,” Hermione said.

“Something you wish to tell me, you two?” McGonagall asked.

“Well, it began when Sirius told us about his plans to visit Gringotts to get his Lord’s Ring this
afternoon,” Hermione began.

Harry simply smiled and swayed with Hermione as she told the Head of Gryffindor the tale.

(Saturday, December 19th, 1994 – 8:45 PM)

Sirius Black walked into the bedroom of his girlfriend, Amelia Bones, at Bones Manor, also known as the Ossuary. He looked around for her, but couldn’t find her.

“Amelia?” Sirius called.

A house-elf popped into the room. “Mistress Bones is taking a shower in the Master Bath, Lord Sirius.”

“Thank you, Brienne,” Sirius said, “I am still glad you are still around. It is so good to see you.”

“Lord Black has said that three times since Lord Black arrived two hours ago,” Brienne said. “Once again, Brienne is happy to see Lord Sirius healthy and whole.”

“Not completely,” Sirius said, “But close.”

“If Mother Billie was still around she would make Lord Sirius whole again!” Brienne exclaimed.

“I am sorry for your loss,” Sirius said, “I liked that elf.”

“Mother Billie liked Lord Sirius too,” Brienne said. “Brienne be leaving Lord Sirius alone with Mistress Amelia. Mistress Amelia be looking forward to this all day.”

Sirius smiled. “Me too, Brienne.”

Brienne smiled, bowed and vanished.

Sirius walked over to the Master Bath, which was connected to the bedroom. He walked into the bathroom and smiled when he saw Amelia’s blurry naked form behind the blurred glass of the shower. He undressed from his clothes, and pulled an item from the pocket of his robes. He enclosed it in his fist, so it wouldn’t get wet, then he opened the glass door of the shower. Amelia gasped, then turned and sighed in relief when she saw him.

“What are you doing, Sirius?” Amelia said, “You couldn’t wait until I finished.”

“Not for this,” Sirius said.

“I’m not as young as I was to have a healthy romp in a shower, Sirius,” Amelia said.

Sirius smiled at the opening she gave him. He moved to one knee then showed her the ring in his hand.

“Are you still young enough to accept being my wife?” Sirius asked. “Amelia Bones – will you marry me?”

“You asked me in my shower?” Amelia asked.
“Is that a yes?” Sirius replied, nervously.

“Yes, you big goof, I’ll marry you!” Amelia said, “Put that ring on my finger!”

Sirius grinned and stood up. He put the ring on her proper finger, then he held her face between his hands and kissed her deeply, as the shower water fell over them.

“I would have said yes, if you asked me after I kissed you in the Courtroom, you know,” Amelia said, after backing away over a minute later.

“I wanted to ask you,” Sirius said, “But I didn’t have the ring I bought for you in 1981. This ring. I had it in my personal Vault in Gringotts. I was going to ask you on my birthday, November 3rd in 1981, and pick it up the previous day. I was planning for us to spend a few romantic days together starting that Halloween. But… you know what happened.”

“Oh, Merlin, Sirius,” Amelia sobbed, “If I had been there in your flat when your alarm rune went off. I could have gone with you. We could have…”

“No ‘what ifs’, no living in the past, Amelia,” Sirius said, “Live in the present.”

Amelia smiled tearfully. “Sirius? I want to see if I am young enough for a romp in the shower.”

Sirius grinned. “I am happy to oblige. Thank Merlin you had decided to shag me minutes after we arrived here. I don’t know if I could do shower sex for my first time after thirteen years!”


“As you wish… fiancée,” Sirius said.

Amelia moaned at the sound of ‘fiancée’. Then she moaned for a whole different reason.

Chapter End Notes

The Shower proposal was a last minute decision, but not the idea of Sirius proposing. Originally, he was going to do it in between shags in bed.

Also, the Hogsmeade visit on Sunday was a last minute decision. As was Dumbledore’s stay in the Hospital Wing. I needed a way to keep him from finding out about Harry opening the Potter Will. It will be too late by the time he finds out.

The Dancing Lesson wasn’t supposed to be much of a focus in this chapter. It was exactly what it was. Harry and Hermione slow-dancing while speaking with McGonagall. They had more of the lesson that wasn’t shown. The ‘proper protocol and manners’ discussion might be summarized. I need to think of it. The sex-ed discussion, unfortunately, will be a simple summarized description. My muse doesn't want me to write a sex-ed discussion.

My muse also didn't want me to write a scene with Amelia and the Weasleys, namely
Ron and Ginny, which I know some of my readers wanted to see. Sorry about that.

Next Chapter: Harry and Hermione's first official date in Hogsmeade and more! Two, maybe three chapters – if I want a Great Alliance focused chapter before – until the Wizengamot Council meetings. Also, the Yule Ball chapter should be Chapter 35… 36, at the very latest! Depends on how long the aftermath of the Wizengamot Council lasts.
Harry Potter awoke on Sunday morning to the sound of a vibrating object. He lifted his head off his pillow and noticed, through blurry eyes, that the compact mirror was moving around on the bedside table. Harry sighed and picked up his glasses and placed them on his face. He grabbed the mirror and sat up, and opened it. Sirius Black’s grinning face was looking at him.

“Good morning, sleepyhead!” Sirius exclaimed, “About time. Been trying to contact you for five minutes now!”

“Too early, Sirius,” Harry muttered, “I was asleep. What time is it anyway?”

“About seven-o-clock,” Sirius said, “Your girlfriend’s awake too by the way. I contacted her first.”

“Did you wake her up?” Harry asked.

“No, she was already awake,” Sirius said, “She, unlike you, gets up early.”

“You just said it is about seven!” Harry exclaimed, “I could have slept in. Especially as it is Sunday. What do you want anyway?”

“Just thought I’d give you some great news,” Sirius said, “Last night, I asked Amelia to marry me! She said yes!”

Harry was wide awake now. “That’s great, Sirius. Congratulations. I’m very happy for you.”

“Thank you,” Sirius said, then he grinned. “I told Hermione a few minutes ago, just because I knew she’d be awake before you. And Amelia’s speaking to her niece, Susan, about it. I’m going to speak to Remus after I speak to you.”

“You didn’t tell your best friend first?” Harry asked.

“He sleeps in like you,” Sirius said. “So it looks like both of us will be engaged blokes by tomorrow, since you and Hermione will be Betrothed.”

“It is just a preventative measure, Sirius,” Harry said, “Hermione said she still expects me to propose to her on her seventeenth birthday.”

“You’ve already discussed that?” Sirius asked.
“It was just something that came up,” Harry said, “a few days before we decided to pen a Betrothal Contract.”

“You do realize everyone will consider you and Hermione engaged already?” Sirius asked, “It is basically synonymous with being Betrothed, you know.”

Harry shrugged. “As long it prevents others from trying to think we’re available for Betrothal Contracts. Hey, I just thought of something. Is Amelia doing anything today? Does she have to work?”

“She has today off,” Sirius said. “She’s planning on meeting with some of the Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance later to prepare for the Wizengamot Council tomorrow, and I will be joining her. Why?”

“Professor McGonagall is letting the students go to Hogsmeade today,” Harry said, “Do you think you and Amelia could meet us at the Three Broomsticks for lunch? Maybe around noon? Remus can come too, if he wants. We can celebrate your engagement.”

“Sounds good to me!” Sirius said, grinning, “Let me ask Amelia.”

Sirius disappeared out of the mirror for nearly a minute. Then he returned.

“Amelia has agreed,” he said, “We’ll meet you at the Three Broomsticks at noon. She’s talking about it with Susan now, so she can officially meet her niece’s new boyfriend.”

“Terry Boot,” Harry said, “Fellow fourth year. One of the Children of the Great Alliance.”

“Then she’s probably known the boy for a few years,” Sirius said, “But now he’s her niece’s new boyfriend, so it is like a whole new meeting.”

Harry nodded. “I just remembered something. House Potter has VIP status at the Three Broomsticks – I could send Dobby ahead and ask Madame Rosmerta to set us up a room for noon. How many should I ask for?”

Sirius disappeared again. He returned thirty seconds later.

“Seven,” Sirius said, “Susan has agreed to meet us with her boyfriend. You, Hermione, me, Amelia, Remus, Susan and her boyfriend. That is seven.”

“I’ll send Dobby with a note to Madam Rosmerta then,” Harry said.

“Well, since we can have a better discussion face-to-face later, I’ll let you go then,” Sirius said, “I am sure you need to get ready for the day and meet with Hermione.”

“See you for lunch, Sirius,” Harry, “Congratulations again.”

“Thanks, kid,” Sirius said, “We’ll see you then.”

They exchanged farewells and Sirius vanished from the mirror. Harry closed it, then crawled out of bed and collected writing material from his trunk. He wrote a note to Madam Rosmerta of the Three Broomsticks with a request, as Heir Potter – not Lord Potter, Head of House Potter -- to reserve one
of the VIP Rooms for a meeting for seven people around noon that day. He then summoned Dobby, who has happy to deliver the letter to Madame Rosmerta.

“Dobby suggests the Great Harry Potter be wearing something warm today for his visit to Hogsmeade,” Dobby said, after taking the scroll of parchment, “It be snowing, and Dobby be expecting it will be snowing all day.”

“Thank you, Dobby,” Harry said.

After Harry completed his morning ablutions, he dressed in jeans, a sweater, and also put on his winter coat. He grabbed the Undetectable Extension money bag from his trunk, which was as big as a tennis ball, even though it had one-thousand Galleons inside, and put it in his coat pocket. Last night when he had returned to his Private Quarters after Dancing Lessons, he had asked Dobby to get him the Galleons from Gringotts so he could do some Christmas shopping in Hogsmeade. Dobby had returned with the bag, and explained the enchantments on it. Harry thought it was pretty brilliant.

He knew a thousand Galleons was a lot of money, but for the first time he had several people to buy presents for. Friends, Allies in the Great Alliance, and the Children, even family when it came to Sirius and Remus. He also wanted to get something for Hermione’s parents, for allowing him to stay at their house with Hermione over their shortened Christmas Break. He already had Christmas gifts in mind for Hermione – and they weren’t something he could find in Hogsmeade.

He made his way into the main room of his Private Quarters. Dobby appeared with a reply from Madam Rosmerta, who had happily accepted his request. He thanked Dobby once more, then headed out into the corridor of the Lion’s Den. Hermione was waiting for him, dressed in an outfit of warm clothes.

“Good morning, Harry,” Hermione said, smiling; she pecked him on the lips when he walked over to her, “I assume Sirius told you his news?”

“Yeah – the vibrating mirror actually woke me up,” Harry said. “But yes, he told me. Pretty brilliant. Actually, I arranged for him and Amelia to have lunch with us at noon in the Three Broomsticks to celebrate. I learned from my monetary report, that I own a percentage of the Three Broomsticks, so I can request use of one the VIP Rooms. Amelia was talking to Susan, giving her the news too. And I invited Susan and her boyfriend, Terry Boot, to lunch too. I hope that is okay with you?”

“That sounds brilliant, actually!” Hermione said, “I look forward to it.”

“Yeah, me too,” Harry said. “Shall we get down to the Great Hall then? I expect the Sunday Prophet will have all kinds of details of what happened yesterday.”

“Yeah,” Hermione said, “Let’s go.”

Harry took Hermione’s hand and they made their way into the seventh floor corridor.

(Sunday, December 20th -- 7:55 AM)

Because the first, second and a good majority of third years – those who didn’t have older dates for the Yule Ball -- had left Hogwarts yesterday for the full Christmas Break, the Great Hall didn’t seem as full as usual, even though there was a good majority of the leftover third years – or as some
younger students had called them ‘lucky third years’ – and fourth through seventh years in attendance. Even though it was still early, there was a Hogsmeade visit today. Also the Sunday Prophet was expected to report the news about the events in the Ministry of Magic the previous day. So even those who might have still been asleep on a Sunday morning, were awake and at breakfast.

As per usual, Harry and Hermione had joined the Ravenclaw Table again. Once again, Neville Longbottom was sitting with Luna Lovegood and Padma Patil. However, Ivan Blishwick – Padma’s boyfriend was sitting next to the Ravenclaw Patil. Padma was reading a copy of Witch Weekly.

“Is that the newest edition of Witch Weekly?” Hermione asked, “Has the Sunday Prophet arrived already then?”

“Not yet,” Padma said, “One of my sisters-in-law is a photographer at Witch Weekly, so thanks to her, Parvati and I get the newest editions early in the morning before the rest of the mail comes. Her owl always delivers us the magazines to our dormitories.”

“Anything interesting about yesterday’s events?” Harry asked.

“Now that you mention it, I was just reading about your godfather’s trial, Harry,” Padma said. “They left the real reporting for the Daily Prophet. This is about the more interesting stories behind the scenes. Like the who’s who of who was there, what various people were wearing, and other things the Daily Prophet might not tell you.

“For example, there’s a bit about your godfather, and Susan’s Aunt Amelia. They question Director Bones’ impartiality in the trial in one line, especially after it was revealed that Sirius and Amelia had a past relationship. Then in the very next line they gossip about the ‘reuniting couple’, and congratulate Amelia for reuniting with her long lost love. Then they ask when she and Sirius will get married! Talk about double standards!”

“Well, as for that last bit,” Harry said, “I’ll let you in on a little secret. I heard from Sirius this morning. He asked Amelia to marry him last night. She said ‘yes’. Amelia told Susan too.”

“So that is why Susan has been looking so happy this morning,” Luna commented.

Harry and Hermione looked over at the Hufflepuff Table and found Susan Bones. She was grinning happily while talking to Terry Boot – who had chosen to sit with his girlfriend, instead of at the Ravenclaw Table – and Hannah Abbot and Ernie MacMillan. She caught him looking at her, and he gave her a thumbs up. She smiled and returned the hand signal.

“So was the impartiality bit the only thing they really cared about Sirius’ actual trial?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, mostly,” Padma said, “Like I said, the Daily Prophet gets to report the real information. Witch Weekly is their sister subscription, so the Daily Prophet lords over Witch Weekly and decides what they cannot publish in their magazine, since it should be exclusive to the main newspaper.”

“I just remembered, Luna,” Hermione said, “Your father owns the Quibbler right. Was he at the trials?”

“He was,” Luna said, sighing, “He wrote me personally about Molly Weasley. He witnessed the entire thing.”
“Oh, that must have been so horrible,” Hermione whimpered. “Being there and seeing that.”

“Yeah,” Luna said, “He didn’t give me too many details. He said there will be no pictures of the event and aftermath, because the Aurors and DMLE took the pictures from the cameramen as ‘evidence’.”

“Good,” Harry said, “They would probably publish them because they believe it is good reporting or something.”

“ Wouldn’t surprise me,” Ivan Blishwick said, “The Daily Prophet has a history of photographing crime scenes and putting them in newspapers. I know the DMLE and Aurors are never thrilled about that. Good to see them on top of this, this time.”

“Daddy was also one of the few reporters present at Sirius’ trial,” Luna said, “He was rather unhappy that Sirius Black didn’t turn out to be Stubby Boardman, former lead singer of the Hobgoblins. Stubby hasn’t been seen in thirteen years, and he thought Sirius’ imprisonment might have explained why.”

Harry blinked, then chuckled. “Sorry to hear he was disappointed.”

“Oh, he got over it pretty quickly,” Luna said, “Just because it means he can follow other leads about where Stubby Boardman might be. The other theory is that Stubby married one of his superfans, and is now living in the Bermuda Triangle with ten children.”

“Would your father actually visit the Bermuda Triangle to confirm or deny this theory?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, yes!” Luna said, nodding happily, “It has been one of our dream destinations for a holiday! We might actually get to go now!”

Harry blinked again, then he just shrugged. He was used to Luna by now. Neither Padma, nor Neville, seemed too perturbed about this either, which made him feel better.

Ten minutes after Harry and Hermione arrived, the flock of owls made their way into the Great Hall. Two owls dropped the new editions of the Sunday Prophet toward Harry and Hermione, who caught them.

Harry wasn’t surprised to see that Sirius’ trial was the headlining article, nor was he surprised that Rita Skeeter had written it. He was surprised about the contents however, before he recalled that he had made a deal with Rita not to write libelous articles about several people, including Sirius and Amelia. He was also quite surprised that – while there was hints that James and Lily Potter’s Will had been opened, due to the evidence of Sirius Black being Godfather, per Godfather Ritual, and James and Lily calling Wormtail, the Secret Keeper and a traitor – Rita did not mention that it was him, Harry, who opened the Will.

Had someone gotten to Rita to stop this piece of information getting out? Sirius? Amelia? One of the Great Alliance? Professor McGonagall – she had been there when Harry had made the deal with Rita. But… she would have told him if she had done this, wouldn’t she? Maybe Rita simply chose not to write about that, so as to not offend Harry? Maybe she realized he would give her juicy information soon about what he discovered in the Will or at Gringotts, and she didn’t want to lose out on that? From what he knew about her, it did seem like something she would do.
Everything else that was mentioned about the trial, Harry had already known, since Sirius had told him about it. It was reported Sirius was now Lord Black, and he had gotten 1,300,000 Galleons in compensation. Harry laughed at the thought of Sirius getting marriage proposals or Betrothal Contracts from older witches, even widows, who might be interesting in marrying Lord Black. He could picture Amelia’s face if she caught sight of these Contracts.

Page Two was a page-wide wanted poster of Peter Pettigrew – Harry recognized the photo of Pettigrew that was used. It was one he had a copy of from his parents’ wedding, but only Pettigrew in his tuxedo was seen. Another picture was of Scabbers on Ron’s shoulder, though Ron was not shown, aside from his shoulder.

The bottom article on the front page was about the ‘tragedy in Courtroom Ten’. Harry skimmed over it, and grimaced when it reported that Dedalus Diggle had murdered Molly Weasley, then killed himself. The report said there was conflicting reports about whether Dedalus was under the Imperius Curse or not. The report also said that if the Imperius Curse was used, it might have been cast by the person who put the Dark Mark in the sky during the riot at the Quidditch World Cup Campgrounds. Rita also spent a whole paragraph complaining about her cameraman’s camera being confiscated, but she blamed it on the DMLE and Aurors, not Amelia herself.

Overall, Harry was satisfied with what had been reported. The best part was that if Dumbledore had read the articles, he still wouldn’t get any clues or hints about what would take place in the opening minutes of the Wizengamot Council meeting the following day.

(Sunday, December 20th – 9:30 AM)

The carriages to Hogsmeade were scheduled to leave fifteen minutes before ten. During breakfast, Harry, Hermione, Neville and Luna decided to get in one together. Padma and Ivan had already planned to join Padma’s sister, Parvati, and Lavender Brown. So, bundled up in their winter clothing and coats, the four friends had made their way out of Hogwarts with the other students who were also heading for the carriages. Snow was falling over the Hogwarts grounds, and there was about half-an-inch on the ground already. Some students were having snowball fights with their friends as they headed toward the carriages.

“Hopefully the snow doesn’t get too deep in Hogsmeade before we have to make our way back,” Hermione commented, as she and Harry sat down on one of the seats in the carriage. “Though I must admit, it does make for a beautiful setting for our first date.”

“It does,” Harry agreed.

Neville and Luna stepped into the carriage and sat down on the other seat. The carriage began making its way to Hogsmeade almost immediately after they had sat down.

“Oh, you’re having your first date in Hogsmeade too?” Luna asked; she smiled and squeezed Neville’s hand, “So are we. However, Neville won’t be with me for the first part of the day.”

“Oh?” Hermione asked, “Why is that?”

“I’m going to be buying an outfit for the Yule Ball,” Luna said, “I asked Padma about it, and she says dress shopping should be the first thing I do today, because she suspects there will be a lot of girls who want to do the same thing.”
“Even though the booklists for the older students told us to bring formal wear?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, yes,” Luna said, “Padma said that now that girls have dates, they may want have an outfit that will match with their dates. Padma also said I shouldn’t let Neville see my dress. She says it will make it more special.”

“Yes, it will, I think,” Hermione said, “I haven’t given any hints to Harry about my dress.”

“I’m completely fine with that,” Harry said, squeezing Hermione’s hand, “I want to be surprised the first time I see you in it.”

“Yeah, sounds good to me too,” Neville said, “I figured I can buy Luna’s Christmas present while she’s shopping for an outfit. So she doesn’t see what I buy her, you know?”

“I don’t have to worry about that,” Harry said, smiling, “I already know what I’m getting Hermione, and it is not found in Hogsmeade.”

“Me too,” Hermione said.

“Now as for shopping for everyone else,” Harry said, “Like my new Allies. That will be more difficult.”

“Make the gifts simple, but meaningful, Harry,” Neville advised him, “Right now, you don’t know the Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance more than Allies. Just give them simple things, but make it mean something too. Maybe consider the gifts for the Children a bit more meaningful, as you’ll get to know them a lot better over the next few years, than you will with the Lords and Ladies. Your Allies won’t be expecting much from you this year, since you literally just debuted yourself as the new de facto leader of the Great Alliance. So don’t get too nervous about it.”

“Thanks, Neville,” Harry said, smiling, “That actually helps a lot. Makes me feel better about shopping for people I really don’t know.”

Neville blushed at the praise. “You’re welcome, Harry.”

As the carriage made its way toward Hogwarts, the four friends talked about their plans for Hogsmeade, and what they would be doing during their free week at Hogwarts before the Yule Ball.

Soon enough, they arrived at Hogsmeade. They separated into couples, and promised to meet up again at some point during the visit.

“Where should we go first?” Harry asked.

“I think we should just walk around for now and avoid the early rush,” Hermione said, “The shops are going to be too crowded.”

“Just walk around and spend time together?” Harry asked.

“At least until we find one of the less-crowded shops,” Hermione said, “We can go to the more popular shops after lunch.”

“Sounds brilliant to me,” Harry said; then he smiled mischievously, “So you already know what
you’re getting me for Christmas. Any hints?”

“Nope,” Hermione said, “Not saying a word.”

Harry didn’t give up there. As they started walking through the village, he started guessing different things she might be getting him. Soon enough, he started getting into more outlandish and wild guesses, which just made Hermione laugh. She obviously realized what he was doing, but she had let him continue. Then he started trying to guess what her outfit for the Yule Ball looked like, but the look on her face made him stop. He realized she truly wanted it to be a surprise. After that, they simply discussed ideas for gifts for their friends as they walked around the village and enjoyed spending time together.

(Sunday, December 20th – 11:55 AM)

Harry and Hermione had done very little shopping in the past two hours, simply because they were only going toward the least-crowded shops for now. They had already found a few things for some of the people on their lists. But they both knew they would find the majority of their gifts during the afternoon when they visited the more popular shops.

They stepped into the Three Broomsticks and found that they were the last of the planned group to arrive. Sirius, Amelia and Remus had already arrived, as had Susan and Terry Boot. Harry walked over to the bar, where Rosmerta was talking to Sirius and Amelia.

“There’s my godson and his girlfriend,” Sirius said, as he caught sight of them, “I was just talking to Rosie about you. Did you know Rosie thought you two had been a couple for a few months now?”

“Really?” Hermione asked Madam Rosmerta.

“You were sitting together without that Weasley boy,” Rosmerta said, “I thought you two were on your first date back then.”

“This is technically our first date,” Harry said, “Though we’ve been together for about ten days now.”

“Only ten days?” Rosmerta asked. “Merlin, you could have fooled me! You know, I still remember when your parents were here on their first date. I was simply a waiter back then. I had been so shocked when they told me they were dating. I knew your father had been trying to catch your mother for a while, but – to be frank – I didn’t think he’d ever succeed. But he did a lot of growing up.”

She smirked as she looked at Sirius. “I also remember you, Sirius, and your friend, Remus, sitting a few tables away from James and Lily eavesdropping on them. I thought you two were going to interrupt their date with a prank or something!”

“Rosie!” Sirius gasped, “We would never! We promised James we wouldn’t do anything to ruin his date with Lily.”

“Good!” Rosmerta said, “I would have hexed you if you did!”

“Moony! Get over here!” Sirius barked.
Remus walked over to the bar. “Yes, Sirius?”

“Rosie thinks you and I were eavesdropping on James and Lily on their first date,” Sirius said, “Were we eavesdropping?”

Remus had a look of thoughtful reminiscence for a moment. “Well, you did choose to sit rather close to them. But no, we didn’t deliberately eavesdrop. We were waiting for Amelia and…”

“Marlene McKinnon,” Sirius said, smiling. “You had actually gotten up the nerve to ask her out. Yes, now I remember. Amelia and Marlene were shopping before they met with us.”

“You weren’t shopping with them?” Harry asked.

“They were doing girl shopping, kid,” Sirius said, “Trust me, you don’t want to get involved if Hermione decides she wants to do some girly shopping.”

“Depends on what type of shopping she is doing,” Harry said, shrugging.

Rosmerta laughed. “You have a very good boyfriend there, Hermione. I knew I was right about the both of you. Still can’t believe it has taken this long for you to get together! Congratulations.”

“Well, thank you,” Hermione said; Harry blushed and echoed his girlfriend.

“Right, I am sure you all just want to get something to eat,” Rosmerta said, “You’re in VIP Room Two. No charge for the room, as House Potter still owns fifteen percent of this establishment. Follow me please.”

“Thank you, Rosie,” Sirius said, “Follow her, kids. Let me save Susan and her boyfriend from my fiancée, and then we’ll follow you there.”

Harry was sure Sirius was joking about having to save Susan and Terry. They seemed to be enjoying whatever they were discussing with Amelia. However, Terry did look a little nervous.

Harry and Hermione followed Rosmerta, while the rest of the group soon followed behind them. They entered the VIP Room, which was basically a well-decorated room with a large circle table and seven chairs. Dishes, silverware and glasses were already set, and menus were sitting on the plates.

“Sit down everyone,” Rosmerta said, “And you can order drinks and look through the menus.”

Harry and Hermione sat down together, of course. Remus sat on the other side of Hermione, while Sirius sat next to Harry. Amelia sat next to Sirius and Susan and Terry sat down last, with Susan sitting next to her Aunt.

When asked for drinks, Harry and Hermione ordered warm butterbeer and ice cold water. This was a mutual decision for most of the table, though Amelia ordered a Cherry Syrup instead of Butterbeer. Rosmerta said she’d be back with the drinks soon, and left right after. The group sat looking through the menu for their meals, and were rather quiet otherwise. Rosmerta returned ten minutes after she left. She served the ordered drinks, then listened to, and wrote down, the orders – Harry ordered the Shepherd’s Pie and Hermione ordered goulash – then promised their meals would be ready in thirty minutes or less. After Rosmerta left, Remus stood up and held up his glass of butterbeer.

“To Sirius and Amelia,” Remus said, “If the world was better than it is, these two would have been
married a decade and a half ago, and might have had a child or two who were students now in Hogwarts. But the world isn’t perfect, life throws many curves. Sirius and Amelia – even through all the struggles, even though separated for thirteen years – you’ve still rekindled your relationship, and are far better for it. To Sirius and Amelia!”

Amelia had misty eyes as the four students toasted the newly engaged couple.

“Thank you, Remus,” Amelia said, “That was wonderful.”

“Yeah, Moony,” Sirius said, “Practicing for best man already?”

“Me?” Remus asked, surprised, “I thought you might choose Harry.”

“He’ll be standing with us too,” Sirius said.

“You deserve it, Remus,” Harry said.

“Do I?” Remus asked, “I thought you were guilty too, Sirius! Just like most people did.”

“Yet, when the truth was revealed, you stood with me,” Sirius said, “Like always. You’re my Best Mate, you’re my Best Man.”

“Yes, I’ll be your Best Man,” Remus said.

“Thank you,” Sirius said.

“So have you decided a date yet?” Hermione asked.

“We discussed it this morning,” Amelia said, “Easter Break, first week of Easter, sometime that week. We’ll figure out a proper date by then. Easter Sunday is problematic, as you would be coming back to London the day before Easter. So sometime in the middle of the week.”

“So soon?” Susan asked.

“Not for us,” Amelia said, smiling; she rolled her eyes at Sirius. “If my fiancée had his way, we’d go to Gretna Green during your shortened Christmas Break and get married then. But I don’t want a Gretna Green wedding. I want a wedding at Bones Manor.”

“It is a fine plan, love,” Sirius said.

“We’re going to formally announce our engagement tomorrow during the Wizengamot Council Meeting,” Amelia said.

“Are Heirs allowed to these meetings?” Harry asked.

“Not during Solstice Sessions,” Amelia said, “During Summer Council meetings, Lords and Ladies sometimes bring their Heirs along so they can learn the ropes, so to speak. Susan and Terry – and most of the Children of the Great Alliance – have been to a few.”

“I always thought they were boring,” Terry said, grinning, “Occasionally it gets interesting, when there are heated debates, or there is an interesting Bill up for debate. But most of the time it is boring stuff.”
“I will agree that a good majority of Council Meetings tend to be rather boring,” Amelia said, smiling; then she looked at Harry and Hermione. “Tomorrow will start with a bang, however.”

“So exactly what will we need to do?” Harry asked.

“Professor McGonagall – or Lady McGonagall in this case,” Amelia said, “is the only representative at Hogwarts – aside from Dumbledore – who currently has a chair on the Wizengamot. If she hasn’t told you already, she will probably escort the two of you to the Ministry tomorrow morning. She will take you down Level Ten. There is a room to the right of Courtoom Nine where the Lords and Ladies gather before Council Sessions – so that they can have meetings with their Allies. Normally anyone below seventeen isn’t allowed in this room. But Harry, as Lord Potter, will be. We might be able to arrange for you to be there too, Hermione. So Harry can introduce you as the newest member of the Great Alliance.

“Right before the Lords and Ladies are dismissed into the Courtoom, the bigwigs – shall we say – namely Minister Fudge and Dumbledore – will enter the room. Minister Fudge will give a speech of some sort, then he’ll tell everyone to go into the room.

“However, since we do not want Dumbledore to know you two will claim your seats before it happens, you will be leaving with Sirius before Dumbledore arrives. The three of you will go into another room near the Courtoom and wait there for one of the Aurors – I’ll arrange for Sirius’ cousin, Auror Tonks, in this case – will bring you into the Courtoom, so you can claim your seats. This is how I suggest that goes…”

Harry and Hermione listened to Amelia’s suggestion, and eagerly agreed to it. Then she walked them through how they would claim their seats.

“After you finish claiming your seats and inviting new members into the Alliance,” Amelia said, “You may request to leave. Ask Minister Fudge, not Dumbledore. I have feeling he will want to keep you there, to keep an eye on you. He’ll get a huge shock due to your revelations of Lordships, and yours, Hermione. If you want to get to Gringotts, and get your Betrothal Contract penned, you need to leave when you’re finished. Do not stick around.”

“I will be waiting for you outside the Courtoom,” Remus said, “Since I won’t be allowed inside. I can escort you to Gringotts if you wish. I won’t join you while meeting your Account Manager. I’ll wait in the Leaky Cauldron for you. Then we can come here and I can get you back to the castle.”

Harry and Hermione agreed with this. Madam Rosmerta returned moments later, with a house-elf in tow. The house-elf came in, snapped their fingers, and plates of the ordered food appeared in front of each seated at the table.

“Anything else I can do for you?” Rosmerta asked.

“Not at the moment, Rosie,” Sirius said; the others murmured their agreement.

“The house-elf who accompanied me is named Buzzy,” Rosmerta said, “Call them if you would like to top off your drinks. If you call for Buzzy when you’re finished with your main course, she can bring you a dessert menu if you wish. Otherwise, just come see me and pay up and that will be it.”

“Thank you, Rosie,” Sirius said.
The rest of the group thanked Rosmerta and she left the room.

“Amelia?” Terry asked, “Have you spoken to my father recently?”

“Not since our last meeting a few months ago,” Amelia said, “Sirius and I will be seeing your Lord father with the majority of the Alliance this evening at Lord Castor’s house for a meeting. Why do you ask?”

“My Father has had doubts about our House remaining in the Alliance,” Terry said, “I wrote to him yesterday after the Children of the Great Alliance meeting finished, but he hasn’t replied yet. I feel like he might go forward with his plans.”

“You do not want this?” Amelia asked.

“No, ma’am,” Terry said, “It – erm – might cause difficulties for my relationship with Susan, especially if my father wants me to set my sights on an Heiress in whatever new Alliance he joins. I don’t want that to happen.”

“What would you ask of me, Heir Boot?” Amelia asked.

Terry looked at Harry. “Tell my Lord father that Lord Potter is our leader now and the Great Alliance he has been waiting for, to return, will only be getting stronger. He would regret leaving the Alliance.”

“I will pass on your message, Heir Boot,” Amelia said.

“Thank you, Lady Bones,” Terry said.

The conversations continued over the next hour while the group ate their lunch, which followed with a delicious dessert, all of which was very enjoyable.

It was nearly one-thirty when Harry and Hermione said their temporary goodbyes to Sirius, Amelia and Remus. Then they continued their shopping trip for gifts, until they had to get to a carriage to go back to the castle. Hermione suggested they ride a carriage by themselves. Harry soon learned why, as he and Hermione spent much of the carriage ride kissing and snogging.

Both Harry and Hermione mutually agreed, by the time they returned to the castle, that their first official date was brilliant. But they were very much looking forward to the events of the following morning.

Chapter End Notes

And so are my readers! This chapter went so much better in my head. I thought there was going to be a lot more going on during that lunch scene. But my muse said 'no'!

As for the shopping in Hogsmeade, I didn't want to get too descriptive, and limit myself when I describe some Christmas gifts in an upcoming chapter. I left it open-ended for that purpose alone.
My apologies for not writing any Rita Skeeter articles. I didn't want to summarize in an article what we witnessed in recent chapters.

I know this chapter felt like filler. But it was mostly a fluffy calm before the storm.

Next Chapter: Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall make their way to the Ministry of Magic. Harry meets the Great Alliance, and the Wizengamot Council scene you've all been waiting for! The only definite scene in the Council meeting I will have is the seat claiming and Harry welcoming Houses into the Alliance.
At the start of this chapter, you'll notice that at the time it starts (7:30 AM), it is still rather dark in Hogwarts Castle. This is because the sunrise on the day of the Winter Solstice was not until around 8:00 in the morning according to research. The Winter Solstice each year has the shortest amount of sunlight per day – seven hours according to research – roughly 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Since this (and the following chapter) highlights the day of the Winter Solstice session in the Wizengamot, I am putting some emphasis into it.

LONG AND IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT BELOW:

I am going to announce it now, since it will happen in a few chapters. When I end "Book 1" (after the Yule Ball), I am going to take a few days off – maybe a week, maybe more - from updating. This is for two reasons. One so I do not burn myself out from writing so much. Two, so I can figure out my plans and notes for the future of this story. Maybe I'll reread the entire "Book 1" again, as I haven't actually done that. Maybe it will give my readers a chance to do the same. I know some have already decided to do so.

Again, "Book 2" will be in this same story, it won't be a new sequel. When "Book 1" is finished it will simply say "End of Book 1", and the next chapter will be the start of "Book 2". I imagine this will happen by Chapter 35 or 36.

There is a simple explanation for why I am doing this. I've published a chapter at least once a day for the last month (we passed a month when I published Chapter 31!) I wrote 200,000 words in a month! I do not have a bunch of chapters ready to publish. I wrote this chapter the day I published Chapter 31. Hopefully this intermission will give me a chance to get a few chapters written for a backlog, while I am planning ahead.

I will say this once (though I might repeat it at the end of Book 1). I AM NOT ABANDONING THIS STORY. I am just going to be taking a few days off after Book 1 is complete, so I can prepare for Book 2.

I might have an "Intermission Q&A" in between the "Books". We'll see.

Sorry for the long author's note, but this announcement needed to be made.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 7:30AM)

Even though it was half-past-seven in the morning, it was still rather dark inside the corridor, even though there were tall windows looking into the corridor. This was because it was the Winter Solstice, and the sun would not rise for another half-hour. Several wall-sconces lit up the corridor, but even then Minerva McGonagall had to walk with a lit wand – using a Lumos Charm, one of the
very first charms she had learned a lifetime ago – as she made her way toward the Hospital Wing.

Last night, she had met with Harry and Hermione in the Lion’s Den after dinner. Her two favorite Gryffindors had told her about Amelia’s suggestion for her to get them to the Ministry. She had happily agreed with her Ally’s plan. Minerva told the two Gryffindors to set their Alarm Clock Charms on their pillows so they could wake up by seven-o’clock. She asked that they had breakfast in the Private Common Room, because she would be meeting them in the Lion’s Den by eight-o’clock, so they could leave soon after. Her plan was for them to take a carriage to the Three Broomsticks, where they would take the Floo Network to the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic.

She would make her way to the Lion’s Den soon, but first she needed to see if Albus Dumbledore was still in the Hospital Wing.

To her dismay, as she entered the Hospital Wing, she found that the Headmaster wasn’t there. Poppy Pomfrey saw Minerva almost immediately.

“Looking for Albus?” Poppy asked. “I excused him about half-an-hour ago. He was being stubborn and insistent about how he needed to go to the Ministry. He didn’t even have breakfast. I told him not to use the Floo Network to get to the Ministry – as he usually does to travel from here – but he just waved me off. He summoned a house-elf, to bring him a specific pair of clothing. So obviously, he was not going back to his Quarters, before he traveled to the Ministry.”

Minerva sighed. There was good news, and there was bad news about this. The good news was that Albus wouldn’t be there to prevent Harry and Hermione from leaving Hogwarts. The bad news was that he had between two and three hours before the Wizengamot meeting began, to find out information about what he’d missed at Sirius Black’s trial. There was a silver lining in the cloud of bad news, however. Even if he did discover Harry had been the one to open James and Lily Potter’s Will, Albus would likely not even suspect that Harry and Hermione would be claiming their Houses’ seats on the Wizengamot today. He was probably so focused on his “block Harry from his Emancipation” plan – which had been confirmed by Lord Greengrass, through the youngest daughter of Lord Blishwick -- that he wouldn’t even see this coming.

And why should he? The only people who knew what Harry and Hermione were doing that morning were in the Great Alliance, and none of them would betray their new de facto leader, the grandson of the man who founded the Alliance. Nobody who would give the information to Albus knew about it.

“Thank you, Poppy,” Minerva said, “Pomona is in charge until either Albus or I return after the Council Meeting. The Solstice meetings are always rather long, so we may not be back until dinner, if we’re lucky.”

Earlier that morning, Minerva had sent two notes off with Mallory, her house-elf, to Pomona Sprout and Rubeus Hagrid. To Pomona was a simple note that she would be in charge for most of the day, as the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress would be away from the castle. To Hagrid, she had asked for a carriage to be ready for her around eight-o’clock, and that she wanted a carriage ready at the Hogwarts gates, to return to the castle, around noon. She didn’t tell Hagrid that Harry and Hermione would be going with her, nor that they would be using the carriage to get back. Harry and Hermione didn’t know exactly when they would return with Remus Lupin, but as they would be visiting Gringotts after claiming their seats, she figured they wouldn’t be back before noon.

“Have a good time at the Council Meeting, Minerva,” Poppy said, “Hopefully nothing too life-changing happens today.”
Minerva merely smiled and nodded in agreement, though inside she was fretting a bit. Sure, Harry and Hermione would be revealing crucial information about themselves to everyone. But this meant Albus would soon discover their important secrets.

“We shall hope,” Minerva said, “I must be off. Have a good day, Poppy.”

“And you, Minerva,” Poppy said.

Minerva smiled again, then turned and left the Hospital Wing. She sighed and started off back toward the Grand Staircase, so she could make her way to the Lion’s Den.

It was time to begin a day that would prove to be a long and interesting one.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 8:20 AM)

As the first sunlight of the day shone over the snow-covered grounds of Hogwarts, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger stepped into one of the carriages that had been prepared for them, followed by Professor McGonagall. They had wanted to dress to impress, since they would be standing in front of the entire Wizengamot Council – if only, hopefully, for a few minutes – and would likely be the subjects of a few photos from the media.

During their Hogsmeade visit the previous day, they had visited the seamstress and had purchased new formal robes – different from the outfits they would wear at the Yule Ball – for the Council meeting, and the penning of their Betrothal Contract.

Speaking of Betrothal Contracts… earlier that morning, upon Professor McGonagall’s advice, Harry destroyed the illegal Betrothal Contract between him and Ginny Weasley. It destroyed the other copies as well. However, as Dumbledore owned the only Contract that hadn’t been discovered – Molly’s old copy had been destroyed by Amelia Bones a few hours after Molly’s death – and it was probably hidden away in the Headmaster’s Office, Dumbledore would probably only find ashes where the copy had once been.

Harry and Hermione had celebrated the destruction of the Contract with a brief kiss, even though the Head of Gryffindor had been present at the time.

Harry and Hermione sat down on one side of the carriage together, while Professor McGonagall sat down across from them. As the carriage jolted into movement, Hermione chuckled nervously. Harry looked at her in concern.

“We’re leaving Hogwarts for the last time as just Harry Potter and Hermione Granger,” Hermione said. “When we return, you will be Harry James Potter, Lord Potter and Lord Peverell, and I will be Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

“We are also leaving for the last time as simply boyfriend and girlfriend,” Harry reminded her. “When we return, we will be a Betrothed couple.”

“I don’t know if the news will reach Hogwarts before the end of the Council session,” McGonagall said, “You may have a few hours of peace before you’re swamped with gossip, rumors and questions from your fellow students. Have you given any thought as to how you going to handle the media with this news?”
“We discussed this during breakfast,” Hermione said, “Rita Skeeter will likely be present for the Council Meeting, so she’ll be there all day. When we finish up at Gringotts, we’ll write a letter to Rita with our statements about our appearance at the Council Session, and our Betrothal Contract. We’ll ask Ragnok for a copy of the Contract we can give to Rita. We’ll put the letter and copy in an envelope and give it to Penelope Clearwater at the Daily Prophet, so she can deliver it to Rita Skeeter.”

“So we should expect it in the Daily Prophet tomorrow morning,” McGonagall said, nodding, then she frowned. “You should probably expect the Headmaster to summon both of you to his office this evening. I will accompany you, of course, since I expect we’re going to have to reveal everything about our Gringotts visit to him.”

“Will we get in trouble for leaving Hogwarts last Sunday… or today?” Hermione asked, concerned. “Technically, Harry shouldn’t get in trouble, as he is Emancipated. But me…”

“You were with me in Diagon Alley last Sunday – and aside from your appointments in the Gringotts Hospital Wing, neither of you left my eyesight,” McGonagall said, “Today, you’ll either be with me or another adult, Remus Lupin – aside from when you’ll be in Gringotts, but you don’t need to mention that. As I am Head of Gryffindor, and Deputy Headmistress, it was within my power to give you permission. Remus Lupin has my permission to escort you outside of Hogwarts. Miss Granger, do not forget. You are also Mr. Potter’s Vassal, and he is your Magical Guardian. As he is Emancipated, he can give you permission to accompany him, as his Vassal. This is all completely legal, and the Headmaster will know that. He won’t be able to argue about it, so do not let him believe he can punish you for it.”

“What about you?” Harry asked, concerned, “It is because of you that we were able to visit Gringotts. It is because of you that we’re going to be able to go to the Council Session.”

“I am sure he will blame me for allowing you to do all of that,” McGonagall said. “However, I will use the Headmaster’s attempt at claiming he was your Magical Guardian before your Emancipation against him. As your Magical Guardian he was responsible for informing you about your responsibilities as Heir and future Lord, and he didn’t do it. As your parents wanted you to learn this information at eleven years old, as said in their Will – which he witnessed being penned -- he has no excuse if he doesn’t want to get in trouble. If he was assigned your Magical Guardian by your parents, he still would have had to follow their wishes for certain parts of your life – such as your education in the responsibilities of being a future Lord.”

“So we can use that against him,” Harry said.

“Precisely,” McGonagall said, “He would have to give us a reasonable explanation as to why he went against your parents’ wishes in their Final Will and Testament. Since we believe he had nefarious reasons for Sealing the Will, and ignoring their last wishes, he isn’t going to want us to find out why he did it. He won’t have much of a defense against our arguments.”

“For being such a wise man,” Hermione said, “He makes a great many mistakes.”

“He likes to say he makes an ‘old man’s mistakes’, ” Minerva said, with a quiet snort, “He will also say that his mistakes tend to be monumentally bigger than those of the rest of us. He will probably say one or both of these things when we meet with him.”

“So I suppose when Harry and I return to the castle,” Hermione said, “We should discuss what might
be brought up, and how to defend against it.”

“Yeah, that sounds good to me,” Harry said, “So we’ll be ready for it.”

“Depending on when you return,” McGonagall said “You should have plenty of time to predict how the whole discussion might go. Simply figure out what kind of questions the Headmaster will ask and how you should answer to any of these questions.”

“Do we reveal that we know about our Natural Occlumency and Legilimency talents?” Hermione asked.

McGonagall frowned and thought about this. After a minute, she replied. “Perhaps. Even if you haven’t done much to consciously train your talents, it is always nice to make him afraid of trying to use Legilimency on you. It is very dangerous using Legilimency on a Natural Occlumens. There is a history of those who tried suffering anywhere from massive migraines, to seizures, to collapsing into a coma. He won’t want to risk any of that.”

“We’ll discuss it when we talk about our other strategies,” Hermione said, “Because if we reveal our Natural Occlumency and Legilimency talents, we’ll have to reveal we know about the other bindings and blocks we had on us. Including the Obliviations.”

“It might come to that anyway, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “Prepare for anything. Expect the unexpected. For example. Expect the Headmaster to attempt to keep you in Courtroom Nine for the remainder of the session.”

“That is why Amelia wanted us to address Minister Fudge instead, isn’t it?” Harry asked, “Because in a room where every Lord and Lady in the British magical society is in attendance, the Headmaster would be mad to try to argue the Minister’s decision in front of so many important witnesses.”

“Correct, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said. “It was good of Amelia to suggest such a thing.”

“It was,” Hermione agreed. “Professor? I assume since a fair share of the third years, and most of the fourth-through-seventh year Gryffindors are still here at Hogwarts, that you got plenty of essays and letters about their crimes against us?”

Minerva smiled. “Would you believe that every Gryffindor in attendance during that meeting – so everyone aside from Ron and Ginny, as well as those you cleared as uninvolved – ended up giving me essays and letters directed to one or both of you?”

“All of them?” Harry asked, “I didn’t expect that. I thought there might be a few rebellious students.”

“It was peer pressure again, wasn’t it?” Hermione asked, “’The rest of us are doing what our Head of House asked us to do. Don’t embarrass Gryffindor for the rest of us.’ Something like that?”

“It is possible,” McGonagall admit. “I am going to go over the letters tomorrow and Tuesday, and I should be able to give them to you on Wednesday. You are not expected to write replies back. If you feel you must write some, do so, but don’t believe you should write to everyone. This isn’t your assignment after all. It was theirs.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Hermione said, and Harry echoed his girlfriend.

As the carriage continued toward its destination in Hogsmeade, Professor McGonagall – ever the
teacher – made sure her students knew exactly what they would be doing in order to claim their seats in the Wizengamot. She was quite satisfied when they recounted the same instructions Amelia had taught them during lunch the previous day. She told them they were both ready for their true introduction to the Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot.

Harry and Hermione were both nervous, but they just wanted to get it over with, while also avoiding too much drama from the Headmaster.

Neither were optimistic this would happen though.

After all, they weren’t nearly as dunderheaded as Severus Snape claimed them to be.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 9:10 AM)

It was after nine-o-clock by the time Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall found themselves in one of the lifts heading down to Level Ten. It had taken several minutes, after their arrival in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic for the first time, to get there. First they had to check in at the Welcome desk, where they had to get their wands checked with Eric the welcome wizard. Then they had to make their way through the crowds so they could get into one of the lifts.

Luckily, he had a winter cap on his head that kept his lightning-shaped scar covered, so nobody in the crowds or the lift recognized him. Therefore, he could look around at the wonders of the Ministry of Magic. This was the first time he and Hermione had been there, and the couple couldn’t help but look around and admire the impressive towering tunnel-like structure that made up the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic.

The Fountain of Magical Brethren, while beautiful at first glance, was rather odd when Harry looked at it closer as they passed by it. While the house-elf might look up at the wizard with that slavishly happy smile, the Centaur and Goblin would not. He could imagine Keeper Ragnok sneering at the thing, and Bane the Centaur, whom he had met in the Forbidden Forest during his first year at Hogwarts, would definitely not approve of it.

“Honestly,” Hermione had whispered, as she sneered up at the fountain, “All it needs is a Muggle kneeling in front of the wizard, and it would be complete, wouldn’t it?”

“If the Dark families had their way, there would be a representation of a Muggle in that very pose, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, her cat-like hearing able to hear her student’s whispers.

Hermione blushed. “Sorry, Professor.”

“No need to apologize, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “I’ve thought the very same of this fountain myself. Many times.”

Now the two students and their Professor were standing together in the crowded lift. The lift stopped at most floors, letting riders in or out. Harry listened to the cool voice overhead rattle off every Department name that was on each floor. He had never heard of some of these Departments before. There were so many. Hermione seemed just as interested, though Harry suspected she might have read about most of the Departments in one book or another.

Finally they reached floor nine, which seemed to be the last floor the lift could reach, even though there was a total of ten floors.
“Level Nine,” the cool voice overhead said, “Courtrooms 1 through 6 and the Department of Mysteries.”

“What is the Department of Mysteries?” Harry asked Professor McGonagall, when they separated from the group that had been with them in the lift.

“A most secret place, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, in a low voice, as she led the students down the corridor, “The witches and wizards who work there, are known as Unspeakables.”

“Oh, yeah, Mr. Weasley pointed a couple of them out at the Quidditch World Cup,” Hermione said, “Remember Harry. He explicitly said they were Unspeakables.”

“Yes, I remember,” Harry said. “Bode and Croaker, I think their names were.”

“Algernon Croaker,” McGonagall said, “He is actually Neville’s Great Uncle.”

Harry and Hermione exchanged a look. “Neville’s Uncle Algie?”

The one who dropped Neville off a pier and out a window, just to prove he wasn’t a squib? Harry thought.

“That’s him,” McGonagall said, “Very few Unspeakables allow their identities known. Bode and Croaker are two high-leveled Unspeakables, very important members of the Department of Mysteries. Oh, look, there’s the entrance to the Department right there.”

Harry and Hermione soon found what McGonagall was talking about. The entrance to the Department of Mysteries was through a long, narrow, shadowy corridor with black-tiled walls and floors, that had no windows and only one plain black door at the very end of the corridor.

“Mysterious,” Harry said, “Guess it lives up to its name.”

“Certainly does,” McGonagall muttered. “This way, we have to go down some stairs to the bottom level. Lifts don’t reach this far. This is where the main Holding Cells are – those that are not located in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement anyway. It is located at the end of Level Ten, and mostly used to transfer the prisoners to the Courtrooms located down here.”

They soon reached the stairs and made their way down to the bottommost level of the Ministry of Magic.

“Can you just imagine how far under London we must be?” Hermione asked Harry, “It is amazing what magic can do when it comes to building hidden structures!”

“Yeah, pretty impressive,” Harry said; he noticed something peculiar, “Er… why are there windows here if we’re so deep underground, and what is this light?”

“Just something to give a natural feeling to the building, Mr. Potter,” McGonagall said, “Department of Magical Maintenance likes to play pranks on the Ministry sometimes with these windows. There was a hurricane in every window one time when the Maintenance Department was on a strike.”

“I’d say it might be something Fred and George might like, but it kind of sounds like an insult,” Harry said.
“Yes,” McGonagall said, “Maintenance is obviously the lowest-paid Department in the Ministry.”

“Don’t tell me,” Hermione muttered, “Made up mostly of Muggleborn… and Squibs?”

“Unfortunately, this is true,” McGonagall said.

Professor McGonagall led them down the corridor, and soon they found Sirius Black and Remus Lupin standing outside a door. Sirius grinned when he saw them.

“There you are!” Sirius said, “Good timing. Gives us plenty of time to introduce you to the Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance, and talk to them for a bit. Especially, as you want to speak to Lords Blishwick and Davis about inviting them formally into the Great Alliance. They’re with the other Lords and Ladies. They were at the Alliance meeting at Lord Castor’s manor last night. They have a bit of an idea what you have planned for them.”

“Great,” Harry said.

“We shall go in then,” McGonagall said, “Especially as you, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger don’t want to be in there when Albus arrives.”

“Of course, Lady McGonagall,” Sirius said, with a bow; “See you soon, Moony!”

Remus nodded. Sirius opened the door, and McGonagall led them inside with Sirius following behind Harry and Hermione.

The room was filled with several tables as if it was a sort of cafeteria. Each table had enchantments around them to prevent eavesdropping from other Council members at neighboring tables. Seated at these tables were members of the Wizengamot Council. Most were sitting with their closest personal Alliances. Harry was rather surprised to see that nobody was looking up at them as they walked through the room.

“Wondering why everyone is minding their own business, you two?” Sirius asked in a low voice, “Enchantments that make sure everyone does exactly that when seated at the tables. This is so they aren’t eavesdropping on other meetings. Some of these Alliances don’t have meetings like the Great Alliance did last night. When they’re in this room, this might be the only time they get to meet with their full Alliance.”

Harry and Hermione nodded, understanding this simple explanation. Soon they arrived at one of the larger tables in the room, where several wizards and a few witches were seated. Four chairs were open near where Amelia Bones was seated.

“Hello, everyone!” Sirius said, grinning, “Feels like we just saw each other last night!”

Most of the witches and wizards at the table chuckled or rolled their eyes – obviously they were used to Sirius’ humor. Then everyone seemed to catch his eye at once, and many of them stared at him. It wasn’t like what happened when others stared at him just for being the Boy-Who-Lived. No… he realized… maybe they were looking at him as if he was a young James Potter.

Harry blushed at the attention, and sat down between Hermione and Sirius, who sat down next to Amelia. McGonagall sat down on Hermione’s other side.
“You probably know who this young man is and why he is here,” Sirius said, “But you probably do not know why this young lady is here. Amelia and I told you last night we were welcoming more than one new House into the Great Alliance today. Maybe your Heirs or Heiresses told you about that in letters yesterday?

“This, obviously, is Harry James Potter, my godson. But he is also the new Lord Potter and Lord Peverell, and the de facto leader of the Great Alliance.”

Harry blushed again as everyone greeted him.

“His girlfriend, seated next to him,” Sirius continued, “Is Hermione Granger, Heiress Dagworth Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger, and one of the newest Houses in the Great Alliance.”

Hermione blushed as everyone greeted her. They had expressions of awe, surprise and shock at the fact that a once-dead House was back.

“At the start of the Council Meeting, Harry and Hermine will claim their seats and give their votes to Proxies, which has already been decided, discussed and agreed. Now, if you will, please introduce yourselves to the young ones.”

The members of the Great Alliance introduced themselves. In addition to Sirius and Amelia, there was Neville’s Gran, Regent Lady Augusta Longbottom, who Harry had seen before on Platform Nine and Three Quarters; Luna’s father, Xenophilius Lovegood; Lord Castor Greengrass, Lord Adam Abbot, Lord Michael McMillan, Lord Thomas Boot, Pacha Patil, the father of the Patil twins, and Ted, Andromeda and Nymphadora Tonks. Houses Lovegood, Tonks and Patil were Minor Houses, and therefore, they weren’t Lords and Ladies.

Also seated at the table was Lord Isaac Blishwick and Lord Derrick Davis. It was these two Harry addressed first.

“Lords Blishwick and Davis,” Harry said, “It is my understanding that my father was planning on inviting both of your Houses into the Great Alliance before his death. It is my wish to follow up with his decision. Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance, please welcome Houses Blishwick and House Davis to the Great Alliance!”

There was applause and soft cheers. Lords Blishwick and Davis looked emotional.

“Thank you, Lord Potter,” Lord Blishwick said, “This means a lot to me and my family, I assure you.”

“I echo my friend’s sentiments, Lord Potter,” Lord Davis said, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Harry said, “I will formally invite you at the start of the Council Meeting after I claim my chairs and give my proxies out. After I invite both of you, then I will ask my Vassal, and my girlfriend, Heiress Dagworth-Granger to claim her seat. Then I will invite House Dagworth-Granger to the Great Alliance. By then, I am sure everyone in the Council will realize that the Great Alliance has returned and is more powerful than ever!”

There was applause and soft cheers around the table again. Most at the table looked emotional. They all knew what this meant for the Alliance.”
“Then we will ask Minister Fudge if we can leave the Courtroom, as we have no other reason to be there, since we will name our Proxies. After we leave the Ministry, we will be going to Gringotts to pen a Betrothal Contract between us. Mostly, it is a preventative measure to stop other Lords and Ladies from believing we’re available for their Heiresses and Heirs respectively.”

Harry grinned when many at the table gave knowing smiles and chuckles.

“Lord Boot,” Harry said, “Please raise your hand.”

Lord Thomas Boot did as asked.

“Your son and Heir, Terry, told me that you had concerns about the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “Is this true, Lord Boot?”

“I am afraid I did have concerns, Lord Potter, and I can see now that they were foolish,” Boot said. “I had been invited to another Alliance, headed by Amos Diggory of House Diggory. Lord Diggory is my wife’s brother, and I was being pressured to join his Alliance and leave the Great Alliance. I almost agreed to do so. Now I am glad I didn’t. I hope this does not lead to further troubles, Lord Potter.”

“I am sure Lord Diggory was just trying to see if he could one-up the Great Alliance,” Harry said, smiling, causing several to chuckle around the table. “Today, we will show him that will not be possible.”

“Hear, hear, Lord Potter,” Lord Boot said, “I thank you for not allowing this to become a bigger issue.”

“No need to start my leadership of the Alliance on the wrong foot,” Harry said. “Now that this issue is dealt with, are there any more issues that needs to be voiced?”

There were murmurs and shaken heads around the table.

“Very well,” Harry said, “That’s done on my end. Let’s enjoy ourselves for a little bit, before my godfather, girlfriend and I need to leave so we can prepare to claim our seats. I’d like to hear about any big plans you might have for the Council today.”

For the next fifteen minutes Harry relaxed in his chair and listened to the others talk amongst themselves. Then Sirius announced they needed to go.

“Auror Tonks, please escort them to a private room near Courtroom Nine,” Amelia said, “You’re in charge of making sure these three are in the Courtroom at the proper time to claim their seats, and that nobody interferes with this.”

“Of course, Director Bones,” the Auror said.

Harry, Hermione and Sirius stood and followed Auror Tonks out of the room, leaving a most excited Great Alliance behind them.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 9:55 AM)

Albus Dumbledore’s Occlumency talents were working overtime. It was all he could do to keep
from showing an expression mixed with panic, rage, and even a bit of fear. Several minutes ago, he discovered something that had shocked him to his core: Minerva McGonagall had lied to him.

She had lied to him about more than one thing! She had lied about what had happened, regarding the mention of his name, in Sirius Black’s trial. There was more accusations targeted toward him in Black’s Trial, then just him being one of the reasons Black originally didn’t get a trial thirteen years ago! All those things he had feared, questions he had wondered about when it came to Black’s Trial had come true! Things he had tried to hide had been discovered during Sirius’ trial. Sirius remembered the Godfather Ritual; he remembered Albus using the Fidelius Charm to name Peter Pettigrew the Secret Keeper for the Potters! Questions about the crime scene resulting in the aftermath of Black confronting Pettigrew had been asked. Questions about the Aurors investigating the crime scene had been asked, especially concerning their disappearances and deaths! Things he had been trying to hide!

Harry Potter had apparently visited Gringotts Bank two Sundays ago and had opened the Final Will and Testament of James and Lily Potter! Upon learning this, Albus had quickly realized something else. Minerva McGonagall had lied to him about the sixth year’s pregnancy scare! She had lied about Potter and Granger staying all day in their Private Common Room that Sunday! No, Minerva had escorted Potter and Granger to Gringotts, likely to meet with Potter’s Account Manager? What all had been discovered aside from the Will? Had Potter and Granger taken Blood Tests, which would reveal all those bindings and blockings? Had they been removed?

This must have been how Amelia Bones had gotten her information! Had Minerva lied again? Had Director Bones spoken to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger about what they discovered at the bank? Is that why she was investigating him? Is that why Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley had been arrested.

How the bloody hell had Minerva, Potter and Granger kept this from him for more than a week?!

Albus’ musings were interrupted by a gavel and he turned to Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, who was standing up in a chair near him.

“Welcome, Lords, Ladies, Department Heads, Media and Guests,” Cornelius said, “to the nineteen ninety-four Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot Council! Aurors! Open the doors and allow those who wish to claim their seats on this glorious Council!”

Albus turned to the main doors of the room as they opened. Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks led three individuals into the room. Sirius Black was the first. Albus frowned, but it was expected that the newly free man would claim the House of Black – likely for the Light Alliance.

But it was the other two Albus looked at that made him nearly vomit in panic and fear.

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were standing near Sirius Black.

Albus could only think of two words, as his plans started to crumble around him, and the truth of what was about to take place came to the front of his mind.

Oh, shit!

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 10:00 AM)
Lord Harry James Potter nearly laughed out loud as he found Albus Dumbledore looking down at him, with a fearful expression. The man looked ready to mess himself!

*Wonder if he has an incontinence pad?* Harry mused to himself.

“The first new hopeful Council Member!” Minister Fudge announced, “Please, come forth and claim what is yours!”

Sirius stepped forward toward a table.

“Lord Sirius Black! How many seats do you claim today?” Fudge asked.

“One, Minister,” Sirius said.

“Please continue,” Fudge said.

Sirius removed his House Ring, and placed it on material that resembled black felt.

“I, Lord Sirius Orion Black, Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black,” Sirius said, in a loud, carrying voice, “claim my rightful chair!”

A smoky wisp resembling the Crest of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black rose through the air. Sirius returned his ring to his finger.

“You have been weighed and accepted, Lord Black,” Cornelius said, “Your Alliance?”

“The Light Alliance,” Sirius said. “And the Great Alliance.”

There were several murmurs, especially from those in the Dark Alliance, and those who supported them. Obviously they thought the House of Black would return to the Dark Alliance.

“Council Scribe,” Fudge said, “Please note that Lord Black has been accepted into the Light Alliance. As he is Lord of an Ancient and Most Noble House, he will have four votes per bill. You may take your seat. Next!”

As Sirius made his way to his seat, which now appeared between the McGonagall and Bones seats, Harry swallowed nerves and walked up to the table. Minister Fudge’s eyes widened as he recognized Harry. Dumbledore frowned as he looked at him.

“Harry Potter?” Fudge asked.

“That is Lord Potter, Minister Fudge,” Harry said, “As I was Emancipated on October 31st, of this year.”

Dumbledore narrowed his eyes. Several members in the Council gasped. Fudge stammered then cleared his throat.

“Lord Potter,” Fudge said, “How many seats do you claim today?”

“Two, Minister,” Harry said, to more gasps.

Fudge coughed. “Please continue then.”
Harry removed his House Potter ring and placed it on the black felt.

“Lord Harry James Potter, Lord of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter,” Harry said, “claim my rightful seat.”

The House Potter Crest appeared in a wisp of smoke. He placed his ring back on his finger, then placed the Peverell ring onto the felt.


The Peverell Crest – also known as the Sign of the Deathly Hallows – appeared in a wisp of smoke. Harry returned the ring to his finger.

“Lord Potter-Peverell,” Fudge stammered. “You have been weighed and accepted. Your Alliance?”

“The Light and Neutral Alliance respectively,” Harry said, “And the Great Alliance.”

Harry glanced at Dumbledore, who frowned and paled. Many others paled as well as they realized what this meant.

“Lord Potter-Peverell, you might be Emancipated, but you are under seventeen,” Fudge said, “Who are your Proxies?”

“I ask Lady Regent Amelia Bones to be Proxy for the House of Potter,” Harry said.

Amelia stood up from her chair. “I, Amelia Bones, accept the Proxy of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter.”

“Lady Regent Bones is Proxy for House Potter and adds four votes to her own,” Fudge said, “And House of Peverell?”

“I ask Lord Castor Greengrass to be Proxy for the House of Peverell,” Harry said.

Dumbledore’s eyes widened as he turned to where Lord Greengrass stood.

“I, Castor Greengrass, accept the Proxy of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell.”

“Lord Castor Greengrass is Proxy for House Peverell adds six votes to his own,” Fudge said. “Next!”

“Pardon me, Minister,” Harry said, “The next is my Vassal of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. But first I have an announcement as Lord Potter.”

“Of course, Lord Potter,” Harry said.

“Lord Isaac Blishwick and Lord Derrick Davis, please rise,” Harry said.

Lords Blishwick and Davis rose from their seats in the Neutral Alliance.

“Lord Blishwick, Lord Davis,” Harry said, “Do you accept membership into the Great Alliance?”
“I do, Lord Potter,” Lord Blishwick said.

“I do, Lord Potter,” Lord Davis echoed.

“I, Lord Harry Potter, de facto leader of the Great Alliance,” Harry said “accept House Blishwick and House Davis into the Great Alliance,”

Dumbledore narrowed his eyes as Blishwick and Davis sat down. There were uncomfortable murmurs around the Council.

“I present my Vassal of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter,” Harry said, “Hermione Jean Granger, otherwise known as Heiress Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger! Please claim your seat, my Vassal.”

Dumbledore’s face went pale white, and his jaw dropped as Hermione walked forward. Several members of the Council also had dropped jaws or looked in awe as Hermione made her way to the table.

Hermione removed her ring from her finger and placed it on the table.

“I, Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth Granger,” Hermione said, “claim my rightful seat!”

The Cauldron Crest appeared in a wisp of smoke. Hermione returned the ring to her finger.

“H-Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Fudge stammered, “I personally wish to welcome back the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger back into our humble Council. We all thought your House had died out. But, pardon me, Heiress, you are a Muggleborn, are you not?”

“Muggleborn, descended from a Pureblood, Minister Fudge,” Hermione said, “According to my Inheritance Test.”

“O-of course!” Fudge said, “Alliance and Proxy?”

“Light Alliance and Great Alliance,” Hermione said, “I ask Lady Minerva McGonagall to Proxy the House of Dagworth-Granger.”

Dumbledore frowned as Professor McGonagall stood up.


“Lady Minerva McGonagall is Proxy of the House of Dagworth-Granger and adds two votes to her own,” Fudge said.

“Minister Fudge,” Harry said, “I believe now that we have claimed our seats and Proxies, my Vassal and I have no other reason to be here. May we be excused?”

“Mr. Potter?” Dumbledore called out.

“Of course, Lord Potter!” Fudge said, interrupting Dumbledore, “I thank you and your Vassal for courageously coming before us and claiming your seats. It was a revelation for us all, I assure you.
You may be excused.”

“Mr. Potter?!” Dumbledore called out again, standing up from his chair.

“It is Lord Potter, Headmaster – erm, sorry – Chief Warlock Dumbledore,” Harry said, “We will see you back at Hogwarts, sir. Have a fantastic Council Session, sir! I am sure you have Bills you wish to pass that you’ve been considering for weeks. Good luck, sir!”

Harry smirked, silently telling the old man he knew what Dumbledore had planned to do to him. Dumbledore stammered and blustered, but said nothing else, while Harry and Hermione followed Auror Tonks back out of the Courtroom. Tonks closed the door, and Hermione squealed, then leapt toward Harry, wrapped her arms around Harry’s neck and kissed him deeply.

“That… was one of the coolest things I’ve ever seen in my life!” Rookie Auror Nymphadora said.

Harry backed away from his girlfriend’s lips. “Yeah… it was pretty brilliant.”

He wasn’t sure if he meant the show in the Courtroom or the kiss.

Both, he decided. Most definitely both!

Chapter End Notes

That was fun! I hope you enjoyed that as much as I did.

Yes, I know, in canon, Unspeakable Croaker’s first name is Saul. In my universe, he is Algernon Croaker, also known as Neville’s Uncle Algie and Unspeakable Toad.

Next Chapter: Dumbledore fumes as the Wizengamot Session continues (I will only show one more moment of the Council session – Sirius announcing his engagement to Amelia.). Harry, Hermione and Remus visit Diagon Alley and Gringotts, to pen the Betrothal Contract! And more!
Conniptions and Contracts

Chapter Notes

Made a mistake in Chapter 32 that some of my readers probably saw before it was corrected. Lord Blishwick's name is Isaac, I accidentally named him by his son's name, Ivan. This was changed and corrected a couple hours after the chapter was published.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing and Plotting; Helpful Goblins

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 10:10 AM)

As he, and the rest of the Lords and Ladies on the Wizengamot, watched the newly introduced Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger leave Courtroom Nine, Albus Dumbledore slowly sank down onto his chair. He could not believe what he had just witnessed take place. Harry Potter and Hermione Granger had just done something that he would have thought was impossible, especially given all the limitations they had – limitations he had set for them – inside Hogwarts Castle.

Somehow, over the past week, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger had completely taken themselves out from under all the influence he had on them. Somehow, they had been able to accomplish a lot of work, without him knowing about any of it until today.

Albus could understand how Amelia Bones had become the Proxy for the House of Potter, and Minerva McGonagall had become the Proxy for House of Dagworth-Granger. Obviously the new Lord Potter had been in contact with Amelia Bones, and the new Heiress had discussed her Proxy with the Head of Gryffindor House.

But how had it been arranged for Lord Castor Greengrass to accept the Proxy for House Peverell? How had Potter been in contact with Houses Blishwick and Davis? How had this been accomplished without him knowing? Wait… he racked his brains as he tried to think of all the post he had received over the past week. As Harry Potter’s mail was redirected to him because of enchantments and blocks, he would receive all of Harry Potter’s post. And yet… he had received none recently, even though he expected Harry Potter and Hermione Granger to receive a bunch of post from people around the magical society of Great Britain, especially in reaction of Rita Skeeter’s article about them becoming a couple. There might even have been Howlers and hex-letters sent to the new couple. So why hadn’t Albus received any of this instead of it going to Potter?

Unless… it was now going to Harry Potter. Which is how Potter was able to communicate with these people – and perhaps the rest of the Great Alliance – without his knowing. The Block had somehow been discovered and removed. Of course! His suspicions about the Blood Test Potter might have taken! The Block might have been discovered! This meant it had been removed – and perhaps, many other blocks and bindings had been removed. Like the bindings on his magical core, his willpower to do better at certain things – such as his schoolwork, which had been originally bound quite a bit so he wouldn’t make Ron Weasley jealous, and lose him as a friend and lose Albus a crucial spy. Like the Natural Occlumency, Natural Legilimency and Eidetic Memory abilities that had been blocked.
How had he discovered nothing of this? Of course, he had been extremely busy over the past weeks. Rita Skeeter’s articles, his visits to the Ministry. Preparing for today’s Wizengamot Council. His time in…

Fuck. His eight hours inside the Gringotts Holding Cell! He was there because Keeper Ragnok The Sixth – Harry Potter’s Account Manager – had sent him a letter! That was the day Amelia Bones had come to Hogwarts to investigate and arrest Ron and Ginny Weasley, and apparently talk to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger! He could not believe it! Had Potter arranged that? Had Potter asked the Goblin to send the letter? Had Potter done it, because he didn’t want Albus to interfere when Bones came to Hogwarts? That meant Potter knew he had stolen all that money from his Trust Vault. Which meant Potter likely knew about his Main Vaults and the vast fortunes inside! He wasn’t supposed to know he had more than a Trust Vault! If he knew about the Vaults, he’d likely know about his properties all over the world. He’d know about Potter Manor!

If Potter went to his family Manor, he’d probably find the Potter Family Grimoire, something Albus did not want to happen! If Lily Potter could protect her son from Voldemort that night, then there had to be some magics inside the Grimoire that could help Potter defeat Voldemort. That could not happen! Voldemort had to defeat Potter, so he, Albus, could defeat Voldemort himself!

Hell, the Grimoire might help Potter defeat him, if the brat ever decided he wanted to do that!

It was all becoming clear to him now. Rita Skeeter’s articles – perhaps Potter had given her that information! Which meant… he had suspicions about Albus’ plans for Granger? Of course! Granger was Potter’s Vassal now, obviously a move to protect her from Albus’ plans!

Albus couldn’t believe it. The entire week – every bad thing he had suffered – was planned in advance by Harry Potter, Hermione Granger… and Minerva McGonagall?

How much had they already accomplished without him knowing? How much did they know? How many of his carefully thought out plans had already been destroyed? He thought after the Weasleys had been arrested, that would be the only part of his plan that would be affected. He could come here today, get Potter’s Emancipation blocked before Potter could meet with his Account Manager, and he could continue his plans! The Potter Will wouldn’t be opened, Harry wouldn’t discover all those secrets, he wouldn’t be able to get Sirius Black freed, and he would have to return to the Dursleys next summer, while Albus continued to work on his plans.

Now Harry Potter was Lord Potter and Lord Peverell. Hermione Granger was Heiress Dagworth-Granger, and Vassal of House Potter. How much did Potter know about the Peverells? About the Three Brothers and the Deathly Hallows? Did he know what his Cloak was? Did he know Albus had the Elder Wand? If that happened… no, Albus couldn’t bear it.

Then there was the Great Alliance. It was back, and more powerful than ever.

That last one… that was a damaging blow, maybe more so than anything else. That was something he didn’t want to happen ever again. The Great Alliance was his biggest problem. With their full power back, with the addition of three more seats, Albus’ power in the Wizengamot Council – and the power of the Dark Alliance as well – was pretty much neutered. All those Bills he could create in the future. All those Bills the Great Alliance might create now that would succeed instead of fail. All problems for him and his plans for the near and distant future. Ruined, because of Harry Potter!

Albus needed to meet with Potter and Granger. He needed to find out what they knew. He needed to
figure out how to get them back under his control. But how?!

The Prophecy… perhaps? If he let Potter know about the Prophecy, and what he needed to do, Potter might realize he needed to work with Albus to finish off Voldemort for good! If only to protect Granger who would surely be one of Voldemort’s biggest targets when the monster returned to power! Yes, for Granger, Harry Potter would return under Albus’ thumb. For Granger, Harry Potter would sacrifice himself.

Albus sighed as Cornelius Fudge continued the next step of the Council Meeting. Albus Dumbledore just wanted the meeting – which would likely span several hours -- to be over. His biggest Bill he wanted passed was already destroyed before he could bring it up. He just wanted to go back to Hogwarts, so he could speak to Potter and Granger.

He shuddered, wondering what Potter and Granger were getting up to, without him being there to make sure they behaved.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 10:15 AM)

Sirius Black could barely hold back the laughter, and the glee in his expression as he watched Albus Dumbledore’s personal world fall around him. Sirius had wanted to laugh and cheer after Harry – ahem – Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger had left the Courtroom after their amazing performance in front of the Council. What a glorious prank that had been! Not just toward Albus Dumbledore, but to the majority of the Lords and Ladies of the Council – everyone but the Great Alliance, of course.

Sirius knew James and Lily Potter must be grinning, laughing and cheering from wherever they were, as they sat and watched the scene in front of them. He knew they would be just as proud of their son, as he was as proud of his godson. What a masterful play!

Sirius’ gleeful musing was interrupted as Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge smacked his gavel down on the surface in front of him.

“Now that we have welcomed back four Houses into the Wizengamot Council,” Fudge said, “And have recuperated from the wonders of what we have just witnessed – the return of a previously thought extinct House, for example, which is wonderful news! -- I believe we can continue on with this all-important Council Meeting.

“This is the Winter Solstice Session, as I am sure none of you need reminding. As per usual during Solstice Sessions, it is tradition for every single Lord and Lady in this Council to have a voice and speak up their issues if they wish it! The Solstice Session, unlike other sessions during the year, is not limited to two-to-four hours. We could be here for twelve hours, while all of you fine Lords and Ladies say what you need to say! And that is okay, because that is what these special Solstice Sessions are for! So let’s get underway with what I am sure will be a very long and very interesting Council meeting!

“As per usual, we will begin with any announcements any of our Lords and Ladies may have, before we move on to proposals for Bills and other important topics. Raise your hand if you have any announcements you would like us to know about! Anything that does not have to do with Bills or other issues needing to be debated, discussed and voted upon. Anything that might have happened recently you want us to know about. Births, deaths, weddings, et cetera and so forth!”
Sirius raised his hand – it had been decided he would be the one to announce his and Amelia’s engagement – as did many others.

“Lord Black!” Fudge said, “Welcome back to the Wizengamot Council, Lord Black. As this is your first Council session in many years, I believe we shall begin with you. You have an announcement for the Council?”

Sirius stood up and cleared his throat as he found every eye in the room staring at him.

“It is my pleasure to announce the future union of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black,” Sirius said, “and the Ancient and Most Noble House of Bones. On Saturday evening, I asked Lady Regent Amelia Bones to marry me and she accepted. We plan to marry during the week of Easter holiday!”

Applause and cheers were heard from the majority of the Light and Neutral Alliances. Several members of the Dark Alliance were merely clapping politely, while others weren’t clapping at all.

“Congratulations Lord Black and Lady Regent Bones!” Fudge exclaimed, after he finished his applause, and slammed the gavel on the surface in front of him, “I am sure I speak for everyone here, when I say I am thrilled for the both of you, and what should prove to be a fruitful and wonderful union for the future of your Houses and our society as a whole.”

Sirius hid a snort at the pompous nature of the Minister’s reply to his statement. Obviously the man was still trying to get on his good side, as a way of apologizing for what happened to him. Sirius merely bowed and sat back down in his chair.

“I trust I will be invited to the wonderful festivities,” Fudge said, chuckling; then he cleared his throat. “Next!”

As Fudge named another Lord, who stood, Sirius ignored the proceedings. The beginning part of these meetings were always Lords and Ladies boasting about certain things that only a few people out of the whole Council might care about. But it was a traditional part of the Solstice Sessions. As Fudge said, everyone got a chance to have their voice heard if they wanted it to be. No one was to walk out of the Session unsatisfied and disappointed that the things they wanted to be voiced weren’t voiced – as happened sometimes during regular meetings. Maybe their Bills wouldn’t pass, but at least they had brought it forth.

At least there were scheduled breaks every couple of hours to relax and wind down a bit from the drama. There was a reason these types of Sessions only happened twice a year. Because it was very long, mostly boring, and most Lords and Ladies didn’t want to spend so long in the company of the certain Council members they did not like. Things tended to heat up when that happened.

Sirius merely slumped back in his chair and watched the show. As he did, he wondered if Harry and Hermione had made it to Diagon Alley yet with Moony. He also started making mental lists of Christmas gifts he needed to buy over the next couple of days for several people.

He already knew what he wanted to give to his godson and Hermione. Minerva McGonagall had told him an interesting piece of information in a letter yesterday. Something Harry and Hermione had not told him – because they hadn’t thought much about it since they learned of it. Harry and Hermione had confirmed Animagus forms, but they needed to train and learn how to gain these forms. That was something Sirius could do.
He, James and Remus – with no help from Pettigrew – had done a lot of research when he, James and Pettigrew wanted to learn how to be Animagi to help Remus. They had written all this research down and made copies of it. Sirius’ copy of the research was in his Personal Vault at Gringotts. He didn’t know where James’ research was. So he was going to give Harry and Hermione his copy. A perfect Christmas gift in his mind!

Now he just had to come up with gifts for others… including his fiancée!

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 10:30 AM)

Harry and Hermione, accompanied by Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks, stepped through the brick archway and into Diagon Alley. They had taken the Floo Network from the Ministry of Magic to the Leaky Cauldron. Nymphadora Tonks, after hearing what they were planning – and congratulating the couple on their planned Betrothal – decided she wanted to tag along, for no real reason other than that she had an off-day from her job as a Rookie Auror for the remainder of the day, and she had nothing better to do!

Even when Harry and Hermione said they would be spending most of the time in Gringotts and not Diagon Alley, Tonks waved them off. Remus wasn’t accompanying them, so he needed some company of his own. Remus’ cheeks had gone red when Tonks – Harry and Hermione quickly learned not to call her by her first name – had decided she would keep the man company.

“Did you know Remus used to babysit me when I was little?” Tonks asked, as they walked down the cobblestone path of Diagon Alley, “Along with Sirius and your father, Harry! This was back before you were born, even before James and Lily got together. Of course, your mother joined them the summer after they finished their education, in those weeks before James and Lily got married. So Remus and I are old friends! Of course, I hadn’t seen him in ages before Sirius’ trial. I was jealous when I heard he was the Defense Professor last year. Missed him by two years.”

“Two years?” Harry asked. “You were at Hogwarts when we were first years?”

“I was a seventh year,” Tonks said. “Sorry I never approached you. I wanted to. But I was… well, it might have had something to do with that enchantment that recently got lifted. I don’t know. We’re cousins, you and I, you know? Second or something. Confusing that. Your grandmother was my Great Aunt, I think.”

“Would have been nice to know I had some good family members back then,” Harry said.

“I would have liked to get to know you too, Harry,” Tonks said, “I met you a few times when you were a baby. My mother has a picture of me holding you, I think.”

Harry blinked, and suddenly remembered a photo of a little pink-haired girl in his photo album. More than one.

“I think I have a picture – maybe more than one -- of you in my photo album I received from Hagrid,” Harry said. “He got a lot of pictures from my parents’ friends and made the book from them. Anyway, I think there was a picture of a pink-haired little girl at a wedding – my parents’ wedding maybe.”

“I was there with my parents!” Tonks said, grinning. “That was a very fun day.”
“I also think I have a picture of you holding little me,” Harry said.

“Might be a copy of the same one Mum has,” Tonks said.

“I was one of those friends Hagrid mentioned,” Remus said, smiling. “He wrote me a letter back then, and I sent you quite a few copies of the photographs I had. I am quite sure Ted and Andromeda sent you a few too, if you have one of Tonks when she was little. I wrote you a few letters too, Harry, but now I know Dumbledore kept them from you. Otherwise you would have known me more than just a Professor last year. When you didn’t know who I was, I knew something was quite off. Sorry I didn’t speak up about it. I was confused and questioning everything. I only started learning the truth after that night you saved Sirius and the hippogriff.”

“I understand, Moony,” Harry said, smiling. “Hey, how is Buckbeak?”

“Buckbeak is fine, though now we call him Witherwings, because he – unlike Sirius – is still a fugitive in a sense,” Remus said, “He has a little paddock in the back of the cottage Sirius and I rented from Tonks’ mother. The one we used as a safe house.”

“I’m glad he is safe,” Harry said.

“Me too,” Hermione said, “I was worried about him.”

“It was a good thing you did for him,” Remus said, smiling.

Soon, they arrived at Gringotts. “Come find Tonks and I after you’re finished. I know you told us you’re planning on going to the Daily Prophet Headquarters. If you don’t find us, we might be in the Leaky Cauldron.”

“We’ll meet you there then,” Harry said.

It was mutually agreed, and Harry and Hermione said a temporary farewell, then headed into Gringotts Bank. Earlier, before they had stepped into Diagon Alley, Harry called for Dobby and asked him to tell Keeper Ragnok that he and Hermione were going to be at Gringotts soon to meet with him.

So it was no surprise that Keeper Ragnok the Sixth was waiting for Harry and Hermione when they arrived.

“Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Ragnok said, with a smile, “It is wonderful to see you again. Follow me please.”

Harry and Hermione nodded and followed the Goblin. Five minutes later they were sitting in the very same meeting room they had been in the last time they had been here.

“I have actually been expecting you to meet with me – whether it be today or in the near future,” Ragnok said, after the two humans and Goblin sat down at the table. “When I realized that the Wizengamot Council was holding an all-important meeting today during the Winter Solstice, I theorized that the two of you may claim your seats on the Council. Is this so?”

“It is, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “It just happened at the top of the hour.”

“Excellent,” Ragnok said, “I am sure it was a most entertaining moment. Am I correct to assume that
the reason you are here is because you wish to do some damage control in the aftermath of these discoveries?”

“Heiress Dagworth-Granger and I wish to pen a Betrothal Contract, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said.

Ragnok grinned. “Yes, I had actually foreseen the possibility of this happening. Obviously you would want to pen a Contract, if only as a preventative measure to block other possible Contracts.”

“Yes, Professor McGonagall told us she had a conversation with you about this very thing,” Hermione said.

“We did, indeed, discuss it, while you were with our Healers last Sunday,” Ragnok said. “It was suggested, because I had foreseen the possibility of you wishing to prevent other wizards and witches trying to take advantage of you with Betrothal Offers. Now, since it should be expected that these Offers will be sent to you, I would suggest you allow me to redirect such offers here to Gringotts. Therefore -- just in case any of these offers have some type of hex-letter enchantment, or Compulsion that might make you react more positive to such an offer than you normally would -- you wouldn’t have to deal with these.”

“We have house-elves who control our post before we receive them,” Harry said. “But since these are Contracts and such, and Gringotts is in charge of such a thing, maybe you should be in charge of this. Hell, just reject all the offers in the first place. I don’t even need to see them.”

“Ah, I would suggest otherwise, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “Perhaps you know why, Heiress Dagworth-Granger?”

“The daughters targeted in these Contracts might receive letters from their parents, Harry,” Hermione said, “What if this happens, and these girls approach you? You wouldn’t expect them to, and you wouldn’t know why they approached you.”

Harry grimaced. “That is a good point, I suppose. Very well. Keeper Ragnok, I request that you redirect any Betrothal Offers sent to me, back to you. After you have cleared them of any nefarious enchantments, please send them my way.”

“Of course, Lord Potter,” Ragnok said, “And you, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Would you like the same treatment?”

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok, I would,” Hermione said.

“Excellent!” Ragnok said. “Now, without further ado, let us discuss the Betrothal Contract between the pair of you. Heiress Dagworth-Granger, as Vassal to Lord Potter, you do not need any other witness besides Lord Potter to sign on your behalf. Therefore, you are free to sign your own name, as it is assumed Lord Potter would favor this.”

“Of course,” Harry said.

“Therefore, Heiress,” Ragnok said, “You have permission to discuss the details of the Betrothal Contract without outside interference or suggestion that isn’t of your approval.”

“I am very relieved about that,” Hermione said, smiling.

“As I have been considering and planning for such a thing for over a week,” Ragnok said, “I have
considered a few suggestions for the provisos for your Contract. For example, the Contract cannot be canceled without both of you seeing a Gringotts-certified Healer. This will make sure that there are no Potions nor other outside influences, influencing you to cancel said Contract.”

“I accept the Proviso,” Harry said. “It can be canceled at any time, as long as we are not under nefarious influences.”

“I agree,” Hermione said.

“Given your history with nefarious potions and other enchantments, I thought you might favor it,” Ragnok said, “Which is why I considered it. Let us discuss and consider other Provisos and then we can officially pen this Contract. First! Offspring! Children!”

Harry looked at Hermione, who smiled.

“My decision, then,” Hermione said, and Harry nodded. “Three, at the very least. So that they can respectively hold the titles of Potter, Peverell and Dagworth-Granger. If we have daughters, the eldest gets the Dagworth-Granger title. Our eldest son gets Potter, and Peverell goes to the other oldest child, be it son or daughter.”

“I like it,” Harry said, “A minimum of three children, then we can have as many more as we want.”

“A agreed,” Hermione said.

“A very good suggestion,” Ragnok agreed. “To continue the thought, usually those who pen these Contracts like to decide when the first child should be expected. Like for example… barring any complications, the oldest child should be born less than five years after the marriage is consummated.”

Harry looked at Hermione, who bit her lip. “I might want to go to University, Harry.”

“I can be a stay at home Dad if I don’t go to University, Hermione,” Harry said, “With the fortune we will have, I don’t need to find a job immediately after leaving Hogwarts. Plus, we’ll have house-elves to babysit any children if we have plans for University or jobs.”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “Barring any complications, before our fifth anniversary, I must either be pregnant, or our eldest child should be born. If I do three or four years of University, this gives us a bit of an opening. Especially if I decide to take off a year in case I do end up pregnant before completing University.”

“I am alright with that,” Harry said. “That should satisfy our Alliance members, and the rest of society, interfering tossers they might be.”

Hermione giggled at this and nodded.

“Very well,” Ragnok said, smiling, as he wrote on the parchment in front of him, “A fine addition to the Child Proviso.”

“Adultery and Infidelity,” Hermione said. “I am not saying it will happen. This is a preventative measure, and needs to be included. If either of us commit adultery, we must be immediately checked for nefarious Potions and other enchantments.”
“I agree,” Harry said, “Nefarious Potions and enchantments are the only way it would happen, as far as I am concerned. Given the… celebrity… part of my life, this is a good Proviso.”

“I am in agreement with this,” Ragnok said.

“The Dagworth-Granger Title,” Harry said, “From this day forward, unless Hermione dies before our future eldest daughter, the next Heiress of the House of Dagworth-Granger, reaches her majority I will not interfere in the decision-making of the House of Dagworth-Granger. I will not sit in the House of Dagworth-Granger seat, nor will I hold the votes for the Dagworth-Granger seat. Hermione and our eldest daughter gets this honor.”

Hermione smiled, her eyes misty. “Thank you, Harry. I wouldn’t have thought of that.”

“I did not think of it either, I admit,” Ragnok said. “It is a good Proviso. Other Lords and Ladies might expect you, as Hermione’s husband, to take control of her House’s votes and responsibilities. This allows her to keep such responsibilities. Forgive me for bringing up this next topic, as it is a tough one. What about when it comes to divorce?”

“Again, I don’t foresee it happening, but on the possibility of it,” Harry said, “we must be checked out for nefarious enchantments and Potions if we even suggest such a thing. We must also agree to sit down here at Gringotts and discuss how we go forward when it comes to children and what will happen with them. Such as what they will inherit, and such.”

“I cannot see it happening either, Harry,” Hermione said. “But I suppose it must be added in the Contract, just in case. I agree with what you have suggested.”

“Very well,” Ragnok said, “I apologize for that. It is always the most difficult part of a Betrothal Contract, even when the future bride and groom don’t even have any involvement in the decision-making. Are there any other suggestions?”

“I think we covered pretty much everything I could think of,” Hermione said. “We’re not going to do a bride price as this is a Contract agreed between the two of us, not any parents or guardians. We’re not going to suggest a required wedding date. That gives us a choice of when we want to be married, be it in the days and weeks after you turn seventeen, Harry. Or, like your own parents, in the months after we finish our education at Hogwarts.”

“I agree,” Harry said, “I don’t want us to have a pre-set required wedding date. That is our decision we can be free to make in the future. I have no other suggestions either.”

“Very well,” Ragnok said. “With that, I can pen an official Contract, and the two of you can sign it.”

“I request a copy of the Contract after we sign it, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “So that I may give it to Rita Skeeter, so she can announce our Betrothal in the Daily Prophet.”

“Of course, Lord Potter, I assumed you would probably suggest such a thing,” Ragnok said, “Speaking of Contracts, I should have asked this first. My copy of the illegal Contract penned between Albus Dumbledore and the late Molly Weasley was destroyed this morning. Was this because of you, Lord Potter?”

“It was,” Harry said, grinning, “I destroyed it early this morning. I didn’t want its existence – illegal or not – interfering in the Contract being created now.”
“I would have suggested its destruction before you signed this Contract if you had not done it,” Ragnok said. “As you alluded to a precaution of it interfering in this Contract.”

Ragnok spent the next five minutes creating the Contract with all the suggested Provisos. He then placed it front of Harry and Hermione, both who read through it.

“Looks good,” Harry said, “Do we need a human witness for this?”

“No,” Ragnok said, “Betrothal Contracts are one of the few Contracts that do not need a Witness. Mostly for privacy’s sake between the two to-be united families.”

“Very well,” Harry said, “I suppose we should sign it then.”

Ragnok snapped his fingers and two Quills appeared in front of Harry and Hermione.

“These are a combination of our Blood and Honor Quills,” Ragnok explained. “I decided your Contract should be penned with this type of Quill, because of past mistakes with Contracts in your case. If an Honor Quill had been used with Albus Dumbledore, the illegal Contract wouldn’t have been penned, because he was not your legal Magical Guardian.”

“Understandable,” Harry said.

Harry picked up the Quill and signed on the line for the Groom. He winced as he noticed his signature appeared in his skin, for a moment before it disappeared.

“Multiple exposures to the Blood Quill, over a short timespan would cause scarring on your hand,” Ragnok explained, after Hermione signed her name on the Bride’s line, and winced and stared at her hand. “As such, the use of the Blood Quill is illegal outside of Gringotts. If you find a Blood Quill outside Gringotts soil, report it to me immediately please.”

“Yes, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, and Hermione echoed her boyfriend.

Keeper Ragnok signed his name on the Gringotts Witness line.

“Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” he said, “With your signatures and mine, the Contract is complete. You are now a Betrothed couple. Congratulations. You may kiss your Betrothed, Lord Potter.”

For a moment, Harry thought Keeper Ragnok was jesting, as affections weren’t allowed in front of Goblins. He shrugged and kissed Hermione briefly, before backing away. Harry and Hermione’s eyes widened as the Contract shone in gold.

“Magic has approved of the Contract,” Keeper Ragnok said. “Doesn’t always happen, and it isn’t required for a couple to be Betrothed. But when it happens, it is a joy to see. Congratulations again, Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

Harry and Hermione blushed and smiled at each other. Ragnok snapped his fingers and five copies of the parchment was made.

“Two of these copies are for you to have in your possession,” Ragnok said, “However, if these are destroyed, they will not destroy the main Contract. Two of these copies will go Vault Potter and Vault Dagworth-Granger respectively. The last one for Miss Rita Skeeter, as requested. Only when
the main Contract you signed with your blood is destroyed, will it terminate the Betrothal Contract. That cannot be done without – as per your Contract – you visiting our Healers for an appointment to make sure there are no nefarious enchantments or Potions influencing you.”

“Thank you, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “May I request writing material and an envelope? I will pay the cost for these.”

“Ten sickles taken from the Potter Vault,” Ragnok said; he snapped his fingers and writing material and a large brown envelope appeared.

Harry quickly wrote a letter for Rita concerning the Betrothal Contract, and giving her permission to write an article about it, and his and Hermione’s show in Courtroom Nine that morning. He signed it, then Hermione did, and he placed the letter and copy of the Contract inside the envelope.

“Now that the Betrothal Contract is penned, we can move on to the other message I wished to give you today,” Ragnok said, ”I expect to have the audit reports for Potter, Peverell and Dagworth-Granger completed before the end of the year. If you so desire, I would like to suggest you meet with me again during the first week of the new year. I can deliver the audit reports to you then.

“We can also go over the results of the Contract that was given to the Dursleys on Saturday morning, which was penned and accepted by Vernon Dursley. By New Year’s Day, the Dursleys will be gone from Number 4 Privet Drive in Surrey, and from Great Britain as a whole – if they know what is good for them.”

“Excellent!” Harry said, grinning, “Thank you very much for doing that. Who was the Gringotts representative who visited the Dursleys?”

“A Muggleborn named Samuel Preston,” Ragnok said.

“Give Mr. Preston a thousand Galleons from Lord Potter,” Harry said, “for doing a wonderful job, and putting up with the Dursleys, which must have been difficult.”

“I am sure he will be quite happy with such a gift,” Ragnok said. “I will be happy to do so. I believe we are finished if you have no other questions. Would you like to visit your Vaults, Lord Potter? Your Betrothed will have permission – if you allow her – to go with you into your Vault.”

“I would,” Harry said, “I need to pick up a few things I expect I will be able to find there. Hermione is, of course, welcome to join me.”

Hermione smiled and nodded.

“Very well,” Ragnok said. “Let us go then.”

Harry and Hermione collected their documents and followed Ragnok out of the room.

Chapter End Notes

And so we come to the end of another chapter. Hope you liked it! Thanks to Rhys Thornbery for his assistance – and approval – of the Provisos of the Betrothal Contract.
The Adultery/Fidelity and Divorce provisos wouldn't have been included without his assistance.

I am sure, since it is now known that Albus wants to tell Harry the Prophecy, that questions will be raised. Could Albus Dumbledore the Dark Lord in the prophecy? Yes. Could Voldemort be the Dark Lord in the prophecy? Yes. Could both? Yes! Does Albus want to even think that he is the Dark Lord in the prophecy? Absolutely hell no! He doesn't want to believe it, because that could mean that Harry could find out that he is the one named in the prophecy. It means that Harry could be destined to defeat him! He doesn't even want to think about that! Therefore, to him, Voldemort is the Dark Lord in the prophecy, and therefore that is what he wants Harry to believe.

Next Chapter: Harry and Hermione visit the Potter Vaults, and do some stuff before going back to Hogwarts. Maybe the Dumbledore meeting? It should happen next chapter. Depends on what else happens in the chapter.
How Can I Trust You?

Chapter Notes

Some of the Vault descriptions are taken from some of my older stories.

In this chapter, you will see a creation of mine I have been keeping secret for a while now. More will be explained in the bottom Author's Notes.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 11:30 AM)

Fifteen minutes after they left the meeting room, Harry, Hermione, and Ragnok were standing in front of Vault 688, which held the majority of the Potter Family material possessions, that which wasn’t currently in the Potter residents around the world.

The trek on a mine-cart, through the Vault tunnels, and deep underground, was amazing. Then there was the humongous, blind dragon used for security. It wasn’t as big as the Horntail Harry had faced nearly a month ago, but it was still a bit terrifying. Ragnok had asked Harry if he wanted to test his Beast Speaking ability to speak to the dragon, but Harry declined, hoping that the Goblin was joking. A brave Gryffindor he may be, but speaking to a dragon he had just met wasn’t brave – it was stupid!

Harry studied the Vault and noticed, etched into the bronze door, a design, like a shield. He held up his Potter Family ring and compared it to the shield. A Griffin standing tall, its wings outstretched, stood above two swords pointed diagonally. On the Griffin's chest, there was a letter P.

“Vault 688 – Potter Family Material Possessions,” Ragnok said. “Lord Potter, walk up to the door, and press the Potter Family ring directly in the hole that forms around the upper portion of the large letter P.”

Harry did as was instructed, then backed away as he heard a great mechanical sound. The Potter Shield split in two, dividing the two swords, as the doors melted into the walls revealing the Vault and its treasures within.

Harry's eyes widened at the sight. The Vault was cavernous – he could compare it to the Great Hall, just by the sheer size. Just standing in the entrance, Harry could see the furniture, chests, and what appeared to be mannequins wearing clothing and armor. Weapons – swords, shields, bows, staffs – hung on the walls. One wall had at least a half-dozen bookshelves lined up together, with dozens of books on each shelf. One glance at Hermione found her staring at the bookshelves.

“Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said, “Do you know where I can find my family’s jewelry boxes?”

“If they are not in your Hope Chest,” Ragnok said, “They should be near the clothing.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “I forgot about my Hope Chest! I even asked my house-elf to bring it to my
Private Quarters at Hogwarts, and I haven’t opened it. Been so busy!”

“You can open it this week, Harry,” Hermione said, smiling.

Harry nodded. “Will you stay out here, Keeper Ragnok?”

“Yes,” Ragnok said, “The dragon will not bother me back here.”

“Very well,” Harry said, “Coming, Hermione?”

“Yes, I want to see those books!” Hermione said.

Harry laughed, as he led Hermione into the Vault. “I thought so. Don’t take any right now, though. Make a list of the books you want and, whenever we want, we can always ask Dobby to take the books from here, so we can read them.”

“Good idea,” Harry said, “Thanks. You can go over to the bookshelves. I need to find the jewelry boxes, if they’re not in my Hope Chest. I am curious as to what is inside them.”

He wasn’t about to tell her he had thoughts of giving her a piece or two of jewelry for Christmas.

Hermione grinned and walked over toward the bookshelves. Harry made his way over to the mannequins, and found dressers and cabinets, which were obviously filled with some types of clothing. There were also racks with various shirts, pants, robes and other clothing hanging up.

Harry soon found what he was looking for. Two jewelry boxes – one large, one smaller – sat on what appeared to be a vanity table. He picked up the smaller one and opened it. His eyes widened as he saw all the various obviously expensive jewelry. It was filled with Bracelets – for both arms and ankles -- earrings and jeweled chokers.

He then looked through the bigger box and found several necklaces and rings. The rings – unlike the Lords and Ladies rings – were mostly engagement and wedding rings which were obviously owned by various Potter Lords and Ladies, and husbands and wives over several generations. He wondered if his parents’ engagement and wedding rings were in here. If they weren’t, maybe they were in his Hope Chest. He’d have to look through pictures, and maybe ask Sirius, Amelia and Remus about it.

He looked through all the jewelry, admiring each, and smiled as he picked out a necklace and earring set for Hermione. He also found a small mokeskin pouch in the large box. He placed the chosen jewelry inside, then stuffed the bag into his coat pocket. With a sudden thought, Harry walked back over to Ragnok.

“Do you know if any of the rings in the jewelry box are Betrothed rings?” Harry asked. “I don’t want engagement rings. Hermione wants me to propose to her on her seventeenth birthday, you see. But we need something to mark our Betrothal in a physical way.”

“As a matter of fact there are,” Ragnok said, “The last Betrothed Potter and his bride – who had been Betrothed when they were eleven years old -- wore Celtic Rings. They should be in the box.”

Harry thanked Ragnok and walked back over to the jewelry boxes. He soon found two Celtic-style rings – the only two Celtic rings in the box. He smiled, as he realized these must be what Ragnok referred to. He walked over to Hermione, who was reading through one of the books she had found.
“Oh, Harry, there are so many wonderful books here,” Hermione said, after putting the book back on the shelf, “It will take me ages to read all of them. If I can read them all. Some of them might be limited to the Potter Family, and I won’t be able to read them until we are married.”

“Just gives you more incentive to marry me,” Harry teased; Hermione giggled and nodded, “Open your hand for a moment.”

Hermione opened her hand and Harry placed one of the Celtic Rings on his girlfriend’s palm.

“Betrothal Rings,” Harry said, showing his own ring, “My last Betrothed ancestor and his bride, who was Betrothed at eleven, wore these. I figured we could wear these as evidence of our Betrothal.”

“Oh, this is beautiful, Harry!” Hermione said, “Very thoughtful of you too. Of course I’ll wear it. Would you put in on me?”

Harry agreed. He placed it on Hermione’s ring finger on the hand that didn’t have her Heiress’ ring. Harry placed his on his hand that didn’t have his Lord’s Rings.

“Thank you, Harry,” Hermione said, kissing Harry on the cheek – unlike earlier, this was the closest show of affection she dared on Goblin soil.

Harry and Hermione spent the next few minutes touring the Vault and looking through the various items. Five minutes after beginning the tour, they came upon something which nearly made Harry’s heart stop, and Hermione choke down a sob at the sight.

It was Harry’s old crib from the Godric’s Hollow cottage. The reason it was recognized, was because there was evidence of damage on the crib, from Voldemort’s attack. Harry knelt down in front of it, staring at the crib, as he pictured the night of the attack in his mind.

He could remember the night vividly due to his eidetic memory. Last time he had seen this crib, his mother had been on this side of it and he had been inside it. His mother had been looking at him through the bars, and he was sitting in the crib with tear-filled eyes and crying for his mother to hold him.

“’Harry, you are so loved,” Harry echoed his mother’s last words, as he heard them in his memories, “Mama loves you. Dada loves you. Harry, be safe. Be strong.’”

“What?” Hermione asked.

“My mother’s last words to me,” Harry said, “I remember them.”

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione said, “I am glad you know her last words to you.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry noticed a box underneath the crib. He pulled it out, and choked at what he found. There were toys and stuffed animals inside. A stag, dog, wolf and tiger – James, Sirius, Remus, and Lily.

“There used to be a rat,” Harry whispered. “I destroyed it with accidental magic at some point, I think. I really didn’t like that stuffed animal. Maybe… maybe I somehow knew about Peter?”

“Maybe,” Hermione said.
Harry cleared his throat and stood up. He placed the box in the crib, then gripped the side of it and closed his eyes.

“Thank you, Mum,” Harry said, “I will never forget your last words to me again.”

He opened his eyes and looked at Hermione, who had a watery smile on her face.

“Come on, love,” Harry said, “Time to go. We need to visit the Daily Prophet before we get back to Hogwarts.”

Hermione agreed and followed Harry out of the vault. Harry took one long last look at the Vault and nodded at Ragnok. The vault door closed.

But he would return sooner rather than later. Once he visited Potter Manor for the first time, he would bring some of the contents of the Vault there. For now it would rest, waiting for Dobby to return when he or Hermione requested books.

“Time to go, Keeper Ragnok,” Harry said. “Much to be done today. Thank you for your service.”

Keeper Ragnok smiled and led the pair past the dragon and back to the minecart.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 1:30 PM)

Since they knew they would miss lunch, after their visit to the Daily Prophet to give Penelope Clearwater the envelope meant for Rita Skeeter, Harry and Hermione had lunch at the Leaky Cauldron with Remus and Tonks. Like in the Three Broomsticks, they had used one of the VIP Rooms. They showed Remus and Tonks the copies of their Betrothal Contract. Remus was quite approving of the listed Provisos and commented that they were ‘very well thought out’.

Tonks merely teased the young couple at the idea of heaving three kids. Hermione teased back and said she might be up to giving Harry a Quidditch team full of kids. Harry had choked on his butterbeer at that, and Remus chuckled as Harry sputtered.

“James would have approved, you know,” Remus had said, in response, “He wanted a Quidditch team full of kids. Lily wanted three or four.”

Harry’s eyes had misted over at the thought of this. He always had wondered what it would be like to have siblings.

He then told Remus and Tonks about what he had found in the Vault of material possessions. Remus’ eyes misted over when Harry told them about the crib and the box of toys and stuffed animals.

“There was indeed a rat stuffed animal,” Remus had said; then chuckled. “I remember your mother telling us that she had gone into your nursery one day and found the rat stuffed animal in two pieces on the floor in front of your crib and stuffing from it around it too. Your mother said she asked you what happened to it. Apparently you said something like ‘Pa’foot n’ Mooey eat it.’

Harry, Hermione and Tonks chuckled. Harry thought he might be able to remember that if he searched for the memory, now that he knew about it.
“Did I like Pettigrew?” Harry asked, curiously.

“You cried and peed on him when he held you once about six months after you were born,” Remus said, then laughed, “might have been during your first Christmas party. It was around that time, I remember. You actually used accidental magic to vanish your diaper so you could pee on him! He never held you again.”

“Oh, Merlin!” Harry said, chuckling; as Hermione and Tonks giggled at this.

“Your father and Sirius thought it was the best prank,” Remus said, “Called it proof you would be a Marauder. Lily didn’t like the fact that you might be a Marauder, and she apologized to Peter for what you did. But later she laughed about it, after Peter left.”

For well over an hour, Harry, Hermione, Remus and Tonks had stayed in the VIP room, having good conversation, Remus and Tonks reminiscing about Harry’s parents and telling stories, and Harry and Hermione talking about some of the happenings at Hogwarts.

It was half-past-one, and Harry and Hermione were sitting, curled up together in a Carriage as it made its way to Hogwarts. Tonks had said goodbye and left after they had finished lunch, and Remus left them with a farewell, after seeing them off in the carriage.

Hermione was holding Harry’s hand and tracing a finger over his Celtic Ring.

“Do you think we should announce our Betrothal the students who remained at School,” Harry said, “Before it is seen in the Daily Prophet?”

“We could tell Lavender if we find her,” Hermione said, grinning, “Be all over the school by dinner.”

Harry chuckled. “I suppose we have told everyone who really should know before they see it in the Daily Prophet. If I told my former dorm-mates, you’d have to tell Lavender, and it would definitely be all over school by dinner.”

“Let them find out when everyone else does,” Hermione said. “We don’t need to tell them otherwise. They’re not our Allies, who we should feel obligated to tell.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Harry agreed. “Luckily, we let the Children know on Saturday. I guess we should go to the Lion’s Den, put these Contracts in our trunks so they’ll be safe, then discuss what will happen in the inevitable meeting with Dumbledore.”

“It is a date,” Hermione said, before kissing Harry’s cheek. “Sounds like a nice way to spend the rest of the day before dinner or Dumbledore’s meeting. Whichever happens first.”

Harry smiled. The couple remained quiet for the rest of the carriage ride, admiring their new rings, and thinking about what they truly represented.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 6:30 PM)

Neither Professor McGonagall, nor the Headmaster, had returned to Hogwarts by the start of dinner. So Harry and Hermione made their way into the Great Hall, and over to the Ravenclaw Table, where they sat down in their usual spot, across from Neville, Luna, Padma and Ivan Blishwick.
Terry Boot was also there, and Harry quickly realized why: the Heir of House Boot was waiting for him.

“Heir Boot,” Harry said, “I spoke with your father today. House Boot is still a solid part of the Great Alliance.”

Terry looked quite relieved. “Thank you, my Lord. I’ve been waiting for this news all day. I’m going to go tell Susan.”

Terry stood and hurried over to the Hufflepuff Table. Harry turned back and looked at Ivan, who was looking at him nervously.

“Heir Blishwick,” Harry said, “House Blishwick – and House Davis – are official members of the Great Alliance.”

Ivan smiled in happy relief. “My thanks, my Lord. That is excellent news.”

Harry smiled and started putting together a plate of food together.

“So?” Padma asked, looking between Harry and Hermione, “Tell us what else happened today! I assume you claimed your seats on the Council. Did you pen a Betrothal Contract?”

“Alright, we’ll tell you,” Harry said, “But in exchange, I want to know something too.”

“Anything, my Lord,” Padma said.

“Have you heard anything about what Viktor Krum is up to lately?” Harry asked, “We haven’t heard anything of him since he was banned from the library.”

“He hasn’t stepped into the castle since that day he was banned from the library,” Padma said. “I think he must have finally realized you would never accept an invitation from him to the Yule Ball. From what I hear, he’s asked – or is planning to ask – one of the girls from Beauxbatons to the Ball. Not the Champion, just one of the other girls.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” Harry said, “Been worried we might run into more issues with him.”

Harry and Hermione recounted the tales of their adventures that day. They were quite amused at how everyone in the Council – aside from the Great Alliance – was gobsmacked about how powerful the Great Alliance had become – what with the return of three Houses, and the addition of three more.

“The Minister was falling over himself when Harry and I claimed our seats,” Hermione said, “He looked like he didn’t know what was going on.”

“Not too uncommon with Minister Fudge from what my Gran tells me,” Neville said. “She never liked the Minister. In fact, she said if the Great Alliance was at its full potential when the Minister was voted in, Fudge wouldn’t be Minister.”

“Oh, yes,” Luna said, “Daddy’s always saying the Minister wouldn’t be in office if he didn’t listen to the voices in his head.”

“My youngest sister is Fudge’s personal secretary,” Ivan said. “She always has the most amusing things to write about the Minister in many of her letters. Just how he fumbles certain things, or how
he is always meeting with somebody who is obviously telling him to do certain things. The Headmaster is one of those somebodies. Malfoy’s father is another.”

Harry and Hermione then followed up, by telling their friends about the Betrothal Contract, and the details of its provisos. Neville and the three Ravenclaws – even Luna! – looked quite impressed.

“My father would be very impressed if he hears the details of the provisos,” Ivan said, “He penned the Betrothal for my sister and Lord Davis – Tracey’s parents. The only one of my sisters who needed a Betrothal Contract. Though if he finds out what my youngest sister is up to these days… fingers crossed and all that.”

“We’ve given Rita Skeeter all the details about the Contract so it should be in the Daily Prophet tomorrow morning,” Hermione said, “I am sure your father will know about the details soon enough. As will everyone else, which is exactly what we want.”

Padma gasped, and her eyes widened. “I just noticed your rings! Are they Betrothal rings?”

Harry and Hermione grinned and lifted up their hands with their Celtic rings.

“They once belonged to the last Potter who was Betrothed,” Harry said, “I found them in one of my Vaults. Hermione agreed with me that we should wear them as an official Betrothed couple.”

“A very good idea,” Neville said, “Should keep those fan-girls of yours away!”

“I hope so, Nev!” Harry said, grinning, “I truly do!”

“I am sure Hermione will also help to keep those fan-girls away,” Luna said, smiling.

“Definitely,” Hermione said, as she wrapped an arm around Harry. “This one’s mine. Forever and ever.”

“And a day,” Harry agreed, then added, “Or two.”

Padma sighed and swooned. “You two are so adorable.”

Harry and Hermione blushed as their friends chuckled.

Twenty minutes later, Harry and Hermione had barely finished their dinner when Professor McGonagall walked over to them.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger,” McGonagall said, “The Headmaster wishes to see you in his office.”

Harry smiled at his friends, when they looked concerned. “Don’t worry. We’ve been expecting this all day.”

His friends looked a little reassured, but still concerned. Harry stood up and, hand-in-hand with Hermione, followed McGonagall out of the Great Hall. As they stepped into the Entrance Hall, they came upon a surprise. Sirius Black was standing there.

“Sirius!” Harry said, “What are you doing here?”

“You might be Emancipated, kid,” Sirius said, “But I am still your Godfather. Dumbledore isn’t
going to try anything as long as Professor McGonagall and I are there. And I would like to hear what he has to say myself. Might have a few questions for him myself.”

“Does he know you’re here?” Harry asked.

“He does not,” McGonagall said. “He took the Floo Network straight to his office, after asking me to inform you to meet him there. Sirius overheard and asked if he could tag along with me, so he could join you in the Headmaster’s office. I accepted and invited him along.”

“Well, thank you,” Harry said, “This makes me feel loads better about this meeting.”

“Me too,” Hermione said.

“Yes,” McGonagall said, “Let’s go. We shan’t keep the Headmaster waiting.”

Harry and Hermione, still hand-in-hand, followed McGonagall while Sirius trailed behind them. They reached the gargoyle ten minutes later.

“Candy Canes,” McGonagall said.

The gargoyle nodded its large stone head, side-stepped to its left, revealing the stairwell behind it. McGonagall led the three up the stairs. The door to the Headmaster’s Office opened as soon as they arrived. Harry, Hermione and Sirius followed McGonagall inside.

“Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, greetings,” Dumbledore said, as he sat behind his desk; his brow furrowed and he frowned when he saw Sirius. “Lord Black, it is certainly unexpected seeing you here.”

“You call me Lord Black, but you call them Mr. Potter and Miss Granger?” Sirius asked. “Is this a school matter, or something else? If it is not a school matter – something to do with their education – I believe you should call them by their titles – Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

Dumbledore frowned, then nodded. “I suppose my reasons for asking Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger here have little to do with their education. Very well, I will address them by their titles. I imagine they are getting well-acquainted with them lately. I assume you are going to remain too, Minerva?”

“I am, Albus,” Minerva said.

Dumbledore waved his wand and four chairs appeared on the nearest side of his desk. Harry and Hermione followed Sirius to the desk, and they sat in the middle two chairs, whilst Sirius sat down next to Harry, and McGonagall sat down next to Hermione.

“Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Dumbledore said, “I believe you are aware that I am now aware that you have been very busy over the past several days.” His eyes twinkled. “And I am not just talking about your end-of-term exams or the other happenings inside this wonderful school. A week ago Sunday, you left this castle, and these Grounds, without permission and visited Gringotts in Diagon Alley.”

“Pardon me, Headmaster, I must stop you there,” Harry said. “We did not leave without permission. In fact, we were escorted to Gringotts by Professor McGonagall. As she is our Deputy Headmaster and the Head of Gryffindor, she had more than enough permission to do so. Let’s not forget that I
was Emancipated, and therefore didn’t need permission. Something you decided to keep from since October 31st of this year. Not only did you keep it from me, you deliberately lied to me about my Emancipation.

“Why? Because you wanted to stand in front of the Wizengamot Council today and beg the rest of the Council to deny my Emancipation. Oh, yes. We’ve known that for a few days now. Very naughty of you, sir. To try to keep me from the very rights you agreed to give me, by agreeing that I should participate in the Triwizard Tournament. If you didn’t want me to become Emancipated, why didn’t you work harder to get me out of the Tournament? I certainly wouldn’t have become Emancipated then?

“Can I guess why you didn’t want me to be Emancipated? You’re afraid of me, Headmaster, aren’t you? You’re afraid of the power I have now. You’re afraid of the power that I could grant as Lord Potter and Lord Peverell. The power I granted today to the Great Alliance. For someone who claims to be the Leader of the Light, Headmaster, you seem very afraid of what the Great Alliance – an Alliance full of Light and Neutral-Light Alliances – can do for our society.

“Or maybe you were afraid of what would have happened when I became Emancipated. It would have meant I would have to visit my Account Manager at Gringotts so I could become Lord Potter and Lord Peverell – along with everything else I discovered.”

“Yes, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said, “I was planning on standing in front of the Wizengamot and talk about Emancipation. I wasn’t only just going to target you when it came to Emancipation, however. I was going to put forth a Bill that would do away with Emancipation outright. Why? Because there is a reason why ‘of age’ is considered seventeen years old. Frankly, I believe that should be changed to. ‘Of age’ should mean those who have finished a magical education, be it here at Hogwarts or elsewhere.

“But that would never pass, because some students chose to not continue their education after they finish their OWL exams. The majority does, of course, go on to take their NEWTS. But there are a few who choose not to, for some reason or another. So unfortunately when it comes to being ‘of age’, it is a controversial topic. That is why I was going to try to do away with Emancipation as a whole, instead of raising the ‘of age” limit to finishing a complete education.”

“Then why didn’t you?” Sirius asked. “You had roughly eight or nine hours to do so. Why did you give it up after you found out Harry was Lord Potter?”

“Because the only Emancipated youngster at the moment is Lord Potter, Lord Black,” Dumbledore said, “I would have certainly been accused of targeting Lord Potter had I done this. Especially after he announced to everyone that he was Emancipated on Halloween. That fact was at the front of their minds. It would have certainly been brought up, wouldn’t it? I didn’t want to send a message I was targeting the Boy-Who-Lived.”

“Because why be honest, right?” Harry asked. “You have been targeting me! From the moment of that Halloween in 1981! You’ve been interfering in my life from that moment. Maybe before that night! Why stop interfering now? Or did you only stop for a moment, because you didn’t want the Lords and Ladies – including Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement – to know you were targeting me?”

“Alright, Lord Potter, I think now is the time to clear the air, is it not?” Dumbledore asked. “It appears you have certainly discovered what I have done to you over the years. Let’s turn this into an interrogation, shall we? Give me your accusations, and in turn, I will give you my defense to the best
“Fine,” Harry said, “But I will not accept the defense of ‘an old man’s mistake’ or ‘at my age, my mistakes tend to be much more grand than most’.”

Dumbledore turned to Minerva, who smirked.

“I believe Lord Potter knows you better than you think he does, Albus,” she said.

“Very well, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said, “I will try to not lean on that particular defense of mine. I can see why it would be… annoying to some.”

Hermione made an uncharacteristic snort. Dumbledore looked at her, and she simply looked back at him. Obviously she was daring him to use Legilimency on her. It was a bit dramatic for a few moments before Sirius barked out laughter.

“Let us cut with the dramatics, Dumbledore!” Sirius said, “I am looking forward to your ‘defense’. Perhaps if you’re not exhausted after wracking your mind coming up with a plausible defense, I might have a go at you with my own accusations.”

Dumbledore frowned then sighed. “Let us begin, Lord Potter.”

“You were the one to suggest my parents move out of Potter Manor,” Harry said, “Which to my understanding, had a lot of defensive and offensive protections on it, due to its war wards. Why did you advise my parents move out of their well-protected home, into the Godric’s Hollow Cottage? Which, by the way, we now know was quite vulnerable.”

“Let me begin with a little story for you, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said. “During the height of the war against Voldemort and his Death Eaters, I formed a – well, there is no better word for it – vigilante group -- that would fight against the Dark Lord and his followers. It was called the Order of the Phoenix. Lord Black and Professor McGonagall here, were a part of it, as was your parents, and Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew, among many others. Professor Moody was also a member.

“In the last couple years of the world, the seeds of paranoia and fear grew. Brothers were fighting brothers, friends were fighting friends. Many people didn’t know who to trust. People were joining the Death Eaters. People were falling under the Imperius Curse. The fear of your family member, loved one, or friend being impersonated, through Polyjuice Potion, by an enemy was a very real thing.

“To my great regret, mistrust grew inside the ranks of the Order. We had a traitor in the ranks.”

“Peter Pettigrew,” Harry muttered, as Sirius snarled.

“Yes, though we did not know that at the time,” Dumbledore said. “Accusations of betrayal were whispered in conversations. I believe at some point, your godfather and Remus Lupin’s names even came up. Remus is, as you know, a werewolf – Voldemort was recruiting werewolves, promising them a better life when he became victorious. Sirius Black here – his family wasn’t exactly the nicest of people.”

“They were Dark as they come, Dumbledore, no need to censor yourself!” Sirius growled. “My cousin, Bellatrix Lestrange is in Azkaban, one of Voldemort’s greatest followers, and the reason Augusta Longbottom is Regent Lady, instead of her son, Frank, being Lord Longbottom. Another
cousin, Narcissa Black became Narcissa Malfoy, married to Lucius Malfoy, and mother to Draco Malfoy, whom I have heard you’re very familiar with.”

Harry, of course, knew this about the Malfoys, but he let Sirius act as if he did not.

“So, naturally, I was painted Black too,” Sirius muttered, “Which, of course, would lead to why most of our society thought I betrayed your parents.”

“Yes,” Dumbledore said, sighing. “Well, of course, I was afraid that a close friend of your parents, Lord Potter, was the spy and traitor. I was afraid that the traitor was someone who knew the details of the protections around Potter Manor. Therefore, Voldemort and his Death Eaters could destroy the wards, get into Potter Manor and ambush you and your parents while you slept, without your parents even knowing. This is exactly what I told your parents. Your father suggested you move to the cottage in Godric’s Hollow. It wasn’t a well-known residence of the Potters. Your father and grandfather had rented it out to people – mostly Muggles, as the village was a mix of magical and Muggle residents. Not very many people in our society knew of the house. There was some debating of course. Your mother wanted to leave Great Britain altogether.”

“Then why didn’t we?” Harry asked; knowing they could have gone to Isle Potter.

“Your father was still involved in the war, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said. “Even your mother helped, even though she was so dedicated to you. She made Potions that helped the Order. James convinced her that they should stay. If Voldemort was targeting them and their friends, he didn’t want to leave and come back to find his friends dead. I know James and Lily argued about this for days, before it was finally agreed.”

“That is why they didn’t use a Secret Keeper for most of the time they were there,” Sirius said. “Lily didn’t want to have a Secret Keeper at risk, if they decided to one day get up and leave Great Britain.”

“As you know by now,” Harry said, “I opened my parents’ Final Will and Testament. The will says Peter Pettigrew was the Secret Keeper, and Sirius was my Godfather by the Godfather Ritual. You knew this, because you were the Witness in the Will.”

“You were also the one who cast the Fidelius Charm, Dumbledore,” Sirius said.

“And yet you sent Sirius to Azkaban without a trial even though you knew he didn’t betray my parents,” Harry said.

“That was not why he was sent to Azkaban in the first place, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said. “It was believed he breached the Statute of Secrecy, our most important law, when it was believe he killed Pettigrew and those Muggles. The Minister at the time, Millicent Bagnold put pressure on me and Bartemius Crouch to handle the breach before the International Confederation of Warlocks decided to barge in on us. Bagnold didn’t like the ICW, I will tell you that. They made a few laws that she did not like. She didn’t want them interfering with her role as British Minister of Magic. So Sirius was sent to Azkaban, so the ICW wouldn’t come in and make the whole thing worse.

“Lord Potter, your godfather might be dead today if the ICW came in. There is a little known fact that the ICW has hit-wizards five times more dangerous than our own hit-wizards at the Ministry. They will not interfere with what they call a Civil War – the troubles between Voldemort and the Light. But they will enforce the Statute of Secrecy.”
Dumbledore removed his glasses and rubbed his nose. “I believe it was an ICW hit-wizard who murdered my friends, Molly Weasley and Dedalus Diggle.”

“You’ve kept that a secret!” Minerva accused.

“Of course I have,” Dumbledore said, putting his glasses back on, “You do not want to mess with their hit-wizards. If the Wizengamot asked me to bring the ICW hit-wizards in to deal with Voldemort, I would not do it. They would see our war as a possible world-wide breach of the Statute of Secrecy and would destroy the British magical society just to kill Voldemort and his followers, if it meant they were protecting the Statute.”

“Wouldn’t the ICW have discovered Sirius was innocent though?” Hermione asked, “Surely they would have interrogated him? Heard his side of the story?”

“It is possible, but not guaranteed, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Dumbledore said.

“Let us move on to the night my parents died,” Harry said. “Why was Hagrid at the cottage in Godric’s Hollow? Why was he there before Sirius? How did he know about what had happened?”

“Why did you believe he could even see the House, as Pettigrew hadn’t told him the Secret?” Sirius asked.

“I put an alarm enchantment on the Godric’s Hollow Cottage in cause of nefarious spells and intruders,” Dumbledore said, “I kept the connecting rune in the pocket of my robes. I was at the Halloween Feast that year when it happened. When the alarm rune went off, I sent what is known as a Patronus messenger to Hagrid, and asked him to go to Godric’s Hollow. I told him I suspected the Potters had been attacked, and that if there were survivors, he was to take them to a safe-house for a night, until I gave him further instructions.

“Lord Black, I am sure you’re wondering why he wouldn’t give Harry to you. You know Hagrid trusts me implicitly, more than anyone, of which I am grateful and thankful for. I, unfortunately, told Hagrid you might be a danger – not to the Potters, perhaps – but to yourself. From what Hagrid told me, he thought you were a threat – not to Harry, but to yourself – in your grief. He wanted to take Harry to me until you calmed down.”

“Then why did you send me to the Dursleys?” Harry asked. “You knew my parents forbid me to go there. You knew I had several Guardians assigned for me! Professor McGonagall was one of my assigned guardians!”

“Something I did not know then,” McGonagall said.

Dumbledore sighed. “As I told you, Lord Potter, there was a lot of mistrust going on. People were going over to Voldemort every day. I didn’t know if any members in the Great Alliance had been turned. Let me give you this scenario. Imagine for a moment. If one single person in the Great Alliance had been turned, Lord Potter. Just one. And your guardian at the time informed this person that you were their new ward. What if this person told the other Death Eaters? You would have been in danger again. For example, the Longbottoms – Alice Longbottom, your godmother, was the next assigned Guardian after your godfather. They were attacked a few days later. Sirius was in Azkaban, and now your godmother was attacked.

“I felt justified, Lord Potter. I felt quite justified that I had made the proper decision. Your parents trusted too many people at a time they shouldn’t have. They trusted Pettigrew, he betrayed them.
They might have voiced their doubt in their Will, and yet they still let him be their Secret Keeper. Does that not tell you they were being foolish with their trust?

“Now, out of everyone, Lord Potter, who was close your parents who could not be Death Eaters?”

“My relatives,” Harry muttered.

“Muggles, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said. “Not very many people in our society know about your relatives. I made sure of that. Trust me… it was the safest place for you to be.”

“Then why did you and Madam Pomfrey have to visit the Dursleys so many times to save my life?” Harry argued, “Oh, yes, Headmaster. I remember that… clearly. If I didn’t know better, I’d say Madam Pomfrey was under the Imperius Curse when you brought her.”

McGonagall gasped. “Is this true, Albus?”

“She wasn’t under an Imperius, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said, “Merely a Confundus Charm so she couldn’t remember where you lived. A part of your protection, of course.”

“Protect me from the outside, not from the inside, is it?” Harry asked.

“You would not be here today if I did not protect you from the inside, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore argued. “When your relatives got too violent, I used magic to change their behavior. But only because I could not remove you from their presence, and give you to another – someone your parents assigned, for example. Again, I did not know if one of your family Allies had been converted to the Death Eaters. The Dursleys – no matter what they did to you – was the best place for you to be. It is the reason you are alive today.”

“Why did you put so many blocks and bindings on me?” Harry asked. “I can understand the binding on my magical core. You didn’t want me to do too much accidental magic around my relatives, who hate magic. What about the others ones? Okay, maybe the Metamorphagus Ability was also understandable, given that it was such an ability that nearly caused my Uncle to kill me.”

“What?!” Sirius asked, “You didn’t tell me that.”


“Let’s start with the Animagus form,” Dumbledore said, “I would have unblocked that one in a few years. I didn’t want you to get any ideas as you are truly your father’s son. You might have endangered yourself. As for the others…”

“You wanted your pet Potions Master to be able read my mind so you could know what I was up to,” Harry said, “And when he couldn’t do it, you had someone else spy on me. Ronald Weasley was your spy on me, was he not? That was why he was chosen to be my friend? Aside from the fact that for some reason, you wanted me married to Ginny Weasley. That Contract you penned five days after my parents died. It is destroyed by the way. I was given a copy that, if destroyed, would destroy all copies.”

“The Weasleys were – are – very good friends of mine, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said. “I wanted a family who was my friends to be close to you. That contract between you and Miss Weasley… there were no Provisos on it. It was a very open-ended contract. In fact, if you had ended up wanting to
marry another girl, I would have had the contract destroyed.

“Here is one thing I will admit to as a crime. Something that has already been remedied by your Account Manager. I allowed Molly Weasley to take money from your Trust Vault, because she needed money to pay for her children’s education. Without that money, the Weasleys wouldn’t have gone to school here. In fact, they might have been home-schooled all their lives. I had hoped you might forgive them, and me, if you ended up with Ginny Weasley. It did not end up that way, unfortunately. For that, I do admit to stealing from you. The money has been returned to your possession.

“Yes, it was arranged for Ron Weasley to be friends with you. However, I can only take partial blame when it comes to various Blocks such as willpower and Eidetic Memory. You see, Ronald was complaining to his mother that you were too smart, too bookish. He didn’t think he could be your friend anymore. So his mother came to me with a plan. I agreed to it, yes. I admit that. Because Molly was my friend, I agreed to put blocks and bindings on you. The Occlumency and Legilimency blocks were requested by Professor Snape, naturally. The others, were requested by Molly Weasley.

“I believe, recently – in the days leading to their arrests -- you saw the true Ronald and Ginevra Weasley. The Ron and Ginny they were keeping from you. If you weren’t Ron’s friend – he would have been like that throughout these past four years. He, Ginny, and your Mother seemed to have this big plan for you. Ginny would marry you and claim your fortune after you died somehow. Whether it be murder, made to look accidental. Whether it be a poisonous Potion. Who knows?

“I created the Betrothal because I wanted you to have a good Light family for friends when you returned to our society. It turns out that three of those family members were really bad seeds.”

Dumbledore sighed and rubbed his nose. “I may have created a monster or three the day I offered the Contract to Molly Weasley. Because of the Contract, she turned her two youngest children into those – no better word for it – monsters you saw recently after you and the Heiress here became a couple. Ginny’s jealousy unleashed that monster. Ron’s jealousy that the Heiress was your best friend turned him into the monster he was. Maybe the monsters were always there. Maybe they were plotting secretly, but able to hide themselves. Because they wanted to hide it from you, as part of the plan. But as you know, recently it came out. And now Molly Weasley is dead and her children have suffered a fate worse than Azkaban because of a mother’s greed.”

Harry didn’t know what to believe right now. Dumbledore’s story that Molly wanted those blocks and bindings on him was a bit believable, was it not? After all, she was responsible for all those Potions he had been dosed with, was he not?

“What about me?” Hermione asked. “Was Molly and Snape responsible for the blocks and bindings on me?”

“Your magical core had one binding on it, because with your full power, you could hurt your parents accidentally,” Albus said. “The Animagus ability was for the same reason as Lord Potter. You are very smart, Miss Granger. Sometimes, too smart. I didn’t want you to harm yourself if you decided you wanted to impress Professor McGonagall and try to become an Animagus too early. The other blocks were all Professor Snape and Molly’s requests, yes.”

“And what about the Obliviations?” Harry asked. “You modified our memories when it came to that Halloween night in our first year!”

“I did,” Dumbledore said, “Ronald Weasley begged me to. He thought you would no longer be his
friend. He made a mistake that day. More than one. He asked me to make it look like he helped you and Heiress Dagworth-Granger. It was a burden I had. A burden of friendship for the Weasleys. It is a heavy burden, friendship. It can heal and harm, it can cause hate and love. And yet we need it more than life itself sometimes. We would die for our friends, would we not, Lord Potter, Lord Black?”

“Yes,” Harry said, “We would. Headmaster, I must be honest with you. I am having trouble wondering how much you have told us tonight to be the honest truth. I don’t know if I should believe it, or consider it hippogriff dung. Frankly, Headmaster, I am finding it difficult to decide whether or not I should ever trust you again. You’ve lied to me so many times. You’ve kept so many things from me. My Emancipation is the most important, of course.

“You kept all my mail from me too. Fan-mail I am okay with being blocked. Who knows how many hex-letters and Howlers I could have gotten. But the correspondence from Gringotts? Do you know how much trouble you could have caused, not only for me, but for Houses Potter and Peverell if Keeper Ragnok had not forgiven me for not communicating with him over the years? Do you know what that would have done for me? I would have been responsible for none of it. You would have, Headmaster. How can I trust you now, when you have put me in so much danger?

“And then there is something I cannot forgive. You put Hermione, my girlfriend, the person I love more than life itself, in danger too. Do not lie to me, sir. You were planning on putting her at the bottom of the lake for the Second Task.”

“Ronald Weasley was my first choice, actually,” Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling, “But yes, she would have been my choice, had the Task continued as it was meant to be. I still say that all the hostages would have been fine.”

“You’re the only one who believes that, Albus,” Minerva said. “And Director Bones would have been right to arrest you for kidnapping.”

"How can I trust you if I cannot forgive you for hurting – not just me – but Hermione?” Harry asked, "And Sirius as well? How can I trust you ever again?"

“I understand this, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said, “I truly do. I have caused you a lot of pain. I have caused those you love a lot of pain. I can only hope to begin to amend this right now. And I can begin with one simple thing. I can answer a question you asked me at the end of your first year. Do you remember, Lord Potter? It was after you saved the Philosopher’s Stone from Professor Quirrell? We were in the Hospital Wing?"

“I asked you why Voldemort is so interested in me,” Harry said, “And you refused to answer me.”

“I did,” Dumbledore said, “I told you that you were not old enough to understand the answer to that question. While I do not believe you’re old enough now, it seems that others do not agree with me, since you have been considered Emancipated by magic herself. Therefore, it is time I answer that question.

“Do you want the answer, Lord Potter? Do you want to know why Voldemort targeted your parents and you that Halloween night thirteen years ago? Why he is so very interested in you?

“Do you want to know why you are the Boy-Who-Lived?”

Harry stared at Dumbledore for a moment. He had not expected this. He had not expected, when he and Hermione had planned for this conversation, that Dumbledore would volunteer to answer this
most important question. He could only say one word:

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

You know… I almost had Harry said "No", because it might be interesting. But it would mess up my plans. So what did you think? So many questions here? How much of Dumbledore's explanations are Hippogriff Dung? I will say this. I loved writing Dumbledore in this chapter. It was so fun.

Did I miss out on anything? Should I have brought up anything else? I am sorry Hermione wasn't involved in the Dumbledore discussion much. It was mostly between Harry and Dumbledore, with Sirius added a bit to it.

There's your Betrothal Rings, for those of you wondering if they would appear.

There's your Viktor Krum explanation, for those of you wondering what was going on with him.

Will ICW Hit-wizards play a bigger role in this story? It is a possibility. We'll see. It wouldn't be until "Book 3" if we do.

Next Chapter: Dumbledore reveals the Prophecy. Then a time-skip to the Christmas Day, and the morning of the Yule Ball. The Yule Ball will be in Chapter 36!
I am giving you two chapters today, because this is a short chapter. This is a shorter chapter, because it doesn't have Christmas or the Yule Ball in it. It will all happen next chapter, even if it is a long chapter. I just didn't want a time-skip and Christmas to interfere with the theme of this chapter.

Several reviewers seemed to think Harry and Hermione were going to believe everything Dumbledore said to be the truth. One guest review (which I did not accept) said they were unfollowing my story because they thought Harry and Hermione were going to just forgive and trust Dumbledore. Really? How have you come to this conclusion after everything you've read so far? I am sure most of my readers will be quite pleased with what happens at the beginning of this chapter.

The description of the Pensieve in this chapter is the one Harry uses in Deathly Hallows, Part 2, to view Snape's memories.

Much of the prophecy conversation is taken from Chapter 37 of "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" by JK Rowling.

Warning: Dumbledore Bashing

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994)

“Do you want to know why Voldemort targeted your parents and you that Halloween night thirteen years ago?” Albus Dumbledore asked, “Why he is so very interested in you? Do you want to know why you are the Boy-Who-Lived?”

Harry Potter knew that Dumbledore had probably been lying through his teeth with most, if not everything, that he had said. He knew that the man was probably trying to throw blame elsewhere, like he tried to blame all those blocks and bindings on the Weasleys. Ron Weasley didn’t want Harry to be smarter than him, and his mother wanted to make sure that didn’t happen so Dumbledore just went along with it, without issue? Harry wasn’t believing it. And that was just one of the issues he had with Dumbledore’s answers to his questions.

However, he also knew something else. Albus Dumbledore was doing exactly what he wanted. Well, not what Harry wanted. But what Sirius Black wanted. On their way to Dumbledore’s office, Sirius told Harry and Hermione the real reason he was there.

“Amelia wants to know what Albus Dumbledore has to say in his defense to whatever accusations we throw at him,” Sirius said. “She believes he will come up with some cock-and-bull story, of course, but whatever he says she can use to help her investigation against him. The real reason I am here, is to produce a Pensieve memory of this upcoming meeting with Dumbledore for Amelia.”

Harry wondered just how Amelia Bones would react to everything they had heard from Dumbledore.
in this meeting. However, Dumbledore’s new attempt at trying to win back Harry’s trust was something he was interested in. If Dumbledore was willingly going to give up the answer to one of the questions Harry had been asking himself for years, then he could only say one thing.

“Yes,” Harry answered the Headmaster, “However, I will not listen unless Hermione, Sirius and Professor McGonagall are allowed to remain and know the answer too. I am going to tell them everything we would discuss anyway, so can we just cut the middleman, Headmaster?”

Dumbledore frowned. “I had hoped it would be a private discussion between the two of us, Lord Potter. However, I cannot fault you for your decision. You have said you do not trust me. In your position, I wouldn’t wish to be alone in here with someone who I did not trust. I suppose since there is nothing I can do to prevent them from learning this information, that Heiress Dagworth-Granger, Lord Black and Professor McGonagall are allowed to hear this explanation.”

“You better believe we’re not going anywhere, Albus!” McGonagall said. “I would be a pretty poor Professor if I left a student alone with someone he did not trust!”

“I would be a piss-poor Godfather if left my godson with you after all that bull-shite you just gave us, Dumbledore,” Sirius said, “This explanation better be good, if you want me to believe that you haven’t been lying through your teeth.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Headmaster,” Hermione said, defiantly.

Dumbledore looked most put-upon for a moment. Then he sighed and stood up. Under the watchful eye of his four guests, he walked over to a cabinet and opened it. He removed something from the cabinet, and walked back over to his desk. He sat the object down on his desk. Harry studied the object. It looked like a large, and nearly flat, metallic bowl of some sort. There was some sort of strange liquid-gas substance inside it that seemed to swirl around.

“Perhaps you know what this is, Heiress Dagworth-Granger?” Dumbledore asked.

“A Pensieve, sir,” Hermione said, “It is used to store and view memories. The user can either view the memories through the pool of water, or they can be… transported somehow into the Pensieve and see it as if they were standing in the memory.”

“An excellent description, Heiress!” Dumbledore said “Fifteen points for Gryffindor. Yes, this is a Pensieve. I use it to store many of my own memories inside. I am a very old man. I have many memories. My head tends to become pretty full and sometimes I just need to be able to sort through all my memories and view them.

“Tonight, I will show you one of these memories. But first, I will ask you a question, Lord Potter. At the end of your third year, you told me about Professor Trelawney’s prophecy she had given you. You asked me if it was a genuine prophecy. I answered that it might have been. I am quite sure it was a genuine prophecy. Do you remember what else I said?”

“You said it was the second one she had ever made,” Harry said.

“I did,” Dumbledore said, nodding. “While you witnessed her second genuine Prophecy, Lord Potter, it was I who witnessed her very first. It was the reason she is the Divination Professor to this very day. If you ask Professor McGonagall’s opinion about Sybill Trelawney, she will tell you that the woman is clearly a fraud and has no business being a Professor here.”
McGonagall snorted. “She is a drunkard, Albus! She drinks sherry constantly, and I am sure she shows up to a good number of her classes drunk!”

“She is a problematic Professor, I will give you that,” Dumbledore allowed. “In fact, I had her pinned as a fraud too. You see, I originally met her because she applied to be the Divination Professor. I was going to do away with the class, but then I received her application and discovered she was the great granddaughter of the celebrated Seer Cassandra Trelawney. So I gave her a chance. I did believe she was fraudulent and that I would never accept her as the Divination Professor. I was about to leave the room and do away with Divination at Hogwarts altogether, when an extraordinary event happened. Something that made me hire her immediately.

“Sybill Trelawney made a genuine prophecy. I was so astounded by what I heard, so focused on it. That I did not hear an eavesdropper outside the door of the room Professor Trelawney and I were in, in the Hogs Head. Turned out to be a Death Eater, and he had heard the first couple lines of the Prophecy. My brother, Aberforth, is the owner of the Hogs Head. He caught the eavesdropper snooping, but unfortunately, he didn’t know exactly what he had caught. He just tossed the eavesdropper out, not knowing it was a Death Eater, and the man went straight to Voldemort as far as I can understand.

“Voldemort tried to kill you when you were a child because of this Prophecy. He knew the prophecy had been made, though he did not know its full contents. He set out to kill you when you were still a baby, believing he was fulfilling the terms of the prophecy.

“You four are about to hear the very prophecy Sybill Trelawney told that evening. The full prophecy – you will know more than Voldemort does.”

“Does?” Sirius asked. “Not did? As in, he’s not dead?”

“Voldemort still lives, Lord Black,” Dumbledore said, “I trust you remember the letter Lord Potter sent you this summer? He sent me the very same letter, and I assumed – as you were the closest adult he could trust – he wrote you about it too.”

“The dream?” Sirius asked, looking at Harry, “The nightmare you had. The one you told me about. About Voldemort… and Wormtail?”

“I thought it was just a dream,” Harry said.

“It was not,” Dumbledore said, “Your description of the dream was very precise. How could Voldemort hold a wand and kill an old man if he was simply the shade he had once been? He has gotten stronger. I believe he has used rituals to make him stronger, but he has not returned to his full strength yet. I firmly believe he will find a way, sooner or later. Possibly before the end of next summer.

“Therefore, I must ask again if the four of you want to hear this Prophecy. If you do, you will know more than Voldemort does. You will know information he wants. If he finds out you know, you would be in great risk.”

“I’ll risk it, Dumbledore,” Sirius snarled, “I want to know why Voldemort targeted two of the greatest people I had ever known, and the boy I love like my own son.”

“I will risk it, Headmaster,” Hermione said, “For Harry.”
“I agree with Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” McGonagall said.

“I want to know, Headmaster,” Harry said, “I will risk it.”

Dumbledore frowned and looked back and forth between all of them. He then sighed and raised his wand to his own temple. From it, he withdrew silvery, gossamer-fine strands of thought clinging to the wand, and deposited them in the basin. He sat back down behind his desk and watched his thoughts swirl and drift inside the Pensieve for a moment. Then, with a sigh, he raised his wand and prodded the silvery substance with its tip.

A figure rose out of it, draped in shawls, her eyes magnified to enormous size behind her glasses, and she revolved slowly, her feet in the basin. But when Sibyll Trelawney spoke, it was not in her usual ethereal, mystic voice, but in the harsh, hoarse tones Harry had heard her use once before.

“THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD APPROACHES… BORN TO THOSE WHO HAVE THRICE DEFIED HIM, BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES… AND THE DARK LORD WILL MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE WILL HAVE POWER THE DARK LORD KNOWS NOT… AND EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER FOR NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES… THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD WILL BE BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES…”

The slowly revolving Professor Trelawney sank back into the silver mass below and vanished. The silence within the office was absolute. For about a minute, silence reigned from the five people in the room, and the portrait inhabitants that had been listening to the conversation since it had begun.

“What the bloody hell is that supposed to mean, Dumbledore?” Sirius asked.

“It meant,” said Dumbledore, “that the person who has the only chance of conquering Lord Voldemort for good was born at the end of July, nearly sixteen years ago. This boy would be born to parents who had already defied Voldemort three times.”

Harry felt as though something was closing in upon him. His breathing seemed difficult.

“It means — me?” he asked.

Dumbledore surveyed him for a moment through his glasses.

“The odd thing is, Lord Potter,” he said softly, “that it may not have meant you at all. Sibyll’s prophecy could have applied to two wizard boys, both born at the end of July that year, both of whom had parents in the Order of the Phoenix, both sets of parents having narrowly escaped Voldemort three times. One, of course, was you. The other was Neville Longbottom.”

“But then,” Harry said, “but then, why was it my name on the prophecy and not Neville’s?”

“I am afraid,” said Dumbledore slowly, looking as though every word cost him a great effort, “that there is no doubt that it is you.”

“But you said,” Harry said, “Neville was born at the end of July too — and his mum and dad —”

“You are forgetting the next part of the prophecy, the final identifying feature of the boy who could vanquish Voldemort. Voldemort himself would ’mark him as his equal.’ And so he did, Harry. He
chose you, not Neville. He gave you the scar that has proved both blessing and curse.”

“But he might have chosen wrong!” said Harry. “He might have marked the wrong person!”

“He chose the boy he thought most likely to be a danger to him,” said Dumbledore. “And notice this, Harry. He chose, not the pureblood - which, according to his creed, is the only kind of wizard worth being or knowing - but the half-blood, like himself. He saw himself in you before he had ever seen you, and in marking you with that scar, he did not kill you, as he intended, but gave you powers, and a future, which have fitted you to escape him not once, but four times so far — something that neither your parents, nor Neville’s parents, ever achieved.”

“Why did he do it, then?” said Harry, “Why did he try and kill me as a baby? He should have waited to see whether Neville or I looked more dangerous when we were older and tried to kill whoever it was then —”

“Voldemort didn’t know the whole Prophecy,” Hermione said, “If he did, he might have given it some more thought. He might have waited.”

“Precisely, Heiress,” Dumbledore said, “As I said early, he only heard the first two lines, because the Death Eater only heard the first part.”

“He heard only the first part, the part foretelling the birth of a boy in July to parents who had thrice defied Voldemort. Consequently, he could not warn his master that to attack you would be to risk transferring power to you — again marking you as his equal. So Voldemort never knew that there might be danger in attacking you, that it might be wise to wait or to learn more. He did not know that you would have ‘power the Dark Lord knows not’ —”

“But I don’t!” Harry growled.

“Do you not?” Dumbledore asked. “I can tell you one thing you have that Voldemort does not know. That he could never know. Love, Harry.”

“Love?!” Harry asked, “Again?! You said the same thing when I asked you in my first year here! Love was the thing that protected me! My mother’s love! Now you say the same for me?!?”

“Your love for Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Dumbledore said, “Your love for your godfather. Your love for your friends. Do you not want to live a full life? Do you not want to grow up and have children and a family with someone like Heiress Dagworth-Granger here? Do you not want to survive?”

“I do!” Harry growled, “Of course I do! But how is that a power?!”

“It is the greatest power in the world, Lord Potter,” Dumbledore said, “There is a line in the Muggle’s Christian bible that comes to mind. Whenever someone asks me why I believe love is the greatest power in the world. Are you familiar with what I speak of, Miss Granger?”

“Faith, hope and love,” Hermione said, “But the greatest of these is love.”

“Yes,” Dumbledore said, smiling. “Faith, hope and love are all very powerful things. And the greatest is love. Faith and hope that you will survive and live and go on to do great things. That is quite powerful in itself. But none of this would be worth it, if you didn’t have anybody you loved to continue on with. It is the Heiress, and Lord Black, and your friends who you will fight for. These
people you love, who you want to fight for and survive. Therefore, love is your power, and it is the power Voldemort does not know. He does not believe in it. He does not care for it. He does not feel remorse. But you do, and that is the power he knows not."

"The end of the prophecy," Harry said, "it was something about... ‘neither can live...’"

"… while the other survives,"" Dumbledore finished.

"So," said Harry, dredging up the words from what felt like a deep well of despair inside him, "so does that mean that… that one of us has got to kill the other one… in the end?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore.

"But you don’t have to do it alone," Hermione said. "You will never be alone."

"Never alone," Sirius said, "I don’t believe for one moment that you have to do this on your own. I don’t care what that prophecy says. It could be a lot of horse-shit from a person who has apparently proven herself over and over to be a fraud. You will not convince Harry that he must do this alone, Dumbledore. Nor, for one second, do I believe he needs you to help him!

"He has friends and Allies who can help him! Smart, talented, powerful people in their own right who can help him! Far better than your Order of the Phoenix. We have the Great Alliance, Dumbledore! The Great Alliance is not just politics, Dumbledore! Don’t think for a second the Great Alliance will not fight for Harry, especially when they just got him back. The Great Alliance got its heart back again. And we’re not about to lose it!"

"Aye," McGonagall said. "I don’t know what you think you would accomplish here, Albus. You could have given Harry this Prophecy the first time he asked you why Voldemort was after him. You could have told us before now! Yet you’ve kept this silent!"

"Of course I have, Minerva," Dumbledore said, "Do you not understand why?"

"Oh, I believe I understand more than you do, Dumbledore," McGonagall snarled. "Thank you for giving us this information. But we’re done tonight. This meeting is over. I’m not letting you lure Harry back into trusting you, because you gave him something you’ve been holding onto for years!"

"Right!" Sirius growled. "If Harry was destined to defeat Voldemort, why was he raised by Muggles! Why was he not trained from a young age for his so-called destiny? You knew Voldemort was still alive, didn’t you? You knew Harry would end up facing him again! And yet you have done nothing to help him until now."

"He was too young – is too young," Dumbledore said, "He needs to live his childhood. No child should have to go through with –"

"No, they shouldn’t!" McGonagall snarled, "But apparently a Prophecy has given Harry no choice! Until you see that Harry is not a child, and has not been for a long time, you will not interfere in his life anymore, Albus. I will be here to make sure of it. Sirius and the Great Alliance will be around to make sure Harry will survive this! Until you tell me you firmly believe he will fulfill the Prophecy, I will not let you influence Harry any longer! Even I can see you have doubts about Harry fulfilling the Prophecy. I cannot allow someone with such doubt like that to assist Harry with his so-called destiny. I will not! Come, you three! Good night, Albus!"
Dumbledore merely stared, frowning at the four of them as Harry and Hermione were basically pushed from the Headmaster’s office. None of them talked for the ten minutes it took for them to get to the Private Common Room in the Lion’s Den.

“How much of that in there was hippogriff shit?” Harry asked.

He and Hermione were sitting in one of the couches in the Private Common Room. Sirius was sitting on the couch across from them, and McGonagall sat in one of the chairs.

“Most of it,” Sirius said.

“The Prophecy?” Hermione asked, “Divination is such a wooly subject!”

“Trelawney-taught Divination is wooly, Hermione,” McGonagall said. “That prophecy was the genuine thing. However, there was one thing it did not say. One thing that Dumbledore seems to believe it says and seems to want us to believe it says that.”

“What?” Harry asked.


“But he marked me!” Harry growled, “My parents defied him!”

“And you weren’t the only one born at the end of July, Harry,” McGonagall said. “If that part of the Prophecy could be questioned – if one of the subjects of the Prophecy is questioned. Then why can’t the other subject? Why can’t there be more than one possibility for the Dark Lord?”

“Who?” Harry asked, “Who is it then?”

“No,” Hermione gasped, “No, you can’t be telling us it is him!”

“Who?” Harry repeated.

“Dumbledore, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Dumbledore,” Sirius said, “Everything Dumbledore’s been doing to you, to us. The reason you grew up with the Dursleys who hated you, who never treated you well. The reason you didn’t grow up with me, or another member of the Great Alliance.

“Why do you think you didn’t know about magic for ten years, Harry?” McGonagall asked. “Why was your magic bound? Why were all your abilities bound? Why were you weakened so badly? Why has Dumbledore been keeping all this from you?”

“Especially the Prophecy,” Sirius said. “It is because Dumbledore might very well be the Dark Lord in the Prophecy. Hell, Voldemort and Dumbledore both might qualify for it! People call Dumbledore the Leader of the Light, and yet everything he’s done to you, and to others, including me and Hermione. That doesn’t sound like someone who works for the Light would do, would it? Dumbledore is the most powerful wizard in Great Britain. If he isn’t a Lord of Light, then he is a Dark Lord.”

“I firmly believe Dumbledore knows he is named in the Prophecy,” McGonagall said. “I also firmly
believe he wants to do everything to deny it. He hopes it is Voldemort. Because he doesn’t want you to defeat him.

“I believe he wants you to defeat Voldemort, Harry,” Sirius said, “Actually, no. I think he wants you to weaken Voldemort and then die against him. Or perhaps he hopes that if you do destroy Voldemort, Dumbledore could come in and defeat you.”

“Are you sure?” Harry asked. “Are you sure that Dumbledore is the Dark Lord – or one of them – in the Prophecy?”

“I am, Harry,” Sirius said, “It would explain so much about what he has done – not only to you, but to me, and the Great Alliance, and others as well. The Great Alliance is a powerhouse is the Wizengamot. But they are also good. Every Bill they would want to pass does good things for the future of our society. Why, if Dumbledore is the Lord of the Light, would he try to weaken the power of the Great Alliance? Why would he block its two most powerful Houses from being a part of it? From having votes. Why would he try to block your Emancipation?”

“Because he wants something much different than the Great Alliance wants,” Hermione said.

“Yes,” Sirius said, “He isn’t the Lord of the Light. He’s a Dark Lord, and he’s the Dark Lord in the Prophecy. Voldemort might also be, but Dumbledore definitely is. And I am quite sure Amelia will agree with me when I take this information to her tonight.”

“Go, Sirius,” McGonagall said, “Mallory! Sadie!”

McGonagall’s two house-elves appeared.

“Escort Sirius out of the castle, and make sure he leaves from the Grounds safely,” McGonagall said. “Take him through the One-eyed Witch passageway. I trust you know that passageway, Sirius?”

“I do, Professor,” Sirius said, “But how do you know about it?”

“We used it to get out of the castle and go to Gringotts last Saturday,” Harry said.

“Ah!” Sirius said, nodding. “I would be happy to be escorted by such lovely elves. I will see you soon, Harry, Hermione. Keep in touch through the mirrors, you two. Watch Dumbledore. Tell me and Professor McGonagall if he tries anything.”

“We will,” Harry promised.

“Good,” Sirius said, “Because this isn’t over. He now knows that you know many things he wanted to keep from you. That makes him more dangerous. Especially if he is the Dark Lord in the Prophecy.”

“We know this, Sirius,” Hermione said, “We’ll be careful.”

“I know,” Sirius said, “I trust you two. I just don’t trust him. I am surprised that I ever could. I must go now. Take care.”

And with that, Sirius followed the two House-elves out of the room.

It will not come down between you and Voldemort, or you and Dumbledore. You have friends, family, loved ones, and Allies. You have a growing army of your own, just like the Order of the Phoenix was. Only the Order of the Phoenix has lost several of its greatest warriors. The Great Alliance will help you when they hear what you’re up against. I can guarantee that.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Harry said.

“I will see the both of you tomorrow,” McGonagall said, as she stood up.

“Keep an eye on the Daily Prophet,” Hermione said, “There will be a very interesting headlining article if Rita Skeeter got our message.”

“Your Betrothal Contract,” McGonagall said, smiling, “I saw your rings. I knew what they were immediately. I do not know if Dumbledore did, because your hands were almost always at your lap.”

“Dumbledore won’t be happy with the Betrothal Contract we made,” Hermione said, grinning, “Especially if he still believes he can split us up.”

“I will be eager to see his reaction,” McGonagall said. “I must leave you now. Good night, Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger.”

“It is still Mr. Potter and Miss Granger to you and the Professors while we’re still students, ma’am,” Harry said; and Hermione nodded in agreement.

“I will let my fellow staff know,” McGonagall said, with a nod.

She said farewell again, which Harry and Hermione echoed, and left the room.

“You’re not going to convince me to leave you, Harry,” Hermione said, “I know you thought about it. Don’t. It won’t happen. We’re in this together. Always.”

“Always,” Harry said, “Because Dumbledore was right about one thing. I do want to survive. I want to have children with you. If you want a Quidditch team of children, I am going to make sure we have a Quidditch team of children.”

“If you promise to never let me go,” Hermione said, “I will give you a full Quidditch team of children. I love you, Harry Potter.”

“I love you too, Hermione Granger,” Harry said.

He kissed her, and for several minutes, they simply held each other, and kissed and snogged. For a while, neither Harry nor Hermione thought about he revelations they had discovered that evening. They simply basked in the comfort of each other.

(Monday, December 21st, 1994 – 8:30 PM)

Amelia Bones and Sirius Black emerged from the Bones Family Pensieve, after a viewing of the meeting with Albus Dumbledore that evening.

“That goddamned bastard!” Amelia growled. “He knew Voldemort survived that Halloween night, and he kept it to himself? He didn’t warn the Ministry. He didn’t let us know. We could have
prepared for this! And now he believes Voldemort will return by next summer?! Fuck!"

“What about the Prophecy?” Sirius asked.

“Oh, you were right about that,” Amelia said. “Dumbledore is the Dark Lord in the Prophecy! Voldemort might be too, but Dumbledore is definitely a subject of that Prophecy! As soon as possible – as soon as the old git will let me see him – I am going to speak to Unspeakable Croaker and ask him about the Prophecy. I am going to ask him if it is in the Department of Mysteries, in the Hall of Prophecies. If Voldemort returns to strength, and wants to know the full Prophecy, he would target the Department of Mysteries. The Prophecy, if it is there, needs to be removed. There is just one problem.”

“Only the subjects of the Prophecy could remove it,” Sirius said, “But then that means that Dumbledore might have already…”

“No,” Amelia said, “He hasn’t. It would only confirm his fear that he is the one named in the Prophecy. It is still there, I am sure. And your godson will be the one to remove it.”

“He can do it while he is back in England for his shortened Christmas Break,” Sirius said.

“Yes,” Amelia said, “It must be done then. Which means I have until then to get in contact with Unspeakable Croaker.”

“So what do you think about the rest?” Sirius asked. “The part about the ICW hit-wizards? Him blaming Molly Weasley for all those blocks and bindings.”

“I don’t believe Molly Weasley is the only one responsible for that,” Amelia said, “Not for one moment. Remember, Dumbledore had to have been the one to put those Secrecy Enchantments on Molly’s children, so they couldn’t reveal their secrets.”

“I forgot you mentioned that to me!” Sirius growled, “As did Harry, Hermione and Minerva. It was just something we forgot to bring up.”

“He would have blamed it on someone else, Sirius,” Amelia said, “Just like he did tonight. As for the hit-wizards, and the whole ICW keeping the Statute of Secrecy from being breached world-wide? It is possible, but I doubt it. I firmly believe Dumbledore did it. He lied through his teeth tonight. But he did it as he always does. He makes it believable. He is a politician after all. It is what he does, and has been doing it for a long time.

“I think that is why he told you all the Prophecy. He had hoped it would give proof to the stuff he had discussed tonight. That he was being honest and lenient with his information. Giving you this big important secret he’s been hiding.”

“Yes,” Sirius said, “He wanted us to believe he was giving us all his important secrets, while hiding the far more important ones. Which leads to an obvious question.”

“What else is he hiding?” Amelia asked.

Chapter End Notes
And so another chapter ends! Sorry I didn't put anything beyond that evening in this chapter. The theme just doesn't fit.

So… our heroes now know the Prophecy, and suspect Dumbledore is the Dark Lord mentioned in the Prophecy! But what can they do about it right now? Especially with the warning that Voldemort will return soon.

Next Chapter: A very long chapter! The end of Book 1. Rita Skeeter's article. A short-time skip to Christmas, and then Christmas day, presents and the Yule Ball!
As it had been on Sunday morning – and for a similar reason – the Great Hall was once again filled with most of the students who currently resided in the castle. Everyone was waiting to see what the Daily Prophet would report about what happened during the Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot. As a good majority of the present purebloods – along with several half-bloods -- were Heirs and Heiresses of important Houses in the British magical society, they were eagerly waiting to see what their Lords, Ladies, Allies, and even enemies, had come up with during the Wizengamot Council meeting.

Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were once again sitting at the Ravenclaw Table with Neville, Luna, Padma and Ivan. They were rather silent, and nervous as they dined on their breakfast. They were, of course, nervous about the news getting out today. Especially since they didn’t know yet what Rita Skeeter would say about it. But they were also nervous about Dumbledore. Would he confront them again, to continue the discussion they had the previous night, or to speak to them about their Betrothal Contract?

Of course, their friends had noticed.

“You two seem very nervous, Harry, Hermione,” Neville said, “Is this about how everyone is going to react to the news of your Betrothal?”

“Not to mention your new titles,” Ivan said.

“I think the reactions will be pretty humorous,” Luna said, brightly. “I cannot wait to see the looks of heartbreak and disappointment on the faces of your fan-girls.”

“That is rather vindictive of you, Luna,” Hermione said, surprised at the comment by the normally peaceful and nice girl.
Luna grinned. “Well, when you realize most of those fan-girls have boyfriends or dates to the Yule Ball. It will be fun to see how the boys will react to seeing the disappointment on their girlfriends’ faces about Harry being confirmed as no longer a bachelor, or that they no longer have a chance with him.”

Padma snorted. “What about Hermione? I am sure there will be some boys – like Krum – who are going to be disappointed too. Especially when they see what you’re going to wear at the Ball.”

“You told her?” Harry asked.

“Earlier this year, I made the mistake of showing the dress to Parvati and Lavender,” Hermione said, “I had to make them promise to keep it secret. Parvati said she would only tell her sister.”

“She only told me,” Padma confirmed. “I don’t think anyone else knows.”

“I would have heard comments about it by now if they did,” Hermione said, “As long as Harry doesn’t know until he sees me that night. That is all I am worried about when it comes to my dress.”

“I don’t mind,” Harry said. “I wouldn’t want you to find out about my Christmas present to you from somebody else, after all. Not that anyone else knows.”

Hermione smiled. But before she could say anything, there was the familiar whoosh of wings as a great flock of owls arrived into the Great Hall. Two owls dropped newspapers toward Harry and Hermione who caught it. Harry unrolled his newspaper and rolled his eyes at the headlining article. He had expected it would be on one of the first pages, but why had the article about him and Hermione been the headliner? Especially since the Winter Solstice Session surely had to be bigger news. He could easily guess that some Lords and Ladies would not be pleased that this was considered bigger news.

The picture on the front page was a close-up of Harry and Hermione standing together near the table in Courtroom Nine. It was as if the photo had been taken from a camera that was in front of them, which was impossible. Unless… could photos be taken inside Pensieves?

“It is plausible,” Hermione said, when Harry asked her the same question. “Since there were no cameras in front of us yesterday, it had to be taken another way. Otherwise this would be shot from the side of us.”

“There are special Pensieves that allow camera to be used inside them,” Luna said, “Daddy has one, so he can take pictures of creatures which would otherwise be scared of camera flashes. It wouldn’t surprise me if the Daily Prophet has one.”

“It explains why some photos I’ve seen seem to be taken of people who had no clue they were being filmed,” Hermione said.

Harry nodded, then started reading the article.

**BOY-WHO-LIVED HARRY POTTER AND GIRLFRIEND HERMIONE GRANGER ANNOUNCE LORD AND HEIRESS TITLES; LORD POTTER-PEVERELL AND HEIRESS DAGWORTH-GRANGER PEN BETROTHAL CONTRACT! FULL CONTRACT PUBLISHED FOR VIEW!**
Last week, this reporter brought you the speculation that the Boy-Who-Lived Harry Potter may, in fact, be Emancipated, due to his participation in the Triwizard Tournament! Yesterday, during the Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot Council, Harry Potter, 14, confirmed these speculations and claimed two seats on the Wizengamot Council.

Harry Potter is now known as Lord Potter of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, and Lord Peverell of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell. His girlfriend, Hermione Granger, who my faithful readers will remember coming up lately in my articles about the Boy-Who-Lived, announced that a once-thought extinct Noble House has returned. Granger, 15, a Muggleborn descended from a Pureblood, per her own words, is the new Heiress of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger, and the descendant of the famous Hector Dagworth-Granger, founder of The Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers.

In addition, Lord Potter announced that the Heiress was now a Vassal of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter. I learned that Lord Potter does not expect servitude from his Vassal. The title is merely a way to further protect the new Heiress! Isn’t that just romantic of the new Lord of two Houses?

But I also learned that Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger went further along the path of protecting themselves, especially as a new couple.

Last night, after coming back from attending the Winter Solstice Session, I was given an envelope, with a letter penned by Harry Potter and Hermione Granger themselves, and what I verified was a Betrothal Contract between Lord Potter-Peverell and Heiress Dagworth-Granger.

Yes, readers, Harry Potter and his girlfriend, Hermione Granger are, in fact, Betrothed! The full Betrothal Contract – of which they gave me a copy – can be seen on Page 2. A few interesting Provisos were included in the Contract, though there is no confirmation of when the future wedding will happen between the new Lord and his Heiress!

One of the more interesting Provisos is that the Betrothal Contract cannot be cancelled unless Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger attend an appointment with Gringotts-approved Healers! Goblin Healers are said to be more thorough then the Healers at St. Mungo’s in how they treat and help humans. But they don’t just help any humans. Only an exclusive group of humans are allowed to be healed by Goblin Healers. The new Lord and Heiress must be an important pair to Gringotts and the Goblin Nation if this was approved to be a Proviso in the Contract!

What does this Proviso mean? Simple… it protects the Betrothed from any nefarious means of breaking them up, such as those nasty, annoying Love Potions! The Betrothed couple went further to protect themselves. If the Betrothed couple are ever accuses of
infidelity or adultery, they must, too, attend an appointment with the Goblin Healers. Sounds like they have thought of everything!

The Contract also proves that we will see lots of children in the next generation of the House of Potter! At least three children must be born so they can become the Heirs, or Heiresses, of Houses Potter, Peverell and Dagworth-Granger! Looks like our new Lord and Heiress have their whole future planned out!

Reminder: the newly Betrothed Couple will be one of the star couples of the Yule Ball this Friday, on Christmas night at Hogwarts! Will this wonderful news make the new couple steal the spotlight! I certainly hope so!

We, at the Daily Prophet, congratulate the new Lord and Heiress on their titles, and on their new status as a Betrothed couple! We wish them happy, healthy and romantic times in their future.

Full details of Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger’s Betrothal Contract – Page 2
History of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter – Page 3
History of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell – Page 3
History of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger – Page 4

Harry whistled as he rolled up the newspaper. Rita Skeeter had gone all out with this article. But he didn’t find anything offensive in the article. She could have put her usual flourish on several parts, such as the Vassal detail, or the whole Goblin Healer thing, but she did not. It was respectful to him and Hermione. He appreciated Rita Skeeter for respectfully announcing their news to Great Britain.

Suddenly, three sharp dings echoed throughout the Great Hall from the Head Table. Harry narrowed his eyes as he saw Headmaster Dumbledore stand up.

“Attention students,” Dumbledore said, “If you have read the headlining article from the ever-popular Rita Skeeter, you will discover some of the big news that was revealed yesterday at the Winter Solstice Session of the Wizengamot Council. Our very own Harry Potter is now Lord Potter-Peverell, Head of two very important Houses in our society, including one of the oldest Houses in our society. Hermione Granger also revealed that she is a descendant of the House of Dagworth-Granger, one of our society’s more famous Houses. Her official title, at this moment, is Heiress Dagworth-Granger. A round of applause, please, for our new Lord and Heiress!”

Harry and Hermione exchanged glances, wondering what Dumbledore was up to. They blushed a little as many of the students applauded and cheered loudly. Over at the Slytherin table, Daphne and Tracey sent small smiles in their direction, as they clapped. However, Draco Malfoy seemed to be rather constipated at this news. He was glaring at Harry, but that wasn’t big news, so Harry ignored it.

The applause and cheers quieted after a minute.

“Yes, yes, congratulations,” Dumbledore said, “However! As many of you Heirs and Heiresses who sit in front of me know, we at Hogwarts do not use formal titles greater than Mr. and Miss when it comes to students. Therefore, Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger will only be addressed as Mr. Potter and Miss Granger by the Professors.”
Ah, that was what he was doing. He was trying to downplay their announcement, make it seem less than it was. Suddenly, Neville cleared his throat and stood up.

“May I speak Headmaster?” Neville asked.

“Of course, Mr. Longbottom,” Dumbledore said, with a smile.

“I, Heir Neville Longbottom, would like to congratulate Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Neville said, “not only for their new titles of peerage, but also for their new Betrothal status!”

Harry and Hermione smiled at Neville, impressed that the usually timid boy was brave enough to stand up. The timid boy returned, however, as he blushed red and sat back down as many students applauded and cheered again. Professor McGonagall and several other Professors joined in.

“Thank you, Mr. Longbottom,” Dumbledore said, once the applause and cheers were finished, “A most proper congratulations. I echo your statements. You may all return to your delicious meals.”

Dumbledore sat down and Harry and Hermione turned back to their friends.

“That was brilliant, Neville!” Hermione gushed, “Thank you very much.”

“It is something Gran would want me to do,” Neville said, smiling.

“I would have done it if he hadn’t!” Ivan said, “It was obvious the Headmaster was trying to downplay your announcements. Neville’s message allowed the news to flourish, as it should. This is big news in our society, I assure you. I know you were raised in the Muggle world, but here Betrothals should be celebrated. As should the return of a previously-thought extinct House. And a new Lord, especially the only surviving soul of two Houses – yes, that should definitely be celebrated. It is big for our society.”

“So I imagine we won’t be able to downplay this if we tried?” Harry asked, “We can’t act as if it just a normal thing?”

“Not unless you want to lose a lot of respect,” Ivan said. “I assume over the next few days, a lot of the Heirs and Heiresses here at Hogwarts are going to congratulate you two if they pass by you in the corridors. Simply give your thanks and appreciation. That is the least you can do. Anymore would seem as if you are trying to further a conversation and are interested in possible Alliances.”

“Thank you, Ivan,” Harry said, “I wouldn’t have known this if you hadn’t let me know.”

“Then I know what I’m giving you for Christmas, Harry, and you, Hermione,” Ivan said, “Books on proper etiquette in wizarding society”

“We do need them,” Hermione said, “Professor McGonagall taught us a bit, but that didn’t come up. Mostly she just taught us things we needed to know for the Yule Ball.”

“The Yule Ball is a Social event, but only the Heirs and Heiresses will be in attendance,” Padma said. “Unless there are chaperones, or high tier Ministry officials coming, the only important people with statuses equal to yours, Harry, are Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall. Remember that.”
Harry nodded. “Thank you. This is all good information.”

“We’re your Allies, Harry,” Padma said, “It is our duty to help our Allies. We’re not going to be remiss in those duties anymore.”

Neville, Luna and Ivan nodded in agreement. Harry and Hermione smiled. They were very appreciative of this.

(Time-Skip – Tuesday, December 22nd, 1994 -- Morning to Thursday, December 24th, 1994 – Evening)

As the week went on and Christmas and the Yule Ball loomed ever closer, Harry and Hermione found ways to pass the time.

Ivan Blishwick had been right. Several Heirs and Heiresses – the majority of whom Harry and Hermione had never met before -- introduced themselves to the new Lord and Heiress. Most were polite. A few Slytherins, however, sneered, and when they greeted Harry and Hermione, it was with a mocking of sorts when they called them ‘Lord Potter’ and ‘Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Hermione suspected most of these were families on the Dark Alliance, someone who would never support them, since they were members of the Light and Great Alliances.

Harry and Hermione would often casually tease each other after being greeted by an Heir or Heiress.

“She’s rather pretty, Harry,” Hermione would tease, “I bet her name is going to be on one of those Betrothal Offers.”

“Her boyfriend’s probably one of those on your Offers,” Harry teased back.

The couple would simply laugh after this, and that was their way to cope with the fact that sooner or later, Keeper Ragnok would send them a great pile of Betrothal Offers from those Lords and Ladies who were foolish to believe they would even think of accepting them.

Draco Malfoy, who had been ignoring the couple for the last several days, had finally confronted them with his minions.

“Finally showing a Mudblood where she belongs, Lord Potter?” Draco asked. “I’m very impressed. You’ve finally realized Mudbloods deserve to serve us betters. Vassalage is the best these Mudbloods could hope for. But did you have to choose her?”

“Haven’t you heard, Heir Malfoy?” Harry answered. “She is Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Descended from one of the most famous purebloods in our society.”

Draco huffed. “How much money did you pay, Lord Potter, to get Gringotts to make your Vassal a fake Heiress? Everyone knows a Mudblood can’t possibly be descended from Purebloods! It is a travesty! My father will hear about this!”

“I hope your father hears about this, Malfoy!” Hermione retorted, throwing his words back at him, “Perhaps then, Lord Lucius can tell you what happened during the Wizengamot Council Session when magic itself approved of my title of Heiress, and put my House Seat back on the Council. What would he say if he heard you insult the Heiress of a once-extinct House? One who is sure to
get a lot of respect from other Lords and Ladies around society. Lords and Ladies your father would not want to piss off! Even the Minister seemed to want to kiss my feet when he heard I was the Heiress of a once-extinct House.”

“Then perhaps I will tell my father,” Draco shot back. “Obviously Fudge no longer deserves to be Minister if he has chosen to support rubbish like you!”

He then sneered and walked off with his minions. That was the last they had seen of Malfoy and his minions, aside from when they were in the Great Hall, and even then he ignored them.

When in private, they found ways to spend time with each other. They had dancing ‘lessons’ every night after dinner in the Private Common Room, though mostly they ‘practiced’ slow dancing, as it was rather difficult practicing the waltz inside the room. However, they were quite confident the two lessons they already had would prepare them enough for doing the waltzes and other dances expected of them.

They also met up with the other Children of the Great Alliance. Wednesday afternoon, they were invited to a snowball fight on the Grounds with every present member of the Great Alliance, including Daphne and Tracey. Harry and Hermione were teamed together, of course. Especially when it was duo fights. When it was groups, they wouldn’t split up, and everyone knew this even when they were grouped with different Children.

Wednesday night, Mallory and Sadie delivered the letters penned from the Gryffindor students. Harry and Hermione put them off reading until they returned to school from Christmas Break. They were not going to let these letters mess up their joy and fun. Professor McGonagall was most pleased, and approved of this decision.

On Thursday, Harry and Hermione spent breakfast with Susan, Hannah, Ernie and Terry at the Hufflepuff Table and lunch with their friends at the Ravenclaw table.

On Thursday evening, Christmas Eve, as Harry and Hermione decided to sit at the Gryffindor Table for dinner, Fred and George Weasley walked into the Great Hall. Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet had greeted them with squeals and kisses right there in the middle of the Great Hall.

“Did you really think we would dump you beautiful ladies and let you go solo at the Ball?” Fred asked.

“Did you really think we would miss such wild festivities known as the Yule Ball?” George asked.

“Not a chance!” Fred and George said.

“Well,” Angelina said, “We wondered if you would be here, yes.”

But we wouldn’t be going solo if you hadn’t shown up,” Alicia said.

“Well’d go together!” Angelina and Alicia said.

Fred and George’s jaws dropped in unison, amid laughter around them. Then they joined in.

“Our soul-mates!” Fred exclaimed

“We found them!” George exclaimed.
More laughter was heard as Angelina and Alicia blushed. Wolf-whistles were heard next as they kissed their respective boyfriend’s cheek. Nobody wanted to break up the fun and laughter, so nobody talked about what must have gone on at the Burrow. It was sure to be a sad and tragic story, given that the Weasley Matriarch was buried, and the two youngest children had their magic bound.

Harry and Hermione ended Christmas Eve bundled up together in front of roaring fire in their Private Common Room, which is wonderfully decorated with Christmas decorations. There was even a Christmas tree in one corner of the room. Dobby had told them that their presents would be under the tree the following morning, instead of at the end of their beds as was Hogwarts tradition. Harry and Hermione approved this, and thanked Dobby and Winky – both of whom had decorated the room – for being so wonderful and thoughtful.

The Betrothed couple spent the night – before they chose to go to bed – kissing, snogging and cuddling, and simply enjoying Christmas Eve. Both knew tomorrow was sure to be just as wonderful as the last few days had been.

(Friday, December 25th, 1994 – 7:10 AM)

Harry and Hermione were once again in the Private Common Room. Instead of sitting on the couch this time, they were sitting by the Christmas tree, where their presents were. The previous night they had agreed to meet there around seven that morning. As tradition was for them to spend Christmas morning in their pyjamas, they agreed to wait to do their morning ablutions until after they opened their presents.

Harry, who hadn’t seen Hermione in her pyjamas since they had become a couple, thought his Betrothed looked quite sexy in her pyjamas. Her curves were quite pronounced against the tight clothing. Harry had to keep himself calm, since he knew his arousal would be obvious in his tight pyjamas!

“So your choice, Hermione,” Harry said, “Do we open each other’s presents first or last?”

“First,” Hermione said. “Each other’s, then Sirius and Remus. Then from our closest friends, then Allies and the rest. My parents didn’t send us gifts since we’ll be home tomorrow.”

“Us?” Harry asked.

“They bought presents for you too, Harry,” Hermione said. “Did you really think they wouldn’t? They know you’re my boyfriend, and they did give us permission to be Betrothed, even if it wasn’t necessary to do so.”

“I just wasn’t expecting it,” Harry said, shrugging, “Even if I am giving them presents too.”

“I am sure they’ll be happy to accept presents from you,” Hermione said, smiling; she picked up a couple boxes and gave them to Harry. “These are from me.”

Harry found the smaller boxes meant for Hermione and gave them to her.

“Don’t judge a box by its size, love,” Harry said, grinning. “I have another gift for you, but it is for your parents and you together, by the way.”
Hermione rolled her eyes. “I haven’t judged a gift on their size since I was about five, Harry.”

Harry smiled. He didn’t unwrap his presents yet. He simply watched his girlfriend as she unwrapped hers. She gasped as she opened the first – a blue pearl necklace – similar to her favorite color. Her other gift, which also made her gasp, were periwinkle earrings.

“I found them in the jewelry boxes from the Vault,” Harry said, smiling.

“These are gorgeous, Harry!” Hermione said, “They’ll go perfect with my dress tonight!”

“Brilliant,” Harry said, “That is why I gave them to you.”

Hermione grinned, then leaned over to him and kissed him. Harry returned the kiss until his girlfriend backed away.

“Open yours now!” Hermione said, excitedly.

Harry smiled and looked at the boxes. “I assume these are both books?”

“Yes, but they are very important books!” Hermione defended her gifts, “Open them!”

Harry smiled and unwrapped the first gift. It was, indeed, a book.

“Legends of the Magical World?” Harry asked.

“It has a chapter on Shadow Panthers,” Hermione said, “Your Animagus!”

“Oh!” Harry said, grinning, “That’s brilliant.”

“I had to owl-order both of these books from Flourish and Blott’s,” Hermione said, “Neither the Hogwarts Library, nor the bookshop at Hogsmeade has them. I was rather relieved when your Vault didn’t have either of these books. Open the next one.”

Harry unwrapped the second box and looked at the book.

“The Peverell Three And The Legend Of The Deathly Hallows,” Harry read.

“Beedle the Bard wrote a Tale Of the Three Brothers,” Hermione said, “Remember, Professor McGonagall mentioned it after you took your Inheritance Test? Well, that book is just a story for kids. This book has the story behind the Tale. It talks about your ancestor and his brothers. And it tells about three items called the Deathly Hallows. I saw this book a while back in Flourish and Blott’s, and I remembered its name when I learned you were descended from Peverell. So I owl-ordered this book along with the Legends of the Magical World.”

“These are great!” Harry said, smiling. “Two more books for my collection.”

Hermione smiled, then sighed. “I hope your family libraries don’t have these books. It is possible.”

“Even if it does,” Harry said, “These are more precious, because they are from you.”

“Oh, you wonderful man,” Hermione gushed; she leaned toward him and kissed him.
The next presents they found were from Sirius and Remus. It was a combined gift for both of them from both Marauders… and…

“My Dad?” Harry asked, confused.

“There’s a letter!” Hermione said, pointing to the scroll on top of the package. “Read it and I’ll open the box!”

Harry took the scroll and unread it.

“Harry and Hermione,’” Harry read, “’You little devils didn’t tell us that you learned you had Animagus forms! We had to learn it from Professor McGonagall! Inside this box is a whole bunch of notes and research about Animagi, and the Animagus transformation. Hermione, you’re also getting a book on Lionesses. Harry, Hermione told us she was getting you a book on your Animagus. Remus says do not try to transform without help from us or Professor McGonagall, and I suppose I must agree with him. Read through these notes and if you have any questions, ask us or Professor McGonagall. If you truly want to work on your transformations, Remus and I will try to meet with you at Hogwarts without your Headmaster finding out.

“Harry, this is also a gift from your father. He helped us do this research. Wormtail didn’t do much to help us, but your father did. He would want you to have these notes. In fact, you may have had them years ago if your parents had lived, or if I had raised you!

“Love Padfoot and Moony.”

Harry looked over at Hermione and found what appeared to be a shoebox full of parchment. Hermione was reading through one of the pieces on top of the pile.”

“These are great!” Hermione said, “We’ll definitely have to look through these notes after we sort them out! Can’t believe Sirius and Remus didn’t sort them out.”

“Probably found this in his Vault or something,” Harry said, grinning, “Maybe he wanted to keep it authentic? Like it was back when he used it.”

Hermione snorted. “Then he was very unorganized!”

Harry laughed. They continued opening more presents. Professor McGonagall gave them books on Occlumancy and Legilimency. Ivan Blishwick had kept his promise and had given them two copies of “A Guide to Social Etiquette in the Wizarding World” books. Most of the Children had given them various gift cards to shops in Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley. Neville, for example, gave Harry and Hermione gift cards to a Herbology based shop in Diagon Alley.

Daphne Greengrass’ gifts surprised them. She gave them copies of an Advanced Potions book. A note said that this book was what Severus Snape had assigned the Slytherins for extra reading this year. Harry also laughed at Daphne’s other gift.

“A fake Betrothal Contract,” Harry said, “Written on parchment you could buy in Diagon Alley. No signatures and definitely not identical to a real Contract.”

“She remembered you teasing her during the Children of the Great Alliance meeting,” Hermione said, grinning. “Probably knew you were expecting Contracts from others, and she wanted you to
get a laugh out of one of them, at least. Any Provisos?"

“I must be sorted into Slytherin starting fifth year,” Harry said, “And I must allow Daphne to accept
Tracey Davis as her Mistress.”

Hermione laughed. “She’s wonderful, isn’t she?”

“She is,” Harry agreed, “Oh! I got a gift from Nymphadora Tonks! It has a note too. Hmm… ‘Harry,
you doofus, why didn’t you tell me your Metamorph abilities had been blocked, and recently
released! I had to hear it from Professor McGonagall! She suggested I talk to you about it! I am a
Metamorphmagus too! Maybe that is why you didn’t tell me, because you didn’t know I am one.
Anyway, I’ve given you a book on the Metamorphmagus talent. Read this, learn from it, practice
some of the easier ones. The harder stuff you can learn it from me! We’ll figure out when I can help
you with it! Tonks.’ Wow!”

“That is why she had pink hair!” Hermione exclaimed, “Because she was an Metamorphmagus. It
wasn’t hair dye as I thought!”

Harry nodded, as he opened the package. “I’ll have to read through this soon enough. I haven’t
really thought about my Metamorph talents… like at all… since I discovered it.”

“We’ve been rather busy, Harry,” Hermione said.

Harry agreed with that. He was surprised, and amazed, to receive several old photographs from
Lords and Ladies of the Great Alliance. Photographs of the Lords and Ladies depicted with James,
Lily or both, and even with little Harry sometimes.

“How lovely,” Hermione said, smiling, “More photos for your photo album.”

“Yeah,” Harry said.

Soon, Harry got down to one last present. It was a fifty-pence piece attached to a note.

“From the Dursleys,” Harry muttered. “‘Let’s see. Use this to take a bus to one of your freaky friends
next summer! Don’t bother looking for us! We’ll be long gone from Great Britain! See you, freak!
Thanks for the money!’”

“Those ungrateful people!” Hermione snarled. “Couldn’t they have been a little thankful and polite.
This is the last you’ll likely ever hear from them!”

“Wait… there’s something on the back of the note,” Harry said. “‘You didn’t just lose your mother
that night. I lost my sister and my best friend. You have her eyes. Thank you for giving us the
money. Forgive me. Dudley asks you to forgive him too. Petunia.’ Well…”

“I suppose that’s alright then,” Hermione said, “She must have wrote that before she sent it off.”

Harry nodded. “I suppose her message was okay. But it will take me quite a bit of time to forgive
them.”

“As it should, Harry,” Hermione agreed.

At that moment, Dobby and Winky appeared.
“Dobby and Winky has presents for the Great Harry Potter and his Hermy,” Dobby said. “Dobby and Winky be giving a packages of candy and butterbeer from Hogsmeade. Dobby wanted to give socks, but Dobby could only find boring socks.”

Dobby and Winky snapped their fingers and large stockings full of candy, and two six-packs of butterbeer appeared on the table.

“This is brilliant, Dobby!” Harry said, “Thanks!”

“Thank you, Winky!” Hermione gushed, “It is wonderful.”

“Hermy sure?” Winky asked, “Winky be knowing Hermy be not eating much chocolate and sweets.”

“I can indulge on Christmas and my birthday, Winky,” Hermione said, “It is a tradition and always has been in my family.”

Winky smiled. “Winky be knowing Christmas and Birthday presents for Hermy from now on!”

Harry and Hermione thanked the elves, who bowed and vanished.

“Good haul this year?” Hermione asked.

“You jesting?” Harry asked, “Best Christmas ever!”

“And it isn’t over yet,” Hermione said.

“I can’t wait for tonight,” Harry said, “Can’t wait to spend the whole night in your arms.”

“Well, why wait?” Hermione asked. “We have a little while before we need to go down to the Great Hall for breakfast.”

Harry was quite happy to ‘practice’ slow dancing with Hermione again. Though he had to do his best to keep himself calm. He could feel her curves against his body, especially with barely any fabric between them! They spent the next half-hour in each other’s arms before they had to go and start their morning ablutions.

“Harry?” Hermione whispered before Harry could step into his Quarters.

“Yes, love?” Harry asked.

“I am impressed you could keep your… arousal… for me so controlled,” Hermione said, grinning. “Especially since I know my body was right up against yours, even with the fabric between us. But let me tell you a little secret. I was having difficulties too. Only… it is more difficult for you to notice it.”

She winked and walked toward her dormitory, leaving a blushing and stammering Harry behind. He hurried into his dormitory. Hermione’s teasing was going to cause him to have a cold shower!

A very cold one!
Harry Potter was nervously waiting in the Entrance Hall, at the bottom of the steps leading to the Grand Staircase. That afternoon, the Children of the Great Alliance participated in another snowball fight. However, halfway through it, around four-o-clock, three hours before the Yule Ball began, the girls excused themselves and said they needed to get ready for the Ball. Hermione had told him to meet her in the Entrance Hall, because she wouldn’t be in the Lion’s Den that night. Apparently Padma and Luna had offered to help her get ready, and she had gone off with them to Ravenclaw Tower after they left the snowball fight.

Harry had retreated to the Lion’s Den around five-thirty, and had taken a shower, and dressed in his formal robes.

Every now and then, students would come down the stairs, either alone, in groups or with their dates. Lee Jordan and Harry’s fellow Quidditch team members had all come down together. They greeted Harry, and the girls commented on how nice he looked. He smiled and greeted them in turn.

With about fifteen minutes to go, Harry saw both Neville Longbottom and Ivan Blishwick coming down together.

“The girls are on their way, Harry!” Neville said, “Better prepare yourself!”

“Did you get to see Hermione before I did?” Harry asked, a little envious.

“Relax,” Ivan said. “Hermione’s house-elf gave us both a message and said our dates were on their way along with yours. We didn’t see any of them yet.”

“Sorry,” Harry muttered.

“No problem, mate,” Neville said, grinning. “If any mates of mine got to see Luna before I did, I’d be pretty steamed too, you know?”

“Same for me and Padma,” Ivan said, “It is even worse for me! She and her sister are dressing nearly the same!”

Harry laughed. “Surely you can tell the sisters apart?”

“Course I can,” Ivan said. “But I’m going to lay off the punchbowl tonight. I heard the Weasleys plan to spike it! Imagine me getting drunk, and mistaking Parvati for Padma!”

Harry and Neville laughed as Ivan shuddered dramatically.

“Oh, shite!” Ivan said, “Time to test our resolve for our dates. The Beauxbatons Champion is here!”

Sure enough, Fleur Delacour entered the Great Hall, and a Ravenclaw walked over to her. Ivan snorted.

“Davies?” Ivan asked, “She’s going with Roger Davies? Him?! Why?!”

“You sound jealous, Ivan,” Neville said.
“Oh, no, I am not,” Ivan said, “It is just… Davies is going to embarrass Ravenclaw tonight. Look at him, you can see a bit of drool on his lip already! She’s got him completely under her thrall. She doesn’t even need to use her Allure, and he still acts like he is under it! Oh, Merlin!”

Harry nodded and chanced a glance up the stairs. “Ivan… turn around. You too, Neville.”

Ivan and Neville turned and looked up the stairs. Padma and Luna were walking down the stairs together. Padma was dressed in a reddish-brown gown, and her hair was braided like a crown. Luna – well, she was very Luna. Her dress resembled a Christmas tree. Dark green with garland wrapped around her as if in a belt. There were even ornaments on her dress. Her earrings seemed to be fairy lights.

“I think Luna ended up in the costume section of the clothing store,” Ivan said.

“Nah, she gave me a few hints at her outfit,” Neville said, as he smiled, watching his date make her way toward him, “She said she couldn’t find a nice dress. So she made one.”

“In less than a week?” Harry asked, “Blimey!”

“You look divine, Miss Patil,” Ivan said.

“I thank you, Heir Blishwick,” Padma replied, “You look very dashing!”

“Miss Lovegood, you might outshine the Champions this evening,” Neville said, “Let no one tell you that you don’t look beautiful. Because you look gorgeous!”

“Thank you, Heir Longbottom,” Luna said, “You look wonderful yourself.”

“Hermione will be here in a moment, Harry,” Padma said, “She wanted us to come down first.”

“There she is!” Luna exclaimed.

Harry cricked his neck as he turned to the stairs, and his jaw almost dropped to the floor. It was as if he was seeing her for the first time. She was wearing a periwinkle-blue dress that seemed to float around her as she slowly made her way down the stairs. Her dress was just cut low enough that he could see that she was wearing blue-tinted heels. The neckline was low enough to show her curves off well, however, Harry hoped that anyone who dared look in that area would only notice the blue pearl necklace he had given her. It matched her dress well. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. He could see the earrings he had given her glistening below her ears.

“I’m breathless, my love,” Harry said, “You left me breathless. But not speechless. You are the star of the Ball tonight. The Beauxbatons Champion has nothing on you.”

“Looked at her, did you?” Hermione teased.

“Only for a moment when she arrived,” Harry said, “But nothing compares to your beauty. Not even a Veela.”

“Alright, you’re going to make me blush, Harry James,” Hermione said, “You look so very handsome yourself. Though I can see you decided your hair wasn’t going to cooperate with the rest of you.”
“It would end up this way halfway through the night anyway after dancing so much,” Harry said, with a laugh, “So, I decided to leave it alone.”

“A fair point, I suppose,” Hermione said.

“Sweet Merlin, beauty like that should not allow a man to hold it!” a voice said behind Harry.

Harry turned and saw Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Davis walking over to them. They were wearing matching silver and green dresses.

“You may be right, Heiress Greengrass,” Hermione said, “But I’m kind enough to allow one lucky male have that honor. And only one.”

“Attention students!” Professor McGonagall, who was wearing dress robes of red tartan, said, “Everyone who isn’t a Champion or their date, should now go into the Great Hall, so that the Champions can be introduced before the Yule Ball can begin!”

“Guess that is our cue,” Daphne said, “Come on, Children!”

Neville and Ivan and their dates followed Daphne and Tracey into the Great Hall. Soon, only the four Champions and their dates were left. Cedric Diggory was hand-in-hand with a gorgeous-looking Cho Chang. Viktor Krum was with a Beauxbatons student, and when Harry caught Viktor staring at Hermione he glared at him. Viktor grimaced and stared forward. Fleur Delacour was ignoring her drooling date, as she gazed at Hermione’s appearance. Harry smirked when he found the Beauxbatons Champion looking envious.

“Line up with your dates, Champions!” McGonagall instructed. “Lord Potter, as Lord, it is your right for you and Heiress Dagworth-Granger to be introduced last. So please stand at the back. Champion Delacour, you first, then Champion Krum. Heir Diggory, you and Miss Chang are third.”

Harry realized Cho Chang must have at least one brother – older or younger – who was the Heir of her House.

“Heiress Dagworth-Granger, you look beautiful this evening,” McGonagall complimented her Lion.

“Thank you, Professor,” Hermione said, “I like your outfit.”

“Keep both eyes on her, Lord Potter,” McGonagall said, with a small smile. “As the two of you are Betrothed, it would be improper to accept a dance with other Heirs and Heiresses.” Then she leaned in and whispered, “Something tells me your Betrothal Rings might act accordingly if someone besides your Betrothed tries to dance with you. I don’t want to find out if I am right. So do be careful, you two.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Harry said.

“I’ll keep one eye on the both of you,” McGonagall whispered. “I did see the Durmstrang Champion eyeing you, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. I will keep an eye on him too.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Hermione said, “His interests in me are a little discomforting.”

“So I’ve heard,” McGonagall said.
She cleared her throat and walked over to the doors, which had been closed after all the students aside from the Champions and their dates, had entered. With a wave of her wand, she opened the doors. Instrumental music began in the room, and McGonagall motioned to Fleur and Roger Davies. The pair walked – arms hooked together – into the Great Hall. A minute later, Krum and his date walked in.

“Professor?” Cedric Diggory said, “I’ll keep an eye on Krum too. He tried to ask Cho out last week, even though she and I have been a couple for months now.”

McGonagall sighed. “Thank you, Heir Diggory. Hopefully there won’t be problems. Do enjoy yourselves this evening, you four. And remember, you’re representing Hogwarts this evening.”

“Yes ma’am,” “Yes, Professor,” all four students said.

“In you go, Heir Diggory, Miss Chang,” McGonagall said.

Harry could barely hear Dumbledore announcing Cedric and Cho’s names as the pair stepped into the Great Hall.

“I have wrangled a seat at the Champions’ Table this evening,” McGonagall said to Harry and Hermione. “Originally, the Headmaster wanted Professor Snape to sit there for some reason. But, to my disbelief – and also glee – Professor Snape is not present this evening. I do not know why. Therefore, I have assigned myself next to the two of you, as your fellow Alliance member, and Head of Gryffindor.”

“You want to make sure the Headmaster behaves,” Harry guessed.

“Yes,” McGonagall said, sighing, “Also, all your food is being served to you by Dobby and Winky. When you request your food, as is custom for this evening’s meal, they will deliver it from the kitchens. In you go.”

Harry cleared his throat and, arms entwined, walked into the Great Hall with Hermione.

“Hogwarts Champion Lord Harry James Potter, Head of the Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, Head of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Peverell,” Dumbledore announced, “and his date, Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress Dagworth-Granger of the Noble House of Dagworth-Granger.”

As the applause, soft cheers, murmurs and whispers – the latter two, due to Harry and Hermione’s appearances – erupted around the Great Hall, Harry and Hermione took in the sights of the decorated Hall.

The walls of the Hall had all been covered in sparkling silver frost, with hundreds of garlands of mistletoe and ivy crossing the starry black ceiling. The House tables had vanished; instead, there were about a hundred smaller, lantern-lit ones, each seating about a dozen people. Harry noticed the remainder of the Children of the Great Alliance sitting together at one table. Well, most of them. At a neighboring table, Parvati Patil sat beside her date Dean Thomas. Parvati’s best friend Lavender Brown was seated on Parvati’s other side with her date Seamus Finnegan. They were seated with the remainder of the Quidditch Team and Lee Jordan.

Harry and Hermione made their way toward a large round table at the top of the Hall, where the
judges and other Champions and their dates were sitting. Professor McGonagall – who had made her way past them while they slowly walked across the Hall -- was standing near three vacant chairs, obviously where Harry and Hermione were supposed to be seated.

Harry and Hermione ignored Dumbledore’s stares in their direction as they sat down beside Professor McGonagall. Ludo Bagman, tonight in robes of bright purple with large yellow stars, greeted Harry and Hermione enthusiastically. Igor Karkaroff was frowning as he looked at Hermione. Obviously he had heard about his Champion’s troubles with trying to get her to go to the Ball with him.

Madame Maxime, who had changed her usual uniform of black satin for a flowing gown of lavender silk, greeted them politely, before turning to speak to Fleur Delacour in French. The way Fleur was looking at Hermione, told Harry she was still envious about how the younger witch looked – she was obviously a bit miffed Hermione looked much prettier than she did.

But Bartemius Crouch, Harry suddenly realized, was not there. Seated on Professor McGonagall’s other side, was Percy Weasley.

There was no food as yet on the glittering golden plates, but small menus were lying in front of each of them. Dumbledore looked carefully down at his own menu, then said very clearly to his plate, “Shepherd’s Pie!”

And a hearty plate of Shepherd’s Pie appeared.

“Rib-eye and Baked Potato!” Harry said, “And butterbeer!”

He grinned as a rib-eye, baked potato, sliced carrots, and a couple buttery rolls appeared. Hermione ordered Ravioli on a bed of Linguine, which looked quite delicious, as well as butterbeer, like Harry.

“Eet is so unfortunate we did not have zis Tournament at ze Palace of Beauxbatons!!” Fleur Delacour said, as she looked around the decorated Hall. “At ze Palace of Beauxbatons, we ’ave ice sculptures all around ze dining chamber at Chreestmas. Zey do not melt, of course. zey are like ’uge statues of diamond, glittering around ze place. And ze food is seemply superb. And we ’ave choirs of wood nymphs, ’oo serenade us as we eat. We ’ave none of zis ugly armor in ze ’alls, and eef a poltergeist ever entained into Beauxbatons, ’e would be expelled like zat.”

She slapped her hand onto the table impatiently. Roger Davies was watching her talk with a very dazed look on his face, and he kept missing his mouth with his fork. Harry had the impression that Davies was too busy staring at Fleur to take in a word she was saying.

“Absolutely right,” he said quickly, slapping his own hand down on the table in imitation of Fleur. “Like that. Yeah.”

“I think it looks gorgeous,” Hermione said, “My compliments to the elves. I assume they decorated the Hall?”

“They did indeed, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Dumbledore said. “I was not aware you were so supportive of our littest staff members. I heard rumors you were trying to see them freed.”

Karkaroff snorted. “Foolish girl.”

The Durmstrang Headmaster blushed a deep red when McGonagall, Harry and Hermione glared at
him. He coughed and turned back to Krum, but found Krum watching the conversation between Hermione and Dumbledore.

“I was working on false information, Headmaster,” Hermione said, “Our library doesn’t seem to have the proper guidebooks when it comes to House-elves. The authors are so biased and the books written just for a quick Galleon, though I don’t know how they could be worth a Galleon. Maybe ten Sickles.”

Dumbledore blinked and frowned. Percy Weasley huffed.

“Oh, but this is most interesting, Heiress Dagworth-Granger!” Ludo Bagman exclaimed. “How would you suggest we better ourselves in the education of House-Elves? I have influence in the Ministry, you see. I could give them some recommendations if you have any! A young witch like you descended from one of the most brilliant minds in our society must certainly have some ideas as to how to improve such an issue.”

“Has anyone written a book after interviewing House-Elves?” Hermione asked. “I know nearly every Noble House and above has at least one house-elf. Why hasn’t anyone interviewed their House-Elf and wrote a book consisting all the information they received? First-hand knowledge!”

Everyone at the table was in stunned silence at this suggestion. McGonagall was smiling brightly at her student.

“Is it not obvious, young Heiress,” Madame Maxime said, with a snort. “British wizards and witches – a good majority – do not respect their house-elves. They do not treat them as well as they should. I imagine the Hogwarts elves are well-treated. But for most private families? Slaves… that eez all they are. If gossip is correct, you have an interest in books, young Heiress. You publish such a book, young Heiress. The descendant of Hector Dagworth-Granger, who was famous even in France, would certainly get a good audience!”

“Hear, hear!” Ludo Bagman said, “Wonderful advice!”

“It is,” Hermione said, “Thank you, Madame Maxime.”

Harry smiled at Hermione, who was looking happy with the attention. Dumbledore’s smile seemed a bit forced, Harry noticed. He shrugged, and decided he didn’t care this evening.

When all the food had been consumed, Dumbledore stood up and asked the students to do the same. Then, with a wave of his wand, all the tables zoomed back along the walls leaving the floor clear, and then he conjured a raised platform into existence along the right wall. A set of drums, several guitars, a lute, a cello, and some bagpipes were set upon it.

The Weird Sisters now trooped up onto the stage to wildly enthusiastic applause; they were all extremely hairy and dressed in black robes that had been artfully ripped and torn.

“Come, Harry,” Hermione said, smiling, “Time to show Professor McGonagall we listened to her these past couple of weeks.”

McGonagall allowed a little chuckle, as she watched Harry and Hermione step out onto the cleared floor in the middle of the Hall. When the four Champions and their dates were in proper spots, a good several feet separating each other, the Weird Sisters started playing their own version of a traditional waltz. Harry took Hermione’s hands and they begun the waltz.
Their lessons had paid off. Compared to the other Champions, only Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang seemed to be able to perform nearly as well as them. Fleur Delacour’s date was obviously trying to impress the Beauxbatons Champion, and was overperforming. Viktor Krum and his date were simply poorly matched at dancing. They fumbled their hands and feet and the first time he was supposed to lift her into the air, he missed his cue. At least Roger Davies had lifted his date into the air – though he was staring at his date’s low neckline a little too much.

Harry and Hermione, thanks to their lessons and McGonagall’s guiding, were performing as if they had done this for months or years. They kept to the right steps, and when Harry lifted Hermione, the crowd gasped and applauded them. The watching crowd’s stares and gazes seemed glued to them as they danced. Even the boys were watching Hermione instead of Fleur. In fact, when everyone was invited to join in, a few of the girls had to drag their dates and boyfriends onto the floor.

Five minutes after everyone joined in, the tune changed to something slow and mournful. Hermione placed Harry’s arms on her waist, and she wrapped hers around his neck, and the pair began swaying on the spot and moving in circles. Harry looked around the floor. He was surprised to see so many couples dancing so close together, given that McGonagall said it was only proper for the closest of couples, not first dates. Neville and Luna, and Ivan and Padma were all dancing closely. Even Daphne and Tracey were dancing as close as Harry and Hermione, though Tracey was laying her head on Daphne’s shoulder. Harry caught sight of Slytherins like Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott sneering at the witch couple, but the girls were ignoring them.

Harry looked around for Viktor Krum, and found him sitting next to Ludo Bagman. Bagman was talking enthusiastically to the Durmstrang Champion, but Krum just looked bored. When he caught Harry’s eye – or rather, he was looking at Hermione – Harry narrowed his eyes. Krum was suddenly more interested in what Bagman was saying.


“Just wondering what Professor McGonagall meant about our Betrothal rings,” Harry said. “Sorry I’m not focused on you.”

“It is alright,” Hermione said, “I’ve been thinking about that too. I wonder if she means they’re enchanted with offensive protections of some type. Like if a boy touches me, it might… I don’t know… Stun them? Throw them away from me a few feet, like a Depulso?”

“I hope we won’t have to find out,” Harry muttered. “I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve caught Krum looking at you tonight.”

“Thirteen times, but who is counting?” a gruff voice said.

Harry looked over Hermione and saw Professor Moody swaying back and forth by himself.

“Eavesdropping, sir?” Harry asked.

“Just keeping Constant Vigilance, Lord Potter,” Moody grunted. “As you are it seems, with the Durmstrang lad. Good on you, boy. He seems mighty interested in your lass. However… I caught your Betrothed talking about those rings on your fingers. Might be on to something. I assume they belonged to one of your Potter ancestors.”
“Yes, sir,” Harry said.


“Just a guess, sir,” Hermione said.

“A good one, lass,” Moody said. “Hopefully you won’t have to discover if you’re correct. Enjoy yourselves, you two.”

Moody limped off to another part of the Hall.

“How long was he watching us, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I have absolutely no idea,” Harry muttered. “Damn it. Why do I need to keep an eye on so many people, when I just want to look at you all night?”

Hermione smiled. “Then look at me.”

Harry did. Hermione leaned toward him and kissed him deeply. She let him return the kiss for a few moments before he backed away.

“Thank you for being so protective of me tonight, Harry,” Hermione said, “But let’s just try to enjoy ourselves.”

“Of course, love,” Harry said.

Harry and Hermione did not get off the dance floor to rest their feet for nearly an hour. Mostly because they were mostly doing slow dances, aside from when there was a couple of quicker dances they had practiced during the lessons. They finally sat down at the Children of the Great Alliance table, where Daphne and Tracey were sitting.

“The Slytherin boys leaving you two alone tonight?” Harry asked the two Slytherin girls, “I saw them give you dark looks and stuff.”

“We expected it, Harry,” Daphne said, “Have you noticed we’re the only same-sex couple in here? It isn’t taboo, per se, but – well –”

“You denied the chance for two blokes to take you to the Ball tonight,” Hermione said, “So they’re being fussy about it.”

“Couldn’t have put it better myself,” Daphne said.

“Heiress Greengrass,” Harry said, “I received your gift this morning. I saw no dotted line to sign my name on.”

Daphne’s jaw dropped. Then she laughed. “I knew I forgot something! You didn’t bring it with you, did you?”

Harry snapped his fingers, and, in an echoing faux-mock, “I knew I forgot something!”

Hermione, Daphne and Tracey giggled.
“I enjoyed the gag, Heiress,” Harry said, “Thank you for finding humor in what I am sure will be a distressing situation.”

“Why don’t you just let your Account Manager at Gringotts take care of all the offers you’ll receive?” Tracey asked.

“We decided if we didn’t receive the Betrothal Offers,” Hermione said, “We might get an unexpected witch or wizard or several, respectively, meeting with us to ask about the Betrothal.”

Tracey grimaced. “I can see your point.”

“Keep on eye on your Betrothed’s post, Heiress Dagworth-Granger,” Daphne said, grinning, “You might want to make sure nothing naughty is in it.”

“Like hex-letters?” Hermione asked.

“Wrong kind of naughty,” Daphne said, with a snort. “Some Heiresses take pictures in two-piece bikinis for future Betrothal offers. To show off the goods, you know. If they are ‘of age’, they might wear less than bikinis, if you know what I mean.”

“That is barbaric!” Hermione huffed, aghast. “Neither of you have had to do that, right?”

“We haven’t been put in any Betrothal Offers yet,” Daphne said.

“Yet is the keyword,” Tracey said, with a sad sigh.

Daphne, who was holding her girlfriend’s hand on top of the table squeezed it. Tracey smiled at Daphne.

“I remind you – if you wish for me to speak to your Lord fathers about such a thing – please tell me,” Harry said. “After all, unless the Heirs or boys in question for a Betrothal Offer are in the Great Alliance, don’t you think I should have a voice in such a thing? After all, you might end up married to these boys. We wouldn’t want them to remove you from the Great Alliance, would we? I would have to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“And all the boys in the Great Alliance are currently involved with other girls,” Daphne said, grinning. “Very Slytherin of you, Lord Potter. If the Betrothal situation comes up, I’ll let Father know that you have told me you might not approve of any offers outside of the Great Alliance.”

“As will I!” Tracey said, “Father will definitely see sense in that!”

“As will mine,” Daphne said, “Thank you, my Lord. That means a lot.”

“You’re welcome, Heiress Greengrass, Miss Davis,” Harry said, “Enjoy the rest of your evening.”

Daphne and Tracey grinned then stood and walked back toward the dance floor.

“That was very sweet of you, Harry,” Hermione said. “Very clever too.”

“Just doing my job as Leader of the Great Alliance,” Harry said, “I don’t want us to lose Heiress Greengrass and Miss Davis as future Voices. Daphne’s a good one, as I can already tell. She was the
leader of the Children before I took over. And she wouldn’t go anywhere without Tracey, it would
seem.”

“Very astute of you,” Hermione said, “So about those pictures of girls in bikinis… or worse?”

“Do you want to look through my post, or subject Dobby to naked human girls?” Harry asked.

Hermione chuckled. “Harry James! Come on! Just for that, we’re dancing again. I don’t care about
your poor feet!”

“As you wish, my beautiful Betrothed,” Harry said.

“Come on, Westley,” Hermione said, with a snort.

Harry’s confused expression caused Hermione to tell him about a Princess Bride as they performed
another slow dance. Afterward, she basically said she was going to make him watch the movie
during Christmas Break. Harry said he looked forward to it.

The pair continued dancing for another hour, before they took another break. This time, instead of
sitting at a table, they headed outside. The front doors stood open, and the fluttering fairy lights in the
rose garden winked and twinkled as they went down the front steps, where they found themselves
surrounded by bushes; winding, ornamental paths; and large stone statues. Harry could hear
splashing water, which sounded like a fountain. Here and there, people were sitting on carved
benches. They realized quickly this seemed to be the place for couples who wanted private time to
snog.

They sat down at one of the empty benches and cuddled. Harry was about to kiss her, when he heard
a scream. He and Hermione jumped up and grabbed their wands, then hurried toward the sounds of
the screaming. Angelina Johnson had her wand out and was pointing at a Stunned ginger-haired
body. Except it wasn’t George Weasley who was on the ground.

It was Ronald Weasley.

“Angelina?” Hermione asked, “What happened?”

“He… we were… kissing,” Angelina said, then she gagged, “and then he started choking and he fell
onto the ground. His body started changing and he turned into George’s brother!”

“Polyjuice Potion!” Harry said, then he caught Lee Jordan and Katie Bell nearby, “Where is Alicia?
I think Fred is Ginny!”

“They were… Fred, he –” Lee said, “He said he and Alicia were going to one of the carriages.
They’re a snogging place too.”

“Winky! Go find McGonagall!” Harry said, “Tell her what happened and bring her here!”

Winky appeared out of thin air, then bowed, then vanished.


Dobby appeared. He had the Marauder’s Map, which Harry had been about to ask for. Harry
thanked Dobby and took the map and opened it. He found Alicia Spinnet with Ginny Weasley
“Hermione, it is her!” Harry said.

“Let’s go find that bitch!” Hermione snarled.

Following the map, which had the grounds as well, Harry and Hermione hurried off toward the carriages. Soon, they were right by the right carriage. Harry pointed his wand at the door.

“Alohomora!” Harry growled.

The door opened and Alica and ‘Fred’ split apart, apparently they had been kissing.

“Alicia, that isn’t Fred, get out of the carriage!” Harry said.

“George was Ron Weasley!” Hermione said.

Alicia’s eyes widened and she scurried out of the carriage as Harry and Hermione pointed their wands at ‘Fred’.

“And this,” Hermione snarled, “is Ginny Weasley.”

“Moron forgot to take his next dose of Polyjuice Potion, did he?” Ginny asked.

“How are you here?” Harry asked.

“Don’t lie,” Hermione said, “Director Bones will find out anyway and she’ll tell us.”

“Bitch,” Ginny muttered.

“Who?” Hermione asked. “Me or Director Bones.”

“Both of you!” Ginny growled. “You and that Bones Bitch got my mother killed, Mudblood!”

“That’s Heiress Dagworth-Granger to you, Ginevra,” Hermione said, “Come on, Ginny. This might be the last time you ever speak to us. Don’t you want to scare us by telling us your big bad plan?”

“Would have worked if it wasn’t for the Moron!” Ginny said. “Found a few hidden doses of Sleeping Draught of Mum’s that the Aurors didn’t find when they arrested her. We slipped our brothers and Dad the Draughts in their tea yesterday at lunch, then we stole Dad’s money pouch and took a few of Fred and George’s hairs. We bought some Polyjuice Potion from Knockturn Alley, and dosed ourselves with Polyjuice and turned into our brothers then came here. Can you believe the wards here didn’t recognize us?”

“Why were you kissing Alicia?” Hermione asked.

Ginny shrugged. “Had to look the part, didn’t I? Make it believable. Besides, she’s pretty good looking. I was going to dump her in a bit – why should my brother have a beauty like her? Then I would go and find you.”

“Me?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, don’t worry, I wouldn’t kill you,” Ginny said, “There is a much worse pain than death, and I
wanted you to suffer it! I have lipstick I found in Knockturn Alley. If I kissed you, you’d be Stunned for a few hours. I’d tell Ron where to find you, so he could have his way with you. Then I’d use Polyjuice with your hair and spend some time with Harry. I’d convince him you wanted to give yourself to him and lie to him, say I was on the Contraceptive Draught. Oops… it turned out to be Fertility Draught. Common mistake!”

“STUPEFY!” Hermione growled.

Hermione’s Stunner was so powerful that Ginny crashed through the back doors of the carriage, which opened and made her Stunned body tumble out of the carriage. Harry and Hermione hurried over to Ginny, who was still unconscious.

“Dobby!” Harry said; Dobby appeared again. “Get McGonagall, and if she is still busy with Ron, get Pomona Sprout!”

Dobby disappeared, then appeared a moment later with Professor McGonagall. McGonagall looked at Harry and Hermione, then looked down at ‘Fred’. She pointed her wand at the unconscious form and said an enchantment. Fred’s body started writhing and shaking and Harry and Hermione’s eyes widened as his body soon turned into Ginny Weasley’s much smaller body.

“Ronald Weasley is unconscious and currently with Madam Pomfrey” McGonagall said, “Tell me what happened.”

Harry and Hermione started from the moment they heard Angelina screaming. Their story ended with them telling Ginny’s whole story and plan for them.

“Thank goodness Ronald was stupid enough not to take another dose of Polyjuice Potion,” McGonagall said, “Or Ginny’s plan might have worked. It was plausible and could have been well-planned out. I am going to have a word with Dumbledore after all the students are gone, about the wards around here. Ginny was right, from what you said she said. She and Ron shouldn’t have been able to get on the Grounds. We would have been alerted. And the Polyjuice Potion? We need to find a ward against that!”

“What’s going on here?” the voice of Alastor Moody asked.

“Alastor,” McGonagall greeted, “Ronald and Ginevra Weasley posing as their twin brothers – since yesterday. Fortunately, Ron Weasley was stupid doing his own part of the plan. They were using Polyjuice Potion. Fortunately, Angelina Johnson was able to stun Ronald, and Harry and Hermione took charge and Stunned Ginny. We need to find a Polyjuice Potion detector ward, Alastor! Know any?”

Professor Moody’s good eye widened. He then coughed and cleared his throat. “Well… well done, Lord Potter, Heiress Dagworth-Granger. Well done indeed! Sorry, Minerva, I do not. But I can go and do some research. I’ll let you take care of this then."

Professor Moody limped away.

“Expected him to say we did a good job at Constant Vigilance or something,” Hermione muttered.

“Mallory! Sadie!” McGonagall called.

The three house-elves appeared. “Mallory, I trust you have found Miss Bones, and requested her to
contact her Aunt, as I asked.”

“Yes, Mistress,” Mallory said.

“Sadie, did you find Percy Weasley?” McGonagall asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” Sadie said, “He be waiting for you in the Entrance Hall, as you commanded me to be asking him to do.”

“Good,” McGonagall said, “Bring this girl to the Hospital Wing, where you’ll find her brother, Ron, and Madam Pomfrey. Tell Madam Pomfrey you two are under my command to guard Ginny and Ron until Amelia Bones steps into the Hospital Wing.”

The two house-elves put their hands on Ginny’s body and vanished with her.

“Come, you two,” McGonagall said, “We’ll go back inside and meet with Percy Weasley and wait for Madam Bones. I imagine Sirius might come too, if he was with her when Susan called her.”

“I’d call him but I left my mirror in my Quarters!” Harry groaned, as they started off back toward the castle.

“Me too,” Hermione said, “I had no pockets to carry it. What’s your excuse, Harry?”

“I forgot,” Harry said, dully.

“I imagine the excitement of the night distracted you,” McGonagall said, “Next time you’ll remember.”

Harry and Hermione nodded. They made their way into the Entrance Hall, where Percy Weasley and Albus Dumbledore were waiting.

“What is going on, Minerva?” Dumbledore asked.

“Ronald and Ginny Weasley used Polyjuice to transform into their twin brothers and come here,” McGonagall said, “Percy, I need you to go home. I believe your family may be under the Potion influences similar to a coma-like state.”

Percy’s eyes widened. “I’ll go now! Thank you, Professor.”

“Percy?” McGonagall asked. “Your youngest siblings are likely going to Azkaban for this.”

“So be it,” Percy muttered.

He walked out of the front doors. McGonagall proceeded to tell Dumbledore the story Harry and Hermione had told her. Harry and Hermione commented when necessary.

“They have obviously been very foolish,” Dumbledore said, sighing, “Fortunately, none of their plans worked.”

“I doubt Ginny could have gotten close to Hermione or Harry, Albus,” McGonagall said. “I believe their Betrothal Rings used to belong to Fleamont and Euphemia Potter. Charlus Potter used to tell stories about how his mother was very good at enchanting Jewelry. I am sure their rings are very
well enchanted.”

“Euphemia was indeed a wonder at enchanting,” Dumbledore said. “Pardon me. I am going to see to
Ron and Ginny Weasley.

“No, Dumbledore, you are not,” the voice of Amelia Bones said.

Harry, Hermione, McGonagall and Dumbledore turned. Amelia Bones and Sirius Black walked into
the Entrance Hall, accompanied by Nymphadora Tonks and a tall dark-skinned Auror.

“I am,” Amelia said, “As the Weasleys are apparently your family friends, you are not welcomed
anywhere near them. You are considered too close to them. Of course, if you disagree, you can
accompany them to the DMLE Holding Cells and spend the night with them.”

Dumbledore frowned. “Minerva, please see to Director Bones and her business here. I am going
back into the Great Hall to make sure our students are behaving.”

“Of course, Albus,” McGonagall said. “Lord Potter and Heiress Dagworth-Granger will go back to
the Great Hall as soon as they give their statements to Director Bones. If they wish to, of course.”

Dumbledore nodded, then turned and walked into the Great Hall.

“Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks,” Amelia said, “Head up to the Hospital Wing and wait for me.”

“My two house-elves, Mallory and Sadie,” McGonagall said, “have been ordered to guard the two
Weasleys until Director Bones arrives.”

“Right,” Amelia said, “Don’t get near the prisoners until I arrive. Just make sure they remain where
they are.”

The Auror named Shacklebolt nodded and walked up the stairs, followed by Tonks, who winked at
Harry and Hermione when she passed by them.

“Thanks for the gift, Tonks!” Harry called after her. “I’ll definitely study it!”

Tonks turned back to Harry, winked and her nose turned bright red like Rudolph the Red-Nosed
Reindeer. Then she turned and followed the Senior Auror.

“Alright, you two,” Amelia said, pointing to Harry and Hermione, “You sound like you’re involved
in whatever happened here. Give me the whole story.”

Harry and Hermione repeated the same story they gave to McGonagall. Amelia looked pissed by the
time they were done.

“I’ll see those two in Azkaban!” Amelia growled. “Putting their family in a coma! Assuming their
brothers’ identities, to come here to rape students! And Ginevra planning to get impregnated?”

“Would snogging Fred and George’s dates be Sexual Assault?” Hermione asked.

“If I can wrangle it!” Amelia growled; then she sobered. “Thank you, you two. I am sorry you had to
be involved in more dramatics with those two. I was trying to arrange wards to be put on the
Burrow, to where Ron and Ginny couldn’t leave the premises. Would have been done by Sunday!
Merlin’s Mercy! This shows you how dangerous Potions are! Those two did all of this with Potions! Not with wands! And now it sounds like Dawlish didn’t do a thorough job! He’s going to get an earful!"

“Calm down, love,” Sirius said, “Get those two out of this castle and away from my godson and his Betrothed. You two! You’re going in the Great Hall, and dancing, and I am going to watch you so you don’t get in any more trouble!”

Harry and Hermione blushed. Amelia and McGonagall excused them and they went into the Great Hall, with Sirius following after them.

They spent the next two hours dancing, or sitting and talking with Sirius and the Children of the Great Alliance. They only left the Great Hall, when the majority of students were allowed to leave. By then, Ron and Ginny Weasley were already in the DMLE Holding Cells, the very same ones they had been in a week prior.

Before they went to bed, they dressed into their pyjamas, then went to the Private Common Room, where they would find out from talking to Sirius via mirror – who found out from Amelia – that Arthur, Bill, Charlie, Fred and George Weasley were now in St. Mungo’s Hospital awake and responsive, and being treated for being under the influence of Potions.

Harry and Hermione did not end up going back to their Quarters. They talked, cuddled, kissed and snogged.

Then they fell asleep in each other’s arms on a bed that had been transfigured by two happy House-Elves. Per Common Room enchantments, none of their pyjamas moved an inch.

End Of Book 1.

Chapter End Notes

And Book 1 ends with My. Longest. Chapter. Ever! So how did you like that finale for Book 1?

As I stated a few chapters ago, I will now take a bit of a hiatus. I am not abandoning this story. I am merely going to write some notes and plans, and an outline of the next several chapters, and also possibly going to get a backlog of chapters written. All while giving me a bit of breathing room so I do not have self-imposed deadlines. Did I say self-imposed deadline? I actually do have one! I tell you what! If I do not post a new chapter before June 1st, I will post the first chapter of Book 2 on June 1st. There… that gives you a rough idea of when Book 2 will begin!

One of two things were going to happen at the End of Book 1 when it came to action. Either the Ron and Ginny invasion, or Viktor Krum trying to grab Hermione to dance with her, and Hermione’s ring ejecting him across the dance floor. I decided the first, and couldn’t find a good place for the second. Viktor meeting Hermione’s ring might happen in Book 2. We’ll see.

Spoiler alert: Albus Dumbledore had NOTHING to do with Ron and Ginny’s plan. Ginny came up with it on her own.
Can you believe – before I changed my mind – that my original plans was to end Book 1 with a lime – not lemon - scene between Harry and Hermione? Which is basically why I introduced the Room of Requirement into the story in the first place! For them to have fun times in later! But I decided it will happen later on in the story, but it will be lemons not limes… okay maybe limes too. It will happen in Book 2. Not too early, though. Sorry.

Instead of a "Next Chapter" I will give you the summary of Book 2.

Book 2: Tournament Drama

The Yule Ball is over, but the Drama continues as the Triwizard Tournament comes back into focus. New problems arise, not just for our heroes, but for others, including the other Champions of the Triwizard Tournament.

Albus Dumbledore is still around, and plotting against Harry Potter and Hermione Granger, even though Amelia Bones is doing all she can to investigate him, before she can finally arrest him and bring him to justice – which she is restricted from doing until the Tournament ends.

But as the days, weeks and months pass and the Tournament continues, a Darkness is looming and coming ever closer, and the Tournament will come to a dramatic conclusion that brings forth new Drama in the lives of our heroes!

Unspeakables! Metamorphmagus and Animagus Training! Veela-Mermaid drama! A long awaited Wedding! Smut! Snape! Malfoy! Krum! And more… coming to you in Book 2: Tournament Drama!
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Chapter Notes

Welcome to the first chapter of Book 2! This chapter is nearly as long as Chapter 36! Speaking of Chapter 36, it is now the highest reviewed chapter in this story, with over 100 reviews on FFN! Once again, thank you to everyone who has reviewed this story! For information regarding future updates to this story, please read the "Important Note" in the Author's Note at the end of the chapter.

In Fleur Delacour's PoV, imagine the characters are speaking French. I didn't want to do accented and broken English.

Warning: Ginny and Ron Bashing. Not all warnings listed here. There are a couple I am not listing for shock factor alone. More info in bottom Chapter's Note.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#).

*(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 7:10 AM)*

Harry Potter opened his eyes and nearly jumped when he saw Hermione in his bed! He was about to ask her how and why he was in her Private Quarters, when it all came back to him. It was the morning after the Yule Ball, and he wasn’t in his bedroom in his Private Quarters. He and Hermione had fallen asleep, in the Private Common Room, on a bed, which had been transfigured from the two couches in the room, by Dobby and Winky. Hermione was currently sitting up against the backboard of the bed and smiling at him. She shoved his glasses in his hand, and he mumbled a thanks as he put
“Good morning,” Harry murmured, smiling at the perfect image of the angel next to him.

“Good morning,” Hermione said, “Do you know you look very adorable when you’re sleeping? You look so innocent and peaceful, like nothing in the world can bother you while you sleep.”

“That might be have been the best night of sleep I ever had,” Harry said.

“I hope so,” Hermione said, raising an eyebrow, “Given that I was sleeping in your arms. It was a wonderful night of sleep for me too.”

“I would give anything to be able to sleep beside you every night for the rest of my life and wake up like this,” Harry said.

Hermione smiled softly. “As much as I would love that, it would be impossible for now. But I do agree. I haven’t felt that wonderful sense of security while I slept since I was little and Mum and Dad let me sleep in their bed whenever I had nightmares, or I was afraid of particularly bad thunderstorms.”

Harry felt quite envious, more than he wanted to admit, that Hermione had been able to have such wonderful memories like that. He could remember when he’d wake up in his cupboard under the stairs, crying about nightmares – mostly involving bright green lights and cackling; when it wasn’t a nightmare about his relatives, that is – and nobody there to comfort him. If his relatives heard him crying, they would usually pound on the cupboard door with their fists, telling him to shut up. Or worse. He didn’t want to say anything like this to Hermione, so he said the first thing that came to mind.

“Well, I eagerly wait for the day where we’re not restricted from being able to sleep next to each other every night,” Harry said.

Hermione smiled, and leaned toward him and kissed him on the lips. But before he could do more than feel her lips linger on his, she backed away. She grabbed her wand from the coffee table that was near her side of the bed, and cast a ‘Tempus’ in the air.

“Seven-fifteen,” Hermione said, “We have to be in a carriage by half-past-nine. Do you want to ask Dobby and Winky to bring us breakfast here, or go down to the Great Hall?”

“If we go down to the Great Hall, we might be swamped with questions from everyone about what happened last night,” Harry said. “The only students we have told are the other Children, but I am sure the news about what happened last night with Ginny and Ron has gotten around the castle by now. I know we might have to deal with it on the train, but…”

“But it would be easier to avoid on the train,” Hermione said. “We also still need to pack.”

Harry’s eyes widened, and he chuckled. “You know what I didn’t realize until right now?”

“What?” Hermione asked.

“This is the first time I am leaving Hogwarts for a Break, before the final Leaving Feast of the year,” Harry said, “I have no idea what I am supposed to do here. Do you usually pack everything? Or just take a travel bag full of stuff?”
“Well, since we’re going back to my home, it is kind of different for you and me,” Hermione said. “I have clothes at home, so I don’t have to bring any home if I don’t want to. You, on the other hand…”

“I see what you mean,” Harry said. “Luckily I have that Undetectable Extension Bag I found in my Vault, so I don’t have to bring my trunk. I can bring the bag, and also a traveling bag too.”

“Why both?” Hermione asked.

“For the train ride,” Harry said. “I can put a few books in it, like the books I received for Christmas. I can do some reading on the train. You’re rubbing off on me – in more than one way, it seems.”

“Oh, you,” Hermione said, smiling, “How about this? We ask Dobby and Winky to fix this room back to the way it should be, and prepare us some breakfast. While they do that, we go back to our Quarters, and go through our morning routines. After breakfast, we can pack our things, and be on our way.”

“I like it,” Harry said, “Dobby! Winky!”

The two house-elves appeared.

“Thank you both for making this bed for us last night,” Harry said. “We’re going to go do our morning routines. Can you fix this room and prepare us breakfast here in the Common Room for us?”

“Yes, Great Harry Potter!” Dobby said, happily.

“We be happy to do this!” Winky said.

“Thank you, both,” Harry said; Hermione thanked the elves as well.

The couple got out of bed, left the Common Room and returned to their own Quarters. Half-an-hour later, after their morning ablutions were finished, they were back in the Private Common Room, dressed in a warm outfit that was comfortable for the long train ride.

As promised, the two house-elves had an assortment of breakfast foods, with jugs of water and orange juice, waiting for them on the table between the two couches, which were back to normal.

“Harry?” Hermione asked, as they began eating. “How much casual Muggle clothing do you own?”

“Not much, if I don’t count the stuff I wore at my relatives’ house,” Harry said, “Why?”

“Well, I was already considering asking my parents to take you shopping for a new formal outfit,” Hermione said. “You see, on New Year’s Eve, my parents and I – when I am home, that is – attend a New Year’s Eve party that is hosted by some of my parents’ friends.”

“I remember you mentioning that during our first dancing lesson with Professor McGonagall,” Harry said. “I also remember you mentioned dancing with other boys.”

“Yes, well, now I have a date this year,” Hermione said. “Which means my parents are definitely planning on taking us to the New Year’s Eve party, just so they can introduce their daughter’s new
“My mother’s a bit of a gossip about me when it comes to her friends,” Hermione said. “Obviously, she can’t tell her friends about my education and stuff. But this…. you, being my boyfriend, is something she can talk about.”

“Well, this New Year’s Eve Party does sound fun,” Harry said, “And it gives us another chance to show off our dancing skills. Especially if it means I can show off those talents with you in front of all those boys you used to dance with. These boys will be there, won’t there?”

“Maybe,” Hermione said, “But I’m not going to dance with any of them, of course. So don’t go start getting jealous and possessive.”

“Jealous, no,” Harry said, “Possessive, though? You’re my Betrothed. The future Lady Potter. The future mother of my Quidditch team full of children. I think I have a right to be a bit possessive.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Fine… be possessive, but not overly so. To these people, you’re just my boyfriend. They can’t know we’re Betrothed, or that we’re of noble peerage.”

“Fine,” Harry said. “I won’t be too possessive. I’ll just make sure no other boy believes you’re available for them to dance with.”

“I am quite sure you don’t have to worry about that,” Hermione said, “But we’ve gone off topic. You need a new formal outfit for the party. You also need a new wardrobe of clothing… Muggle clothing. Winter and Spring for now. Clothing you can wear when you’re not wearing your school outfits. We can do Summer shopping when we return to England at the end of June.”

“Alright,” Harry said. “When we go shopping, I can get Dobby to transfer some of my Galleons into Muggle money.”

Hermione agreed with this. Suddenly, Harry felt a vibration in the pocket of his jeans, and realized it was the mirror Sirius had given him. He removed the compact mirror from his pocket, and opened it. Sirius’ face was in the mirror.

“Good morning, Sirius,” Harry said, “Hang on a moment, Hermione’s with me. We’re in the Private Common Room.”

Sirius merely nodded. Harry stood and placed the mirror on the couch on the other side of the table, then made it grow bigger. Then he sat back down on the couch.

“Good morning, Sirius,” Hermione said, “Something come up you couldn’t tell us last night?”

“Good morning, you two,” Sirius said, “Yes, it did. Have you read today’s edition of the Daily Prophet yet?”

“Hasn’t arrived yet,” Harry said.

“Then you haven’t heard,” Sirius said. “Bartemius Crouch – one of the Triwizard Tournament judges – was found dead in his home last night.”
“Oh, Merlin, how horrible!” Hermione gasped.

Harry frowned. “Any word on cause of death?”

“Not yet,” Sirius said, “But between Ronald and Ginevra Weasley, and now Crouch’s death, Amelia is going to be very busy today. Therefore I am going to be meeting Susan at Platform Nine and Three Quarters and taking her back to Bones Manor. Amelia’s speaking to Susan now about this.”

Harry nodded. Having met Sirius twice – in Hogsmeade celebrating Sirius and Amelia’s engagement, and at the Yule Ball the previous evening – Susan was quite familiar with Sirius now. In fact, she had gotten to know her soon-to-be Uncle better when she was taking breaks from dancing with her boyfriend, Terry Boot.

“Well, since you’re going to be there,” Hermione said, “We can introduce you to my parents on the Platform too then.”

“I’d be happy to meet my godson’s future in-laws!” Sirius said, grinning, making Harry and Hermione blush.

“Please don’t embarrass me in front of Hermione and her parents,” Harry said.

“I will be a perfectly serious godfather,” Sirius said, “Or is that Sirius godfather?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “So did Amelia talk to Ron and Ginny last night?”

“Nah, she didn’t want those two ruining the rest of our Christmas,” Sirius said, “It didn’t start off so bad, don’t get me wrong. We celebrated at a fancy Muggle restaurant. Thankfully we were able to get through the meal, before Susan contacted Amelia. Anyway, Amelia will interrogate them today when she’s not investigating Crouch’s death. She did tell me that Ron and Ginny are definitely having a trial this time, and that there is a possibly you two will have to be witnesses.”

“I suppose this will happen before we come back to Hogwarts?” Hermione asked.

“Very likely,” Sirius said.

“We’ll let my parents know,” Hermione said. “Just keep us up-to-date.”

“Right, speaking of your parents, Hermione,” Sirius said. “When I heard you and Harry were spending a week at your parents, I got to talking to Amelia about it. We believe that you should hire Gringotts to place some protective wards on your parents’ residence. As you are the Heiress of a Noble House, you have that right.”

“I live in the middle of a Muggle neighborhood, Sirius,” Hermione said.

“No big deal,” Sirius said, “Gringotts will be able to put wards on your house anytime – even overnight – without any Muggles knowing.”

“We can speak to Keeper Ragnok about it, and see what he suggests,” Harry suggested to Hermione.

Hermione nodded. “We’re already planning on doing some shopping in Muggle areas. We can go to Diagon Alley on the same day.”
“Muggle shopping?” Sirius asked, interested.

Sirius’ interest piqued when Hermione explained about the New Year’s Eve party they would likely be attending, and the need for Harry to get a formal outfit for the party.

“So we’re making a whole shopping trip out of it and getting some Muggle winter and spring clothing for Harry too,” Hermione finished.

“Sounds fun!” Sirius said, “I’m sure you’ll enjoy yourselves, and it will give you some good practice when it comes to social parties you’ll attend in magical society.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

“Oh, yes,” Sirius said, “Maybe even as soon as next summer. Hell, you’ve already decided to return to Potter Manor next summer right?”

“I was thinking I might check it out during Easter Break,” Harry said, “When we’re not busy with your wedding.”

Sirius nodded. “A fine suggestion. Means you can have it ready to move into by this summer.”

“True,” Harry said.

“Well, that is all on my end,” Sirius said, “I know you probably need to get ready to get onto the Hogwarts Express. So I’ll see you tonight at the train station.”

“Thanks for letting us know about Mr. Crouch,” Harry said.

Sirius grimaced. “I might not have liked the man. But I didn’t want to see him dead. He’s the last of the Crouches.”

“No children?” Hermione asked.

“Bartemius Crouch, Junior,” Sirius said, grimacing. “Was a Death Eater. One of the Death Eaters who attacked the Longbottoms a few days after that Halloween. He was in Azkaban, a few cells away from me. He never left.”

“You mean he’s dead?” Harry asked.

“Yeah,” Sirius said, “Died in his cell. Not surprising. If you’re weak-minded like he was, you don’t last long in Azkaban, especially from Dementor Exposure. Better death though when compared to those who live in Azkaban for a long time. They go mad. Insane. Worse than they were when they entered. You heard what it did to me, and I knew I was innocent. Padfoot helped me a lot too. Anyway, ol’ Bartemius’ wife died around the same time. She was quite ill, as I hear it. And now ol’ Bartemius is dead too. End of another Noble House, though in truth it was dead when the son went to Azkaban. Senior wasn’t going to take another wife after his own wife died. Even if it meant the end of his House. Such a shame.”

“That’s so horrible,” Hermione said. “Even if the son was a Death Eater. The end of a House is so terrible.”

“Happened a lot during the last war too,” Sirius said, nodding, then snorted, “Ironic, when you think
about it, given that it was Voldemort who was mostly responsible for it all. Can’t believe the Death Eaters were so supportive of what that bastard was doing, since prime Pureblood families were dying out, even if they were ‘blood traitors’.

“Surely they must have realized what they were doing?” Hermione asked.

“Of course, they did,” Sirius said, “But Voldemort’s influence was too great. Mostly, I suspect they were too afraid of him once they realized what was happening, and then it was too late for them to back out. You don’t stop being a Death Eater. You’re in for life – whether it be a short one or a long one. Well, with that grim thought, I must be off.”

“We’ll see you tonight, Sirius,” Harry said.

The three said their farewells, and Sirius disappeared from the mirror.

“I hope he doesn’t embarrass us – or himself – when I introduce him to your parents,” Harry said, grinning.

“Knowing Sirius, that is exactly what is going to happen,” Hermione said, smiling. “Just to make a good first impression or something.”

“And this is probably going to be right after you formally introduce me as your boyfriend and Betrothed to your parents,” Harry said, “And you wonder why I am so nervous about the entire thing?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It will be just fine, Harry. Mum will love you. Dad might try to do his whole ‘tough-father-meets-daughter’s-new-beau’ routine, but I imagine Mum has already predicted such a thing and has warned him off. It won’t be as bad as you think it will. Especially as you are spending the next week with us. I doubt Dad wants you to be terrified of him during the next week. Unless…”

“Unless what?” Harry asked warily.

“Unless he plans to use that as a way to keep us from snogging too much over the next week,” Hermione said, then she shrugged. “It is possible. Just be polite and on your best behavior, and by the time he’s saying goodbye to us when we have to get back on the Hogwarts Express, he’ll have no choice but to realize you are the perfect candidate for my future husband.”

“Yes, dear,” Harry said smiling.

Hermione smiled and gave him a peck on the lips. The pair continued eating their breakfast and talking about inconsequential things as they ate. When they were finished, they returned to their Quarters to pack their belongings that they wanted to bring with them.

As he packed, he once again couldn’t help but think about how strange it was that he was leaving Hogwarts for Christmas Break, whether shortened or not. The thought that he had someone to spend Christmas Break with, away from Hogwarts, made him smile all throughout the time it took for him to pack his belongings.

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 10:30 AM)
Harry and Hermione were relaxing on separate seats in the same carriage of the Hogwarts Express, as the train made its way down the tracks on its long journey toward London. Hermione was reading through a copy of the Daily Prophet, and Harry was reading through the “Legends of the Magical World” book Hermione had given him for Christmas.

They were the only two occupants currently in the carriage, though a few of their friends had come by already, and more were expected during the long ride to London. Harry and Hermione just hoped Draco Malfoy decided not to have his ‘traditional’ visit he usually did with his minions during every train ride.

Earlier, Neville, Luna, Padma and Ivan had come by, curious as to why they had not come to the Great Hall that morning for breakfast. Their fellow Children were all understanding when Harry and Hermione explained why. They also confirmed that the news about what happened with Ginny and Ron Weasley had indeed gotten out around the castle.

Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet had also come by and had thanked Harry and Hermione for helping them the previous evening. The girls said they had planned to get in contact with Fred and George Weasley within the next few days to make sure the Weasley twins – and their brothers – were alright. Harry and Hermione asked the girls – if they did see the twins – to give them their best wishes, and that they hoped the twins returned to Hogwarts at the beginning of the new term. Angelina and Alicia promised to pass on their wishes, then thanked them again and left them alone.

Hermione’s huff of annoyance made Harry look up from the chapter on Shadow Panthers he was reading.

“‘There’s absolutely nothing in here about the incident with Ginny and Ron,’” Hermione said, “nor with their father and brothers. There’s a whole lot of talk about the rest of the happenings at the Yule Ball. We star in a lot of it. There are even a lot of images of us, along with the other Champions, and everyone else. But… you’d think…”

“We were in the center of what happened to Ginny and Ron,” Harry said, “And since it involves me, it would be something that someone would report, even if it wasn’t Rita Skeeter. Do you think Dumbledore somehow stopped the media from reporting anything about it?”

“It is possible,” Hermione said, “Either that or – well, maybe Amelia or someone else at the DMLE is stopping them. Ron and Ginny are minors, after all. I don’t recall reading anything about their other arrest in the Daily Prophet either, do you?”

Harry shook his head. “No, there was something about their mother, but not them.”

“Maybe it is because they’re minors,” Hermione said, “and something like this can’t be reported without express permission from… well, either the DMLE, or the parents and guardians… or both? It is different than gossip about us being a couple and stuff. This is more serious.”

“True,” Harry said. “Hermione? Do you think Ron and Ginny will end up in Azkaban this time?”

“Yes,” Hermione said. “Their mother isn’t around any longer to make deals for them. Dumbledore won’t dare make a deal with Amelia, given her interest in him. They’ll be going to trial, and will likely end up in the Minimum Security cells of Azkaban where the Dementors don’t venture. I read about Azkaban Prison after Sirius escaped, and it said the Minimum Security cells – cells not guarded by Dementors -- are used for the less dangerous prisoners. They’re just guarded by wizards
and witches specifically trained for that role.”

“I suppose they should consider themselves lucky they won’t be in the cells near the Death Eaters, where Sirius was,” Harry said, “And as Sirius said, we’ll probably have to be witnesses at their trial.”

“Good,” Hermione huffed. “They were planning on raping us, and Ginny tricking you into impregnating her. They deserve Azkaban, and we deserve to be part of the reason they’re put there! We deserve to be done with them, Harry.”

Harry smiled at the passion in his girlfriend’s voice. “Yes, love. I completely agree. We were completely wrong about them, weren’t we?”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“The first time we spoke about them to Amelia,” Harry said, “We said they were pawns. Willing pawns, but pawns just the same.”

“They were pawns when their mother was still alive,” Hermione said, “Ginny took her place, it seems. Ron still seems to be a pawn, the way Ginny spoke of him. A willing pawn. The bastard willingly went along with everything, just so he could rape me.”

“Hey,” Harry said, “Don’t think like that. It didn’t happen, alright?”

Hermione smiled and nodded. “I know, Harry. It’s just… a girl’s first time is supposed to mean something, you know. He would have taken that from me. From us, really. Bastard deserves everything he is getting for even thinking of doing that to me.”

“I completely agree,” Harry said.

“Harry?” Hermione asked. “Even if they were simply posing as our friends for their own endgame or not, Ron and Ginny were still our friends for a while. I cared about them in one way or another. Which means, I’m probably going to need a good cry after they end up in Azkaban. I might hate them now, but… we still had some good times with them, you know? The Quidditch World Cup was great, aside from the riots. We had fun with them. I want to remember them like that. I am probably going to cry for that Ron and Ginny, the friends we thought we had. Not for those monsters we’ll never see again.”

“You’re a good person, Hermione,” Harry said, “Not very many people would want to think about the good in a person who did so much bad to them. And if you need a good cry, I’ll be a shoulder for you to cry on. And anything else you need me to be. I promise.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Hermione said. “You are the greatest and sweetest boyfriend in the world. No matter what my father might think.”

Harry laughed, and returned to his reading. He didn’t know when he was going to be able to complete his Animagus transformation, but he was looking forward to it. Everything he read about Shadow Panthers told him he was going to have a lot of fun as an Animagus. Especially if he could do everything one of these beasts of legend could do!

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 11:15 AM)
Director Amelia Bones stared in disbelief at the piece of parchment in front of her. It was the initial results of the investigation surrounding the death of Bartemius Crouch.

“Cause of death,” Amelia said, “Shock resulting from an empty magical core, leading to his body shutting down completely. Well, I’ll be buggered!”

“Pardon?” Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Senior Auror who had delivered the results of the investigation to Amelia himself, asked.

“It would seem that Albus Dumbledore knew what he was talking about,” Amelia muttered. “The reason I cannot tell you and a group of Aurors to march to Hogwarts now and arrest Dumbledore, is because he got a brief pardon from Minister Fudge. The pardon lasts through the end of the Triwizard Tournament, apparently because if Dumbledore isn’t involved in the running of the Tournament, if he doesn’t turn up at a Tournament event as a judge, or official representative, if he misses important meetings preparing for certain parts of the Tournament, the Goblet of Fire – a representative of magic -- could cause him to break whatever vow is binding him to the Contract. He would lose his magic, and very likely die because of it.”

“And this is what happened to Crouch?” Shacklebolt asked.

“It would seem so,” Amelia said. “He didn’t show up at the Yule Ball last night, and magic saw that as him breaking the Contract.”

“Even though he was ill?” Shacklebolt asked. “He was taking sick days off until the new year.”

“Maybe it was already affecting him,” Amelia said, “Giving him some kind of warning. Maybe that is how the Contract works. That settles it then. Bartemius Crouch’s cause of death is a broken Vow.”

Amelia Bones could not believe it. She had been spending days trying to figure out how to circumvent Albus’ temporary pardon, trying to prove that Dumbledore was lying. And apparently, here was proof that the bastard actually might have been telling the truth!

“There was nothing suspicious found at the scene?” Amelia asked. “No signs of intruders? Nothing like that?”

“No, boss,” Shacklebolt said, “His assistant Percy Weasley was reported to have found his dead body. He had gone to Crouch’s residence after making sure his family was okay and safe in St. Mungo’s. He says he wanted to give Crouch a Christmas gift, and found the man dead in a chair in his sitting room. Weasley then alerted the proper authorities. Weasley was the only known witness, and had a solid alibi. Why do you ask?”

“My initial belief was he was murdered by whoever cast the Dark Mark at the Quidditch World Cup Campgrounds last summer,” Amelia said. “After all, it was Crouch’s old house-elf that had apparently stolen the wand that cast the Mark.”

“What happened to the elf?” Shacklebolt asked.

“Crouch dismissed it,” Amelia said, “I don’t know where it is now. I can’t even remember the elf’s name – or gender. I don’t even recall who owned the wand that was stolen. There wasn’t any Aurors on the actual scene, so there were no reports.”
“Auror Scrimgeour is still a bit displeased with that whole fiasco,” Shacklebolt said. “Any Aurors on the scene were too busy looking for the rioters, while the rest of the Ministry representatives on the scene went to where the Dark Mark was. Even with all the Aurors there, none of the culprits of the riot have been apprehended. Not a one.”

“Yes, I am aware of this, thank you, Auror Shacklebolt,” Amelia said.

She didn’t need to be reminded that the culprits in the riot, and the culprit who cast the Dark Mark, were still out there somewhere. It was still considered an open case.

“Thank you for this report, Senior Auror Shacklebolt,” Amelia said “I have another job for you. Please escort Ronald and Ginevra Weasley to two separate, and neighboring, interrogation rooms. I am going to speak to them soon, and you are going to be assisting me. I will meet you there. I assume Rookie Auror Tonks is on duty today?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Shacklebolt said. “She had the last two days off, and came back today.”

“Have her assist you,” Amelia said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Shacklebolt said. “By your leave.”

Amelia nodded, and her gaze dropped back down to the parchment, as Shacklebolt left the room.

“Why does this seem a little too convenient?” Amelia muttered, as she rubbed her forehead; then she shook her head. “No, Bones, do not go there. Not everything leads to Albus Dumbledore. Broken Vows have happened before. Death by Unbreakable Vow is one of the top ten leading causes of death amongst magic users.

“Crouch missed the Yule Ball, a scheduled and traditional event of the Triwizard Tournament. It wasn’t as if the Ball was pulled out of a hat of suggestions for the Tournament. This was an event that happened with every Triwizard Tournament. The Goblet of Fire – a representative of magic – decided Crouch had broken the Vow he made. Ergo, he died due to a broken Vow.”

Amelia snorted. “Technically, it could be called suicide. After all, if Crouch hadn’t been one of the fools to bring back this cursed Tournament, then he wouldn’t have lost his life last night. Also, his illness could be argued as a way to warn him to keep to the Vow, and he ignored it.”

Deciding she would come back to this later, she placed the parchment back in the folder it had come from. She placed it in one of her desk drawers, which were enchanted so only she could open them, and stood up. She made her way out of her office, and passed the vacant desk of her secretary Samantha. Samantha was not at work today – having had the last couple of days off for Christmas. She wondered if Samantha was spending time with her girlfriend, Isabella, and hoped – whatever the girl was doing – she was having a lot more fun than Amelia currently was.

Amelia had been having a very enjoyable evening the night before, with her fiancée Sirius Black. Sirius had taken her out to a very fancy Muggle restaurant for dinner the previous evening. Even though it had been Christmas, the restaurant was open and packed with patrons who had decided to celebrate the holiday the same way she and Sirius did – with a romantic dinner.

Luckily, Amelia and Sirius had been able to finish dinner before her niece, Susan, had mirror-called her saying there was an emergency at Hogwarts. Amelia had contacted Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks, then she and Sirius had headed off to Hogwarts last night. She couldn’t believe it when she
heard Ron and Ginny Weasley had invaded Hogwarts, trying to target Harry Potter and Hermione Granger again. They had used Polyjuice Potion, impersonating their twin brothers, Fred and George, and had been able to remain as the twins for well over twenty-four hours, using multiple doses of Polyjuice Potion.

Arthur, Bill, Charlie, Fred and George Weasley were still in St. Mungo’s recovering from the ordeal of being in a brief coma-like state from a mixture of overly strong Sleeping Draughts among other things. Muriel Prewett had been ill for a few days – apparently nothing to do with Ron and Ginny, and more due to grief over the loss of her great-niece – so she hadn’t attended the Christmas celebrations at the Burrow. Lucky for her, or she might have been dosed with the Draught as well. And with her being around one-hundred years old, who knows whether or not she might have survived from the dose of Draught mixture!

These thoughts, and others, ran through her mind as she made her way toward the Interrogation Rooms. When she arrived, she found Auror Shacklebolt, Rookie Auror Tonks, and a couple other Rookies -- whom she was hard-pressed to remember their names – standing near two of the Interrogation Rooms. Through the one-sided glass windows, Amelia could see Ginny Weasley sitting at a table in one room, and her brother, Ron, sitting at a table in another room.

“They say anything yet?” Amelia asked.

“Ronald said he was hungry, but he was given breakfast a couple hours ago,” Shacklebolt said.

“Ginevra kept muttering on about how she couldn’t believe she had done it for nothing,” Tonks said, “I have no idea what she was talking about. I thought it was the whole Polyjuice Potion thing, or maybe poisoning her family, but I don’t know.”

“I suppose that will be something I’ll ask her then,” Amelia said, “We’ll speak to her first. Aurors Shacklebolt, Tonks, you’re coming in with me. You two –” she nodded to the other two Rookies, “—stay out here and make sure Ronald Weasley doesn’t do anything stupid.”

“Yes, ma’am,” “Yes, boss,” the two Rookies said, clearly.

Amelia led Shacklebolt and Tonks inside Ginny’s interrogation room. Auror Tonks walked over to the wall behind Ginny and stood there, while Auror Shacklebolt stood at the door.

Amelia placed a large bag on the table and opened it. She removed her notepad, a roll of parchment, and Dictation Quills with Self-Inking Charms. She set the Quill on top of the parchment.

“Test,” she said clearly.

When the Quill confirmed it was working, Amelia vanished the word with her wand. Amelia removed her pocket-watch from her pocket and opened it up, then glanced at it.

“It is eleven thirty-five in the morning of the twenty-sixth of December in the year nineteen hundred and ninety-four,” Amelia said. “Interrogation Room B. Interrogator: Director Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Prisoner is Ginevra Molly Weasley – also known as Ginny -- of the Minor House of Weasley. Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt and Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks –” Tonks winced at the mention of her first name, “-- are witnesses of the Interrogation.

“Miss Weasley. Your mother’s not here to make a deal, so –”
“No, she’s not, is she?” Ginny muttered, staring at Amelia. “She’s not here. She’s dead, because of you. She wouldn’t have been in that Courtroom, she wouldn’t have been hit with a Killing Curse, if you didn’t arrest her.”

“Miss Weasley, I am truly sorry for your mother’s death,” Amelia said. “We’re still trying to figure out what happened that day. However, she was breaking the law, so I had no other choice but to arrest her. As I was saying, however. She’s not here to make a deal for you. So you’re probably going to end up in Azkaban, right along with your brother. Where, in Azkaban, you end up, however, is entirely your choice. Be it the maximum security cells near the convicted Death Eaters —”


Amelia ignored her. Not even the mention of her niece would make her lose her nerve.

“Be it in the maximum security cells, or in the minimum security cells,” she continued, “where only Auror guards make the rounds, and you feel very little of the Dementor Exposure. If I have to force you to take Veritaserum, Miss Weasley, the chance of you occupying a cell near Death Eaters goes up. Alright?”

“It isn’t like I have a choice,” Ginny said, dully. “I’ve already explained my plans to Harry and his Mudblood whore. I am sure they’re going to be witnesses at mine and my brother’s trial. So at least I’ll get to see my Harry one last time, while he betrays me for a life with that bitch who doesn’t deserve him.”

“I don’t think you told them everything last night, Miss Weasley,” Amelia said. “But you’re going to tell me. For example, my Aurors tell me you were talking to yourself earlier. You were saying something about how you had done it for nothing. Done what? Poison your brothers and father? Impersonate your brothers?”

“I am sure you’re wondering how Ron and I were able to convince everyone in Hogwarts we were Fred and George, for twenty four hours,” Ginny said. “How we even convinced their girlfriends. While I was putting together my plan to impersonate my brothers, I overheard Fred and George bragging to Bill and Charlie about their girlfriends.”

“Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet,” Amelia said.

“Whatever,” Ginny said. “I had no idea the girls were their girlfriends. I thought they were just their dates to the Yule Ball. My brothers bragged about how they impressed their girlfriends with their snogging skills. Whatever rumors and gossip you might have heard about me being sexually active, or a whore, or whatever, at Hogwarts, I’ll tell you this. None of it is true. I had never even been kissed.”

“Had?” Amelia asked.

Ginny glared at her. “Obviously, my kissing abilities needed to be up to par. As did Ron’s. The moron had been dreaming and wanking off to the thought of kissing the Mudblood, but he didn’t
have any idea how to kiss anyone either.”

Tonks snickered behind Ginny and Amelia looked up at her.

“Do you have something to say, Rookie Auror Tonks?” Amelia asked.

“I believe what the prisoner is saying is that, in order to make it convincing that she and her brother were actually her twin brothers,” Tonks said, “She and her brother had to... practice their kissing skills, since it was apparent they would have to kiss their brothers’ girlfriends. I believe the prisoner, here, had to practice kissing with her brother, Ron, so as make sure they could do it right.”

Amelia raised her eyebrow and looked at Ginny, who was looking rather green in the metaphorical gills.

“Is this true, Miss Weasley?” Amelia asked. “Did you have to practice kissing with your brother, Ron, in order to make it convincing when you had to – as your twin brothers – kiss their respective girlfriends?”

“Yes,” Ginny growled. “It is true, no matter how much I might regret doing it. I had to do it, because I needed to be able to kiss well enough to fool Spinet. You can’t imagine what it is like having to kiss your brother. Especially someone like the Moron. His breath was horrible. He was horrible at kissing. It took forever for him to figure out how to do it convincingly enough. We must have kissed several dozen times for him to get it right. Frankly, I am surprised – and impressed – he was able to convince Johnson. She must be a dunderhead. Either that, or Fred isn’t as good a kisser as he bragged he is. Course the Moron had to mess the entire thing up.”

“According to what you told Lord Harry Potter and Heiress Hermione Granger,” Amelia said, “You were planning for Ron to sexually assault and rape Hermione while she was knocked out from – a dosed lipstick, was it? Is this true?”

“Yes,” Ginny said, “The Mudblood would have deserved it. She is a whore, and believe me, she was begging for it. Ron was just too stupid to realize what she wanted from him. And I can hear the question you haven’t asked me. No, I did not do something like that with him to make sure he knew what he was doing.”

“Why not?” Amelia asked, “you were planning on doing the same to Lord Potter. You practiced kissing. Why not this? If you believe Hermione Granger is a whore as you say, surely she must have some experience with sex. Didn’t you believe you needed to be experienced too, to impersonate her well enough?”

“I wasn’t going to shag my brother – I wasn’t going to go that far,” Ginny said. “Besides, Lord Potter’s a virgin. He wouldn’t have realized whether or not I was experienced. All that mattered was that he finished inside me while I was dosed on the Fertility Draught.”

Amelia spent the next several minutes asking questions and getting answers from the girl. Much to Amelia’s surprise, Ginny didn’t need Veritaserum to admit everything. She must have realized it was inevitable that she’d be going to Azkaban, and didn’t want to end up near a cell near the Death Eaters.

Amelia was surprised by how Ginny and Ron dealt with the complexity of the plan. They didn’t use magic or wands – even though they had taken Fred and George’s wands to make their impersonations look more convincing. They didn’t know what kind of magic they could pull off with
four bindings on their core. So they simply used Potions – which they had found in a hidden cupboard of their mother’s, that John Dawlish hadn’t found through the first sweep through the Burrow. What Potions their mother didn’t have, they bought in Knockturn Alley with money from the moneybags they stole from their father and eldest brothers.

As they didn’t dare sleep in Fred and George’s dormitory, where Lee Jordan might find them in their normal appearances, they spent the night of Christmas Eve in one of the Prefect Bathrooms, sleeping on the cold tile floor. Ginny went green in the gills again, as she described remembering waking up to Ron spooning her for warmth, his arms wrapped around her waist and feeling his ‘morning wand’ – as she called it -- against her bum, through their clothing.

“You wanted me to be thorough, didn’t you?” Ginny asked, after mentioning that part, “There you go. Fred and George’s friends didn’t notice anything wrong with us. I suspect they blamed our behavior on the grief we were still experiencing over our mother’s death.”

Amelia nodded. She could understand that. Grief made everyone act uncharacteristic of themselves.

“How were you able to use Polyjuice Potion – every hour – without anyone noticing anything was off?” Amelia asked.

“Ron and I explained that we had hit each other with experimental prank charms we had created,” Ginny said. “My idea. Anyway, the ‘prank charm’ made us have to pee constantly. So if we wound up going into a bathroom randomly to take the Potion, we had an excuse.”

“So why did Ron miss his last dose?” Amelia asked. “If you had such a good plan?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Ginny asked. “Moron got caught up in snogging a girl who was willing to snog him. He was enjoying himself too much. I also imagine he was thinking about what he’d be doing later with the Mudblood – if our plan had worked – and he had gotten distracted by everything. So he was in the middle of snogging Johnson, when the Polyjuice wore off, and the idiot ruined our plan.”

“Your plan wouldn’t have worked, Miss Weasley,” Amelia said. “It would have gone downhill the moment you tried to kiss Heiress Granger using that lipstick. She has a Betrothal Ring on her finger that stuns anyone – who isn’t her Betrothed -- who tries to touch her.”

Ginny snorted. “The Betrothal Contract. That is what made me do it all, you know? Seeing Rita Skeeter’s article about Harry’s Betrothal Contract with the Mudblood. That stupid Proviso about nefarious influences, and needing to be checked with Goblin Healers, before they could break the Contract. That is why I planned to impersonate the Mudblood and end up pregnant with Potter’s baby. Why I planned for Ron to rape her.”

“You wanted to ruin them both when it came to intimacy,” Amelia said, “While also getting your wish of becoming pregnant with Lord Potter’s Heir. You believed their love wouldn’t last after something like this.”

“I wanted what was owed to me!” Ginny growled. “What was promised to me since I was a little girl! I was supposed to be Lady Potter! The wife of the Boy-Who-Lived. The Mudblood stole him from me! She insinuated I was a whore! I wanted to punish them both, but especially that dirty-blooded bitch! You believe she is an Heiress! Are you stupid?! She manipulated the Goblins, just like she manipulated my Harry! How can a Mudblood be an Heiress?!”
“Thank you, Miss Weasley,” Amelia said, “Interrogation complete… for now. I’ll speak to you again after you calm down. Auror Shacklebolt, Auror Tonks, we can leave now. She can remain here for a little while, so she can cool off.”

Ginny was glaring at Amelia, but she didn’t say anything else. She merely watched as Amelia, Shacklebolt and Tonks left the room.

“That girl is grade-A mental, Boss,” Tonks said. “I’m not sure whether or not we can blame it on her mother anymore. She definitely deserves to go to Azkaban, however. If she gets another chance at Lord Potter and his Betrothed, something bad might happen before it can be stopped.”

“I agree with the Rookie, boss,” Shacklebolt said.

“Yes,” Amelia said, “I’m in complete agreement as well. Come on, then. While I doubt we’re going to get anything new from Ron that his sister hasn’t told us yet, I still need to speak to him.”

She was right. She got nothing new from Ronald Weasley except for the fact that he was hungry. Again.

She stepped back into her office ten minutes after she finished her very brief interrogation with the youngest Weasley son. Ronald and Ginevra were still sitting in the Interrogation Rooms cooling off before they would return to their Holding Cells.

As she walked over to her desk, she saw a small piece of parchment in the center of it that hadn’t been there before. She recognized the signs of a Notice-Me-Not Enchantment on it, but it was apparently directed to anyone that wasn’t her. Even then, she waved her wand over the parchment. Samantha wasn’t on duty today, but obviously someone had gotten into her office and placed this piece of parchment here. So it was more than suspicious. She didn’t find any enchantments on it besides the Notice-Me-Not that apparently everyone but her was subject to. The letter was obviously meant for her eyes only.

She sat down at her desk and picked up the parchment then read its contents.

_Bones,_

_I know what you want to talk to me about. You have my permission. If you can get Lord Potter to the Ministry on Monday, you can bring him to the Department of Mysteries, so he can retrieve his property from the Hall of Prophecies._

_Maybe Potter should be here for a different reason altogether, so he isn’t just here to go to the Department of Mysteries – which might make people suspicious. How about a trial in which he is a witness, hmm?_

_See you on Monday,_

_Toad_

Amelia raised an eyebrow. Toad. The Unspeakable code-name for Algernon Croaker. She had been trying to get in contact with the Unspeakable for the past few days, so she could speak to him about the Hall of Prophecies and Harry Potter. There was a Prophecy directed at Lord Potter, and she needed to schedule a day when Lord Potter could remove it from the Hall of Prophecies, so others couldn’t do it.
Amelia snorted. “You don’t need to give me such an dragon-sized hint, Toad. Ronald and Ginevra Weasley will have a trial on Monday. I’ll ask Lord Potter and his Betrothed to be witnesses. After the trial, I’ll take Potter to the Department of Mysteries. His Betrothed will likely be coming with us, as will his Godfather.”

Amelia raised an eyebrow as a new line appeared on the letter.

_P.S. This is agreeable with me, Bones. See you after Ronald and Ginevra’s trial. Good luck with those two._

Amelia narrowed her eyes. Was Toad eavesdropping on her?

“I will find out how you are doing that, Toad!” Amelia growled.

Amelia gasped as the parchment set aflame and burned to ashes. Then the ashes formed into three words before they vanished:

_Good luck, Bones._

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 1:30 PM)

While most of her fellow classmates – and former hopefuls for Beauxbatons Champion – had to remain at Hogwarts during Christmas Break, much to their chagrin, Fleur Delacour was able to spend time with her family for one particular reason. Her family had a residence in London, England.

Well, the Manor didn’t actually belong to her family, but it had been an option for residence for the past seven years, ever since her father, Pierre Delacour, became the French Ambassador to the British Ministry of Magic. Every French Ambassador to the British Ministry of Magic, and their family, used this house as residence whenever they stayed in Great Britain.

She had used the Floo Network in the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade Village to travel to the Manor earlier that afternoon. Now, upon request of her mother, Apolline Delacour, she was making her way to her mother’s study.

When she arrived, she stepped into the study, where she found her mother sitting at a desk, writing on a piece of parchment. Apolline Delacour was the Ambassador of the French Veela Colony, one of the very few Veela – residing in France -- who didn’t live in the Colony. This was mostly because of whom her chosen Mate was. Pierre Delacour was a successful businessman and politician, that he was a central face in the French magical society. Therefore, he couldn’t just join the Colony like other chosen Mates. Apolline had become Ambassador when she had become pregnant with Fleur. This had given Apolline permission to spend the majority of her time – when she wasn’t summoned to the Colony – to spend time with her husband and Veela daughters.

“Sit down, daughter,” Apolline said, not looking up at Fleur, as she continued writing.

Fleur sat down at the lone chair on the closest side of the desk. Apolline finished the line she was writing, then set the Quill down and looked up at her daughter.

“Madame Maxime recently wrote me about the Second Task of the Triwizard Tournament,” Apolline said, “Under her direction, I was not to speak of it to you, until you figured out the Egg’s clue. I trust you have?”
“The British newspaper, the Daily Prophet, had an article with the clue in it, Mama,” Fleur said. “I am lucky it did, because the clue was sung by a Mermaid’s Voice. I could not bear to listen to it.”

“Yes. Mermaids,” Apolline Delacour snarled the second word in disgust, “Madame Maxime told me that, at the moment, the Second Task would pit you and your competitors in the Hogwarts Lake, where you would swim to a Mermaid Village and rescue an object you ‘would sorely miss’. Until recently, it was going to be person, but thankfully that has been averted. Otherwise I might have gone to the British Ministry of Magic and made those foolish Englishmen change their minds.”

“Excuse moi, Mama for my interruption,” Fleur said, “But did you say ‘at the moment’?”

“I did indeed,” Apolline said, smiling. “I have discussed the Second Task with your father, and voiced my displeasure about it with him. He has agreed with me that it is problematic. So, in his role as French Ambassador to the British Ministry of Magic, your father, after the new year begins, will be meeting with Albus Dumbledore and the other Tournament Officials – perhaps even Cornelius Fudge – and will voice our displeasure for the Second Task. He will… implore them… that they change the Second Task and change it to a different kind of Task.

“He will, of course, tell them about the dangers between the Veela and the Mermaids, and why this silly Task should be changed, so the British Ministry of Magic is not the cause of breaking the current truce between the two peoples.”

“Is there anything you want me to do, Mama?” Fleur asked.

“There is,” Apolline said, with a smile, “I want you to write to one of your fellow competitors. This… Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter. I hear he has become a recent Lord of two Houses, and has brought a powerful Alliance in the British Wizengamot back into full force. It is known as the Great Alliance. I believe with the help of Lord Potter and his Alliance, we can succeed to change the Second Task.”

“I do hope you’re not asking me to seduce him, Mama,” Fleur said, disapprovingly. “The boy is deeply in love with his Betrothed, the Heiress Dagworth-Granger. He is immune to my Allure as I discovered during the Yule Ball. He only had eyes for his Betrothed.”

“Yes, I saw the pictures of Lord Potter and his Betrothed in this morning’s Daily Prophet,” Apolline said. “She is a very beautiful girl. No, I do not want you to seduce Lord Potter. Merely gain his trust. Your father has heard rumors of Darkness spreading in Great Britain. Rumors that this Dark Lord of theirs – the one with that silly French moniker -- is not at all dead as was assumed. Rumors this Dark Lord is actually growing in strength, and is in the process of returning.

“There are also rumors that this Dark Lord will target Lord Potter more than anyone else – aside from, perhaps Dumbledore – due to the defeat he had been served back in ’81 when Lord Potter became the Boy-Who-Lived. If Lord Potter agrees to help us with the Second Task, and this Dark Lord does return – then our young Lord may just have some unexpected allies to help him get rid of the pest with the French moniker. Let him know this, daughter.”

“Do you want me to contact him now via Owl Post?” Fleur asked, “Or speak to him when we return to Hogwarts?”

“Now,” Apolline said, “If he does not respond to a letter, then you can speak to him at Hogwarts about it. Though we should not expect a letter of complete acceptance or denial back immediately. I
am sure he will want to speak to his Alliance about this. If we do receive an immediate reply back, it is more than likely we will hear exactly that. And daughter? I suggest you use the French-to-English Translation Quill.”

Fleur blushed at her reminder that her English – whether it be speaking or writing – wasn’t the best. The Translation Quill was a nifty little object. It would hover over a piece of parchment, while the writer wrote on a different parchment. Whatever the writer wrote in French, it would translate to English on the other piece of parchment.

“Yes, Mama,” Fleur said.

“You’re excused, daughter,” Apolline said. “Welcome home.”

“It is good to be home, Mama,” Fleur said.

Fleur stood up and left the office. She was very nervous about writing to Lord Harry Potter. The last time they had interacted was the night before, and most of the time, her ‘interactions’ were to glare at Harry Potter’s Betrothed. She couldn’t help it. The Muggleborn Heiress looked so much more beautiful than she did. The girl had stolen her spotlight. Hers! The boys were all supposed to be watching her during the night. Admiring her beauty, even without her having to use the Allure. She didn’t want to use her Allure, because she knew it would make the Davies boy worse!

She still couldn’t believe how that had turned out. Roger Davies was a very handsome boy, and she thought he would be a wonderful date to the Ball. But that had been a disaster. He was drooling all over himself, nearly stupefied half the night because of her, and he could hardly dance! She had appreciated how he was so dedicated to her – but only at first. After about an hour or so, it just got overwhelming, even for her, a Veela! She had made mistakes with boys before, but Roger Davies was her biggest mistake.

Even worse, Lord Potter and his Betrothed had stolen her spotlight. All the boys and girls had been watching them, not her. She couldn’t help but be envious and jealous of them.

No, she was not interested in the boy, when it came to romance. Any fool could see that Lord Potter and his Betrothed were very much in love. She knew she couldn’t interfere with that. The best she could do was earn his friendship. Maybe he could introduce her to a friend of his that she could seduce or – would she dare? – fall in love with. But she wouldn’t dare try to seduce him. No, she would be his friend, without trying to seduce him. A difficult task, since, as a Veela, every man – and some women – should be someone she should seduce for her own pleasures.

But not this one. On her mother’s orders, he was to be a friend and possibly Ally, so as to help her change the Second Task, so she wouldn’t have to deal with Mermaids. She shuddered at the very thought of Mermaids. She had been raised to hate, loathe, and even fear the Merpeople, just because of a long civil war between their two species. And now, if the Second Task wasn’t changed, she’d be forced to swim into the center of a Mermaid Village! She shuddered again at the very idea.

She needed to write this letter to Lord Potter, and it needed to sound good. And she had to do it without seducing him.

“Why me, Mama?” Fleur said, “I am going to make a fool of myself.”

Fleur blinked as thought crossed her mind. Could it be? Was her mother training her to be the future Ambassador of the French Veela Colony? Was this her first role as Ambassador’s Apprentice? She
wanted to be the future Ambassador, like her mother. Because otherwise, she had a good chance of having to go to the Colony and live there for the rest of life, even if she found herself a Chosen Mate.

“I’ll do it, Mama,” Fleur said, resolutely. “If this is what I think it is, then I’m going to do it, and I’m going to make you proud.”

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 2:30 PM)

Bartemius Crouch, Jr – in his disguise as Alastor Moody – cursed the fake leg he had been forced to use over the past few months, as he limped up the pathway toward the Hogwarts Gates. He had left the castle, to confirm that his father had been found dead overnight, like the Daily Prophet had reported.

It was true. His father was dead. That was the good news. The bad news: he hadn’t been responsible for the bastard’s death. So who was responsible for it? One of the rotten scum who dared call them followers of his Master? He didn’t know, and he had tried to find out. Because he wanted to kill the bastard who took away his revenge for what his father had done to him. He hadn’t found any answers, so his plan was to go back to Hogwarts and find out if Dumbledore knew anything about his father’s death. After all, Moody and his father had been great friends. Why shouldn’t he be concerned about it? Why shouldn’t he ask questions? Why shouldn’t he want to know who killed his friend?

Suddenly, as he walked toward the Hogwarts Gate, his body felt weird. As if something was stopping him. Then… pain! But it wasn’t unbearable pain. He could fight through it for the moment. He took Moody’s wand out and used silencing spells around him, so nobody would hear him screaming. It was a close call though. He groaned and screamed as he realized what was happening. The Polyjuice Potion was wearing off! How? He had taken a new dose just fifteen minutes ago!

Then he realized… Polyjuice Prevention wards! That bitch McGonagall had been concerned about them, and had started raising questions about putting them up around the castle, after those Weasley brats had decided to impersonate their twin brothers! He thought he would have more time! In fact, he was planning on escaping Hogwarts, but only after he killed the real Alastor Moody, so the old Auror wouldn’t blab! The Auror knew who he was, after all!

“No!” Barty screamed, as he realized his plans – his Master’s plans – were now in great risk!

He screamed and fell to the ground as another wave of pain hit. He tore at the magical eye in his eye socket and barely forced it out before his good eye came back. He then tore off his pants, and removed the peg leg before his began growing back. He screamed as his real appearance started coming back. Before he had gone to Azkaban, he was good with pain. He was getting his tolerance for pain back little by little, but this! This forced flushing of the Polyjuice Potion, and his body returning to his true form, all thanks to the Prevention wards, was terrible!

Miraculously, it only lasted for five minutes. He was still cursing and panting as the pain began to recede, but he needed to fight through it. He needed to get away from Hogwarts and Hogsmeade before he got caught. He grabbed Moody’s wand, stood up and – fighting through the pain – ran off back down the road. He didn’t dare Apparate yet. With the pain breaking his concentration, he’d likely Splinch or kill himself!

He was halfway in between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts, when he finally risked Apparation. But he didn’t Apparate to his master’s residence. Not yet. He needed to prepare himself. His Master would
likely be angry with him. He would surely be the target of many Cruciatius Curses. He needed to recover from his ordeal, before he returned to his Master to give him some very bad news.

He cursed that McGonagall bitch. She was definitely going to pay for this!

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 3:15 PM)

Minerva McGonagall made her way to Alastor Moody’s office. Albus had asked her to check on his old friend, and see why he hadn’t attended the latest staff meeting. The staff meeting had been about the aftermath of Ron and Ginny’s invasion the previous evening. Albus had announced that he had already placed temporary Polyjuice Prevention enchantments around the castle, and would seek to make them permanent in the wards before the students returned for the new term.

Minerva wasn’t sure whether to be impressed with the Headmaster, or find humor in the situation. Obviously this was a preventative measure of some sort, but not toward those who might use Polyjuice Potion. No, this was a preventative measure for Albus himself, so Amelia Bones wouldn’t come back to Hogwarts and ask why nothing was being done to prevent what had happened last night from happening again.

She made her way into the Defense Against the Dark Arts Classroom, and crossed to the back of the room, where the Defense Professor’s office was located up a staircase. When she arrived at the door, she knocked on it. When there was no response, she took out her wand, just in case. She was about to enter the office of a paranoid man. She opened the door and stepped into the room, pointing her wand around the room.

“Alastor?” Minerva called out, “Alastor, it is Minerva.”

Suddenly, she heard a loud, vibrating sound and she pointed her wand toward the direction of the sound. There, in the corner of the office, was a large trunk – Alastor’s trunk, she realized. It had seven compartments. It started shaking and vibrating.

“Mallory!” Minerva called.

Mallory appeared a moment later.

“Mallory, use your special magic on that trunk and tell me what is causing it to shake,” Minerva said.

Mallory held both hands up in the direction of the trunk. Then she gasped and cried out.

“There is an injured human inside the largest compartment, Mistress!” Mallory said.

Minerva’s eyes widened. “Open the trunk, Mallory!”

Mallory snapped her fingers, and the trunk opened to the biggest compartment. Minerva pointed her wand toward the trunk as she walked toward it.

Her eyes widened as she looked into it. She was looking down into a kind of pit, an underground room, and lying on the floor some ten feet below, thin and starved in appearance, was the Alastor Moody. Minerva’s eyes widened as the implications of what this meant started going through her mind.
“Alastor?” Minerva asked.

“Who – who is it?” Alastor’s voice grunted, hoarsely.

“It is Minerva McGonagall, Alastor,” Minerva said.

“Minerva,” Alastor said, “Get Albus. Barty Crouch, Junior… he’s alive… he’s been… using my hair and Polyjuice Potion. What’s the date?”

“Day after Christmas,” Minerva said, “How long…?”

“August,” Alastor said, “Last few days of August.”

“Merciful Merlin!” Minerva gasped.

An escaped Death Eater – long-thought dead – had been posing as Alastor Moody for the entire term! Students had been taught by a Death Eater!

“I’m going to get my house-elf to take you to Poppy Pomfrey, Alastor!” Minerva said; she turned to Mallory, who looked ready for commands, “Mallory! Go down into the trunk compartment, and take Alastor to the Hospital Wing. Tell Poppy he’s been a victim of long imprisonment, and that the Moody we knew these past few months was not him! Then go to Albus and explain everything! I’ll be heading for the Hospital Wing soon. First I need to get in touch with Amelia Bones!”

Mallory nodded, then vanished. She appeared next to Alastor, and both wizard and house-elf vanished. Suddenly another revelation came to Minerva.

“Oh, Merlin,” Minerva said; “It was Crouch, Junior. Posing as Moody. He was the one who put Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire!”

Then yet another revelation crossed her mind. “Alastor Moody is one of Albus’ greatest friends. How did he not know his good friend was being impersonated… for nearly five months?”

Chapter End Notes

And so ends the thirty-seventh chapter, and the first chapter of Book 2: Tournament Drama!

I almost begin Book 2 off with a scene showing Bartemius Crouch's death, but I wanted to leave a bit of mystery to it. Did Snape do it on Dumbledore's orders – was that why he was not at the Ball? Did something else happen to him? I wanted that left wide open.

The last two scenes of this chapter almost didn't happen this early on in Book 2. It would have happened before Harry and Hermione returned to Hogwarts, but not this early. But I decided there was real reason to delay it. Besides, it gave Crouch a good reason to be out of the castle, come back and run into the temporary wards.

A lot happening in this chapter. Plots beginning, others continuing. Like the chapter with Molly Weasley's death, I chose not to have a warning for Character Death. I also chose not to have one for "Mention of Sibling Incest (Kissing)" because it would impact
the shock factor of Ginny's interrogation.

Next Chapter: Albus finds out the news about Moody. Amelia comes back to Hogwarts again! Moody tells a story, and a new Defense Professor – not Moody – is decided!

IMPORTANT NOTICE: I am not going to be doing daily updates for a while. Unfortunately, I didn't get a great backlog of chapters during my break. So for a while – until I say differently - I am going to be doing once a week updates – every Saturday is my current plan.
(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 3:45 PM)

Albus Dumbledore stared in disbelief at the emaciated, pale form of his good friend, Alastor Moody, as the man lay in one of the Hospital beds. Alastor had bald spots and shortened hair on parts of his head, where the hair had either been torn, or cut from his head, in order to use for Polyjuice Potion. He had an eyepatch over his empty eye socket, where his magical eye was no longer. He had never seen his good friend looking so vulnerable before.

So many questions were running through his mind. How had Bartemius Crouch, Junior – a man long-thought dead of Dementor Exposure in Azkaban – been able to impersonate his good friend, Alastor Moody for nearly five months without him knowing? He knew someone like Amelia Bones, or even Minerva McGonagall, might doubt him for saying it, but he had absolutely no idea his good friend had been imprisoned and impersonated for five months!

Not only had Bartemius Crouch, Junior been able to perfectly act like his good friend, absolutely none of his spy – ahem – security system in Hogwarts had reported anything odd or off about Alastor! Yet, there were also vital clues that something was very off. Severus Snape had reported constant thefts of certain ingredients, and now that Albus thought of it, most of those ingredients were needed for Polyjuice Potion. Albus remembered all those times he had seen Alastor drinking from the flask. Why had he never realized that the man was drinking it every hour?

Then there was the whole Goblet of Fire thing. As much as Harry Potter’s name being entered into the Goblet of Fire had been great for his future plans, Albus still questioned how it had happened! Now, it was obvious, wasn’t it? Bartemius Crouch, Junior had done it. Obviously, the man was in contact with Voldemort. Obviously Harry Potter’s name being entered into the Goblet of Fire was all part of some plot between Junior and Voldemort. And Albus had trusted his good friend, Moody, to help him figure out who had placed Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire, when it had been Moody himself – well, the Moody impersonator.

Albus grimaced as he thought of Junior and Voldemort laughing at him for this whole thing. Tom Riddle had never been able to fool him like this in such a convincing way! It was as if Tom was taunting him.

“Alastor Moody is an old friend of yours, Albus,” Tom would say, “A good friend of yours. Isn’t he? How did you not know he was being impersonated?”
He knew people like Amelia Bones and Minerva McGonagall were going to ask him similar questions. He wouldn’t blame them if they thought he was lying. It was hard for him to convince himself he was being honest about this entire thing.

“Albus,” Minerva’s pleading voice whispered behind him; he turned around and found Minerva McGonagall looking not at him, but at Alastor. “Tell me you didn’t know about this. Tell me you didn’t knowingly allow our friend – your good friend – to suffer through this. Tell me this isn’t another Philosopher’s Stone plot where Harry Potter must figure out the clues for himself.”

That last accusation stung. Mostly because it was true.

“I did not know, Minerva,” Albus said, “I would make an Unbreakable Vow on that, if it soothed yours, Alastor’s and Amelia Bones’ minds.”

“Well, you might just have to do that soon enough,” Minerva said. “I contacted Amelia and told her about this. She’s making her way here with a couple of Aurors. She might already be coming up to the Castle in a Carriage, as we speak. I asked Hagrid to provide her one and meet her at the Gates.”

Albus sighed. He was not surprised; he knew that was coming.

“I am glad you did,” Albus said, “If you hadn’t, I might have done it myself after I made sure Alastor was alright.”

“I cannot believe this, Albus!” Minerva said, “This is almost as bad as the Philosopher’s Stone fiasco! A Death Eater was able to impersonate Alastor! A Death Eater we thought was dead! Did he… did Crouch put Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire?”

“I believe he did,” Albus said, “I believe we also found who is responsible for casting the Dark Mark into the sky at the Quidditch World Cup.”

“To what end?” Minerva asked.

“Something to do with Voldemort gaining strength,” Albus said, “But how or why? I honestly do not know.”

But he would find out. There had to be a reason Bartemius Crouch, Junior was still here, after all this time. Long after he had successfully entered Harry into the Tournament. Was he supposed to guide Harry through the Triwizard Tournament? Did Tom’s endgame have something to do with the Second or Third Tasks? He knew one thing. Tom Riddle would not give up. He would have a back-up plan, and probably a back-up plan for that plan, and so on and so forth.

“What do we do, Albus?” Minerva asked. “What do we tell the students and their parents? We have to tell them something, especially the parents. Their students were taught by a Death Eater!”

Albus frowned. He had been so worried about everything else surrounding this newest fiasco, he hadn’t thought of this. There was no way he could cover this up. Amelia Bones would never allow it. Not with her investigating him. She’d probably try to convince Cornelius Fudge that a cover up was a perfect reason to cancel his pardon!

“The truth, Minerva,” Albus sighed, “It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution. However, in this case, we must allow caution to fall aside. We will send
letters – in a mass-delivery, like the booklists – to the students and their parents to explain what has happened. And we will tell them the truth.”

“We have to find a new Defense Professor, Albus,” Minerva said. “We cannot have Alastor teach. One, he is going to need to recover from this for weeks, maybe months. Two…”

“No student will want to be taught by someone who looked like the Death Eater who was teaching them,” Albus said.

“Indeed,” Minerva said. “Their parents would complain too. Merciful Merlin, we might lose several students from this anyway! We may be dealing with a minor exodus of students whose parents wish to transfer them elsewhere!”

Albus grimaced. He knew Minerva was completely correct about this.

“I will write the letter to the parents and students myself, Minerva,” Albus said, “Hopefully my voice will reassure the majority of the students and their parents, and the exodus – as you call it – won’t be as severe.”

Minerva nodded. “That is probably for the best, Albus.”

Poppy Pomfrey walked over to Albus and Minerva.

“Alastor wants me to give him an Invigoration Draught so he can stay awake to speak to you, Albus,” Poppy said. “I told him this might make his health worse, and he told me to do it anyway. Stubborn coot says it won’t be – his words – ‘that bastard who kills Alastor Moody!’”

“Director Amelia Bones will be here momentarily, Poppy,” Albus said, “Naturally she’ll want to speak to him too. Give him an Invigoration Draught, then you can do whatever you need for him after we are done questioning him. Whatever you can do, Poppy. We cannot take him to St. Mungo’s. Crouch, Junior might find out and attempt an assassination. I am sure Alastor would tell you the same thing.”

“Of course, Albus,” Poppy said. “I will work on him all night if I must. He’s not just your friend, Albus. He’s a good friend of mine too. I can’t believe we didn’t realize this was going on!”

“I know, Poppy,” Albus said, “Thank you, my dear.”

Poppy smiled weakly then walked over to her cupboard of Potions to find the necessary items. Albus sighed and conjured two chairs for him and Minerva, and set them at the end of Alastor’s bed. He and Minerva sat down.

“Albus?” Alastor said, hoarsely, “I… forgive you. We all… make mistakes.”

“We do,” Albus said. “Mine –”

“Are just… bigger than… the rest of us,” Alastor said.

Albus smiled. “You know me too well, old friend.”

Too well, indeed. In addition to Amelia Bones, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Minerva McGonagall, Sirius Black and Tom Riddle, Alastor Moody was one of those who could very well
be a great danger to his future plans.

In fact, Alastor Moody very well might be the most dangerous threat to his plans. Yet he had been in the bottom of his own trunk for the past several months. So he knew nothing about Rita Skeeter’s articles, nor Amelia Bones’ investigation, nor everything to do with Harry Potter.

Yes. This weak, emaciated man in front of him might just be the biggest threat to one Albus Dumbledore. And he could do nothing about it. Not with Minerva McGonagall, and Amelia Bones so concerned with the health and well-being of Alastor Moody, and their suspicions surrounding him.

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 4:05 PM)

For the third time in two weeks, Director Amelia Bones, Senior Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt and Rookie Auror Nymphadora Tonks were making their way through the corridors of Hogwarts Castle. In fact, they were on the same route they had been no less than eighteen hours ago – toward the Hospital Wing.

Nearly half-an-hour ago, while Amelia had been in her office in the DMLE Headquarters, a house-elf by the name of Sadie – belonging to Minerva McGonagall – appeared in her office and brought her a letter from her Mistress. For the second time that day, Amelia had stared at a piece of parchment in disbelief. She couldn’t believe it. Bartemius Crouch, Junior – the previously-thought dead son of the recently late Bartemius Crouch, Senior, was apparently alive. And he had been impersonating Alastor Moody for the past five months. The real Alastor Moody had been found at the bottom of his own trunk, emaciated, with great clumps of his hair missing – obviously used for Polyjuice Potion.

Immediately, Amelia had wondered how Crouch, Junior had been able to accomplish this. Alastor Moody was one of Albus Dumbledore’s greatest friends. They had fought in two wars together! How had Crouch, Junior been able to impersonate Albus Dumbledore’s friend, in Albus Dumbledore’s own castle, where the man had his own spy system! How?! Did Albus Dumbledore know that Crouch, Junior was impersonating his good friend, Alastor Moody?!

Minerva’s letter also answered two more questions that had plagued her mind. The first: Barty Crouch, Junior was obviously responsible for casting the Dark Mark in the sky. Amelia still found it rather amusing that she and Shacklebolt were just talking about this very event just hours prior to her receiving what was likely the proof that she had finally discovered that particular culprit.

The second: he was the reason Harry Potter found himself competing in the Triwizard Tournament. That just brought up more questions for Amelia. Did Albus Dumbledore know Crouch, Junior was going to put Lord Potter’s name in the Goblet of Fire, and that was why he allowed the Death Eater to impersonate his good friend?

Then there was the biggest revelation that wasn’t from Minerva, but from Amelia’s own thoughts. Barty Crouch, Junior had likely placed Harry in the Tournament to help Voldemort – in Albus Dumbledore’s own words – return to full strength by next summer! Obviously Crouch, Junior had been here to guide Lord Potter through the Tournament, which was why he had still been around, impersonating Moody, long after his target was in the Tournament. But why? Obviously Crouch and Voldemort had planned for something big to happen during one of the Tasks? Was the plot assassination-by-proxy? Did they hope the Tournament would kill the Boy-Who-Lived?
Amelia shook her head. So many questions. She put these thoughts aside, as she stepped into the Hospital Wing. Her heart sank at soon as she saw Alastor Moody. She suddenly heard a whimper behind her, and looked over her shoulder, just in time to see Tonks hastily run out of the Hospital Wing.

“He was her mentor over the last three years at the Brighton Auror Academy,” Shacklebolt explained, “I warned her this might happen, but she said she wanted to be here for him.”

“Go to her, Kingsley,” Amelia said. “Believe me, I understand. I am sure you do too.”

Shacklebolt nodded. Alastor Moody meant a lot to many people, especially those who had worked in the MLE or Auror Departments for several years. If he wasn’t one of their co-workers, he was their mentor or teacher in the Auror Academy. And now he lay in a Hospital bed, emaciated, weak and vulnerable. Three things she never expected to see when it came to the strongest Auror she had ever known.

As Shacklebolt left the Hospital Wing to comfort the Rookie Auror, Amelia walked over to Alastor’s hospital bed, where Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagall were keeping vigil.

“Amelia,” Albus said, “Alastor has volunteered to take a Invigoration Draught so he can answer our questions before Poppy does what she does best. Please, do sit down.”

Amelia conjured herself a chair next to Minerva and sat down. Poppy, who had been waiting and watching, stepped over to Alastor, and gave him a cup filled with what Amelia assumed was Invigoration Draught.

“You’re not going to choose now to be paranoid and accuse me of poisoning you, are you, Alastor?” Poppy asked.

“There are… very few people… I trust with my life, Poppy,” Alastor said, hoarsely, “You are… one of them.”

Poppy smiled. “Thank you, you old soldier. I feel the same way. Now, take your medicine.”

Alastor gave a weak smile and allowed Poppy to feed him the Draught. He swallowed it in two gulps and grimaced, then cleared his throat.

“Feeling better already,” Alastor said, his voice no longer hoarse. “Feel like I could get up and find that bastard Death Eater!”

“You let us do that job, Alastor,” Albus said, “Besides, you’re missing a leg.”

“Yes, about that,” Amelia said.

“She took what appeared to be a small stick and an eyeball out of her robes. She pointed her wand at the stick, and it grew back into the peg leg that belonged to Alastor.

“Found your fake leg, and your magical eye laying in the road a few feet from the Hogwarts Gate,” Amelia said; she stood up and placed the peg leg and magical eye on the table next to Alastor’s bed.

“The Polyjuice Prevention Ward,” Albus said, “Minerva, it seems as if we owe you a great deal. It was you, after all, who implored me to place that ward up around the school. It is temporary for now,
but it will be permanent before the students return. It would appear that Crouch, Junior – who wasn’t in the Castle at the time I placed the ward up – walked up to the Gate, and ran into the ward. Obviously, it canceled the Polyjuice, and forced him to turn back into his own appearance.”

“You find my wand?” Alastor asked, “I assume the bastard was using it.”

“No, I am sorry, Alastor,” Amelia said.

“It’s alright.” Alastor said, “Scum probably used it to Apparate away from Hogwarts and Hogsmeade. Not like it was my original wand anyway. I’ve lost count how many wands I’ve used over my life. Just have to visit my good friend Garrick and buy another one.”

“What happened, Alastor?” Amelia asked. “Start from the beginning. I remember a report of you being attacked in your own home. Arthur Weasley was called to disenchant some dustbins that went wild.”

Alastor laughed. “I used those in my fight against that bastard. It was him and Peter Pettigrew! Pettigrew! He’s alive Amelia. Which means Black is –”

“Innocent, Alastor, we know,” Amelia said. “He had a trial a week ago and was found cleared of all charges. In fact, later that night, he proposed to me and I said yes. We marry during Easter break.”

Alastor smiled. “Good for you, Bones. Course, if you ask me, you two should have already been married for years now, with a child or two of your own.”

“In a perfect world, we would have been,” Amelia said, “Please. Continue your story. We need to get through it before the Draught wears off.”

“You’re right, of course,” Alastor said. “Anyway, Pettigrew ambushed me. He’s a rat Animagus, in case you don’t know. I saw a rat scurry across my sitting room floor. I pointed my wand at it, ready to kill it, and it turned into Pettigrew! Pettigrew distracted me while I tried to curse him. Meanwhile, Crouch, Junior – I’ll call him Junior, I suppose – he enters the house while I am fighting Pettigrew, and tries to attack me. Junior – that bastard is still an outstanding duelist, you know. Course he was likely taught by Bellatrix Lestrange, so it isn’t surprising. I fought a good fight for about fifteen, twenty minutes, before I was finally overcome. Dustbins weren’t the only thing I used to assist me in the fight. I was using everything and the kitchen sink. But they got me in the end.

“They didn’t take me anywhere, though. Kept me in my own house. In the basement. You mentioned Arthur Weasley earlier. Think I heard his voice, and he was apparently talking to me!”

“Junior’s first time impersonating you,” Albus said.

“Yeah,” Alastor said. “I was, of course, worried about Weasley, thinking he was either going to be a prisoner with me or worse. But Junior had let him go. Pettigrew was already gone, off wherever he was hiding. Junior realized my secret of dosing myself to the gills with various preventative Potions and Draughts. Realized I had a concoction that prevented Veritaserum was working. So the bastard starved me for a good three days. I pissed and shit myself a lot, thanks to all the water and flushing draughts he was giving me to purge the preventative concoction from my body.

“Then he finally succeeded in ridding me of the anti-Veritaserum concoction, and stuffed me with truth serum. Interrogated me for hours. But not about any Auror, DMLE or Ministry secrets, or anti-Voldemort secrets. He asked me questions about myself. Personal questions, all of them.”
“He was researching how to successfully impersonate you,” Amelia said.

“It worked, whatever he did,” Albus said, “He fooled even me.”

“Really?” Amelia asked Albus, with a doubtful tone, “He was able to fool you into believing he was one of your greatest friends. A friend you’ve known for a very long time, and fought wars with! He was able to fool you, inside your own castle, where you claim to be able to know everything that happens at all times?”

“Cut it out, Bones,” Alastor grunted. “I’ve already forgiven him for it. I believe it when he says he didn’t know it wasn’t me. If you can’t believe him, believe me! Especially after I tell you this. When he was good and done with getting all the personal information from me, Junior impersonated me again. He did it so well, it felt as if I was looking and talking to a mirror! Yes, that is how good he was, Bones! I felt like I was talking to myself! I was staring right at the guy, knowing who he was and what he was doing, and he had even been able to convince me that he could pull off impersonating me!

“Do you realize – truly realize – how horrifying that is? Especially coming from someone like me?! Junior was able to do this to me, Bones. I may hate that bastard and want to kill him myself. But damn me to hell if I don’t respect the scum for what he was able to pull off!”

Amelia grimaced. Alastor was right. Junior would have to be quite cunning to not only fool and overpower Alastor Moody, but also fool Albus Dumbledore, and everyone else in the castle.

“Fine,” Amelia said, “I’ll believe you, Albus.”

This time, she thought to herself, Albus doesn’t deserve your loyalty, Alastor. I hope you realize that soon enough.

“Anyway, you can figure out what happened next,” Alastor said, “He trapped me in my own trunk, so he could take hair from my head while he impersonated me.”

“Did he ever tell you what his plans were?” Amelia asked.

“Never,” Alastor said, “Which was rather surprising. I would have assumed he’d be to the type to brag about how he was fooling everyone. No, he never said a thing about his plans. Whatever they are, they’re serious and dangerous enough that he was keeping silent about them.”

“Well, it is pretty obvious what some of his plans are or were,” Amelia said, “Harry Potter’s name came out of the Goblet of Fire during the Choosing Ceremony. He’s the fourth Champion.”


“That was a possible motive running through my mind,” Amelia said, “The other possibility is that it has something to do with Voldemort.”

Alastor snorted. “I could have told you that. That was one thing I heard Junior muttering on about. He kept talking about how once his Master had returned, all the Death Eaters who never went to Azkaban would pay for their betrayal. Mentioned Snape and Karkaroff specifically.”
“Karkaroff is here,” Amelia said, “As Durmstrang Headmaster.”

“Three Death Eaters in your castle at the same time, Albus?” Alastor asked.

Albus sighed. “I trust Severus Snape, Alastor. And I am keeping a watchful eye on Karkaroff. Before today, Karkaroff was a suspect for putting Harry Potter’s name in the Goblet of Fire.”

“You know how I feel about Snape, Albus,” Alastor grunted. “You might trust him, but I do not. But we’ll pass him by for the moment. Junior may not have given up any of his plans, but I do believe he, or Pettigrew, or both of them, are in contact with Voldemort. Which means Voldemort is getting stronger.”

“Yes,” Albus said, “The Dark Mark on Severus’ arm is getting darker. I suspect Voldemort may return by this summer. The question is how?”

“Search me,” Alastor grunted. “It might have something to do with Potter. If he wasn’t put in the Tournament to die, he was put it in it for another reason. Follow that line of thought, and you might find out what is at the end of it before it is too late.”

“Is there anything else, Alastor?” Amelia asked. “Anything you can tell us? Anything would help.”

“Sorry, Bones,” Alastor said, “I’ve given you all I… all I can think of. Bugger it. Damn Draught is… wearing off.”


Alastor snorted, and relaxed back on his pillow.

“Alright, that is enough,” Poppy Pomfrey said, “He needs his rest and my help if he is going to survive this ordeal.”

“I told you, Poppy!” Alastor grunted, “it ain’t Junior… who is going to kill me… damn it!”

Poppy tutted and waved off Amelia, Albus and Minerva. Amelia stood, vanished her chair and found Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks standing a few feet away. Obviously they had heard part of what Alastor had to say.

“Is he going to be okay?” Tonks asked, hoarsely.

“He’ll be fine, lass,” Minerva said. “Poppy isn’t going to let him go, and Alastor is too stubborn to go himself. He might outlive us all.”

Tonks smiled. “Thanks, Professor. It is just scary… seeing him like that.”

“It is a real eye-opener,” Albus said, “Especially for these old eyes. A vivid reminder what Voldemort and his followers are capable of.”

“I just realized something,” Amelia said, “He isn’t going to be able to teach anytime soon, is he?”

“He is not,” Minerva said. “Albus and I already decided we needed to find a new Defense Professor. Also, there would likely be several students who would likely wish to drop out of Defense, than be taught by someone who looked like the Death Eater that had taught them.”
“So you’re going to tell the truth about this, Albus?” Amelia asked.

“I am, Amelia,” Albus said, “I am going to write a letter myself that will explain everything.”

Amelia nodded. That was certainly surprising. She had been ready to argue against a suggestion of a cover-up. Then she smirked as an idea crossed her mind.

“Well, if you need a Defense Professor, search no longer,” Amelia said; “Auror Shacklebolt? How would you like to be the Defense Professor until the end of June?”

Shacklebolt raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure, boss? Surely I could be more useful at Headquarters.”

“I am quite sure, Auror Shacklebolt,” Amelia said, “In fact, Rookie Tonks can be Assistant Professor.”

“Me, really?!” Tonks exclaimed. “Blimey – that might be wicked! We could teach the kiddies how to duel like Aurors!”

“At the very least we could teach them how to protect themselves,” Shacklebolt said. “I am sure the younger students are rather lacking in this department.”

“I think that is a wonderful idea,” Minerva said, “What say you, Albus?”

Amelia could see the frown trying to hide itself on Albus’ face. Had he suspected her other motives for suggesting two Aurors as Defense Professor? So they can keep an eye on him.

Albus sighed. “It would release the heavy burden of me having to find someone by the time term begins. And I am sure I could find no one better than Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks. Very well, if you wish to volunteer as Defense Professor, I will accept.”

“Auror Tonks and I would be happy to accept this offer, Headmaster,” Shacklebolt said.

“Excellent!” Minerva said, “How about we meet on Monday and we can discuss it?”

“Monday is Ron and Ginny Weasley’s trial, Minerva,” Amelia said. “I expect you’ll be there as Lady McGonagall?”

“I will be,” Minerva said. “Tuesday then. Meet me here, Aurors Shacklebolt and Tonks, and we can discuss your new role as Professor and Assistant Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

“We accept, Professor,” Shacklebolt said; Tonks nodded eagerly.

“Albus, Minerva?” Amelia said; as a thought ran through her mind, “Was Junior here through the entire night?”

“He was,” Albus said, “He did not leave until earlier this afternoon. In fact, he probably left around lunchtime. He was not present for it. Why do you ask?”

“Just eliminating him as a suspect in his father’s death,” Amelia said.

“I wonder if that is why he left in the first place?” Minerva suggested. “To find out what happened to
“Boss?” Shacklebolt asked, “Is it possible Crouch, Senior had something to do with his son’s escape from Azkaban?”

Amelia raised an eyebrow. “It is, Auror Shacklebolt. When I return to the Ministry, I’ll send someone to Azkaban to dig up Crouch’s grave and see who is inside it.”

“I believe you might discover that it is Bartemius’ wife,” Albus said. “She was very sickly at the end of her life. Polyjuice Potion might be a culprit in that too.”

“The old switcharoo, as my father likes to say,” Tonks said.

“Junior must have been weak from his time in Azkaban,” Amelia said. “Dementors are blind, wouldn’t have realized anything was different. One weak, sick individual entering the prison, one weak, sick individual leaving the prison. Yes, it is certainly plausible that we will find Bartemius’ wife inside that grave. Which means if we exhume his wife’s grave, we’ll likely find it empty. Alright then! Let’s get going, so we can prove it! I will see you Monday for Ronald and Ginevra Weasley’s trial, Albus, Minerva.”

“You’re actually allowing me to be there for their trial this time?” Albus asked.

“Depends,” Amelia said, “Are you going to interfere with proper justice, Albus?”

“No,” Albus said, “Not after what they did last night, and intended to do. It was monstrous. You’re not intending on placing them in the Maximum Security, are you?”

“Minimum security with the human guards, Albus,” Amelia said. “They’re still teenagers, after all. They wouldn’t survive even a minimum sentence in Maximum Security.”

Albus looked rather relieved at that. For someone who believed Ronald and Ginevra Weasley were “monstrous”, he still seemed rather close to the pair of them.

*He’s a suspected Dark Lord, isn’t he?* Amelia mused, *Monster feeling empathy for another monster, the only ones they feel empathy for.*

“We must be off,” Amelia said. “Come Shacklebolt, Tonks. I’d ask if you wanted to say goodbye to Alastor, but… he might not be able to hear you.”

“I’m not saying goodbye to him,” Tonks said, “Because I know I will see him again.”

“Aye,” Shacklebolt said, “No need to say goodbye when we will see each other again.”

Amelia, Minerva and Albus all smiled at this.

“Amelia?” Minerva asked, “Do you not wish to search Alastor’s office for any clues Crouch might have left behind.”

“Do you believe I’ll find any, Minerva?” Amelia asked. “I don’t. He was so meticulous, and so careful through everything he did. He would not have left the castle, while leaving evidence of who he was behind. No, the only things he left were that eye and peg leg.”
“And Alastor Moody alive to tell us who was responsible,” Shacklebolt said.

“Only because he didn’t suspect the Polyjuice Prevention wards,” Amelia said. “He left the castle with full intentions of returning to continue his role as Alastor Moody. Only reason Alastor is alive is because he needed his hair. Alastor’s lucky he even remembers Junior’s identity. I am rather shocked he remembers anything. I imagine if Crouch was here until the end of the Tournament to finish his plot, our good friend, Alastor, might not have survived his ordeal.”

“Again, thank you, Minerva, for suggesting the Polyjuice Prevention wards,” Albus said. “You helped divert a true disaster and tragedy in the making. And you saved our good friend’s life.”

Minerva smiled, misty-eyed, as Amelia and the two Aurors agreed with Albus’ sentiments.

“We must be off now,” Amelia said. “See you Monday.”

Farewells were exchanged, and Amelia and the two Aurors left the Hospital Wing. Amelia decided when she returned to her office, she would mirror call Sirius to tell him about these new developments. Then she would advise him to tell his godson about it. Lord Potter needed to know they finally discovered who was responsible for him being in the Triwizard Tournament.

Chapter End Notes

So what did you think? I loved writing Alastor Moody's character in this chapter. Especially his story and stuff – my favorite part was him talking about how convincing Junior was about impersonating him. Loved that.

I am sure a lot of people are disappointed that I had Dumbledore completely fooled by Crouch, Junior, but I decided it would be a weakness in Dumbledore's armor. He was distracted by other things.

So what do you think about Shacklebolt and Tonks being the new Professor and Assistant Professor of Defense? The main reason I did this, was so Tonks is around to help Harry with his Metamorphmagus tutoring. But having them around to teach dueling and actual defense is great too.

Next Chapter: Harry deciphers the legend of the Deathly Hallows. Then, Harry and Hermione speaks to Sirius again and finds out what happened to Moody, and who put his name in the Goblet of Fire. Harry meets Hermione's parents, finally!

Can you believe my original plan was for him to meet the Grangers in Chapter 37? Then I decided Crouch, Junior was going to fail in his plot, and Alastor Moody would be found, and it created this chapter! So two chapters later than intended, Harry will meet Hermione’s parents! And more!
Meet The Parents

Chapter Notes

I shamelessly borrowed some of the stuff in this chapter (such as the Granger's House) from my story "Vanishing Cabinet of Time" (on FFN).

Edit: Euros changed to Pounds in this chapter. Will be explained more in author's note in beginning of next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 4:45 PM)

As the Hogwarts Express continued down the tracks toward London, England, Harry Potter was reading through yet another book, this time it was the book about the three Peverell Brothers, Antioch, Cadmus and Ignotus. Hermione was currently reading the book on Lionesses, her Animagus form, which she had received from Sirius.

Harry raised an eyebrow as he came across a particular passage in the book:

Ignotus Peverell would outlive his brothers by several decades. He would die three days after giving his most prized possession, the Invisibility Cloak, to his eldest son, Charlus. Charlus Peverell would pass the Invisibility Cloak onto his eldest child, a daughter, Iolanthe Peverell, who would marry Hardwin Potter. While it is believed the very same Cloak has been passed on throughout the generations of Potters, Charlus Potter refused to comment about it when this author discussed it with him.

Harry sat up, placed his book on the seat next to him, then removed his Invisibility Cloak from his pocket. He studied it and looked through every inch.

“How long do you reckon this Cloak has been in my family, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know,” Hermione said, “Your father had it in his possession.”

“How long do Invisibility Cloaks usually last?” Harry asked.

“I read up on them during our first year after you received that,” Hermione said. “It is said the Demiguise Hair grows weaker as time goes on and Cloaks grow thinner and wear out.”

“I think this Cloak hasn’t aged at all,” Harry said. “Yet, this is the Cloak my father had in his possession when he died. Hermione, I believe this is Ignotus Peverell’s Invisibility Cloak. One of the so-called Deathly Hallows.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “The Deathly Hallows are a legend, Harry. Do you really believe there is a stone that can bring back the dead? I know you would love to have your parents back, but… no magic can bring back the dead, Harry.”
“I know that,” Harry said. “Forget the stone. Hermione, this Cloak does not age. This isn’t a Demiguise cloak.”

“You think it is part of Death’s cloak?” Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I don’t know what to believe aside from the fact that I am convinced this is Ignatus Peverell’s original Cloak,” Harry said. “His granddaughter, Iolanthe Peverell, married Hardwin Potter, an ancestor of mine. The Cloak then passed down from child to child – I suspect they had many sons, in order to keep the Potter name intact. My grandfather is mentioned in this book, Hermione. It said he wouldn’t talk about the Cloak. Which means he was hiding something about it. Like, the fact that it does not age, and has been passed down through all these generations of Peverells and Potters?”

“Alright, Harry, let’s say you’re right,” Hermione said, “What is your point? Okay, you own one of the legendary Deathly Hallows. The Stone cannot exist, Harry. It defies logic and magic.”

“What about the Elder Wand?” Harry asked.

Hermione hesitated. “There is a real possibility it is real. However, it hasn’t always been referred to as the Elder Wand. It was also known as the Deathstick, among other names. Harry, if the Elder Wand in the story is the Elder Wand that has been used throughout history, then it is extremely dangerous. It has a very bloody history, before it was lost several years ago.”

“What makes you believe it is lost?” Harry asked.

“It is what the books say,” Hermione said.

“Let me show you what this book says – or rather depicts,” Harry said.

He picked up the book, then flipped through the pages, until he came upon a picture of the Elder Wand. He turned the book to Hermione and showed it to her.

“I’ve seen this wand before,” Harry said, “Have you?”

Hermione’s eyes widened as her gaze fell on the wand. The various orbs spaced out along the wand were very familiar.

“Is that… it can’t be, Harry!” Hermione gasped. “Dumbledore’s wand?”

“Dumbledore’s wand,” Harry said, “Dumbledore owns the Elder Wand, Hermione. The apparent Dark Lord in the Prophecy I am involved in is in possession the Elder Wand.”

“Maybe,” Hermione said, “Next time we see Dumbledore, we’ll make sure. But, Harry, it could be a completely different wand.”

“Really, Hermione?” Harry said, “You know what I think? I think Dumbledore was in possession of my Cloak for so long, because he was obsessed with the Deathly Hallows, and wanted to see if my father’s Cloak was the Peverell Cloak. He probably read this book, and he saw my grandfather’s name mentioned. But he could never get Charlus Potter to let him see the Cloak. So when he finally got a chance to borrow it from my father – when my father would conveniently have need for it – he took it.”
“It does give credence to the theory that he owns the Elder Wand,” Hermione said, “But if that is true, how are you supposed to beat him then?”

“Maybe I don’t have to,” Harry said, as he showed her the Peverell ring, “I am Lord Peverell. I might be able to summon the wand from him without having to duel him over it.”

“That’s a big stretch, Harry,” Hermione said.

Harry shrugged. “I’ll look into it more, before I even try to summon it from him.”

“You do realize what is going to happen when you take it from him, don’t you?” Hermione asked “Or attempt to do so?”

“He’ll know that I see him as a true enemy,” Harry said.

Hermione nodded. “Promise me, Harry James. You promise me you won’t try anything against him until you are really sure you can handle what comes after.”

“I promise, Hermione.” Harry said, smiling.

Hermione smiled, looking quite relieved. Suddenly, the compact mirror in Harry’s jeans started vibrating.

“I think Sirius is calling,” Harry said, “What the bloody hell could he want that he can’t tell us when we arrive in London?”

Hermione merely shrugged, while Harry removed the mirror. He opened it and saw Sirius looking at him.

“What’s up, Sirius?” Harry asked, “Must be an emergency if it couldn’t wait for a couple more hours.”

“Is Hermione still with you?” Sirius asked.

“Yes,” Harry said.

“Sit together, and make the mirror larger,” Sirius said, “I have a couple things to tell both of you. Something happened at Hogwarts in the past hour or so. Amelia had to go and investigate it.”

Harry nodded. He stood up and made the mirror grow to size four. He placed it on his seat, then sat down next to Hermione, who had sat up from her laying position.

“What’s wrong, Sirius?” Hermione asked.

“Remember this morning how I told you Bartemius Crouch’s son, by the same name, died years ago in Azkaban? Turns out that didn’t happen. Amelia’s working theory is that Bartemius Crouch, Senior switched his son with his ailing wife – using Polyjuice Potion – and brought his son out of Azkaban. Looks like I’m not the first to escape Azkaban anymore! Not sure whether I should be happy or disappointed about that.

“Anyway, it was discovered Crouch, Junior has been at Hogwarts ever since September 1st, impersonating somebody, using Polyjuice Potion. That somebody turned out to be Alastor Moody.”
“What?!” Harry and Hermione asked.

“We had a Death Eater teaching us Defense all term?” Harry asked.

Harry couldn’t believe it. The Defense Professor that had provided them with so many memorable lessons had turned out to be one of Voldemort’s followers, using Polyjuice Potion.

“Seems like it,” Sirius said, grimacing, “The real Alastor Moody was trapped in a seven-compartment trunk since late August. Apparently the seventh compartment was some kind of deep well-like space. Moody was kept prisoner so Junior could use his hair for the Polyjuice Potion.”

“Oh, my God!” Hermione said, “Harry, last night when we were with Ginny and Professor McGonagall. Moody was acting rather… off… when Professor McGonagall started talking about an anti-Polyjuice ward!”

“Yeah, well, apparently a ward was found,” Sirius said. “Junior was out of the castle – apparently trying to discover how his father died – when Dumbledore put up temporary Polyjuice Prevention wards. From what Amelia discovered, Junior ran into the wards, and lost his disguise at the Hogwarts Gate. He made off with Moody’s wand and Apparated away. But he left Moody’s magical eye and fake leg behind. The only reason we know it was Crouch, Junior was because Moody knew it was him.”

“It was Crouch, Junior wasn’t it?” Harry asked. “He put my name in the Goblet of Fire?”

“Yes,” Sirius said, “It is believed it was him. What his endgame plan was is up in the air, but it is believed he was doing it under orders of Voldemort. It is also believed Junior is responsible for casting the Dark Mark in the air at the Quidditch World Cup. There’s something else. When Moody was kidnapped back in August, Pettigrew was helping Junior apprehend him.”

“My dream about Voldemort and Pettigrew,” Harry said. “They were talking about someone being on the inside or something. Voldemort mentioned his ‘most faithful’ or something.”

“Junior,” Sirius said, nodding. “Guess that confirms it then. Whatever Junior was plotting when he put you in the Tournament, Harry, it is because of Voldemort.”

“Dumbledore believes Voldemort will regain his full strength by summertime,” Harry said, “Maybe this is part of how it will be done?”

“But the plot is over, isn’t it?” Hermione asked. “Junior’s plot was discovered. He won’t be coming back to Hogwarts.”

“Maybe not,” Sirius said, “But Voldemort’s not going to let something like this stop him from returning to his full strength. I am sure he has a back-up plan for this. We just don’t know what it is.”

“Guess we’ll just have to remain Constantly Vigilant!” Harry said then he grimaced, “Oh, god, a Death Eater taught us that!”

Hermione snorted. “He was a pretty good teacher, you know. Which is just all kinds of wrong, when I think of it. He was better than Quirrel and Lockhart, definitely. Almost as good as Remus.”

“I’m sure Moony will be pleased he’s a better Professor than a Death Eater,” Sirius snarked. “By the
way, the other message I wanted to give you. Ron and Ginny Weasley will have a trial on Monday. You two will be witnesses. We’ll figure out when it will begin, and how we’ll get you there sometime tomorrow. I’ll contact you then.”

“All right,” Harry said; he turned to Hermione, “If your parents can’t take us to the Leaky Cauldron, we could take the Knight Bus. Then we can use the Floo Network at the Leaky Cauldron to get to the Ministry.”

“That might work,” Hermione said, “We’ll see what my parents say.”

“Sounds good to me,” Sirius said, “Well, barring any more emergencies, I will see you in a couple of hours when you arrive in London.”

“Thanks for telling us, Sirius,” Harry said.

“No problem, kid,” Sirius said, “Unless you need anything, I best be off.”

Harry thought about asking Sirius if he knew anything about the story of his Invisibility Cloak. He decided he’d asked Sirius about it another time.

“Nothing for now,” Harry said.

“Me either,” Hermione said, “See you in a couple of hours, Sirius.”

Sirius winked then vanished from the mirror.

“I don’t know what is stranger, Harry,” Hermione said, “The fact that we were taught by an apparent Death Eater. Or the fact that we actually learned a lot from an apparent Death Eater.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, “Pretty weird to think about it. At least we finally know who put my name in the Goblet of Fire.”

“But we don’t know exactly why,” Hermione said.

“Uh. Hermione, maybe we do,” Harry said. “Moody – Crouch, Junior – was the one who encouraged me to use my Firebolt, and he was the only who suggested a Summoning Charm. What if… what if he was trying to make sure I won the Tournament?”

“For what purpose?” Hermione asked.

“Whatever happens after the Tournament is over, I suppose,” Harry said.

“How so very vague,” Hermione said, “Honestly, that could mean anything. Especially if Sirius is right, and Voldemort has a back-up plan.”

“Well, I suppose we have to do what a Death Eater taught us and remain constantly vigilant!” Harry said, grinning.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Honestly… please don’t remind me of his teachings. The fact that I very much appreciated his classes for the entire term is rather disturbing, since he is a Death Eater.”

“Taught by a stuttering Voldemort in our first year and a Death Eater for half of our fourth year,”
Harry said, then he grinned, “Voldemort must really care about our education.”

“Harry James!” Hermione huffed, “That is so very wrong. And very terrifying. Honestly I just want to forget about a Death Eater teaching us.”

“I know how I might be able to help,” Harry said.

Hermione raised her eyebrows questioningly. Harry grinned, and pulled her over to him then kissed her. Hermione relaxed in his arms and returned the kiss. They continued kissing and snogging for a few minutes, then cuddled up together. As the Hogwarts Express made its way toward London, they talked about what they had read in the various books over the past few hours on the train.

(Saturday, December 26th, 1994 – 6:30 PM)

The Hogwarts Express arrived at Platform Nine and Three Quarters at precisely half-past-six. Harry and Hermione took hold of their Hedwig’s cage, and Crookshanks’ carrier. The cat was meowing and purring inside his carrier, while Hedwig looked around curiously in her cage. Harry’s carry-on bag -- and Hermione’s as well -- was already packed away in his Undetectable Extension Bag, which was latched to his belt, as if it was a coin purse. So, carrying their pets’ cages, they made their way out into the corridor with the other students who were waiting to make their way out onto the Platform.

Soon enough, Harry was following Hermione as they crossed the Platform in search of her parents and Sirius. They found her parents first. As soon as Hermione approached her parents, she set down Crookshanks’ cage and hugged her mother, than her father.

“Hello, sweetheart,” Hermione’s mother said, “Why don’t you formally introduce us to this young man?”

Hermione cleared her throat and turned to Harry with a smile.

“Mum, Dad, this is my boyfriend, Harry Potter,” Hermione said, “Harry, these are my parents, Drs. Daniel and Emma Granger.”

“Drs. Granger,” Harry said, smiling politely, “It is wonderful to finally officially meet you. Hermione’s spoken some about you, but I believe she wants me to get to know you myself.”

“Well, aren’t you a polite young man,” Emma Granger said, smiling. “How about you call us Emma and Dan, hmm? You are Betrothed to our daughter in magical society, aren’t you? Doesn’t that make you family, basically?”

“Not for a few years, Mum,” Hermione said. “I believe I told you that in my letter. Which is why I simply introduced him as my boyfriend. After all, that is all he is in the Muggle world, right?”

“Oh, sweetheart, do relax,” Dan said, smiling, “Your Mum’s just teasing Harry.”

“To stop you from doing it, right?” Hermione asked.

Emma grinned as her husband huffed. “My husband might look like he is trying to be intimidating, but he is just a big softie.”

“Softer than a teddy bear, Daddy,” Hermione said, grinning.

“See what it is like around these two, Harry,” Dan said, “I’m seriously outnumbered. Maybe it will be even with you around for a week.”

“I wouldn’t dare side against Hermione, sir!” Harry said.

Dan’s eyebrows raised, then he laughed and nodded. “Good man.”

“I just passed some sort of test, didn’t I?” Harry asked.

“One of many, I am sure,” Hermione muttered. “He’s probably been thinking of these tests ever since I invited you to spend Christmas Break with us.”

“My precious Godson! I found you!” Sirius Black’s voice exclaimed, as he appeared near Harry, with Susan Bones towing behind him with an amused smile.

Dan and Emma looked on, amused, as Sirius grabbed Harry in a one-sided hug.

“Geroff, Sirius!” Harry huffed, “You’re embarrassing me in front of Hermione’s parents.”

Sirius released Harry and smiled at Hermione’s parents.

“Sirius, these are my parents, Drs. Daniel and Emma Granger,” Hermione said, “Mum, Dad, this is Harry’s godfather –”

“Greetings!” Sirius cut in, “Name’s Sirius Black. You might have seen my handsome face on the Muggle telly a couple summers ago.”

“Really now?” Dan asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Remember the wanted fugitive a couple summers ago? That’s him. He escaped from Azkaban, the wizard prison, but he’s completely innocent. Cleared of all charges a week ago.”

“Oh!” Emma said, “Well, that is most interesting. It is lovely to meet you, Mr. Black.”

“Technically it is Lord Black, but you can call me Sirius!” Sirius said, dashingly, “After all, we might be family in the future. Speaking of family – there you are, Susan! This is my fiancée’s niece, Susan Bones. My fiancée is the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and is rather busy. So it is my job to pick her niece up.”

“Hi,” Susan said, shyly, “I’m a friend of Hermione and Harry. Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too, young lady,” Emma said, “Sounds like you have a scoundrel of a future Uncle here.”

“Scoundrel?!” Sirius echoed, in mock-horror. “I’ll have you know my fiancée has been working on curing me of my scoundrel ways.”
“She’s not doing very well, is she?” Harry asked, in a stage whisper to Hermione and Susan, who giggled.

Sirius pouted. “I feel so very outnumbered here. Anyway, allow me to be serious, and not just Sirius. It is an honor to meet the parents of a young lady who means so much to my godson. And to me. She helped me out recently in ways I will never be able to pay back. I am sure Harry and Hermione can tell you more about that.”

“Well, it is nice to meet you too, Sirius,” Dan said, “I am sorry these introductions are so short, but I am afraid we must be off. Where are your belongings, you two?”

“Here,” Harry said, pointing to the bag on his belt. “Undetachable Extension Charms on it.”

“It is like Mary Poppins’ handbag, Daddy,” Hermione said.

“Oh, that is very interesting and certainly makes it easier to carry your luggage around!” Dan said.

“Susan and I must be off too,” Sirius said, then looked at Harry and Hermione, “I’ll contact you two tomorrow about Monday.”

“Oh, alright,” Hermione said; she then turned to her parents, who looked curious, “We’ll tell you later.”

Her parents merely nodded. After some farewells, Harry and the Grangers split off from Sirius and Susan. It took nearly fifteen minutes for them to reach the Grangers’ family car.

The trip to the Grangers’ home in Crawley would take about an hour or so. So to pass the time, upon request of Emma, Harry and Hermione discussed some of what they had learned in their classes for the first term, along with how their exams had gone. Everything else they wanted to speak to Hermione’s parents about – the more serious stuff – wasn’t the type of conversation one should have in a car.

“Actually we can show you some stuff we learned this week,” Hermione said. “I told you about Harry’s Emancipation, and how I am his Vassal now? Well, that basically gives both of permission to use magic at home, as long as we’re not using it in front of Muggles who don’t know about magic.”

“Well, that is wonderful, sweetheart!” Emma said, “I know you’ve wanted to show us what you learned at school, but never could.”

“Well, now we get the chance to do it,” Hermione said, grinning.

“Speaking of Muggles who do not know about magic,” Dan said, “Hermione, I assume you’ve told Harry about the New Year’s Eve party we attend each year?”

“Yes, Dad,” Hermione said, “Actually, I just discussed it with him this morning. I assume we’re still going?”

“Of course, dear,” Emma said, “We wouldn’t pass it up this year, especially now that you have a handsome boy to show off to everyone! You’ll be the envy of all the girls your age this year, Hermione, thanks to this handsome young man.”

Harry blushed and Hermione rolled her eyes.
“As long as they don’t think they’ll be able to steal him from me for a dance,” Hermione said. “Harry agreed to purchase a new formal outfit for the party. I also figured he could buy a few winter and spring outfits.”

“Of course, dear,” Emma said, “Your father and I were thinking about going shopping tomorrow. You and I can find you a nice dress for the party, while Dan helps Harry find a nice outfit. Then he can shop for anything else he needs.”

“We also need to go to Diagon Alley, Mum,” Hermione said. “We need to speak to our Account Manager at Gringotts Bank.”

“‘Our’?” Dan asked, momentarily looking at Hermione through the rear-view mirror. “You two aren’t already sharing a bank account already?”

“Of course not, Dad,” Hermione said, blushing. “We just happen to have the same Account Manager for House Potter and House Dagworth-Granger.”

“Yes, House Dagworth-Granger,” Dan murmured. “I was certainly surprised to discover my family is descended from – who was it?”

“Hector Dagworth-Granger,” Hermione said, “Founder of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers. He’s a famous wizard in our society.”

“I was most surprised to find out we’re descended from wizards and witches,” Dan said. “I’m still trying to figure out why Dagworth sounds so familiar. I know I’ve heard it in recent years, before you found out you were a witch, in fact.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out sometime, Daddy,” Hermione said.

“Yes,” Dan said, “I am sure I will.”

It was nearing eight-o-clock in the evening when they finally arrived in the city of Crawley. Before they made their way to the Granger’s home, they stopped by a local pizza shop, and ordered a couple of pizzas for dinner that evening.

At a quarter-past-eight, they finally pulled into the driveway of the Granger’s home. Harry stepped out of the car, then grabbed Hedwig’s cage – Hedwig having behaved most admirably during the entire ride -- then he took his first look at the house. It was beautiful two-and-a-half story brick house with an attic at the top. Large windows covered much of the front of the house, and shades hid the interior from view. Six-foot hedges and fences surrounded the front and back yard, allowing privacy. Dan and Emma led Harry, and Hermione toward the front door.

As Harry followed Dan and Emma inside, he found that the bottom floor of the house looked eerily similar to Number Four, Privet Drive. To his left, there was an archway which led into the family sitting room. Ahead of them, at the end of the hallway, there was another door.

“Welcome to our humble home,” Emma said. “Through the door at the end of the hallway, is the kitchen and dining room. To the door to your left is the sitting room. Hermione? Harry will be sleeping in the guest room. Please show him a tour of the upper floor and lead him to his bedroom. Then come on downstairs to the sitting room. We can dine on pizza and open up presents.”
Harry was quickly reminded of his present for Hermione and her parents in his bag, and reminded himself to get it out soon.

“Yes, Mum,” Hermione said, “Come on, Harry!”

Harry followed Hermione up the stairs. The bathroom was the first room they came to – the door situated nearly right in front of the stairs.

"This is the family bathroom," Hermione explained. "Mum and Daddy's bedroom at the end of the hallway has their own little private bathroom as well. My room is on the left side, here, with a window showing the front of the house. And the guest room – your room – has a nice view of the backyard."

"Our rooms are right across from each other, huh?" Harry said. "Interesting."

"Don't get any ideas," Hermione said, "Mum and Dad can hear the doors open and close quite easily. Come on inside. I need to get my things from your bag anyway."

Harry followed Hermione into her bedroom. He smiled as he looked around her room. It was very Hermione, with at least four bookshelves full of books, and the walls and ceiling were painted periwinkle blue, same as her dress had been the previous evening. Hermione set Crookshanks' carrier down and opened it up.

An orange blur sped from the carrier with a meow and Crookshanks ran out of the room.

"Probably has to use the bathroom, poor thing," Hermione said, with a giggle.

Harry grinned. He opened his bag and pulled out Hermione's traveling bag from it and handed it to her.

“Go on, now, before Daddy sees you in my room,” Hermione said, smiling, “I'll meet you in the hallway in five minutes.”

Harry agreed and stepped out of Hermione’s bedroom, and crossed the hallway, then stepped into the room which would be his bedroom for the next week. The walls were covered with a light-blue wallpaper, the same as Hermione's own bedroom. He was beginning to understand her preference for favorite colors. The bed was as big as the one in his bedroom in his Private Quarters at Hogwarts. He walked over to the desk sitting below the window, and set Hedwig's cage on it. Then he walked over to the opened the window, and Hedwig's cage.

"This is new territory for you, girl," Harry said, "So be careful."

Hedwig barked in acknowledgement and flew out the window. Harry removed the travel bag, which mostly held books inside, and placed it on the desk beside Hedwig’s cage. He then rummaged through his bag and found the two wrapped presents, one which was a combined gift for Hermione and her parents, and one was a gift for Dan and Emma.

Suddenly, Dobby appeared.

“Hello, Dobby,” Harry said.
“Dobby be having a letter for the Great Harry Potter,” Dobby said, “Dobby be believing it be from the French Tournament champion.”

“Fleur Delacour?” Harry asked.

“Yes, that be her name,” Dobby said.

Harry thanked Dobby and took the scroll of parchment Dobby offered.

“Dobby?” Harry asked, “Could you go to Gringotts and exchange some Galleons from my Vault for 500 pounds? Please put it on the desk here when you return. Also, please tell Keeper Ragnok that Hermione and I will meet with him sometime tomorrow, but we do not know the exact time. Tell him we apologize for that.”

“Dobby be doing so,” Dobby said.

Dobby vanished, and Harry stared at the scroll of parchment in his hand. What was Fleur Delacour writing him about? He shrugged and set it on the desk. He would read it after spending some time with Hermione and her parents.

“Harry?” Hermione asked, “You ready?”

“Coming!” Harry said.

He grabbed the two wrapped presents, and walked out of the room.

“Dobby just came by,” Harry said, “He gave me a letter from Fleur Delacour. No, I haven’t read it yet, and I have no idea what she could want.”

“As long as it isn’t a love letter, my love,” Hermione teased. “You haven’t been writing her love letters, have you?”

“No, Hermione,” Harry said, “You’re the only girl for me, and you always will be.”

“Just making sure, Harry James,” Hermione said, smiling. “Come on. My parents are probably waiting for us.”

Harry smiled and followed Hermione downstairs.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the abrupt ending, but I was having so much trouble trying to figure out what to do with the gift-giving scene. It almost made me want to delay posting this entire chapter over a simple scene. So I stopped the chapter here. I will try to summarize the gifts in the next chapter, and it will begin with Fleur’s letter.

Next Chapter: Fleur’s letter, shopping and another visit to Gringotts. Harry and Hermione then discuss everything that had happened over the past three and a half years surrounding them, Hogwarts, and the recent developments as well.
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